

POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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EDITORIAL

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Editorial

There are few topics in Politics in Central Europe as traditional and as important as the Russian foreign policy. As early as in nineteenth century, political thinkers like František Palacký thematised Russian influence on the Central European region where new nations were building their identities and cultures at that time. The huge Slavic empire in the East could not be overlooked in this process, just as the German element in the West.

During the twentieth century, Russian foreign policy, previously a European issue, had become a global one. The so called Cold War reduced global “high politics” on power competition between the Soviet Union and the United States, from which most of other political and economic issues derived.

The 1990 s seemingly reduced the urgency of analysing Russian foreign policy, as the focus shifted to Russian internal transformation that was expected to produce desirable foreign policy outcomes. The rapid development of international relations since the fall of the Soviet Union produced new threats as well as opportunities and attracted attention of analysts to new phenomena such as weak states, terrorism, human security, human development, “new” powers, international integration and many more. Russian foreign policy might have seemed an obsolete and even unimportant topic for analysis within the rapidly changing world and Europe.

Nevertheless, the last few years proved otherwise. The Russian Federation found resources and political capital to support its interests by decisive foreign policy steps attracting a new wave of attention. At first, as one of the so called “new” powers, such as China or India, with rising economic power and unknown political priorities and appetite, and then as a vital but not always reliable energy supplier for the European Union, and lately also as an ambitious regional power decisively projecting its power into the neighbouring region by using all available means including military ones. But neither “gas wars” nor the Georgian War have attracted attention of such a massive scale as the Ukrainian crisis did.

By the Ukrainian events, Russian foreign policy re-entered first pages of world newspapers, and re-gained space in prominent academic journals and publishing houses. Russian foreign policy became, once again, an interesting topic for a wide variety of audiences.

In this environment, the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic supported me and my colleague Marina Henrikson from University of Manchester in organizing a thematic conference “Russia: Identity and Foreign Policy”. A wonderful group of experienced scientists and young talented, Ph.D. students came to Pilsen in April 2014 to discuss the issues of Russian foreign policy. As the conference turned out to be a very pleasant and

fruitful event, we decided to publish selected papers. At this stage, my long-time colleague and chief editor of Politics in Central Europe, Ladislav Cabada, helped us in providing us space in this journal. Now you are reading the result of our efforts – the thematic issue of the Politics in Central Europe focused on Russian foreign policy.

You will find eight papers in this issue focusing on various aspects and topics of Russian foreign policy. First, more general aspects of Russian foreign policy are analysed. In his essay, Brendan Humphreys searches for sources of Russian exceptionalism and compares it with other national exceptionalist concepts. Fabian Linde focuses on the concept of civilisation in Russian political discourse and how it is used in contemporary Putinite Russia. Second, particular vectors of Russian Foreign policy are analysed. Russian emphasis on “new” powers and new regions face to face with deteriorating relations with the West are analysed by Alexandra Sitenko in her paper dedicated to Russian-Venezuelan relations. Kaneshko Sangar presents us the relations of Russia and Afghanistan, a very important vector of Russian foreign policy considering the current anti-terror efforts of the Russian Federation in Syria. Finally, Dominik Sonnleitner provides an insight into Russian policies in the Caucasus, which proves very inspiring when analysing current Ukrainian events. Last but not least, the Ukrainian crisis is analysed in the issue. Moritz Pieper focuses on Russian relations to the Eastern Partnership Project and provides us with an important framework for analysis of the current events. My paper is dedicated to the Russian reaction to Western sanctions imposed on the country. And last but not least, Ekaterina Kalinina discusses the “information war” and crucial narratives used in current Russian foreign policy. We hope that in the environment keen on information about Russian foreign policy our modest contribution may find its readers and provide them with new material, useful ideas and points of view when forming their own opinion on what is going on in contemporary Russia.

Magda B. Leichtova
Visiting editor

ESSAYS



Russian Exceptionalism: a Comparative Perspective¹

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BRENDAN HUMPHREYS

Abstract: *This article seeks to define a certain form of exceptionalism – missionist exceptionalism – and ask to what extent it applies to Russia. The method will be a broad comparative analysis. The core argument is that missionist exceptionalism is fundamentally paradoxical; that polities make largely similar claims about themselves while pleading sui generis uniqueness. This hypothesis is asserted by examining the exceptionalism of other polities. These are two rivals of Russia; the United States and Poland, a “sentimental ally” of Russia, Serbia, and a country with a deep and interesting relationship with Russia, Israel.*

Keywords: *exceptionalism, missionism, victimhood, civic religion, sacred*

Introduction

With his written address to the American people (New York Times, September 12, 2013) Russian President Vladimir Putin provoked much debate. One aspect of his letter was of compelling interest; Putin’s denial of Russian exceptionalism, and his rebuke of President Obama’s exceptionalist claims for the United States. It is generally naïve to take political leaders at their word, but there might be some historical significance in the claim of a Russian leader that Russia was just another country. Much Russian (and later Soviet) historical experience was predicated on the opposite argument, that Russia was unique in the world.

Exceptionalism has several meanings and one in particular will be examined here. At the international level, all polities and cultures can claim some degree of uniqueness or particularism. There is nothing too controversial in such assertions, our cultures differ from each other, our countries and political circumstances are all conditional on location; famously it is said that “all politics are local”. Like all generalizations, it is oversimplified but there is nonetheless

1 This paper was supported by Grant system of University of West Bohemia, project » Bezpečnost středovýchodní Evropy a česko-ruské vztahy« number SGS-2015-032.

something in it. Two examples of exceptionalist claims – the assertion that unique circumstances apply and therefore ordinary rules do *not* apply – are the Irish party Sinn Fein and post-Dayton Bosnia. People have complained that Sinn Fein was judged by different standards and it got away with much that other parties in the British Isles could not. The term exceptionalism has also been used to describe the highly unique political structure that exists in Bosnia Herzegovina – the fact of two entities existing with one federal framework, and the multiple political offices and ministries and so on. In both cases the term exceptionalism is justified.

For this paper we need to move beyond this definition and identify a more specific phenomenon. I propose to call this *missionist exceptionalism*. What is meant by this is a sense that a certain country is felt by its power elite – and probably many of its population – to have a unique place in the world, a distinct *role* to play, and importantly, due to the gravitas of this role, ordinary restraints – such as the rule of law – do *not* apply. Indeed few countries have had such a sense of *role* as Russia: no question has resonated through Russian social thought as much as Что делать? “What is to be done?” The missionist assumption is that something *must* be done. Missionist exceptionalism in this sense is more than simple nationalism, and goes a long way to resembling millennialism, but without its full religious literalism. Certainly when one examines exceptionalism historically, one sees consistently religious/civilizational assertions at its core, but in the contemporary world, these assertions are expressed in more legal/rational language. In that sense what we are dealing with can be formalized as *nationalism plus* and *millennialism minus*. In this aspect, it problematizes that sacred/secular dichotomy to a high degree, see below.

Furthermore it is useful to assert that missionist exceptionalism is less concerned with domestic policies and arrangement; it is rather international and relational, it exists *viv-a-vis* rival cultures and polities. To proceed, we can look at exceptionalist patterns in several countries and encounter a large paradox; that despite claims of uniqueness, most of the assertions of missionist exceptionalism are in fact repeated across the different polities. They resemble each other to a large degree. In fact it is not too much to say that – from a sufficient critical distance – missionist exceptionalist claims are Macluhan: the claim *is* the message, the contents – allowing for local variations – are often generally familiar.

In addition to Russia, four other countries will be sketched here, although interestingly each has a distinct relationship with Russia. One is a traditional rival, the United States, one a country that has a fascinating relationship with Russia, Israel,² and two fellow Slavonic countries, Serbia and (only to a limited

2 “...it was the Soviet Union that held a special fascination for us – both as the country of origin of most of the Jews then in Palestine...the Russian influence of the evolving ethos of Jewish Palestine was pro-

but instructive extent) Poland, which unlike mainly-Orthodox Serbia, has a history of rivalry with Russia.

Holy Russia

Both insiders and outsiders have made large claims about Russia being a unique culture. We can define these assertions as *auto-exceptionalist* and *hetro-exceptionalist* claims. To offer examples of both, “One Russian will know another Russian from I know not what distance. A hundred miles perhaps.” So said Nabokov to his biographer Andrew Field (Field 1986, 374). “Russian ideas are the most exhilarating, Russian thought the freest, Russian art the most exuberant; Russian food and drink are to me the best, and Russians themselves are, perhaps, the most interesting human beings that exist”, so wrote John Reed in his *War in Eastern Europe, Travels in the Balkans in 1915* (Reed 1915, 103) Both of these statements do make claims to exceptionalism without being missionistic (or political) as such, although both authors had pronounced political views, deeply reactionary in one case, revolutionary in the other (Reed was, of course, best known for his enthusiastic reporting of the October Revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World*). There are, of course, a contrary set of generalizations that single Russia out in a highly negative way. In an interview with Philip Roth, Milan Kundera argued that all the great movements of modern Europe, from Reformation to Enlightenment and beyond had no impression on Russia.

„As a concept of cultural history, Eastern Europe is Russia, with its quite specific history anchored in the Byzantine world. Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, just like Austria have never been part of Easter Europe. From the very beginning, they have taken part in the great adventure of Western civilization, with its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation – a movement that had its cradle precisely in this region...The post war annexation of Central Europe (or at least its major part) by Russian civilization caused Western culture to lose its vital center of gravity. It is the most significant events in the history of the West in our century“ (quoted in Roth 2001, 91–92).

Such hetro views – and many less sophisticated variations – have been articulated by such influential figures as Richard Pipes and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The less sophisticated views were often comical; during the early Cold War, Soviet

found”. So wrote Shimon Peres in his memoir *Battling for Peace* (1995). Peres was born in Imperial Russia, as were nearly all of Israel’s foundational leaders; Chaim Weizmann, David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, and Moshe Sharett. It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that Israel is a Russian invention; some early Zionists, including Hertz himself, were willing to accept the British offer of Uganda as a Jewish homeland. It was only the intervention of the Russian Zionists – including Weizmann – that rejected the offer and insisted on Palestine. It may seem strange, given the later alignment of the Cold War, but the first country to recognize Israel was the USSR. Israel has a large recently Russian population and several of its politicians such as Natan Sharansky and Avigdor Lieberman are ex-Soviet citizens and dissidents.

aggression was even “explained” on the basis of the tight swaddling clothes that Russian babies had to wear!

Scholars such as Maria Engström and Peter Duncan have examined the religious origins of Russian auto-exceptionalism. Duncan has written on the doctrine of The Third Rome. Engström has recently published on the idea of *Katechon* (from the Greek *ὁ Κατέχων*, ‘the withholding’, in effect, defense) and how this has recently guided assertive Russian foreign policy (Duncan 2000, Engström 2014). However there is always a high risk of literalism when trying to trace the actual influence of an idea, especially a religious one: do people literally believe this and – if they are in a position of political influence – do they really allow it to guide their actions? Or do they just use religiosity to legitimize or make more respectable their policies? This is hard to measure; do many Jews, a geographically diverse group living in numerous countries of varying degrees of secularism really believe they belong to a divinely “chosen” people? Or do many Serbs believe literally in Heavenly Serbia, or Poles in Poland as the Christ Among Nations? Even if not, what such ideas do offer is an interpretative framework through which people(s) can interpret their collective historical experience. This is even more heightened if the historical experience is – as in the cases mentioned here – traumatic.

What is interesting about Russian auto-exceptionalism is that it went from an openly religious idea – messianism – to being radically translated into secular terms over a tiny period of time, following the October Revolution. Holy Russia suddenly became – at least until Stalin came to power and Socialism in one Country became official doctrine – the fulcrum of world revolution. Squaring this circle took considerable invention. For an overview of this huge modernisation shift, see Richard Stites’ *Revolutionary Dreams*.

Heavenly Serbia

Taken at its most literal, Serbia’s most ambitious claims about itself are that Serbs are a heavenly people, whose sacrifice at the Battle of Kosovo Polje (1389) gave them a permanent place in heaven. Additionally, much of Serbs’ history have offered evidence of great sacrifice, including during both World Wars, and this have reinforced a national narrative with a high degree of victimhood. The Serbian novelist (and sometime politician) Dobrica Cosic has made the following claim: „...almost every [Serbian] generation had its Kosovo. Such were the migrations of the XVII and XVIII centuries, the insurrections and wars against the Turks in 1804, 1815, 1876, and 1912, and the rejection of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum in 1914; the rejection of the military defeat in 1915 and the crossing of Albania by the Serbian army; the rejection of the Tripartite pact with Germany on March 27, 1941; the insurrection against fascism in 1941, and the conduct of war under German conditions of retribution; a hundred Serbs

for every German soldier; the rejection of Stalin's hegemony in 1948..." (quoted in Vujaci 2004: 3).

There are also hetro views on heavenly Serbia. One example is Branimir Anzulovic's book *Heavenly Serbia, from Myth to Genocide*, a sustained exercise in negative exceptionalism, which argues loudly that Serbs have a propensity for genocide because of their cult of the Battle of Kosovo Polje. Other examinations of the Kosovo cult, argue that its legacy is mixed; it has offered continuity and cohesion to Serbs under Ottoman rule, and it inspired has inspired several, often contradictory, modes of politics (or has been simply exploited by opportunistic politicians such as Milosevic (Emmert and Vucinic 1991, Humphreys 2013).

This sense of being a defender is something that the anthropologist Joel Halpern noted in his ethnographic work in rural Serbia in the 1950 s; "The patriotism and pride exhibited by the Orasasi (occupants of the village that Halpern studied) are characteristics of all Serbs. They feel themselves to be much more than simple inhabitants of Serbia. They are the creators and defenders of their county. "We are Serbia" (Halpern 1955: 293).

The USA, The Shining City on the Hill

In her book *The Wordy Shipmates*, Sarah Vowell writes that "the country I live in is haunted by the Puritans' vision of themselves as chosen people, a beacon of righteousness that all others are to admire." She draws the strongest of connections between the Puritans and American adventures ever since, "we're here to help, whether you want our help or not" (Vowell 2006: 24/25).

Although one of the globe's model democracies, certainly in terms of durability and continuity, the US too has a culture of missionistic exceptionalism, albeit articulated in more moderate language. America's need to have a military presence in over 120 of the world's states has usually been voiced in the language of "security", its current preferred term is "leadership". During the Cold War, its sense of civilizational struggle was salient; this has been re-forged during the War on Terror, (which has continued largely unchanged under Obama's two terms, but with slightly more moderate language than that of the Bush administrations). Although the US has a long history of overseas engagements, the huge permission offered by 9/11, the nightmare of mission creep called the War on Terror, was fueled by victimhood.

For decades American politicians pondered how to rid the country of "Vietnam syndrome". They need worry no longer; a huge historical trauma was decommissioned by another trauma, guilt over a brutal invasion (and humiliating defeat) was instantly forgotten by an attack of shocking scale and visibility. Important here is that fact that it allowed Americans, both ordinary citizens and political elites, to feel that their subsequent actions – invading first Afghanistan, then Iraq, while expanding drone and other bombing actions – is *defensive* and

therefore justified. They are victims seeking justice, not aggressors. Because of its scale and huge diversity, it is difficult to generalize about the United States; almost any assertion can prove to be also its opposite. However I would suggest that there is a strong stain of religious language and sentiment – it’s less clear if there is substantive belief behind it – in American public life. And for those who do not attach themselves to formal religious life, there is a highly developed culture of civic religion in the United States (see below for further discussion).

Poland, Christ among Nations

In his book, *Resentment in History*, Marc Ferro writes that Poland retains resentment that its sacrifices are not sufficiently appreciated in Christian Europe. Poland had, so the claim goes, saved Europe four times on different occasions: The first time by leading the defeat of the Ottomans during the Siege of Vienna, in 1683. He quotes the King of Poland from that time, Jean Sobiesky: “Here we are on the Danube, lamenting the loss of our horses and the ingratitude of those whom we saved”. (Ferro 2010, 74). Not only had Poland saved Europe in 1683, it had saved Europe from the Bolsheviks in 1920, and during the Second World War Poland helped save Europe from the Nazis (*and* the Soviets) and then again from the Soviets again. The journalist Magda Jelonkiewicz (the grand-niece of a victim of the Katyn massacre) wrote that, “As children, we were taught that Poland’s suffering would help to redeem the sins of the evil world. The idea of being a victim cemented us as a nation.” (Jelonkiewicz 2010). The idea of Poland being a Christ among Nations has long existed, even the Marxist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski (1927–2009) cautiously subscribed to it: “One of the things most derided and mocked by twentieth-century Polish writers and thinkers was the idea of Polish messianism...it depicted Poland as the ‘Christ of nations’ whose suffering and crucifixion would redeem mankind. This seemed a ridiculous, self-comforting, and self-compensating fantasy.” (quoted in Tismaneanu 1999: 59).

One might agree, but Kolakowski continues: “...but on closer inspection there may have been some truth in it. Poland, the first country to defeat the Red Army shortly after the Revolution, prevented Europe from falling victim to communism, and perhaps confirmed the Hegelian notion that in every historical form the seeds of its future demise can be discerned from the outset. Poland was the only country invaded by the allied armies of Hitler and Stalin; this invasion triggered the Second World War. It was the first country to fight the Third Reich and one of two occupied (with Yugoslavia) that continued armed resistance against the German invaders. After the war, under communist rule, it was the first country to develop a mass movement of criticism, ideologically articulate, which culminated in 1956 in the change of leadership and first appointment of a Communist Party leader without investiture by Moscow, indeed in defiance of

the Kremlin...It was the first country in which the communist ideology clearly and irreversibly died away. And the first in which a mass civic movement “Solidarnosc” emerged and swept like fire over the land in 1980, nearly destroying the communist state machinery. Poland was the first...” (quoted in Tismaneanu 1999: 59). As recently as 2006, members of the Polish Parliament have tried to have Jesus officially crowned King of Poland.³

Yet unlike the other four states mentioned here, Poland’s exceptionalism is (at least at this stage in history) very different. In the past, its sense of victimhood has, as Ferro argued⁴, fed into anti-Semitism, but now it seems largely sacrificial rather than vengeful. Poland has had territorial disputes (Danzig/Gdansk and Vilnius/Wilno), but these are largely resolved. Perhaps it is the positive direction of recent Polish history, emergence from Soviet influence, successful EU and NATO membership that has decommissioned Polish missionism? If this is accurate, then one must say that what might re-ignite is precisely the renewed expansionism of Putin’s Russia.

Civic religion

In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote that “Every society and official tradition defends itself against interferences with its sanctioned narratives; over time these acquire an almost theological status, with founding heroes, cherished ideas and values, national allegories having an inestimable effect in cultural and political life.” (Said 1993: 380) What is meant by this “almost theological status” is worth dwelling upon. The term civic religion well describes public practices that seem to exist in a poorly-lit confusion of secular and sacred.

In this sense the gradual secularization of Western societies since the enlightenment has only been a partially-fulfilled project, despite what religious authors might believe. For example, the philosopher and practicing Roman Catholic, Charles Taylor can assert – with some obvious concern from his perspective – that “The presumption of unbelief has become the dominant one in more and more of these milieu and has achieved hegemony in certain crucial ones...” (Taylor 2007: 13). This may be accurate in respect to some (though not all) institutions, but this is not the full picture. I fully agree with Mircea

3 “In December 2006...forty-six members of the Polish parliament – 10 percent of the lower house – submitted a bill seeking to proclaim Jesus Christ the king of Poland and to follow the path of the Virgin Mary, who was declared honorary queen of Poland in 1665” (see Juraj Buzalka, *Nation and Religion, the Politics of Commemoration in South-East Poland*, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, Halle, 2006)

4 Speaking of the 1941 Jedwabne Pogrom (which was not carried out by the *Wehrmacht* – local people murdered at least 300 Jews) Ferro writes: “Being taught that Jews had crucified Jesus was the first wound that these Poles had received in the early infancy. Passed on from generation to generation, it has aroused a desire for vengeance and that vengeance had finally taken place. “We were taught that in school...”. Ferro, p. 11.

Eliade's assertion that: „...the man who has made his choice in favor of a profane life never succeeds in completely doing away with religious behavior...even the most desacralized existence still preserves traces of a religious valorization of the world“ (Eliade 1958: 23).

Civic religions may not be concerned with deities, but they do hold up their chosen narrative, heroes and events as revered, much in the manner of doctrinal religion. Much heritage and custom, particularly in the public/political sphere sees to preserve “religious valorization of the world” and long for the sacred. The sacred – as a category, familiar from Durkheim and elsewhere – is pervasive in human cultures. One particular aspect of the sacred is of interest here, this is, its unchallengeability. To be *unchallengeable* is an enviable status, and no culture – yet alone interested political agency – would be in a hurry to ditch it. It is no coincidence that the most valorized of events in Soviet/Russian history – the Great Patriotic War – is also being referred to in popular culture as the Sacred War. History, as Nikolay Kuposov has memorably said, is a “hard currency” in Russia. Indeed the teaching of local history *kradevedenie*, as Milena Benosvka-Sabkova argues, is both part of the religious revival in contemporary Russia and a vehicle for Putin's nationalism (Benosvka-Sabkova 2008: 8).

Israel and Victimhood

Of the cases examined here, a strong common element is victimhood. This is victimhood in the collective sense; not individual victims of crime or trauma, but rather a huge collective sense of wrongdoing. Such collectives are problematic, because not every single member of any group – least of all of countries containing tens, even hundreds, of millions of citizens – will react to events in a similar manner. Collective victimhood claims are necessarily constructs; they can indeed be based on external events, sudden attack, protracted warfare, or defeat, but they need to be formulated and articulated in terms and language people can easily identify with (and hopefully subscribe to).

The formulation and articulation of victimhood claims is a fascinating process and nowhere perhaps better than in Israel. For the contemporary observer, it seems obvious that Israel's governing national narrative – and strong victimhood claim – is the European Holocaust. However, as Amos Elon has argued, in the first years of its statehood, Israel's power elite rejected the Holocaust as an instructive narrative. It seemed inappropriate to the pioneers and nation-builders to embrace passive victimhood; rather a heroic, military story Masada, was used as the young country's governing narrative. Peter Novick notes that the myth of Masada – a mass-suicide by Jewish rebels during an uprising against the Romans – had no place in Jewish culture for 1900 years (Novick 2000: 4). But when the State of Israel was founded, Masada became its foundational myth. Officers of the Israeli Defense Forces, then as now, that country's most cherished

institution, were sworn in on the site of Masada, vowing “Masada will never fall again!” Indeed the archeologist responsible for the exploration of Masada, Yigael Yadin was the second Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (one of his replacements, the legendary Moshe Dayan, was a keen amateur archeologist). In his exhaustive study, Nachman Ben-Yehuda writes that: “...commanders wanted to use the Masada as a vehicle by which to instil what they felt were important values in their new recruits: a willingness to fight to the end, nonsurrender, *a renewed link to the past*, an identification with ancient Jewish warriors, a love of freedom, a willingness to sacrifice” (Ben-Yehuda 1995: 59 italics added).

Yet within two generations, Masada was replaced by another, more powerful narrative, the Holocaust. It must be stated that in the immediate post war years – when Masada was sanctioned as the national narrative – the recent Holocaust was not publically mentioned or institutionalized in Israel. But this all changed, as Amos Elon wrote: „By the later Fifties, the stunned silence about the Holocaust gave way to loquacious – often officially sponsored – national discussion of its effects. It became common to speak of the Holocaust as the central trauma affecting Israeli society. It would be impossible to exaggerate the effect on the process of nation building“ (Elon 1993).

Today Masada is more of a tourist site⁵ than the centre of a heroic national story. Dormant for almost 2,000 years, the narrative was (very literally) dug up and placed into the centre of national political/cultural life, but discarded within two generations, replaced by another narrative that has a more useable value. This process is quite similar to the displacement of the Vietnam War by 9/11 in American national life, both allowed people to share a sense of collective political victimhood.

Political victims can be defined as individuals who feel a grievance for wrong not committed to them personally, but committed because they belong to a certain group. Furthermore the wrongs have been committed by a rival group and therefore the resentment is not only directed at the individuals who committed the wrong, but potentially the entire group (even if many, or most, individuals of the rival group are innocent of any wrongdoing). To extend this group dynamic; members of a victimized group – who have not personally suffered wrong – nonetheless identify as victims, secondary victims or even “surrogate victims”, who do not belong to the group but identify with it (LaCapra 2001).

The bracketing of *victim* with *innocent* is almost axiomatic, and indeed some writers on victimhood speak of the constant asymmetry of victim/perpetrator relations. This may be true in the study of crime but at the group level it is more problematic, victims may be blinded to injustice because of their own suffered

5 Furthermore, the large majority of people visiting Masada are increasingly non-Israelis. Ben-Yehuda, gives a figure of 646,000 non- Israelis visitors for the year 1996, as compared to only 77, 351 Israelis. Ben-Yehuda, 199.

injustice. We have already distinguished between *sacrificial victimhood* and *vengeful victimhood*. The latter is common to missionist exceptionalism, which will typically see its actions as defensive and even if brutal, as nonetheless fully justified. Victimhood, if acknowledged, is a powerful political weapon. So attractive is victimhood that LaCapra speaks of people who become surrogate victims, who over-identify with victims and even wish to belong to that group, illogical as that sounds. This is the difference between mere defeat and acknowledged victimhood statues: it is very hard to imagine a “surrogate loser” but there are many willing surrogate victims. Victims often feel that ordinary restraints do not apply to them, this is equally true in international politics.

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to define missionist exceptionalism, use the term to define an aspect of Russian identity and explain some aspects of its foreign policy. This however has been done in a broad comparative context, arguing that missionist exceptionalism is certainly not unique to Russia and the other countries examined share certain elements. These include: a sense of victimhood, a religious core idea (or merging of nation with religion) although this may not articulate itself in traditional religious or nationalist language. Often this is articulated as civil religion, whether instead of, or alongside, professed religion. This is true of the US, Israel, Serbia, and Russia, all of which have a high culture of civic religion, as well as intrusions of formal religion into political life. There is typically one signal historical event, the most salient in each country’s usable past, in these cases 9/11, the Holocaust, the Battle of Kosovo (and the large losses of both world wars), the Great Patriotic War, and if we are to include Poland, Katyn. All cases mentioned have a foreign policy predicament, and the enemy/rival groups is often another religion (War on Terror, Israeli/Arab conflict, Serbs standoff with Kosovo (and its previous wars against Croats and Bosniaks), Russia’s war in Chechnya, though this confessional aspect is not a factor in Russia’s actions in Ukraine). However, all these actions have been articulated as defensive; Russian *Katechon*, the noted sense of Serbs being “defenders and creators” of their country, American and Israeli actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza etc. There is often a sense of being misunderstood, even to the point of hatred by rivals; “Why do they hate us?” was one of the cries of pain following 9/11. There is often a sense of political paranoia as defined by Hofstadter, a sense of being surrounded by enemies, be it NATO in Russia’s case, Arab states and Iran in Israel’s, international terrorist and their supporters in the US case often a corresponding preoccupation with internal disloyalty, even traitors (Hofstadter 1966). For all these reasons, these polities plead exceptionalism; explicitly that the usual rules of international law and diplomacy do not apply. Applied to contemporary Russia we can see all of these elements.

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State Civilisation: The Statist Core of Vladimir Putin's Civilisational Discourse and Its Implications for Russian Foreign Policy¹

FABIAN LINDE

Abstract: *The essay examines Vladimir Putin's civilisational discourse, which arose in earnest with the publication of his presidential campaign articles in 2012. It argues that what makes Putin's rendering of Russia's civilisational identity distinctive is its strongly emphasized Statism, understood as a belief in the primacy of the state. This suggests that while his endorsement of a distinct civilisational identity represents an important conceptual turn as regards how national identity is articulated, there are also significant lines of continuity with previous presidential periods, given that state primacy has been at the heart of Putin's political agenda since the very beginning of his presidential career. This detail also reveals a great deal about the political rationale behind Putin's commitment to a Russian civilisational identity. It provides the government with a theoretical justification of an illiberal political course. There are important implications for foreign policy-making as well. In relation to the West, there is an attempt to limit its normative reach by depicting liberal values as less than universal. In regional affairs, Russia is attempting to legitimate its involvement in the near abroad on civilisational grounds. The loose definition of 'co-patriots' as foreign nationals experiencing some affinity with Russia gives it plenty of leeway in this regard. Lastly, Russia has petitioned for Ukraine's neutrality based on the argument that the country is straddling a civilisational fault line.*

Keywords: *civilisational discourse, national identity, foreign policy, Statism, Russia*

Introduction

At the onset of Vladimir Putin's third period as president, which began in 2012, the political analyst Nikolai Zlobin perceptively observed that the world was witnessing the arrival of a new Putin who markedly differed from the previous

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one(s). Zlobin's observation had reference to a palpable shift in priorities attached to Putin's public political profile. "If, for the purposes of discussion," he wrote, "the first Presidency can be said to have been about politics, and the second about the economy, then the third is about ideology. Putin 3.0 is the president of values" (Zlobin 2012). Or, as Zlobin put it more succinctly, "the main objective and aims of [Putin] 3.0 are ideological" (Zlobin 2012).

For all its sweeping assertions, Nikolai Zlobin's observation about the increasing importance of values and ideology in Putin's public image did have a great deal of validity and constituted a timely remark on something which has almost become a truism since then. Today, it is widely recognized that emphasizing the uniqueness of Russia's cultural heritage and promoting its 'traditional values' are central concerns for the federal government. Moreover, political choices are being made that demonstrate the fact that ideology in many cases gains the upper hand over both economic concerns and considerations relating to diplomatic convenances.

One of the signature features of this development has been Vladimir Putin's adoption of a civilisational model for framing Russia's national identity. During Dmitry Medvedev's presidency it chiefly used to be Sergey Lavrov, Russia's long-standing Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was the one among the top politicians to conceptualize world politics in accordance with a multicivilisational approach, flanked by Medvedev's advocacy of Russia as an integral part of European civilisation. In recent years, however, this civilisational discourse has taken on a more insular character with Vladimir Putin's promotion of a self-contained Russian civilisational identity. The latter trend began with the presidential campaign articles that were published in his name in January and February 2012. In his articles, Putin made overt reference to both a "civilisational model [*tsivilizatsionnaia model'*]" (Putin 2012a) and a Russian "civilisational identity [*tsivilizatsionnaia identichnost'*]" (Putin 2012 b). His commitment to this civilisational identity did not end, however, with the publication of these articles. During the last few years, he has continued to make public statements that confirm not only the enduring significance of the basic idea of multiple civilisations, but also the importance of Russia having a distinct civilisational identity.

While this can be said to have been a new departure when it comes to the general political direction of Vladimir Putin's public profile, there were also considerable lines of continuity with previous periods. Upon closer examination, this becomes even clearer, especially when one considers exactly how the offered civilisational model was being conceptualised. Putin has for a long time been identified as a dedicated Statist and a state-centric political outlook can indeed be traced back to the very beginning of his presidential career.² Given that a distinguishing feature of Putin's civilisational discourse was and is the strong

2 For a discussion of this aspect of Vladimir Putin's profile, see (Hill – Gaddy 2013).

emphasis that is being placed on the state in Russian history and society, the conclusion can be drawn that there is a great deal of continuity with Putin 1.0 and 2.0. This detail makes it possible to nuance and qualify somewhat Nikolai Zlobin's observation quoted above. It also enables us to identify the political motivation behind the adoption of the civilisational model itself. In fact, the evidence suggests that the heightened interest on the part of the government in matters concerning cultural values and national identity is motivated by an effort to strengthen the state's position in society. A definition of Russian national identity that singles out the state as central assists the government in consolidating its hold on power since it legitimates an expansion of its mandate to impose its own order of things on society. Thus, it shifts the balance between the state and society in favour of the former. There are in addition a number of serious implications that this approach brings with it for foreign policy. In order to corroborate these points, let us proceed to examining how the civilisational model is being articulated.

Vladimir Putin's civilisational model

In one of his articles, Vladimir Putin maintained that “the self-definition of the Russian people is that of a multi-ethnic civilisation [*samoopredelenie russkogo naroda – eto polietnicheskaiia tsivilizatsiia*]” (Putin 2012 b). The critical detail for Putin when defining the nature of this civilisation was the idea of a “state-civilisation” (*gosudarstvo-tsivilizatsiia*), the existence of which he saw confirmed in Russian history.³ Indeed, beginning in 2012, the notion of Russia as being a ‘state-civilisation’ has been stressed repeatedly in his public texts and talks. To take one example that can stand for many, in his 2012 Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin stated that “we must value the unique experience passed on to us by our forefathers. For centuries, Russia developed as a multi-ethnic nation (from the very beginning), a state-civilisation bonded by the Russian people, Russian language and Russian culture native for all of us, uniting us and preventing us from dissolving in this diverse world” (Putin 2012c).

The crucial importance of the state, it is claimed, has been an essential and inalienable feature of Russian history. Conversely, Russia's identity as a distinct civilisation is seen as the enduring foundation on which the state as a political entity rests. During the 2013 Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, for instance, Putin maintained that “Russia [...] has always evolved [...] as a state-civilisation, reinforced by the Russian people, Russian language, Russian culture, Russian Orthodox Church and the country's other traditional

³ Already in 2009, Marlène Laruelle drew the attention to Mikhail Remizov (b. 1978), a politologist, publicist and conservative thinker, as one of the ideologists behind the notion of a Russian ‘state-civilization.’ See (Laruelle 2009: 62).

religions. It is precisely the state-civilisation model that has shaped our state polity” (Valdai 2013).

There are two features evident here that are worthy of note. The first is that the idea of a self-sufficient Russian civilisation ceases to be merely a matter of detached historical and cultural interest and is transformed into a political ideology. Issues concerning culture and values then become major political concerns. It goes without saying that if the state in this connection is envisioned as an upholder of a select cultural programme through which it defines itself and its subjects, this will have great consequences for its cultural policy. It bestows on the state the mission of upholding and defending the traditional cultural values that are believed to be inherent in the civilisational matrix.

The second feature, which follows from the first and is subtly related to it, is that the centrality of the state is inscribed as it were into the civilisational model itself, the main idea being that the state makes up the historical basis of, and is inseparable from, the civilisation in question and has been a key component in how this civilisation has played out in history. The civilisation and the state are envisioned as being so intimately connected as to be practically indistinguishable. In other words, Russian culture is envisioned as being fundamentally state-centric when it is at its most authentic and original. There is an obvious political conclusion to be drawn from this approach and that can best be described as a belief in the primacy of the state, or Statism.

Mention has already been made of Vladimir Putin’s preference for Statism as a political philosophy. Statism has been an enduring source of Russian foreign policy-making as well, and not only Putin’s. Andrei P. Tsygankov has identified it as one of three “distinct traditions, or schools, of foreign policy thinking” (Tsygankov 2013a), with its own specific preferences and priorities. “Statists,” writes Tsygankov, “have emphasized the state’s ability to govern and preserve the social and political order.” They are “explicit in choosing values of power, stability, and sovereignty over those of freedom and democracy” (Tsygankov 2013a).

Indeed, Vladimir Putin has promoted the idea of a strong Russian state from the very first day of his accession to the presidency. Upon becoming Acting President in 1999, he announced Statism (*gosudárstvennichestvo*), together with patriotism (*patriotizm*), great-poweriness (*derzhavnost*), and social solidarity (*sotsialnaia solidarnost*), as being the “core values and fundamental ideological reference points” of his proposed “Russian idea [*rossiiskaia ideia*]” (Putin 1999). In his article, Putin claimed that a Statist political outlook and a reverence for the state is something that is an inalienable feature of the Russian people:

“For us, the state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and the people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to fight against. Quite the contrary, it is the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and the main driving force of

any change. [...] Society desires the restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state” (Hill – Gaddy 2013).

Based on this line of reasoning Putin concluded that “Russia needs a strong state power and must have it” (Hill – Gaddy 2013). Given this background, the strong emphasis that has been put on the state in Putin’s civilisational discourse during the last few years should come as no surprise, quite despite the fact that it was articulated at a much later date than were the words just quoted.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this observation is that the so-called ‘civilisational turn,’ important and consequential as it is in itself, nevertheless has *not* brought with it any major changes in the fundamental priorities and aspirations that guide the Russian leadership and were already in place prior to this development. In other words, the civilisational turn can be described in terms of *enduring preferences and changing strategies*.⁴

The Uses of the Civilisational Identity

If, as it is argued here, the introduction of the civilisational model signifies merely a change in strategy rather than in foundational principles, then the question must be asked wherein the political expediency of it lies, and why the distinct Russian civilisational identity was adopted in the first place. How, in other words, does it help the ruling elite in achieving its Statist goals? To answer this question we will have to examine briefly under what circumstances it arose, starting from the basic assumption that it was part of a concerted effort to deal with specific situational demands to which the government saw itself forced to respond.

Andrei P. Tsygankov has suggested three contexts as relevant for making sense of the ‘civilisational turn’ in Russian politics: a global one, a regional one, and a domestic one. “Globally, Russia confronts the ongoing efforts by the United States to spread democratization across the world and present Western values as superior to those of the rest of the world” (Tsygankov 2013 b). The regional dimension refers to “the fear of radical and militant Islam” (Tsygankov 2013 b). In the domestic context, a number of issues converge. Most important among these are “the growing influence of Islamist ideologies, rising immigration from Muslim-dominated former Soviet republics and desolation on the

4 For a discussion of the distinction that is drawn here between fundamental state preferences and changeable policy strategies, see (Moravcsik 1997). In Moravcsik’s view, the underlying societal interests that are represented by powerful domestic groups and corporate agents are crucial in determining which state preferences will come to shape state behaviour on the international arena. To my mind, applying this approach to the case at hand goes a long way in explaining what has taken place during the last few years. In terms of social group, we are dealing, of course, with the powerful so-called *siloviki*, who generally share among themselves a Statist political outlook. For further details about them, I would like to refer the reader to the research of Olga Kryshstanovskaya and Stephen White (e.g. Kryshstanovskaya – White 2003; Kryshstanovskaya 2008; Kryshstanovskaya – White 2009).

North Caucasus,” which have “created a dangerous environment,” with ethnic tensions on the rise (Tsygankov 2013 b).

Tsygankov’s thesis about a threefold contextual challenge makes a great deal of sense. An examination of the relevant source texts does on the whole corroborate that the circumstances mentioned by him represent the major conditioning factors that should be taken into consideration when one tries to understand the gradual emergence of the civilisational discourse in Russian politics prior to 2012.

When it comes to the formulation of Russian civilisational identity that emerged in 2012, and especially Vladimir Putin’s rendering of it, however, these three contexts taken by themselves are not enough to account for this development. This latest phase of the ‘civilisational turn’ is reflective rather of another, more profound, predicament. It is both an outcome of and itself a contributing factor towards a long-term and systemic crisis of liberal democratic values in Russian politics. It is indicative of the failure not only to decisively implement such values, but also is a direct result of the enduring Statist agenda which compromises these values entirely. Rather than explaining these developments as a result of inter-state interaction, then, and as a protective measure taken to counter a belligerent Western-led democracy promotion and moralistic proselytism, it makes more sense to regard it as a result of policy choices made by a small but exceedingly powerful elite grouping at the pinnacle of power.

At the end of the day, we are dealing with a case of regime survival, effected by a regime that can hold on to power and ensure its own continuity only by means of safeguarding its quasi-democratic, unreformed, order. It quite justifiably feels threatened by the prospect of a full implementation of a liberal democratic programme, which would mean having to accept relinquishing power at one time, demands for which have come not only from forces in domestic society but from transnational society as well. During the period leading up to Vladimir Putin’s public endorsement of the civilisational identity, there was an increasing urgency in this regard when significant questions were being raised among the general public about the democratic legitimacy of the regime. During 2011, in increasing numbers, the young urban elite took to the streets demanding fair and equal elections. It protested as well against the pre-planned transfer of presidential power from Dmitry Medvedev back to Vladimir Putin and against the authorities’ alleged involvement in the electoral rigging that reportedly took place in connection with the Russian legislative elections in late 2011.

In this situation, which in the eyes of the authorities seemed to spell disaster in the form of a ‘coloured revolution’ finally taking place inside the country, an approach had to be found by means of which it would be possible to discredit and alienate the protesters and those criticising the government, mobilise popular support, and divert people’s attention away from the increasingly obvious democratic deficits to a common threat. The latter was artificially brought

about by references to hidden adversaries, ‘foreign agents,’ and a ‘fifth column,’ who purportedly wanted to destabilise the government and generate political chaos, which created a fearful atmosphere and a sense of being under siege. The civilisational model also played its part in legitimating this political course, in which Liberalism became the first casualty.

In fact, the civilisational paradigm challenges liberal values in at least three major ways. First, the idea of multiple civilisations, being based as it is on the notion of a competition between different value systems, makes relative the notion of universality, which lies at the basis of human rights. Second, as a form of nationalism (more about which shall be said presently), the civilisational approach rejects Liberalism on the basis that it represents a value system belonging to an alien culture, which is not to be emulated by Russians. Third, the way it is represented, it offers a rendering of Russian culture and its ‘traditional values’ which takes hold of the elements in history that have been decidedly non-liberal. Indeed, already in his 1999 article, Putin asserted that “it will not happen soon, if it ever happens at all, that Russia will become the second edition of, say, the US or Britain in which liberal values have deep historic traditions” (Putin 1999).

Thus, in regard to the values dimension, the civilisational approach *essentializes differences*, and represents in this sense an ideology of separateness that can be used as a means of *self-distinguishing* and, concurrently, of *othering* (two approaches which involve a reifying both of the Self and of the Other). In order to categorize this phenomenon in cases when it touches upon national identity, Emil Pain coined the term ‘civilisational nationalism’ (Verkhovskii – Pain 2012), which subsequently has been employed by other scholars as well (e.g. Mjør 2012). However self-contradictory as this label might appear at the first glance it actually captures quite well what came to the fore at the top political level in 2012. In the present context, civilisational nationalism can be said to refer to the notion of civilisational diversity in the service of a particularist agenda, that is to say utilised for the purposes of consolidating “society on the basis of concepts of a common historical and cultural essence and to counterpose [one’s] own special and unique community to ‘foreign’ communities” (Verkhovskii – Pain 2012). Thus, at the basis of ‘civilisational nationalism,’ as it is understood here, there lies an emphasis on cultural distinctiveness and uniqueness. In short, it is a framework which legitimates a Russian *Sonderweg* (special path).

By means of this approach, the government has created an ideological platform on the basis of which it can stave off efforts at democracy promotion coming from abroad, and stigmatise as stewards of alien powers domestic actors who appeal for political reform. In the international context, it has been called upon to make the domestic political order impervious to foreign critique, and can therefore be said to further a *normative resistance*, or a *defiance against being a norm-taker*. In so far as this policy serves to promote the attainment of *policy independence*, which has been an enduring objective for the regime since at least

2004 when Russia was semi-officially branded as being a ‘sovereign democracy,’ this strategy can be said to further the Statist agenda. That perfectly legitimate domestic and transnational societal demands for reform are discredited as being nothing more than the dictates of foreign states gives further witness to the Statist bias against an independent and free civil society.

The Statist priorities shine through as well in the accompanying *securitisation of identity*, which has been noted by several scholars (e.g. Viatcheslav Morozov and Igor Zevelev). One might recall that “critical to [Russian] Statism is the notion of external threats to Russia’s security” (Tsygankov 2013a). In order to strengthen internal political control and to consolidate national unity external threats are magnified and the spectre of a largely hidden enemy is evoked. This policy was palpably present in Vladimir Putin’s presidential campaign, and could be felt not least in the allusions that were being made at that time to a looming threat to the civilisational identity itself and its common “cultural code.”⁵ Putin claimed, for instance, without specifying how this was being done or by whom, that the Russian ‘cultural code’ “has been attacked ever more often over the past few years; hostile forces have been trying to break it, and yet, it has survived. It needs to be supported, strengthened and protected” (Putin 2012 b). It is explicitly made clear here that the ‘cultural code’ is not viewed as self-supporting, but has to be fortified and defended by the state. It might also follow from this argument, based as it is on the notion of a Russian state-civilisation, that a refusal to somehow conform to the cultural values supposedly inherent in the ‘cultural code’ can be seen as an attack on the state. It goes without saying that this reasoning provides an argument for expanding the mandate of the security services within society, something which according to the findings of Olga Kryshstanovskaya indeed has taken place since Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency (Viktorov 2014).

Consequences for Foreign Policy

It has already been mentioned that the ‘state-civilisation’ model of Russian identity would have some important implications for foreign policy. Now, the question naturally arises concerning what its function has been in recent international developments. Although a more qualified answer to this question will have to wait for a future study, I shall attempt a tentative answer this question

5 At times, the terms ‘cultural code’ and ‘civilisational code’ have been used interchangeably. This is the case, for instance, in the document entitled Russia’s National Policy Strategy through to 2025, which states that “the modern Russian state brings together a single cultural (civilisational) code, based on the preservation and development of Russian culture and language and of the historical and cultural heritage of all the peoples of Russia, which is characterised by a particular striving for truth and justice, respect for the unique traditions of the peoples living in Russia, and by the ability to integrate their best achievements in a single Russian culture” (Strategiia 2012).

by examining below the role of the official civilisational discourse in the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict.

The first tenet of the civilisational model that has been instrumentalised in the Ukrainian crisis is that of the existence of mutually exclusive civilisational units. This has implied drawing up dividing lines between Russia and the monolithic West, the result of which is to foster a new kind of *bloc thinking*. For instance, in an article published on 13 February 2014, that is to say roughly one week before Viktor Yanukovich abandoned the capital of Kiev, Sergey Lavrov referenced what Samuel P. Huntington had written on Ukraine. He then called attention to the idea of Ukraine as being a country that strides the fault line between two different civilisations, something which makes it difficult for the country's leadership to decide in what main direction to turn when it comes to its foreign relations.

“If one examines the history of independent Ukraine, it becomes clear that all attempts to swiftly and ‘in one fell swoop’ determine the vector of the country's foreign relations – to the West or to the East – invariably have ended in failure. [...] Strictly speaking, the ‘texture’ of the Ukrainian society does not allow it to ‘swing’ one way or the other. Already twenty years ago Samuel Huntington wrote about this in his *Clash of Civilizations*, warning that any attempt to determine this issue would be a factor tearing domestic relations in the Ukrainian state apart, with potentially dire consequences for the country” (Lavrov 2014).

The intention behind this reference to Huntington's idea of Ukraine as a ‘cleft country’ was of course to bolster the Russian government's opinion that Ukraine should remain a neutral and non-aligned country and not be allowed to join either the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, for which the Ukrainian opposition fought, or NATO.

Later in the year, the Russian President intriguingly also picked up this Huntingtonian idea of Ukraine as being divided between two civilisations, although he made reference to it in a slightly less direct manner than Lavrov had done before him. In his speech at the 2014 Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Vladimir Putin had the following to say:

“Today, we already see a sharp increase in the likelihood of a whole set of violent conflicts with either direct or indirect participation by the world's major powers. And the risk factors include not just traditional multinational conflicts, but also the internal instability in separate states, especially when we talk about nations located at the intersections of major states' geopolitical interests, or on the border of cultural, historical, and economic civilisational continents [*na granitse kul'turno-istoricheskikh, ekonomicheskikh, tsivilizatsionnykh ‘materikov’*]. Ukraine [...] is one of the examples of such sorts of conflicts that affect [the] international power balance, and I think it will certainly not be the last” (Valdai 2014).

Here we can see Vladimir Putin's acceptance of Sergey Lavrov's long-standing theory of a tectonic shift taking place in the global political landscape and the

increasing importance of economically, politically and culturally defined poles or centres of power. Noteworthy as well is the manner in which the idea of multiple civilisations is interwoven with the geopolitical discourse, which of course experienced a peak in popularity during the Ukrainian crisis.

The next point to be mentioned here has reference to the civilisational identity itself. Although ‘state-civilisation’ is the privileged designation to which the civilisational identity refers in this case, it does not follow that it represents a civic identity. To the contrary, it is a cultural identity that designates membership in a cultural community. This makes the civilisational identity significantly vaguer and more difficult to handle politically and administratively than the civic identity, which is formalised as citizenship. On the other hand, it offers more freedom of manoeuvre for a political actor who needs a malleable formula for identity that contains an element of uncertainty and is open for interpretation.

In the Ukrainian crisis, such has been the function of the concept of ‘compatriots’ or ‘co-nationals’ (*sootchestvenniki*), which has been crucial for the Russian government in legitimating Russia’s incursions into the Ukraine. It provided an argument as to why foreign citizens, even though they hold a non-Russian citizenship, nevertheless are entitled to protection by the Russian state. The translations that have figured in the English-speaking media, such as ‘ethnic Russians,’ ‘Russophones’ or ‘Russian-speakers,’ do not do justice to it, since it is not in the first place based on such ‘objective’ criteria (linguistic, ethnic or otherwise), but on (inter-)subjective ones, most important among which is a shared sense of community with Russian culture. Admittedly, Russian ‘compatriots’ can be both ethnic Russians and/or Russophones, but none of these factors are ultimately decisive for deciding who belongs to this category. What is decisive, though, is the Russian authorities’ self-appointed right to decide who belongs to the community of Russian ‘compatriots’ based on a very loose and permitting definition. In 2014, at an annual reception organised on behalf of newly appointed foreign ambassadors to Russia, Vladimir Putin was quite outspoken about this. In fact, he used ‘compatriots’ and ‘Russian people’ (*russskie liudi*) interchangeably, thus implying that his understanding of Russian identity itself, and of the Russian state’s so-called right to protect, would not be limited only to citizens of the Russian Federation.

“In Ukraine, as you may have seen, at threat were our compatriots [*sootchestvenniki*], Russian people [*russskie liudi*] and people of other nationalities, their language, history, culture and legal rights, guaranteed, by the way, by European conventions. When I speak of Russians [*russskie liudi*] and Russian-speaking citizens I am referring to those people who consider themselves part of the broad Russian community [*tak nazyvayemyi shirokii russskii mir*], they may not necessarily be ethnic Russians, but they consider themselves Russian people [*shchitaiut sebja russskim chelovekom*]” (Putin 2014a).

At a later date, during the latest round of his annual televised marathon interview, Vladimir Putin returned to this issue. He reiterated once again that the compatriot identity was principally a cultural one, and that the ultimate criterion for having such an identity was subjective, that is to say would have to be based on self-identification.

“At this point, Russia is not expecting anything from Kiev officials except one thing. They must see us as equal partners in all aspects of cooperation. It is also very important that they observe the legitimate rights and interests of Russians living in Ukraine and those who consider themselves Russian regardless of what their passports say. People who consider Russian their mother tongue and Russian culture their native culture. People who feel an inextricable bond with Russia. Of course, any country cares about people who treat it as their motherland (in this case, Russia). This is nothing extraordinary” (Putin 2015).

This line of reasoning ties in with what was said above about the conviction that the Russian state is tasked with defending the members of the larger cultural community that is the ‘Russian world.’ It deserves mention here that the ‘Russian world’ is one of the several designations that have been used during recent years to brand the Russian civilisation. In many ways, it is a natural outgrowth of the civilisational discourse. Yet, in terms of usage and in the purpose attached to it there are also certain specifics. The ‘Russian world’ concept was co-opted by the Russian government as a means of reaching and attracting the Russian diaspora, and also as part of an effort to enhance its soft power abroad. The fact remains, though, that the authorities at times have explicitly framed the ‘Russian world’ concept in civilisational terms, as the following quotation of Sergey Lavrov makes clear: “I think everyone will agree that the priority efforts of the state and civil society is to further promote the concept of the ‘Russian World’ as a civilisational and cultural space, which unites people of different nationalities who are not indifferent to the fate and place of Russia in the world” (Lavrov 2014 b).⁶

Lastly, it deserves mention that the civilisational model bestows on the Russian authorities an even more elevated mission, which transcends its role as a regional power. In the already quoted speech given to the newly installed ambassadors to Russia, Putin would bring up the idea of Russia as a defender of global civilisational diversity, rising to the occasion to defend against the alleged attempt by some major world powers to force their own order on others:

“There is hardly any doubt that the unipolar world order did not come to be. Peoples and countries are raising their voices in favour of self-determination and civilisational and cultural identity [*tsivilizatsionnaia i kulturnaia identichnost’*], which conflicts with the attempts by certain countries to maintain their

6 For a more qualified discussion of the uses of the ‘Russian world’ concept, see (Laruelle 2015).

domination in the military sphere, in politics, finance, the economy and in ideology” (Putin 2014a).

Again we are confronted with an attempt at safeguarding Russia’s policy independence, with the securitisation of cultural identity, and with the view that the fight against a Western-led globalisation is a righteous cause. Of course, the entire official Russian political discourse during the Ukrainian crisis has been defined by a highlighting of matters pertaining to defense and security. The cultural and civilisational dimensions of Russian national identity have been instrumentalised in order to amplify this argument. One should not underestimate the importance of this strategy for gaining a hearing with a domestic audience. In the imagination of many Russians, and non-Russians as well, the conflict surrounding the Ukraine has taken on the proportions of a full-blown clash of civilisations, as prophesied at one time by Samuel P. Huntington, with the notable difference that Russia is battling not only for its own sake but for all non-Western civilisations’ who want to exist independently. And the authorities have played their part in bringing this conviction about. During a press conference held on 18 December 2014, Vladimir Putin summarised Russia’s involvement in the Ukraine crisis and the country’s present economic hardships as the result of its rightful wish to continue to exist as a separate civilisation:

“ANTON VERNITSKY, CHANNEL ONE RUSSIA: Mr President, are the current economic developments the price we have to pay for Crimea? Maybe the time has come to acknowledge it?

VLADIMIR PUTIN: No. This is not the price we have to pay for Crimea... This is actually the price we have to pay for our natural aspiration to preserve ourselves as a nation, as a civilisation, as a state” (Putin 2014 b).

Conclusion

In the present essay, a brief examination has been made of the recent ‘civilisational turn’ in Russian political discourse. Based on the observation that what distinguishes Vladimir Putin’s rendering of Russian civilisational identity is its strongly emphasized state-centrism, the argument has been advanced that the Russian ‘civilisational nationalism’ is first and foremost motivated and driven forward by aspirations integral to a previously consolidated political outlook, the first articulation of which can be traced back to the very beginning of the present decision-making community’s assumption of power at the turn of the millennium. It has furthermore been argued that this development is also the outcome of a systemic crisis that has come about as a result of the strategic choices made on the basis of this Statist position. To be more specific, ‘civilisational nationalism’ has been called forth and shaped by a combination of a Statist political outlook, inherited from Soviet times but adapted to Rus-

sia's post-imperial condition, and of situational policies adopted as responses to a set of pressing challenges relating to the increasing deficit of liberal democratic values in the Russian political system.

The political expediency for the present regime of a self-contained Russian civilisational identity is also better understood if it is brought into relation with the Statist agenda. It bestows on the state the domestic civilising mission of upholding and defending the traditional cultural values supposedly inherent in the civilisational matrix, thus providing a formula for an identity politics that suits the authorities well. At the same time, the influence of foreign cultures on Russia can be limited on the basis of it, since it can be argued that they spread values that are not only alien, but potentially detrimental to the integrity of the Russian 'cultural code.'

There have been some important repercussions for foreign policy-making as well. When it comes to regional affairs, Russia is attempting to legitimate its involvement abroad on civilisational grounds. The loose definition of 'compatriots' as foreign nationals experiencing some affinity with Russia gives it plenty of leeway in this regard. Furthermore, Russia has petitioned for Ukraine's neutrality and status as a nonaligned party based on the argument that the country is straddling a civilisational fault line. In relation to the West, there is an attempt to counteract its globalistic agenda by depicting the liberal values that it attempts to spread as less than universal.

From what has been said above it should be quite clear how the described ideology sits well with a regime that is increasingly intent on defending its own illiberal positions. The ruling elite has taken on itself the mission of preserving intact its semi-democratic political system, dubbed alternatively "electoral authoritarianism" or "managed democracy," against the onslaught not only of domestic demands for reform, but also of the imperatives that the increasingly interconnected global community is bringing with it. It imagines itself as positioned on the summit of a paternalistic and values-based state hierarchy, which is encircled by hostile forces and that towers over a domestic civil society that is circumscribed to the degree demanded by it. Despite the fine words of cultural self-determination and the importance of indigenous values, what has really happened is that the ruling elite has co-opted Russian culture for its own political purposes and has taken on itself the task of deciding who belongs to the Russian community and who does not.

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Latin American vector in Russia's Foreign Policy: Identities and interests in the Russian-Venezuelan Partnership¹

ALEXANDRA SITENKO

Abstract: *The crisis in Ukraine, that broke out in 2013 and escalated in 2014, has led to sanction policy and the emergence of significant political divergences between Russian Federation and the West. This has resulted in an intensification of Russia's foreign and economic policy alliances with its neighboring countries as well as with the rest of the BRICS members. In his interview with Cuba's Prensa Latina, Vladimir Putin further classified cooperation with Latin American states as one of the key and very promising lines of Russia's foreign policy.*

In light of the above mentioned developments, this paper addresses the Latin American vector of Russian foreign policy using the example of Russian-Venezuelan partnership, which has been intensified after 2004. It explores the underlying key elements of this partnership based on realist and constructivist assumptions and is aimed at outlining foreign policy identities, perceptions and interests constitutive for the cooperation between the two countries. The author concludes, that the cooperation is based both on realist and constructivist elements, whereas Russian interests are mainly realist and Venezuelan constructivist, and that fact could hinder long-lasting and both-way beneficial bilateral collaboration.

Keywords: *Foreign Policy, Security Policy, Identities, Russia, Venezuela*

Introduction

The outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine has brought significant divergences into Russian-European relations. This led to strengthening of foreign and economic policy alliances between Russia and its neighbors within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as in Latin America and other BRICS countries.

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In April 2014, the founding of the Eurasian Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus was announced. A month later, the signing of major energy deals with China came about. In August 2014, when Russia imposed a ban on imports of agricultural products from the EU countries, the US and Canada, several South American countries, including Brazil, Argentina and Chile agreed to supply their products to Russia. In October 2014, Latin America and the BRICS were proclaimed by Vladimir Putin as Russia's new foreign policy priorities (Voice of Russia 2014).

Thus, with the growth of the tensions between Russia and the European Union in the context of the conflict in Eastern Europe, Russian foreign policy interests in Latin America are experiencing a new boost comparable in its intensity to the close cooperation which used to mark Soviet-Latin American relations. Though at present, also Latin American actors that stayed irrelevant during the Soviet period are making a mark as Russia's new strategic partners in the Western hemisphere. Venezuela is one of them.

This paper is based on the thesis that *the transatlantic link Venezuela-Russia represents a realpolitik-alliance but is simultaneously being guided by similar foreign policy perceptions and identities*. It enquires the underlying key elements of the Russian-Venezuelan partnership since the arrival in power of Vladimir Putin and Hugo Chávez in 2000 and how they influence the intensification of the bilateral cooperation. It is based on realist and constructivist assumptions and is aimed at outlining foreign policy identities and interests constitutive for the cooperation between the two countries, focusing on security, regional and energy policy areas, whereby energy and economic sector is being foregrounded. Before starting the analysis, a brief theoretical outline is to be presented.

Realism and Constructivism in International Relations

Realism and Constructivism traditionally represent two different schools of thought within the discipline of International Relations. The Realist theory is based on the assumption that the national interests of a state determine the shape of its foreign policy. This, in turn, causes that the international politics are transformed into a "battlefield" of states, dominated by selfishness, rivalry, and lust for power, where state actors are determined to enforce their respective interests (Korab-Karpowicz 2010). According to the founder of the classical or biological Realism, Hans Morgethau, the international climate of rivalry attributes to the fact that "politics are governed by objective laws, which have their roots in human nature" (Morgenthau 1973: 4). The human egoism thus becomes visible in the international politics. Further, the acquisition of power is regarded as the main foreign policy goal and is at the same time an instrument for the enforcement of national interests (ibid: 8). If certain countries become too strong or develop too big political ambitions, that could jeopardize

the international status quo, there is the instrument of the so-called Balance of Power that should insulate these power aspirations. The typical strategy for achieving it is alliance formation (ibid: 167). The 'Politics of the Status Quo', based on Balance of Power is not the only policy form pursued by the states. In addition to this form and the 'Policy of Imperialism', Morgenthau uses the term 'Policy of Prestige', whose main objective is to impress other states with the power that one state possesses or believes to possess. This objective is being achieved by the states through diplomatic ceremonial and display of military power (ibid: 74–75).

The theoretical models of Morgenthau formed basis for the development of different strands of the theory of Political Realism, which drew the attention of science to new elements and priorities of the relationships within the international community. In this paper we mention only Neorealism.

Neorealist school, created by the political scientist Kenneth Waltz, criticizes the assumption of classical Realists about the bad human nature. Instead of dealing with human beings, Neorealists suggest to deal with the structure of the international system. For Kenneth Waltz, the cause of all international conflicts lies in the anarchic nature of the international system, which is lacking a referee to solve conflict among states. Egotistic states are those who alone coordinate the international scene. Anarchy is therefore the context in which relationships between different international actors take place, and conflicts between states are thus pre-programmed (Waltz 2001: 160). From the anarchism of the international system, according to Waltz, results the pursuit of Balance of Power, which should be traced back not to the human nature or the national interests of the states, but only and alone to the anarchic state of the international system that forces the states to survive (Kissane 2011: 84).

In Realism, states are regarded as rational actors, who deliberately pursue their interests and fight for the extension of their influence on the international stage. In Classical Realism, human nature is responsible for such state of affairs, and Neorealists see the causes for it in the anarchic nature of international system. However Realism doesn't broach the issue of where national interests and foreign policy priorities exactly come from or how are they being constructed. Their existence is simply accepted as given and is not questioned.

Constructivists analyze actions of political actors based on their identities and worldviews. Both, structure and environment as well as actors in this structure, such as states, constitute and change it through interaction. Through social interaction ideologies, interests, and priorities of international actors undergo various transformations, and are therefore by no means perpetual, nor always based only on power gain as suggested in Realism.

One of the most influential Constructivists – Alexander Wendt – does not deny the importance of national interests and the anarchic nature of the international system, however advocates, like all Constructivists, that the system

has arisen in the course of social processes and national interests are therefore product of an international interaction and exchange of ideas. The only substantive part of it is human nature (Wendt 1999: 135).

The author uses the rational choice theory for his argumentation, which states that “desires” and “beliefs” create “choices”. Rationality is thereby defined as “having consistent desires and beliefs” and “choice” means “the enactment of these desires and beliefs” (Wendt 1999: 124–125). Using the example of the status quo states Wendt shows, that the decision-formation of a state has nothing to do with its material interests, but for a small part with the desire of all men for security, and mainly with the identity of the state as “law-abiding” or “member of a society of states”, whose rules it respects (ibid: 124). This notion of its own nature causes, that certain state opts for a certain foreign policy behavior. Hence the identity and therefore foreign policy objectives of a state can undergo various transformations and phases and are not predetermined.

There is also an overlap between the two theoretical approaches. Some Constructivists, among them Daniel Green and Martha Finnemore, admit the existence of realistic factors in the behavior of political actors (Green 2002, Finnemore 1996). According to Vaughn Shannon, ideal components change nothing about the fact that “at the bottom, all political actors are (...) sensitive, goal driven (...) materially constrained rational actors” (Shannon-Kowert 2012: 6). In this regard, one cannot refrain from involving a realistic perspective in the analysis of interests of foreign policy actors. But at the same time we should consider, that national interests “are not just out there waiting to be discovered” (Finnemore 1996: 5), but they are constituted with and through the international relations. This construction incorporates geographical and historical factors of a state, its status related aspirations, the expectations of its partners and the existing international standards and regulations. However, the concept of the international standards is problematic. International norms have been designed by the community of nation states and are controlled by these, meaning that the existing international normative acts could not have come about without their adaptation to the national interests of more than one hundred individual states. In this paper, the normative aspect, which is very controversial and complex, will not play any role.

To this paper applies, that foreign policy is guided by national interests, according to which alliances and covenants are made. National interests are connected with ideas and worldviews. Further, the international status is important for most of international players, and they strive to find international recognition (Welch Larson 2012). Accordingly, behind every international action all or at least some of the following factors are to be assumed: selfish national interests, identity-related preferences, and the desire for recognition. In the following analysis of the relations between Venezuela and Russia, an

investigation of the major foreign policy interests in consideration of the above mentioned factors will come to the fore.

A new chapter in Russian-Venezuelan relations

In the past, soviet Russia has maintained good relations with countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Cuba. Venezuela has never been as present on the foreign policy agenda of Russia as today.

The origins of Russian-Venezuelan relations date back to the end of 19th century and the establishment of direct relations between the two countries with the opening of the Venezuelan Consulate in St. Petersburg (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores 1996: 9). However, the formal establishment of relations did not provide any concrete initiatives until the 20th century.

The relations with the Soviet Union, established in 1945, have been marked by highs and lows. In the 50's, they were dominated by alienation rather than cooperation. Only a chargé d'affaires represented Soviet delegation in Caracas. The reason for this was the ideological incompatibility of the programs of the Social Democratic Party Democratic Action (AD), which provided the governments in Venezuela since 1945, and the Soviet communism (Romero 1992).

The Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, which by that time has reached its most tense phase, was an additional obstacle on the way of political and economic rapprochement of Venezuela and Russia. For the USSR, Mexico, Uruguay and Argentina were more important due to their loyalty and independence of the foreign policy course during the Cold War (cf. Romero 1992, Davidov 2009, Khachaturov 1999). After 1959, the socialist Cuba became the closest ally of the USSR in Latin America.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and as the first phase of the crisis in the early 90 s has been overcome, the relations between Venezuela and Russia experienced an upswing, as illustrated by the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Fuel and Energy (1993). Nevertheless, Venezuela was still by far not as important for Russian foreign policy agenda as were Cuba or Mexico.

After the change of power in Moscow and Caracas in early 2000 s, the mutual cooperation has experienced a new impetus. Under the presidency of Hugo Chávez and Vladimir Putin, the Caribbean country has risen to become one of Russia's most important partners in Latin America, and Russia has become one of the main international partners of Venezuela. Especially close cooperation has been taking place in military and energy sector (Kroth 2012, Romero/Corrales 2010). In 2005, Russia and Venezuela began to produce oil in Venezuela's Orinoco basin. Meanwhile, the funding for the bilateral projects is being allocated through the joint Russian-Venezuelan bank, founded in 2009 (ibid.).

It is worth mentioning, that prior to 2004 the bilateral Russian-Venezuelan relations were less dynamic. Only after Chávez's third visit to Moscow in No-

ember 2004 we can speak about a “qualitative improvement” (Katz: 15) of the Russian-Venezuelan relations and concrete joint projects, which this paper is centered on.

Political regimes in Russia and Venezuela

In 1998, Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias won the Venezuelan presidential election. His victory led to radical changes in Venezuelan society. With the new Constitution of 1999, the country was renamed in the República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). The name already contains the central political concept of the new government – el Bolivarianismo or Revolución Bolivariana (The Bolivarian Revolution). This concept is for the most part influenced by the thinking of a revolutionary and the founding father of independent Latin America – Simon Bolivar, based on more social justice and the idea of creation of united Latin America. The new social order should make traditionally marginalized sectors of the population to the central political actors in order to then build the Socialismo del Siglo XXI (‘21st century socialism’), that sees a departure from the economic liberalization and the rule of political elite towards the rise of ‘people’ in Venezuela (Schoen/Rowan 2009, Isidoro Losada 2011, Herrmann 2012, Perez Salazar 2013). The Venezuelan society had hereby to be reoriented towards socialist values like equality, solidarity and the common good and be dissociated from capitalism. After the death of Hugo Chávez on March 5, 2013, its policy has been continued by Nicolas Maduro, who also comes from the ranks of Chavismo.

Russia, on the contrary, has left the socialist path with the collapse of the Soviet Union and has been transferred into a capitalist-oriented market economy. The term ‘ownership’ has been defining the social order and social status, which is being determined on the basis of income and assets (Schroeder 2007). These principles apply in today’s Russia under Vladimir Putin. Thus, the radical ideas of the redistribution of power and disempowerment of elites, that determine the ideological concept in Bolivarian Venezuela, are obsolete in Russia.

The fact that the governments of two distant countries that represent two very different concepts of society maintain close bilateral relationship suggests behind this connection purely pragmatic interests, dictated by political Realism (Morgenthau 1973, Waltz 1979). But closer inspection shows important similarities between Venezuelan and Russian models.

Venezuela of Hugo Chávez and Russia of Vladimir Putin are characterized by a strong centralization of political power, which is centered on the figure of the president. In Russia, all the state power is concentrated in the presidential administration (Malek 2009). In Venezuela, the president can apply the instrument of the so-called ‘Ley Habilitante’ (‘Enabling act’) and with it have the ability to bypass Parliament’s consent and to adopt laws by decree. In the 13 years of his

presidency, Hugo Chávez has governed a total of five years by ‘Ley Habilitante’ (El Universal 2012). Under Chávez and Putin, the staffing policy in public sector in Venezuela and Russia has been subjected to the will of decision-makers, whereby public offices have been awarded mainly to pro-government candidates. The energy industry has been nationalized, the independence of the judiciary has been limited and the coverage in the mass media increasingly subjected to state control (Malek 2009, Orttung/Walker 2013). An important element of both governments is the politicization of the military. In Venezuela, active and retired military personnel occupies numerous political and administrative offices (Isidoro Losada 2011), while in Russia much of the political elite, including President Putin, used to have ties to Soviet or post-Soviet secret services and military (Mommsen 2004, Malek 2009).

Despite substantial differences, the political models of Venezuela and Russia since 2000 have many common elements which bring their governments ideologically closer together and suggest beside *realpolitik*-based also constructivist components in their bilateral cooperation.

Main features of Venezuelan and Russian foreign policy under Hugo Chávez and Vladimir Putin

Like in domestic policy, there are also a number of similarities in the foreign policy structure of Russia and Venezuela. First, it should be noted that in both cases the president plays the decisive role in formulating foreign policy tasks and priorities. The Russian Constitution says explicitly that “in compliance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the federal laws, the President of the Russian Federation determines the guidelines of domestic and foreign policy of the State” (Constitution of the Russian Federation: Article 80). Article 236 of the Venezuelan Constitution entrusts the president with the foreign policy activities and with the preparation of the national development plan Proyecto Simon Bolivar, in which the foreign policy guidelines are formulated (Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela: Art 236.). Furthermore, there is a similar temporal classification in the formulation of foreign policies of the two countries.

Venezuelan foreign policy under the socialist government is traditionally divided into two stages: 1) the stage of consolidation of the Bolivarian Revolution from 1999 to 2004 and 2) its radicalization after the victory of Hugo Chávez in the recall referendum of August 2004 until his death in spring of 2013 (González Urrutia 2006, Werz 2011). A similar periodization can be applied also to the Russian policy under Putin. Russia that Putin took over after the two terms in office of Boris Yeltsin in 1999 was in a deep financial crisis, that erupted in 1998 and made the country insolvent (Grinkewitsch 2010). The social situation in Russia was equally disastrous. Internationally its reputation has also suffered

great damage. Among Putin's priorities during his first term of office until 2004 were therefore a set up of the Russian economy and the fulfillment of international financial obligations of his country in connection with the crisis (Herr 2002). Only after his re-election in 2004, the foreign policy claims of Russia came clearly to light and became visible both on the regional as well as on the security and energy policy level.

It was thus not accidentally that only after 2004, as both countries have overcome a phase of domestic political insecurity and had defined their foreign policy goals and priorities, their bilateral relations experienced a decisive push, in order to be transformed into a strategic transatlantic cooperation, that is being continued at present.

Security policy assumptions in Russian-Venezuelan relations

The national interests of Venezuela, which are articulated by its foreign policy, relate primarily to the promotion of a multipolar world with Venezuela as a sovereign state (Líneas Generales 2001–2007). Since the coup d'état of 2002, however, the main interest lies in the creation of an international anti-US-American alliance together with other developing countries (Proyecto Nacional Simón Bolívar 2007–2013). The direction of the new political course of the Venezuelan government has been set at 12 and 13 November 2004 at a high level a meeting. Hugo Chávez drafted a "new strategic map of Bolivarian Revolution" with the aim of deepening the Bolivarian Revolution and the construction of a direct democracy and a socialist society (González Urrutia 2006: 160). The foreign policy tasks that had to serve the above mentioned purposes found their detailed articulation in the Project Simon Bolivar 2007–2013, the first socialist plan, which, among other things, concerned new international geopolitics. As a foreign policy priority it defined the creation of a multipolar world "with new centers of power that represent a break with North American imperialism" (Proyecto Nacional Simón Bolívar 2007–2013: 40). Hereby, Venezuela is supposed to play a leadership role. The perception of danger emanating from the United States defines since 2004 the Venezuelan national and international security policy.

It must be noted that Russia, like Venezuela asserts the need for a multipolar world order as well. The term 'multi-polar world' is mentioned in many bilateral documents (Malek 2009: 51) and has a prominent place in the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation (Concept of national security 2000). The affirmation of a multi-polar world, however, implies that Russia should be one of the poles, first and foremost due to its historical and cultural relevance. According to Vladimir Putin, the objectives of Russian foreign policy have strategic character and "reflect the unique place of Russia on the world political map and its role in world history and in the development of civilization" (Putin

2012). Russia therefore deserves a special place on the international arena due to its undoubted historical and political significance. Nevertheless, there were visible “efforts of a number of states to weaken Russia’s position in the political, economic, military and other fields” (Concept of National Security, Section I). This trend was the result of attempts “to create a structure of international relations, which is based on the dominance of developed Western countries led by the United States in the international community and is aimed at one-sided, military-violent solution of the key problems of world politics (...)” (ibid.). The interests of Russia are to restore its former international weight and to be at least one of the political world centers as well as curb the influence of the United States and to prevent NATO enlargement. Characteristic of the Russian foreign policy perception is a *realpolitik*-view of the modern world order, a dislike of the western dominance in international politics and the affirmation of the necessity for Russia to take a proper place on the international scene.

According to the foreign policy goals, the partnership between Russia and Venezuela is thus based on three key common security policy principles: 1) the principle of *multipolarity in international politics*, which is most evident in the Russian and Venezuelan search for alternative political alliances; 2) the affirmation of the *need of existence of a superior international organization* to conduct the conflict regulation in the international community, in order to put paid to Western dominance; 3) *militarization and demonstration of military power*, in order to be able to compete on the international political scene.

On Venezuelan side, the shared principles with Russia also include the so-called “common anti-imperialist interests” (Proyecto Simón Bolívar: 40). Obviously, Venezuela sees in Russia a potential partner in its anti-imperialist struggle. Russia is thus attributed to an anti-imperialist identity without that it has ever assigned to this ideological category.

The sense of a certain ideological proximity to Russia as a former Soviet country, although it has now no relation to socialism anymore, has made that Russia has been proclaimed by Venezuela as a strategic partner. Still, the national interests of Venezuela shouldn’t be underestimated. Russia is supposed to play an important role in the realization of the key foreign policy interest of Venezuela, namely in the construction of a multi-polar world and a new world order. At a conference in Caracas in 2012², the former Venezuelan Deputy Foreign Minister Temir Porras Poncelón underlined: “The imperial hegemony can only be combated with an alternative political power” (Porras Ponceleón 2012). He also added that this resulted in “the necessity to construct a strategic relationship with one of the emergent or re-emergent powers of the world” (ibid.). According to Ponceleón, Russia represents such power (ibid.). The Deputy Foreign Minister also stressed the Latin American and the Caribbean pursuit

2 The author was present at this meeting and can attest to the discussion.

to be one of the new centers of power in the world, which was why it had been important to build relations with another center of power – the Russian Federation. At this point we can state that the Venezuelan-Russian cooperation is based on constructivist identity-related elements as well as on *realpolitik*-calculations.

Though for Russia what counts are not the ideological aspects but rather the practical benefit it gains from the strategic partnership with Venezuela, related primarily to military cooperation. The peculiarity of the Russian-Venezuelan arms deals, however, is that Venezuela pays the arms supplies with Russian money. In 2009, Caracas received the first loan of 2.2 billion US dollars and bought Russian tanks. Another loan of 4 billion US dollars was granted in 2011 (Nezavisimaya Gazeta 2011). Economically, Russia hardly profits from the arms deals with Venezuela. The benefit that Moscow has is geopolitical, as it allows Russia to secure its presence in South America. In addition to Venezuela and Argentina, also Peru, Brazil and Colombia are now buyers of Russian arms (RIA Novosti 2007). Thus, Russia is coming closer to its goal of global influence expansion. While NATO is approaching the eastern borders of Russia, Russia is operating a geopolitical offensive in Latin America. The joint military exercise in Venezuelan waters in 2008 was the first large-scale maneuver close to the US since the end of the Cold War (Moeller-Holtkamp 2008).

Through joint military exercises with a *global player* Russia, Venezuela is gaining international attention for its political project, for the commercial deals and military exercises with Russia have received broad media coverage. Ultimately, Venezuela gains political weight by exercising what Realist Hans Morgenthau calls *Policy of Prestige*, a policy that aims at increasing one's international recognition (Morgenthau 1973: 74–75).

In security terms, Russia and Venezuela combine negative attitude towards the power-political claims of the United States as well as the idea of creating a multi-polar world order, with Latin America and Russia as two of these poles.

Russian rivalry with the West is particularly evident when looking at the aspects of the regional policy. In case of Venezuela, the targeted isolation of the United States is an important element of its regional strategy. This aspect plays an important role in connecting Venezuela with Russia.

The role of regional policy for the Russian-Venezuelan connection

It seems unlikely at first sight that regional policy of two geographically distant countries has something to do with their bilateral relations. The reason is political in nature and can be ascribed to the Venezuela-led ideologization of Latin America. The strong anti-US-American propaganda of Hugo Chávez and his followers as well as the expulsion of US institutions, like *Drug Enforcement Administration* (DEA), from Venezuela (Romero/Corrales 2010: 222) opened up new political and economic cooperation opportunities for Russia. Russia's activities in Latin

America can be regarded as political and economic occupation of the former US sphere of influence. But apart from the competition with the United States, world power ambitions of Russia are relevant. Although geopolitically the CIS countries are priority for Russia (Concept of the Foreign Policy: 14), it has to look for alternatives elsewhere given integration challenges in the region (Bordachev/Skriba 2014). In the European Union, Moscow is now regarded as aggressor in the Ukraine conflict and as destabilizing power in Europe. In Moscow, the EU is seen as a geopolitical competitor who wants to export its democratic values to the CIS. In Asia, China currently has the supremacy, which makes it difficult for Russia to expand its political interests into the Asian region cold-shouldering China. The current Russian-Chinese alliance is based rather upon pragmatic considerations than on fair-minded friendly intentions. Besides of it, originally, the idea of a close alliance with China proposed to Putin in 2000 by former Prime Minister Primakov in 2000 was received with little enthusiasm (Mangott 2005: 95). The Latin American region, instantaneously neglected by the US and the EU, proves to be the best alternative with Venezuela as an entry point. From Venezuela Russia can establish links with other South American and Caribbean countries. For the Caribbean country and its South American neighbors Russia constitutes an alternative to the historical US-American and European dominance.

The *Chavistas*³ in Venezuela consider the USA to be the epitome of imperialism. Consequently, Venezuela's rapprochement to Russia can be regarded as a result of its anti-imperialist identity. It ignores though that historically Russia has also played a hegemonic role in Central Asia and Caucasus. This fact contradicts the anti-imperialist attitude proclaimed by *Chavistas*, but is not subjected to discussion due to ignorance or pragmatic considerations. Meanwhile, the cooperation benefits both partners. Their collaboration is brought forward not only by similar *realpolitik*-considerations, but also by the same view-points on issues of regional integration and the need to stop the US-American influence on both continents. The methods that the governments of the two countries employ to preserve the loyalty from their neighbors are the same. Both Russia and Venezuela rely on their energy monopoly power and oil revenues to influence or control political events in neighboring countries. It is what constructivist Alexander Wendt defines as "socially shared knowledge or culture" (Wendt 1999: 139). Russian and Venezuelan political culture, treated with rejection in many countries, brings them together.

In addition to regional security and political aspects, Venezuela and Russia are also connected by their resource wealth, which is their most important geopolitical instrument and enables an expansionist foreign policy. Energy sector is one of the key areas, where Venezuela and Russia have developed a variety of joint projects and therefore deserves a closer look.

3 Supporters and political followers of Hugo Chávez (author's note)

Economic and energy policy issues of Russia and Venezuela

In Venezuelan case, there is virtually no difference between the concepts “economic policy” and “energy policy”. Because the oil is now the only asset Venezuela can offer its foreign economic partners. Venezuela’s economy is based on its oil wealth. Since the change of power in 1998, the Venezuelan oil dependency has been steadily increasing. While the oil and its derivatives amounted to 69% of total exports with \$11.06 billion in 1995, in 2008 their share was already 94.4% with \$94.52 billion. The proportion of other goods in export volume of Venezuela has declined in the same period from 31% to 5.6 % (Schaeffler: 502). It is unlikely that these circumstances can change in the near future, for the National Plan Simon Bolivar allows in the years 2007–2013 for the realization of a “national development strategy that combines the sovereign use of natural resources with regional and global energy integration (...)” as well as for the transformation of Venezuela “in the medium term in an energy super power with global influence” (Proyecto Simon Bolivar: 35). The Chavistas see Venezuela not only as a global leader of the new socialist movement and as a Latin American influence power, but also as a leading power in the energy field at the international level.

The coming to power of Hugo Chávez has also changed the logic of Venezuelan economic policy. Just like the already analyzed areas of security and regional policy, the economic relations of Venezuela had to serve ideological and geopolitical objectives of Chávez. The confrontation with the USA that broke out during the presidency of Hugo Chávez and affected the security and regional policy issues has found its continuation also in the economic area. Chávez has taken every appropriate opportunity to threaten his nemesis and most important oil customers – the US – with petroleum delivery suspension (CNN México 2010). All threats turned out to be pure provocations and have never been implemented, mainly because the United States is by far the most important purchaser of Venezuela’s oil (Werz 2011: 381). The government in Caracas is aware of it and seeks, driven by the ideological and pragmatic economic necessity, for alternative alliances in the economic sphere. The group of alternative partners is being led by China, Iran and Russia (Matz 2010, Romero/Corrales 2010, Romero 2010).

Russia is another big energy nation. However, the most important role is being attributed not to the oil, but to the natural gas, as the country is the largest gas exporter. In addition, Russia is the largest oil producer outside of the OPEC. The abundance of natural resources thus represents Russia’s key source of income. It also represents the geopolitical instrument of the Russian government. As stated in the Energy Strategy, the energy policy factor is the “basic element of Russian diplomacy” due to the “global nature of the energy-related problems and their politicization” (Energy-Economic Strategy of Russia up to 2020: item 7).

Its positive economic development since 2003 has helped Russia to consolidate its position among the major international energy policy players. By the end of the 1990 s, it was still an “energy appendage of the West” (Malek: 80), and during Putin’s second presidential term it has risen to an international energy power. The Russian economy has made an impressive development between the first and second term of Vladimir Putin. The gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by 35 %, between 2000 and 2005, the foreign debt has fallen from 60 % of GDP to 15 % and the gold and currency reserves have increased from 12 billion US dollars to 200 billion US dollars (Dynkin 2007).

Accordingly, the strategic priorities in that policy area have changed. The energetic expansion of Russia is currently to be guaranteed through the presence of its national energy companies abroad, which are getting diplomatic support from the Russian state (Energy Sector Strategy of Russia to 2020: item 7). The cooperation is aimed primarily at strengthening ties with the CIS countries, East Asia, the Shanghai Organization, the EU and with “other international organizations and countries” (ibid.). In addition, creation of a common economic energy space between Europe and Asia is planned (ibid.). Though regarding the creation of a Russian-Asian-European energy space, there is currently no clear perspective. Russia aims to gain a monopoly on gas supplies to Europe. The Europeans in turn, led by Germany, want to be relatively independent from the Russian gas. This goes back to interruptions in gas supply in Western Europe due to wage disputes between Russia and Ukraine. The major gas cut-off happened in 2009, as a majority of Central, Eastern and South European countries experienced a large gas supply disruption (Kroeger 2009). That is why the same year in Ankara several EU countries agreed on the construction of the Nabucco pipeline that had to transport gas from the Caspian Sea via Turkey and southern Europe to Austria (Spiegel Online 2009). Another project, called Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), envisaged gas supplies from Azerbaijan via Italy to Central Europe and has been declared ready by 2019 (Reuters 2013). The possible prospect of Europe’s energy supply without Russia’s participation clearly defies the strategic energy interests of Moscow. That is why Vladimir Putin gave the state-owned gas giant Gazprom in 2012 the order to start building the South Stream gas pipeline (Graetz 2012). The pipeline should extend from Russia through the Black Sea and through Bulgaria and the Balkans to Italy. The project was cancelled in 2014 in light of the political differences between Russia and Europe. However, Russia is planning to substitute it through the Turkish Stream pipeline, which is supposed to bring Russian gas to South Europe through Turkey, avoiding Ukraine (Buckley 2015).

In the energy policy sector, there is a conflict between the Russian effort to gain control over the gas supplies for Europe and the European intention of avoiding dependence on Russian supplies in view of the supplies disruptions in the past.

Economy and energy as principal boundary points between Russia and Venezuela

The economic policies of the Bolivarian Venezuela and Putin's Russia have a number of characteristics in common. This concerns, first, *the prominent place of the raw materials* in the economic policies concepts. In both countries, petroleum and natural gas constitute the main export goods and both Venezuela and Russia are hoping to win a prominent place in the international economic system. Venezuela's National Plan Simon Bolivar allowed in the years 2007–2013 for the realization of a “national development strategy that combines the sovereign use of natural resources with regional and global energy integration (...)” as well as for the transformation of Venezuela “in the medium term in an energy super power with global influence” (Proyecto Simon Bolivar 2007–2013: 35). Energy policy is the essential part of Moscow's foreign policy strategy in the 21st century and a tool for expanding the international influence of Russia. The renewed version of the *Energy Strategy of Russia* up to 2030, envisions not only strengthening of Russia's position on the energy market, but even Russia's “full integration” in it (Energy Strategy of Russia up to 2030: Point V.9). Petroleum and natural gas are also used by Venezuela and Russia *as a geopolitical instrument*. Further, the energy business in Venezuela as well as in Russia is being conducted through *state owned enterprises* and is thus completely controlled by the government. In Venezuela, it is the state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA), whose transactions are decided on by the President alone (Graetz 2013: 208–209). The largest Russian company *Gazprom*, which originally was involved only in gas production, but became an oil producer in 2005, has undergone a strong state control after restructuring in 2001. Its management has since been largely occupied with the confidants of Vladimir Putin (ibid: 107–108). The next common element is the *diversification of economic relations*. Venezuela is looking for alternatives to its longtime one-sided focus on the US, while Russia is trying to reduce its dependence from the European energy market. At the same time, Venezuelan and Russian governments are aware of their dependence from the United States and Europe and are trying to hold on to the old connections either by threats of oil supply cut-offs – in case of the *Chavistas* – or the construction of new pipelines – in case of Putin. Finally, there is one more element that Caracas and Moscow have in common. It is the critique *of the international economic behavior of the United States*. Some years ago, Vladimir Putin and Hugo Chávez came to the conclusion that the US is an “economic parasite” that benefits largely from the dollar monopoly (Agência Latina Press 2011). These similarities, which are based on economic policy ambitions but also on similar foreign economic strategies and approaches, provide a sound basis for bilateral cooperation.

Currently there are several Russian energy companies operating in Venezuela. The leading role belongs to the LUKoil. The escalation of hostilities between Russia and the United States in the Georgia War in 2008 accelerated the political, economic and energy-technical cooperation with Venezuela that led to the establishment of a petroleum consortium with the participation of *LUKoil*, *Rosneft*, *Gazprom*, *Surgutneftegaz* and the Venezuelan PDVSA (Gabuyew 2008). On May 24, 2013, the Russian *Rosneft* and the Venezuelan PDVSA signed an agreement establishing a joint venture for oil production in the Orinoco block Carabobo-2 (Rosneft 2013). On top of that, Russian companies are digging for gold in Venezuela's gold mines, building apartments in Caracas, and the company Ruso-Orquídea Venezolana SA is engaged in the export of Venezuelan orchids to Russia (Kroth 2012).

A mutually beneficial cooperation?

At first glance, Russia and Venezuela have a mutually beneficial cooperation, based upon economic considerations, practical reasons and similar economic preconditions. However, Venezuela is getting numerous loans for the purchase of Russian weapons without a clear perspective to get them paid back. The logic behind it is to make Venezuela dependent on future Russian arms and its spare parts. Still, the geopolitical factors play major role in this connection. Venezuela has a partner in its alliance against the US and can ensure its military-technical security with Russian weapons. Russia wins solid presence in Venezuela and South America – the traditional sphere of influence of the West – while its state energy companies secure its income through the promotion of the largest proven oil reserves. Nevertheless it is doubtful that such cooperation can work permanently without penalizing one of the partners, for the existing alliance is not among two equal partners. The oppositional Venezuelan newspaper *El Universal* occasionally publishes articles that analyze Venezuelan-Russian relations. In one such article the author states:

“The concern arises when we realize that Chávez believes he has woven an alliance between equals. It is a big mistake. What he is [doing] is turning Venezuela into a world chess pawn of Russia and that, far from being desirable, is harmful, because all that will happen is that we will substitute the dependence on the “natural” geographic, economic and cultural centers by others are only temporary will swiftly discard us when it seems appropriate for them” (Salguero 2008).

In accordance with this opinion, Venezuela is important for Russia as long as the Eurasian country is consolidating its presence in Latin America. In the long term Russia is not interested in a close bond with Venezuela. Fernando Ochoa Antich puts it in a nutshell saying: “In big games small players always lose (...) It is sure, that Venezuela will come at least singed out of this game” (Ochoa Antich 2008). Thus, there is growing consensus in oppositional circles,

that Venezuela is merely a means to an end for Russia that serves as temporary alliance partner in the balance of power against the United States and as the gateway to South America. Ultimately, according to Ochoa Antich, Venezuela would expect the fate of Cuba that has been excluded from the Russian sphere of interest with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (ibid.). However, the biased attitude of the Venezuelan opposition towards the policy of the *Chavistas* has to be taken into account. The suggested dramatic scenarios as a result of the foreign policy of the government can also be part of political tactic.

Conclusion

This paper revealed that the Russian interest in Venezuela is largely guided by considerations of geopolitics and realist power politics, while to Venezuela constructivist ideology-based components are critical. Venezuela is not envisioning global leadership – except in the energy area – as such ambitions would simply go beyond the capacities of a small Caribbean country. It pursues the ideological goal of expelling the US from Latin America and establishing of a multi-polar world, whereby Latin America should serve as one of the poles. A “friendship” with Russia provides legitimacy to Venezuelan government and draws international attention to it. This factor stays relevant for the *Chavistas* also after the death of Hugo Chávez. Yet in his charge as interim president, the current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro assured that the friendship with Russia would continue to exist (RIA Novosti 2013). During Maduro’s this year’s visit to Russia, Vladimir Putin stated: “Before discussing energy and international matters, I would like to underscore that Venezuela is not only a fellow country; we are also very close partners, it is one of Russia’s most important partners” (El Universal 2015). But while Venezuelan security notions are strongly influenced by ideological elements anchoring in socialist anti-imperialism and are not dictated purely by political interests, Russia is mainly concerned with regaining its former political weight and disarming geopolitical competitors, whereby Venezuela is supposed to function as a gateway to South America and the Caribbean. That is the main difference between the policies of Venezuela and Russia, and it is questionable, whether they can join forces in a durable manner. Without innovative ideas, Venezuela would remain relevant for Russia primarily as weapons market, a gateway to South America, and also possibly due to its OPEC membership.

However, given the current escalation of tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine and the dominance of an anti-Western course in Kremlin, Russia is interested in Latin America and would most likely try to keep Venezuela in the foreign policy focus at least in the medium term. In view of the rise of the US crude oil and gas production (Holeywell 2015), it is also important for

Russia to contribute to the maintenance of Venezuelan energy production, in order to deter the Latin American region from a renewed political shift towards North America, which doesn't seem unlikely in light of the historic meeting between Barack Obama and Raul Castro at the 7th Summit of the Americas 2015 in Panama.

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Afghanistan's significance for Russia in the 21st Century: Interests, Perceptions and Perspectives¹

KANESHKO SANGAR

Abstract: *Since President Barack Obama set the end of 2014 as the deadline to complete the planned troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, numerous commentators have sought to assess Russia's Afghan policy since September 11, 2001 and anticipate Moscow's strategy in 'post-2014' Afghanistan. This paper maintains that an assessment/evaluation of Afghanistan's significance for Russia in the current system of international relations is needed to understand Moscow's current and future Afghan strategy. Hence, the aim of this study is to identify and analyse the major factors, which lead to a conceptualization of Russia's interests in Afghanistan. When assessing Russia's interests in Afghanistan, one must take into account a plethora of significant issues, including Putin's 'great-power' rhetoric; geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic rivalries in the wider region; security threats such as the illegal narcotics emanating from Afghanistan and global terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism; the rivalry and competition for energy resources; and control over pipeline routes and energy corridors. The analysis of these substantiating factors demonstrate why in the 21st century the Afghan problem remains a significant challenge to Russia's 'great power' identity, to its international strategy abroad, to its strategically important 'near abroad,' and to the country's domestic socio-economic policy.*

Keywords: *Russia, Afghanistan, US, geopolitical, energy, terrorism*

Introduction

In 2009, President Barack Obama set the end of 2014 as the deadline to complete the US troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. Since Barack Obama's announcement, a number of commentators have attempted to explain Russia's role in

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Afghanistan since 2001. These include several analyses of Russia's Afghan strategy and foreign policy in the so-called 'post-2014' Afghanistan² and a number of studies³ that sought to reflect on the post-Taliban stage of Russian-Afghan relations. However, no attempts were made to provide a clear overview of Russia's main interest in Afghanistan. A significant question, why Afghanistan matters for Vladimir Putin's Russia, remains unclear. Hence, this paper does not aim to explore or evaluate Russia's political, economic, and security policy in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Instead, this study maintains that, to understand Russian foreign policy in Afghanistan and Central Asia since September 11, 2001 and anticipate its future strategy, one must identify and analyse Russia's main interests in contemporary Afghanistan. Thus, the guiding research questions of this paper ask what Russia's main interests in Afghanistan are and why Afghanistan occupies an important place in Russian foreign policy thinking.

Vladimir Putin, in a 2012 pre-election article dedicated to foreign policy, discussed a number of significant challenges facing Russia's national security and foreign policy. These challenges include 'nuclear proliferation, regional conflicts and crises, terrorism and drug threat' (Putin 2012). It is noteworthy that all the issues mentioned by Putin were somehow related to Afghanistan. Although in his pre-election article Vladimir Putin stated that, 'Russia has obvious interests in Afghanistan', when it comes to Central Asia and especially to Afghanistan, Vladimir Putin's Russia has been unable to clearly and coherently articulate the country's foreign policy interests (Bakhtiarovich 2013; Putin 2012). By applying a constructivist approach to identity, foreign policy, and national interest, this paper aims to identify and analyse the main factors that lead to the conceptualization of Russia's national interests in Afghanistan.

Theoretical Framework

When discussing the interests of one state in another, Ted Hopf mentions the two most common interests: strategic and economic. Strategic interests, according to Hopf, involve threats and opportunities; the former involves danger to oneself, while the latter 'involves the possibility of averting danger through relations with others and collaborating for joint gains' (Hopf 2002: 16). Hopf (2002: 16) poses the fundamental questions of 'what constitutes a threat? and what constitutes an opportunity?' He claims that a theory is needed to capture

2 Wishnick 2014; Katz 2014; Stepanova 2013; Menkiszak 2011; Trenin-Kulakov-Malashenko 2014; De Haas 2014; Kazantsev 2012; Molchanov 2012; Konarovskiy 2014; Kulikov 2013; Plastun 2013; Karyakin 2014; Povolotskii 2014; Nessar 2015.

3 For an overview of Russian-Afghan bilateral relations and analyses of Russia's 'Afghan strategy' since 2001, consult the following literature: Paterson 2010; Snetkov et al 2013; Tsygankov 2012, 2013; Trenin – Malashenko 2010; Stepanova 2007, 2012, 2013; Molchanov 2012; Laruelle 2009, 2011, 2013; Laruelle – Peyrouse – Axyonova 2013; Menkiszak 2011; Mendkovich 2012; Lang 2014; Kumar et al 2014; Smigielski 2010; Krickus 2011; Yakushik 2011; Kuhrt 2010; Korgun 2010.

the meaning of the two concepts. Hopf's (2002: 16) social cognitive theory of identity provides an 'account of how a state's own domestic identities constitute a social cognitive structure that makes threats and opportunities, enemies and allies, intelligible, thinkable and possible'. Concerning economic interests, by mentioning the example of US 'interest in Iranian natural gas reserves', he argues that the fact that there is no such thing as unalloyed economic interest makes the question of interest a very complex one. 'Every single question', Hopf (2002: 16) states, 'demands an understanding of the identity politics underlying US relations with the Middle East, Iran and Russia'. Similarly, when discussing Russia's interest in Afghanistan, one must understand the identity politics that underlines Moscow's complex and multidimensional relationships not only with the West as its significant Other but also with other regional players, such as China, India, and Iran, with whom Russia has developed competitive relationships. Furthermore, one must take into account the history of Russia's hegemonic position in the region and its priorities in the post-Cold War international order.

As Bobo Lo (2002) indicates, Russian foreign policy is too complicated to be placed in any single framework within the many 'fashionable paradigms' of Western theories of international relations. He notes that the 'complexities of Russian foreign policy require an approach that is broad in scope and conceptually based, rather than one that treats it as a compilation of discrete individual issue areas' (Lo 2002: 9). I am also in wholehearted agreement with Tsygankov (2010: 14) that international relations theories such as realism and liberalism largely ignore Russia's 'indigenous history and system of perceptions'. Indeed, they consider Russian foreign policy from the Western perspective and are 'developed in the West by the West for the West' and become problematic in a world that is 'multicultural and multilingual' (Tsygankov 2010: 14). Some have argued that the realist and neo-realist theories of international relations imagine the world in a very simplistic way (Reus-Smit 2005: 192), while others consider both the realist and liberalist theories as well as their neo versions as ideologically driven. Another significant problem with the realist and liberalist schools of international relations is the fact that they are mutually exclusive and tend to 'highlight one over the other', which makes them incapable of developing a 'comprehensive and complex explanatory framework' (Tsygankov 2010: 14).

In most traditional schools of international relations theory, international actors are considered 'atomistic egoists' whose interests are formed 'prior to social interaction' and are initiated purely by the desire for lucre and 'strategic purposes'. For constructivists, however, international actors are social beings whose identities and interests are formed by 'the products of inter-subjective social structure' (Reus-Smit 2005: 193); these are commonly held ideas, norms, culture, and knowledge (Checkel 1998). Granting the state human qualities, constructivists argue that, in the process of interaction with 'other members of

international society, nations develop affiliations, attachments and – ultimately – their own identity’ (Tsygankov 2010: 15). Similar to post-positivists, constructivists claim that, throughout their interaction, states constantly ‘produce and reproduce the social structures – cooperative or conflictual – that shape actors’ identities and interests and the significance of their material contexts’ (Wendt 1995: 81). Thus, the state is a cultural and social phenomenon.

Instead of simply assuming that they are rational or irrational, we must carefully study the formations of national interests since they are defined by their particular social context. Grasping the process of how actors develop their interests is vital in explaining various political phenomena in international politics that are largely ‘ignored or misunderstood’ by the traditional schools of thought. According to Wendt, ‘identities are the basis of interests’; Wendt, like other constructivists, believes that the identity of states informs their interests and that their interests inform their actions (Wendt 1992: 398; Reus-Smit 2005: 199). Russia’s national identity, settled during Putin’s first term ‘as maintaining international status’ and being an aspiring ‘great power’, is the primary identity in its main interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia (Clunan 2009: 2010).

The Afghanistan Discourse in Vladimir Putin’s Russia

Historically Russia, as a ‘great power’, had vied for power and influence in Afghanistan against its main adversaries, such as the British Empire in the 19th century and the US during the Cold War. After the disintegration of the USSR, the region’s geopolitical order changed once again, and since the early 1990 s, Russia’s main interest in Afghanistan has been related to its own ‘War on Terror’. Russian politicians have always portrayed Russia as country that has struggled against Islamic fundamentalism, which entered the territory of the former Soviet Union through Afghanistan. Therefore, in 2001, when the US attacked the Taliban, Russia was very keen on becoming the US’s main partner in the ‘War on Terror’. According to Natasha Kuhrt, with the US’s help, Russia hoped to curb the rising threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and therefore allowed NATO to be based in its ‘back yard’, Central Asia. However, soon, Russian politicians and policymakers realized that the US was there to stay. As Natasha Kuhrt notes, the US had established ‘bilateral relations with the Central Asian states with oil in mind, not Islamic fundamentalism’ (Kuhrt 2010: 5; Duncan 2013: 130–131).

Ever since the failed attempts by Andrei Kozyrev and Boris El’tsin to integrate Russia into the West, distrust towards the US and its allies has been increasing in Russia, especially among the political elite who rose to power under Vladimir Putin. The ‘Coloured Revolutions’, seen by Russians as regime change operations funded and orchestrated by the US, and the war with Georgia in 2008 accelerated this trend. Most commentators, as well as practitioners and diplomats

within the Russian government, seem to be very certain about the 'fact' that the US and its allies are seriously focused on eliminating Russia's influence in the former Soviet Union. As Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Kisliak stated at a conference, 'we see attempts by the U.S. and other Western countries to strengthen their influence in the former Soviet Union'. Further, he declared that Russia is actually in favour of developing relations with the US and other Western countries as long as they do not work against Russia and take into consideration Russia's interests in the region (Felgenhauer 2008).

In particular, Russia's military establishment became very suspicious of the US presence in Central Asia; Russian commentators seemed infuriated by the idea of 'geo-political pluralism', advocated by Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997a, 1997 b), who argues that the US had to prevent the 'emergence of a hostile coalition that could challenge America's primacy'. According to Brzezinski's (1997a: 57, 61) 'geo-strategy for Eurasia', the US had to limit Russia's influence in Central Asia and focus on cooperation with China and Turkey instead of with Russia. It is important to note that, among Russian scholars and strategists, Brzezinski is considered the ideologue of US foreign policy thinking. His prominence in Russia owes much not only to his reputation as an anti-Soviet *apparatchik* with over 50 years of experience in Russophobic and anti-Russian activity in Washington but also to his elaboration of Halford J. Mackinder's 'Heartland' thesis, manifested in the book *The Grand Chessboard*, published in 1997. In this influential work, Brzezinski picks up on Mackinder's concept of a Eurasian 'pivot area', which supposedly includes all of Siberia, the greater part of Central Asia, and the Central East European region. Brzezinski (1997 b: 38) interprets the 'pivot area' as 'vital springboards for the attainment of continental domination'. According to Mackinder's theory, any actor, as long as it is a geopolitical object, that controls the 'Heartland', supposedly comprising the entire area ruled in 1904 by the Russian empire (except the Kamchatka Peninsula), possesses all the necessary economic and geopolitical means to dominate the 'World-Island', comprising the three interlinked continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. According to Mackinder's theory, discussed in his 1919 book *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 'who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World' (Mackinder 1962/1919: 150; 1904/2004: 436).

Four decades later, Nicholas J. Spykman produced, according to Francis P. Sempa, an 'analysis and critique' of Mackinder's famous work, developing his own theory concerning the 'pivot area' and producing another version of this basic geopolitical model (in Spykman 1942/2007: xxvii). Spykman believed that the significance of the Heartland was overestimated in Mackinder's theory and that the real key to world domination was the 'Rimland'. In fact, Spykman modifies Mackinder's theory and argued that the Rimland, the strip of coastal land that encircles Eurasia, is the 'pivot area', vital for control of the Eurasian

continent, rather than the Heartland. Thus, Spykman (1944: 43) changes Mackinder's dictum and argues, 'Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world'.

The Central Asian region is part of the wider Heartland, and Afghanistan has been placed between the Heartland and Rimland; to be precise, northern Afghanistan is part of the Heartland and southern Afghanistan, beyond the Hindu Kush, is located within the Rimland.

Russia's political elite believe that international politics is guided by geopolitical precepts and therefore consider the struggle around Afghanistan and Central Asia in geopolitical terms. Eurasianists such as Alexander Dugin explain the presence of coalition forces in Afghanistan by maintaining that the 'Atlanticist forces' want to use the Rimland 'as a base for expanding deep into Eurasia to gain military-political and economic dominance over the continent' (Vertlib 2006). Indeed, despite the fact that the Russian ruling elite 'are indeed deeply divided in their reading' of Russia's foreign policy and security priorities, a large segment of its elite consider the Afghan issue from the "Duginist" geopolitical perspective and believe that the US is attempting to entrench itself in the IRAFPAK zone (Laruelle 2011: 4; Dobaev-Dugin 2005: 71-75). Since the fall of the Taliban, Russia's Afghan policy seems to have been incoherent, unclear, and very often undecided. On the one hand, Russia cooperated with the West and supported NATO's counterterrorism strategies. On the other hand, it has expressed concerns and criticisms, not only regarding the West's real intentions in the IRAFPAK zone but also concerning the West's failure to stabilise Afghanistan. Clearly, since 2001, a gap has existed between the official views promoted by the Kremlin and the elite discourse concerning Afghanistan. While many considered the US presence in Afghanistan a threat to Russia, officially, Moscow and Washington were partners in the 'War on Terror'. Boris Gromov, in charge of the Red Army when the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from the Hindu Kush in 1988-1989, and Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's ambassador to NATO, even insists that the US should not leave Afghanistan until it succeeds in its mission of completely eradicating the Taliban, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorist groups (Gromov-Rogozin: 2010; Halbach 2013: 137). Despite this ambiguity in Russia's Afghanistan discourse, it seems that many in Russia's political elite view the US and its presence in the region from a geopolitical perspective, grounded in Mackinder's Heartland or Spykman's Rimland theory or, indeed, on any other version of this basic geopolitical model. As Wohlforeth (2006: 273) notes, when prominent Western thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and George Friedman discuss the US foreign policy precisely in geopolitical terms, one should not be surprised when the Russians do the same.

There seems to be a rare consensus within the Russian ruling elite - policymakers, current and former strategists within the military establishment, and diplomats - that Afghanistan is the planet's 'geo-political nerve' and

a 'potential aircraft carrier' in the middle of one of the world's most important strategic regions.

Indeed, most Russians seem to be convinced that the US presence in Afghanistan is just part of their wider strategic aim to penetrate the Heartland and dominate the entire Eurasian continent. Russian commentators, such as Yurii Krupnov (2009), General Anatolii Kulikov (2013), Vladimir Paramanov (2013), Dmitrii Popov (2013), Gennadii Chufirin (2013), Aleksei Dundich (2013) and Aleksander Knyazev (2013) have repeatedly argued that the only reason for the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan is their goal to establish a geopolitical, geostrategic, geo-economic, and military 'bridgehead in the heart of Asia deploying a powerful network of military bases in Afghanistan and the Central East and Middle Asia as a whole' (Krupnov et al. 2008: 16). The 'War on Terror' and search for Osama bin Laden has always been an excuse to build up 'the U.S. and NATO military and organizational machine in the region and maintaining its open-ended presence there' (Krupnov et al. 2008: 16).

Influential and respected in Russia's expert community, strategist General Leonid Ivashov (2008) has declared that the US is in Afghanistan not to 'defend democracy and restore order' but to use Afghanistan as a 'strategic bridgehead to put pressure on China, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia'.

Indeed, Russia often sees the struggles between other great powers, such as China and the US, for geopolitical and geo-economic domination in the Caspian region as part of their aspiration to achieve global hegemony (Marketos 2009: 8). US initiatives such as the 'Greater Middle East'⁴ and 'Greater Central Asia'⁵ projects are seen as geopolitical plots designed to tear away the former Soviet republics of Central Asia from Russia's sphere of influence and incorporate them into one region with Afghanistan, dominated by the US, thereby turning the entire region into a US protectorate.

The official line from Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems very quiet on this issue while emphasising the 'partnership' in the 'War on Terror' between Russia and the US. However, Dmitrii Rogozin (2012), despite substantially following the Kremlin's official stand, has occasionally hinted in his interviews that Afghanistan is strategically too important and therefore that it would be naïve to expect the US to leave the country and the region.

The respected Afghanist Vladimir Plastun in 2011 claimed that he never believed that the United States would ever withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, arguing that the US would use any possible excuse to remain in Afghanistan for a very long time. Even when the US had set a deadline for the withdrawal of its forces, it seemed that nobody in Russia believed those announcements.

4 As part of George W. Bush's 'forward strategy of freedom' agenda, this project was supposed to promote region-wide democracy.

5 The Greater Central Asia Partnership for Cooperation and Development (GCAP), a forum for the planning, coordination, and implementation of an array of US programs in the region.

The sceptics' doubts were confirmed when the US completed the building of large military super bases, the so-called multipurpose military airbases, which are equipped with air and space surveillance systems, enabling NATO forces to monitor air traffic over most of the Eurasian continent. This served as confirmation that the NATO forces are in Afghanistan to stay. In October 2013, Sergey Lavrov expressed Russia's concerns in an interview with *Russia Today*, noting, 'the information is that some nine quite fortified military bases are being constructed inside Afghanistan. We are asking questions about what is the purpose for this remaining presence'. Lavrov expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency of the Americans concerning the purpose of their long-term military bases in Afghanistan (Lavrov 2013).

Since, in Russia's official rhetoric on national identity, the country is no more on its knees than it was during the 1990 s under the leadership of the Boris El'tsin but is instead a strong and rising power, a 'great power', it must confront or even counter any attempts by its formidable opponents to gain influence in a territory that has traditionally been in Russia's sphere of influence.

This discourse maintains that Russia, which aims at becoming 'a full-fledged member of a multipolar international order by 2020' (Tsygankov 2009: 352), must limit US influence in Afghanistan as well as throughout the Central Asian region. Afghanistan and especially the foreign powers 'entrenching' the Afghan soil are considered a potential threat to Russia's integrity and sovereignty. Hence, the issue of Afghanistan provides a context for constructing the view and image of the external threat and solidifies Vladimir Putin's official discourse of a great power being encroached upon by the significant Other and its allies.

Afghanistan's Significance for Russia's Regional Energy Policy

The Afghan problem is also important for Russia's energy and hydrocarbon strategy in Eurasia, which is primarily about Russia's access to region's energy resources and control over the trade, transportation, and communication corridors. As Roy Allison notes, post-Soviet Russia has perceived 'oil and gas resources as both a strategic asset and a strategic instrument in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia' (Allison 2004: 290). Central Asia not only contains vast hydrocarbon fields, both onshore and offshore in the Caspian Sea, that have the potential to serve as an alternative to OPEC suppliers of energy resources but is also one of the most important crossroads/intersections of the world's energy communications in the North-South and Europe-Asia directions (Dolgušev 2011: 91; Yinhong 2007: 161; Campbell 2013: 3). The main motivation behind Russia's involvement in the region is to maintain Russia's status as the main transit route for energy exports from Central Asia to Europe, in addition to limiting the influence of other players in 'Russia's own backyard' (Bergsager 2013: 9). Throughout the last decade, major Russian firms and corporations

have controlled most of the transportation infrastructure for Central Asia's oil, gas, and electricity towards the North and West.

One of the socially constructed images of Afghanistan since 1991 is that of a 'potential energy corridor'. This seems to be wishful thinking for most of the regional players except Russia. The West dreamed of connecting Central Asia to a warm water port to have direct access to region's hydrocarbons. In the 1990 s, Turkmenistan had a deal with the Taliban and the UNOCAL oil company to build a trans-Afghan pipeline into South Asia (Rashid 2010: 179). India and Pakistan both desperately seek to connect to Central Asia to solve their energy needs, especially in the case of India, which must explore ways of supporting its ever-growing economy and industry; this is a major aspect of its foreign policy (Rashid 2010: 179).

Since September 11, 2001, two alternative pipeline projects have been advanced: the US-backed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI)⁶ pipeline and the China-backed Termez-Kabul-Peshawar-India (TKPI)⁷ pipeline (Aziz 2007: 64). However, because of instability in Afghanistan, the feasibility of both projects remains in question. The United States has also attempted to promote Afghanistan's role as an 'economic land bridge' between Central Asia and South Asia by promoting a broader vision for the Central Asian region called the 'Silk Route Strategy'; this project involves not only pipelines but also large-scale infrastructure projects that would unite the region (Kuchins 2010, 2011: 77; Rashid 2013).

What is noteworthy about these projects is that they all exclude Russia and are considered by many a potential threat to Russia's dominant and hegemonic position within the Central Asian energy infrastructure. Russia has always been interested in consolidating its 'leadership in the emerging system of interstate political and economic relations in Central Asia' by dominating these states'

6 The aforementioned TAPI is the most ambitious of all the proposed projects to transport Turkmen energy southwards. It is worth \$7.6 billion and would be 1,040 miles (2,000 km) long, stretching from the Dauletabad gas fields in southern Turkmenistan all the way to India, passing through the Herat, Helmand, and Kandahar provinces of Afghanistan (Palau 2012). From there, it would extend to the Pakistani cities of Quetta and Multan, and the pipeline would end in the Indian town of Fazilka, on the Indo-Pakistani border. Although the long-standing tensions between India and Pakistan as well as those between Pakistan and Afghanistan call the feasibility of this project into question, many experts have not lost faith in the so-called 'project of the century'. Since 2009, the countries involved have been discussing alternative routes by 'circumnavigating the more dangerous areas of Afghanistan by redirecting the pipeline to Gwadar in southern Pakistan, near the border with Iran' (Petersen-Barysch 2011: 54).

7 In 2013, China proposed an alternative to the US-backed TAPI. The gas pipeline would transfer Turkmen gas via northern Afghanistan to China (Halbach 2013: 145). While Russia attempts to maintain its control over the pipelines of Central Asia, China aims to turn Afghanistan into a vital part of its energy infrastructure, which would connect China to Central Asia and to Iran and Pakistan. I am in agreement with Thrassyvoulos N. Marketos that China's financial strength has allowed it to buy significant energy assets in Afghanistan, thereby securing 'for itself not just energy flows but key strategic advantages for years to come' (Marketos 2009: 17).

strategic, political, and economic affairs (Yuldasheva 2007: 41). Some experts also claim that Russia is interested in preventing any actors from succeeding in establishing an energy corridor through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean and will attempt to restrict any plans to create a transportation axis that would connect Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan via Afghanistan and Pakistan (Trenin 2012: 230; Kuchins 2010, 2011). Indeed, Dmitri Trenin (2010: 230) argues that the Kremlin's policies in the region are based on two main imperatives: to prevent the construction of any new gas pipelines bypassing Russia (or constructed through the shelf of the Caspian Sea) and to avoid any kind of military presence in other states except the coastal ones. Experts such as Jeffrey Mankoff (2009), Andrew Kuchins (2010, 2011), and Aleksei Malashenko (2012: 112–113) have argued that instability in Afghanistan is in Russia's interests because it is impossible to build pipelines while the country is in a state of war and chaos.

According to John Foster many prominent US think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution, Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and the Heritage Foundation, have openly analysed the competition for pipelines, the so-called 'New Great Game in Central Asia', which they consider a 'geopolitical game among the world's Great Powers for control of energy resources' (2008: 10). This is the reason that many in Russia strongly believe that Central Asia and the Caspian region are of great significance for the United States' current framework of its geostrategic interests concerning specific energy issues. However, US authorities have also officially stated that this region is the sphere of American strategic interests because of United States energy security' (Dolgushev 2011: 91). Donald Rumsfeld's statement that it is in the US's interests to ensure access to the key markets and strategic resources of the planet is very often mentioned in Russian literature and media (Morozov 2010). Another quote frequently mentioned in Russia is attributed to Madeleine Albright: 'it is unfair that Russia owns Siberia'. While no one can provide a reference for this quote, it is very often used to promote Moscow's perspective. Serbian director Emir Kusturica mentioned the quote when he voiced his support for Russia's actions in Ukraine and Crimea in March 2014 (Kusturica 2014). As far as Russians are concerned, US never stopped planning a possible transportation corridor linking Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan, disregarding Russia's national interests. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Zbigniew Brzezinski's argument that Caspian oil should be torn away from Russia, thereby eliminating any possibility of Russia's reintegrating into a post-Soviet empire, is often used to justify Russia's special interest in the region.

Because of its geocentric position, Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of the world's richest oil and gas regions, such as those of Saudi Arabia, Mosul (Iraq and Iran), the Caspian region and Central Asia, the Volga-Urals, and West Siberia. These regions contain a unique concentration of nearly 80 per cent of the planet's hydrocarbon reserves (Morozov 2010). It is widely believed that

the US presence in the region guarantees not only access to all these riches but also control over its formidable competitors, such as Russia, China, and Iran. Shi Yinhong emphasises the two main objectives of the US in the region. These are to 'guard against the expansion of Russian power' within the CIS and compete with Russia for influence within Central Asia and to guard against China (Yinhong 2007: 164). In Russia's elite discourse, it is natural that the US desires a constant military presence in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. Therefore, they believe that the issue of Afghanistan should play an important role in Russia's current geostrategy with regard to the region's hydrocarbons. As one of the key players in the 'New Great Game', Russia should treat the US 'as a serious challenger to Russia throughout Central Asia and the greater Caspian region' (Kanet 2010: 81).

Russia's Economic Interests in Afghanistan

Russia's economic interests in Afghanistan are often underestimated or completely neglected. First, Russia is trying to develop a single economic zone in which Central Asia will play an important role. This will make the union's economy vulnerable to an Afghan threat. Second, Afghanistan is rich in mineral resources; according to one report, Afghanistan's untapped mineral deposits could exceed a trillion dollars. The report is based on geological exploration work completed by the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s. It claims that Afghanistan has significant deposits of aluminium, iron ore, molybdenum, cobalt, gold, silver, copper, niobium, fluor spar, beryllium, and lithium (Alexander 2010). According to another report issued by the US military and geological experts, Afghanistan could be 'part of the long term solution to the Rare Earth Elements (REE) supply problem' (Dawd 2013). In 2010, the Pentagon classified a document calling Afghanistan the 'Saudi Arabia of Lithium' (Risen 2013), and following these reports, many Russian experts and Afghanists, including Yurii Krupnov, Victor Korgun, and Zamir Kabulov, have called on the Russian government and corporations to invest in Afghanistan and play a larger role in regional dynamics.

Since 2001, numerous plans and negotiations for bilateral partnerships have been discussed by Russia and Afghanistan. Future projects involved the reconstruction of industrial enterprises and infrastructure mostly built by Soviet engineers and specialists in the second half of the 20th century, as well as Russia's participation in a large-scale humanitarian de-mining campaign (Korgun 2004: 117). The Afghans were interested in offering Russia the opportunity to reconstruct the famous Kabul house-building factory, the Janagalak repair plant, which was a key component of Afghanistan's infrastructure for many years, Mazari-e-Shariff's bread factory, and a fertilizer plant. Moreover, both sides considered cooperating on the reconstruction of Afghanistan's main roads,

which were also built by the Soviets in the 1960 s and 1970 s. The construction of new power plants and power lines was also negotiated. Two nations were keen on Russia's large-scale involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, as 80% of all Afghanistan's industry and enterprises, consisting of 142 large-scale projects, had been initiated and realized by the Soviet Union. Therefore, after 2001, Russia genuinely believed that, unlike other major players in post-Taliban Afghanistan, such as China, India, and the US, Russia had not only the appropriate technologies but also the technical and economic expertise, along with specific experience in the construction and operation of large-scale development projects in Afghanistan. This, many believed, was an advantage that would compensate for Russia's inability to donate cash to Afghanistan and ensure an equal partnership with the West. However, these were rare exceptions: most of the bilateral meetings and negotiations held by Russia and Afghanistan were concerned with what Russia *could* do rather than what Russia *would* do, and the talks were usually dominated by empty rhetoric, promises, and bilateral declarations of intent. One of the main reasons for Russia's ambiguous and contradictory behaviour concerning Afghanistan's reconstruction was a lack of funds and the long-term credit necessary to undertake development projects in Afghanistan. As Ekaterina Stepanova notes, Russia companies operating in Afghanistan had become dependent on international donors and foreign partners (Stepanova 2007: 76). Very often, these partners and international donors were not keen on involving Russia in any significant projects, and the role of Russian companies would have been limited to subcontracting and transportation (Stepanova 2007: 76).

Russian experts and Afghanists are convinced that Russia has lost its economic battle with China over Central Asia and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's Aynak copper mine, which is considered the world's largest untouched copper reserve, is a good example of where Russia has lost the opportunity to benefit. By various estimates, the mine has copper reserves worth nearly 100 billion US dollars. In 2009, a Chinese company, China Metallurgical Group, won the exploration rights for the Aynak copper mine. Under the terms of the deal, China will pay Afghanistan a total of 25 billion dollars, and experts have estimated the future profit from Aynak at around 80 billion US dollars. The fact that it was Soviet geologists who discovered the Aynak copper, conducted massive exploration work that resulted in the creation of 1,300 maps of the area, and even started to develop the Aynak reserves, yet it is now the Chinese and Americans who will reap the benefits, makes many Russians feel extremely uncomfortable. Since 2003, the Russian government has numerous times voiced their disapproval of the US's unilateral decisions and deliberate exclusion of Russian companies from Afghanistan's contracting process (Stepanova 2007, 2012, 2013).

Security Threats and Islamic Fundamentalism

Another reason that Afghanistan is highly important for Russia is its potential to destabilise the entire Central Asian region. In particular, Russia is concerned about possible spill-overs of Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, and Afghan-style 'warlordism' into Central Asia. Another socially constructed image of Afghanistan that has been developed since the early 1990s is Afghanistan as a source of instability and Islamic fundamentalism, which could 'Afghanise'⁸ (*afganizatsiia*) the region. In addition, the people and the governments of Russia and the Central Asian republics have come to believe that the Islamic terrorist threat stems from the activities of Islamic fundamentalist movements based in Afghanistan.

It is often argued by commentators that the real threats emanating from Afghanistan have been exaggerated and often economically and politically motivated (Kazemi 2012). However, one should not ignore the fact that most of the radical Islamic terrorist groups and Islamic fundamentalists active in Central Asia throughout the last two decades have been supported, managed, ideologically encouraged, and funded by entities outside Central Asia, namely some of the Gulf states, and reached Central Asia and Russia via Pakistan and Afghanistan (Rashid 2002: 55, 141, 223; 2009; 2010; 2013). An Afghanistan Analyst report claimed that thousands of IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) fighters are hiding in the northern and southern provinces of Afghanistan, including Balkh, Faryab, and Kunduz, all bordering Central Asia. Others claim that the bulk of the IMU fighters are in Pakistan, waiting for their chance to pass through Afghanistan and take over Uzbekistan, turning it into an Islamic state under sharia law (Ruttig 2013).

Furthermore, Islamic fundamentalists, madrassa and university students, jihadists, and members of radical Islamic groups from all over Central Asia and CIS can be found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are people who have attended and who still attend the Taliban's terrorist and extremist training camps, funded by wealthy sheikhs from the Gulf States. Some of these militants went to Central Asia and Afghanistan to fight for jihad and Islam against the US, and, as Ahmad Rashid argues, they are returning to the Central Asian republics. David Satter (2013) quotes Ahmad Rashid as saying that 'they have done enough fighting for other people. They want to fight for their own country... They are trying to infiltrate weapons, ammunition and men back into Central Asia'. Since 2001, there has been a boom of radical groups within Central Asia, particularly in the Fergana Valley. These groups include not only older organisations with clear links to al-Qaeda and international terrorist networks such as the banned-in-Russia cult Hizb ut-Tahrir movement (Mamirgov 2007: 417), the Islamic

8 Many respondents interviewed by the author used the term *Afganizatsiia*, which means 'Afghanisation'.

Movement of Uzbekistan (Duncan 2013: 130), and the Islamic Jihad Union but also smaller groups such as Islam Lashkarliary (Warriors of Islam), Tabligh (Mission), Uzun Sakal (Long Beard), Noor (Ray of Light), Adolat Uyushamsi (Justice Society), and Tovba (Repentance) (Malashenko 2007: 94–95). Although they are small movements and do not pose any immediate threat, they are radical enough to take up arms at any time. These groups are ‘regaining strength and, in the opinion of analysts, preparing for a long, sustained military campaign in Central Asia’ (Satter 2013). Since 2015 there are widespread speculations in the media that the ISIS forces are gaining ground in Afghanistan and are preparing to proceed further to Central Asia.

This could lead to the destabilisation of Central Asia, and any destabilisation in weak countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, or ‘the most dangerous Uzbekistan’ will inevitably have ‘immediate repercussions’ in Russia. As Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov stated in an interview with KUNA, Kuwait’s news agency, on June 18, 2013.

Developments in Central Asia are directly linked to the Russian national security. You are right that today’s processes in Afghanistan seriously affect the entire situation in the region. There is a threat of its destabilization. Even more so that ethnic Uzbek and Tajik extremist and terrorist groupings in the north of IRA are already working on plans to penetrate territories of Central Asian countries.

Ted Donnelly (2011) observes that a careful strategic analysis of the Central Asian region demonstrates that Central Asia is inseparably linked, strategically as well as operationally, to Afghanistan. It is certain that strategic success in Afghanistan is critical to strategic (not just operational) success in Central Asia and vice versa (Donnelly 2011: 13). Therefore, Russia is interested in a stable Central Asia and, as Marlène Laruelle (2009: 7) argues, control of energy resources and maintaining regional security are Russia’s two major goals in the region. Hence, the issue of ‘security is a key domain of Russia’s presence in Central Asia’ (Laruelle 2009: 7). Since the regional security issues are directly correlated to Russia’s domestic security, this serves as a strong factor in Moscow’s continued presence in the region.

Many in Russia are indeed worried that the Fergana Valley will turn into an area resembling Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). There is indeed a danger that the Fergana Valley will become a FATA-like ungoverned space, which will serve as a ‘safe haven, breeding ground and staging area for violent extremist organizations and militants’ (Donnelly 2011: 18). The extremist groups mentioned above will be able to use ‘this safe haven, as well as reconstituted rear areas in Afghanistan, to increase Islamist insurgent pressure on secular Central Asian governments’ (Donnelly 2011: 18). However, from a Russian perspective, if this scenario were to happen, then it would certainly be a part of a larger plan by the anti-Russian coalition, consisting of the United

States and its allies in the Gulf, to ensure the spread of so-called *upravliaemyi khaos* (controlled chaos), already successfully implemented by the US and NATO in countries such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Afghanistan. As several high profile Russian officials and academics interviewed for this study noted, ‘Yesterday Iraq, today Syria and tomorrow Russia’; to prevent this, Russia must implement a variety of preventive measures.

Drug Trafficking/Illegal Narcotics

The fact that Afghanistan remains the world’s largest producer and supplier of cannabis, raw opium and heroin (Oliphant 2013: 9–11) is the last but not least important reason why Afghanistan occupies a significant place in Russian foreign policy thinking. Moscow is interested in improving security in Afghanistan and Central Asia since it is greatly concerned with the scale of the influx of Afghan heroin and hashish. Indeed, the issue of illegal narcotics has become one of the major challenges in Russia’s recent history.

The threat posed by illegal narcotics has been growing steadily and surely for the last two decades. Once one of the main hubs for the transit of drugs towards the West, Russia has become one of the main consumers of Afghan drugs (Malashenko 2012: 110–111, 117). As Director of the Federal Drug Control Service (FDCS) of Russia Victor Ivanov has declared numerous times: Russia is the world’s biggest consumer of Afghan heroin. According to some estimates, 150,000 people die annually as a result of heroin used in post-Soviet republics (Chernenko 2012). In Russia’s official documents, the problem of *narkomania* (drug addiction) or *narkougroza* (narcothreat) has been declared an issue of national security rather than a health problem or a law-enforcement issue (Dorofeev 2011: 94). Victor Ivanov once said that ‘Afghan drug traffic is like a tsunami constantly breaking over Russia – we are sinking in it’ (War on Drugs 2012). The scale of damage to Russia is indeed alarming. There are between one and two million drug addicts in the Russian Federation, most of whom live on crime. In addition, because of the lack of coherent and progressive drug policy, an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 drug addicts die every year from drug-related deaths such as AIDS and overdose. Because heroin production has increased by 40 times since the coalition forces entered Afghanistan in 2001, many Russians believe that this has been done purposefully to maximize the damage to Russia since Russia is the largest consumer of Afghan heroin and cannabis (Syroezhkin et al. 2011: 359–364). Vladimir Putin in 2005 accused coalition forces in Afghanistan of ‘sitting back and watching caravans haul drugs across Afghanistan to the former Soviet Union and Europe’ (Radyuhin 2008). In addition, in the pre-election article dedicated to foreign policy mentioned earlier, he addressed the issue of illegal narcotics and claimed that drug trafficking has become one of the most serious threats facing Russia. He stated that drugs not

only 'undermine the gene pool of the whole nation but also create a ground/basis for corruption and crime'. Putin also noted that Afghan drug production is increasing every year and that, in 2011 alone, production rose by 40 per cent. According to Vladimir Putin (2012), Russia faces a real heroin threat, causing huge damage to the health of Russia's citizens.

The revenue from drugs trade is used to fund extremists and terrorist activities not only in Afghanistan but also in Central Asia. It has been reported that the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), the Islamic Party of Turkmenistan, the East Turkestan Liberation Organization, and other extremist groups are also benefiting from the drug trade. The ancient Silk Road has turned into a 'heroin route', which is, as an UNDOC (2009: 4) report expresses, a path of 'death and violence' running through a strategically important and volatile region. The report also refers to the alarming and ugly combination of drugs, Islamic fundamentalists, and crime as 'the Perfect Storm', and this storm is blowing towards Russia; therefore, it is in Russia's interest to play a larger role in the Afghan problem to address Afghanistan's ever-growing drug production or at least restrict the import and transit of illegal narcotics to Central Asia and into Russia.

Conclusion

As this study has shown, in Moscow's view, because of its geographic and geo-strategic location, Afghanistan continues to be an important focus of all the major players in international politics. The Russian establishment has always believed that, in its quest for world dominance, the US consistently seeks to increase its military presence in this strategically important region. Despite the official discourse of Russia being the West's partner in the 'War on Terror', many Russians see the US presence in Afghanistan as part of a larger plan by NATO and the US to encroach upon Russia. Russia's elite discourse is dominated by the notion that Afghanistan is pivotal in relations among regional actors such as Russia, the US, China, Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan and that it is the geopolitical nerve of the whole planet. Hence, Afghanistan plays a vital role in Russia's constant geographic strategy formulation, which is mainly concerned with the dominance of Eurasia and former Soviet territory, which is vital for Russia's 'great power' identity.

Russia seems to be very concerned about the prospect of NATO's long-term presence in the region. Due to their Hobbesian view of international relations, large segment of Russian political elite believe that in order to survive as a country, restore its strategic influence in the world, and be recognized as a great power, Russia must limit the influence of the US in the wider region, which includes Afghanistan and its surroundings. By emphasising the socially constructed reality, the constructivist theory maintains that ideas directly or indirectly influence the construction of the political agenda as well as affect the

way in which political actors deal with each other. As Emanuel Adler (1997: 324) argues, 'the identities, interests and behaviour of political agents are socially constructed by collective meaning, interpretations and assumptions about the world'. The idea concerning Afghanistan is that Russia's historic role in Afghanistan and the wider region involves containing the penetration of hostile foreign powers, in this instance NATO, headed by the United States, into the region, which traditionally had been in Russia's sphere of influence.

Russia desires to preserve its special relationship with Central Asia, its 'backyard', not only in the political, economic, security, and defence senses but also in the cultural and even linguistic spheres. Furthermore, Moscow wants to retain maximum control of the Central Asian hydrocarbons and their transit routes, ensure Russia's participation in energy projects such as TAPI and the development and exploration of mineral deposits such as lithium and copper, and secure access to the Central Asian and Afghan market for Russian goods. Therefore, Moscow must play a major role in competition and cooperation surrounding Afghanistan and develop competitive relations with other involved actors and players. Finally, according to Moscow's neo-Eurasian doctrine, Russia must keep the region's economies in line with its economic system and achieve their integration with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Security issues and regional stability also play a major role in Russia's current foreign policy interests in Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism are considered major security threats. Hence, Afghanistan must also retain a prominent role in Russia's attempts to maintain its influence and presence in the region to hamper the Islamisation of Central Asia and prevent the penetration of radical Islam into Russia. Finally, Afghanistan's opium and hashish production and its illegal traffic to Russia via Central Asia have become one of the most challenging problems faced by post-Soviet Russia. The Afghan–Central Asia–Russia–EU Northern drug route has created an array of informal networks that have contributed enormously to ever-growing corruption and crime in Russian Federation and the region in general.

A careful analysis of all these substantiating factors demonstrate that, in the 21st century, once again, the Afghan problem has become a significant challenge to Russia's international strategy abroad, to its strategically important 'near abroad', and to its domestic socio-economic policy.

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Russia's backyard – unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus¹

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Abstract: *The Caucasus played a prominent role in the Russian foreign policy for a long time, which has not changed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Beginning with four general hypothesis about Russia's interests in its "near abroad" the essays gives an insights in the current status and developments in the relations between Russia and its southern neighbors Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. A special focus is on the frozen conflicts in South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's role in these conflicts.*

Keywords: *Russia, Caucasus, Foreign Policy, Frozen Conflicts, South-Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh*

Introduction – Russia and the Caucasus

The Caucasus is playing a role in Russia's foreign Policy for a long time. Since the 19th century Georgia, Azerbaijan and the northern Caucasus have been a long contested part of the Russian Empire. Wars with the Osman Empire and Persia as well as with the region's mountainous inhabitants shaped the Russian image of its southern neighbors. After the Russian civil war the three newborn republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were swiftly incorporated into the new construct of a "Soviet Union, where they would stay for almost 70 years. The "backyard" of Russia's foreign policy became part of the house. This situation changed again during the collapse of the USSR, when old aspirations for freedom and national states arose together with old conflicts and tensions. During the 90ies the Caucasus would not only see the birth of three national states but as well two major conflicts – the war over Nagorno-Karabakh from 1988 until 1994 and the Georgia Civil War from 1988 – 1993 – resulting in four

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unclassified constructs: The semi-states of Abkhazia, Adzharia,² Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia. The region should not become restful any time soon and the conflicts remain unresolved until today.

During this transformation period the government in Moscow was occupied with its own problems; therefore the engagement in the Caucasus was limited to peacekeeping missions in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia and complete neglect of Nagorno-Karabakh. But the Caucasus should remain part of the “near abroad” and therefore a pivotal part of the Russian foreign policy. This role as “near abroad”, constituting an area of protection for Russia, got challenged for the first time after 2003, when a new regime in Georgia decided for an embrace of the West and especially for a deep cooperation with the United States (Asmus 2010).

The 2008 following war between Russia and Georgia marks a clear cut in the Kremlin’s foreign policy and was a signal to all post-soviet countries aligning themselves with the West. Therefore the insight gained by examining the Russia’s southern neighbors can be transferred to the overall foreign policy. Under Putin, whose foreign policy takes place within neorealistic framework (Mearsheimer 2014) Russia’s approach to its neighbors and the world is guided by these principles:

- 1) Stabilizing its own role as energy supplier. As the latest crisis shows Russia’s national budget as well as its economy as a whole are highly dependent on the disposal of oil and gas. In the past the largest share went towards the west, to Europe. Accordingly, any aspirations to elude this position either by increasing the own trade with Europe or even by introducing own pipeline-projects are a threat to Russia.
- 2) Create or support similar regimes as ruling in Moscow. Given the shared soviet history a way away from the Kremlin into more democratization and even a more of material wealth is hard for Russia’s ruling elites to tolerate. It might lead to questioning the Russian way and the position of the government.
- 3) Keeping the borders safe. In regard of the Caucasus this attempt has two dimensions. On the one hand to hold off NATO and especially the US from its borders. In the Kremlin’s view of the world not only military alliances and NATO enlargement are perceived as threats. The same goes for “remote-controlled” street protests as for example the “color revolutions” and the mass demonstrations in Moscow in 2011 (Krastev/Leonhard 2014: 3). On the other hand Russia has to deal with its own insurgency in the northern Caucasus, which terroristic attacks still claim hundreds of lives every year. Establishing a “sphere of interest” especially amongst the former Soviet Republics is part of this objective.

2 Unlike the other conflicts, the status of Adzharia got settled in a peaceful manner in the course of the Rose revolution 2003.

Based on these principles, the main thesis of this paper is that Russia's main objective to secure its own political influence in the Caucasus, to keep western powers – both the EU and the US – out and to disturb regional cooperation (Abushov 2009: 204). But how is this policy in detail and especially in regard of the different situation in the three countries enforced? And what role do the still prevailing conflicts play?

Russia's relation to its southern neighbors

Despite their similarities and the small geographical space, in which they are located, Russia's approach towards the countries of the South Caucasus is distinct. In the one corner we have the obvious bad boy – Georgia; in the opposite a country so economically dependent on Russia it is close to follow the fate of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and become a Russian satellite state. Azerbaijan is in the middle, following a multidirectional foreign policy. It is due to its resource-based prosperity able to go its own way and become a competitor of Russia in the field of energy supply. The common denominator for all three is Russia's status as the regional power in the Caucasus. Unregarding the different situation and future aims all three countries have to find a way how to behave towards Russia.

Armenia

Armenia's situation is notoriously difficult. Due to the closed borders to two of its four neighbors its economy is more than struggling and the persistent hostility with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh is a huge threat for the country's security. Lacking an own infrastructure for energy supply (and generally an own infrastructure for anything other than cognac, sacred places and nice scenery) and a constant need to rebalance Azerbaijan's armament have driven the small country in Russia's arms. The Russian Army maintains two military bases in the country and is without any doubt the dominating power in Armenian politics. Even the Armenian economy stretching from airlines over chemical products to telecommunication and of course energy supply is dominated by Russian companies. Due to the fact that there are no shared borders Russia is less perceived as a threat with facilitates good relations. The country's isolation and the conflict with Azerbaijan greatly benefits Russia, therefore its main interest is to preserve the status quo. The greatest issues in doing so are: Armenia's need to improve its relations other countries first of all Georgia. The oil shortage in Armenia in course of the five days wars showed drastically not only Yerevan's dependency on Russia's resources but as well on the transport corridor through Georgia. It is therefore a crucial interest for Armenia to maintain good relations with Georgia and engage in regional infrastructure projects (Petros 2008: 11). In conclusion

the more Russia increases the pressure on Georgia it damages its relations to Armenia. One other option for Armenia to improve its situation is to establish close ties to Iran, who as a pariah of international relations is happy to gain new partners. As an aspiring nuclear power, Iran's gaining more influence close to its borders, is definitely no pleasant perspectives for Moscow. The last possible option for Armenia to gain more leverage would be a rapprochement with Turkey, an option that gained speed after the 2008 war. The NATO-member and rising star Turkey, who already in the 90ties established close ties with Azerbaijan and some central Asian countries, is in Moscow seen a possible competitor over the Caucasus area and seriously questions Russia's self-assumed leadership role (Torbakov 2012).

Azerbaijan

The first and most important issue for Azerbaijan is the regaining of its territorial integrity. Therefore the Russian support for Armenia in the Karabakh conflict did chill the relations compelling Baku to look out for new partners and raising distrust against Russia. It was aided in that mission by being not dependent on Russian oil for energy supply, enabling it to reach out further. In contrast to its southern Caucasian companions Azerbaijan profits from legroom in its relations with Russia. As part of its multi-directional foreign policy it has good relations with the US and the EU, especially in economic terms (Franke et al 2010: 162). Its relations to Turkey, from whom it receives military support up to NATO standards (German 2012: 222), have been described by President Heydar Aliyev as "two states, one nation". The two countries even signed an agreement about mutual military support, which would include any foreign – and especially Russian – engagement in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is seen as part of Azerbaijani territory. In regard of its general policy towards Russia, Azerbaijan tries to avoid conflicts while maintaining as much independency as possible (German 2012: 221). Especially this close relationship with Turkey is seen as a problem in the Kremlin. Another issue for Russia was the support Chechen fighters gained from Azerbaijan, culminating in the TV-appearance of the terrorist leader Shamil Basayev from a private station in Baku (Kelkitli 2008: 83). Moscow reacted with visa-restrictions and by demonstratively performing maneuverers with Armenian armed forces (Ibid.), coercing Baku back in line swiftly. This example shows on the one hand how little influence Russia has in Azerbaijan, but it makes as well clear how much Moscow is will to use the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh to get its will. Other than Georgia, Azerbaijan does not seek to close – and especially no military – ties (Petros 2009: 5–7) to the US, which means it is less of a threat to Russia. Nevertheless, the area where Azerbaijan can have a negative impact on Russia is the field of energy policy. Especially projects as the South-Caucasus pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan

pipeline, which are supposed to continue in cooperation with the new Trans-Adriatic-Pipeline to Southern Europe (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2013) were in direct competition to Russia's (now closed) own project South stream. On the one hand, they increase Europe's dependency on Russian oil and gas on the other hand they strengthen the cooperation Tbilisi-Baku and free Georgia from Gazprom's pressuring hands. Examples of Azerbaijan supporting stability in Georgia are plentiful (Idan/Shaffer 2012: 256). Since Azerbaijan has no access to the high seas the cooperation with other states – firstly Georgia, secondly Turkey, to a lesser extent Iran – is crucial for its economic success. It will remain Russia's highest priority to hinder the deepening of the relations. A good mean to do so, seems to be the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Georgia

The small country with a large history has proven to be Russia's most difficult neighbor, even compelling it to its first military mission outside its own borders since the Afghan war in the 1980 s. Despite the fact that the five days war in August 2008 ended with a quick and clear military victory for Russia, thus showing both its superiority and willingness to take action to other CIS-states flirting with the west, on a political level the mission turned out as failed. It did not stop Georgia to become Russia's main opponent in the Caucasus. It did not stop Georgia to support separatism in the Northern Caucasus and improve its relations with the republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, North-Ossetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea (Dzutsev/Siroky 2012: 304–306). It did not convince Georgia to loosen its ties with the West and return to a more friendly relationship with Russia. It did not set an example deterring other post-soviet countries from doing so. On the contrary it rather deepened the distrust amongst the smaller states engaging the US as a possible counter-balance even more in the region. And it did not finally solve the issue of the de-facto states Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

What it did though was making a re-integration of these regions into Georgia – still one of the most important issues for the small country – more unlikely than ever before.

In the following years the Georgian foreign policy naturally grew rather careful and more focused on soft power approaches. One of the most successful was the so-called North Caucasus initiative, a change in the visa regime for Russian citizens and especially for the citizens of the northern Caucasian republics. The new regulations brought significant changes, almost completely freeing traveling to Georgia of restrictions. Although it might not seem a lot, but it means a great change for the citizens of the northern Caucasian republics, who are usually not even able to travel unrestricted inside Russia (Ibid.: 308). The advantages for Georgia are twofold. On the one hand it supports

the separatisms (and as claimed by Russian officials even terrorism) in these regions by offering a sanctuary for any kind of opposition in these republics, ranging from politically or ethnically persecuted to Islamic fighters. This of course makes it more difficult for Russia to put an end to the insurgency and withdraw its attention and especially the huge financial support from the region. On the other hand it offers an economic alternative for the usually rather poor republics. The plan behind this idea is to establish Tbilisi as a regional center in the Caucasus, thus creating closer ties amongst the small Caucasian countries and ultimately a counterweight to Moscow. This agenda is supported by several soft power initiatives especially in the areas of economics, education and cultural cooperation.

These ambitions do not constitute a very pleasant perspective for Russia. On the one hand an independent and Anti-Russian Georgia always bears the possibility of the presence of US-troops at its borders. The current crisis made this scenario even more likely (Smirnova 2015). On the other hand Tbilisi as a regional center in the Caucasus would have fatal consequences for Russia's interests in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It would enhance the separatism in the northern Caucasus by setting an example how things could go without Moscow. And it would offer an alternative for the actors close to Russia, namely Armenia. These developments could in the end have a fatal repercussion on the Kremlin's position itself.

Russia's first regularly used method to prevent undesirable developments in Georgia is to put economic and diplomatic pressure on Georgia, usually by introducing a harsher visa-regime or banning Georgian products from the country. Russia incentives to prevent these are also closely related to the frozen conflicts with Georgia's secessionist regions, which will be examined more closely on the following pages.

The role of the frozen conflicts in Russia's foreign policy

The conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are all a relic from the 1990 s and the independence of their respective nominal states. Despite all the differences they all play such an enormous role in the involved country's policy that it is not to say that the future of the Caucasus depends on these issues. From the Russian point of view these conflicts are great opportunities to keep a foot in the door in regard to its former compatriots. At first the situation in Georgia will be elaborated and secondly there will be a closer look into the conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijan over the de-facto independent nation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Separatism in Georgia – South Ossetia and Abkhazia

The loss of the two regions is an open wound in the flesh of Georgia. Although having a long history and ethnical identity the wish for separatism arose in both regions during the 1990 s and got inflamed by the aggressively promoted nationalism under Georgia's first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The first blood was shed in the course of the Georgian civil war in 1993, with the prelude of declarations of independence in Abkhazia in 1992 and in South Ossetia in 1990. In both conflicts Russian troops were involved in establishing the ceasefire and in fixating the status quo. These peacekeeping troops were stationed until the new outbreak of the conflict in 2008, which should change the situation drastically. The origins, background and outcomes of this conflict have already been discussed at length elsewhere (Asmus 2010). The most drastic long-term change was the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states by Russia, who thereby gave up its role a neutral mediator. Although the story of these de-facto states sounds similar there are a few noteworthy differences. On the one hand the population and economic capabilities. Meanwhile Abkhazia has a population of still 240.000 people and due to its access to the Black Sea and beautiful landscape some economic possibilities³ (Kapanadze 2014). South Ossetia is much smaller – estimated 72.000 inhabitants – and is completely dependent on Russia's support in order to sustain its survival. On the other hand the political will for independence. Most recently in 2014 the Abkhazian citizens have made it clear in several mass demonstrations that they do not wish any closer alignment to Russia to speak of a complete integration (Cecire 2015). It might seem odd for a country, where 96 % percent of the population owns a Russian passport, where the official currency is the Russian Ruble and where most commonly spoken language is Russian. Nevertheless, the Abkhazian will for sovereignty is quite strong and re-unification with Georgia is out of imagination for most Abkhazians. In South Ossetia the situation is different. The ties to Russia are just as close or even closer, but in difference to Abkhazia independence might not be South Ossetia's final destination. Since the country can hardly survive on its own, integration into Russia seems likely. But even in regard to a re-unification with Georgia the Ossetian administration is surprisingly open (Abushov 2009: 206–207).

As mentioned before, one similarity between the regions is their economic dependence on Moscow. Every year estimated 20 billion ruble flow into Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Wechlin 2014). What does Russia get back from these expenditures?

First and most important, it is a way to keep Georgia unstable. Therefore it makes Georgia less attractive for Western partners, especially NATO, which

3 Not at least to mention the newly developed partnership with Turkey, which (?) became Abkhazia's most important trading partner after Russia.

usually would not allow membership to a country with unresolved military issue on its own territory. It also might work as leverage to convince Georgia that NATO might not be the way for its future. As Kavus Abushov (2009) puts it: “[...] Georgia would only withdraw from NATO membership if Russia helped it restore sovereignty over the breakaway regions. Whether Russia has the resources to assist Georgia to subdue Abkhazia and South Ossetia is another question.” The fact that it seems rather unlikely for Russia to convince Batumi that a re-unification with Georgia is its best interests plus Russia increasingly menacing projection on its neighbors might lead to a closer alignment with NATO unregarding the unresolved issues.

Nevertheless, Russia’s support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia serves yet another purpose. It keeps a gap between Tbilisi and the republics of the North Caucasus. The sympathy for the Ossetians and the Abkhazians are the cause of anti-Georgian animosities amongst many ethnicities in the North Caucasus, especially amongst the North Ossetians. During the 2008- war and earlier the local troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were significantly supported by fighters from the other side of the mountains (Abushov 2009: 193). This animosity serves Russia’s aims in the Caucasus greatly. On the one hand it prevents Georgia from becoming a regional center with too much influence on its neighbors on the northern border, on the other hand it helps to prevent separatism in Russia itself, by portraying a positive image of the central administration. The last point is the instability these ongoing conflicts create in Georgia, binding a huge heap of Georgia’s political will and resources on the regain of the lost territories. In addition constant possibility of a new outbreak of hostilities, which might be used to a repeated military engagement of Russia, is a threat not only Georgia but also its possible partners feel. In conclusion, Russia prefers situation of controlled instability in the South Caucasus rather than long-term stability for the region (Ibid.: 205).

A complicated situation and no way out – Nagorno-Karabakh

The still ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is one of the world’s most dangerous clashes waiting to break out again. Despite its origins in the 1920 s, the current conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh started already during soviet times in 1988. It ended with a military victory of the Armenian and Karabakh forces and the displacement of estimated one million people. The result is far from being a final solution and the frontline between the two countries is closer to a combat zone than an international border. Nagorno-Karabakh became a de-facto – but not recognized⁴ – independent republic, meanwhile Azerbaijan continues to regard the region as part of its own territory. Even more interesting

4 Despite by other commonly not recognized republics: Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria.

is the relation between Karabakh and Armenia. Despite the fact, that Karabakh seems to be an integrated part of Armenia in daily affairs and is completely dependent on its neighbor in the west and the Armenian diaspora, it remains an independent republic, which is not even recognized by Armenia. Despite various peace-talks since 1994 – always but not exclusively under Russian guidance – no improvement has been reached since, especially because the situation is made more difficult by the additional occupation of Azerbaijani territory (the Lachin-corridor connecting Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh), possible security guarantees for the Armenian population of Karabakh and the high number of refugees on both sides.

Russia's engagement in the conflict did not start with its role as an "honest broker". Due to the fact, that the conflict broke out while the involved countries were still soviet republics, the communist authorities had to deal with the problem. In the case of Armenia, the unsatisfactory solution of the problem became the driving force behind the independence movement (Zürcher 2007: 156). It was the leaving of the Red Army and the opening of the arsenals, which led to the evolution of a small-scale local conflict to a full-scale war in 1992 and the Russian president Boris Yeltsin brokered the ceasefire in 1994.

Russia has been actively involved in the peace-negotiations, as well as part of the Minsk Group as most famously on the initiative of president Medvedev in 2011. Since the conflict takes place in a region, Russia considers its distinct sphere of interest in a multipolar world order, its preoccupation with the conflict is unmistakable. A peace treaty under Russian guidance would bring the regime in Moscow great international reputation and underline its ability to solve the problems in the world – or at least in its neighborhood – without help from the outside, especially from the US. Russia's role as an honest guide in the negotiations is emphasized by that fact that the conflict Nagorno-Karabakh is the only post-soviet dispute without the engagement of Russian troops.

Nevertheless, Russia might also be able to make use of the continuation of the conflict. As mentioned above the threat of Azerbaijani military superiority keeps Armenia, which might otherwise go the same way as Georgia and seek closer alignment to the West, a close and dependent ally. But also in its relationship to Azerbaijan the continuation of the conflict has some benefits. Without Russia withdrawing its support the regain of Karabakh for Azerbaijan is out of question, so support for a more Azerbaijan friendly outcome of the situation is a great incentive for Baku. In addition, the ongoing conflict rather adds to the authoritarian style of leadership practiced by President Ilham Aliyev, which in turn creates an obstacle for the formation of cordially relations to the EU. The reluctance of the EU to take a clear stand on the issue also creates a negative image of Europe amongst the Azerbaijani population (Simão – Freire 2008: 56; Musabayov – Shulman 2009).

Conclusion

As these examples show the power of Russia's foreign policy is in decline, cautious of losing influence and rather controlling and destabilizing the situation than creating or shaping it. This can especially be seen in regard to the frozen conflicts. Moscow can use these the situation, but it neither invents not initiates it. Despite trying to remain the *Ordnungsmacht* in the Caucasus, Russia will in the future be increasingly challenged by other emerging powers, especially Georgia and Turkey, as well as "outsiders" to the region like the US and the EU. Even now, Russia has lost its position as a hegemonial power, although it of course remains the most important actor for any state in the region. Russian interests remain present but it has lost its dominance over the region. Even without a solution to the conflicts, the continuation of which supports Russia's position; its presence in the countries of the South Caucasus will in the long run recede. Armenia will have to continue seeking other option especially since the war in 2008 showed the fragility of its economic dependency on Russia. Possible partners would be Georgia, Iran and – less, likely as a partner due to its traditional ties to Azerbaijan but nevertheless a new window to the world – Turkey. Azerbaijan is, due to Russia's support for Armenia, more and more drawn to Western partners, especially Turkey. Last but not least Georgia, who continues to see in Russia its main antagonist in its struggle over territorial sovereignty. Although military means are after the devastating defeat in 2008 out of question, Georgian soft power policy and anti-Russian alliances will continue to be a thorn in Russia's southern flank.

These insights can be transferred to the general Russian foreign policy. Despite its rhetoric and global aspirations, Russia is an empire in decline, trying to keep as much of its power as possible and securing its homeland. The Russia's military expenditures are similar to single European countries as France and the United Kingdom do not match those of China not to mention the US. The sanctions and the drop of the oil-prices showed distinctly Russia's economic weakness and its dependency on the global economy. Even the developments in the Ukraine show that Russia has become prone to simply reactions on events instead of creating and shaping the international relations. How this new instability will affect its relations to the south Caucasus and the developments there, remains to be seen.

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The Construction of Crisis: The 'internal-identitarian' nexus in Russian-European relations and its significance beyond the Ukraine crisis¹

MORITZ PIEPER

Abstract: *Since 2012 and with Putin's return to the presidency, Russian politics underwent a process of securitization of domestic politics. This laid the groundwork for the crisis in European-Russian relations that culminated in the 'Ukraine crisis' from late 2013. This article will trace the domestic determinants of Russian foreign policy choices and narratives since 2012 that help explain the political deadlock between 'the West' and Russia over the European Union's 'Eastern Partnership'. It will thereby also analyze the effects for the Russian perception of agency between the US and the EU as well as path dependencies that European Union sanctions have created. Not only Russia's relationship with the West is at stake in this stand-off. The 'Ukraine crisis' has developed into a fundamental systemic crisis of the Putinite regime. Only if Putin's 'social contract', which had guaranteed economic well-being in exchange for political inactivity, was to be eroded by sanctions imposed on Russia, the 'civilizational' narrative of Russian exclusivity would be endangered. A new social contract will be a generational task and will have to take stock of the nexus between internal determinants and identitarian foreign policy choices. It will also be the first step in recalibrating European-Russia relations.*

Keywords: *Ukraine crisis, Russian-European relations, domestic factors in identity projection, Russia sanctions, Putin's 'social contract'*

Introduction

The Cold War ended without a formal treaty, agreement or declaration outlining the future relationship between Russia and 'the West'. The guarantees allegedly given to Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the disintegrating

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Soviet Union, that NATO would not enlarge beyond its existing Eastern borders, were never given in writing.² The Cold War ended asymmetrically. Two decades later, the West and Russia face each other in the most fundamental post-Cold War crisis with two diametrically opposite narratives. In both narratives, references to initial missteps in the post-Cold War order are made. But as this article will attempt to show, the international dimension of Russian-Western misunderstandings often was a surface layer to cover deeper, and more fundamental, inability to find common identitarian arrangements. I define 'identitarian' here as identity politics projected into foreign policy. These identitarian predicaments were simmering as long as both sides agreed on issue areas where 'selective cooperation' was possible.³ With an unprecedented domestic protest movement emerging in late 2011, however, Russia's leadership was faced with a dilemma: The simmering identity question needed to be instrumentalized for regime consolidation purposes, or the Putinite regime would gradually erode. With Prime Minister Putin's planned return to presidency in May 2012, the Kremlin was determined to prevent the latter scenario. The path was thus set for a deliberate policy choice that externalized Russian domestic deficiencies at the cost of disconnecting Russian society from Europe. The Ukraine crisis in late 2013 hit these deliberations like a bomb shell and acted as a catalyst for Russia's alienation from Europe. Its occurrence can thus be analyzed as an illustrative case for the working of narratives in shaping governmental policy.⁴ Before this article explores the consequences thereof, two foundational aspects require elaboration: The nature and power of narratives before the crisis, and internal determinants of Russian foreign policy.

Discourse and narratives as makers of foreign policy

The Ukraine crisis has become a catalyst for two clashing narratives about international order after the end of the Cold War. The Russian narrative is woven around the centrality of the perception of encirclement of Russia by the West and the Western neglect of Russian security interests after the US had implicitly declared itself the 'winner' of the Cold War. NATO enlargement was seen as a precursor to EU enlargement, contributing to an overall perception of 'encirclement' and humiliation of Russia by the 'transatlantic community'. The second major line of argumentation related to the relativity of legality claims: When

2 The assurance in 1990 that NATO would not move westwards (given both to Gorbachev and foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze) only referred to the former German Democratic Republic. In the Western reading, no promises have been broken. And with the GDR's dissolution and German reunification, the guarantee of non-membership for 'East Germany' was obsolete.

3 Examples are the 'New START' disarmament talks between Moscow and Washington, the coordination of non-proliferation policies or constructive cooperation on the Iranian nuclear file.

4 The theoretical angle chosen is therefore sympathetic to moderate constructivism (cf. Kowert & Legro 1996; Sørensen 2008).

charged with the accusation that Russian foreign policy moves were a breach of international law, Moscow was quick to respond that the US were leading the list of international law-breakers. Irrespective of structural differences, the 'Kosovo precedent' kept being cited by Russian officials in defense of Russia's logic for the 'integration' of Crimea into the Russian Federation. Russian reactions are understood as purely defensive. The West, so the overall reading since the 1990 s, had failed to initiate a dialogue with Russia to include it into the wider European, and possibly, Eurasian, security architecture. The 'common European house' that Mikhail Gorbachev dreamt about was built without a room for Russia, as the former State Secretary Madeleine Albright is said to have remarked. The Cold war ended without a formal political arrangement that would define rules and roles for the Russian-Western relationship.

The Western narrative focuses on Russia's interests in keeping strategic influence in its wider neighborhood in order to hold clout and 'buffer zones' between its borders and those of 'Europe'. 'Frozen conflicts' in Moldova, Georgia, and possibly Eastern Ukraine, in this thinking, serve to uphold a Russian meddling hand in unstable regions so as to 'freeze', short of solving, conflicts that could easily be turned into hot ones, should this be to Russia's strategic convenience. Against the backdrop of the difficulty of defining European space – both geographically and in terms of identity projections – this narrative has always contained a sub-debate about the role of Russia in the international system and its relation with the 'Euro-Atlantic community'. The Ukraine crisis has seen a shift from qualified to overt disagreements over the Euro-Atlantic political economic arrangements that were always seen as exclusionary and 'identitarian' by Russia. The 'common neighborhood' has become a 'contested neighborhood' (Sakwa 2015: 26–49).

Russian activities in Eastern Ukraine, first denied, then tactically admitted by the presidential administration, are seen as legitimate response to the long-standing attempts of the West to promote Western interests in the 'common neighborhood'. Not only had this been done without consulting Russia, so the Russian thinking, but as a deliberately planned policy to control Russian influence in the region (Aliboni 2005; Casier 2007).

To understand how we got there, we need to look beyond narratives and turn to internal determinants that drive Russian foreign policy.⁵

Internal determinants of Russian foreign policy

On 10 December 2011, I was on Bolotnaya Square in central Moscow. I saw the masses of people of all ages and of various political convictions. What united

5 For analytical purposes of this article, internal determinants of European Russia policies are not discussed here. However, how structural determinants of Russian foreign policy, in turn, can or cannot condition changes in European Russia policies will be analyzed in the remainder of this article,

them was not only a feeling of a growing alienation from the ruling elite, but of having seen another manipulation of the Duma elections on 4 December 2011. A long-standing Soviet and post-Soviet practice, these forged elections were one too many and unleashed the biggest protest movement since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. With the prospect of Vladimir Putin returning to presidency half a year later, these protests – although limited in geographical scope – entailed an alarming message for the Kremlin administration and demanded a reaction.

Putin's reaction was a violent crack-down of the protests, stifling of the civil society, tight restrictions on the freedom of assembly and the freedom of speech, and externalization of these threats. The 2011 protests have forced an identitarian choice onto Putin's reign: By the compelling logic of strengthening the powerful state vertical (cf. Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011), the identity question (hitherto deliberately left vague) now demanded an uncompromising answer, and it was telling that some government-sponsored anti-demonstrations were labeled 'anti-Orange protests' in reference to the Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' of 2004 (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 245). This set Russian conceptions about 'Europe' onto an inevitable collision course with the EU's liberal integration project.

In Putin's first and second presidential terms, his rhetoric did not draw such a sharp in-group/out-group distinction between the Western liberalism and Russia's allegedly unique identity yet. This now started to change as he was preparing for his return to presidency. In his stream of articles published in newspapers in 2011 and 2012, Putin made references to the concept of 'state civilization' (Putin 2012). As peculiar as this conflation of terms appears, it underlined the crucial importance of a strong state and his understanding of a unique character of Russian *statist* identity (anchored in Orthodox spiritual values). Emphasizing a strong state was gradually paralleled by the externalization of everything that is ailing Russia: Liberalism now explicitly belonged to another cultural code that was not applicable to Russia anymore. It was in this context that new NGO laws ('foreign agent law'), anti-gay laws, or the crack-down on 'Pussy Riot' had to be seen. While the consequences were still domestic at this stage, this new thinking was a combination of externalization of domestic deficiencies and securitization of identity conceptions. Liberalism was now explicitly defined as threat to Russia's civilizational identity. 'The West', including the European Union, had to become the hostile 'Other'. Olga Malinova (2014; cf also her contribution in this issue) thus observes that a discursive shift took place in Russia's anti-Westernism from *ad hoc* measures to a consistent pattern and defining feature of the new ideology.⁶ This ideology, in Morozov's (2015)

6 The governmental embrace of this approach effectively sidelines a traditionally more varied domestic debate about Russian foreign policy and identity (for an overview thereof, cf. Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 181–209).

analysis, is a shallow one: While presented as a conservative project of returning to ‘Russian values’, this ‘dialectic of the subaltern’ is nothing but a negation of Western hegemony, so his withering conclusion. In a similar reading, Vladislav Inozemtsev (2015) finds strong words when he asserts that “Russia’s transition from a promising westernized nation into an aggressive authoritarian regional power is nearing completion” (1).

The Ukraine crisis thus entered this equation not as its root cause, but as the culmination of a systemic problem in Russian-Western relations. Russia’s message of force has a twofold audience effect here: To the outside world, Russia’s reaction to Yanukovich’s flight on 21 February 2014 demonstrates that attempts to override ‘Russian interests’ will be answered with a determined response (however flimsy Russia’s legal standing and argumentation). To the domestic audience, the message served to consolidate the ‘conservative’ world-view propagated by the Kremlin administration since late 2011 that ‘the West’ will not be allowed to undermine Russian values – neither at home nor in its ‘spheres of influence’. The practical consequence is a transnational discourse that is explosive in its implications for the post-WWII international order. The question whether the annexation of Crimea was planned as a long-term scenario or it was an improvised tactical move will be a critical one for historians to answer. The crucial ramification for Russian-European relations, however, is this: The prospect of a regime weakening in 2011 propelled the Kremlin to impose an identity model onto the domestic field that conveyed civilizational exclusivity. This model externalized threats, securitized relations with Europe, and therewith ‘built itself a discursive cage’, as Fischer (2014: 3) puts it. Any policy compromise between Russia and the EU is complicated by the perception that finding common ground with a hostile actor is a sign of weakness and will be seen as receding to outdated positions, according to the compelling logic of Russia’s narrative. Russian structural identitarian causes, coupled with domestic deficiencies, then met Europe’s response to the unfolding Ukraine crisis: sanctions.

European Union responses and path dependencies

Against the backdrop of the imposition of European Union sanctions on Russia and the downgrading of Russian creditworthiness by rating agencies such as Moody’s, Fitch, and Standard & Poor’s, the attractiveness of Russia as an investment target has decreased.⁷ The Russian economy has experienced an intensified capital flight. While Russia dismisses such downgrading and economic pressure as a ‘political decision’, and especially so since the imposition of ‘phase II’ sanc-

⁷ First, in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Russia has been downgraded to one notch above ‘junk’ status. In January 2015, Standard & Poor’s downgraded Russia’s foreign currency credit rating to junk status, thereby placing it below investment grade (BBC 2014 b; Andrianovna & Galouchko 2015).

tions after the downing of the civilian airliner MH17, the decision to adopt these sanctions had been taken before. It was only the momentum that intensified in the wake of the airplane shoot down.⁸ But the economic alienation is mutual: The Russian government has shown a tendency of economic alienation from US-inspired financial and economic instruments – in addition to the level of political resentment, and the reaction to Western attempts to isolate Russia economically. Examples are the Putin administration's announcement to substitute embargoed manufactured goods from the West by domestic produces; indirect taxes and direct product bans; and relevant changes in the customs legislation (Libman 2014). The European Union is Russia's largest trading partner, and its most important provider of much-needed technologies. The EU-28 accounts for over 70 % of foreign direct investment into Russia. Not only are Western economic isolation attempts detrimental for Russia's economy, Russian reactions to Western pressure have also been counter-intuitive from a purely economic perspective. Economic considerations alone thus cannot explain Russian policy planning here. Instead, it was the construction of exclusive identities and the externalization of domestic deficiencies, as highlighted above, that forced a compelling path dependency onto the Russian administration. If anything, Western sanctions seemingly only confirmed the view held by Moscow that the West had long been working to undermine the Russian 'regime'.

Yet, this path dependency holds the potential to endanger the foundations of the very regime Putin and his entourage seek to protect. Russia's economic isolation has set in motion a dangerous downward spiral that has only intensified the already existing structural economic deficiencies. Russia's state budget is dangerously dependent on revenues from oil and gas exports (over 50 %, if exploration, sale and export duties are included; cf. Inosemzew 2014). For the last two decades, Russia has failed to invest in infrastructure, technology, and research. Russia imports almost all of its manufactured goods from Europe. This situation now creates a predicament for Putin's 'social contract', which is the basis for the functioning of his regime. This social contract guaranteed a relative economic well-being for Russia's citizens in exchange for political inactivity.⁹ The wider dimension of the Ukraine crisis for Russia's political and societal development is this: Putin's social contract is running the risk of expiration if Western sanctions are upheld (or even toughened), and oil prices continue to be at a historic low. If relative economic stability cannot be guaranteed in the mid- to long-term, new forms of engagement between the Kremlin and its populace will have to be found. Putin has navigated himself into a deadlock with a consistent alienation from the West as the only logical consequence. At

8 On two different readings of the event, cf. Sakwa (2015: 168–171) and Wilson (2014: 140–142).

9 The establishment of this social contract went hand in hand with the strengthening of the 'power vertical', and the vigor of this new arrangement had to be experienced the hard way by prominent oligarchs ('from equidistance to subordination', cf. Sakwa 2014: 24–46).

the same time, Europe is Russia's most 'significant Other'. Russia needs Europe economically, and Russian identity conceptions always included Europe – even if only to distinguish itself from the other.

Post-modern complications

Thus the parameters were set. What intensified in the course of the Ukraine crisis was the shrillness of the rhetoric as well as the perfection of conveying exclusive narratives. The latter quickly obtained a label of its own: Information warfare. In support of the civilizational narrative outlined above, a whole 'information industry' was beefed up (although it had existed before (cf. Politkovskaya 2004), it was now magnified to its best).

Already before the Ukraine crisis reached a new level with the fights in and over Eastern Ukraine, Russia and 'the West' have had proxy arguments about the promotion of 'values'. Narratives were not only at the core of the conflict, they also violently turned into an operational warfare scenario. In Moscow's rhetoric, reference was often made to US-instigated coups and campaigns to undermine Russian neighboring countries (Putin 2014). Ukraine and Georgia ranked high among the battle grounds in this arena, and the prospect of NATO membership for these countries, alluded to at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, rang all alarm bells in Moscow. While Europe is Russia's most significant identity and trading partner, as highlighted above, accusations of unlawful interference in Eastern Europe were mostly charged against the United States. At root lay an extended Cold War understanding that NATO, and the US by implication, was the security provider of Europe. Sakwa (2015) thus connects the security threat that NATO constituted in Russian thinking with the crisis implications for Europe: "This fateful geopolitical paradox – that NATO exists to manage the risks created by its existence – provoked a number of conflicts. The Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 acted as a forewarning tremor of the major earthquake that has engulfed Europe in 2013–14" (5).

Western perceptions of Russia instigating unrest in neighboring regions were juxtaposed by the Russian narrative of a legitimate promotion of Russian 'conservative' values and worldviews in the post-Soviet space. This is done via NGOs and the media to counter the Western 'infiltration' of these countries. The promotion of the Russian 'worldview', and the 'unique civilizational character' of Russia was supported by influential (Eurasian) ideologues like Alexander Dugin, who was instrumental in detecting a domestic 'fifth column' of alien elements that were undermining Russia's value system (Fiona and Gaddy 2015: 347–48). This witch hunt for domestic political enemies bears a striking resemblance to Soviet practices. The reference to a distinct Russian civilizational identity harks back to the 19th century philosophers Nikolai Danilevsky and Konstantin Leontiev and the 20th century philosopher and publicist Ivan Ilyin, but acquires

a politically activist connotation in this context. History becomes politicized, and Putin's distortionary use of historical references in justifying why Crimea is as holy to Russia as the Temple Mount is to Jerusalem was but the most appalling of examples in the political discourse (Arkhipov and Kravchenko 2014).

The practice of such 'political technology' has been aptly demonstrated elsewhere (Wilson 2014: 20–24). Next to the implication for domestic constituencies, the audience effects are internationally just as significant. 'Information warfare' has long entered the vocabulary of 21st century conflicts. This has far-reaching consequences not only for the conduct of future conflicts, but for their mediated interpretations and 'truth-telling'. In situations like in Eastern Ukraine where factual verification is being complicated by ground combat, opposing narratives will continue to compete for believers, dispel alternative speculations and nurture conspiracy theories on all sides. Intelligence and shrewd manipulation are used in astonishing new ways for domestic and international audience effects. This opens up the postmodern Pandora's box where 'nothing is true and everything is possible' (Pomerantsev 2014a). Postmodernity becomes a zone of permissiveness. In a similar vein, information becomes 'weaponized' (Pomerantsev 2014 b; Burkhardt 2015).

This works well even with segments of Western societies, as it meets a general (perceived or actual) dissatisfaction with poor reporting in the Western media. "Abroad, organizations like the Russia Today TV channel are successful because the Kremlin line is buried in a post-modern *mélange* of 'alternative' views", Wilson (2014) writes (22). If information is relative, 'values' and 'norms' have to stay contested by design. And if norm contestation means leveling power hierarchies, it also levels the power of attraction for certain norms. This could ultimately be the nail in the coffin of the EU's liberal 'norm promotion' project. Arguably, Joseph Nye's 'soft power' concept (2004) emerged from a Western political thinking that has never found much resonance in Russian policy thinking. 'Soft' and 'hard' power are now enmeshed in a way that will define the 'hybrid' nature of geopolitical contestation in conflicts to come.

The relativity of truth claims bodes well for Putin's rejection of Western liberalism and thus bolsters up his emphasis on a unique Russian statist civilizational character, as outlined in the sections above. Nonetheless, the wider political implication is catastrophic: It sets Russia on an inevitable collision course with any pan-European identity. If Russia is unique, so the logic, it cannot be judged by the same standards. This is an exclusivity claim that is dangerous in terms of political accountability. Putin admitted that much in his September 2013 *New York Times* article, then referring, however, to the United States: "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever their motivation" (Putin 2013).

The intersection between trade and identitarian integration projects

Against the backdrop of this ideational and informational stand-off, the nexus between inter-regional trade initiatives and identity conceptions has to be understood as a major bone of contention. The EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy (ENP) born in 2004 lumped together the Southern and the Eastern neighborhood and was quickly criticized for taking a too country-unspecific and generic approach. This program was then refined with a more differentiated approach that separated 'the South' from 'the East'. The 2008 Eastern Partnership (EaP) now sought to formulate more integrative approaches to the EU's Eastern neighbors (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). The means of achieving gradual regional integration was by closer market harmonization. Inter-regional trade projects, however, have become the stumbling block in the EU-Russian relations, as it had become clear that Russia had its own ideas about market integration in this region. The reason for this lay in the intersection between trade and identitarian integration. Bringing markets closer together would, so the hope of Brussels and the fear of Moscow, also align governance models and societies over time. This ambition fundamentally clashed with the Russian perception of legitimate 'spheres of interests' held by Russia in the post-Soviet space. At the latest by announcing the EaP, the role of the regional rival, in the Kremlin's eyes, was taken over by the European Union (Fischer 2014). This was a role that had hitherto been played by the US. Accusations of illegitimate interference in the post-Soviet space were raised against perceived or actual pro-US actors, media, and foundations. The 2004 Orange Revolution in Kiev was a prime example of the 'classic' post-Cold War stand-off between 'Russian interests' and 'US interests'. The EU was perceived as a complacent follower of the US policy priorities at best.¹⁰ What changed with the Eastern Partnership program was the perception of agency. With the European Commission now in the driver's seat to shape a regional policy agenda that was inimical to Russian conceptions of regional order, threat perception has changed as well (cf. Baunov 2015).

Sakwa (2015) contrasts the 'Wider Europe' idea of expanding a liberal integration model based on the principle of EU conditionality, emanating from Brussels, with that of a Russian-favored 'Greater Europe' that conceived of a continental Europe ('from Lisbon to Vladivostok') and that, in theory, would be able to accommodate multiple centers of power. Although both the 'Wider' and the 'Greater' Europe agenda contained a certain conceptual fuzziness as to scope, methods, and goals, the narratives of two competing Europes served to

¹⁰ At times, this assumption is even upheld with regard to EU's own sanctions, arguing that Washington convinced the EU to pursue policies that are not in Europe's best interest (Fischer 2015: 4).

cement the dividing lines. Yet, it was the particular combination of neoliberal market integration with the security dimension of the Atlantic community (“NATO enlargement and the aggressive promotion of Western democracy”, Sakwa 2015: 27) causing that the EU’s new approach to Eastern Europe had to face Russian resistance.

When Russia proposed and initiated its own integration projects for the post-Soviet space, it implied conflicting ideas of regional order. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) that was formally launched in January 2015 to succeed the Eurasian Customs Union of 2010 and the ‘Single Economic Space’, which came into effect in 2012 (consisting of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan), was an explicit counter-model to the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood projects. Ukraine happened to become the *casus belli* between these two integration models. What gave the crisis a wider and more contagious dimension was the readiness to resort to military means in order to reverse the decline of Russian influence in Ukraine. A root cause was the politically desired connection between trade and identitarian integration models: Deliberately conceived as an alternative integration project, the EEU was left with an ideationally vague underbelly. For Russian nationalists and Eurasianists, it was one step closer to the fulfillment of a Russian-led (re-)unification of Eurasia (cf. Weiss 2015). With this, the Kremlin may have been waking some demons it might not have wanted in the first place. However, with a conscious anti-liberal and anti-Western ‘civilizational’ rhetoric since 2011–12, as laid out above, this rhetoric has now conveniently coincided with perceptions of the EEU as an alternative model of transnational governance.

The proposal to start discussions about possible areas of cooperation between the EEU and the EU, in this context, was a first recognition of structural deficiencies in crafting the regional order that had led to the crisis over Ukraine’s future. Economic interconnection between these two trading blocks would not only be welcomed by those in favor of (a somewhat fanciful) common economic space between Lisbon and Vladivostok. It could also be an important long-term precondition for talks about joint security arrangements. Economic, security, and identity perceptions, as this episode has forcefully shown, are closely intertwined. The insistence of some European leaders in response to Russian ‘aggression’ in Ukraine, that Ukraine was never ‘forced to choose’ between one or the other regional model, thus only explains half of the story. The identitarian and political implications for any conception of a ‘Common European House’ with Russia were largely ignored. Yet, the task of solving both the structural dimension of inter-regional trade connections by appropriate regime and security guarantees for all actors involved as well as the more immediate politico-military crisis over Ukraine is not an easy one. As so often in conflict management, the crisis has developed a dynamic of its own that is spiraling out of control of those actors who could have prevented its occurrence in the first place. And on an ideational level, the depiction of the EEU as a rival regional order is politically

explosive in combination with Russia's governmental discourse of a unique civilizational identity. This combination of factors will complicate any inter-regional discussions between the EU and the EEU.

Recalibrating the transatlantic character in EU-Russian relations?

Scholarly research on Russian foreign policy following the break-up of the Soviet Union has divided Russia's post-Soviet relations with the West into distinct phases of foreign policy re-orientation, ranging from assimilationist (under President Yeltsin) to more pragmatic and accommodating (with foreign minister Primakov and during Putin's first term) through to more assertive and independent foreign policies (under President Putin in his second and third term) that bespeak Russia's quest for a post-imperial foreign policy identity.¹¹ The deterioration in relations between Russia and the West and the character of Putin's leadership has also sparked a range of studies analyzing causes and consequences thereof.¹² Underlying many analyses of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy is the unidirectional focus of *change* in Russia's approach towards the West. It is at this juncture that the stand-off over Ukraine has disclosed a much deeper-seated malaise in Russian-Western relations that is born of identitarian clash narratives. With this crisis, Russian foreign policy experienced a shift from qualified to overt confrontation with the West, as the previous sections have traced. Second, a subsumption of European foreign policy under the wider umbrella of 'Western' approaches has taken place. This has brought a perception of European agency in co-determining models of regional order in the European-Russian 'common neighborhood' to the fore. Hitherto, (actual and perceived) US policies in the region were seen as the most destabilizing factor in the region. The 'Ukraine crisis' thus has become an 'actorness' test for the European Union. European Union policies have contributed their share to the crisis, and European mediation was expected at its outbreak. The underperformance in this role as crisis manager led to disillusion not only in Ukraine, where the initial motivation behind the 'Maidan' revolts had been to step up for a closer association with the EU. The EU's inability to find a common language on Russian policies in Ukraine were received with scorn and ridicule on the part of Moscow, but also Washington. The leaked remarks by US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs Victoria Nuland to "fuck the EU" have become emblematic for US puzzlement about the EU's internal divisions about the appropriate approach to the Ukraine crisis and to European-Russian relations (cf. BBC 2014a).

11 Belopolsky (2009: 14–28); Casier (2006); MacFarlane (2006: 44f.); Sakwa (2002); Trenin (2006); Tsygankov (2007); Mendras (2012); Nizameddin (2013: 52f.); Shakleina (2013: 166–174).

12 Sakwa (2008a; 2008 b; 2014); Stürmer (2008); Mendras (2012).

The question thus has to be asked whether this most severe post-Cold War crisis between Russia and the EU has the power to affect change in European Russia policies and in the crafting of new identity and security arrangements between Russia, Europe, and the United States. A recasting of European-Russian relations on equitable terms will require re-defining Europe's role in the Euro-Atlantic community and a re-balancing of EU-US relations to dispel the impression in Moscow of interchangeability of policy agendas between Brussels and Washington. Investigating re-definitions of EU role perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe not only in relation to Russia but in relation to the US in reaction to the Ukraine crisis would reverse the directionality of most studies of EU-Russia relations, and more scholarly analysis will be needed to reflect on these policy options.

However, for credibility reasons, the EU is in no position to lift its sanctions against Russia without any tangible change in Russian positions. Not only do sanctions, once imposed, develop a dynamic of their own. They also narrow down the policy instrumentarium at the disposal of those adopting them. The political momentum will largely determine EU Russia policies in the short- to mid-term. And these mid-term policy decisions are likely to complicate broader strategic planning of EU relations with Russia beyond the sanctions debate. Moreover, the coupling of the lifting of EU sanctions with the implementation of the Minsk (II) agreement is politically intricate, if Europe sticks to its position that the annexation of Crimea is the gravest breach of international law since the end of the Second World War. If Crimea-related sanctions are exempt from this coupling, Crimea will stay with Russia, while Europe tacitly returns to 'business as usual' with Russia.

However, the previous sections have shown how Russian identitarian choices have set any rapprochement with 'the West' onto a dead-end street for some time to come. Internal choices in Moscow have become conflated with an identitarian agenda that should have been shaped jointly by Europe and Russia in the first place.

Conclusion

Talk of cooperation between the EU's regional integration projects and the EEU, although a useful step towards dialogue, cannot tackle the fundamental inherent determinants of Putin's new identity course. Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk (2015) caution that such inter-regional discussion could be a useful starting point, but should acknowledge different assumptions about its rationale and possibilities. If Russia's government is set to exclude European values from Russia's cultural code, political dialogue does not address root causes of the crisis. Reaching out to Russian society and conveying the message that sanctions are not directed against the people but the administration is compli-

cated for at least three reasons. First, it would be adding water to the mill of the Russian rhetoric that ‘the West’ is seeking to undermine Russia’s regime and governance model, and it would smell of the 1990 s ‘democratization’ talk in ‘transition economies’. “This is not because Russia’s leaders are congenitally opposed to the West,” Richard Sakwa (2015) puts it in rather stark terms, “but Russia’s whole history militates against simply adapting to an alternative ‘imperial’ project, in this case succumbing to the West’s ideological expansionism in the form of democratism” (254). President Putin’s speech on the occasion of the Victory Parade on 9 May 2015 forcefully underlined the end of a fragile post-Cold War order (Trenin 2015).

Second, the level of information warfare in ‘postmodern’ European conflict situations creates a Russian audience that is unlikely to be receptive to European outreaches. If information is weaponized, history politicized and democracy ‘managed’, the framework conditions for societal rapprochements, otherwise existing in open societies, are absent. And third, EU sanctions are increasingly seen as hurting Russian society as a whole, and not as being targeted at the Russian elite only, as polls indicate (Kredler 2014). This is perhaps not surprising given Russian official disinformation about Russia’s non-engagement in the conflict in Ukraine. This creates a communication gap that the EU will find difficult to bridge. The high approval rates of Putin’s policy course are a crucial point in this case. Only if a protracted economic crisis endangers Putin’s social contract defined in his first and second presidencies, the edifice might start to crumble. As this article has shown, such development would need to address the nexus between internal determinants of Russian foreign policy discourse and its ensuing identity choices that affect relations with the West at large and Europe in particular. It will be a generational task to deconstruct exclusionary narratives.

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Abstract: *In this paper, we borrow the dramaturgical analysis from sociologists and use it to analyze how contemporary Russian elites communicate with the public. It is my goal to analyze the performance of the Russian political elite when presenting the changes caused by the worsening Russo-Western relations over the Ukrainian crisis to the domestic audiences, with focus on the impact of sanctions introduced by the Western countries last year. Which strategies, narratives and symbols remain the same and which are adjusted, erased or newly introduced by the political elite when communicating with the public in order to justify the contemporary situation? We will focus especially on two basic components of the narrative: the symbolic level, particularly the use of history, geopolitics and other symbolic topics to frame the current situation; the pragmatic level, especially adjustment of current strategies and introduction of new plans and partners who will help to manage the new situation. As we will clarify later, our analysis will focus on symbolic arguments used by Vladimir Putin as “the national leader” and pragmatic politics introduced by him as “the president”.*

Keywords: *dramaturgical analysis, Russian foreign policy, sanctions, Ukrainian crisis, Russian politics*

Introduction

In this paper, we borrow the dramaturgical analysis from sociologists and use it to analyze how contemporary Russian elites communicate with the public. Based on the classic metaphor of Erving Goffman (1999), we will understand politics (just as any other social relation) to be a kind of theater-like performance. It is my goal to analyze the performance of the Russian political elite when presenting the changes caused by the worsening Russo-Western relations over the Ukrainian crisis to the domestic audiences, with focus on the impact of sanctions introduced by the Western countries last year.

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For this purpose, we divide the text into three parts representing the steps we need to make in order to find sustainable answers to this question. First, we will introduce the approach itself. As the dramaturgical analysis is not used very often in political science, I consider it useful to give a short introduction into some terms and concepts it works with, in order to clarify how these terms will be used in the text. Of course, the metaphor of theater is not unknown to political science and the IR, and several works were published under the label of “role theory”, which will be explored. Second, we will focus on the analysis itself. For the reasons explained below, the dataset of official statements of President Putin is collected and analyzed, in order to gain basic outline of the regime narrative and its change in response to the sanctions. Third, we will focus on the dataset collected from Russian state television in order to analyze the whole communication stream introduced to the Russian public in its complexity. We will especially focus on two basic components of the narrative: the symbolic level, particularly the use of history, geopolitics and other symbolic topics to frame the current situation; the pragmatic level, especially adjustment of current strategies and introduction of new plans and partners who will help to manage the new situation. As we will clarify later, our analysis will focus on symbolic arguments used by Vladimir Putin as “the national leader” and pragmatic politics introduced by Vladimir Putin as “the president”.

Politics as a theater

In the very beginning of the text, we shall introduce some key terms and concepts to build up the theoretical framework of this paper before we apply the approach on the case in question. In this sub-chapter we will go through the basics of Goffman classic dramaturgical analysis of society in order to introduce the key terms used in the following text. Later we will also look at the role theory in political science in order to explore concepts, which might be useful for our purposes.

In his famous text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1999 [1959]), Goffman introduces relations in society as a theater, where all of us play various roles in front of various audiences. Each social role is tied to widely shared and socially constructed patterns of behavior, which distinguish the holder of a particular role from others and, at the same time, enable the audience to identify the role one is playing. Everyone plays multiple characters in their lives. One person can be a mother to her children (performing e.g. the role of an adviser or guardian), daughter to her parents (performing, for example, the role of respect or even obedience), wife to her partner (performing the roles of a caring partner, supporter, etc.), manager to her subordinates (performing the roles of another type of authority or effective problem-solver), and so on. Moreover, expressions used within individual performances vary broadly depending on

the situation (children perform their roles according to agreed standards, so a mother basically does not need to manifest her authority, in contrast to a situation when children are breaking rules and the mother needs to re-establish or re-negotiate them by more firm means) or depending on a combination of roles applied at the same time (performing the role of a mother in front of her own parents, performing the role of a wife in front of her mother-in-law, etc.).

We may thus understand a role as a pattern of behavior following some basic rules constructed by the society, which enable the audience to identify the person with the social status and/or situation and evaluate his/her performance. There are two important messages behind this understanding of the word “role”, which need to be said clearly. First, there is only limited freedom in our actions, we are driven by the rules of the characters we are playing all the time, and even the most rebellious players obey the basic rules of their role, otherwise their performance would become incomprehensible to the others. Second, there is ongoing process of evaluation by the audience, which further limits the scope of our choices and strategies (which is partially truth when applied to politics), in the form of acceptance, rejection or even punishment of our behavior in every particular role.

The role-playing, of course, consists of two inseparable and mutually fueling components – the verbal and the non-verbal performance. As we analyze television broadcasting, providing us access to visual data, we will pay close attention to both of these components. We will focus especially on how the particular role is illustrated in speech and posture and gestures.

In addition to the idea of individuals acting out their respective roles, Goffman introduces the concept of teams, who play common acts. Thus, role-playing is even more complicated when we accept the idea of teams. A man performing the role of a husband and a woman performing the role of a wife can play “a couple” together at the same time (which would not make any sense without both individuals playing husband and wife to each other at the same time) in front of a group of friends who come to visit them. Individuals are usually members of various teams, all of them having some membership conditions and acceptable or even group-defining patterns of behavior (a man can be a member of a married couple, but also a teammate of one of his visiting friends on a local hockey team, colleague of another, etc.). Team memberships can sometimes collide with each other (hockey buddy vs. loving husband) or influence one’s performance on other stages (mother and teacher can easily use some techniques from her job at home). Team members work together to create a desirable impression in front of an audience. Team members also usually share secrets of how create the impression. These secrets usually come to existence in the “backstage” – some place hidden from the audience where the members do not need to act as a team. The deal made backstage binds the team members together by a common interest to maintain a desirable image of the team, also giving them power to use

acknowledged secrets against members of former or non-present teams (most often in the form of gossip) or even against members of a current team in case of an internal conflict.

Let us summarize again what we have learned by accepting the idea that individuals not only play their solo performances, but they also participate in team acts. First, the scope of behavioral choices narrows even more, if the individual is part of a team. He/she is bound by deal and strategy chosen by the team for the particular situation, he/she has to oblige inside rules of the time that qualify him/her as an insider, he/she has to follow not only his/her personal interests but also goals and priorities of the team. Second, there is considerable amount of very powerful internal information, which is not known to the audience, but which drives the behavior of the actors on stage significantly.

Finally, it is useful for us to introduce the concept of front stage and backstage in more detail, as described by Goffman. Front-stage is basically a physical place where the performance takes place, and which is usually equipped to serve the purposes of the performer (a living room is usually equipped to represent the well-being of the family and provide a comfortable environment for guests). The front stage is equipped with various scenery items, which serve to support the actors (a huge library in the house of an academic scholar illustrates and materializes the wisdom he/she should perform). Front stage is also strategically and symbolically organized to strengthen the desired impact of the performance or represent desired hierarchies (not only the existence of the library, but also the materials used, its position in the room and its position in relation to the scholar and to the audience shape the impact it makes). Analysis of the front stage is very important in this paper, as it is the only environment providing additional information to the audience about the priorities, self-evaluation and self-image and, of course, also about the taste of the analyzed team or individual(s). For this reason, we will pay close attention not only to the act itself, but to the stage it takes place on, too.

In our case, the concept of the front stage has one more layer. The stage we have access to is basically the TV screen. So the first front stage for us to analyze is what actually happens on the screen. Nevertheless, the TV broadcasting takes us to other stages where the pictures shown on the screen were made (for example, the press conference of President Putin). These stages need another inspection (where the President is seated, who accompanies him, how the place is arranged etc.).

Backstage, on the other hand, is a space where individuals and teams can escape from the sight of the audience, take off the masks of their team and discuss secrets and prepare for the upcoming performance without being watched. In our family metaphor, the cloakroom, bathroom or even bedroom can hide particular family members in case they need to restore their image for their role (to make up, to calm down, to re-dress in order to enter the “home” and put off

the “job” costume). A hosting couple can leave their guests alone for a while to discuss a strategy how to impress them in the kitchen, or as “husband” and “wife” solve a disagreement about how to perform the role of a “couple”. Nevertheless, every backstage an individual shares with others is also a front-stage at the same time. In our kitchen, the man can take off his mask of the “one half of the couple” for a while, but he is still playing the role of a husband. Usually even if a person is alone, he/she performs the role of “him/herself” to him/herself, while adjusting his/her life experiences to a desired self-image.

Backstage, from its very nature, is not visible to us as audience, which is especially true when analyzing media content. What is broadcast is a result of precious tuning and editing by various professionals. Moreover, the content is broadcast only when some level of desired form is achieved. Viewers do not stand a chance to participate in the process. Nevertheless, there are some routines in the production of media content that we can expect to take place (e.g. order of information), there are some known external conditions defining how some things are done (for example, state ownership of the media), which partially allow us to include some backstage information into our analysis.

It is already apparent that we understand Goffmann’s metaphor within the framework of social constructivism. The relation of a performer and the audience is always mutual. Not only does a performer impress the audience, but the audience’s reactions and expectations influence the performer when planning the performance and also when delivering the act. The audience’s expectations are of special interest in our case. Another classic text from social sciences, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *Social Construction of Reality* (2001 [1966]), helps us to recognize essential stages in the performer – audience (subject – society) relation. Berger and Luckmann describe a three-step process of social construction of the social reality. On one hand, a subject influences its surroundings by its actions (*externalization*), and at the same time, successful or powerful strategies of behavior become common and widely used, reactions of subjects in similar situations follow successful or popular patterns (*objectivization*) slowly turning into norms of behavior. In the end, society considers these appropriate and teaches them as behavior rules and demands them from the subject (*internalization*).

If we connect this concept with dramaturgical analysis, we must conclude that the ability to fulfill at least some minimum level of the audience’s expectations is usually a necessary condition for the individual to keep his/her role in the long term. It means that these widely accepted social rules and expectations impose limits to the behavior of the subject making his/her behavior to some level predictable, or at least a small number of possible strategies. These rules are quite stable evolving usually in public debate, which makes them observable for the external analyst.

The performance of politics

If we apply the presented framework on politics, a new and interesting perspective opens up to us. Politics seems to be a highly theatrical segment of social relations by definition. The widely used terminology enables us to use the theater metaphor very easily thanks to terms like “world stage”, “political arena”, “speech delivered”, “political performance” and, best of all – “political actor”. Politician is a social role that, from its very beginning, has been related to a specific facade and behavior attempting to *show* the public that they deserve a superior position in society. Politicians are representatives of others, leaders of the society and they are constantly supposed to prove they can *play this role*.

Unlike the roles of “mothers” and “wives”, we *expect* the “politician” to be a sort of act. Nevertheless, this should not blur our standpoints – we should not mix holding a role with pure rational fabrication or even lying. Holding this role is only partially, if at all rationally, calculated, and the rendering of the role springs usually, at least partially, from deep values and beliefs of the very person being “natural and sincere” for him/her. “Playing” does not necessarily have to mean “pretending” and it is very important to bear this fact in mind throughout this paper.

A political actor may knowingly pretend or lie, but this is also part of the act he “honestly” plays, based on his/her image of the political position he/she holds and based on social expectations imposed on him/her as a politician. For example, he/she might be afraid to admit some kind of behavior (e.g. being drunk) and lies about it because he/she is the president, and presidents are not supposed to behave this way, it would “*de-mask*” him/her, and might result into the decay of his/her social authority. In other words, intentional pretending is derived from the “role playing”, which we are interested in in this paper.

We should also consider the very interesting fact that in politics the audience can choose their actors. The role of a politician is most often granted by the public. When performing the role of a “politician”, stakes are usually very high for the individual as the audience demands satisfactory performance; otherwise, the politician might lose his/her right to enter the stage and may be replaced by someone else who is more persuasive and can better keep the facade and represent the role of a politician.

Whether the regime in question is democratic or not has, as it seems, smaller significance than we might initially expect. Public opinion can often be ignored in an authoritarian regime because legitimate means of expressing disapproval such as elections, strikes or demonstrations are limited, manipulated or prohibited. The opposition is bullied or threatened making the price of resistance extremely high in an authoritarian regime. Therefore, the opposition’s appearances tend to be limited. On the other hand, such limitation of legal means of disapproval deprives the government of the public opinion and immediate

feedback to their own actions. Authoritarians very often fear coups and revolutions and take preemptive measures to eliminate any signs of it because they have no honest feedback evaluating their own position. Therefore, public support makes authoritarian rule much easier and the occurrence of some type of breaking point less probable. It even provides a kind of protection within elite teams to the top-leaders of the regime if they are widely popular. For this reason, even authoritarian regimes try to gain public support and use various tools to convince the public they rule in the interest of the nation and its citizens.

Different political regimes seem to differ mostly in the importance they ascribe to various audiences and in tools using in their political play. Even under various regimes, the public, some kind of oligarchic political elite, the army, or even some foreign partners or groups of businessmen all become audiences of different importance to the political actors. Depending on the system and regime, the individual playing the “politician” categorizes audiences according to their importance for him/her. Irrespective of how noble an individual’s goals in politics, he/she can hardly pursue them without holding the office. Thus, a politician categorizes audiences according to which audience influences his/her chances of maintaining power the most, and then chooses strategies which allow him/her to pursue goals to the extent which makes the role worth playing (morally, economically, personally) and at the same time satisfy the important audiences to the extent securing his/her office.

Role theory and the international relations

Even if dramaturgical analysis is most often used in sociological research, it is not as exotic for the international relations as we might think. There is a well-established theoretical approach called the role theory, which partially overlaps with the dramaturgical approach introduced above. The concept became widely known in the 1970 s after the publication of K. J. Holsti’s *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, and since then, it occupies a stable position among theoretical tools of foreign policy analysis. For introducing the basic stand points, we may quote Glen Chafetz and his colleagues (1996: 732) who noted that the role theory “assumes as do many scholars and other analysts of international relations and foreign policy that states are ‘actors’ who behave consistent with specific roles with which they identify”.

Holsti’s pioneering work remains very useful until today, even for this paper, because Holsti excellently did most of the thinking for us, when it comes to applying the concept of the individual social role to the international politics analysis. What is very useful of Holsti’s work is the terminology he develops. It will be useful to distinguish between “role performance”, which describes the very act of the role playing, “role conception”, referring to the actor’s image of how the role should be played and the actor him/herself should present it,

and “role prescription”, which means the image of the audience of how the role should be played. In our case, we will follow the role performance in order to identify how the actors introduce their conceptions to the audience and how they are limited by the role prescriptions while doing this.

Furthermore, Holsti makes two important points, which we suggest to be slightly reconsidered for our purpose. First, he claims that in the international environment the external pressure of norms and treaties is weaker than in the social relations among individuals, and concludes that it is mostly the domestic demand shaping conceptions of a national role for the policy makers (which was a ground-breaking opinion in 1970). Second, he observes that roles like “superpower”, which countries play in international relations, are much vaguer than social roles held by individuals (Holsti 1970: 242–243). These valuable arguments nevertheless mirror the state-of-the-art in the 1970’s and, in case we want to use his text in this paper, we should consider the changes which have happened both in the world politics and in the theory.

Firstly, the world opinion has grown much stronger than it was in the hey-days of the Cold War. As a result of the dissolution of the bipolar structure of international relations, of globalization of international trade and finances, the famous “Retreat of the State” (Strange, 1996) weakened the armor of national states. Empowered by cheap transportation and developments in communication, the global (civil) society is able to form strong opinion platforms to all relevant international issues, to which states (at least democratic ones, often meaning rich and powerful) have to react and respond. This does not undermine Holsti’s original argument nor does it mean a return to structural arguments that tied national roles to structural forces of the international system. Rather, it means that non-state actors who advocate and support norms and particular forms of behavior traditionally connected to the domestic political process are now present also in the international environment broadening the international audience who watches the role-playing. Also the data suggest that at least part of the presidential argumentation is inspired by external audiences and their perceived expectations, which makes the phenomenon important for our analysis. Nevertheless, as the reader will see below, great emphasis is put on domestic sources of the performance in our paper.

Secondly, the social constructivist approach to the international relations theory leads me to the conclusion that national role is yet another type of the social role. National role in Holsti’s understanding tends to be more practical, describing role merely as a behavior pattern defined in political bargain or, as Walker (1987) adds, given by cultural norms, which allows us to form role typologies and sort the states into prescribed boxes or sets of boxes. The constructivist approach seems to reach further into the social dimension of the role. Alexander Wendt introduces the concept of “role identity”, which suits our purposes better (Wendt 1999: 228). He introduces the role as inter-subjectively

negotiated between the self and others, which pushes the concept back toward its original “social” meaning more in accordance with our constructivist stance and Goffman’s approach.

Nevertheless, considerable analytical gaps remain in our argumentation including an abyss at the level of analysis between the “national role”, as introduced in this part of the paper, and personal roles introduced in the previous part. To make our stances clear, we need to provide a more profound explanation of the issue. First of all, for our purposes it is useful to consider the national role to be a social role negotiated and constantly evolving in the international environment. On one hand, the national role can be understood as a set of “generic statements about identity” (Chafetz – Hillel – Grillot 1996: 749), informing us of the “mission and the share of our state in the world” which “must be specified by statesmen before national interest and any particular event can be defined and pursued” (Shih 1988: 602). On the other hand, as noted above, the international environment itself creates context where the role-playing takes place. Moreover, the success or failure of the performance is double-reviewed. First, the domestic audience reviews the foreign policy and its coherence with the “self-image”, the “national perception” of their national role. Second, the international community of states and non-state actors reviews the performance according to their norms and perceptions of the state’s position in the world context. Of course, mixed results can occur in this double-review process. Actions approved by the majority of the domestic audiences may be condemned by important members of the international audience and vice versa. This is very often the case in Russian foreign policy, as we will see later.

Regarding the issue of the level of analysis, we face the problem of interconnecting the national role of the state with Goffman’s almost anthropological perspective. First of all, as also the above-mentioned authors of the role theory are aware of, there is the simple fact that a state, as unobservable immaterial social institution, can by definition hardly “play” or “perform” any kind of role to any audiences. It is the statesmen who act as intermediaries between abstract national role scenarios and practical politics. They deliver the national role to the audiences, which again allows us to return to the analysis of the presidential performance.

Russian political theater

Even basic knowledge of the Russian political system ables us to identify the most important actors of the Russian political *ensemble*. Institutionally, it is the president who plays the *leading role*, while the government is seen as an *supporting actor*. The system is dominated by the executive power and a legislative body, which can be bypassed if necessary, even though it has proved it can make the governing process more *dramatic*. In terms of representing the system,

President Putin is also in practical terms the key *figure* of the contemporary system in front of both domestic and foreign audiences to the extent that the term “Putin’s Russia” is now being widely used. This fact led us to focus on the president’s performances in this article.

Based on the role theory, if we analyze the performance of President Putin, we need to analyze all of the above-mentioned levels of his acting. First, there is the national level – role of the “national leader”. On this level, a person presents and advocates the image and interests of his/her country and nation. Second, there is the individual role. Here the same person delivers the act of the politician named “the president”, the one for the job who, in the best case, deserves to be chosen to play the national leader. On the level of the “national leader” in accordance with Holsti’s approach – a president needs to deliver performance reflecting expectations of the domestic audience regarding Russia’s position in the world. Further, to follow Wendt’s constructivist logic, he also needs to take into account expectations and perceptions of influential foreign audiences regarding the same issue. On the individual level – “the president” act – close to Goffman’s perspective, he needs to deliver all of the above-mentioned as a president of the Russian Federation, which by itself poses various demands on the performance form.

Both levels meet at all important stages. First, it is necessary for “Mr. Putin” to negotiate his leading position on the stage which can be nicknamed “internal Kremlin politics”. At this stage Vladimir Putin negotiates conditions with official or informal interest groups, under which they are ready to obey his leadership as “the president” and to which scope he will be able to shape the “national leader” position if it is granted to him. Second, leaving the “internal Kremlin politics” in the backstage, he needs to deliver his political decisions to the public on the “domestic politics” stage by such a performance that the audience will accept, not only because of the content of the policy, but also because it is presented by someone they may respect as “our president”, the accepted head of state, and to whom they may assign the role of the “national leader”. Third, he needs to act as president of the Russian Federation on the stage of “international politics” with his performance driven by his desire to achieve advantageous positions as the “Russian president” – i.e. a trusted partner, capable competitor, etc. – and avoid to be seen as incapable puppet of some shadow masters, psychopathic dictator, etc. in order to open as much space as possible for successful representation of his country as the “national leader”. In this perspective, despite his magnificent personal power in the system, his maneuvering room seems surprisingly narrow and his behavior much less unpredictable than it might seem at the first glance.

Let us focus closer on the teams the president is a member of. Based on the Russian Constitution, the most obvious and officially fully supportive team of President Putin consists of members of the Government led by Prime Minister

Medvedev.² Another supporting team of the president, which is officially presented to both the domestic and foreign public, is United Russia, a political party without any political priorities except for those presented by the president. The United Russia team is not established by the Constitution per se, nevertheless its existence is a result of the constitutional order, which expects the Government to be able to achieve support of the Parliament, and at the same time, expects the same Government to be president's close cooperative. In front of foreign audiences, and sometimes also in front of the domestic public, the president presents himself as a proud member of the "Russia team", as one of the country's citizens. Other unofficial and often not publicly presented teams, whose influence is based on custom and power balancing within the system and not on its legal foundations, include the Army and secret service officials, informal groups of businessmen, the Church etc. These teams can partially personally overlap with the governmental team and the United Russia team, but they are not officially and publicly presented and their loyalty and the relations of their members to the president are the subject of never-ending disputes among analysts.

If we focus on the leading man, the audiences to his actions are obviously all of these previously mentioned teams. His position is thus dependent on maneuvering among several teams and their interests and on the use of secrets enabling him to exert his strength, get rid of his opponents, push back the opposition, and hold the role of the leader both in the institutional and (most probably also) real power hierarchy.

It is apparent now that when delivering his act to the domestic public, President Putin is of course bound by conditions negotiated among the elite teams in exchange for their public support and also by pacts made with international partners when negotiating their support on various issues. But at the same time, when delivering his act to the international audiences, he is again tied with domestic conditions for the public and elite support or tolerance for his regime. In terms of dramaturgical analysis, on the every political front stage, he has to respect deals and rules agreed in the backstage in order to present a sustainable and viable act.

If we focus on the stages of the "domestic politics" and "international politics", it is crucial for this paper that the Russian political elite actively works towards gaining support for the regime. In comparison to democratic leaders, an authoritarian politician can "manufacture" success to a larger extent – also via the state media. In our metaphor, authoritarian leaders can sort out who will appear with them on the political stage and whether their part will be significant

2 Dmitri Medvedev is in our metaphorical world the unappreciated actor, who was able to play the role of "president" in the institutional branch of the system for an ascribed period of time, without stealing the role of the "national leader" from Vladimir Putin.

or the one of a hero or a villain. But despite all this power and their control over the play, they still need to make their performance satisfactory enough for the spectators not to leave the theater and choose for coup or revolution. For this reason, we can consider the state media to be the basic active tool of the political elite to deliver their desired message to the Russian public and to the international audiences. In order to confirm the role of the media in the message delivering and in order to analyze the peculiarities spreading from simultaneous communication with the domestic and international audiences, let us have a closer look at the image-making in the Russian environment.

When focusing on the president as the leading man of the regime performance, Vladimir Putin has always carefully worked on his image. His adventures became legendary during the years presenting a nice example of the issue of too a heterogeneous audience. Putin's heroic actions may inspire jokes by the Western media, but their spirit is often quite understandable – even if old-fashioned – in the Czech environment and the same actions are probably hitting the right targets among parts of the Russian audience. Acceptance of “gender stereotypes, and a patriarchal culture that privileges maleness and masculinity over femaleness and femininity” is something Valerie Sperling considers essential for using gender symbols in Russian politics (Sperling 2015: 5). Vladimir Putin presents himself as a “Marlboro man”.³ He performs physical fitness (famous half-naked fishing), combat skills (judo duels), survival instincts (shooting a tiger attacking his group), bravery and dedication (fire-fighting) and leadership skills (leading the birds). Elisabeth Wood recognizes two versions of President Putin's “Marlboro man” acts – heroic leader (who stands above the others and dominates the power hierarchy) and the street style tough guy (who navigates securely through dangerous everyday life). This side of his image is underlined by his limited body language and scale of facial expressions. Without any doubt, the desired impression is authority and the desired reaction is respect. And it works. When asked to give the name of a “real man” among Russian politicians, almost one half (44,8 %) of the respondents named Vladimir Putin (Ryabov – Ryabova 2011: 60). There is also a “softer” side of the President's image when he shows graciousness and smiles. Nevertheless, this side appears mostly when in contact with women, pets or Prime Minister Medvedev.⁴ Even the president's more relaxed performances actually fits into

3 Elisabeth Wood calls it “Marlboro man” style in her great lecture *Putin: Masculinity and Hypermasculinity* delivered at University of Michigan in 2011. Available at Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEoPDOH_wHc (7. 5. 2015)

4 This sarcastically looking remark actually has an observable ground, as some analysts argue that Dmitri Medvedev underwent social “feminization” during the presidential campaign of 2008 – he was presented in such situations and making such comments that Putin's tough image was not endangered or even competed (Sperling, 2015).

his “macho” image of the tough, responsible and dedicated man, protector of the weak and appreciator of beauty.⁵

The state media work as a precise transmitter of the desired images of the president’s life to the public, where the right pictures and right moments are chosen to be broadcast in the desired amount, varying from zero (March 2015) to most of the news coverage (especially in pre-election periods).

When we focus on the regime performance as a whole, there are several tools used to support the president’s act and solidify the regime, and the media again serve as the transmitter to the audience. First, there are supporting actors appearing on the domestic or international stage who support the presidential line, and their performances are broadcast by the media to the domestic or international public. The most familiar faces include Prime Minister Medvedev, but also *silovik* ministers such as the Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu and obviously the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov. In the position of *guest stars*, various celebrities, experts and foreign politicians participate on building the united and desirable media image of the regime.

Besides the troupe, also proper *scenery* has to be built on the stage. There are two types of sceneries: first, the physical one – where the actor stands, what he wears and holds, how the scene is arranged. Second, I decided to call them symbolic – symbolic matters the actors use regularly to support their position and message. In this category in the Russian case, there were at least two important features of the current regime that the spectators could find interesting and that the politicians regularly use to generate support. Firstly, this was a rapid economic growth allowing Russian elites to include a whole range of activities into their performances, which are hidden behind symbolic cards of prosperity and well-being and acclaimed by the public (rising wages, building a social security system, renovations of infrastructure and public places) (Sakwa 2008: 247). Secondly, the performance was decorated by nationalism-supporting symbols carefully crafted around traditional easily revivable sources of Russian national pride. In this context, I consider Russian greatness to be the key symbol used by the patriotic revival (Leichtova 2014: 13–14), which has apparently inspired a great number of activities orchestrated by the current Russian elite (V-Day celebrations, Sochi Olympic Games, G20 summit, popularity of geopolitics in the IR theory, the idea of Eurasianist civilization, etc.).

Recent developments, however, seem to have withdrawn a portion of the economic tricks from the repertoire of the current regime. The economic conditions of the Russian Federation are worsening and furthermore, they have been hit by the economic sanctions launched by the Western countries in response

5 After all, President’s statements regarding women are sometimes (to put it mildly) disputable – for several examples inspired by his remarks on Hillary Clinton see: Radio Free Europe (2014). A Real Ladies’ Man: Putin’s Remarks On Women Over the Years. Available under: <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-putin-women-comments/25411775.html> (7. 7. 2015)

to the Ukrainian crisis. The leading teams and actors representing the current regime would need to adjust their performance in order to keep the audience satisfied and it seems that they have decided to fill the stage with nationalism and push the economic issues to the backstage now, out of the audience's sight.

In this paper we focus on this process, we follow the changes in the stage scenery and symbolic narratives used by the Russian ruling elite in their political acts in order to soften the impact of the economic slowdown and deterioration of relations with some international partners on their public support.

The narrative of the leading man

In this case study, we analyze several performances of the leading actor of the Russian political system – President Putin – directly reacting to the sanctions imposed between Russia and the Western countries and on the economic situation caused by them. First, we would like to confirm our hypothesis that national pride based on Russian strength and greatness is offered to the public as a substitute for economic prosperity in the Russian political elite's performance during the unwelcome plot twist represented by Western sanctions and economic slowdown. Second, we would like to analyze the tools and acting techniques used in the Russian political theater in order to convince the public to support, or at least tolerate, the performance.

Based on what had been said, I assume that the main stage for politicians to perform in front of the public is the media – this fact also shaped my definition of the data source. Moreover, specific conditions on the Russian media market indicate that the media coverage of the national leaders' performances truly serves as a *stage* for them. In Russia, the most popular media is television delivering news to most Russians, while only several channels broadcast nation-wide. The most popular PervyiKanal (*First Channel*) is a state-run television *channel*, which *channels* the political performance directly to the public. This situation may be unlucky for Russian viewers, but it is very useful for my analysis. In other words, broadcasting can be analyzed as a stage for the particular performance, part of the performance presented and edited consistently with the priorities of the political leaders, channeling their political message to the public.

I have collected two sets of data. The first set of data analyzes the leading man of the *ensemble*. I have collected all official statements of the Russian president where sanctions were mentioned in the period July-October 2014⁶ from the official website of the Kremlin and matched them with video footage of particular speeches available on the Internet (mainly on YouTube). This set of data

6 The period begins in July 2014 when the US (July 16th) and then the EU (July 31st) broadened their economic sanctions against Russia and covers three months of regime adjusting to the new conditions, providing the actors enough time to re-arrange the performance and introduce new symbolic narratives to the public.

allows us to analyze the president's performance in a "raw" form – full-length and without any journalists' processing. This material provides us with a set of strategies, priorities and interpretations, which the president – as a leading man of the performance – repeats during his public speeches regarding sanctions, and provides us with guidance through the adjustment period of the regime. The second set of data analyzes media broadcasting targeting domestic audience. All news broadcast by the First Channel where sanctions were mentioned between September 12th and November 12th were analyzed in order to see the regime performance as a whole and grasp the adjustment of the narratives, change of presentation strategies and other tools used to deliver basically bad message (worsening of international position and economic slowdown) without endangering the regime.

The leading man's act

The "raw" material used for this paper contains several speeches given by President Putin, the last of which was the meeting of the Valdai discussion club held on October 24th, 2014 and the first of which is the already famous "world barracks" speech to ambassadors and diplomats delivered at July 1st, 2014. When analyzing the material from the above-mentioned perspectives, we focus on how Vladimir Putin plays the role of the "Russian president" and "national leader" on the "domestic politics" *stage* in order to present the unpleasant situation to the domestic audience without losing their support for him to keep the above-mentioned roles.

First, let us take a closer look at the physical arrangement of the stage. Throughout the whole sample, which includes footage from the occasions broadcast by television or photography material taken during the occasions, there are several patterns in the stage arrangements for the leading man – most of which correspond to arrangements used during political performances of leaders also in other countries. In the event that it is meant to be a discussion with partners, members of the meeting sit around a table or several tables facing each other. The president, if possible, has a prominent central position (in the middle of one side of a square table, the middle of the longer side of an oval table, or the front side – the other being empty – of a rectangular table). If the occasion is meant for the president to be answering questions or delivering a speech, the space is physically divided into a stage and an auditorium sector, the stage being slightly higher in most of the analyzed cases.⁸ The scene where

7 The day when a new round of sanctions was imposed and we may expect a cascade of comments made by Russian officials channeled through the media. The period of two months is representative enough to show how regime delivers the messages to the public, how the ensemble works, what symbols and narratives are used, how they are framed and presented by reporters and editors in order to achieve the desirable impact.

8 Even though experience with other speeches of President Putin proves that the risen stage is not a necessary part of his Q & A sessions.

presidential speeches take place is usually identified as “Russian” – it is common to see national colors used in the particular interior or Russian flags decorating the stage. Sometimes the space is modern and universally applicable (LED screens and white chairs of the Russia calling! summit), while at other times, the space underlines the tradition and dignity of the presidential office – the president enters through huge golden doors when meeting the Human Rights Council or appears behind a movable golden wall to meet journalists after the BRICS meeting. To sum up, the physical side of the scenes usually underlines the importance of the person in the presidential role, underlines the person’s authority in relation to the audience or the discussion partners and identifies the head of state as the head of the Russian state via national symbols. The scene thus helps Vladimir Putin to be interpreted as “the President” even before he has entered the stage, which is common practice probably known from most of the official occasions attended by presidents of any country.

President Putin always comes last⁹, while the others (members of the Government, Human Rights Council members, journalists) wait for him, and after brief greetings the president rushes to work. Again, this is nothing unusual, but we can consider it a part of the performance of “the presidential” role. The president is always spatially centered occupying a prominent space on the stage, which attracts most of the audience’s attention. He is presented as the one without whom any meeting cannot start, the one who is expected by others, and shortly upon his arrival things start moving. All these symbolic arrangements inform us that the president is the leading man of the play and also, that he is effective and capable of dealing with the presidency.

From analyzing the scene and settings we shift our focus to the leading man’s act – how Vladimir Putin physically portrays the roles of the “Russian president” and “national leader”. The president keeps almost always his signature “poker face”¹⁰, which is also supposed to be understood as a part of the performance and not as a lack of his acting talent.¹¹ Absence of emotional expressions has several positive outputs for the president’s performance. Firstly, it fits into the Russian cultural framework – Russians do not smile as often and their body language is not as expressive as that of southern Europeans or Americans. Secondly, every real smile is very rare and makes the audience grateful for it. The president uses this acting skill and “awards” audience with jokes, or wide smiles from time to time with a guaranteed response from the audience. Otherwise, the president usually goes along with just hints of smile, boredom

9 And quite famously and often with delay.

10 The most famous exception to this long-term image of the president is his emotional speech after the 2012 elections (available at YouTube also with English subtitles under the title Putin’s Victory Speech 2012 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30oMuEo4eDw> (12. 3. 2015)

11 The gossip that the president’s alleged Botox surgery makes the poker face a necessary, not chosen, look; however, we leave it up to the reader to consider.

or irritation. Third, by not revealing his actual emotions too often, he opens a space for himself to react to a situation later. When someone else is speaking, the president usually has the expression of polite interest, often writing notes. The president's body language mostly indicates self-confidence, sitting casually with no signs of nervousness and using limited gestures, which is underlined by his limited facial expressions. This, combined with his undeniably central position on the stage, self-confident behavior and subordinate behavior of other members of his team, supports his authority in front of the audience. In sum, Vladimir Putin's portrayal of the "Russian president" and "national leader" in our samples is based on the image of strength, intelligence and control. The president is presented as a strong authority, with advice or valuable opinion always at hand, driven by pragmatism and rationality rather than emotions.

As for the content of the president's speeches, we will consecutively focus on several mutually interconnected levels, which follow our theoretical standpoints. Regarding Vladimir Putin's role as the "national leader", we will focus on broad concepts that the president uses to frame his practical policies – concepts connected with Russian national identity and its place in the world. Special attention will be paid to the "symbolic" scenery of his performance; what historical events are remembered to encourage the national pride, which features of national identity are cherished and emphasized, what are the relations to the outside world framed into wider concepts of friends and enemies and Russia's historical mission? Regarding his performance as "the President" we will evaluate the "practical" scenery of his performance – policies and strategies that he suggests applying as a response to the Western sanctions. Finally, we will consider relations between both roles held by Vladimir Putin, how do his broader concepts of Russian identity and place in the world fit into his policies and vice versa?

Vladimir Putin as National Leader

When focusing on the broader framework President Putin uses in his speeches we can identify several repeating topics and patterns of argumentation, which present a picture of the regime's perceptions of the world agreed within the circles of the "internal Kremlin politics" and acceptable for the public. First, the president warns against chaos.

Chaos is not a new threat or issue in President Putin's worldview and it is one of the evergreens of Russian post-Soviet politics in general. The early 1990s were (for several very good reasons) perceived as chaotic already during Yeltsin's 1996 presidential campaign where "Yeltsin successfully exploited slogans of continuity, stability and reform" (Sakwa, 2008 b: 174). Nevertheless, the following political and economic development had not brought much of the highly desired consolidation transforming the demand for stabilization into the public political priority number one. This clearly made way for Putin and

his stabilization policies, which, after a few years of ambitious reforms targeting Russian competitiveness in global affairs, slowly turned into a conservative regime relying on bureaucracy, centralization and exclusion of external risks (Medvedev, 2008: 225). Even if perceptions of the meaning of stability changed, the policies announced in their name varied, and the tools and methods chosen for their achievement evolved, the topic was there to stay.

As an issue very well-known and broadly accepted in internal politics, the threat of chaos and promise of stability work very well for President Putin also in Russian foreign policy. Again, it is nothing new or invented by Putin's Administration. The Russian mission of bringing stability to Europe was already promoted in Tsarist Russia, the world stability relied on US-Russian relations and nuclear power balance for most of the post-war history. In the name of global stability, President Yeltsin also tried to exploit the Russian superpower reputation in the early years after fall of the Soviet Union in relations with the West (Lo, 2002: 110). Later, with the growing influence of Eurasianism and conservatism, Russia was not only pictured as a great power, "it was also a status-quo power facing a revisionist United States" (Clunan, 2009: 200). This is a very important – even if not very surprising – twist in Russian perceptions of the world. The worsening of the Russo-American relations was a long-term process fringed with milestones like the NATO enlargement, solution of the Bosnian war, controversies over the first Chechen war, bombing of Serbia, the Iraq invasion and many more. The main lesson Russia learned during the post-Soviet period was, that expecting an equal position to the US in the world politics was too optimistic (Leichtova, 2014). Instead, for the Russian foreign policy narrative, United States slowly became the source of instability in the current international system while instability was perceived as a threat to the so much desired stability. Such perceptions slowly led to a division, as mentioned by Clunan, between the revisionist (destabilizing) power of the United States and the status-quo (stabilizing) defender – Russia.

These views are clearly demonstrated on several places in the dataset. The president repeatedly warns against deterioration of the international order, slipping into chaos, disrespect for international law, unilateral actions and revolutions in general. And while warning against all these disturbing phenomena he makes it clear who is the one to blame. President Putin has blamed the US for building a "global barracks" at the July meeting with ambassadors¹², where he also mentioned that Russia is not treated as an equal partner as it is given only an observation role in the questions of international and European security. During his interview for ITAR-TASS¹³, Putin labeled US behavior towards some

12 Meeting with ambassadors: Available in English under the title "Putin unveils new Russian foreign policy (live recorded feed)" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzNL-rRF7FI> (20. 10. 2015)

13 Interview for ITAR-TASS, available in Russian at <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/46218>. (10. 12. 2014)

countries as harassment, and at his press conference following his journey to Latin America¹⁴, he called the US foreign policy “aggressive”. At the same occasion, he indirectly spoke about those who might cause war by blindly pushing their own interests. Very similar notions of how war can be started by selfish policies are made during his speech at the First World War anniversary ceremony.¹⁵ There is no other actor, state or region in the president’s speeches that is blamed more often for the deterioration of good international relations than the US. At the same time, Russian-American relations are marked as those of global interest suggesting that Russia is a superpower, which should not be (but is) underestimated by the US.¹⁶ In this sense, the nuclear power of Russia is reminded during several occasions such as the meeting with the Russian youth during Seliger 2014.¹⁷

The president also suggests that such developments pose a threat to international security. This is a logical conclusion if US actions are interpreted as endangering the system stability, at the same time, stability is cherished as one of the most important values of national as well as international politics. At the meeting of the Valdai discussion club, the president said directly: “*Sadly, there is no guarantee and no certainty that the current system of global and regional security is able to protect us from upheavals*”.¹⁸

The values that may help Russia deal with challenges of the external world are also indicated in the dataset. It is conservatism and patriotism. These have been no novelties in Russian politics, which is especially true under President Putin’s regime since 2003/2004. At that time, several events occurred which, according to many observers, turned the perceived presidency into a more authoritarian direction quite promisingly. During his first term, foreign analysts and politicians were quite optimistic regarding the new president and skeptical to his ability to possibly turn the Russian state into an authoritarian regime.¹⁹

14 Responses to journalists’ questions, available in Russian at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/46236> (10. 12. 2014)

15 First World War memorial speech. Available under the title “Great Vladimir Putin Speech about World War 1 Russia – WWI 1914” also in English at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K81T66P7MGg> (4. 3. 2015)

16 Interview for the Politika newspaper available in Russian at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/46806> (10. 12. 2014)

17 Seliger Youth Forum 2014. Available with subtitles under the title “Vladimir Putin answers – with Secret Service informations – FULL HD Subtitles” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxTLkCl6fBA> (4. 3. 2015)

18 Valdai Discussion Club meeting. Available in English under the title “Putin at Valdai – World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules (FULL VIDEO)” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F9pQcqPdKo> (4. 3. 2015)

19 Thomas Nichols, for example, in 2001 in his great work on the developments in the Russian presidency doubts Putin would be able to change the political course even if he wanted to, because “The transition in 1999 and the subsequent election in 2000 show that Russians have gotten accustomed to speaking their minds, to communicating freely with each other, to voting, and even to the idea that Russia is, and will remain, a capitalist state.” (Nichols, 2001: 180).

Nevertheless, it was the shadow of revolution endangering the stability – the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and mass protests of seniors in Moscow in 2005 (according to Horvath, 2013: 6), or even earlier the regime criticism after the Yukos take-over in 2003 and an uncontrolled threat of terrorism after Beslan 2004 (according to Medvedev, 2008: 225) that led the regime to emphasize centralization and self-preservation in order to gain more control over the changes in society.

Again, from this internal perspective, Putin's conservatism in foreign affairs is easier to understand. What the regime fears at home – upheavals, revolutions and uncontrolled acts of violence – it seems to fear in international affairs, probably also for similar reasons, therefore its aim being control of the internal and external environment and its evolution in order to sustain power for the regime. Holding power is – without any need to access secret information – probably the basic deal made between President Putin and other actors on the “internal Kremlin politics” stage. Fulfillment of such a deal is much easier in a stable, controllable and slowly evolving internal and external environment. It may be for this reason the president is sure that:

*“Mass protests and rallies are an entirely legitimate method for expressing one’s opinion and fighting for one’s interests, but all of this needs to happen within the framework of the law. Revolutions are bad. We have had more than enough of those revolutions in the 20th century. What we need is evolution”.*²⁰

We shall also focus on President Putin's interpretation of nationalism. He does not hesitate to call himself the “*biggest nationalist in Russia*”²¹ which is very illustrative for his view of nationalism. In his perception nationalism is inextricably connected with the State, its institutions and also government.²² The Seliger meeting gives us a very useful historic example:

*“In the First World War, the Bolsheviks wished to see their Fatherland defeated. And while the heroic Russian soldiers and officers shed their blood on the fronts in World War I, some were shaking Russia from within and shook it to the point that Russia as a state collapsed and declared itself defeated by a country that had lost the war. It is nonsense, it is absurd, but it happened! This was a complete betrayal of national interests!”*²³

20 Valdai Discussion Club meeting. Available in English under the title “Putin at Valdai – World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules (FULL VIDEO)” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F9pQcqPdKo> (4. 3. 2015)

21 *ibidem*

22 In this sense, he claims he is his own biggest supporter, which is undoubtedly truth

23 Seliger Youth Forum 2014. Available with subtitles under the title “Vladimir Putin answers – with Secret Service informations – FULL HD Subtitles” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxTLkCl6fBA> (4. 3. 2015)

Regardless of what they believed in, of any higher principle they might have believed to follow, Bolsheviks betrayed national interest by revolutionary dismissal of Russian state institutions. It is obviously the best self-preservation strategy for the regime, to proclaim the state institutions untouchable by any revolutionary or unconstitutional means by pronouncing such activities non-patriotic or betraying national interests, while getting under control all legal ways of a possible change. Similar logic seeps into foreign policy. The President maintains that Russia always deals with official leaders of a country and does not support any unconstitutional changes such as coups, revolutions or civil wars:

*“Russia always supports the acting authorities. We are not like some of our partners. Maybe, in this regard, they are even being more pragmatic, they are always putting their eggs into multiple baskets. Moreover (the Americans do this), even if a government somewhere is loyal to them, they always work with the opposition. Always!”*²⁴

In support of patriotism, President Putin has also other symbolic cards in his hand than the State itself. All of them can be linked with the idea of Russian greatness. Despite that the president says he does not look for any special place for Russia in world affairs, just for a respected position with its interests taken into account²⁵; he also makes it clear, that such position is equal to the world’s most powerful states. We have already mentioned the nuclear power hints here and there, we may also include the military power in general. A very illustrative example for this whole section is the following quote from the president’s meeting with the parties represented in Duma:

*“Russia, just as any other large, powerful, sovereign state, has different tools for ensuring its national interests, and these include the Armed Forces and military equipment. However, this is not a cure-all and we do not intend to run around the world waving a razor blade, as some people do.”*²⁶

Also the victory in the Second World War is mentioned now and then²⁷ with indirect or direct contemporary messages:

Regrettably, in some European countries the Nazi virus “vaccine” created at the Nuremberg Tribunal is losing its effect. This is clearly demonstrated by open mani-

24 Ibidem.

25 Valdai Discussion Club meeting. Available in English under the title “Putin at Valdai – World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules (FULL VIDEO)” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F9pQcqPdKo> (4. 3. 2015)

26 Meeting with members of political parties represented in the State Duma <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451>(10. 12. 2014)

27 Naturally it happens mostly in May when the V-day is celebrated.

festations of neo-Nazism that have already become commonplace in Latvia and other Baltic states. The situation in Ukraine, where nationalists and other radical groups provoked an anti-constitutional coup d'état in February, causes particular concern in this respect. Today, it is our shared duty to combat the glorification of Nazism. We must firmly oppose the attempts to revise the results of WWII and consistently combat any forms and manifestations of racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and chauvinism".²⁸

The Second World War is also used as a symbol of national pride and proof of Russian strength.

In the world shaken by unilateral actions of the US, the European countries – despite their alliance with the United States – are still presented with much more understanding. This, again, has roots older than the current Ukrainian crisis. First of all, on the domestic stage the relations to Europe are framed into the centuries-long question whether Russia is or is not a European country. Second, it is linked with the turn in Russian foreign policy which came already with minister Primakov in late 1990, who sought to counter-balance the American prevalence in the system. Under the new president, the change has become much more visible and also effective. Bobo Lo, aptly as usual, sums up:

"The single most powerful factor in effecting this change has been Putin himself. Although he [2000a, p. 156] has echoed Gorbachevian ideas of a 'common European home' by stating his conviction that Russians are 'a part of Western European culture', he has in practice pursued a highly flexible approach to issues of cultural-civilizational location. In particular, he has balanced a personal Eurocentrism by assiduously promoting relations and contacts with non-Western countries and regions. He has thrown himself into a frenetic programme of two-way visits, involving not only the major Western and non-Western powers, but also several countries – North Korea, Cuba – which his predecessor conspicuously ignored. He has also carefully tailored his messages to his audience. When visiting Europe, Putin has spoken the language of European integration [2001c, p. 1]; in relations with the CIS member-states, the emphasis has been on post-Soviet integration and common values and interests arising from a shared past and present [2001 b, p. 4]; with China, the focus has turned to 'strategic partnership' in a multipolar world [2000c, p. 6]; and Moscow has sought common cause with the Islamic world on the basis of, among other things, a civilizational front against the menace of international terrorism [2001c, p. 2]" (Lo 2002: 159)

28 Interview for the Politika newspaper available in Russian at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/46806> (10. 12. 2014)

This “obsession” with multi-polarity partially relieved the situation for the regime when sanctions were imposed on Russia. Europeans are introduced as dependent and under American pressure in the current situation. The president says directly: *“We are aware of the pressure our American partners are putting on France to force it not to supply Mistrals to Russia.”* during the speech for ambassadors.²⁹ While China and other BRICS countries are introduced as cure for the trouble, as we will see later. At first sight, according to the narrative, it seems as if almost nothing has changed in the Russian foreign policy following the sanctions.

To sum up, as national leader President Putin pictures the contemporary world as a place of growing instability caused by the unilateral activities of the United States. The situation is presented as potentially dangerous to Russia especially by its potential to bring about chaos instead of the deservedly earned stability. As a counter measure to such undesirable developments, he prescribes nationalism understood as loyalty to the State, supported by national pride on heroic history, military power and international importance of Russia. Another important value is conservatism and opposition to any abrupt changes that might cause instability resulting into declared support for ruling governments and opposition to revolutionary forces in foreign as well as domestic politics – with considerable freedom, as proved in the Crimean case, to label various political movements home and abroad revolutionary and unconstitutional, or just and rightful.

Vladimir Putin as “the President”

When drawing a bigger picture of the world shaken by American activities directed in case of sanctions once again against Russia, President Putin has to propose practical steps to solve the situation. As national leader he may frame the situation into broader context in order to explain to the public what happened and why it happened, but as “President” he also needs to say what is to be done in order to deal with the situation. In our case the situation in question is the imposition of Western sanctions. The president’s immediate response to the situation available in the dataset may be summed up as follows:

- sanctions are groundless and illegal
- sanctions don’t work, have a boomerang effect and damage those who impose them
- for Russia, the sanctions are an almost welcomed opportunity to develop itself
- Russia can find substitutes for their Western suppliers and markets, especially in China but also in Latin America.

²⁹ Meeting with ambassadors: Available in English under the title “Putin unveils new Russian foreign policy (live recorded feed)” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzNL-rRF7FI> (20. 10. 2015)

The common message in all of the above-mentioned arguments if translated into the “national leader” narrative may be interpreted like this: the United States not only attempt to destabilize Russian immediate surroundings by sponsoring the Ukrainian coup, but now they are trying to destabilize Russia itself by attacking it in the form of sanctions. During his interview for the Russian main news agency ITAR-TASS, he said directly that Russia is harassed and under American attack:

*“Recently Russia has been exposed to a sanction attack from the United States and its allies. We are grateful to our BRICS partners who have criticized such practices in different forms. At the same time, substantive conclusions should be drawn from the current situation. Together we should think about a system of measures that would help prevent the harassment of countries that do not agree with some foreign policy decisions made by the United States and their allies, but would promote a civilized dialogue on all points at issue based on mutual respect”.*³⁰ President Putin repeatedly describes the sanctions as illegal and unilateral claiming, for example, at the meeting with ambassadors, that international sanctions must be based on Article 7 of the UN Charter otherwise such step should not even be called sanction but political instrument.³¹

Regarding the impact of the sanctions – some damage is expected but it is expected to be mutual for both sides. The Russian President blames European and American leaders for damaging their own companies, which are not allowed to do business in Russia even if they would profit there.³² Quite a lot of attention in the dataset is dedicated to the argument that Russia will not only manage the situation thanks to its internal strength but can even profit from it. The president summarized his position during the Valdai meeting:

*“Russia is not going to get all worked up, get offended or come begging at anyone’s door. Russia is a self-sufficient country. We will work within the foreign economic environment that has taken shape, develop domestic production and technology and act more decisively to carry out transformation. Pressure from outside, as has been the case on past occasions, will only consolidate our society, keep us alert and make us concentrate on our main development goals”.*³³

30 Interview given to the news agency ITAR-TASS. Available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46218> (10. 12. 2014)

31 Meeting with ambassadors: Available in English under the title “Putin unveils new Russian foreign policy (live recorded feed)” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZNL-rRF7FI> (20. 10. 2015)

32 Press conference following President’s visits to Cuba, Nicaragua, Argentina and Brazil. Available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46236> (10. 12. 2014)

33 Valdai Discussion Club meeting. Available in English under the title “Putin at Valdai – World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules (FULL VIDEO)” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F9pQcqPdKo> (4. 3. 2015)

If we link this approach with the “national-leader” role, the president definitely refers to Russian greatness (physical and symbolic) and also to Russian rich (and rated as heroic) history of suffering in the name of the country. This is also a level, where it is possible to combine very naturally the “presidential” and “national leader” parts of his performance: *“If we did not think – if I did not think – that Russia’s agriculture sector is up to the challenge, we would never have taken these counter sanctions”*.³⁴ In this quote, the president presents himself, in accordance with the visual part of the performance, as the moving engine within the country’s leadership making a connection between its policies and the patriotic belief in Russian greatness and ability to survive.

At the same time, the president emphasizes that the situation has not come to existence by Russia’s fault, but by decision of the Western countries, especially the US. Further, he reminds of the validity and Russian readiness to engage in common economic and humanitarian Eurasian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok during his meeting with ambassadors.³⁵ Russian counter-sanctions are presented as a necessary measure taken only under the condition of an unlawful attack:

“Government of Russia has made the decision to limit imports from many nations that imposed entirely unfounded and unlawful sanctions on Russia. But I want to note that this is not just a retaliatory measure”.³⁶

The last important argument the president gives regarding the sanction situation is the chance for developing the Asian vector of Russian foreign policy to substitute the Western one. It is again a strategy known for at least 20 years, when the then foreign minister Primakov introduced his foreign policy concept of natural Russian world power interest to have multilateral international ties (Lo, 2002: 19). His concept included development of strong ties with China (and also India). President Putin and the multi-vector foreign policy of his first two terms follow the pattern with greater ambition, resources, and some observable success. Therefore, emphasizing partnership with China and Asia in general in times of disputes with the Western countries is a natural strategy which is, at least partially, based on existing experience and knowledge of the audience. The president exploits this fact in order to emphasize there is nothing really special about the situation and Russia will cope with it just by following its long-term policies suggesting indirectly that Russian leadership was basically prepared

34 Russian Popular Front Actions Forum. Available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47036> (10. 12. 2014)

35 Meeting with ambassadors: Available in English under the title “Putin unveils new Russian foreign policy (live recorded feed)” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzNL-rRF7FI> (20. 10. 2015)

36 Meeting with members of political parties represented in the State Duma. Available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451>(10. 12. 2014)

for something similar coming from the West. For example during his visit to Italy, President Putin said to the journalists at the press conference: *“We are expanding our contacts with countries in Asia and the Pacific. This is not a political decision. This is because we have long been working in this direction, bearing in mind the economic growth rates in the Asia-Pacific region”*.³⁷ During the Russia Calling! investment forum in St. Petersburg, he also stated clearly: *“Among our priorities is greater business, trade, investment and technological partnership with Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region and our colleagues within BRICS, including China and India, naturally”*.³⁸ Summed up, in the president’s speeches, Russia is definitely introduced as a superpower, a superpower that is paying for its “rebellion” against American dictate, while it would like to build open relations with the US but is not allowed to; a country whose arms are open for European partners but it is not accepted, therefore it turns to more open and rational partners that will treat Russia better.

In the most specific part of the performance dealing with practical policies, President Putin is from time to time very detailed when suggesting the steps to be taken, quoting precise numbers and introducing short-term development scenarios.

For example, in order to prevent the ruble from free fall he suggests using the Russian currency in international trade (especially with China), which would increase demand for ruble and stabilize it.³⁹ Also at the Russia calling! summit, the president introduced massive programs of state investments which would support national industry especially in innovations and patents, and develop national agriculture. This again may be tied with his “national leader” position, as it is the State taking care of the situation; citizens are seemingly supposed to hold on and wait for state policies to ease their lives. Further, several times within the dataset, the dichotomy between the somehow negatively presented West and positively described Russia appears again even though in very new connotations:

“Unfortunately, mass food production in many industrially developed countries is largely based on the use of chemicals, on medicines that they give to cattle to keep it healthy, and the various growth stimulators: the faster your cattle grows the faster your turnover and the more money you can make. But this is harmful. Look at the

37 Answers to journalists’ questions after the official visit to Italy. Available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46827> (10. 12. 2014)

38 Russia Calling! Investment forum. Available under the title *“RUSSIA CALLING!’ Putin’s full speech, Q & A at key investor forum”* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoTGKuLugmE> (2. 3. 2015) quoted transcript available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46713> (10. 12. 2014)

39 Russia Calling! Investment forum. Available under the title *“RUSSIA CALLING!’ Putin’s full speech, Q & A at key investor forum”* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoTGKuLugmE> (2. 3. 2015)

*situation with obesity in some countries. It is terrible! This has to do with food. Our produce is of course much better and healthier”.*⁴⁰

On this level of analysis, the visual and rhetorical parts of the performance meet nicely. President Putin evidently likes presenting himself as the one who always has the exact information in hand, who knows about all important aspects of basically any issue relevant for his country. This fits perfectly to the physical arrangements of the occasions mentioned above. The president likes to cite the exact amounts of bilateral trade, sums of trade deals, size of investments, etc.⁴¹ Such behavior emphasizes his role of the central character in the performance and his ability to play the role of “the President” in front of the audience. This strategy works usually quite well with a few exceptions where the president’s range of knowledge may seem almost absurd for some members of the audience (so for the author): “*A decade ago, we imported 360,000 tons of poultry from the United States. Last year, as far as I remember, the figure was only 200*”.⁴²

The orchestrated dance of the ensemble

We have described quite extensively the performance of President Putin. His performance is channeled to the public via the media. To gain more detailed information about the performance as a whole, we will focus on the media coverage in order to describe the performance Russian public is being presented with in its complexity. I followed the broadcasting of one of the biggest state TV channels – the First Channel, where I expected the biggest impact on the population. TV is the main source of information for Russians, as about 98 % of the population watch TV, while it is only the First Channel and Rossiya, both state-owned TV channels, reaching over half of the Russian population each week (Pietilainen – Fomicheva – Resnianskaia 2010: 48).

We will not spoil any surprise if we confirm now, that our premise that the media coverage is in accord with the president’s line.⁴³ According to the dataset, the First Channel constantly broadcasts good news about the Russian regime and its ability to overcome any difficulties that may be caused by sanctions. The First Channel, in accordance with President Putin’s public speeches, clearly helps repelling any concerns among the public that might have been given rise

40 Meeting with members of political parties represented in the State Duma <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451> (10. 12. 2014)

41 This is such an extensively used feature of President Putin’s public appearances that basically any sample from the dataset would do to support of this claim.

42 Meeting with members of political parties represented in the State Duma <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451> (10. 12. 2014)

43 All cited reports are available in Russian at the website of the First Channel after inserting the keyword “sankcii” into the search engine <http://www.1tv.ru/>

by the sanctions. There are several types of performances presented on the First Channel News roughly corresponding to the president's performances.

The first type is the “*sanctions do not work*” performance: news like the success of Rossiya Bank (October 9th) – where the president himself in one of my favorite performances of his self-confidence outside of the dataset period – opened an account (March 21st), the success of Vneshekonombank (September 23rd), news from the Defense Ministry that supplies for the army will be delivered to the full this year (October 10th), refusal to introduce a new tax on sale (September 19th) or cited statistics of the good macroeconomic state of the Russian economy (Putin during the Russia Calling summit with investors, Medvedev during a meeting with investors, September 24th). This applies also to the ruble, as the Central Bank announced it would let the ruble float freely until the end of October and then stabilize it within a 4.5 – 6.5% inflation rate. Further, an ambitious plan to invest 74 billion rubles into sport development until 2020 seems to fit into this category (October 9th). In short, everything disturbing is presented as temporary, or sometimes even planned in advance, while assuring the audiences that the federal budget is strong and fulfills the agreed targets (October 3rd).

The second type of performance is “*sanctions are an opportunity for our own development and will damage those who have imposed them*”. As mentioned before, President Putin himself delivers speeches on this topic during his solo acts. This line has fully been supported by Prime Minister Medvedev at the International Investment Forum (several reports on September 20th), where he cited several reasons why Russia will survive the situation, including the fact that it has 150 million citizens and stretches over half of Eurasia, which fits nicely into the rhetoric of a “national leader”. Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov talked in a similar manner to a journalist on September 24th, emphasizing that Russia will not retreat from its priorities in order to have the sanctions lifted, and that those who imposed them will be losing lucrative opportunities in Russia.

The third type of performance presented to the Russian public is “*there are others who are keen on doing business with us*”. The deal signed by President Putin with Chinese representatives served this purpose repeatedly on September 14th. Moreover, Sergei Lavrov claimed in his above-mentioned speech that there are others to work with on the Russian Antarctic shelf, if American companies do not want to, and Prime Minister Medvedev goes even further claiming that for Germany, it took 40 years to become Russia's best customer, although he cannot say if it would also take as long to replace it by China (September 21st). Again, the role of BRICS and Latin America as prospective regions for trade and investments is mentioned several times within the sample.

The fourth type, “*the West is divided*” performance, is widely used in the news. Various politicians, analysts and experts are quoted who do not agree with the sanctions imposed on Russia or are willing to express their hope for the situ-

ation to improve. The former president of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus (November 3rd) and the incumbent president Miloš Zeman (besides indirect quotes in the dataset, he gave an often cited interview for the Russian media on November 16th) are being quoted, too. However, the German long-time and now former minister Hans Ditzich Genscher appeared on the First Channel claiming that Russia is part of Europe and sanctions are unlikely to be effective (September 20th). Even almost extreme cases appear: for example, the American political scientist Geoffrey Stenberg introduces his theory of a devastated Western financial market where tycoons force President Obama to get hold of Ukraine in order to acquire new resources and markets (September 21st).

Moreover, several *reports serving only to support the current regime* appear. First of all, support ratings of the current country leadership are quoted as record-high (September 28th). Secondly, there has been a new launch of patriotic sentiment, including T-shirts with President Putin in the Moscow GUM shopping center, which was welcomed by thousands of customers and broadcast by the media (October 6th). Several references to Second World War were made (September 28th) introducing Russia as guarantor of a peaceful and stable world order.

Quite open *criticism of the Western countries* can be found in the sample, furthermore, very often from the mouths of Western politicians, authors, and experts. Inclusion of Western experts is undoubtedly a part of the performance accentuating the impression that Russian elite opinions and opinions of the First Channel are supported worldwide. Sometimes the message is not only critical but even threatening. This is especially the case when NATO is mentioned in the narrative. Usually pictures of civilian victims, explosions and military equipment illustrate the message on the screen (also on quite unexpected occasions, such as reporting on Sergei Lavrov's speech in the UN on September 28th) while the US are presented as direct threat to Russia, including in military terms (September 29th). To sum up, no single case of open criticism of the president's performance can be found in the sample. Throughout the dataset, the governmental team plays hand in hand supporting President Putin's views on all levels analyzed above. Government members are usually providing similar information like the president, only from various viewpoints depending on their specialization. Sometimes they provide more details or contextual information making the message more trustworthy for the viewer. A specific phenomenon is presentation of foreign experts and politicians. Their comments and opinions are in accord with the president's performance and we can hardly find another reason for them to be incorporated into the broadcasting than further support for the presidential line. The opinion presented in the media is thus quite coherent while supported by domestic and foreign authorities and experts, without confusing the viewer too much. The message is quite clear and uniform from the president down to the commentators. We may probably add that overall

experience with other Russian state-owned media suggests that the credibility is further enhanced by considerable accord among various media channels.

The media team supports the official line not only by the scripted texts for their reporters but also by various technical and professional means. It is noteworthy that the level of similarity between the official line and the media coverage during the observed period of two months basically cannot be random, and therefore suggests some level of coordination between the media and the political ensemble. Also the topics and opinions presented in the media follow in most cases timely their appearance in the political narrative, giving us the hint that the agenda setting – the topics to be broadcast – are mostly created on the political stage, and not that much in the media editorial offices. At times, the media sample goes further than the presidential sample in particular topics. There are no discrepancies but the broadcasting is occasionally more “radical” in criticism, outrage, patriotism, etc. There is more space for speculation and unconfirmed scenarios in the broadcasting than the president might use in his performance without endangering his credibility. This feature has also positive impact on President Putin’s performance of authority and leadership as, in comparison to other voices on the media stage, his appearances are moderate and rational.

Conclusions

There are several modest conclusions we may draw from our analysis. First of all, dramaturgical analysis proved a useful metaphorical framework for this paper, providing us with very useful distance from the analyzed problem of sanctions imposed on Russia, allowing us to grasp the issue as a partially unexpected plot-twist that forces the main actors and their teams to improvise on stage in order to keep the audience satisfied. This framework allowed us to focus on the actors and their acting skills, on Russian politicians and their communication with the public rather than on searching for reasons for Russian behavior based on external information. We could follow President Putin, his team, strategies, frameworks and symbolic reasons for their actions rather than following external interpretations imposed on them. I hope all my interpretative work above was always clearly consistent with the dataset while understandably linking the particular parts of the performance for the reader to understand my conclusions even if possibly not agreeing with all of them.

We may now sum up our findings regarding President Putin’s roles. Vladimir Putin performs simultaneously in two slightly different but strongly interlinked positions of “the national leader” and “the President”. The first position describes a person who inspires and leads the society in a broader symbolic and spiritual manner, a person who presents acceptable versions of such topics as national identity, patriotism, characteristic of the outer world, etc. The other position describes a person who achieved the institutional position of the Presi-

dent and is accepted as the person performing the job by introducing specific policies, carrying out daily administrative duties and representing the country abroad. I considered it useful to distinguish these roles, as I believe it is possible to hold one of the roles without holding the other – for example in the years 2008–2012, Vladimir Putin was not “the President”, but only few would question his role of the “national leader”. In our research, we focused on the domestic political stage and the message delivered to the Russian public, but we shall not forget that especially in case of President Putin all his performances are simultaneously presented to influential groups behind the main stage, whom we nicknamed “internal Kremlin politics”, and most of his performances are also followed by spectators from the stage of “international politics”.

In his role of the national leader, President Putin puts strong emphasis on the issues of stability, evolution, patriotism and conservatism. As argued above, his priorities are not new in Russian political thinking, which makes them easily “digestible” for the general public. Moreover, all mentioned topics are clearly interlinked. International stability relates directly to the stability of the state and the domestic regime, while patriotism is presented as loyalty not only to the nation but also to the state. Only evolutionary changes are acceptable and should be implemented in the form of healthy conservatism, ensuring the bases of the nation and the state are not being undermined. All of the above mentioned topics are here and there elegantly framed into the unifying topic of Russian greatness and exceptionality.

This framework is transmitted into the contemporary world in quite a clear manner. The main source of danger is instability and the main source of instability is the unilateral and arbitrary behavior of the United States. As a remedy for threats posed by US American actions conservatism and new partners are advisable to balance the US. According to the narrative, most promising partners are to be found in East Asia.

As “the President” solving the unwelcome issue of economic sanctions launched against his country, President Putin follows the above-mentioned framework. First of all, he presents the sanctions as an illegal and arbitrary action of the United States fittingly accompanying the above-mentioned logic of the US as the main threat to Russian stability. Then he announces the strong role of the state in coping with the new situation, which again fits the idea of the state as embodiment of the nation. While introducing ambitious plans and strategies the president calls for patriotism understood again as support for the state institutions and regime. Historical symbols are also present on the stage, where on several occasions historical heroism of the Russian nation is remembered and connected with the fact that in the most heroic moments – especially the World War Two fulfills this symbolic role – the people actually suffered. The motive of enduring and unification under pressure is present on several places in the dataset and might be considered culturally specific.

The presidential line is further taken up by the media. Only when following the state media we may observe the performance delivered to the Russian public in its complexity and also formally independent from the “international politics” stage. The framing and priming made by Russian state media gives the presidential message its final sense and tone quite independent from the opinion of foreign audiences (who watch the president’s speeches framed and interpreted by their own media).

Not a single case of discord was found in the media dataset if compared with the presidential dataset. On the media stage, President Putin’s performance is complemented with the performances of supportive teams and actors. First of all, not very surprisingly, such role is reserved for the government members including the Prime Minister. Their loyalty to the president is already stipulated by the constitutional order of the country and further cemented on the “internal Kremlin politics” backstage. We would expect similar behavior from the majority of the members of Parliament if they appeared in the dataset, as many of them are tied with the presidential line within the common team of United Russia.

Second, many seemingly independent politicians and experts are engaged in the broadcasting, who often originate from the Western countries. This has definitely a very significant effect on the overall impression of the viewer. All such guests at least partially agree with the line of the Russian regime or at least disagree with the Western actions and successfully provide credibility of the widely shared and repeatedly confirmed opinion of the official line. In the dataset, not a single purely critical comment was given a voice in the broadcasting, even though we are aware that such critical voices do exist. If we focus on the case of the Czech Republic, it was our incumbent as well as the former president who appeared in the dataset criticizing the sanctions regime, while supporters of the sanctions from the Czech political spectrum were not quoted.

Third, the reporters themselves and the staff responsible for the technical and visual side of the news do not doubt the official line. The agenda setting is made on the political level and state media only broadcast the message to the public. Sometimes we may find that the media picture some actors or events in an even more graphical way than the president’s speeches. This can be interpreted in the framework of dramaturgical analysis – President Putin always plays on several stages, so he needs to balance his steps in order not to discredit himself in front of any of the audiences. On the other hand, Russian state media target mostly and primarily the Russian public. They are not very interested in “internal Kremlin politics” deals and accept their results by accepting the official narrative; foreign audiences do not pay mass attention to the Russian national broadcasting either. Even the president needs credibility and authority to deliver satisfactory performance, while repeated false accusations or inaccurate information might discredit his performance. The current situation provides

him even with the opportunity to act as a rational and moderate leader under the conditions of aroused emotions.

The dataset contained supportive materials for all of the above-mentioned positions of President Putin being it Russian greatness, heroic past, destabilizing United States, patriotism as loyalty to the state. Thus the performance is quite convincing and clear for the viewer without leaving him in doubt. The domestic situation under the sanction regime is pictured in bright colors with massive investment programs broadly introduced; good news is listed regarding the Russian economic performance, the national reserves are presented as an engine of the country's development. On several occasions, sanctions are described as Russia's opportunity to build up its own sources and create new partnerships (especially in China) in the international trade arena. Despite the fact that difficulties are expected, this information is presented either with the vision of a better future or with a clear identification of the culprit. The one to blame are the United States and (somewhat less) European countries, their sanctions being considered illegal and unprovoked. This is a very important interpretation in clearly stating that the current situation was not caused by the Russian leadership, and even sending quite openly the message that Russia's interests and economy are under external attack, which probably carries significant potential to generate wider support for the regime.

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Narratives of Russia's "Information Wars"¹

EKATERINA KALININA

Abstract: *Information warfare became a topic of a heated discussion with the advancement of the Russian state on the territory of the neighbouring Ukraine. Already forgotten since the collapse of the Soviet Union discourse about the Cold War made a rapid comeback into the media and public discourse creating confusion among readers. Hence, this article aims to clarify the relevant terminology when it comes to the use of information operations in Russia as well as to point out the importance of mediated narratives. By relying on Russian military thought, the article sheds some light on the importance of narratives such as: Russia-West confrontation and hybrid wars, Russian history and identity, and Russian patriotism.*

Keywords: *Russia, information activities, patriotism, identity, modern warfare.*

Introduction

Russia has a long history of agitation and propaganda for mass mobilization and popular support (Berkhoff 2012; Glantz 1988; Kenetz 1985). Hence, it comes with little surprise that Russia has been making use of similar information strategies during the Ukrainian crisis. Conversion of the physical, political and informational activities in Ukraine in 2014–2015 have shown sophistication in Russia's adaptation to the modern networked communication environment. As Ukraine has been part of the extended Russian cultural and informational space for a long time, a sharp rise in information operations was identifiable with the start of the Euromaidan demonstrations. These operations were continuously intensified and extended to target globally (Jaitner 2014). It is difficult to measure the effect of these operations, as they run parallel to other, more "traditional", political and military operations. Nevertheless, it is possible to state that information operations complement other military actions in modern warfare and can often play a leading role (Checkinov – Bogdanov 2011; 2015). That is why in today's Russia a lot of resources are put into modernisation of

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information operations, creation and maintenance of long lasting universal narratives, which call for mobilization and can be used on different fronts (Jaitner 2014). Carefully constructed narratives have legitimising and mobilising effect and create social reality for people who live in the information landscapes where these narratives are being mediated. Hence, in this article I will focus on the intersection of modern Russian information operation strategies and Russian patriotic narratives as an important component of these strategies. The aim of this article is to discuss narratives common in Russian media and the public sphere since the start of the Ukrainian crisis, based on available media sources and secondary literature. The overview of the narratives is carried out within the context of information activities, which are often called “information wars”. Thus, first, I am going to discuss the theoretical framework of information operations in the context of modern warfare and then proceed with the analysis of the narratives.

Importance of information

Russian official documents reveal that a lot of emphasis is put on information: ‘information superiority’ is one of the key elements of the new military doctrine. Authors of the National Security Strategy 2020 stress the intensification of global information operations and identify them as a possible threat. In order to withstand this information threat, this document emphasises the importance of the army’s modernisation through “informatisation” and development of various technological systems, which would be able to stop the spread of “wrong” messages (Russian Federation Security Council 2009).

In order to understand how Russian “information war” is being conducted, one has to take into consideration that the Russian military thought has a specific understanding of what information is and how it can be used. Margarita Jaitner, researcher at the Swedish National Defence University, stresses a rather holistic view on information, where the wholeness of technological systems and the wholeness of cognitive information are parts of overall information security. Hence, there is a principal difference to the western approach of treating cyber security as a standalone concern. She points out that this is visible from the terminology, as Russian strategies, doctrines or academic and professional discourses refer to information security rather than cyber security (Jaitner 2014). This means that defence of the technological system combines with defence of the information landscape. In this light, information becomes a weapon, which is not only combined with other military means, but can also be one of the most important strategic resources (Vorobjev – Kiseljev 2013; Chekinov – Bogdanov 2011). Therefore, the fact what is being mediated is just as important as by what means it is being mediated.

Terminology: hybrid warfare, the 6th generation war and reflexive control

Media often include information operations, which are usually referred to as “information wars”, among the so-called “hybrid wars”. In fact, using “hybrid war” as a term with regard to Russia’s information operations and military actions in Ukraine can be misleading, as “hybrid warfare” is not a well-defined concept. The US Navy researcher Franc Hoffman writes about hybrid warfare: “Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations; terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. Hybrid wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battle space to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict. The effects can be gained at all levels of war” (Hoffman 2007: 8).

The military experts explain that “the combination of irregular and conventional force capabilities, either operationally or tactically integrated [...], is not necessarily a unique phenomenon” and history has seen many examples (Hoffman 2009: 36). In such conflicts, the sides exploit “[a]ccess to modern military capabilities, including encrypted command systems, man-portable air-to-surface missiles, and other modern lethal systems, as well as promote protracted insurgencies that employ ambushes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and coercive assassinations. This could include states blending high-tech capabilities such as anti-satellite weapons with terrorism and cyber warfare directed against financial targets” (Hoffman 2009: 37).

I would like to point out that what is understood under “information operations” is not included in this definition. What is referred to is use of information technologies for precision weapons and more advanced military strategies. Information confrontation or “informatsionnoe protivoborstvo”, which is “a strategic form of struggle, in which the sides use special means and tactics, which influence information environment of the enemy and protect its own in order to achieve the strategic goals of the war”, is considered by the Russian military expert Vladimir Slipchenko as one of the essential elements of the new generation of warfare: remote contactless war or the 6th generation war, and one of the central elements of the future 7th generation warfare, when information operations would have a decisive influence on the warfare (Slipchenko 2002: 46–48). He points out that “information war”, in fact, is an incorrect term as it refers to more complex social-political phenomenon and hence should not be applied to the 6th generation warfare.

The goal of information confrontation is to surpass the enemy's/ies' ability to analyse, acquire and use information as well as regarding its quality and quantity (Slipchenko 2002: 46). Among the strategies of information confrontation Slipchenko names: maskirovka (deception), disinformation, radio-electronic confrontation, physical destruction of the information infrastructure, "attacks" on computer networks, "information impact", "information invasion", and "information aggression", which could be used in a broad spectrum of specially developed levers, such as computer viruses, "logical bombing", psychological attacks or aggression (Slipchenko 2002). He points out that the use of information confrontation in warfare is not a new phenomenon, as the conflicting sides have always aimed at controlling information of the enemy not only during war time, but also during peacetime (Slipchenko 2002: 48). In the future, an information weapon will be, in his view, "a combination of specially organised information, information technologies providing information dominance and allowing to purposefully change (destroy, deface), copy, block information, to overcome protection systems, to restrict the admission of legitimate users, to carry out disinformation, to disrupt the work of technical equipment, computer systems and information networks" (Slipchenko 2002: 48).

The military expert Peter Mattsson (2014) also includes information operation, as non-military means with military power, to the 6th generation war. He points out that in the 6th generation warfare, the boundaries between war and peace are blurred, and information operations penetrate several stages of military strategies. The 6th generation warfare is divided into eight different phases, with the first four phases containing non-military, asymmetric, information, moral, psychological, ideological, diplomatic and economic influences and attacks. Phase four is the launch of a heavy propaganda campaign directed towards the whole society. The basic aim of information operations is to obliterate the opponent's/ts' basis for national identity, lifestyle and set of values, if it is directed outwards; and to legitimize the proponent's actions while discrediting the oppositional forces, as well as disarmed masses, if it is directed inwards. Mobilization and popular support is another goal of such an information campaign, which is ascribed to "agitation propaganda" (Ellul 1973). It can be used to influence the decision-making process by destabilizing information flows.

One of the central elements of the Russian information operation strategy is the so-called reflexive control. "Reflexive control is defined as a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action" (Thomas 2004: 237). The meaning of the concept of reflexive control is close to the American perception management, with the difference that the mechanism of reflexive control is aimed more at controlling rather than managing the subject (Thomas 2004: 237). The aim of reflexive control is to interfere

with the opponent's decision-making process. It is employed by the Russians on the strategic level both in external and internal politics (Thomas 2004).

One of the examples of reflexive control directed inwards is Russian media reporting about American soldiers "who feel like the masters in Ukraine" and a little boy crucified by the Ukrainian military forces (Slutskiy: Voenniye is... 2015; Bezhenka iz Slavjanska vspominaet... 2014). When it became evident that the events reported by a television channel had never taken place, the channel's representatives did not consider apologizing for disinformation. It had already penetrated online space leaving an enormous effect on the perception of the Ukrainian crisis by Russian audiences. In the meantime, investigations undertaken by journalists of the Russian opposition-minded newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* showed that men fighting in Ukraine on the side of the pro-Russian rebels had reproduced the mediated narratives about molested population and, hence, justified their participation in the armed conflict by the will to protect children and women (Kostjuchenko 2015).

It is important to mention that these narratives are being spread not only by the official media, but also by the so-called "trolls" (people employed to favourably engage in online conversations) and those who believe such narratives and multiply them based on conviction or ideology (Jaitner 2015).² Russian online communities in one of the biggest Social Networking Sites *Vkontakte* host many who share "important information no one else dares to post" and "information you will never find in western media".

Understanding the subject's decision-process and knowing their cultural specifics helps to plant information that would trigger the desired response. "The reflexive control occurs when the controlling organ conveys (to the objective system) motives and reasons that cause it to reach the desired decision, the nature of which is maintained in strict secrecy. The decision itself must be made independently. A 'reflex' itself involves the specific process of imitating the enemy's reasoning or imitating the enemy's possible behaviour and causes him to make a decision unfavourable to himself" (Thomas 2004: 241).

In this case, the authors of these media campaigns were pulling the strings of "Russian identity" and "Russian patriotism" expecting a certain reaction. One of the examples of RC directed inwards are reports by the Russian media that Right Sector and the National Guard of Ukraine were "instructed to prosecute those who express any sentiment or support for pro-Russian rebels". Narrations about molested women and children, humiliated elderly people together with calls for protection from the "fascists" function like a red rag to a bull. Narrations about violence towards civilians mixed with references to right-wing Ukrain-

2 Cambridge Dictionary gives the following definition of trolls: someone who leaves an intentionally annoying message on the internet, in order to get attention or cause trouble.

ian nationalists are pulling the right strings because the ground for them has already been prepared (Galochka 2014).

Hence, as experts point out, the content of information flows is as important as information technologies and is one of the essential elements of modern warfare. In this regard, one should be more attentive to the mediated narratives, as they contribute to or even create reality. Peter Pomerantsev, a TV producer based in London working on Russia's weaponization of the information culture, wrote that mediated narratives are one of the main weapons of Russia's information attacks: "The new Russia doesn't just deal in the petty disinformation, forgeries, lies, leaks, and cyber-sabotage usually associated with information warfare. It reinvents reality, creating mass hallucinations that then translate into political action" (Pomerantsev 2014: online). Many of these narratives become intertwined with conspiracy theories creating a complex web of stories, which aim to disrupt and contradict western narratives and world views.

Looking at Russian media over the last two years, one notices several important narratives: Russia-West confrontation and hybrid wars, Russian history and identity, and Russian patriotism. Some of these narratives mirror General Valery Gerasimov's idea about mechanisms of protection against information attacks carried out against Russia (Gerasimov 2014). He singled out three groups of such mechanisms: a) patriotic upbringing of the youth; b) historical education and presentation of Russian history in a positive light, with a specific focus to be put on the positive portrayal of the Soviet history; c) construction of a unifying national idea and strong identity.

Russian versus Western narrative

Starting point for these protection strategies is the establishment of a specific narrative about the ongoing confrontation between the West and Russia, which is sometimes referred to as the "new Cold War" by the media and in the academic discourse (De Neshnera 2014; Ivanov 2015). The confrontation is explained by inherent civilizational differences: Russia and the West have antagonistic worldviews (Inosmi 2014). The West is presented as willing to "destroy" Russia by using a so-called "Yugoslavian scenario" and strongly supporting "separatism" from abroad (Putin 2014). The West (the EU and the USA) are presented as aggressive forces who expand their influence over Ukraine knowing that this region lies within the sphere of political interest of the Russian Federation, and who try to dictate their will to the Kremlin. Hence, Ukraine is becoming the main battlefield of this on-going conflict, the war for world dominance where there are no "open mobilizations" (Putin at Valdaj 2014). Considering the fact that Ukraine and Georgia are in the sphere of geopolitical interests of Russia, these countries should, according to V. Putin, never become NATO members. Thus, Russia is "forced to act" in order

to respond to the “aggressive politics” of NATO and to use all possible means to win this confrontation. As a result, Russians have to use similar tactics in order to reach the set goals. In this conflict, Moscow is using the full spectrum of possible methods to achieve its aim: from political and economic pressure to open and covert symmetric and asymmetric military operations, as well as psychological, information and cyber warfare.

By describing Russia’s military actions in Ukraine as “partisan war”, the Russian media create a positive image of Russian military actions: partisan war is a war citizens lead on their own territory, which is occupied by (or has a vast presence of) the enemy’s military forces. This implies that Russia sees Ukraine as “its own territory” or as an area of its geopolitical interests, which is under external threat and therefore calls on its citizens to protect it. This threat has been real for the last twenty-five years and became more acute after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when, according to some Russian media, external (Western) and internal (Soviet elites in agreement with the USA) forces united to bring down the Soviet Empire (Anonymous 2014). This narrative is one of the basic premises for the construction of Russian modern identity and the patriotic upbringing in today’s Russia.

Narrative about hybrid wars

Some analysts consider Russia’s actions in Ukraine in 2014 as a form of “hybrid warfare” (The Military Balance 2015). The Institute of International and Security Studies, a leading British think tank, released the 2015 version of *The Military Balance* – an annual assessment of global military trends and capabilities. In this document, the concept of hybrid warfare – broadly defined as situations where the adversary uses a combination of conventional and irregular warfare – is described as a prominent feature of modern warfare. Media quickly picked up this term often using it to describe the sophisticated combinations of conventional and unconventional means of warfare as well as information and psychological operations deployed by Russia (Laganovskis 2015; Bender 2015; Mineev 2015; Kostikov 2015). In the Russian media discourse, information wars and propaganda are considered a part of hybrid warfare (Pukhov 2015; Mineev 2015; Kostikov 2015). The Russian media point out that this type of war originated in the West and, according to the narrative, Russia is forced to respond to these threats by applying strategies that could potentially minimize the damaging effect for the country (Ivanov 2015; Sidorov 2015). Hence, Russia’s actions, both on the ground and in the information space, are portrayed as defence against the threats to Russia’s sovereignty and political interests.

While in the Western media coverage, journalists usually use this term to describe Russia’s actions in Ukraine as well as such actions supporting far-right

parties in Germany, France and Greece, Russian media suggest that Russia has to undertake necessary activities in order to counterbalance the hybrid war started by the West against Russia. Russian media acknowledge that Russia is striving to gain support abroad – at times operating covertly, however, at the same time, it argues that the West had been using similar techniques a long time ago in Columbia, Mexico and Libya, thus making the point that Russia is not doing anything the West would not have done before. By making this argument, Russian media are stressing the double standards of the Western media and politicians. This, in turn, falls on fertile ground amongst euro-sceptics in the international arena, successfully justifying their own actions domestically, and undermining the ideals of Western democracy.

Discredit of the Western notion of democracy intensifies when the media portray the “colour revolutions” and support for democratic developments in Russia’s neighbouring countries as part of a hybrid war against Russia (Belsky – Klimenko 2014). Consequently, the media and politicians in Russia claim that the West attempts to influence these countries despite being aware of Russian geopolitical and security interests. This is further explained as an ongoing Western contest against Russia’s strength or even existence. At the same time, the media point out that there is no evidence that Russia has used similar strategies or established non-governmental organisations in other countries in order to destabilise current political regimes in other sovereign countries. This is an important narrative laying the basis for construction of other narratives of Russia’s information war, including patriotism and national identity narratives.

National identity narrative

The national identity discourses changed dramatically with Valdimir Putin’s comeback to power in 2012. If the first two presidential terms were signified with a rather affirmative liberal narratives and aspirations to be considered a part of the common European family, then the third term in office was marked by noteworthy ideological changes.

The notion of “sovereign democracy” introduced into the Russian discourse by Vladislav Surkov, First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration from 1999 to 2011, which reflected Russia’s priorities in the international area, had a significant impact on Russian national identity discourse. Being actively used during Vladimir Putin’s second presidential term, the concept contained a strong message about “Russia’s intention to be regarded as a ‘normal’ country, a full-fledged member of the international community”, and referred to its European historical experience accentuating Russia’s belonging to the Western political and cultural tradition (Makarychev 2008: 50). At the same time, it also reflected Putin’s opposition to NATO’s military infrastructure and

the EU neighbouring policy expansion towards Russia's western borders that he allegedly proclaimed in Munich in 2007.³

The identity rhetoric has radically changed with Putin's third term in office, "turning toward a normative, moralizing discourse promoting Russian 'traditional values' as opposed to the 'moral decay' of the West, which is portrayed as a haven for homosexuality and paedophilia" (Makarychev – Medvedev 2015: 45). Aspirations for European liberal ideals were substituted by conservative family values, which were "proclaimed to be the national idea and spiritual bond of the Russians, and grounds for opposing the West" (Makarychev – Medvedev 2015: 45).

Since the start of the Ukrainian crisis, the national identity narrative intensified and became one of the steadiest in the public and media discourses. Building a strong national identity was again pronounced as one of the priorities and a defence strategy. According to Valery Gerasimov, a Russian general, incumbent Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, and first Deputy Defence Minister, the construction of a unified national identity is one of the key instruments constituting a strong national defence (Gerasimov 2014). Gerasimov's views resound the words of Vladimir Putin who often stresses the need for a strong national idea based on shared cultural values and history (Putin 2014). Positive outlook on history and respect to cultural roots is what Gerasimov sees as one of the most important elements for constructing a coherent national identity (Gerasimov 2014).

The claim that one should be proud of its origins became almost an axiom. However, the complexity of Russia's history presents obvious challenges to the creation of an "objectified" positive assessment of Russian history. In such constellation, mythologisation of history and nostalgia for the Soviet period, which originated from in the longing for personal life-worlds and hence had positive and light-hearted components, served as fruitful ground for political manipulations. People who experienced nostalgia for the Soviet Union during the 1990 s were mostly nostalgic for their childhood and youth, while they were critical towards the Soviet regime and its politics (Kalinina 2014). As a result of Yeltsin's reforms some started to long for the times of "prosperity" and "security", and a better quality of life. In their fantasies, it was the time of Brezhnev's stagnation. They also strived for a unifying national idea that they believed was irreversibly lost with the collapse of the Union. Gradually, that critical attitude towards the Soviet past was substituted by its commercial exploitation. During the 2000 s, the Soviet Union developed into a powerful brand that could be sold in the form of various consumer products and services

3 Sovereignty can be defined "as an ever-continuing process in which a state or a nation constructs socially and politically the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', between the internal and the external"(Lehti, *Sovereignty Redefined*, quoted in Makarychev 2008: 49).

(fashion design, interior design, travels and entertainment). To be able to sell the products with Soviet symbols, those symbols had to be emptied of their negative connotations not to frighten the potential consumers. When this happened, the political forces were able to take over and start manipulating history and nostalgia to make it a new state ideology (Kalinina 2014). The Soviet past became an emotional currency and a ground for strong patriotic feelings. The state started using Soviet myths to mobilise a new type of patriotic Russian-Soviet identity (Etkind 2009; Scherrer 2007: 192).

Against this background, the disapproving evaluation of the 1990s and the fall of the Soviet Union turns out to be one of the key elements of Russian national identity. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the revolution of 1991 are cloaked in conspiracy theories and seen as the events, which led to an era of chaos and anarchy (Oushakine 2009). Undoubtedly, Vladimir Putin's evaluation of the end of the Soviet Union as "the biggest geopolitical catastrophe" has officially framed the popular discourse and set the trajectory of conceptualisation of post-perestroika's Russia as a period of loss, trauma and humiliation (Putin 2005). History textbooks usually describe the epoch of the 1990s as controversial, often giving negative evaluations. In comparison to the rule of Yeltsin, Putin's period is assessed in positive terms as a time of stability and prosperity (Levintova – Butter 2010). Taking into consideration that the Russians value economic and political stability more than democratic freedoms (Levada center 2014), it comes with little surprise that Putin's period of stability is valued higher than Gorbachev's or Yeltsin's "democratisation".

History and memory debates occupied the central role in creating the new Russian national identity to suit best the Kremlin's political agenda and to justify the military actions in Ukraine. But history debates did not start with the Ukrainian crisis. For example, debates about the "falsification" of history started during Dmitry Medvedev's presidential term, when in 2009, Medvedev set up the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests in order to "defend Russia against falsifiers of history and those who would deny Soviet contribution to the victory in World War II" (The Presidential Decree N 549 of 15 May 2009). The vague formulations of this bill make one suggest that it would do a lot more harm to the historians researching the war events than actually serve the right purpose. In May 2014, the Russian State Duma adopted a new law against "public rehabilitation of Nazism", the essence of which is to ensure that a revision of the international criminal tribunals (notably the ones of Nuremberg and Tokyo) is a criminal offence. This law raises similar doubts about its possible application, especially with regard to the events in Ukraine.

Patriotic narrative

Patriotism became the new banner of Vladimir Putin's politics of national revival and one of the central narratives in the Ukrainian conflict. The work on patriotic upbringing started long ago. The government launched several programmes of "patriotic education for the citizens of the Russian Federation", which were aimed at promoting and glorifying the country's power (Pravitel'stvo 2001, Pravitel'stvo 2005, Pravitel'stvo, 2010). Official institutions such as the Ministries of Defence and Education, the Russian Orthodox Church, political parties and pro-presidential youth movements – all contributed to the implementation of this governmental policy. Television and cinema as well as online communities have joined the setting of the new patriotic agenda and revival of the unified national idea. "Reference to the fatherland is used as a means of mobilising a detached public around the state and giving renewed prestige to a country whose international status has been questioned" (Laruelle 2015: 1). During the last ten years, scholars have been studying various discursive and symbolic manifestations of patriotism (Zvereva 2005; Gillespie 2005; Roberts 2008; Laruelle 2009; Norris 2012, Laruelle 2015; Omelchenko – Pilkington 2012), pointing out at a visible gap existing between the official discourses and directive and complex alternate social practices.

According to the recent research on patriotism in Russia, the state "has defined categories of patriotic actions in three governmental programmes of 'patriotic education for the citizens of the Russian Federation' that have run from 2001 to 2015, as well as a framework text entitled 'Concept for Patriotic Education for the Citizens of the Russian Federation', which was adopted in 2003" (Daucé et al 2015: 2). In the first document, patriotism was defined as "love for motherland (rodina), devotion to fatherland (otechestvo), willingness to serve its interests and defend it, up to and including self-sacrifice (samopozhertvovanie)" (Pravitel'stvo 2001). The stated objective of patriotic education programmes was thus to give a "new impetus to the spiritual rebirth of the people of Russia" in order to "maintain social stability, restore the national economy, and strengthen the defensive capability of the country" (Pravitel'stvo 2001). Each federal subject is supposed to implement the patriotic programme, its ultimate practical aim being three-fold: to prepare citizens for military service, to revive the spiritual values of the country, and "to weaken ideological opposition to the state" (Pravitel'stvo 2001). In line with several publications of Russian scholars attempting to draw attention to the problems of the youth, the document stresses the lost sense of solidarity, development of negative characteristics such as selfishness, cynicism, lack of respect to authorities, individualism as well as growing nationalism (Pravitel'stvo 2001). The following two documents complemented its predecessor by adding that family values and "appropriate reproductive behaviour" should be promoted among young people,

by praising encouragement of commemorative practices and participation in historical re-enactment clubs, by endorsing Cossak traditions and worshipping the dead, as well as by stressing the mobilization of media and internet and campaigning for economic patriotism (Pravitel'stvo 2005; Pravitelstvo 2010). The researchers stressed an “all-catching” nature of patriotism as defined in the official documents, which in reality covers much more than the state-orchestrated or/and supported activities (Daucé et al. 2015). The researchers showed that individual and corporative actors in Russia, in fact, promoted a very extensive use of patriotism (Kalinina 2013). “The patriotic label is often instrumentalised for non-political ends, and motivations to engage in so-called patriotic activities may have little to do with what the state or an external actor would qualify as patriotism” (Daucé et al. 2015: 4). The scholars concluded that: “The development of patriotism in Russia allows for the renewal of many collective and professional practices. More than an application by society of state commands, it appears as a bottom-up instrument for reconstructing solidarities that were badly undermined during the post-Soviet transition. As such, it helps legitimise practices inherited from the Soviet period, incorporate activities authorised by the market economy, and invent new principles for communal action, transcending the ruptures that came from the reforms of the 1990 s” (Daucé et al. 2015: 4).

The scholars pointed out that patriotism exercised by individuals or communities in Russia did not necessarily lead to increased support of the authorities or “weakening the ideological opposition to the state” (Daucé et al. 2015). Strongly believing that the state produces nothing but empty discourses, many activities and perceptions were, in fact, very different from state directives and the Kremlin's narratives. “While the state claims to be the conductor of a patriotic orchestra, it frequently finds itself devalued by those who [...], define themselves as patriots, and who see in it only a synonym for bureaucracy, red tape, and corruption” (Daucé et al. 2015: 5).

The situation changed in 2012 with Vladimir Putin's return to presidency. The official patriotic line hardened ‘restoring the old cliché's of Soviet propaganda such as anti-Americanism’ as well as the idea of the clash of Western liberal and Russian values. “Official patriotism transformed itself into a more coercive tool that tries to disarm all forms of criticism, whether this means fighting against associations and civil society with the ‘foreign agents’ law, controlling media and internet blogs, or developing stigmatisation discourse toward migrants and sexual minorities” (Daucé et al. 2015: 6).

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has given rise to an unprecedented patriotic advance, which seems to unite both the state-driven components and bottom-up patriotic activities of Russia's citizens. New patriotic discourses set classical ideas about Russia's moral duty to defend those who belong to the sphere of the so-called Russian World [Russkiy Mir].

The official film broadcast on Russian television channels *Crimea. Road to Motherland* (“Krim. Put’ na Rodinu”, Alexander Kondrashev, 2015, Channel Russia 24) could serve as an illustration. The film opens with panoramic views of Crimea and its churches presenting the region as the cradle of Christianity, the very last “citadel” that has to be “freed” from the “enemy’s aggression”. The frame changes turn into the image of Vladimir Putin setting the atmosphere of the narration as well as the main narrative: Russia had no choice but to act forcefully in order to save what is left from Ukraine and defend the Russian-speaking population from Ukrainian nationalists who came to power as a result of an unconstitutional revolution, which in its turn was initiated and supported by the United States. The film presents the only Russian version of the events excluding alternate narrations. The events are told from the perspective of “average people”, “participants”, “witnesses” and “military experts”. The language of the narration is biased and full of negatively charged words and expressions when it comes to describing the adversary. The film presents a collective image of the enemy including the Right Sector [Pravij sektor], the Tatars, the official Kiev administration, Maidan participants and everyone who seems to express critical attitudes towards Russia’s actions in Ukraine. The Russian-speaking actors in this film (mainly participants of the events, Russian soldiers, politicians, military experts and members of their families) are presented as holy defenders of their endangered home country and real patriots. Their patriotism rests upon the idea of obligatory military action and self-sacrifice demanded by their fatherland in danger.

Other propaganda videos widely circulated on Youtube *I am tired of apologizing for being Russian* (‘Ya ustal izvinjatsja za to, shto ja Russkij’) and *I am Russian occupant* (‘Ya Russkij okkupant’) present people dressed in military uniforms who are “wrongly accused as occupants and aggressive conquerors”. By using “historical references” the makers of the videos present Russians as people who are “tired of apologizing” for having the mission to “save Europe” from external aggressive forces and afterwards being blamed of “occupation”, or for bringing “peace, modernisation and prosperity” and then being accused of “colonisation” of other ethnic groups.

These ideas have found a positive response in the online environment, especially in patriotic communities in Vkontakte (such as *Patrioti Rossii*). Surveys by several online communities reveal that patriotism does not function as a catch-all category any longer, but has a specified definition. The frequenters of these communities often describe patriotism as an obligatory positive attitude and love to one’s home country. They understand patriotism as an emotional connection, love, which does not have to be explained or questioned:

User 1:

I understand patriotism as the readiness to kill anyone who dares to say even one bad word about Russia. Of course, patriotism is impossible without knowledge of Russian history and culture.

26. 05. 2014.

User 2:

For me, patriotism is one of the elements of my life: loyal love to motherland, to its people. It means to sacrifice oneself for the fatherland during harsh moments, as well as to preserve traditions...

11. 07. 2014.

User 3:

In my understanding, patriotism is the wish to make one's motherland strong [...]. It is to stand up with weapon in your arms and defend it till the last breath.

22. 07. 2014.

User 4:

It is to love your motherland and defend it till you die.

16. 08. 2014.

User 5:

Patriotism is when you do not think whether to defend your motherland or not, but you know that you have no other choice.

18. 08. 2014.⁴

For these people patriotism also means non-conditional sacrifice of people's lives when "the motherland needs it". This support is expressed not only in the form of discursive practices but also by an active call for actions – mobilization for war and call to fight enemies. This military angle is present in online discussions in the form of shared images of Russian military forces and equipment as well as discussions about tactical and strategic weapons.

The military component is also seen in the discussions of various historical battles and especially the role of the Red Army in the WWII. Young Russians see their history as a narrative of uninterrupted heroic battles and campaigns against enemies with the Russians on the mission to save its neighbours from the enemies at the gates – the main narrative used in propaganda campaigns. By referring to historical events, both official and popular discourses introduce narratives about fascists and nationalists whose aim is to start a new genocide of Russian people. The Ukrainians are here presented both as brothers to be saved

4 The names of the users are anonymous in order to keep their identity secret.

and enemies, who are under the influence of fascists and started a fratricidal war against the people of Russia.

Concluding remarks

During the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has shown how well it is accustomed to the modern communication environment as well as strategies of modern warfare. Information activities intensified and extended globally making it very difficult for Russia's opponents to develop a coherent defence against them. The funds and vigour invested in these information campaigns mediated via any available channel lead to Russia's almost indisputable superiority within the information landscape. Even though it is difficult to measure the effect of these undertakings, as they are run parallel to other, more "traditional", political and military activities, it is evident that the content of the mediated information has a significant impact. Carefully constructed narratives have legitimising and mobilising effect and create social reality for people living within the information landscapes where these narratives are being communicated.

The strength of these narratives is in their long-term articulation: they did not appear out of the blue but, on the contrary, they have a sound base in discourses of Russian identity and world-view. The identity debates started with the collapse of the Soviet Union going back to centuries-long philosophical discussions on whether Russia belongs to the European civilization or presents a geopolitical entity of its own. If Russia presented itself as an ambitious European civilization with some unique characteristics during the 1990 s and the first half of the 2000 s, then, starting from the second half of the 2000 s, it appeared to the world as a matchless state-civilization with its own set of distinctive values. Values of the new Russia are articulated as incompatible with the Western set of democratic ideals and norms. Russia is pictured as the only country loyal to Christian traditions and the so-called traditional family values. Its conservative outlook on family, gender relations and sexuality makes Russia a state of exclusion where not everyone can fit in. Conservatism and wholehearted devotion to one's fatherland have become the foundation of patriotism ideally leading to an unquestionable will to sacrifice one's life for the sake of the country and the Russian-speaking community and civilization built on Russian culture and values. This idea of patriotism consistently articulates fears of a constant threat both from outside and within, and hence is profoundly based in the narratives of confrontation or even war between Russia and the West. The idea of Russia conducting a defensive war against its enemies becomes in itself a fruitful ground for intensification of militant patriotism and mobilisation.

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The Power of the Capability Constraint: On Russia's Strength in the Arctic Territorial Dispute¹

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Abstract: *Based on a geographical-administrative definition of the region, the theoretical assumptions of contemporary French structuralist geopolitics, cross-sectional data for 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010 from the Updated Arctic Regional Attributes Dataset, and the technical capabilities of MS Office Excel 2010, this research (a) reveals and contrasts the Arctic states' capability constraints deriving from their longitudinal material and virtual power potential (physical potential, socio-economic potential, military potential, and symbolic potential); and (b) analyses the role of this constraint in the process of preference formation in case of one specific Arctic actor, Russia, in the Arctic territorial dispute. This study confirms that Russia's capability constraint is the lowest in the region and that the latter does not form a stable trend throughout the period studied. It also suggests the preference formation framework for Russia in the Arctic dispute based on the evolution of its polar capability constraint.*

Keywords: *Russia, the Arctic, geopolitical analysis, power, capability constraint, regional strategy*

Introduction: On Russia's Role in the Arctic Territorial Dispute

The Arctic region has recently started a new era of continuous natural- and human-related transition. Firstly, the unprecedented and continuously increasing rate at which the polar multiyear ice has been melting is one of the stable characteristics of the beginning of the twenty-first century. Secondly, similarly to the Antarctic, the emergence of the Arctic as a distinct international region has, in fact, been the most recent among all global regions. Consequently, histori-

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cal factors have had a minimal effect in the Arctic. Throughout most of the 20th century the northernmost region was an exclusively military-strategic location within the Cold-War system of international politics. However, today the Arctic is becoming more and more 'attractive' to the global community due to its economic potential. Thirdly, with the exception of Japan, all major global players of the Northern Hemisphere (the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Russia) are active participants in the intraregional strategic dialogue. Finally, the shrinking of the polar sea ice in rendering the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route more attractive for global maritime trade network logistics.

Four states within the 'Arctic Eight' group² have been continuously signaling the desire to extend their own outer limits of the northernmost continental shelves in the central part of the Arctic Ocean: Canada, Denmark, Russia and the United States. However, only two of them, Russia and Denmark, have already provided specific coordinate points delimiting the area to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). These two states are the initiator decision makers, because they are attempting to change the status quo.³ Although, in legal terms, neither Canada nor the United States has an active Arctic claim, their territorial aspirations are routinely replicated in political maps delimiting their sovereignty claims in the Central Arctic Ocean by a range of cartographic agencies⁴ and news channels⁵ and their strategic situation is part of the current analysis as well.

There is significant overlap in the existing northernmost territorial claims in two areas next to the geographic North Pole where the Russian claim intersects with the Danish claim and the potential Canadian claim.⁶ In terms of the relationship of these countries with the international community⁷ (the third,

2 Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States – countries whose land and/or water territories currently lie within the Arctic Circle.

3 This study is based on the (still dominant) state-centric approach: the governments-in-power of the Arctic states signaling their intention to extend their own sovereignty in the Central Arctic Ocean are viewed as the definite actors of international relations – the final decision-makers in the judicial sense.

4 Among others, IBRU, *Map of Arctic sovereignty claims* (2015): <<https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/resources/arctic>>.

5 Among others, BBC, *Denmark challenges Russia and Canada over North Pole* (2014): <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30481309>>.

6 In December, 2014, Denmark made an official claim to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) over some 900 thou. sq. km of the ocean north of Greenland, thus extending the claim under the original sector approach ('stopping' at the North Pole) deep into the Russian sector. In this case the intersection of the Danish and Russian claims is significant – see the updated Arctic dispute graphics at: <<http://www.economist.com/news/international/21636756-denmark-claims-north-pole-frozen-conflict>> However, given the timing of the event (post-Crimea), we may believe that by doing so, Denmark tries to raise the stakes in order to make concessions in the later stages of negotiations – a frequent strategy in business and diplomacy (Malhotra 2006: 1+).

7 The rest of the "Arctic Eight" group (Canada, the United States, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland), more than twenty non-Arctic states demonstrating readiness to invest in the commercial development of the region, and even countries that are, so far, not interested at all in the Arctic – "mankind".

cumulative player in the dispute) with regard to whether the latter would agree to an almost full 'seizure' of the Arctic by just several countries, with Russia alone aiming to acquire almost one third of it, the stakes are expected to be high. A number of provocative manoeuvres have already been systematically occurring, including the planting of a one-meter-high titanium Russian flag on the underwater Lomonosov ridge, which Moscow claims to be directly connected to its own continental shelf, in 2007.

Because of alternative interpretations of the topographic reality (e.g. whether the Lomonosov ridge is truly a continuation of the continent), and since the actors may or may not intend to act in the same way (e.g. form a functional coalition), the dispute may have a range of outcomes, starting with the preservation of the status quo by recalling one's own submitted claim, and ending with the unilateral seizure of all claimed areas by the claimant states.⁸ Because a potential intraregional dispute over the location of the northernmost maritime borders might be resolved either peacefully or by force, it is important to know what capability constraint faces each player in the process of its regional preference construction.

Aside from a number of theme-specific reports by international (mostly environmentally-oriented) organizations, the majority of research incorporates either an actor-oriented perspective or a structure-oriented perspective while analysing the probability of conflict in the region. In both cases, the research either focuses on variables describing the Arctic geographic space (Dowdeswell and Hambrey 2002, Woodford 2003, Stein 2008), evaluates the effectiveness of regional cooperation attempts (Chaturvedi 1996, Exner-Pirot 2012, Hough 2013), or summarizes the expected geopolitical implications from the changing environment (Chapman 2011, Ostreng et al. 2013). With the exception of a comprehensive empirical introduction to the geopolitical functioning of the Arctic system by Knell (2008), draft scenarios of the region's development in the near future by Brigham (since 2007), and game-theoretic treatment of regional geopolitics by Cole, Izmalkov and Sjöberg (2014), a formal, quantitative method to define Russia's Arctic strategy according to the distribution of its hard and soft power – and classify the major geopolitical risks and opportunities for the actors based on these preferences – is still missing in the literature. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing geopolitical research, polar studies and Russian foreign policy analysis by:

- a. providing longitudinal empirical evidence for the development of geopolitical power equilibria in the Arctic region (1990 – 2010);
- b. computing Russia's polar capability constraint and comparatively assessing it against that of other Arctic states;

8 Given three solution strategies (preserve status quo, compromise, or full seizure), if the two initiating decision makers do not form a full coalition, the Arctic sovereignty game has $3^2=9$ options.

- c. identifying the strengths of Russia's Arctic strategy-making as implied by its polar capability constraint in order to be used as an input in resolution modelling in the regional territorial dispute.

In order to approach these goals the following (technical) questions should be answered: *Do all Arctic actors face similar power constraints in the northernmost region? How strong is the difference in power potential and capability constraint between Russia and the other Arctic states? Is the distribution of power stable over time? How do the material and virtual power capabilities influence the formation of Russia's preferences in the region?* The vast research on political geography/geopolitics of the Polar Regions, whose popularity in research has almost tripled over the last decade,⁹ does not provide a clear answer to these questions. This research (a) allows for an understanding of the role of capability constraint in the process of regional policy preference formation and (b) offers a compact and neutral analytical framework to deal with the internal logic of the Arctic territorial dispute.

The study consists of a two-stage analysis. First, we identify and compare the capability constraint for each Arctic actor. Second, we construct Russia's preferences in the Arctic territorial dispute based on its polar capability constraint. Two hypotheses are tested:

H₁. Russia's capability constraint in the Arctic sovereignty game is the lowest in the region.

H₂. Russia's capability constraint forms a stable trend throughout the studied period (1990–2010).

The work is structured as follows: in the next section we define capability constraint, introduce the nature of its role in the regional policy-building process and summarize the methodological configuration of the study. In the third section, following that, we present the dataset and the measurement procedure. The fourth section presents the results of the power index construction. The final section summarizes the main findings, evaluates the character of comparative advantage available to Russia in the Arctic sovereignty game as implied by its capability constraint, and suggests directions for further research.

⁹ Based on the average appearance of "Polar-", "Arctic-", "Antarctic-" and "Geopolitics" in Jstor, WoS and Questia platforms in 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Theoretical and Methodological Configuration

If territory is disputed between sovereign nation states, it is usually indivisible: “the contest is necessarily a winner-take-all affair so that there is no room for compromise, probably leaving the dispute to devolve into a war of attrition. [...] Naturally, if there is not some way to compensate a player for a loss of this sort, the problem does not have a bargaining range. One side wins and the other loses” (Bueno de Mesquita 2010: 7). In other words, the territorial dispute over the central part of the Arctic Ocean is non-cooperative. In game-theoretic language, what options are available to Russia and other claimant states? What solutions are available in the Arctic territorial dispute?

For the largest part of the contested area, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)¹⁰ provides a clear solution: a coastal state’s maritime sovereignty decreases with increasing distance from the baseline and stops at 200 nautical miles (nm) from the coast. In order to move the border further into the ocean, a claimant state must issue an application to the CLCS¹¹ and provide it with supporting scientific and technical evidence that the border must be moved due to the existence of an adjacent ‘submarine ridge’. In this case, public international law grants this state the right to extend its own sovereignty up to 350 nm from the baseline. But the 350 nm limit does not apply if the continental shelf is defined as a ‘submarine elevation’. In other words, in order to extend its own border beyond 350 nm, the coastal state must provide sound evidence that the Arctic undersea ridges are not ridges but elevations. However, the final decision on the location of the maritime boundary still rests on the claimant state. It is also the claimant state which performs surveillance and mapping, so there exists a relatively high risk that “... scientists will seek to interpret the data in a way that is as beneficial as possible for extended Continental Shelf claims while staying within what is scientifically credible” (Strandsbjerg 2012: 834).

The story becomes even more complicated with the fact that the Commission has no mandate to determine maritime boundaries between coastal states or to settle disputes unless the coastal states accept it.¹² Keeping in mind that the United States has not ratified the Convention and, therefore, is still not bound by its provisions, the Commission’s recommendations only relate to Norway, which, in turn, does not have an actual claim in the central part of the Arctic Ocean.

10 UNCLOS is an international treaty that provides a regulatory framework for the use of the world’s seas and oceans, *inter alia*, to ensure the conservation and equitable usage of resources and the marine environment and to ensure the preservation of the living resources of the sea. The treaty has entered into force in 1994 and as of December 2014, 166 states have ratified, succeeded to, or acceded to, UNCLOS. The full text and status of the Convention can be found at: <http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm>

11 Submissions are made through the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Article 76 of UNCLOS).

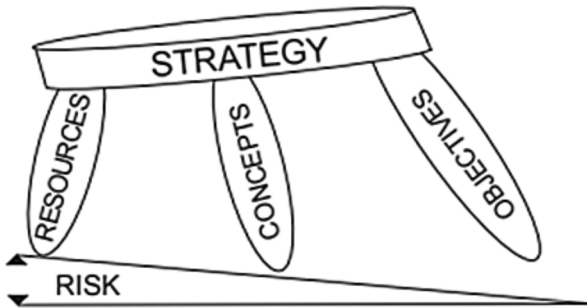
12 For a number of reasons, neither Denmark nor Russia accepts this.

In the broader context of time–space geography, capability constraint can be defined as a limit to one’s actions, either due to biological needs (such as hunger), or due to restricted facilities (such as landlockedness).¹³ In the realm of international politics, “...the most successful states... match their geostrategy to the underlying geopolitical reality” (Grygiel 2006: 1). Russia’s Arctic strategy formation is based on five underlying assumptions of strategy from a national perspective as described by H. Richard Yarger (2010). Firstly, strategy is proactive and anticipatory: it provides direction for the coercive or persuasive use of power to achieve specified objectives and this direction is, by nature, proactive. Secondly, the strategist knows the end state that (s)he is trying to achieve (i.e. to answer the question: What is to be accomplished?). Rational policy makers develop appropriate objectives leading to the desired end state and therefore analyse the desired end state in the context of the internal and external systemic environment. Thirdly, a rational strategist strives to optimize the balance between ‘ends’ (the objectives sought), ‘ways’ (methods to pursue the objectives), and ‘means’ (the resources available), so that an end is supported by concepts based on all the instruments of power and the associated resources. Fourthly, political purpose dominates all strategy, in the spirit of Karl Clausewitz’ famous dictum: ‘war is merely the continuation of policy by other means.’ Policy is the expression of the desired end state sought by the decision makers. Objectives that lead to the desired end state provide purpose, focus, and justification for the actions embodied in a strategy. Finally, strategy is hierarchical: it cascades from the national level down to the lower levels. Political leadership ensures and maintains its control and influence through this hierarchy (Yarger 2010: 43–44).

In other words, *rational* players employ strategies which appropriately balance the objectives (ends), concepts for accomplishing objectives (ways), and resources for supporting these concepts (means). This is achieved by adding resources, using different concepts, or changing the objectives. According to Arthur Lykke, ends, ways, and means are three dimensions upon which the strategy rests. The logic is described through a ‘chair metaphor’, with the three legs of the ‘strategy’ chair – objectives (ends), concepts for accomplishing objectives (ways), and resources for supporting these concepts (means) – having the same height and diameter in order to minimize the risk of the chair falling after a ‘heavy’ national security is placed on it – see Figure 1 below. If any dimension is out of balance, the risk is too big and the strategy collapses (Lykke et al. 2001). In the Arctic sovereignty dispute, the level of relative superiority in material and virtual capabilities, whose derivative is the capability constraint, are considered to serve as the means each Arctic actor takes into consideration while building regional strategy. How are these individual capability constraints constructed?

13 See Golob and Regan (2001) and Axhausen in D. Ettema and H. Timmermans, eds. (1997).

Figure 1: The Lykke Model



Source: Yarger 2010: 48.

The Arctic region is an open, complex geopolitical system. Its internal processes constitute a set of interconnected elements: changes in certain attributes (actors' material and virtual strength) imply ultimate changes elsewhere in the system. At the same time, the system is constantly interacting with the surroundings: both can adapt, and both are affected by the changing environment. Due to this complexity, any purely linear approach to the Arctic is inadequate because, as Niave Knell points out, "...it would not recognize the complexity and the second and third order effects of any one action... It is then necessary to study the system's *dynamic* [my emphasis] interaction of parts" (2008: 8).

Any research on the relations among states in the international system deals, to a lesser or a greater extent, with a structure-agency dilemma.¹⁴ Although this research accepts a certain complementarity of structure and agency,¹⁵ it focuses on agency and therefore reconstructs the actors' preferences in the Arctic dispute according to seventeen variables describing the regional geopolitical configuration – the actors' geographically- and socially-based capabilities.

At the same time, the analysis is positivist: the reality is considered to be external to human theories about it and it is assumed that the researcher's role is to solve problems and interpret the results without predetermined biases. However, it does not mean that the study is free of prejudice. It means that the scholar is aware of the potential dangers of this kind and chooses adequate research techniques to minimize them. A 'neutral' systemic framework significantly reduces the 'disturbances' arising from hidden biases related to the author's country of origin and cultural background. A quantitative and empiri-

14 Functionalists and Marxists believe that social life is primarily determined by social structure and that individual activities can be explained as an outcome of structure. In contrast, phenomenological sociologists and symbolic interactionists insist on the ability of individuals to construct and give meaning to social life.

15 While structure influences human behavior, individual activities similarly influence the social structure.

cal character of research is based on a firm definition of all variables and strict rules of interaction between these variables. As a result, at this stage of research, each Arctic state enjoys the same degree of objective attention.¹⁶ Epistemologically, the analytical process is perceived through the prism of allocating the complex social reality (the whole) as a system of interconnected elements and then integrating these elements back into the whole as defined by Konstantin Plokhonnikov [1]:

Whole → System of elements → Whole’ (2012: 18) [1]

Gerard Dussouy’s ‘Global Interpretation Method of the World’ (2010) ‘translates’ this version of systemic modelling into the language of geopolitical analysis.¹⁷ The idea is that “...no two-dimensional map can capture the multi-scalar intersection of physical, demographic, strategic, socio-economic, and cultural-ideological forces at work in the geopolitical arena; instead, we need to think in terms of the interaction of all these things in different places and under varying circumstances” (Murphy 2010: 151). The author contributes to the approach developed by the contemporary structuralist branch of the French school of geopolitics by segregating the global system into five distinct geopolitical action spaces: physical, natural space; demo-political space; diplomatic-military space; socio-economic space; and symbolic, idealistic and cultural space, with the first four forming the system’s objective structure and the last one being its subjective component. The goal is then to analyse, spatially, the transforming tendencies within each of these spaces in order to extract the system’s structural logic and internal contradictions it faces (Dussouy 2010a: 143). By doing so, Dussouy attempts to offer a “...methodology for gathering data that can serve as the basis for an empiric-inductive theory” (Cohen 2010: 163).

This instrumentalist approach to modelling seems well suited to the construction of actors’ preferences in the Arctic territorial dispute for three major reasons. First, the breadth of its scope allows the researcher to capture the multi-dimensional geopolitical reality of the Arctic region – a reality that cannot be properly reflected either by the classical approach to geopolitics, nor by its (recent) critical alternative.¹⁸ Second, it is a relatively simple method of systematization that can operate on any geographic scale (local – regional – global)

16 The amount and origin of empirical data.

17 A special issue of *Geopolitics* (vol. 15, no. 1, 2010) was devoted to Dussouy’s model and its evaluation by top global specialists on geopolitics and international relations such as Alexander Murphy, Saul Cohen, and Robert Jervis.

18 Classical geopolitical theory insists on either total geographical determinism (Ratzel, Kjellen, Haushofer – the German School) or nearly total geographic determinism (Mahan, Mackinder, Spykman – the Anglo-Saxon School), while (post)structuralist critical geopolitics instead tends to focus too much on the role of cultural and social aspects of power in international relations (Ó Tuathail, Agnew, Dalby).

and is based on a solid number of axioms that have been widely accepted in academic literature (Cohen 2010: 157–160). Third, it allows us to re-construct the power of a state and reveal its capability constraint. The biggest problem with this approach is that Dussouy neither defines the variables representing the geopolitical configuration in the model, nor provides any hint on how to operationalize these variables.

As “the lines between international economics and regional economics are becoming blurred” (Krugman 1993: 8), it is appropriate to position the Arctic provinces within both regional and international contexts. We operationalize the variables that are assumed to constitute the ‘core’ of geopolitical analysis by Aymeric Chapraude (2007), Guyla Csurgai (2009) and Patrice Gourdin (2010) to reconstruct the power relations in the Arctic region.¹⁹

Dataset

The Updated Arctic Regional Attributes Dataset (ARA Dataset)²⁰ is presented in Appendix A²¹ in Excel 2010 format. It is a cross-national dataset of eight cases (all Arctic states – permanent members of the Arctic Council) covering seventeen variables. Balancing between the costs of data compilation and the need to generate credible results, the dataset does not include all data for a 20-year period but instead contains information from the selected databases that is taken once every five years, starting in 1990 and ending in 2010. Following Tom Sniders, we work with time series: the Arctic (or any) geopolitical configuration can be observed at a number of discrete time points, under the assumption

19 Aymeric Chapraude defines geopolitical analysis as the study of the ‘desire for power’ of states in relation to its physical and human geographical characteristics. The power of a state is assumed to depend on two factors: geographic conditions (both material geographical position and discursive geographical representations of populations) and absolute strength (qualitative and quantitative human, military and economic factors) – Chapraude (2007): 17. Patrice Gourdin defines power as capability (a capability to act, a capability to make others act; a capability to prevent others from acting; a capability to refuse to act) and focuses on thirty factors, divided into four categories: Territory (maps, geographical situation, mountains-valleys, climate, vegetation, natural resources, cities-towns-villages, boundary symbols), Population (demography; ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-economic, cultural and tribal or clan-related dividing lines; and political rivalries), Representations (symbolic places, national sentiments, disputed elements of history, resistance against oppression, messianic tendencies and desire for power), and External actors (‘Friend and Foe’ reasoning, economic interests, territorial claims, international obligations, strategic objectives, regional power ambitions, non-state actors that operate within the law, and illegal non-state actors) – Gourdin (2010): 248–262. Similarly to Aymeric Chapraude, Guyla Csurgai believes that any geopolitical system consists of both constant and variable components, and have objective and subjective components: elements of physical geography, availability of natural resources, boundary specifics, ethnic composition and demography, socio-economic factors, the question of identity, geopolitical representation and historical heritage – Csurgai (2009): 48, 51.

20 The description of the original ARA Dataset can be found in Valko, Irina. “Differentiating Arctic Provinces: A Cluster Analysis of Geographic and Geopolitical Indicators.” *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2014).

21 Appendix A is available upon request.

that there exists an unobserved evolution occurring between these time points (Snijders 2005: 215).

Three indicators (*Lo_Lan*, *Reg_Co* and *History*) are the author's analytical inventions, and the rest has been imported from the eight Arctic states' national statistical databases, circumpolar database ArcticStat, Encyclopedia Britannica, CIA – World Factbook, Weatherspark: Weather Dashboard, Sea Around Us Project, DaftLogic: Advanced Google Maps Distance Calculator, OANDA Historical Exchange Rates Database, Bartsits (2000) and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Dataset. Some variables have been standardized in order to eliminate nation-specific scaling differences. The detailed description of data aggregation is provided in Appendix B.²² What follows is a brief description of four categories of power potential.²³ Each Arctic state's regional capability power potential is characterized by a mix of strength coming from the following geopolitical sub-systems:

- ⊗ Physical potential – non-weighted average of national capability arising from the Arctic geo-physical features:
 - *Area (thou. sq. km)*²⁴ – the sum of all polar land area (including inland water and glaciers) delimited by provincial boundaries and/or coastlines, as defined in the respective sub-national administrative division of the Arctic states. The variable is configured at constant 2010 values throughout the entire period studied.
 - *EEZ (thou. sq. km)*²⁵ – the existing maritime delimitation of the region; recalculated for each Arctic province according to the length of its coastline facing the northernmost ocean. Data for Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Svalbard, Jan Mayen and Alaska (Arctic sea basin-only) are imported from the *Sea around Us Project*. In all other cases, the EEZ per province is unknown. The available data is therefore transformed using basic algebra. First, we find the length of coastline (km) and area of the EEZ (km sq) for each Arctic state. Second, we 'reconstruct' precisely the same length of coastline for each Arctic state in *DaftLogic: Advanced Google Maps Distance Calculator* to overcome the coastline paradox.²⁶ We refer to the same maps and markers to

22 Appendix B is available upon request.

23 In most cases, the variables are defined according to their specification in the codebooks for the related datasets. Those interested in the exact configuration of all variables should therefore refer to the original documentation found in aforementioned public datasets.

24 <www.arcticstat.org>, <www.britannica.com>, <www.gks.ru>

25 <www.seaaroundus.org/eez/>, <www.gks.ru>, <wediscovercanada.ca>, <www.seaaroundus.org/eez/>, <www.daftlogic.com/projects-advanced-google-maps-distance-calculator.htm#loginbox>

26 Due to the fractal-like properties of coastlines, the length of the coastline depends on the method used to measure it.

calculate the share of the coastline of the Arctic state polar province in relation to the country's total coastline. Third, we recalculate the country's total Arctic basin-related EEZ according to the percentile value of the provincial coastline. Fourth, we sum all polar provinces' results to obtain the total EEZ generated by the Arctic coastline of the eight states. The variable is configured at constant values throughout the entire studied period.

- *t_Jan.* and *t_Jul.* (average, °C)²⁷ – the average temperature²⁸ registered at thirty-seven weather stations located within the Arctic Circle. If data at several stations in the Arctic province is available we take a simple average.
- *Lo-Lan (binary)* – variable describing relative proximity strength on land: 1 = the air distance (km) between a state capital city and regional capital(s) is smaller than between regional capital(s) and the Geographic North Pole (90°N). For each Arctic actor, the weighted average of results for all polar provinces is calculated; 0 = the air distance (km) between a state capital city and regional capital(s) (administrative center(s) of polar provinces) is greater than between regional capital(s) and the Geographic North Pole (90°N); The variable is configured at constant values throughout the entire period under consideration.

❖ Socio-economic potential – non-weighted average of national capability determined by the demographic and economic features of the Arctic:

- *Pop* and *Ind_Pop (thou. persons)*²⁹ – the total number of residents (citizens and non-citizens), and total number of indigenous residents, of Arctic states as of January 1 of the respective year. All data are standardized. Data for Sweden, Norway, Finland, Canada and Russia are averaged.
- *GRP (mln. USD)*³⁰ – Gross Regional Product, by polar province, by year, in current prices, summed for the Arctic state. The data have been standardized. National currencies have been converted into current USD using OANDA yearly-average historical currency exchange rates.

27 <weatherspark.com>

28 Due to the significant heterogeneity in the extent of seasonal temperature scattering across Arctic provinces, the annual average temperature is not as informative as bi-annual average temperatures.

29 <www.arcticstat.org>; <www.statcan.gc.ca>; <www.stat.fi>; <www.ssb.no>; <www.census.gov>; Hugo Ahlenius, et al. (ed.), *Vital Arctic Graphics: People and Global Heritage on our Last Wild Shores* (Arendal: UNEP/GRID, 2010), accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.grida.no/publications/vg/arctic/>, p. 15

30 <www.arcticstat.org>, <www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates>

No data is available for Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec (2000, 2010); Finnmark, Nordland, Tromsø, Norrbotten, Västerbotten (2010). These values are therefore predicted. We first judge, via the construction of a scatterplot, whether the available time range forms a trend. If they do, we predict the missing value using multiple regression analysis. Only significant results with 95 per cent probability are included.³¹

- *Agric. (mln. USD)*³² – the share of agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting within the Gross Regional Product, by province, by year, recalculated according to percentile value for every respective year, summed for the Arctic state. The missing data on Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon in 2010 is reconstructed in the same way as in the case of GRP.
 - *Ind. (mln. USD)*³³ – the share of mining, manufacturing (metal products, electronics, machinery and scientific instruments, shipbuilding, pulp and paper, foodstuffs, chemicals, textiles, and clothing) and energy and water supplies, within the Gross Regional Product, by province, by year, recalculated according to a percentile value for every respective year, summed for the Arctic state. The missing data on Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon in 2010 has been reconstructed by the same method used in the case of GRP.
 - *Serv. (mln. USD)*³⁴ – the share of construction, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, information, finance, real estate, tourism, education, healthcare and social services within the Gross Regional Product, by province, by year, recalculated according to the percentile value for every respective year, summed for the Arctic state. The missing data on Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon in 2010 has been reconstructed by the same method used in the case of GRP.
- ⊗ Military potential – non-weighted average of national capability determined by the region’s security configuration:
- *Reg_MB (number)*³⁵ – active permanent military installations (land bases, including training centres, maintenance sites, surveillance bases, air bases and heliports, naval bases, Coast and Home Guard

31 Significance level = 0.05; p-value < 0.05.

32 <www.arcticstat.org>

33 <www.arcticstat.org>

34 <www.arcticstat.org>

35 <thesimonsfoundation.ca/arctic-security>; <www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/canadian-forces-bases>; <www.fmn.dk/eng/allabout/Pages/TasksintheArcticandtheNorthernAtlantic.aspx>; <<http://www.puolustusvoimat.fi/en/>>; <<http://mil.no/organisation/about/norwegianmilitarybases/Pages/default.aspx>>; <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1073.pdf>; <<http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/Organisation/The-Swedish-Army/>>; <<http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/>>

and sledge patrol bases) located within the borders of the Arctic states' polar provinces. A land base is defined as a military installation with a personnel of at least 18 persons. A naval base as a military installation with at least one armed vessel. An air base as a military installation with a runway of at least 1600 m (45 x 40 m in case of heliport). Data on Khanty-Mansii and Yamal-Nenets provinces of Russia are unavailable.

- *Reg_Co (number of active links)*³⁶ – the number of Arctic states' active membership in any of the following military integration frameworks: North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland, the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Norway, and the government of the Kingdom of Sweden concerning Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support; and the North American Aerospace Defense Command. We codify national advancement in regional institutionalized military integration according to the following scale: 0 = no active link, 1 = one active link, 2 = two active links; with no intention of reflecting the intensity ('depth') of integration.³⁷ Each province of the Arctic state, including the the Arctic provinces, is assumed to share all national-level opportunities and responsibilities granted by the given integration frameworks.
- *Exp_1 (mln. 2011 USD)*³⁸ – the data on regional military expenditures is unavailable, so we work with national data that is taken from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Dataset. We consider the military expenditure of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States in 2000, 2005 and 2010, in million constant 2011 USD.

❖ Symbolic potential (power of geopolitical representations) – non-weighted average of national capability in the system's ideational and subjective space:

wiki100k/docs/Military_of_Iceland.html>; Siemon T. Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic," *Background Paper* (Stockholm: SIPRI, March 2012).

36 Valko 2013: 104, 109.

37 Coding the intensity ('depth') of institutionalized integration is a challenging task: in contrast to economic regionalism, wherein a range of approaches to typifying regional economic integration frameworks exist (e.g. Telo 2008), without operationalization algorithms, no template for evaluation of military regionalism is available.

38 <milexdata.sipri.org/files/?file=SIPRI+military+expenditure+database+1988-2012.xlsx>

- $Exp_2(number)^{39}$ – share of military spending as percent of Gross Domestic Product, for each Arctic state, for each respective year.
- $Sector(thou. sq. km)^{40}$ – the potential (imaginary) partition of the Arctic Ocean. Finland and Sweden are non-littoral states – their coastlines do not directly face the Arctic Ocean. Simultaneously, Iceland does not have an active claim over the High North, even though part of its EEZ is located north of the Arctic Circle. Zero values are assigned in all three cases.
- $History(binary)^{41}$ – the strength of historical affiliation of each Arctic actor to the polar landmass and waters. We assign value 1 if an existing state sovereignty has been manifested and/or formed in the 18th century or the 19th century. A zero value is assigned if that happened in the 20th century. The variable is configured at constant 2010 values throughout the entire period under consideration.

Measurement

After defining the parameters of the power potential assessment we set up a measurement algorithm. There are m Arctic states and n indicators for each Arctic state, so a matrix of values $x_{i,j}$, $i = 1, \dots, m; j = 1, \dots, n$ can be constructed. At a given level of approximation, for a number of reasons,⁴² equal weights are granted to sub-indices within the aggregate index. The matrix of sub-indices $In_{i,j}$, $i = 1, \dots, m; j = 1, \dots, n$ can be found with [2]:

$$In_{i,j} = \frac{x_{i,j} - \min_{1 \leq j \leq n} x_{i,j}}{\max_{1 \leq j \leq n} x_{i,j} - \min_{1 \leq j \leq n} x_{i,j}}, \quad i = 1, \dots, m; j = 1, \dots, n. \quad [2]$$

The value of each index $In_{i,j}$, $i = 1, \dots, m; j = 1, \dots, n$ varies from 0 to 1. A value that is close to 0 is proximate to the minimal value, while being close to 1 signals proximity to the maximum value. The aggregate index CIn_i , $i = 1, \dots, m$ is a mean of the indices $In_{i,j}$, $i = 1, \dots, m; j = 1, \dots, n$, according to [3]:

$$CIn_i = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n In_{i,j} \quad [3]$$

39 <milexdata.sipri.org/files/?file=SIPRI+military+expenditure+database+1988-2012.xlsx>.

40 Bartsits 2000.

41 Hough 2013.

42 Because geopolitical theory does not offer the model for evaluating the 'weight' of specific dimensions within the complex geopolitical system, we refer to the basic assumption of the inferential logic: we assume no variation in this weight. The analysis of the results of the empirical test allows for the initial assumption to be modified, based on any quasi-experimental research design template.

The aggregate index varies from 0 to 1. If $CCn_i = 0$, all sub-indices $In_{ij}, j = 1, \dots, n$ are equal to zero, i.e. all indicators have the lowest values. In contrast, if $CCn_i = 1$, all sub-indices $In_{ij}, j = 1, \dots, n$ are equal to 1, i.e. all indicators have the highest values. Then, we calculate the percentile share of each Arctic state's aggregate power index $CCn_i, i = 1, \dots, m$, where m is the number of parameters in the system, multiplied by 100, as in [4]:

$$CCn_i = 100 \frac{CIn_i}{\sum_{j=1}^m CIn_j}, i = 1, \dots, m \quad [4]$$

In this case, the sum of all indices $CCn_i, i = 1, \dots, m$ is equal to 1:

$$\sum_{i=1}^m CCn_i = 1$$

Finally, we consider the polar capability constraint of each state, Zn_i , to be an inversed aggregate power potential, i.e. aggregate weakness [5]:

$$Zn_i = 1 - CCn_i \quad [5]$$

Russia's Polar Capability Constraint

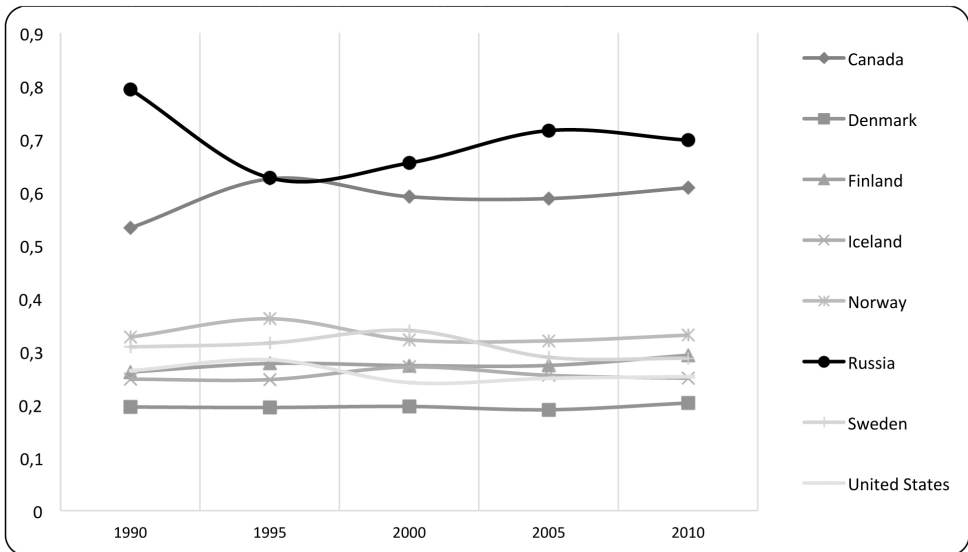
We now turn to the results of the application of the aforementioned measurement procedure to the data from the Updated ARA Dataset. Figure 2 demonstrates the evolution of the aggregate polar capability indices for the eight Arctic states. Axis x represents moments in time, while axis y represents the actual value of polar capability (the latter varies from 0 to 1). Figure 3 demonstrates the inverse situation: axis x represents the same time shots, but axis y now shows the significance of resource constraint in the Arctic system (the latter again varies from 0 to 1). It is apparent from both graphs that, throughout the period studied, the geopolitical strength of the Arctic states can be grouped into two internally homogeneous clusters. We label the first cluster as 'Russia and Canada'. These two countries share a unique combination of geographical, economic, military, demographic and institutional integration capabilities not found elsewhere in the region. On the one hand, as of 2010, Russian and Canadian polar provinces occupy almost 80 percent of the region's land (and roughly one half of the EEZ in the northernmost ocean), 87 percent of the Arctic population, and 56 percent

of military installations in the region, and approximately 80 percent of gross regional product (53 percent of agricultural product, 84 percent of industrial product and 81 percent of services).

Canada and Russia also generate slightly above half of the symbolic connections in the region. On the other hand, their cumulative military strength reaches ‘only’ 36 percent of the total capability in the region. The polar capability constraints of Russia and Canada are the lowest in the region: throughout the period under consideration, this constraint for Russia and Canada varies from 0,2 and 0,46 in 1990 to 0,3 and 0,39 in 2010, respectively.

All other Arctic states, including the remaining two players of the Arctic sovereignty game, Denmark and the United States, belong to the second cluster, which we call “the Rest of A8”. Aside from the aggregate military potential, which can be explained by an extremely high value for national military spending in the United States, and physical geography domain, where the aforementioned grouping is not as evident as in other dimensions of social power base, none of these countries is able to reach a fifty-percent share of total capability in the region. Russia’s capability constraint varies from 0,2 in 1990 (minimum value) to 0,37 in 1995 (maximum value), so there is a non-zero variation range [0,37 – 0,2 = 0,17]. The second hypothesis is therefore falsified.

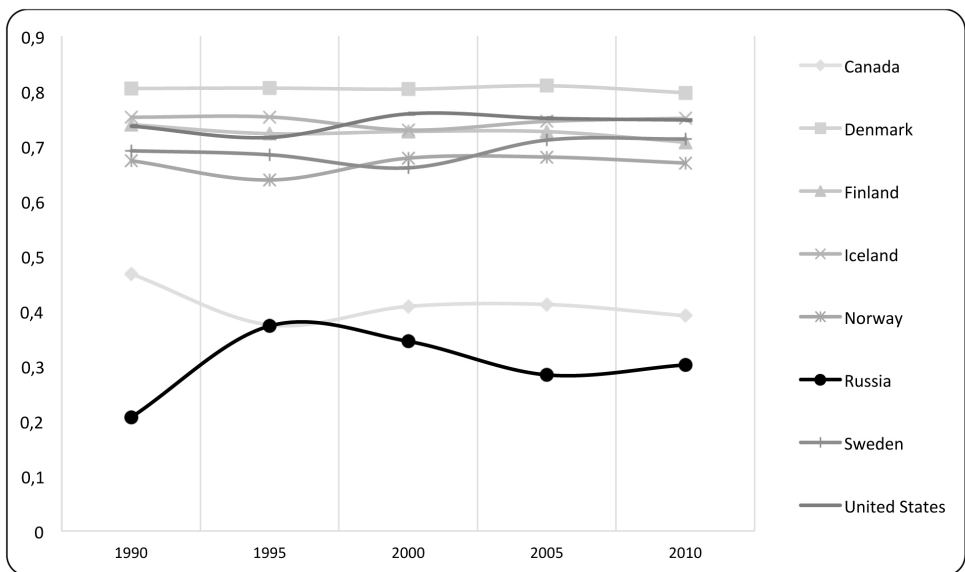
Figure 2: Agent-based aggregate polar capability (1990–2010)



Source: author.

Because the aggregate index blurs the distinction between individual geostrategic action spaces (we assign the same weight to all four categories of regional strength) it is important to analyse the evolution of regional power in each dimension of state power. Figure 4 demonstrates the differentiated, dimension-specific power capability of Russia, in contrasted with the other Arctic states. Russia's physical geographic characteristics make it a leader in the geo-physical action space, mainly due to having the largest land area and EEZ beyond the Arctic Circle. As the values of the majority of variables belonging to this category have been fixed,⁴³ no significant variation in the domain can be observed. A/ The Minor variation is due to the 20-year variation in the mean temperature.⁴⁴

Figure 3: Polar capability constraint (1990–2010)



Source: author.

In contrast, the socio-economic domain is a source of ‘turbulence’ in Russia’s aggregate polar capability. These variations are mainly due to the changing values of gross regional product – the result of the domestic economic recession of the mid-1990s (the culmination of the effects of market reforms) and of 1998. Another reaction to the collapse of the USSR can be observed via the gradual decrease in Russia’s military capability in the Arctic. Even though this drop is slightly corrected in 2000, it still does not reach the level of 1990. The main

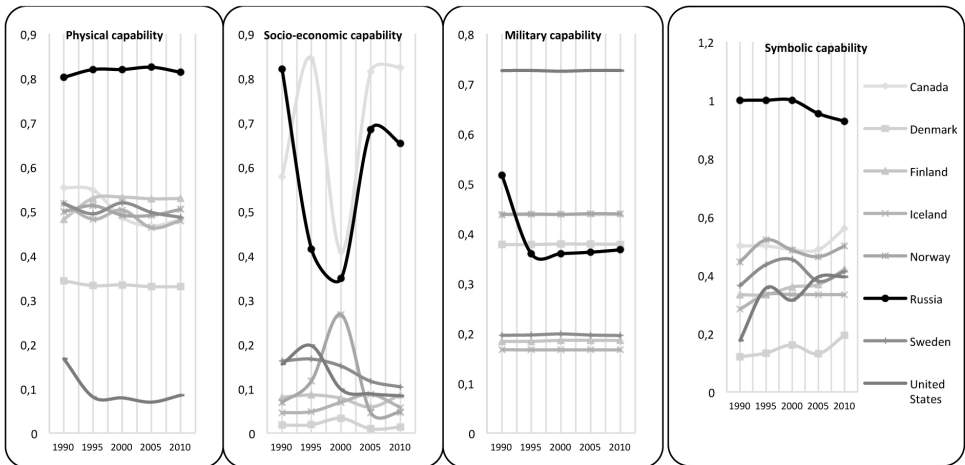
⁴³ See Section 2. 1.

⁴⁴ Because we study only a twenty-year period, temperature variations are not significant.

reason for such a ‘poor’ result is in the simultaneous interplay of two factors in which Russia cannot outbid the opponents: regional military integration frameworks in which the country does not participate, and its current military spending, which is not the highest in the region.

These two factors outweigh the fact that Russia has the largest number of regular military installations in the region. Finally, with the largest national sector claim in the Arctic Ocean, and with the second highest military spending (measured as a percent of gross domestic product) – just after the United States – Russia is a continuous leader in the regional symbolic power domain. The worsening of Russia’s position in this last domain is mainly due to the sharp drop in military spending, from 12.3 percent of GDP in 1990 to 3.6 percent in 2000–2005.

Figure 4: Dimension-specific polar capability



Source: author.

In Place of Conclusion: Implications for Russia’s Arctic Strategy

This analysis differentiates the Arctic states according to seventeen specific attributes, in order to identify the relative geopolitical strength of Russia in the Arctic sovereignty game as determined by its regional (material and virtual) resource base, and to determine whether this strength forms a stable trend throughout the period studied. The analysis of the aggregate polar capability constraint has divided the eight Arctic states into two distinct clusters (‘Russia and Canada’ and ‘the Rest of A8’) with the former representing the most powerful actors in the region and the latter representing the weaker actors. Despite

popular rhetoric on the major 'weakening' of Russia in 1990s due to the period of socialism-to-capitalism transition, the ranking of Russia among all Arctic states according to its power configuration in the Arctic has not changed dramatically, even though some fluctuations can be observed in socio-economic and military geostrategic action spaces in 1995 and 2000. In 2010, Russia remains the most powerful Arctic actor due to the lowest value of its polar capability constraint. The first hypothesis is therefore confirmed. At the same time, the aggregate power grouping is unstable throughout the period under consideration. A non-zero variation range is observed in the evolution of Russia's polar capability constraint, hence the second hypothesis is falsified.

Returning to Arthur Lykke's 'chair metaphor', can we suggest the preference formation framework for Russia in the Arctic sovereignty game based on the evolution of its polar capability constraint (i.e., Russia's strategic means)? If we know the resource base of a given actor, can we theorize on the appropriate mix of concepts and objectives?

In this specific situation, Russia is considered to be a rational decision maker: while choosing whether or not to act, it relies on cost-benefit analysis and attempts to maximize the expected utility. Imported from neoclassical economics, perfect rationality implies a purposeful calculation of all strategic options, subject to the constraints of technology and endowments. But, due to information asymmetry and time constraint, the decision makers in the social world are not able to calculate everything. In order to overcome this problem we follow the economists whose approach is summarized by one of the most respected specialists in methodology of economic research, Mark Blaug:

In common parlance, rationality means acting with good reasons and with as much information as possible or, in somewhat more formal terms, consistently applying adequate means to achieve well-specified ends. For the economist, however, rationality means choosing in accordance with a preference ordering that is complete and transitive, subject to perfect and costlessly acquired information; where there is uncertainty about future outcomes, rationality means maximizing expected utility, that is, the utility of an outcome multiplied by the probability of occurrence (1992: 229).

The instrumental definition of strategy from a national perspective as described by Yanger (2010) allows, for the purpose of future research on Russian policy in the Arctic, to rank preferences over the alternative scenarios (options) prior to running the polar sovereignty game. Preferences might be properly ranked if the following conditions are satisfied: decision makers order alternatives in terms of their preferences and they know the intensity of their preference; the order of preference is transitive (if A is preferred to B and B is preferred to C, then A is preferred to C); decision makers always select the strategy that yields the highest expected utility and the lowest costs (i.e., they opt to act only if the

expected gains are larger than the expected losses) and they consider alternative means of achieving desirable ends in terms of the product of the probability of achieving alternative outcomes and the utility associated with those outcomes – refer to Bueno de Mesquita’s expected-utility model for formal mathematical notation of these assumptions (1989: 144). Based on these assumptions, in aggregate terms, Russia (and, to a lesser extent, Canada) is best ‘equipped’ with polar resources since its polar capability constraint is the lowest in the region. Russia is the most powerful actor in the Arctic sovereignty game: in contrast to all other Arctic states, Russia may allow itself to intensify own goals (i.e. be able to set more ambitious objectives) and use more coercive means to achieve them.

It is much more rational for Russia to be the first to start moving the dispute into a new state of equilibrium (either alone or in functional coalition with other players) than for any other Arctic actor.

The results of this study provide a diagnostic, preliminary map of the geostrategic balance in the Arctic, and the geostrategic importance of the polar vector of Russian foreign policy is steadily growing in modern Russia. It is important to understand whether the periods of major dimension-specific fluctuations (culminating in 2000) which serve, in fact, as evidence that Russia’s capability constraint does not form a stable trend throughout the period studied, are due to the inconsistency of raw input into the dataset, or because there exists a hidden geopolitical development which is not evident at the current stage of analysis. It is also crucial to ascertain whether the observable differentiation of all Arctic states into stronger and weaker players is altered by the introduction of additional indicators of regional development. Finally, the positivist research design, the dataset and the measurement procedure (which is based, among others, on the horizontal approach to the weights of all specific dimensions in the complex system) have certain limitations, so the next step would be to obtain data on other aspects of geopolitical developments in the region (among others, the structure-implied capabilities of the Arctic states, as the centrality in the network of economic, military and demographic inter- and intra-regional material and virtual exchange), and to support current findings by other analytical approaches (regression-based techniques, qualitative analysis) and, to complete the picture, to develop a framework for strategic interactions between all Arctic players in the polar sovereignty game based on polar capability constraint, in the same way as it has been done here for Russia.

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REVIEWS

Bayir Derya (2013): *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law*. Ashgate Publishing Ltd. p/bk 302. ISBN 978-1-4094-2007-1.

JAROSLAV DVORAK¹

In her first book *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law*, Turkish scholar Derya Bayir provides a critical, diligent, and encyclopedic account of the rights of Turkish minorities. This book is especially topical in the context of the contemporary international politics as post-Maidan manifestations of nationalism in Ukraine caused separatism in the country and the loss of Crimea. The fear of direct Russian aggression stirred *the status quo* of national minority policy in many post-communist states.

In her six-chapter book, Derya Bayir has diligently revealed the uniqueness of the Turkish case and the dominant crossovers, stimuli, and consequences of minority policy, which had influence on nationalist reforms. The present review discusses three chapters of the book in greater detail.

In the first chapter of the book, the author has carried out a retrospective reconstruction of the Turkish case, starting with the description of the Ottoman pluralist system and ending with concrete cases of nationalism (linguistic or economic). Bayir has described the millet system in great detail, which, according to the author, “was not a minority protection system in contemporary terms; it was an organizational structure which managed the issues of non-Muslim diversity” (p. 27). It becomes clear that the non-standard state management structure was successfully used in resolving the questions related to minorities. However, standardized administration and centralization leads to the limitation of minority rights. When reading this chapter, one gets an impression that Turkey was the Promised Land of Muslims, Arabs, and non-Muslims. Nevertheless, the evidence provided shows that the non-Muslim community was in constant anxiety about its position. The revolution in 1908 strengthened the position of the political organization “Committee of Union and Progress” and reformatted the diversity management in Turkey to linguistic and economic nationalism.

In the second chapter, the author maintains that the main factor, influencing the development of nationalism, was Turkish national fights for the realization

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of the national state in 1919–1923 rather than fear for national security, which is usually considered to be the influence on nationalism. The evidence provided by the author demonstrates that the appearance of the nationalist discourse transferred the *minority* concept to legal documents. On the other hand, nationalists directed their attention towards fights with Christians, who became minorities in the new Turkish state. However, Turkish discourses are interesting not only because of the relationship with Christians. In the formation of the new Turkish identity, the question of non-Turks Muslims arose. There were attempts to join this religious group with the Turks, changing the concept of Turkish nationalism by alternative concepts, e.g. national groups, Ottomans, or Islam. As the largest Turkish Muslim community was the Kurds, the author does not refer to this community as a minority most probably deliberately. Naturally, nationalists were afraid of Kurdish separatist ideas and developed the discourse of brotherhood and solidarity, considering autonomy. Bayir analyses the Kurdish question and discusses the local administration discourse in the Constitution of 1921. This Constitution was constructed for the new administrative structure of the country (p. 75). Nevertheless, it is admitted that these ideas were not fulfilled, and the Constitution of 1924 strengthened centralization. The book describes one more aspect, i.e. exchange of citizens between Turkey and Greece, which reveals the extremes of nationalism, moving towards a national state. As noted by Bayir, this affected 1,700,000 people (p. 82). The selection criterion of this post-human action was religion, disregarding loyalty, merits, or language.

In the third chapter of the book, the author analyses the diversity management of the Turkish state in 1923–1960. The title of this chapter softens the ideas developed because the reader can understand diversity management as the attempts of the Turkish authorities to match the interests of the stakeholders successfully. However, the research results show authoritarian ways of the Turkish nationalist government in destroying the ethno-cultural diversity in the country. Cultural nationalism is manifested in limiting the use of other languages. In order to be a Turk, one had to speak Turkish; the use of other languages was considered to be a crime, and sanctions were imposed. Not only minorities, but also the Turks were pressed as they were ordered to reject dialects and international words; the status of the Turkish language was stipulated in the constitution, education in other languages was forbidden, surnames and place-names were changed, and the history of Turkey was rewritten. Turkification in economics was very painful, as the minorities were replaced by the Turks in economic relations: the enterprises had to change non-Turk employees into the Turks, Turks were also encouraged to work in the banking and financing sector, and the representatives of minorities were forbidden to work in civil service. The tax system was also used in implementing the Turkish dominance, as high taxes were imposed on the representatives of minorities. The author states that assimilation policy was directed towards transforming Kurds into

Turks. The regime disseminated a discourse that the Kurds do not have history, language, and traditions, and attempted to destroy the Kurdish nation.

In conclusion, it can be maintained that the topic under the present investigation is popular, and various multicultural aspects are analysed in great detail; however, this particular research is focused on the case of Turkey. I would consider the author's conception to describe the questions of minorities and nationalism as diversity management ungrounded because the issues described in the book are related to the formation and implementation of religious-national minority policy, while diversity management is a narrower concept. Despite this, the book provides us with substantial evidence to construct more knowledge about the case of Turkey and to consider new possibilities of thought, language, and implementation of practical multiculturalism policy.

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- If the reviewed book is the result of a particular event (a conference, workshop, etc.), then this should be mentioned in the introductory part of the review
- Review authors should describe the topic of the book under consideration, but not at the expense of providing an evaluation of the book and its potential contribution to the relevant field of research. In other words, the review should provide a balance between description and critical evaluation. The potential audience of the reviewed work should also be identified
- An exact page reference should be provided for all direct quotations used in reviewing the book.

Contributors of review essays should meet the following requirements:

- A review essay should not exceed 6,000 words. It should also comply with all of the above requirements for book reviews
- Authors may either review several books related to a common topic, or provide a review essay of a single book considered to provide an exceptional contribution to the knowledge in a given field of research
- While a review essay should primarily deal with the contents of the book(s) under review, *Politics in Central Europe* encourages authors to use the reviewed material as a springboard for their own ideas and thoughts on the subject.

