



Lost in Annexation?

The Causes of Russia's Foreign Policy Choices in Crimea Anno 2014

Árni Þór Sigurðsson

Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í alþjóðasamskiptum

Félagsvísindasvið

2015



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Leiðbeinandi: Alyson J.K. Bailes

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*To my children,
Arnbjörg Soffía, Ragnar Auðun, and Sigurður Kári*

ABSTRACT

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 marked a dramatic turning point in East-West relations. Likewise, it signalled a watershed in Russia's policy in the near abroad, most importantly with Ukraine, with whom Russia has shared fate and fortune through centuries. What may have caused Russia's resort to such an assertive move against its brother nation, violating international law in many people's opinion, and jeopardising its *renomm  * in world politics? The two nations' common history and culture, and extensively shared identity, were in full play in this 'Borderland' crisis, and so were concrete concerns of geopolitics as the Black Sea region is of utmost significance for Russia. This study examines continuity and change in Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, and *inter alia* considers the role of President Putin. While traditional realist balance-of-power analysis might appear to fit the Crimea case, Russia's foreign policy choices cannot be fully explained or understood unless due weight is accorded to the historical and ideational context, in keeping with constructivist tenets. The study's main finding is that the causes of Russia's action in Crimea must be sought in its perceived lack of recognition as a great power by the West; Russia's strong belief that Crimea is essentially a Russian land; and a defensive calculation whereby Russia – yearning for a strong post-Soviet space – could not face losing the fraternal country of Ukraine to its adversaries.

Key words: *Russia, Crimea, Ukraine, annexation, Putin, foreign policy, International Relations (IR), Constructivism, Self/Other, Soviet Union, Gorbachev, Yeltsin.*

ÚTDRÁTTUR (ABSTRACT IN ICELANDIC)

Innlimun Krímar í Rússland í mars 2014 olli áhrifamiklum umskiptum í sambúð austurs og vesturs. Ennfremur var hún til marks um straumhvörf í stefnu Rússlands í málefnum nærsvæða, einkum Úkraínu, en þessi tvö ríki hafa deilt súru og sætu um aldir. Hvað olli því að Rússland greip til svo einbeittar aðgerða gagnvart bræðraþjóð, fór í bága við alþjóðalög að mati fjölmargra, og laskaði orðstír sinn á alþjóðavettvangi? Sameiginleg saga og menning þessara tveggja þjóða, og sjálfsmynd sem þær deila að verulegu leyti, gegna ríku hlutverki í þessum átökum – sem kennd hafa verið við „Jaðarland“ – og hið sama má segja um geopólítískar áhyggjur Rússa vegna sérstaks mikilvægis Svartahafssvæðisins. Í þessari ritgerð er fengist við samfellu og breytingar í utanríkisstefnu Rússlands frá endalokum kalda stríðsins, og meðal annars er hlutverki Pútíns Rússlandsforseta gefinn gaumur. Enda þótt hefðbundnar raunhyggjukenningar um valdajafnvægi gætu virst eiga við um innlimun Krímar, verður utanríkisstefna Rússlands samt ekki að fullu skýrð og skilin án þess að sögulegu og hugmyndalegu samhengi sé gefið tilhlýðilegt vægi, í anda kenninga mótunarhyggjunnar. Helstu niðurstöður ritgerðarinnar eru að leita verði orsaka aðgerða Rússlands í Krím í meintum skorti á viðurkenningu af hálfu Vesturlandanna á Rússlandi sem stórveldi, í bjargfastri sannfæringu Rússlands um að Krím sé þegar allt kemur til alls rússneskt land, og í varnarviðbrögðum þar eð Rússland – í eins konar þrá eftir sterku bandalagi á svæði gömlu Sovétríkjanna – gat ekki hugsað sér að tapa hinni úkraínsku bræðraþjóð í hendur andstæðingunum.

Lykilorð: *Rússland, Krím, Úkraína, innlimun, Pútín, utanríkisstefna, alþjóðasamskipti, mótunarhyggja, Sjálf/aðrir, Sovétríkin, Gorbatsjov, Jeltsín.*

АННОТАЦИЯ (ABSTRACT IN RUSSIAN)

Аннексия Крыма Россией в марте 2014 г. явилась кардинальной поворотной точкой в отношениях Востока и Запада. Помимо этого, она ознаменовала перелом в российской политике в ближнем зарубежье, в особенности в отношении Украины, с которой Россия веками делила пополам радость и горе. Что могло заставить Россию прибегнуть к столь решительному ходу против братского народа, нарушив – по мнению многих – международное право и рискуя своим реноме в мировой политике? Общая история и культура народов России и Украины, а также значительная общность их национальной идентичности были в полной мере задействованы в этом «пограничном» кризисе – как и конкретные геополитические соображения, связанные с чрезвычайной важностью района Чёрного моря для России. В настоящей работе рассматривается преемственность и изменения во внешней политике России со времён окончания холодной войны – и в частности, роль президента Владимира Путина. Может показаться, что традиционные реалистические концепции баланса сил применимы к крымскому вопросу, однако внешнеполитические решения, принятые Россией, могут быть в полной мере поняты и объяснены только в том случае, если историческому и идейному контексту будет придаваться должное значение в соответствии с принципами конструктивизма. Основные выводы данного исследования заключаются в том, что причины действий России в Крыму следует искать в предполагаемом непризнании России Западом как великой державы, в твёрдой убеждённости России в том, что Крым в сущности является Российской территорией, а также в защитной реакции, поскольку для России – тоскующей по сильному пост-советскому пространству – было немыслимо, чтобы братский украинский народ попал в руки её противников.

Ключевые слова: *Россия, Крым, Украина, аннексия, В.В. Путин, внешняя политика, международные отношения (МО), конструктивизм, Я/Другой, Советский Союз, М.С. Горбачёв, Б.Н. Ельцин.*

*«Umom Rossiju ne ponjat'...
Rossiju možno tol'ko verit'»¹
Fyodor Tyutchev 1866*

PREFACE

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 is a relatively recent event, there has not been much written on it, nor research carried out, so far. The author has a background in Russian Studies and has previously worked as a correspondent for the Icelandic State Broadcasting Service in Moscow, and has also taught Russian Foreign Policy at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics at the University of Iceland. When seeking a subject for a dissertation in International Relations², the unfolding events in Ukraine and Russia's foreign policy choices were an almost self-evident choice.

This research was conducted under the supervision of Adjunct Professor Alyson J.K. Bailes at the Faculty of Political Science, School of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland. It counts for 30 ECTS credits and is in partial fulfilment of a Master of Arts degree in International Relations at the University of Iceland. During the preparation for this assignment I have drawn on and am thankful for comments from fellow-students in the mandatory course 'Masters Theses: Research Plans and Design' as well as the course's lecturer Erla Hlín Hjálmarsdóttir, particularly with regard to the scope of the dissertation. It became clear that there was a risk of the topic expanding too far unless a clearly delimited framework was chosen for the analysis: thus – for example – this study will chiefly focus on two International Relations (IR) theories, and only very briefly address other relevant concepts and theories (see chapter 2). This dissertation is written at and submitted to the Faculty of Political Science at the School of Social Sciences, University of Iceland. The research and the writing fully abide by the Code of Ethics applicable at the University.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Adjunct Professor Alyson J.K. Bailes. She has been of tremendous help through the whole process of this work, and it fact through whole my studies in International Relations. Her supportive and encouraging attitude,

¹ This citation is from one of Russia's greatest romantic poets, Fyodor I. Tyutchev (1803-1873). Its meaning is: 'The Russian spirit is not to be comprehended ... in Russia one can only believe'.

² The term 'International Relations' is written with capital letters when referring to the science as such, otherwise normal spelling rules are applied.

and the many enjoyable discussions we have had on various international affairs, have made a great difference and without her engagement, this dissertation would not have been promptly concluded. She also encouraged me take master-courses on international affairs and global politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science, which was both enjoyable and hugely useful for the completion of my Master degree. I am also grateful to the peer reviewers, Dr. Valur Ingimundarson (Professor in International History and International Relations), Dr. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson (Associate Professor in Political History), and Dr. Jón Ólafsson (Professor in Russian and Cultural Studies), all based at the University of Iceland, with whom I have exchanged views on the topic of this study, thereby underpinning its scientific quality. Pétur Dam Leifsson Associate Professor in Public International Law at the University of Iceland, has been kind enough to read the sub-chapter on legal aspects. I am thankful to Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, who has on several occasions helped me with the many nuances of the Russian language, *inter alia* the Russian translation of the Abstract. During the work on this dissertation the London-based Chatham House Institute of International Affairs invited me to attend a lecture by Professor Richard Sakwa, from the University of Kent, on ‘Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands’, which I very much appreciated. Last but certainly not least, I owe a special debt of gratitude to my family. My wife Sigurbjörg has patiently borne with me, during the time-consuming work on this dissertation, with love and passion. And my children Sigurður, Arnbjörg and Ragnar, to whom I dedicate this work, deserve thanks for understanding and encouragement, and not least for having faith in their old father, who decided to embark on a (still another) university education in his early ‘50s.

All this support notwithstanding, I alone shoulder the sole responsibility for this work, including errors that might be found.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

There are several ways in which Cyrillic letters, and Russian and Ukrainian names and words are transliterated into the Latin alphabet. In this dissertation I have deliberately chosen two different systems. First, names and other proper nouns are transliterated according to English custom (in line with the Romanisation standards set by The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and its British counterpart The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN).³ This includes names and words such as *Gorbachev*, *Yeltsin*, *Sevastopol*, *Kyiv*, *Crimea*, *perestroika*, *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (instead of *Gorbačëv*, *El'cin*, *Sevastopol'*, *Kijiv*, *Krym*, *perestrojka*, *Majdan Nezaležnosti*) and so forth. Second, titles of articles, books, organisations (unless where official English translation is used), and single words and phrases are transliterated according to international scholarly recognised standard.⁴ This entails the use of diacritic signs, e.g. in words and phrases like: *Koncepcija vnešnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii* (*e. Russian Foreign Policy Concept*), *Sodružestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv* (*e. Commonwealth of Independent States*), *Akt prohološennja nezaležnosti Ukraïny* (*e. Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine*).

In the bibliography names of Russian and Ukrainian authors are written according to the first rule,⁵ whereas the title of the source (books, articles, etc) is written in accord with the second rule. The reason for this is first and foremost that the scientific transliteration is widely used in academic literature and corresponds correctly to the Russian/Ukrainian/Cyrillic alphabet and gives readers with knowledge of Russian/Ukrainian accurate information as for the proper Russian/Ukrainian equivalent. On the other hand, it would obviously confuse the reader if the scientific system were used in names and terms that already occupy a place in English tradition. I hope that this dual use of transliteration system will prove to be suitable for the purposes of this work. [English translation of sources in other languages in the list of bibliography is given in square brackets].

³ See: <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/romanization.html>.

⁴ See for instance: <http://intranet.library.arizona.edu/users/brewerm/sil/lib/major.html>.

⁵ There is a certain ambiguity though: the –ий and –ый at the end of names is rendered as –y (as in Dmitry instead of Dmitriy), unless where the person in question uses simple –i in publications (as in Dmitri). The same applies for the ending –ей as in Andrey, in some cases the transliteration –ei is used (Andrei) if that version occurs in an original source.

When referring to particular Russian terms or phrases in the English text, the appropriate Russian term is shown in brackets, with a small *r.* in front. Likewise, English equivalents to Russian terms in the main text are indicated in brackets with a small *e.* in front. In the same vein other languages are indicated by their first letter (*u.* for Ukrainian, *g.* for German).

Translations into English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

Original spelling is retained in quotations.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BRIC	Brasilia, Russia, India, China - an association of five major emerging national economies
CEEC	Central and East European Countries
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FPC	Foreign Policy Concept
GA	United Nations' General Assembly
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova - Organization for Democracy and Economic Development
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IR	International Relations
NATO	North-Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSC	National Security Concept
OUN	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists
RF	Russian Federation
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SC	United Nations' Security Council
SCO	Shanghai Co-operation Organization
SNG	Sodružestvo Nezavisimyk Gosudarstv
UK	United Kingdom
UkrSSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	World War II

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General introduction

ON MARCH 21ST 2014, the Russian Federation (RF – hereinafter: Russia) annexed the Crimean peninsula – an established part of Ukrainian sovereign territory since 1991 (see Map 1-1). This happened five days after a hastily arranged (unconstitutional according to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine) referendum was held in the region in which roughly 95% of participants voted in favour of joining Russia. Russia's occupation and subsequent annexation of this territory, forming part of a prolonged crisis in Ukraine that also involved a pro-Russian rising and alleged Russian intervention in the country's Eastern regions, has been met with condemnation and economic sanctions against Russia by the Western world. Russia, in contrast, has claimed its legitimate right, based on the history of the disputed peninsula and on the will of the Crimean people – expressed through a referendum – to join Russia rather than to remain a part of Ukraine.⁶ The prelude to this dramatic event was the dispute over a planned EU-Ukrainian Association Agreement, implying – in the eyes of many Ukrainians – a real perspective of EU membership for Ukraine. President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to recede from the Agreement with the EU led to unrest in the capital city of Kyiv and, in fact, across the country in the last months of 2013 and the first months of 2014, and ultimately forced him to flee to Russia.

When Russia emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Union it inherited in many regards the latter's position in the international arena. Despite endeavours to join the Western 'club' in the early 1990s, Russia soon retreated to the barracks opposite to the West. Media coverage of, and the general political attitude towards, Russia in the West are often coloured by the same partiality and *Manichaeian* attitude as prevailed *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union. As a result, the understanding and knowledge of Russian mentality and worldview is naturally somewhat one-sided or limited in the West in general.

⁶ The denomination of the country Ukraine will in this dissertation be used without the direct article the in line with The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, see <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ukraine>: 'In the past Ukraine was frequently referred to as the Ukraine; however, since Ukraine declared independence in 1991, most newspapers and magazines have adopted the style of referring to Ukraine without the the, and this has become the more common styling'. Likewise, the proper noun Crimea is written without the article the, which is now a common usage in British media.

Map 1-1 Crimea



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea> (accessed April 18, 2015).

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the causes of Russia's foreign policy choices in relation to the decision to annex Crimea, *inter alia* within the context of common historical and cultural roots of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, and other Russian involvement in Ukraine through history. In the West, the discourse so far has mostly revolved about international repercussions, and it should add value in terms of understanding the Russian move to examine this highly significant event from Russia's perspective, i.e. to figure out the driving forces of the Russian leadership and what calculations (if any) it might have made *a priori* to their decision. The idea is neither to add to the storm of negative Western comments, nor to take side with the supporters of the Russian actors; rather the aim is to examine, or at least to discern, the main causes and motives of the Russian move in Crimea. The approach taken, however, is not *positivist* or value-free. On the contrary, the approach is *interpretivist* in that it does not assume that the research can be depersonalised;⁷ in fact it is difficult to foresee a political study

⁷ Paul Greenbank, "The role of values in educational research: the case for reflexivity," *British Educational Research Journal* 29, no. 6 (2003): 793.

otherwise as value-laden to some extent at least. The important thing, however, is to be conscious about any possible biases and to adopt a reflective approach in the interpretation of the sources applied.⁸

The ‘case’ studied in this dissertation is of great importance in the sphere of International Relations (IR). The event has already caused tremendous repercussions on the international stage, not least in the relations between Russia and the Western world, most notably involving the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In the vortex of this political cold snap, Ukraine itself is faced with political unrest and instability, the consequences of which are yet to make themselves fully felt. It is therefore highly relevant to examine this event, and obviously it can be done from various angles. Here, the point of departure is Russia’s motives: the causes of this dramatic event and the calculations that might have guided the Russian leadership on this seemingly unpredictable and risky voyage. In so doing, it is necessary to take into account the historical context – the fact that Russia and Ukraine have through centuries belonged to the same state structure. As both nations belong to the East Slavic tribe, along with Belarusians, their cultural identity and languages are firmly rooted in the same or similar soil, out of which they have grown and developed, albeit partly in different directions. History also recounts numerous conflicts between Ukrainians and Russians – *inter alia* over territory, including the Crimean peninsula: the battlefield of the current dispute between the two countries.⁹

In Russia-Ukraine relations, history, national identity, language, and culture are all in full play as will be explained thoroughly below. Therefore, the vantage-point taken in the analytical part of this dissertation is one of (social) constructivism. Even so, strategic thinking and geopolitics complicate the picture and the current conflict between East and West has resulted in slogans and headings reminiscent of Cold War rivalry. Consequently, attention will also be paid to explanations offered by the theory of realism, and the contribution of both theories will be discussed and evaluated. Another mainstream IR theory is also addressed, *viz.* liberal institutionalism (particularly for the last years of the Soviet period), because its proponents have argued that it forcefully explains the end of the Cold War. Foreign policy analysis is an

⁸ Ibid., 798.

⁹ Here it is important to pay attention to the complex picture of identity and self-image within Ukraine, i.e. between the western and central part on the one hand and the eastern and southern part on the other, see the discussion in §3.7.

additional tool used in the dissertation and introduced in chapter 2 on the theoretical framework; and chapter 2 also provides a short account of the Russian IR discourse in relation to general IR concepts.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

THE – ADMITTEDLY AMBITIOUS – purpose and the value of the dissertation is to shed some new light on the development of Russian Foreign Policy in the period leading up to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Behind the Russian troops' march (without resistance) into Crimea – it goes without saying – lay an instruction from the highest-ranking authorities in the Kremlin. What might have induced the Russian leadership to order the military to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and allegedly breach international law and contravene Russia's own international obligations, most notably the United Nation's Charter and the Budapest Agreement of 1994?¹⁰ Seeking answer(s) to this pressing question requires a study of the historical and political context within which the decision took place; an examination of the calculations the Russian leadership might have made; and an analysis of the decision-making procedures that were antecedents to the ultimate decision. By exploring the intertwined history and common destiny of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, this study provides added value for explaining and analysing the motives behind Russia's choice to annex a part of Ukrainian territory. It explores the leadership's potential calculations: for example, was this choice a deliberate one or a more reactive one? Also, the dissertation endeavours to answer the pressing question of to what extent the Russian action rests upon President Putin exclusively, or whether it must be regarded as a collective governmental policy that would have been pursued irrespective of the presidential incumbent. The dissertation deals with the fundamental notion of the 'foreign policy' of Russia and its development: specifically the question of assessing *change*

¹⁰ The Budapest Agreement was signed by the presidents of Ukraine, Russia and the US, and the UK Prime Minister on December 5th 1994 (later including China and France), by which the following is confirmed: '1. The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with the principles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine; 2. The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America reaffirm their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defence or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations;' See: *Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances*, 1994. Council on Foreign Relations (Dec 5, 1994).

versus *continuity*. Here the focus is on whether the Russian State, embodied in the current leadership, is *regressionist* (yearning for the ‘good old’ Soviet days), a proponent of the *status quo*, or perhaps seeking a ‘third way’, i.e. to restore political and economic cooperation in the post-Soviet space under Russia’s leadership. The Russian reaction can, further, be viewed alternatively as offensive or defensive in relation to Russia’s general foreign (and security) policy, and/or in relation to the specific Ukraine-EU agreement that sparked off the unrest in the country.

The core research question this dissertation deals with can thus be phrased as follows:

- What have been the *causes* of Russia’s foreign policy choices when deciding to annex the Crimea?

Important sub-questions, as indicated above, include:

- What is the historical, ideational, and political *context* of Russia’s action?
- What *calculations* did the Russian leadership most likely make when deciding on the annexation?
- Does the Russian action illustrate an *offensive* or *defensive* policy?
- Does the annexation of Crimea represent *continuity* or *change* in Russia’s foreign policy?
- What is the *role of the incumbent* Russian President in the decision making?

These questions are interlinked and they are therefore not dealt with separately, but rather discussed and observed as a single complex during the research and exposition.

More detailed issues that will be touched on in the study include whether the annexation of Crimea constitutes a major (*intentional*) *policy shift*, or if it is rather a *fumbling reaction* to the unrest in Ukraine, caused by Russian interpretations of and alarm over developments in the Ukraine-EU relationship. *History*, *strategy*, and *economy* are all vital components that might have contributed to the assessment and calculations made by the Russian leaders. *Timing* is also an important factor in defining the context within which the annexation must be assessed and analysed. Why did Russia react to the development in Ukraine in 2014 and not, for instance, in 2004 or 2008? Russia has hitherto regarded its own relations with the US (and to some extent also to the EU and NATO) as an important part of its foreign policy; so did Russia deliberately take the chance of jeopardising these relations, or did it not foresee or anticipate the reaction we have witnessed? Has the timing factor to do with the composition of the leadership, or simply a

different assessment of the situation from one time to another? Or has Russia actually changed its foreign (and defence/security) policy?

The main assumptions in this study are that Russia's perceived lack of recognition as a great power by the West, its strong belief that Crimea is essentially a Russian land, and a (defensive) calculation whereby Russia could not face losing the fraternal country of Ukraine to its adversaries, *inter alia* because it wanted to restore a strong post-Soviet space, constitute the main causes of Russia's action in Crimea and *vis-à-vis* Ukraine.

The IR theories applied in this dissertation are interwoven into the discussion on these research questions. They help in explaining Russia's motives, causes, and foreign policy choices with regard to its decision to annex Crimea. A correct diagnosis in the current study might, further, help to predict future acts by Russia *vis-à-vis* other former Soviet satellite states – but this is very uncertain, as foreign policy behaviour may also depend on many other factors not studied in the current research. At the end of our analysis there will still be unanswered questions that could benefit from further research.

1.3 Scope and structure of the dissertation

IN THIS STUDY the focus is on Russia's policy and decision-making leading up to the annexation itself. Although a vivid debate has flourished in the aftermath, related to sanctions and the health of the relations between Russia and the West, the long-term political consequences have yet to be brought to light; hence, the developments following the annexation, including the Russian involvement in East Ukraine, fall beyond the confines of this dissertation. Likewise, Western perceptions and motives are barely explored, whilst any relevant perceptions and calculations from the Russian side regarding the West are taken into account.

As the Russian and the Ukrainian people have shared fate and fortune through centuries, the analysis starts with an account of the historical background, although the deeper historical aspects must be kept distinct from the run-up to the latest developments in Crimea. For this purpose it has been necessary to go back as far in history as possible – at least briefly – so as to indicate both the separate features of the Ukrainian tradition, and its organic interweaving with the rise of the Russian state. An interesting angle, which is only touched upon in brief, is the question of how far history has been or is being used (or misused), not only as an explanation,

but not least as a ‘justification’ for the Russian annexation. Such a manipulation would be nothing new in political history and might require an in-depth study of its own.

Next, an account is given of the development of Russia’s foreign policy, focussing on the prelude to the end of the Cold War, through the first decade of the Russian Federation and up to today. The development is explained and analysed in light of prevailing theories within International Relations, and the ‘change/continuity’ phenomena is examined with the help of foreign policy analysis. Providing this context is valuable, and in fact indispensable, for an enquiry into the causes and motives of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and can help in identifying the ‘real motives/causes’ for the annexation.

The time scope of the dissertation is mainly confined to the period immediately prior to the annexation. It has been necessary, however, also to study the development of Russian foreign policy in recent years, as explanations to the Russian move in March 2014 might be found some years back. In the context of the annexation itself, several angles are explored. First, the issues of identity and nation-building are discussed, as these are of utmost importance in the relationship between the Russians and the Ukrainians in general. Second, we focus on the political turmoil in Ukraine in the first decade of the 21st century: the ‘colour revolutions’ in three post-Soviet states, notably Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in the first decade of the new millennium, and Russia’s anxiety that their spirit would ultimately disseminate to Russia did affect Russia-Ukraine relations, but the question is why Moscow did not intervene at that point. Then follow some considerations on the strategic and economic importance of Crimea and the Black Sea region at large. Fourth, international law will be in the spotlight. In the discourse between the adversaries, reference is frequently made to the legal framework; and it is true that the provisions in the UN Charter on sovereignty and territorial integrity of states on the one hand, and the right of self-determination of peoples on the other, may seem contradictory. As this is an important part of the debate and argumentation on either side, a due account of the legal aspects is appropriate. It can certainly shed light on the way in which Russia interprets the international legal framework, and hence adds to the explanation of Russia’s decision to seize Crimea.

Lastly follows a discussion on Russia’s choices, *inter alia* with reference to the appropriate IR theories, and the role of President Vladimir Putin, because he has been the most powerful figure in Russian politics for one and a half decades. By examining the change and continuity in

Russian foreign policy since the demise of the Soviet Union, the importance of individual actors may be better appreciated.

1.4 Methodology

THE DISSERTATION IS a qualitative single case study, reviewing literature which is used to explore the 'case' or the event.¹¹ It is largely built on existing literature, mainly from scholarly sources. In addition, contemporary discourse as reflected in actors' statements and to some extent in the media, not least in Russia and Ukraine, is examined. This method has, like all other methods, both strengths and weaknesses.¹² Conventionally, there have been prejudices against case studies in general, where the critics have pointed out that theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge: that one cannot generalise from a single case, hence, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; that the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; that the case study contains a bias toward verification; and that it is often difficult to summarise specific case studies.¹³ But as Flyvberg explains, this conventional wisdom is wrong and misleading.¹⁴ The fact is that this method is commonly used in political sciences, and is helpful in contributing to the understanding of processes and decision-making within various kinds of organisational and political structures.¹⁵ Within the International Relations subfield of political science, qualitative methods and case studies have long played an important role,¹⁶ although there is no consensus regarding the definition of a case study.¹⁷ In fact, the cases that are research subjects 'often involve interaction effects among many structural and agent-based variables, path dependencies, and strategic interaction among large numbers of actors across multiple levels of analysis'.¹⁸ Applying a case study method requires a 'careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political

¹¹ Chris Hart, *Doing your Masters Dissertation* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2005), 119.

¹² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Inc., 2009), 3.

¹³ Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2006): 219.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4.

¹⁶ Andrew Bennett, And Colon Elman, "Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 170.

¹⁷ Jack S Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (2008): 2.

¹⁸ Bennett, "Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield," 171.

contextual factors'.¹⁹ The qualitative case study method is therefore well suited to comprehend the decisive elements of a given political assessment, on the basis of which decisions are made. The current study of the Russian annexation of Crimea falls nicely within the general case-study framework. It represents a critical case, where the aim is to determine whether certain propositions are valid, and it can also be defined as a unique case with general bearing.²⁰

The ambition of this study is to shed some light on the motives, the causes and the calculations that lie behind Moscow's decision to annex Crimea, and contribute to a better understanding (*nota bene* not 'justification') of the Russian move. The main sources are scholarly writings on Russian Foreign Policy and its development since the demise of the Soviet Union. A sample of literature on the Russian-Ukrainian relationship and common history through centuries is also applied. In addition, a random sample of contemporary statements and media discourse, in Russia, Ukraine, and the West alike is examined.

There are several ways in which the quality of a piece of research can be assessed. Not all methods are applicable in all cases. Creswell speaks about the verification, rather than validity, of research to underline qualitative research as a distinct approach²¹ as opposed to quantitative approach. He identifies eight procedures that can be applied, and advises that in any given qualitative study researchers should engage in at least two of them.²² In the current research the two most important procedures of verification are *triangulation* and *peer review*. The triangulation consists of the use of multiple and different sources and theories so as to provide corroborating evidence. The different sources comprise among others a range of literature on Russian foreign policy and the general discourse on the case studied. Peer debriefers, or a panel of reviewers, have been mobilised as 'devil's advocates' to carry out an external and additional verification of the research process.

1.5 Sources

IN THIS CASE study, based on literature review, it has been essential to think carefully about where to search for appropriate sources. The reason is what could be called 'alleged hostility' or

¹⁹ Nerida Hyett, Amanda Kenny and Virginia Dickson-Swift, "Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports," *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being* 9 (2014).

²⁰ See discussion in: Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 47-50.

²¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 201.

²² *Ibid.*, 203.

scepticism of most Western writers and commentators towards Russia. It is nevertheless a fact that the great majority of scholarly contributions to IR theories and foreign policy analysis stem from the West, making it inevitable to rely to a large extent – but not exclusively – on Western sources. The additional review made of governments' statements and media discourse helps to broaden the variety of sources, and hence to consolidate the research outcome.

The vast majority of the literature used is in English, mostly written by Western scholars, but some sources are in other languages including Russian, Ukrainian, and the Scandinavian languages. In addition, significant use has been made of internet sources, such as media coverage, in the aforementioned languages. A number of Russian academics have published articles in English, both in Russian and Western journals, in addition to writings in the Russian language. The same applies for Ukrainians. Applying a variety of sources helps in ensuring the quality of the research and interpreting different views, thereby reinforcing the arguments of the dissertation.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IS A relatively young academic discipline, in the proper sense. Normally the foundation of IR is traced back to the end of the First World War, notwithstanding the fact that many historians, philosophers, lawyers etc. had written extensively about international politics before. Canonical works, such as Thucydides' *Melian Dialogue* in his 'History of the Peloponnesian War' (431 BC) and Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532 AD), have incontestably inspired IR thinkers of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the origin of the discipline has been convincingly traced to the establishment of a Chair of International Relations at the Aberystwyth University in Wales in 1919.²³

Developments in foreign policy and in the relations between states in general, as well as single events in particular, can be explained and examined with the help of International Relations theories; and there is an abundance of these, although some have – as it happens – enjoyed a more voluminous place in the literature than others. For the purposes of this dissertation two main theories are utilised in attempting to explain Russia's action in Crimea, notably *realism* and *constructivism*. These two theories are explained, as well as the way in which they are applicable for the current work. Some scholars have applied *liberal institutionalism* to explain features of transformation in Russian foreign policy, notably Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*;²⁴ hence a brief account of that theory is apt in that particular context, although this author does not find it useful in explaining Russia's foreign policy choices in regard to the annexation of Crimea. Further, in deepening the study of the annexation, it is meaningful to make use of *foreign policy analysis* (FPA), particularly its interplay with constructivism. Also and importantly, foreign policy analysis emphasises the role of individual actors in foreign policy-making in a much more comprehensive and compelling way than traditional IR-theories do. This is highly relevant as for the importance of Russia's incumbent president with regard to the country's policy architecture and choices. The theoretical overview is then concluded by a short account of the Russian IR context.

²³ Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, "Introduction," in *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Scott Burchill, et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 6.

²⁴ See e.g.: Michael W Doyle, "Liberalism and the End of the Cold War," in *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow & Thomas Risse-Kappen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

2.1 Realism

POLITICAL REALISM (sometimes referred to with its German term *Realpolitik*) as thought of in an IR context, emphasises the ‘imperatives states face to pursue a power politics of the national interest’. It is, as it happens, the oldest theory of international relations and is frequently applied in the study of relations between states and developments on the international stage. The core elements of realism, such as *human nature* and *international anarchy*, can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* from the mid-17th century.²⁵ Realism can be found in several guises and a brief account of the most important of them is appropriate here.

2.1.1 Classical Realism

Realism was the prevailing IR theory for decades, not least during the Cold War period. The theory describes the international system as a struggle for power between states, defining power as capability relative to other states. The main reason for the success of this theory is that it describes in a simple and forceful way the rationales for war, alliances, imperialism, and obstacles for cooperation, as well as other factors of importance in international relations. Importantly, the theory was in conformity with the image that characterised the conflict and polarity between the two superpowers at the time of realism’s modern development. Hans J. Morgenthau, who in the early days of the Cold War became the most significant progenitor of classical realism with his seminal book, *Politics Among Nations* (1948), believed that states – just like human beings – possessed an inherent desire to rule over others, and that this natural characteristic would ultimately spark off conflicts and wars. ‘We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out’.²⁶ Morgenthau emphasised the strength of the multipolar system of power balance and considered the bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union as dangerous. By virtue of the fact that the international system is anarchic – he argued – states must maintain their relative power, implying an enduring power struggle, otherwise they would ‘risk being victimized by others’.²⁷

²⁵ Jack Donnelly, "Realism," in *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Scott Burchill, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 29-30.

²⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The struggle for power and peace* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1993), 5.

²⁷ Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 260.

As a pioneer in the science of International Relations, Morgenthau wanted to extend knowledge as well as applying it, and believed that the status of IR would be easier to defend if it was a science proper. Such a defence turned out to be essential since his theory collided with the prevailing foreign policy of the US.²⁸ By creating a theory Morgenthau was convinced that it would be possible to 'retrace and anticipate' the acts of a statesman, in the past, present or future, by looking 'over his shoulder'.²⁹ If this was true, the theory would obviously be a very powerful tool. The three core assumptions of realism are the state-centric assumption, the rationality assumption and the power assumption.³⁰ Most IR theories, and not only realism, presume rationality and state-centrism,³¹ although they differ in their detailed approaches.

2.1.2 Neorealism

Neorealism (also called *Structural realism*), most forcefully launched by Kenneth N. Waltz in his work *Theory of International Politics* (1979), focusses on the influences of the international system, rather than on the human nature. According to Waltz the international system comprises many powerful states which all seek to survive, and each must do that on its own, since the system is anarchic, i.e. there is no supranational authority. This is what Waltz labels 'self-help'. Contrary to Morgenthau, he maintains that the bipolar system is more stable than a multipolar system. The power struggle, according to neorealism, is determined by the structure of the system and states seek to gain more power relative to other states.

Waltz maintains that the system level has been neglected in IR theories, and directs attention towards the sovereign state that seeks to survive in the anarchical international system. Waltz's argumentation is based on the state as the main unit. Through self-help, the state will survive and all states are alike (*like-units*). The polarity of the system is decisive for the balance of power;³² and – unlike classical realism – neorealism maintains that bipolarity is more peaceful than multipolarity, pointing at two world wars (and many smaller ones) during the period of multipolarity that prevailed from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, ending the Thirty Years War,

²⁸ Robert O. Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics," in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed.

Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 10.

²⁹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The struggle for power and peace*, 5.

³⁰ Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics," 164-165.

³¹ Donnelly, "Realism," 30.

³² Kenneth N Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 83-94.

to the end of the Second World War.³³ The structure is a key element in neorealism and Waltz considers the structure as a constant while the units may change. Hence the structure ensures the stability of the system. For Waltz the main concepts are the *ordering principles*, *like-units* and *distribution of capabilities*. By relative capability, neorealism refers primarily – but not exclusively – to the military strength of one state in relation to another.³⁴ The changes that occur in the international system are due to shifts in relative capability. Neorealism has long been one of the most influential IR theories, although there are various different currents within the neorealist school. For instance, neorealists disagree on the structure of the international system following the end of the Cold War, i.e. whether the system is multipolar, or unipolar with the United States as the sole hegemon.³⁵

The most important divide between neorealists concerns the question of *how much* power is enough. This disagreement is embodied in the divide between so-called *offensive* and *defensive* realists. These two currents divide with regard to the behaviour of states, most importantly ‘over the question of how much power states want’.³⁶ Defensive realism, anchored in Waltz’s seminal work, argues that states should not endeavour to maximise their power because they would be punished by the system if their power becomes too overwhelming, whereas the offensive version claims that seizing as much power as possible is to be preferred.³⁷ Defensive realists refer to classical realism’s groupism, claiming that the stronger the group identity is, the harder it would be to conquer and subjugate other groups and ‘the harder conquest is, the more secure all states can be’. Conversely, offensive realists believe that the anarchy has a ‘conflict-generating structural potential’, hence states must always be suspicious when other states increase their power and be consequently tempted to strengthen themselves. While offensive realists focus on the material structures, defensive realists argue that analysts should look at possible domestic or ideational causes of war and peace.³⁸

Realism in general and neorealism in particular may be tested by applying them to the study of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The distinction between defensive and offensive realism

³³ John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theory: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84.

³⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 1979), 131.

³⁵ Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," 86.

³⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 21.

³⁷ Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," 78.

³⁸ William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and foreign policy," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Amelia Hadfield Steve Smith, and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39.

is of utmost significance, as it may tell us something about the predictability of Russia's future acts in other former Soviet states, and also add to the understanding of its underlying motives.

2.2 Constructivism

AS THE NAME indicates, constructivism (also called *Social Constructivism*) is based on the idea that relations between states are socially constructed. Human nature is the core fabric on which international relations are grounded, but these relations 'take specific historical, cultural, and political forms that are a product of human interaction in a social world'.³⁹ The notion of constructivism was already well-rooted in other branches of social sciences when it emerged in the IR context, e.g. through the works of the psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the first half of the 20th century. In a sense, constructivism shares some strands with Marxism, as both are adversaries to realism and liberalism, claiming that the latter fail to comprehend how social processes are historically constructed.⁴⁰ This is quite clear, for instance, when comparing the constructivist understanding of identity, ideas and cultures with what Marx wrote: 'Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand'.⁴¹

A core question regarding constructivism is whether it is an International Relations theory proper, or perhaps rather an analytical tool. Even Nicholas G. Onuf argues that constructivism is a study of social relations rather than a theory.⁴² In general, constructivism is seen as the main *foe* of neorealism as well as neoliberalism, although Wendt's intention was to bridge the gap between the two. As for constructivism, it is fair to say that the internal debate concerns two approaches: the rationalist and the critical.⁴³ This discontent has been expressed through different

³⁹ Karin M. Fierke, "Constructivism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 189.

⁴⁰ Mark Rupert, "Marxism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 154.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (NY: Socialist Labor Party of America, 2003), 12.

⁴² Nicholas G. Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual," in *International Relations in a Constructed World*, eds. Vendulka Kubáľková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1998), 58.

⁴³ Christian Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," in *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Scott Burchill, et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 221.

labels, such as the distinction between ‘conventional’ and ‘critical’ constructivism,⁴⁴ but this distinction will be left aside for the purpose of this study.

The chief theoretical foundations of constructivism within IR are laid down in Onuf’s book *World of Our Making* (1989) and not least in Alexander Wendt’s wide-cited article *Anarchy is what states make of it* (1992). The main characteristics of constructivism are its emphasis on ‘the importance of normative as well as material structures’.⁴⁵ It is the study of ‘identity formation and how social interaction produces social identities’.⁴⁶ The proponents of constructivism were dissatisfied with realism, liberalism and historical materialism, because their fundamental thesis is that interests – be it of individuals, states or the international society – are not decided *a priori*. Rather, the individuals collectively construct and change cultures through ideas and norms. States and states’ interests are therefore a product of the social identity of these agents: ‘identities are the basis of interests’.⁴⁷ Constructivists reject explanations based purely on material structures. In his above-mentioned article, Wendt maintains that the structure of the system is unable to explain the behaviour of state, and that identity may change due to collective behaviour and experience. Constructivism examines the power of ideas, cultures and languages, and searches for the fount of power and how it constructs identity. In Onuf’s words, constructivism ‘begins with deeds. Deeds done, acts taken, words spoken’.⁴⁸ The driving force of constructivism is, thus, not least the approach that considers interests and identity in terms of a historical process, paying particular attention to changes. By developing such insights, constructivism has become the main adversary to realism within the IR sphere.⁴⁹

Wendt asserts that the end of the Cold War was a catalyst for the constructivist thinking within International Relations.⁵⁰ His *Anarchy is what states make of it* was a watershed in underpinning constructivism. The aim, according to Wendt, was to bridge the gap between realism and liberalism. Constructivism emphasises the importance of ideas and norms and argues

⁴⁴ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 181.

⁴⁵ Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," 209.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Constructivist Approaches," in *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, ed. Jennifer Sterling-Folker (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 116.

⁴⁷ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 42, no. 6 (1992): 398.

⁴⁸ Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making* (London: Routledge, 2013), 36.

⁴⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* 110, no. Spring (1998): 40-41.

⁵⁰ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

that states' behaviour, exactly as is the case for individuals, is socially constructed. International anarchy and the *security dilemma* are not fixed invariables, as realism assumes. Wendt opposes the neorealist notion of *self-help* as a product of the anarchic structure; instead he claims that if the world is characterised by self-help, that is not because of the structure. His main idea is that the structure of interests and identity is not simply determined by anarchy, and that it is essential how the anarchy is understood: anarchy is what states make of it. Of fundamental importance for constructivism is that 'people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them'.⁵¹ Constructivists working in International Relations have thus drawn the notion of collective identity into the science. Everyone who focusses on how collective identities are constructed in international relations can draw on the extended space that Wendt creates.⁵² In simple terms, 'constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life'.⁵³ While neorealists claim that structure is fixed and unchanged, constructivists challenge the idea that structure explains everything, arguing that no change would be possible within such a structurally deterministic view of the world. In their view agents (people and states) also play a role, and thus the 'agents and structures are mutually constituted'.⁵⁴ This means that Wendt does not altogether abandon the structural feature of anarchy. It has been claimed that constructivism should be looked at as a sort of a 'middle ground' between rationalists and relativist IR theories.⁵⁵ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink argue that constructivism is in a sense similar to *rational choice theory*, because 'it does not, by itself, produce specific predictions about political outcomes that one could test in social science research'.⁵⁶ The way in which constructivism 'has the potential' to bridge the gap between most IR-theorists and postmodernists makes sense when taking into account that constructivists' 'quarrel with mainstream IR-theories is ontological, not epistemological'.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," 394, 396-397.

⁵² Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31, 35.

⁵³ John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 856.

⁵⁴ Alexander Wendt, "The agent-structure problem in international relations theory," *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1987): 350.

⁵⁵ Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997): 330.

⁵⁶ Martha Finnemore, And Kathryn Sikkink, "Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001): 393.

⁵⁷ Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (1998): 327.

In sum, one may argue that constructivism challenges the more traditional IR theories on their ontology, while accepting the positivist epistemology, and that by so doing constructivists have ‘gained considerable legitimacy’.⁵⁸ In Hopf’s words, conventional constructivism ‘is a collection of principles distilled from critical social theory but without the latter’s more consistent theoretical or epistemological follow-through’.⁵⁹ As we have seen, identity is one of the most important notions in constructivists’ view. It is also on the origin of identity that the most distinct divergence between conventional and critical constructivists surfaces; the former can ‘accommodate a cognitive account for identity, or offer no account at all’, whereas the latter ‘are more likely to see some form of alienation driving the need for identity’.⁶⁰ In other words, conventional constructivism is closer to an objective view on the world, whilst the critical branch rather sees the world through interpretive/relativism lenses, to paint the divide in stark colours.

Identity holds a pivotal place in the processes of nation-building and policy formation concerning Russian-Ukrainian relations. Constructivists argue that the international environment is subject to processes of interaction, so that ‘actors’ identities are not given but are developed and sustained or transformed in interaction’.⁶¹ Further, as Alexander Wendt claims, ‘[A]ctors acquire identities – relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self’,⁶² which means that identity derives from an actor’s self-understanding. Wendt explains that two ‘kinds of ideas can enter into identity’, i.e. ‘those held by the Self and those held by the Other. Identities are constituted by both internal and external structures’.⁶³ In line with the ontology of agents and structures as being mutually constitutive, constructivists regard identities ‘as social relationships that change over time and across contexts’,⁶⁴ so identities underpin interests, as opposed to the liberal, realist and Marxist assumption that interests stem from material sources.⁶⁵

Constructivism brings (back) ideas, culture, and domestic politics to the IR sphere. These are all important things for shaping a state’s identity, and ‘identity politics at home constrain and

⁵⁸ Fierke, "Constructivism," 193.

⁵⁹ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," 181.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁶¹ Maja Zehfuss, "Constructivism and identity: a dangerous liaison," in *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his critics*, eds. Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander (London: Routledge, 2006), 95.

⁶² Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," 397.

⁶³ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations*, 224.

⁶⁴ Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 2007), 65.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 86.

enable state identity, interests, and actions abroad'.⁶⁶ It is here that constructivism becomes of the utmost significance for the study of Russia's motives and foreign policy choices, when it decided to intrude on Ukraine and annex Crimea. The main question that arises for the present study is whether Russia's motives are palpably interwoven with the (constructed) Russian identity, history and culture.

2.3 *Liberal Institutionalism*

JUST AS REALISM can be traced back in history to ground-breaking writings by e.g. medieval thinkers like Hobbes, liberal institutionalism (sometimes labelled *idealism* or simply *liberalism*) has its roots in seminal works by 18th century liberal thinkers of the Enlightenment, most notably Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bentham to name but a few. Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (g. *Zum ewigen Frieden*) from 1795 has in particular been greatly influential in the development of liberalism within IR. Although liberal institutionalism, like realism, is a state-centric theory, it focusses on the limits of state power, democracy and individual rights, cooperation between states and economic interdependence. As realism became the most prominent theory in International Relations in the 20th century, not least after the Second World War, liberal institutionalism came under the shadow of the prevalent realism.⁶⁷ However, states' growing interdependence and the globalisation of the world economy, along with the end of the Cold War and subsequent dissemination of democracy, has created the conditions for liberal institutionalism to revive.⁶⁸

The power politics of realism are pretty much absent in liberal institutionalism, which largely explains why the former had the upper hand during the lion's share of the confrontational 20th century, with two World Wars and a cold one. Firmly embedded in the Kantian peace philosophy, adherents of liberal institutionalism claim that the world becomes more peaceful as more countries convert to democracy.⁶⁹ Contrary to the realist assumption, individuals are essentially rationalists and good according to liberals, who thus take a more optimistic view than their realist counterparts. The anarchy of the international system can be managed and

⁶⁶ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," 195.

⁶⁷ Jill Steans et al., *An Introduction to International Relations Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2010), 23.

⁶⁸ Scott Burchill, "Liberalism," in *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Scott Burchill, et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 57.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey Haynes et al., *World Politics* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2011), 139.

ameliorated through international organisations, which is one of the core elements of liberal institutionalism. Ultimately, however, a successful and perpetual peace would depend on the mere political will of the main players.⁷⁰ To some extent, this liberal worldview appears ingenuous, particularly when assessed in the light of the belligerent 20th century and the empirical evidence it brings.

This disbelief notwithstanding, liberal institutionalism has possessed influential proponents within politics and academia alike in the last century. Woodrow Wilson, the US president during the First World War, was incontestably first among equals in shaping that group. He was confident that international organisations were of critical significance in securing peaceful coexistence in world politics. Loyal to his conviction, in 1920 he initiated the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations.⁷¹ Ironically, his own country eventually chose not to become a member state of the League, rendering the organisation somewhat impotent.

The end of the Cold War inspired liberals to prophesy the ‘end of history’, represented by the alleged victory of capitalism and democracy over communism and autocracy. Francis Fukuyama saw this event as ‘the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution’ and the ‘final form of human government’.⁷² This optimism was obviously premature and substantially naïve, as the political developments on the international scene following the end of the Cold War were to show. However, Fukuyama’s and similar reflections on this highly significant event were influential at the time, particularly because they ‘encapsulated many of the core liberal ideas’ that flourished in the US and many international organisations alike.⁷³

By virtue of liberal institutionalism’s focus on economy and international organisations, this author finds the theory of limited use in explaining the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine over Crimea, which is the objective of this dissertation. This is mainly because the relationship between Russia and Ukraine themselves is not defined by any institutional framework that liberal institutionalists would recognise, and Russia’s behaviour implies seeing Western-type organisations in the role of an external enemy rather than a welcoming or restraining community. This is not to say that the theory would not be able to add value to some angles of the conflict, e.g. if the emphasis of enquiry was on the role of international

⁷⁰ Stephanie Lawson, *International Relations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 40, 85.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books Inc., 1992), xi.

⁷³ Burchill, "Liberalism," 59.

organisations, such as the OSCE or EU; but since that focus fall beyond the confines of the current study, liberal institutionalism will be left aside.

2.4 Foreign Policy Analysis

AS MENTIONED ABOVE, International Relations as an academic discipline has its origin in the establishment of a professorship at the Aberystwyth University in Wales in 1919. It is multi-disciplinary in that it includes various areas, e.g. politics, economy, history, law, philosophy, and sociology. The main impetus for this was the desire to understand and explain the causes of conflict between states, thereby promoting worldwide peace and security and decreasing the likelihood of interstate war. In the course of time, as the complexity of world politics, including conflicts, became clear, IR also came to cover foreign policy-making, strategic studies, and peace research.⁷⁴ Hence, foreign policy analysis evolved as an important tool within IR.

While traditional IR theories deal with the international system in general and its manifold features, foreign policy analysis is occupied with the sources of decision-making and states' actual policy conduct.⁷⁵ Here, the agent-structure *problématique* becomes a core subject. While mainstream IR theories normally define states as the main units of analysis, FPA acknowledges the fundamental interrelation between human agents and social structures,⁷⁶ and moreover, it puts the emphasis on the human being as the true agent and is thus actor-specific.⁷⁷ Valerie Hudson maintains that it became clear in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union that it was 'impossible to explain or predict system change on the basis of system-level variables alone'. Therefore, an actor-specific complement to IR theories was needed.⁷⁸ As such, FPA is not to be considered as an independent 'intellectual domain'; rather, it should be looked at as one approach in the toolbox for studying foreign policy.⁷⁹ It places the emphasis on the making of policy decisions themselves rather than on the policy outcomes, mediating 'between grand

⁷⁴ Haynes et al., *World Politics*, 6-7.

⁷⁵ Chris Alden and Amnon Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1.

⁷⁶ Walter Carlsnaes, "The agency-structure problem in foreign policy analysis," *International Studies Quarterly* (1992): 246.

⁷⁷ Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁹ Steve Smith et al., "Introduction," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, eds. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

principles and the complexity of reality'.⁸⁰ In doing so foreign policy analysis draws on different IR theories, and it provides a useful addition to such theories as a vehicle for studying how and why policy-makers make certain decisions and choices. This is why FPA is an appropriate tool in the current study of Russia's decision to annex Crimea.

It is necessary to explain in some details how FPA is linked to the main IR theories applied in this dissertation, since this will also show why constructivism is arguably best suited to expound the Russian move.

2.4.1 Foreign Policy Analysis and Realism

William C. Wohlforth acknowledges that realism does not guarantee a 'clear and accurate analysis' of the foreign political realities. For instance, the leading advocate of neorealism, Kenneth N. Waltz, proclaimed as late as in 1988 that the Cold War was 'firmly rooted in the structure of postwar international politics and will last as long as that structure endures'.⁸¹ Another influential realist, John J. Mearsheimer, argued in 1990 that 'the West has an interest in maintaining the Cold War order, and hence has an interest in maintaining the Cold War confrontation'. Thus as he saw it, it would be in the interest of the West to support the survival of a strong Soviet Union⁸² – a view also in line with the neorealist belief that a bipolar world would be safer than a multipolar world. The political realities of the 90s, however, became different from what these prominent neorealists predicted and argued. Therefore, Wohlforth argues, analysts of foreign policy must take into account that 'anarchy in the real world is a variable, not a constant'.⁸³

Wohlforth also points out that theories operate in a competitive scholarly world, whereas many foreign policy analysts previously tended to consider theories as complementary instead of competitive.⁸⁴ They would thus draw on different theories, making the most out of each of them, to suit the *explanandum* at hand. The problem here is that realism and certainly neorealism are all too focussed on the material structures of the international system and rationalism, and do not

⁸⁰ Valerie M. Hudson, "The History and Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, eds. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

⁸¹ Wohlforth, "Realism and foreign policy," 47-48.

⁸² John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the future: instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International security* (1990): 125.

⁸³ Wohlforth, "Realism and foreign policy," 51.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

account for ideational structures and reflectivism. As a result, such theories might be too abstract to deal with certain foreign policy decisions; or as Gideon Rose puts it, '[b]ecause neorealism tries to explain the outcomes of state interactions, it is a theory of international politics; it includes some general assumptions about the motivations of individual states but does not purport to explain their behavior in great detail or in all cases'.⁸⁵ Waltz himself was not of the opinion that theories of foreign policy should be tested on the basis of his structural realist framework; on the contrary, he distinguished clearly between international politics and foreign policy by stating that '[m]uch is included in an analysis, little is included in a theory'.⁸⁶

Realism includes, as we have seen, a variety of strands which differ in their fabrics, while all maintain the core foundations of a belief in the anarchical international system and the importance of material structures, such as power balance and distribution of capabilities.

As mentioned, Waltz maintained that international politics are not foreign policy, thereby implying that IR theory and FPA were distinct and unconnected enterprises. Not all realists share this view, and the result has been the birth of yet another strand within the realist realm, *viz.* neoclassical realism. This current endeavours to capture neorealism's rigorous and general theorising, while also trying to give a more comprehensive account of foreign policy by factoring in specific traits of a particular situation. Neoclassical realism

explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.⁸⁷

At the same time as neoclassical realists build on the neorealists' structural theorising, they also factor in domestic conditions and the human traits of decision-makers. Consequently, the neoclassical school can be situated in the middle between neorealism and constructivism, as pointed out by Rose.⁸⁸ By that token neoclassical realism has substantial advantages over other

⁸⁵ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," *World politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 145.

⁸⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, "International politics is not foreign policy," *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): 54-55.

⁸⁷ Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," 146.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 152, 158.

realist strands with regard to foreign policy analysis, because its aim is not to create a single universal IR theory: rather, it questions which strand of realism is most suitable for analysing foreign policy in a given context.⁸⁹

2.4.2 Foreign Policy Analysis and Constructivism

The guiding lights of constructivism have been eloquently encapsulated in the titles of two seminal works, *viz.* that ‘the world is of our making’ and that ‘the anarchy is what states make of it’.⁹⁰ Ideas, norms, and identity in a socially constructed world contribute to shaping political action, where agents and structures are mutually constitutive. Wendt’s notion of ‘*Self-Other*’ further adds to this complexity, as the ‘daily life of international politics is an on-going process of states taking identities in relation to Others, casting them into corresponding counter-identities, and playing out the result’. How to manage this process and how to treat the ‘Other’ then becomes a fundamental task of foreign policy which the unit-level alone cannot account for.⁹¹ In reality, foreign policy decision makers will in all probability take such factors into account in their calculations when choosing their foreign policy orientation, because ‘identities strongly imply a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action in particular domains, and with respect to particular actors’.⁹² This is evidently in stark contrast to the emphasis of realism and liberalism on the self-interested state. As a further difference, constructivism assumes that people would ‘consider options for action reflexively and consider whether the action is appropriate for their identity’, which realism and liberalism would not have them do.⁹³

Constructivism’s emphasis on mutually constitutive identities, social practices and institutions makes it in many regards better suited to tackle changes in international politics than other IR theories. Chris Alden and Amnon Aran express this by proclaiming that employing ‘constructivism provides a means to account for the interplay between ideas, agents and structures, all of which are in a condition of flux and act as sources of influence on foreign

⁸⁹ Wohlforth, "Realism and foreign policy," 40.

⁹⁰ See fn. 47 and fn.48.

⁹¹ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations*, 21-22.

⁹² Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," 175.

⁹³ Trine Flockhart, "Constructivism and foreign policy," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Amelia Hadfield Steve Smith, and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85-86.

policy'.⁹⁴ In arguing in the cause of constructivism as the most logical base for approaching foreign policy analysis, David P. Houghton points at the weaknesses of realism and in particular neorealism:

[f]or neorealists, states are the primary actors, while for FPA scholars it is foreign policy elites; for neorealists, states act on the basis of the rational calculation of self-interests, while in FPA elites act on the basis of their "definition of the situation"; foreign policy for the realist is best understood as the endless search for security in an anarchical world, while for the FPA scholar it is seen as a series of problem-solving tasks; power is the currency of IR for the neorealist, while in FPA it is information; the anarchical structure of the international system determines the state's behavior in neorealism, while that system is merely an arena for action in FPA; and policy prescriptions for the neorealist involve adapting to structures rationally, while compensating for misperception and organizational pathologies is the prescription offered by FPA.⁹⁵

Even such an unquestionable realist as Stephen M. Walt has acknowledged the contribution of constructivism to international politics, and as such it has become a third 'pillar' of international studies – in addition to realism and liberalism.⁹⁶ Foreign policy analysis is, as we have seen, focussed on the process of decision making, i.e. how and why the political elite comes to a certain conclusion in designing its foreign policy. Constructivism meanwhile is occupied with processes of social construction, which in turn resonates with FPA's emphasis on agents and the ideas and identity of the decision maker(s).⁹⁷ This provides *inter alia* according to Houghton, the 'justification for collaboration or "marriage" between individual and social construction' because 'each benefits from restoring the missing piece of the puzzle each leaves out; neither is complete without the other, and neither can fully claim to represent the process of making foreign policy in isolation'.⁹⁸ In the same vein, Hudson argues that FPA and constructivism seem 'natural bedfellows' although the engagement between these two schools has been 'precious little systematic'.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Alden and Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 105.

⁹⁵ David Patrick Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 1 (2007): 25.

⁹⁶ Paul A Kowert, "The Peril and Promise of Constructivist Theory," *Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies* 13, no. 3 (2001): 158.

⁹⁷ Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁹⁹ Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 218.

In studying a state's foreign policy choices and motives one inevitably has to dwell on the processes leading up to certain decisions, as well as whether such decisions constitute policy change or continuity for the state in question. In spite of being convinced that realism will remain the most compelling theory in understanding international relations, Walt also concludes that constructivism is best fitted 'to the analysis of how identities and interests can change over time, thereby producing subtle shifts in the behavior of states and occasionally triggering far-reaching but unexpected shifts in international affairs'.¹⁰⁰

Grounded on the discussion above, this author believes that constructivism is best suited to embrace the complexity of, and to characterise, the causes of Russia's foreign policy choices in regard to its decision to annex Crimea. That is not to say that other theories, such as realism, are of no importance; it is quite commonplace, as noted above, to apply a variety of theories or approaches in order to fully understand a decision-making process. Thus, the current study will to some extent draw on realism's theorising, in particular from the defensive version, although constructivism is considered to give the most vigorous explanation. This will be further elaborated during the discussion on Russian foreign policy in chapter 4.

2.5 IR theories in Russian context

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AS an academic realm, has traditionally been vastly West-centric and 'all too often reflects political, ideological, and epistemological biases of Western, particularly American, civilization'.¹⁰¹ This does not mean that IR theory has not developed in other corners of the world. In post-Soviet Russia there has been an academically open debate on IR, but the main currents are deeply entrenched in Russian history from the tsarist period onwards. The question whether Russia is in Europe is discussed below, but constructivist-oriented scholars 'suggest concepts that transcend the known dichotomy of the region as either pro-Western or Eurasian'.¹⁰² In this debate the question whether Russia needs to 'return' to the West or 'preserve' its distinctiveness has been prominent. Dmitri Trenin, for instance, assumes that Russia needs to 'become' a part of Europe and what he calls the 'new West'. He argues that

¹⁰⁰ Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 44.

¹⁰¹ Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A. Tsygankov, "New directions in Russian international studies: Pluralization, Westernization, and isolationism," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 2.

¹⁰² Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A. Tsygankov, "Russian theory of international relations," in *International Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert A. Denemark (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2010), 6379.

Russia has historically been European, but often ‘fell out of’ Europe.¹⁰³ Yet he grants Russia the right to pursue its own distinct path. While Russian IR thinkers have developed their own ‘schools’ – often divided into Westernism, Statism, and Civilisationism¹⁰⁴ (see Table 2.1) – these main currents correspond basically to the traditional schools of liberalism, realism, and constructivism, as articulately described by Andrei Tsygankov and Pavel Tsygankov.¹⁰⁵ Such a division pertains to the ‘Russian idea’ and the perception of the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, and it is nothing new; rather it has been a recurrent *leitmotiv* in Russian politics for centuries. It is therefore fully appropriate to apply traditional IR theories in seeking to explain developments in Russian foreign policy and the leadership’s foreign policy choices, while however paying due attention to the distinctiveness of Russian circumstances. The different stance between Russia and the West can for example be seen in their dissimilar perception of key concepts such as sovereignty and democracy. Charles Ziegler argue that ‘from the Russian perspective both sovereignty and democracy are socially and culturally determined, and clash with Western readings of sovereignty and democracy’,¹⁰⁶ which indicates that the Russian perception represents a constructivist approach, whilst the Western take signifies a realist understanding of the concepts.

Table 2.1 Three Russian ideologies

	Westernism	Statism	Civilizationism
Self	Part of the West	<i>Derzhava</i> or independent state	Independent civilization
Other	Non-Western world	States threatening Russia’s independence	Western or non-Western civilizations
Action	Integration with the West	Building a normal great power	Resisting Western pressures <i>or</i> Promoting inter-civilizational dialogue

Source: Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A. Tsygankov.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Dmitri Trenin, *Integracija i identičnost' - Rossiya kak "novyj Zapad"* [Integration and identity - Russia as a "new West"], (Moscow: Moskovskij Centr Karnegi, 2006), 63, 167.

¹⁰⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2010), Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A. Tsygankov, "National ideology and IR theory: Three incarnations of the 'Russian idea'," *European Journal of International Relations* (2010): 677.

¹⁰⁶ Charles E. Ziegler, "Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: Realist and constructivist perspectives," *International Politics* 49, no. 4 (2012): 415.

¹⁰⁷ Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "National ideology and IR theory: Three incarnations of the 'Russian idea'," 670.

Russia's decision to annex Crimea can be viewed from different angles, but it cannot be segregated from Russian foreign policy at large. Liberalism (Westernism) considers Russia to be part of the West ('Self'), whereas the non-Western world constitutes the 'Other', and thus integration with the West (Atlanticism) would constitute the right policy. It sees the international system as characterised by democratic unipolarity, and the emphasis on Eurasia as a distinct concept of regional order is rejected. While this stance gained momentum as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and many of its proponents occupied important positions in the first half of the 90s, its star has been ebbing in Russian politics ever since, particularly after Putin's coming to power. Realism (Statism) accentuates the logic of power (*r. deržava*), so that the self-image becomes one of Russia as an independent state, whilst the 'Other' is perceived as all states that threaten Russia's independence. The realists conceptualise the international order in terms of pluralistic unipolarity, and regionally they focus on the post-Soviet space as the crucial arena to preserve Russia's influence. These ideas were embraced by prominent political figures like Yevgeny Primakov, whose multi-vector orientation was conspicuous.

For protagonists of realism in Russian politics, building the nation into a normal great power is the preferred policy; hence they seek the West's recognition rather than being inherently anti-Western. President Putin, for instance, has 'emphasized bilateral relations in Russia's periphery and aimed to develop a partnership with America to deter terrorism'.¹⁰⁸ Constructivists (Civilisationists) by contrast, deem an independent civilisation to constitute the 'Self', whereas the 'Other' consists of Western and non-Western civilisations alike. Russian civilisationism can, in fact, be divided between constructivism and what has been called 'cultural essentialism': these two schools have in common 'an interest in studying the role of culture in international relations and proceed from the assumption of Russia's cultural or civilizational distinctiveness', while they 'radically differ in the methodological and ontological assumptions they make in their research'.¹⁰⁹

Constructivism stresses the pluralism of civilisations as representing the international system, while rejecting the idea of either pro-Western or Eurasian regionalism; Gleb Pavlovsky, for instance, uses the label 'Euro-East' (*r. Evrovostok*) to conceptualise 'the region as a part of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 669.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 675.

Europe and distinct in its own right'.¹¹⁰ This doctrine advocates 'humanistic globalism' and 'cultural dialogue' and has probably been most prominently supported by Mikhail Gorbachev, *inter alia* by funding research which promotes the idea of inter-cultural dialogue, and introducing the idea of peace and tolerance as a kind of 'bridge' between civilisations.¹¹¹ Interestingly, Putin has also shown sympathy with this stance by calling for enhanced cooperation with the Islamic world and raising concerns 'about the danger of the world splitting along religious and civilizational lines'.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Gleb Pavlovsky, "Rossija vsë eščë iščet svoju rol' v mire," [Russia is still searching for its role in the world], *Nezavisimaja gazeta* (2004).

¹¹¹ Mikhail S. Gorbachev, ed. *Grani globalizacii* (Moscow: Al'pina, 2003), Preface.

¹¹² Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "National ideology and IR theory: Three incarnations of the 'Russian idea'," 677.

3 BORDERLAND – BURDEN OF A COMMON LEGACY: HISTORY AND IDENTITY

EVERYONE WHO MAKES THE acquaintance of Russia-Ukraine relations will soon encounter the term 'Borderland'. This is not surprising, as the shared geographical border of these countries stretches for roughly 2,000 km, constituting more than 35% of Ukraine's total borders with other countries and by far the longest. This term is also used figuratively, chiefly because of the etymology of the word itself. While there exist various explanations of the meaning of the word *Ukraine* (r. *Ukraina*; u. *Ukrajina*), the most reliable in all probability is the Russian-born German linguist Max Vasmer's etymology. He derives the word from the Old Russian *oukraina*, meaning simply 'borderland' (r. *pograničnaja mestnost*) and descending from the proto-Slavic word *kraj*, meaning *edge* or *border*, but adds that this denomination was before 1918 only used for the eastern part of the country, i.e. without Galicia.¹¹³ Some Ukrainian linguists, by contrast, prefer to derive the word from the more contemporary meaning of the Ukrainian *krajina*, Belorussian *kraina*, and Russian and Polish *kraj*, all meaning simply *country* or *region*, rather than *edge* or *borderland*.¹¹⁴ In consequence, the term 'borderland' in Russia-Ukraine relations does not only connote the general meaning of the English word *borderland* but rather has deeper roots in the etymology of the languages and history of the two peoples, and is commonly used to refer specifically to Ukraine. This connotation is important to bear in mind. Also, it should be mentioned that when tsar Peter I had transformed the Muscovy tsardom into the Russian Empire, the terms *Great Rus'*, *Little Rus'*, and *White Rus'*, (referring to Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus respectively – r. *Velikaja Rus'*, *Malaja Rus'*, and *Belaja Rus'*) became frequent and remained so under the Russian imperial rule.¹¹⁵

3.1 *Kievan Rus' – where the roots lie?*

THE SLAVIC NATIONS are normally divided into three main sub-groups: West-Slavic, South-Slavic, and East-Slavic, the latter consisting of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. The first

¹¹³ Max Vasmer, *Ètimologičeskij slovar' russkogo jazyka* [Etymological Dictionary of the Russian language], vol. IV (Moscow: Progres, 1987), 156-157. Galicia normally refers to a territory in the southwest and west in contemporary Ukraine, bordering Hungary and Poland.

¹¹⁴ F. Shevchenko, *Istoriya Ukraïns'koï RSR* [The History of Ukrainian RSR], vol. 1 (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1979), 189.

¹¹⁵ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 68.

literary texts were written in the 11th century in Church Slavonic. It was in the old Kyiv, which at that time was the main city in the Kievan Rus',¹¹⁶ the Church Slavonic literature flourished, with influences from Byzantium and the South-Slavic Bulgaria (see Map 3-1). The Old Russian literature, most notably the Chronicle *Tales of Bygone Years*, and *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (*r. Povest' vremennykh let* and *Slovo o polku Igoreve*) also originated there. In the 13th century the Mongol Tatars under Genghis Khan defeated Kyiv in *The Battle of the Kalka River*, which eventually led to the beginning of the end of the Kievan Rus'. The Tatars ruled for one and a half centuries and it was the Grand Principality of Moscow (often simply denominated *Muscovy*) that repelled them, an undertaking finally consummated by the Grand Prince Ivan III the Great in 1480. This development meant that Kyiv became a periphery of Muscovy and the ties between the Russians in the south and north loosened. The Russians in the south (Ukrainians) as well as in the west (Belarusians) were pulled under the power of their mighty neighbours in the northwest, i.e. Poland and Lithuania. The only carriers of national and religious consciousness in this period were in fact the persevering Cossacks in the lower Dnieper region, who had been hardened by a century long fight with the Tatars.¹¹⁷ Following the *Truce of Andrusovo* in 1667, Ukraine was divided between the Muscovy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the river Dnieper as border, which subsequently led to Ukrainian history being dealt with within the context of imperial Russia.¹¹⁸ As a result of the *Battle of Poltava* in 1709, where Peter the Great won a decisive victory over the joint forces of Sweden's Charles XII and the Ukrainians, Russia became a major European power and Ukrainian autonomy saw the dawn of its long-term decline (see Map 3-2).¹¹⁹

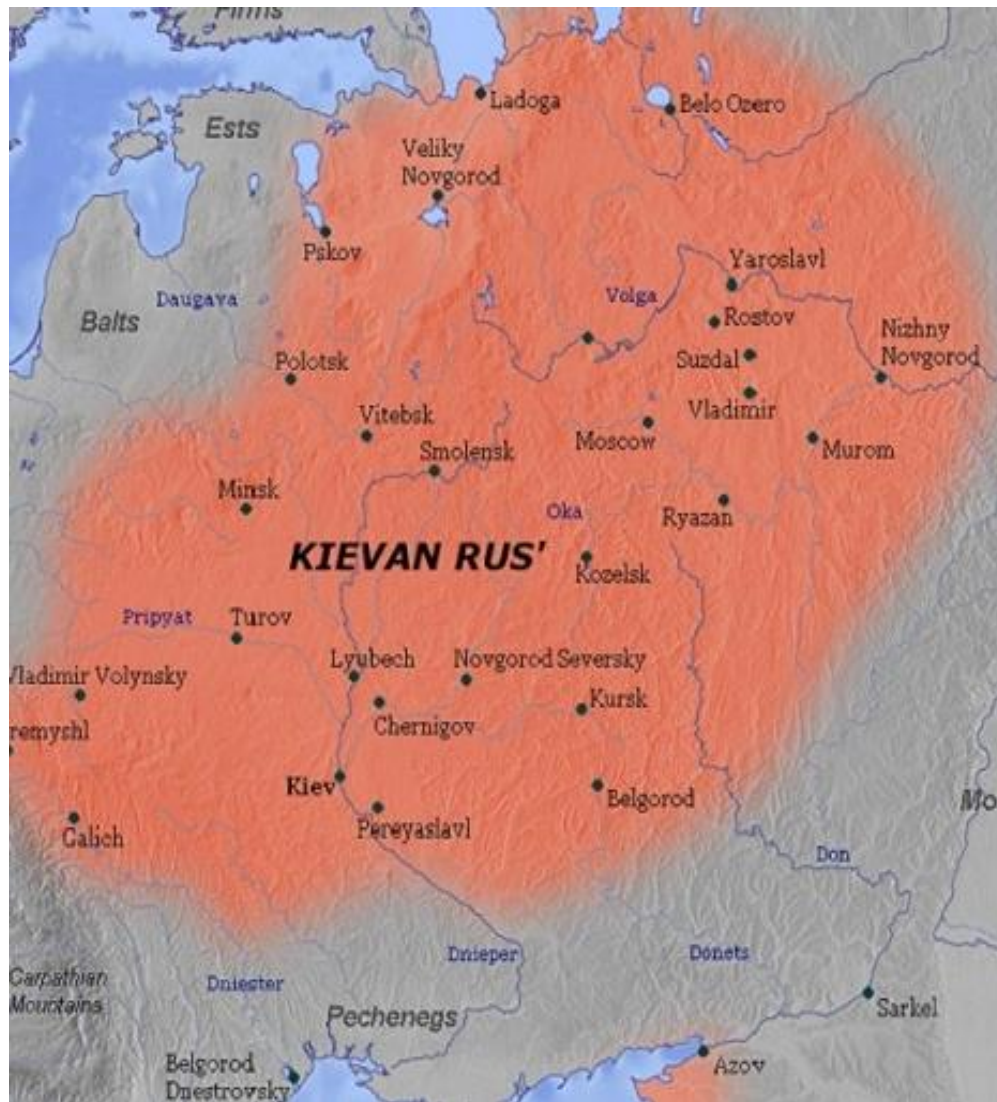
¹¹⁶ It was Prince Oleg of Novgorod, who reigned from 879-912, who united the northern and southern Rus' in one state and proclaimed Kyiv its capital, and famously named it 'mother of Russian cities' (*r. mat' gorodov rossijskikh*), see. e.g. Árni Bergmann, *Rússa sögur og Ígorskiða* [Russian stories and The Tale of Igor's Campaign], (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009), 27. This denomination has sarcastically echoed in the recent verbal war between Russia and Ukraine, cf. §5.4.2.

¹¹⁷ Olav Rytter, *Slavisk målreising* [The Slavic Languages' Formation], (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1971), 97-99.

¹¹⁸ Serhii Plokhy, *Ukraine & Russia: Representations of the Past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 56. 169.

¹¹⁹ Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29.

Map 3-1 Kievan Rus'



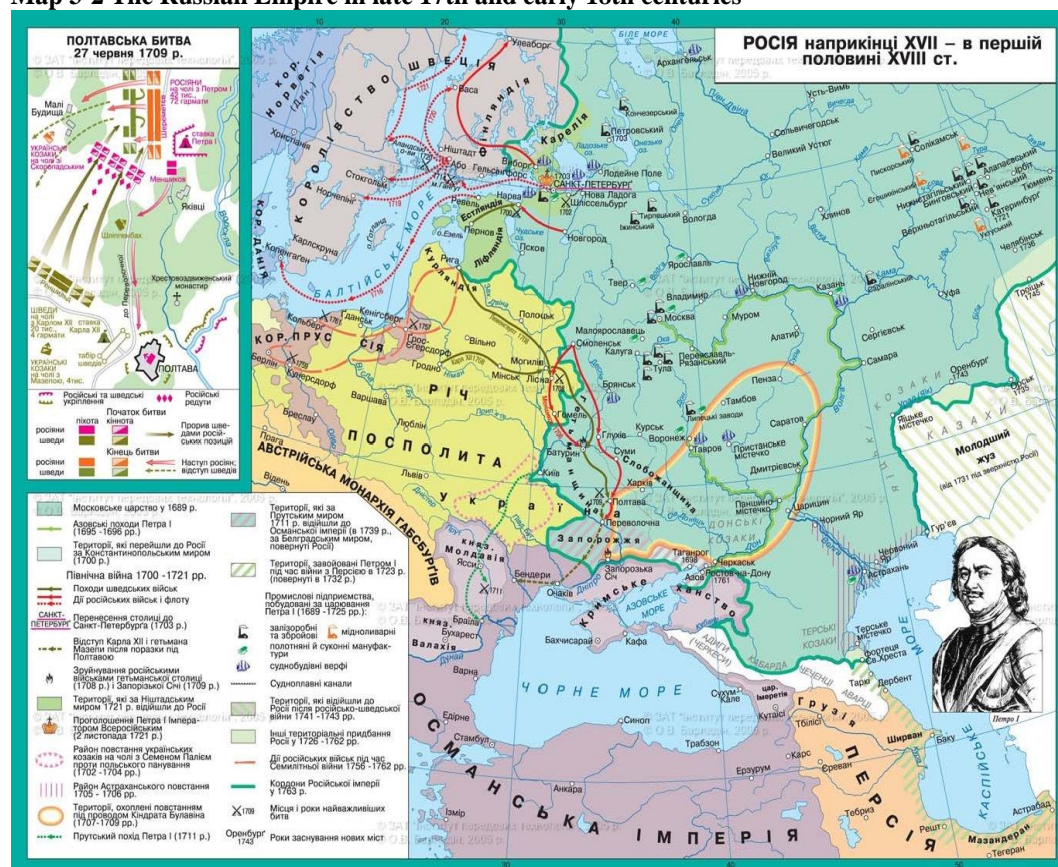
Source: http://www.stamp-collecting-world.com/russianempire_history.html (accessed April 18, 2015).

This historical background also coloured the development of the Ukrainian language. Although the differences between Ukrainian and Russian languages are slight, the Ukrainians were well aware of their language's distinctive features. The language renaissance that started in the second half of the 18th century was particularly strong in the eastern part of Ukraine. In spite of the Russification policy of the Russian emperors, in particular Catherine II the Great, Ukrainian writers began to publish works in their native language, but Ukrainians also contributed a strand to Russian literature, most notably the renowned Nikolay Gogol.¹²⁰ Who was Ukrainian and who was Russian? – the distinction was not always straightforward. Famously,

¹²⁰ Rytter, *Slavisk måltreising* 100-102.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky once said: ‘We all come out from Gogol's *Overcoat*’ (r. *Vse my vyšli iz Gogolevskoj šineli*),¹²¹ referring to one of Gogol’s St. Petersburg short stories and implying that Gogol, a Ukrainian, more or less shaped what at that time was the modern Russian literature. A distinctive Ukrainian literary tradition can, however, be traced back to the national poet, Taras Shevchenko, a contemporary to Gogol. His inborn mastery of the popular tradition and common language created the wellsprings of the final literary formation and dissemination of the Ukrainian language,¹²² and was so influential that he has been named the ‘father of the modern Ukrainian nation’.¹²³ So interwoven was the Ukrainian and Russian culture, literature, languages, history and tradition.

Map 3-2 The Russian Empire in late 17th and early 18th centuries



Source: <http://ukrmap.su/uk-wh8/460.html> (accessed April 18, 2015).

¹²¹ Geir Kjetsaa, *Nikolaj Gogol: Den gåtefulle dikteren* [Nikolai Gogol: The Mysterious Poet], (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1990), 8. Kjetsaa argues that it is of no significance whether it actually was Dostoyevsky or Turgenev that made this statement about Gogol, the important thing is that it could have come from all the great Russian writers as a tribute to the poet that Anton Chekhov called ‘the biggest in Russia’.

¹²² Rytter, *Slavisk målreising* 105-106.

¹²³ Plokhyy, *Ukraine & Russia: Representations of the Past*, 7.

3.2 *The Mongols and Tatars' presence in Crimea*

THE CRIMEAN PENINSULA is a true cauldron of peoples from a historic-cultural perspective, with archaeological evidence of human settlement dating tens of thousands years back. The name *Crimea* is believed to stem from the city of Qirim (today Stary Krym), which was the capital of the Golden Horde province, located in the south-east of the peninsula. Allegedly, the name derives from the Crimean Tatars via the Mongols, but the ancient Greek called it Taurica after the Tauri people (allegedly meaning *mountaineers*). By size it is almost the equivalent of Belgium, and the isthmus that joins it to mainland Ukraine is barely 8 km wide. Before the Slavs gained foothold in Crimea in the 10th century, the territory was populated by Huns and later Khazars, a Turkic nomadic people, ancestors of the Crimean Karaims. The Mongols captured Taurica in the 13th century and gave it its present-day name of *Krym*.¹²⁴ One of Genghis Khan's descendants established a Crimean Khanate in the mid-15th century, and some decades later it became a suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan with the Khan's consent, remaining under the Ottoman Empire for three centuries up to 1783,¹²⁵ (see Map 3-3).

Crimea played an important role, strategically and economically, for the Ottomans and Russians alike. From the Ottoman vantage point it provided a defence to the North against the increasingly powerful Russia; the Khanate army assisted the Ottomans on their many warfare against Persia to the East and against the Hapsburgs and Poles to the West; and lastly the territory was a vital economic and trading centre, *inter alia* for slave trading. From Russia's vantage point, by contrast, the Ottoman rule of Crimea was a nuisance of no lesser magnitude. Two of Russia's most important waterways – Don and Dnieper – were located within the Khanate, and the frequent slave-raiding incursions into Russia by a Muslim neighbouring state – an heir to the Mongol tradition – were particularly embarrassing and humiliating for the waxing Russian Empire. Hence, in the wake of the victory of Empress Catherine the Great over the Ottomans, it ultimately annexed Crimea into the Russian Empire. From 1783 the Muslim Tatar population of Crimea, which at the height of the Khanate rule counted over 5 million, thus came under Russian control.¹²⁶ Throughout the Russian rule over Crimea, large flows of Tatars emigrated in reaction to an immensely oppressive tsarist policy, and they only counted roughly

¹²⁴ M. Clement Hall, *The Crimea: A very short History* (Bedford: Amazon.co.uk Ltd., 2014), 7-8.

¹²⁵ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), xi-xii.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

300,000 by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The annexation saw a massive migration of Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, and Germans into Crimea, thus vastly changing the composition of the peninsula's population.¹²⁷

Map 3-3 The Crimean Khanate in 1600



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_Khanate (accessed April 18, 2015).

The Crimean Tatars, a collective denomination of a number of Turkic peoples, have been inhabiting the territory since the early Middle-Ages. Another important group of people are the Cossacks. They do not constitute a nationality or a religion of their own right: they were just free men, initially serfs who had run away in a search for freedom, living in a no-man's-land. Their natural habitats were steppes along main rivers, such as Don and Dnieper; the inhabitants of the former were commonly known as Russian Cossacks, the latter Ukrainian or *Zaporozhian* (e.

¹²⁷ Hall, *The Crimea: A very short History*, 8.

beyond the rapids) Cossacks.¹²⁸ Importantly, the Cossacks made an invaluable contribution to obstructing Tatar raids into Ukraine, thus assisting the Russians to defeat the Ottoman rule over Crimea, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783.¹²⁹

Under the Crimean Khanate there were several non-Muslim minorities living there, small in numbers but important nonetheless. These were Christian Armenians, Georgians, and Greeks, and the so-called Karaim Jews. The former mostly emigrated from Crimea into Russia in the 1770s, whereas the latter remained in Crimea.¹³⁰ The Karaims had more or less assimilated Turkic traditions and ways of living, apart from the religion, and they spread out to various parts of Eastern Europe.¹³¹

Russia repeatedly waged wars with the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. During Catherine the Great's reign in the latter half of the century, commonly known as 'Russia's Golden Age', the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774) resulted in the Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca, making the Crimean Khanate independent from the Ottoman Empire and aligning it with Russia. On paper at least, Crimea was thus independent between 1774 and 1777.¹³² This short-lived independence came to an abrupt end when Catherine the Great incorporated the Crimean Khanate into Russia in 1783, and thereby 'finally fulfilled the age-old dream of the Muscovite and Russian rulers, which even Peter I had failed to realize – control of the Crimean Peninsula and most of the coastal region north of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov'. Subsequently, Catherine the Great succeeded in usurping the whole of Ukraine and it became an 'integral part of the Russian Empire'.¹³³

3.3 The Crimean War and the Tsarist period

THE NAVAL CITY of Sevastopol on the South-western tip of Crimea has long been the symbol of the Russian fleet, often labelled 'the city of Russian glory' as it is closely linked to the Russian national identity. Not least, it formed the focal point in the two-and-a-half-year-long Crimean

¹²⁸ Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 58.

¹²⁹ Hall, *The Crimea: A very short History*, 28-30.

¹³⁰ Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783*, 13.

¹³¹ Henryk Jankowski, "Karaims of the Crimea and Eastern Europe: Some Questions of Ethnicity and Identification," *Studia Orientalia* 99 (2004): 83.

¹³² Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783*, 55-56.

¹³³ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 275-276.

War (1853-1856), which was waged as a result of international conflict over the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Two of Europe's at that time most powerful empires, Britain and France, supported the Ottomans, because they neither wanted Russia to seize control over the important Black Sea straits nor to strengthen its position in the Balkans. Following the victory over Napoleon earlier in the century, Russia was convinced that its army and fleet were one of the most powerful in Europe: but that did not prove to be the outcome in the Crimea. However, the Russians fought courageously in a battle that both sides had to pay dearly for in terms of casualties. It was only in 1855, after a long and exhausting siege, that the Russians had to concede and renounce its claim to maintain a Black Sea fleet. This was obviously a major blow to the Russian Empire, but the heroism displayed by the Russians sparked off the myth of Sevastopol as a glorious city and the veneration of its heroes,¹³⁴ most famously immortalised by the renowned novelist Lev Tolstoy – who participated in the Crimean War – in his *Sevastopol Sketches*: 'Long will the great tracks of this Sevastopol epic live in Russia, where the hero was the Russian people...'¹³⁵. As it happens, the Crimean War was the largest war waged in Europe between the Napoleonic wars and the First World War; the death toll was probably around 650,000 men, thereof three-quarters on the Russian side, who died overwhelmingly from diseases. The Crimean War was thus not as unimportant as it is occasionally thought to be, but rather the greatest conflict fought in the 19th century.¹³⁶

Although the Crimean Tatars participated in the war against Napoleon, the Russian Tsar did not entirely trust them, accusing them of intrigue and betrayal by cooperating with the enemy. After the war, Russian Tsar Alexander II saw the Crimean Tatars as a fount of danger and instability. In 1859 he therefore empowered his officials to take steps for their emigration, which resulted in some 100,000 Crimean Tatars having left Crimea by the end of 1860.¹³⁷ This massive emigration, accompanied by the immigration of Russians and Ukrainians, contributed to a huge shift in the composition of the Crimean population. These changes notwithstanding, the Crimean Tatars constituted the largest ethnic group in Crimea in the 1897 census, counting approximately 36%, with Russians closely behind with 1/3 of the population and Ukrainians

¹³⁴ Plokhy, *Ukraine & Russia: Representations of the Past*, 185-187.

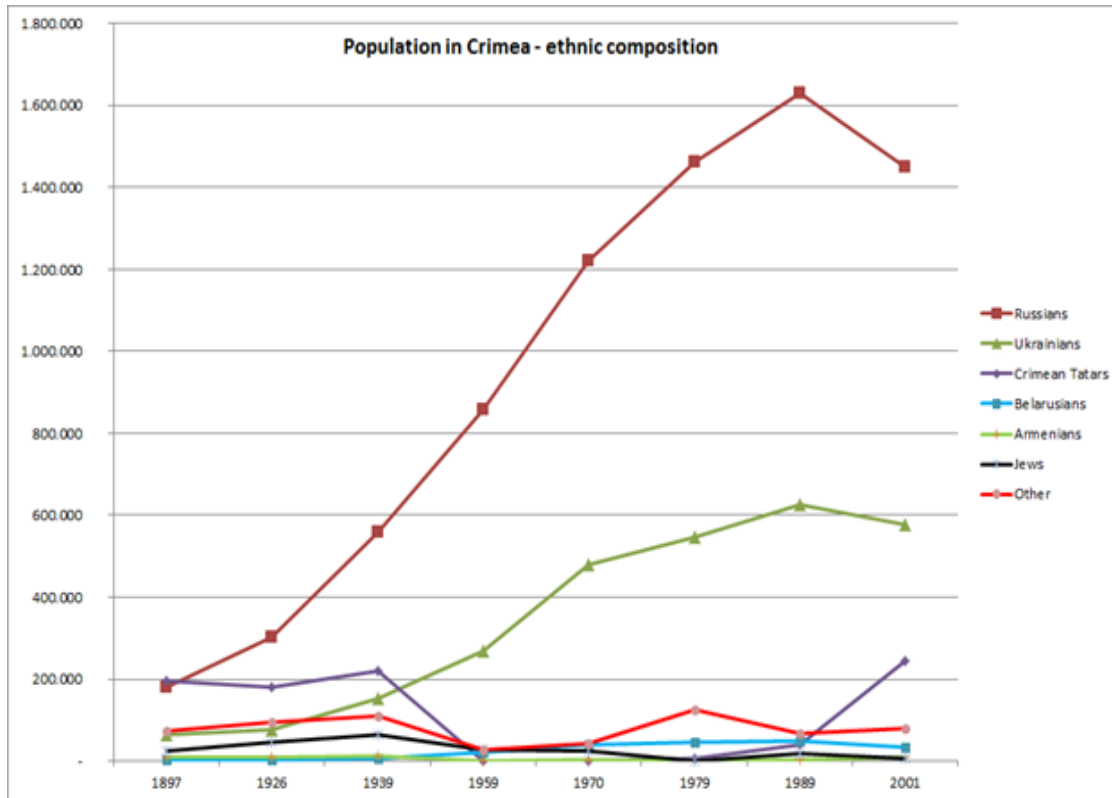
¹³⁵ Lev N. Tolstoy, *Sevastopol'skie rasskazy* [Sevastopol Sketches], (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1983), 31. (r. 'Nadolgo ostavit v Rossii velikie sledy èta èpopeja Sevastopolja, kotoroj geroem byl narod russkij...').

¹³⁶ Clive Ponting, *The Crimean War: The Truth Behind the Myth* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 334.

¹³⁷ Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Inst. Press, 1978), 89.

about 12%. The 20th century again saw a dramatic change as will be discussed below. (See Figure 3-1 & Figure 3-2).

Figure 3-1 Ethnic composition of the Crimean population 1897-2001



Source: Based on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Crimea (accessed April 17, 2015).

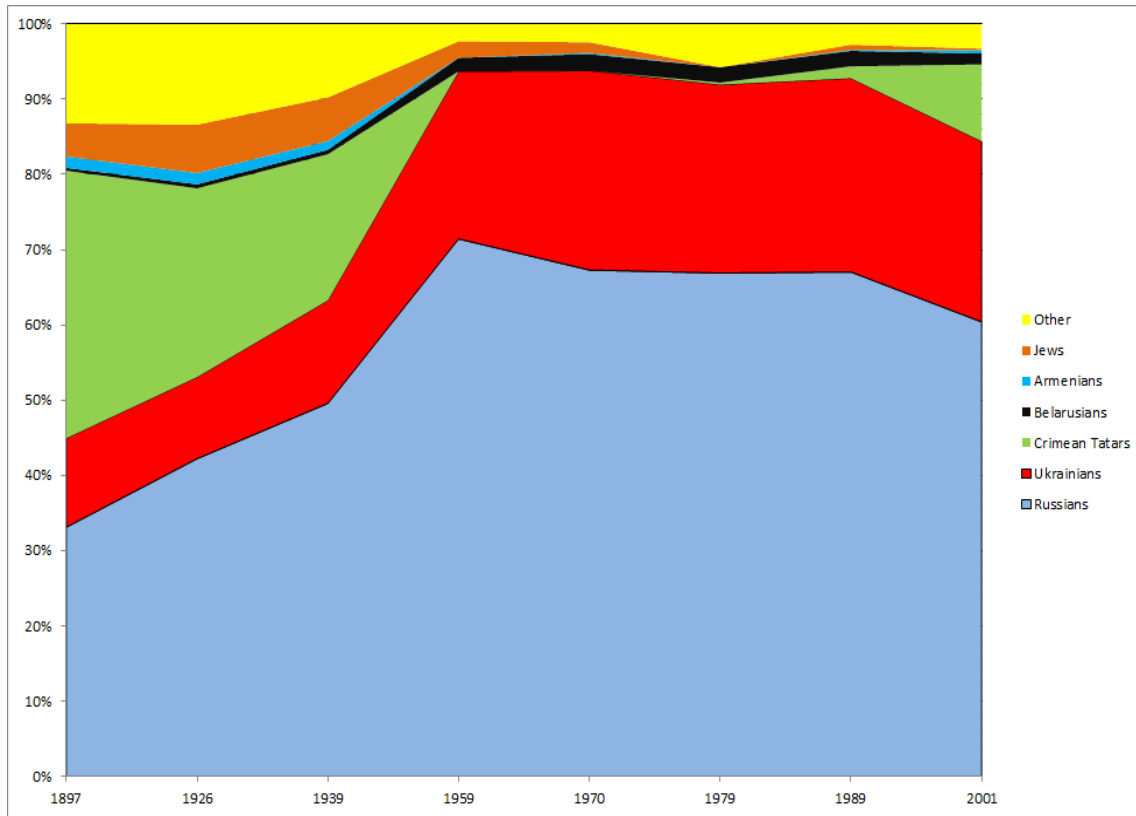
3.4 An attempt for an independent Ukraine – Bolsheviks emerge to power

THE DEBACLE OF the Crimean War was a keystone, though not the only one, for a reconstruction in Russian society that ultimately led to the abolition of serfdom. It has been pointed out that ‘the catastrophe in Crimea had made the argument for reform, including emancipation, irresistible’.¹³⁸ Dissatisfaction had festered throughout society, not only among peasants and nobles, but not least in the *intelligentsia* which emerged and put down its roots in the latter half of the 19th century. These elements were most notably motivated by the well-known novel *What is to be done?* (r. *Što delat?*) by the philosopher and critic Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1863), and also Ivan Turgenev’s famous novel *Fathers and Sons* (r. *Otci i deti*), published one year earlier. These

¹³⁸ Gregory L. Freeze, "Reform and Counter-Reform 1855-1890," in *Russia - A History*, ed. Gregory L. Freeze (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 172-173.

were important stepping-stones in the growth of the revolutionary movement that culminated in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.¹³⁹

Figure 3-2 Ethnic composition of the Crimean population 1897-2001 - %



Source: Same as figure 3-1.

At the turn of the century, the revolutionary movement was not united. The Social-Democratic Worker's Party, formally established in 1898, was divided between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, and in 1902 the Socialist Revolutionary Party was established. The two parties differed *inter alia* on the question of nationality, posing a particular problem for the Ukrainian revolutionaries. The latter party favoured 'federalism and national-cultural autonomy', which the former saw as reactionary, arguing that in the event of a national-cultural autonomy the bourgeoisie would be dominant and would hinder social change. For the Ukrainians the question was whether to fight for independence or to retain their relations with Russia and its burgeoning socialist movement. Actually, the first mention of an independent Ukraine as a political goal occurred in Iuliian Bachynskyi's book *Ukraina irredenta* (1895), and it was

¹³⁹ Ibid., 191-192.

followed by similar formulations a decade later.¹⁴⁰ The contradictions facing the different currents in the Ukrainian revolutionary movement revolved around national versus social priorities, reflected in two socialist parties: the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party and the Ukrainian People's Party. Other non-socialist parties also emerged, some of them emphasising a federal system in which Ukraine would constitute a part of a democratic Russian Empire. In the wake of the 1905 revolution in Russia, political parties in Ukraine were legitimised, and Ukrainian provinces were represented in the first Russian parliament, the Duma, in the 1906 elections. Ukrainians used the Duma to push for local autonomy and acknowledged status for the Ukrainian language. However, this phase of parliamentarism was curbed by Tsar Nicholas II, and the political achievements of the Ukrainian movement were soon reversed. This development obviously weakened the struggle for independence or autonomy, and eventually forced the movement underground or even into exile, while the ban on the use of the Ukrainian language in higher educational institution and on Ukrainian publications was revived. Nicholas II's policy of suppression eventually led to a situation where 'the idea of an exclusive Ukrainian identity [...] prevailed only among the intellectual and political fringes of Dnieper-Ukrainian society'.¹⁴¹ Such were the conditions for the Ukrainian sense of identity on the brink of the First World War.

After the demise of the Russian Empire in the October Revolution of 1917 and the Austria-Hungarian Empire by its defeat in the First World War, the ground was fertile for the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state comprising both the eastern and western part of the country. While ethnicity could be claimed as a significant factor of Ukrainian identity, entitling the nation to a state of its own, there was a stark contrast between the 'confusion about national and social allegiances' in the Russian-ruled eastern part and 'the national solidarity among the Ukrainian masses' in Galicia in the west.¹⁴² The larger strategic circumstances may have paved the way for the Ukrainian revolution, but by the same token 'the ensuing international struggle influenced its outcome', as the mighty armies that waged war on either side, 'together with the political decisions made by the victorious Allies after World War I, sealed the fate of the Ukrainian lands'.¹⁴³ As a result of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in early 1918,

¹⁴⁰ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 446.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 378-382. [Omission here].

¹⁴² Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 66.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67.

the Bolshevik government in Russia under Lenin's leadership recognised the independence of Ukraine, which the Ukrainian *Rada* had proclaimed in December the previous year.¹⁴⁴ The fact that the Ukrainians aligned with Germany and its allies in the ongoing war clearly shows that they were eager to stay outside Russia, and apparently believed that their independence was better secured by leaning towards their mighty western neighbours rather than Bolshevik Russia. This is also evident from the fact that Pavlo Skoropadsky, who was proclaimed so-called *hetman* of Ukraine in April 1918, had already *a priori* accepted the conditions that the Germans set for his coming to power. However, this Ukrainian independence proved short-lived chiefly due to the Central Powers' capitulation in November 1918 and the fact that the Allies favoured a united Russia. Despite Skoropadsky's fumbling endeavours to save the *Hetmanate*, his credibility was shattered and he fled the country with the Germans as they abandoned Kyiv.¹⁴⁵

Ukraine was now a country in desolation. The distinction between the east and the west was unmistakable and the country had become a victim of great power rivalry, a pawn in the division of territory when the victorious Allies redrew a map of Europe at the Peace Conference in Versailles. The American historian, Richard Pipes, has described the situation in the following year as miserable:

The year 1919 in Ukraine was a period of complete anarchy. The entire territory fell apart into innumerable regions isolated from each other and the rest of the world, dominated by armed bands of peasants or freebooters who looted and murdered with utter impunity. In Kiev itself governments came and went, edicts were issued, cabinet crises were resolved, diplomatic talks were carried on – but the rest of the country lived its own existence where the only effective regime was that of the gun. None of the authorities which claimed Ukraine during the year following the deposition of Skoropads'kyi ever exercised actual sovereignty. The Communists, who all along anxiously watched the developments there and did everything in their power to seize control for themselves, fared no better than their Ukrainian nationalists and White Russian competitors.¹⁴⁶

It would not be an overstatement to claim that the political situation in Ukraine was chaotic in 1918-1920 (Map 3-4). It was characterised by a ping-pong game between the Bolsheviks and the Directory of the Rada, also involving Germany and Poland. The Red Army overthrew the Rada in February 1918 only to be ousted by the Germans few months later. The Soviet authority

¹⁴⁴ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 595.

¹⁴⁵ Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 73-76.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), 137.

was then restored in the fall of 1919, but eventually the country was divided between Soviet Russia and Poland as a result of the termination of the Soviet-Polish War in 1920, sealed in the Treaty of Riga in 1921. This made an end to the Ukrainian revolution.¹⁴⁷ As for Crimea, it changed hands on numerous occasions during the Civil War period of 1917-21 in Russia; it was actually in Crimea that the White Army ‘made their last stand’ in their fight with the Bolshevik Red Army, but eventually the resistance was defeated.¹⁴⁸ Henceforth, the eastern part of Ukraine, including Crimea, belonged to Russia, whereas the western part was under Polish rule, and this situation remained so until the World War II.

Map 3-4 Ukraine in 1920



Source: http://www.conflicts.rem33.com/images/Ukraine/sovukwar_E.htm (accessed April 18, 2015).

The Bolshevik leadership in Ukraine tended to align with Stalin. But as in Moscow, there was a division between the ‘rightists’ and the ‘leftists’ and towards the end of the 1920s the Ukrainian Communist Party was subject to the same political purges as were witnessed in

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 470-471. See also: Yekelchik, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 83.

¹⁴⁸ Hall, *The Crimea: A very short History*, 39.

Moscow, resulting in the expulsion of tens of thousands of party members.¹⁴⁹ In 1928 Stalin abandoned the New Economic Policy (NEP) in favour of Collectivisation and introduced the first five-year plan. By now, Stalin was unopposed leader of the Bolshevik Soviet Union. The collectivisation combined with a suppressive policy towards the ‘bourgeois’ had devastating consequences for Ukraine in particular. As Yekelchuk points out:

Collectivization and the Famine of 1932 and 1933 destroyed the Ukrainian peasantry as a social force capable of resisting the authorities. The Terror eliminated the indigenous political class. The repeated cleansing of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, which began in 1930, undermined the national culture and instilled Stalinist cultural values that included the preeminent role of Russian culture in the USSR.¹⁵⁰

In the process, Ukrainisation was abandoned and the distinctive features of the specific national and cultural identity in Ukraine were destroyed.¹⁵¹ The Great Famine (*u. Holodomor*) brought about horrific and dire consequences for Ukraine in particular. Stalin accused the Ukrainian nationalists – and in particular the kulaks¹⁵² – of having requisitioned grain and the harvest, providing excuse for his ‘murderous ruthlessness’ *vis-à-vis* the Ukrainian population.¹⁵³ This terror is believed to have left around seven million dead, so it is no surprise that many Ukrainians have depicted the Famine ‘as an act of genocide’, a ‘planned eradication of the Ukrainian nation’ carried out on no other grounds than that they yearned to remain Ukrainians.¹⁵⁴

Crimea came under Soviet control in 1921 as an autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). At that time the composition of the population had changed and the Tatars were no longer the most numerous nationality in the peninsula. Russians accounted for 42% of the population in the 1920s and the Tatars just one quarter (cf. Figure 3-1). Nonetheless, they were dominant in political and cultural terms. The period in mid-1920s became commonly known as ‘the golden age of the Soviet Crimea’. This was not least by virtue of the fact that the Kremlin’s

¹⁴⁹ S.V. Kulchytsky, *Ukraina miž dvoma vijnamy (1921-1939 rr.)* [Ukraine between two wars (1921-1939)], (Kyiv: Alternatyvy, 1999), 135.

¹⁵⁰ Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 103-104.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The kulaks were a category of relatively wealthy farmers in the later Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and early Soviet Union. Lenin described the kulaks as ‘bloodsuckers, vampires, plunderers of the people and profiteers’ and that they ‘are the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters, who in the history of other countries have time and again restored the power of the landowners, tsars, priests and capitalists’. See: Vladimir Lenin, “Comrade Workers, Forward To The Last, Decisive Fight!,” in Lenin’s Collected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 53-54.

¹⁵³ Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 111.

¹⁵⁴ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 144-145.

trusted Crimean Communist leader, Veli Ibrahimov, pursued a policy of *Tatarisation*, bringing the indigenous Tatars into all levels of the government and ensuring preservation of their specific cultural features. As with many communist leaders, however, Ibrahimov fell victim to Stalin's political purges; he was eventually executed in 1928 and his policy totally discredited.¹⁵⁵

Hitler's idea of *Lebensraum* for future Germany was *inter alia* directed at Ukraine. As a prelude to World War II, armed conflict occurred in Transcarpathia, a border territory between Ukraine, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Then, in the wake of Nazi Germany's occupation of Poland in September 1939, Stalin's Red Army – on basis of a secret clause in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – 'reunited' Belarusian and Ukrainian-inhabited territories in Poland with Belarus and Ukraine respectively. In an urgently called election – under the auspices of the Red Army – a national assembly of Western Ukraine was formed which subsequently requested the territory to be annexed to the Soviet Union (this sounds *mutatis mutandis* somewhat familiar!). Following this 'reunification' of Ukraine – which the Soviet Union saw as a liberation proper – the Soviet communist style of government and socioeconomic fabric was implemented in the new territory.¹⁵⁶ However, the narrative of an alleged liberation of Ukraine is many-sided. When the Germans invaded Ukraine – having declared war on the Soviet Union – they also tried to assure the Ukrainians that they were the true liberators. Several groups of Ukrainian nationalists had emerged across Europe, most notably the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), led by Stepan Bandera. Their version was that the people of Ukraine was collaborating with Germany in combating Bolshevism,¹⁵⁷ and as expressed by Paul Robert Magocsi, 'some Ukrainians welcomed the German invasion, because they hoped that with the end of Soviet rule their country would enjoy better life and perhaps some form of national sovereignty'.¹⁵⁸ It is first and foremost in this legacy that we see the foundation for, and parallel with, the current debate on alleged far-right nationalist elements in Ukrainian politics today.

The end of the World War II saw the map of Ukraine redrawn once again. In the inter-war period most of the territory of today's Western Ukraine belonged to Poland, with some territories belonging to Romania and Czechoslovakia. In line with the Potsdam Agreement of 1945,

¹⁵⁵ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 579-580.

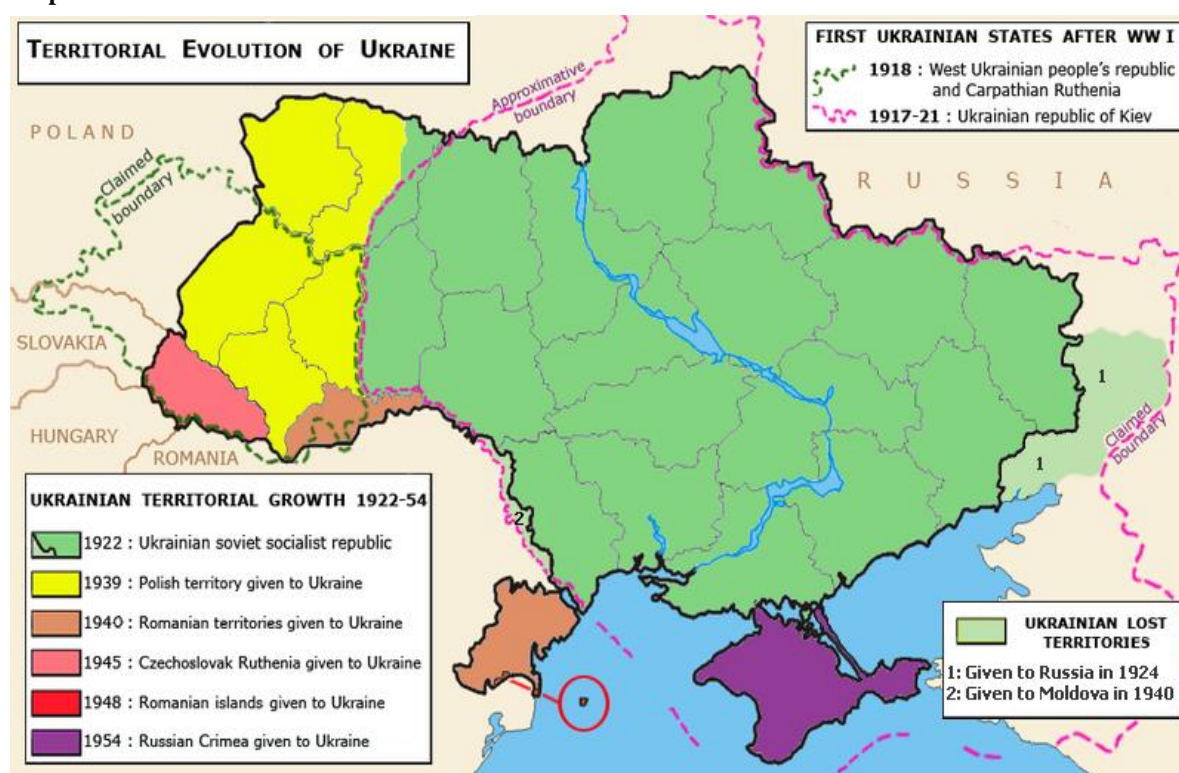
¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 612-621.

¹⁵⁷ Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 213-214.

¹⁵⁸ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 625.

Ukraine in its entirety became part of the Soviet Union and remained so until the demise of the latter (cf. Map 3-5). If the Ukrainians had to pay dearly in terms of casualties during the Great Famine, the Second World War was no less costly: more than 8 million Ukrainians lost their lives. Even if unwittingly, however, Russia's conquest in the West for the first time united most ethnic Ukrainians in one state, although it must be assumed that to be unified under the hammer and sickle was probably not what most of them dreamt of.¹⁵⁹

Map 3-5 Territorial evolution of Ukraine



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/236579786649875915/> (accessed April 18, 2015).

3.5 Crimea transferred to Ukraine - Khrushchev's alleged gift

CRIMEA WAS NOT spared by Stalin's terror in the 1930s and it continued in the wake of the WWII. The battle of Crimea was one of the bloodiest fought on the Eastern Front, where the Black Sea Fleet city of Sevastopol was the main target. Following a 250-day-long siege, the city was finally captured by the Axis. Stalin was convinced that the Crimean Tatars in particular had collaborated with Nazi Germany and more than 200,000 of them were deported, mostly to Central Asia, where before the war was over many of them died of starvation. The allegations

¹⁵⁹ Yekelchuk, *Ukraine - Birth of a Modern Nation*, 151.

that the Crimean Tatars were Nazi collaborators were purely slander however. Evidently the Soviet authorities 'did not merely send suspected German collaborators and their families into exile'; instead the victims of the mass deportation were 'innocent women, children, invalids, Red Army veterans, Communist Party members and Komsomolists without exception'.¹⁶⁰ J. Otto Pohl also claims that the true reason for their deportation was related to Stalin's policy *vis-à-vis* Turkey, notably the Soviet demands in the Black Sea.¹⁶¹

By the end of the war, the status of Crimea was degraded from an autonomous republic to an *oblast'*,¹⁶² but still belonging to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).¹⁶³ The massive purges and deportation caused a further visible shift in the composition of the Crimean population. In the immediate pre-war period the Crimean Tatars constituted one-fifth of the population (having been the most numerous group at the turn of the century), with Russians as the largest ethnic group – approximately 50% – and Ukrainians about 14%. In the 1959 census, the Russians accounted for more than 70% and the Ukrainians 22.5%, whilst no Crimean Tatars were registered (cf. Figure 3-1).

In spite of Russians being the by far largest ethnic group in Crimea, the *oblast'* was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet republic in 1954. It is a common perception that it was the Ukrainian Nikita Khrushchev, as Soviet leader, who decided on this transfer as a 'gift' to Ukraine, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the union of Ukraine and Russia,¹⁶⁴ the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav. This view was put forward, not least, by Russian and local Crimean leaders as a consequence of Ukraine declaring sovereignty in 1990, and the Russian Duma in 1992 discussed the legitimacy of the Crimea transfer, where foreign minister Kozyrev proclaimed: '[T]he donation in 1954 was illegal, as it was only a decision by the communist elite'.¹⁶⁵ But the same interpretation can also be found in the West, for instance in a paper published by the US

¹⁶⁰ J. Otto Pohl, "The deportation and fate of the Crimean Tatars", (paper presented at the *5th Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities*, Columbia University, New York, 2000), no paging.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *Oblast'* was an administrative division within the union republics of the Soviet Union, of lower rank than autonomous republics, meaning *province* or *region*.

¹⁶³ Hall, *The Crimea: A very short History*, 48-54.

¹⁶⁴ See e.g.: S. A. Ivanov, "Pravovoj status Kryma: istoričeskij aspekt" [The Legal Status of Crimea: Historical Aspect], (paper presented at the *Nauka i obrozovanie: problemy i perspektivy*, Bijsk, 2014).

¹⁶⁵ Doris Wydra, "The Crimea Conundrum: The Tug of War Between Russia and Ukraine on the Questions of Autonomy and Self-Determination," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 10, no. 2 (2004): 115.

Army War College in 1992.¹⁶⁶ Similar arguments were voiced during the 2014 crisis, as a justification of Russia's annexation.¹⁶⁷ However, the picture is more complicated. Seemingly, none of the relevant documents at that time mentioned the 300th anniversary.¹⁶⁸ The 1954 transfer was apparently in conformity with the Soviet constitution of 1936, within which 'ratification of any border changes between Union republics' was the exclusive prerogative of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.¹⁶⁹ The procedure followed was, it seems, in strict accordance with the existing legal framework, and included consultations with both the Russian and the Ukrainian Soviet republics. In February 1954 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet approved a resolution that stated:

Considering the commonality of the economies, the territorial proximity and the close economic and cultural ties between the Crimean province and the Ukrainian SSR, the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Supreme Soviet resolves:

"To ratify the mutual representation of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and the UkrSSR Supreme Soviet regarding the transfer of the Crimean province from the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic".¹⁷⁰

This resolution was reaffirmed by the Supreme Soviet itself, as was required by the constitution, in April 1954.¹⁷¹ Volodymyr Butkevych points out that Khrushchev played a very small role in this decision, as he was at that time engaged in power struggle in the Kremlin, and that he did not even attend the Presidium meeting in question.¹⁷² On the other hand, it has been pointed out that Khrushchev had voiced the idea of a transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1944 when he was the first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party.¹⁷³ Gwendolyn Sasse concludes that Khrushchev in fact played the central role, but 'he as yet lacked the political strength to impose such a radical change unilaterally'.¹⁷⁴ The argument, expressed e.g. by Tomsinov – which most likely is

¹⁶⁶ David T Twining, "Ukraine's Defense Dilemma," in *DTIC Document* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 1992), 9.

¹⁶⁷ John Ja Burke and Svetlana Vladimirovna Panina-Burke, "Eastern and Southern Ukraine's Right to Secede and Join the Russian Federation: A Secessionist Manifesto," *Social Science Research Network* (2014), 10.

¹⁶⁸ Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine - Crimea - Russia* (Stuttgart: ibedem Verlag, 2007), 104. This assertion is *inter alia* supported by official documents published in 1992, shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union: see Gwendolyn Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 107-110.

¹⁶⁹ Volodymyr G. Butkevych, "Who has a Right to Crimea," *InFoUkes* 10, no. 02 (2000): 40.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in: *ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁷¹ Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, 110.

¹⁷² Butkevych, "Who has a Right to Crimea," 49.

¹⁷³ Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, 115.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

characteristic for Russia's legal view – that the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine was a 'gross violation of constitutional norms of the Soviet state' and thus legally invalid, is therefore not compelling.¹⁷⁵ This view was most recently reiterated by President Putin, in his speech to the Russian lawmakers on March 18 2014, when he said that 'this decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then' and taken on the 'personal initiative' of the then CPSU leader.¹⁷⁶ Even if the legal foundation for the decision is disputed, it is an overstatement that the transfer of Crimea was 'Khrushchev's gift', as it was a decision 'made by the central authorities of the Union'.¹⁷⁷ Further, the decision to transfer Crimea to Ukraine has also been explained by economic and agricultural factors, namely the construction of hydroelectric power station on the Dnieper River to supply the southern regions of Ukraine and Crimea.¹⁷⁸ It must thus be concluded that Crimea's transfer from Russia to Ukraine was not a personal whim or act of charity, but rather a logical step, based on economic reasons, and taken not single-handedly but in conformity with the then Soviet constitution and legal framework by the legitimate authorities. The fact that Russians were the most numerous nationality in Crimea, with Ukrainians lagging far behind, was of very little significance at the time because a dissolution of the Soviet Union was not at issue.

3.6 Independent at last – a sovereign Ukraine including Crimea

IT WAS NOT the collapse of the Soviet Union that provided the immediate trigger for Ukraine's latest declaration of independence, but the attempted *coup d'état* against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991. That said, the sovereignty issue had been the 'limit of most political imaginations' through the whole year of 1991, a process in which Leonid Kravchuk – who had been chairman

¹⁷⁵ V.A. Tomsinov, "'Krymskoe pravo" ili Juridicheskie osnovaniya dlja vossoedinenija Kryma s Rossiej," ["Crimean right" or legal bases for the reunification of the Crimea with Russia], *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta* 11, no. 2 (2014): 21. In the Russian original: 'Peredača Krymskoj oblasti i Sevastopolja v sostav Ukrainy v 1954 g. byla provedena s takimi grubymi narušenijami konstitucionnykh norm Sovetskogo gosudarstva, čto mogla sčitat'sja juridičeski nedejstvitel'noj s samogo načala'.

¹⁷⁶ Vladimir Putin, 'Address by President of the Russian Federation', *President of Russia* (Moscow: 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Grzegorz Skrukwa, "Crimea—the Ukrainian Point of View. History and the Present Time," *Sensus Historiae* 2 (2011): 137.

¹⁷⁸ This view has been put forward among others by Khrushchev's son, Sergey Khrushchev, in an interview with the web-edition of the Voice of America: 'Gidroëlektrostantsija nakhoditsja na territorii Ukrainy, a značit, davajte perevedem ostal'nuju territoriju Kryma pod jurisdikciju Ukrainy, kotoraja i budet za vse otvečat', [...] Tak oni i sdělali. Èto ne bylo političeskim rešeniem, ne bylo ono i ideologičeskim. Èto bylo delovoe rešenje'. Andre De Neshnera, "Sergey Khrushchev: peredača Kryma Ukraine byla èkonomičeskim rešeniem," [Sergey Khrushchev: the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine was an economic decision], (Washington:Voice of America, 2014). <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/crimea-krushev-history/1866005.html>.

of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet since 1990 – played quite a significant role.¹⁷⁹ The Ukrainian parliament adopted the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine (*u. Akt proголоšennja nezaležnosti Ukraïny*) on August 24th 1991 with an overwhelming majority. In December that year in a national referendum, an equally overwhelming majority of the people voted in favour of the independence, with more than 90% and an 83% turnout.¹⁸⁰ Even in Crimea, with its Russian ethnic majority and where the support for independence was lowest, more than 50% of the electorate voted in favour.¹⁸¹ The will of the Ukrainian people could not be misinterpreted. Once again the map of Europe was redrawn. Ukraine as a state of its own, with more than 50 million inhabitants and a territory approximately equal to the size of France, constituted the largest new state to emerge in the wake of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.¹⁸²

In this new Ukraine, an absolutely predominant majority of the population is either Ukrainian or Russian. According to the 1989 census, Ukrainians accounted for 73% and Russians 22% of the population. By the turn of the century (the 2001 census) the figures were 77.5% and 17% respectively (cf. Figure 3-1). In the latter census, Ukrainian was the native language of 67%, but 30% claimed Russian as their mother tongue.¹⁸³ This means that a considerable number of the population consider Russian as their native language, although they do not see themselves as Russians by ethnicity, rather as Russian-speaking Ukrainians. A further survey carried out in 1997 showed incontestably how complex the identity issue in Ukraine really is. Whilst 56% of the respondents claimed that they were ‘Ukrainian only’ and 11% that they were ‘Russian only’, as many as 27% answered ‘Both Ukrainian and Russian’ (7% ‘more Ukrainian than Russian’, 14% ‘equally Ukrainian and Russian’ and 5% ‘more Russian than Ukrainian’). Not unexpectedly, the densest concentration of ‘Ukraino-Russians’ is in south-eastern Ukraine and particularly in Crimea, where ‘pure’ Russians outnumbered Ukrainians and Ukraino-Russians alike.¹⁸⁴ An interesting complication in this respect is the different meaning of ‘the people of Ukraine’ (*u. narod Ukraïny*) versus ‘the Ukrainian people’ (*u. Ukraïns’kyj narod*), referring to a not uncommon perception in the Russian-speaking areas that the alleged

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 165.

¹⁸⁰ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 722-723. Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 169.

¹⁸¹ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 169.

¹⁸² Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xvii, 46.

¹⁸³ State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, ‘All-Ukrainian population census’, (Kyiv: 2001).

¹⁸⁴ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 219.

‘ukrainisation’ is designed to nationalise the ‘people of Ukraine’ into the ‘Ukrainian people’.¹⁸⁵ This dividing line is neither new, nor was it first brought to the fore in the 2014 crisis. On the contrary, it simply illustrates the inflammable situation between the two nations of brethren whose ideas of identity colour their coexistence, and the delicate political reality in the country. As if this was not enough, the language patterns are even more convoluted as bilingualism is essentially common. In effect all Ukrainians master Russian and *vice versa* (albeit to a lesser extent), and an unofficial (*macaronic*) mixture of these closely related languages called *suržyk* (which virtually means a mixture of wheat and rye) is widespread especially in the central part of Ukraine where the two languages meet (cf. Map 3-6).¹⁸⁶

The demise of the Soviet Union caused a whole range of problems, including those of defining and deciding borders. Although the borders of the former Soviet republics were maintained – and in some cases were blurred indeed – there existed a number of break-away regions or enclaves that had to be dealt with, such as Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Transnistria in Moldova. Although different from these regions, Crimea in Ukraine added further to this confusing picture.¹⁸⁷ Its perceived ambiguity of status was – and still is – a harsh political reality that had simmered for a long time, and the consequences of which have now surfaced and are embodied in the current dispute. In the words of the renowned American sociologist William I. Thomas: ‘If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’¹⁸⁸ – and must be dealt with accordingly.

3.7 The eternal search for identity – and nation-building

3.7.1 ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ and identity formation

An independent Ukraine was faced with the huge task of (re)building an identity as a nation and a sovereign state, as it did not ‘inherit a uniform national identity.’¹⁸⁹ It was not self-evident that the demise of the Soviet Union automatically created ‘nations’ within the boundaries of its

¹⁸⁵ Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, xix.

¹⁸⁶ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 220.

¹⁸⁷ Plokhy, *Ukraine & Russia: Representations of the Past*, 166-167.

¹⁸⁸ William I. Thomas and Dorothy Thomas, *The Child in America* (Alfred Knopf, 1929); Cited in: Aleksandr Kustarev, "Ukraina: mig meždu prošlym i buduščim " [Ukraine: a moment between the past and the future], *Neprikosnovennyj zapas*, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁸⁹ Taras Kuzio, "Identity and nation-building in Ukraine Defining the ‘Other’," *Ethnicities* 1, no. 3 (2001): 358.

successor states.¹⁹⁰ The system of identity has obviously been affected by the creation of new sovereign states, but at the same time the rise of ethnic autonomies, and a changing landscape in Europe with the expansion of the European Union to the east, can spark off changes in the perception of identity.¹⁹¹ Identity is therefore neither a static nor unchangeable concept.

Map 3-6 Ethno-linguistic map of Ukraine



Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnolinguistic_map_of_ukraine.png (accessed April 18, 2015).

In line with the constructivist vision discussed in chapter 2 above, such a nation-building process clearly included a definition of 'Self' and 'Other', because 'identity is inconceivable without difference'.¹⁹² As has been explained above, Ukrainians and Russians have shared history, culture, and language for centuries, mostly within the same state structure. Therefore, the dividing line between identities can appear blurred, also because 'ukrainianness' had been subjugated under Moscow rule and the Ukrainian existence had to some extent at least been

¹⁹⁰ Oxana Shevel, "Nationality in Ukraine: Some rules of engagement," *East European Politics & Societies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 386.

¹⁹¹ Karina V. Korostelina, "The multiethnic state-building dilemma: national and ethnic minorities' identities in the Crimea," *National Identities* 5, no. 2 (2003): 141.

¹⁹² Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as Central Europe's constituting other," *East European Politics & Societies* 7, no. 2 (1993): 350.

‘defined as a temporary historical aberration’.¹⁹³ For a country that was rising from ruin the process of self-identification was and still is inevitably linked to the perception of the ‘Other’, all the more so when taking into account the interwoven coexistence of the two peoples in question. It further adds to this complexity that there was not a uniform consensus among the political elite in Ukraine, how to define Russians in this regard, and whether Russia or the West should be considered the ‘significant Other’. Taras Kuzio has categorised the political landscape in Ukraine as reflecting five main currents: the communists, the moderate leftists, the centrists, the centre-right, and the nationalists. For the communists, it is clearly the West that constitutes the ‘Other’ and they do not see any particular difference between Ukrainians and Russians. By contrast, the nationalists regard Russia as the ‘Other’ *par excellence*, and they are equally hostile towards Russians within Ukraine and within Russia. The other groups are more liable to define both Russia and the West as the ‘Other’, albeit to various degrees, depending on where in the left-right spectrum they are positioned. The attitude of the political parties in Ukraine varies also in relation to the question of whether Russia and Ukraine belong to Europe or Eurasia. Whereas the parties to the left consider both countries as belonging to Eurasia, the centre-right and the nationalists characterise Ukraine as belonging to Europe and Russia to Eurasia. The centrists take a third approach, considering both countries as belonging to Europe and Russia also as part of Eurasia. A similar division manifests itself with regard to the status of the Russian language and the question of whether to define Russians as a ‘second titular nation’ or as a national minority in Ukraine.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, as Kuzio points out, the ‘relationship between the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in the Ukrainian-Russian context is far more complex than at first meets the eye’, and the clash of identities may prove more and not less conflictual when the identities are closely intertwined, as in the current case.¹⁹⁵

By virtue of this complex history, lack of national unity, cultural plurality, and the diversified ethnic and linguistic situation among others, Ukraine ‘is not a homogeneous entity’. Perhaps few states are, but this diversification is seemingly more compound in Ukraine than in most cases.¹⁹⁶ This division is essentially between the eastern and western part in Ukraine, and

¹⁹³ Kuzio, "Identity and nation-building in Ukraine Defining the ‘Other’," 347.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 351-355.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 359-360.

¹⁹⁶ Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 207-211.

this is why Ukraine cannot choose *either* West *or* Russia as Tatyana Parkhalina notes.¹⁹⁷ Hence, the task of identity formation and nation-building has been extremely challenging in Ukraine since 1991: but Ukraine must accommodate itself to this diversity if it is determined to remain unified.

If the identity issue is complicated in Ukraine in general, then that is even more so the case in Crimea specifically, not least because of the fragmented ethnic situation in the peninsula which differs considerably from that in Ukraine at large. While the dissolution of the communist system caused ethnic conflicts and violence in many of the successor states across Europe, Ukraine was spared such an experience until the current events unfolded, and Crimea specifically has more or less escaped the miseries of armed conflict altogether. Jane Dawson argues, based on her study on the post-Soviet identity search in Crimea, that ‘the absence of violent conflict in the region may be attributed to the failure of Crimea’s political entrepreneurs to bring these three important identity cleavages [i.e. ethnic, ideological and geopolitical] into alignment to create a deep and potentially dangerous schism in society’.¹⁹⁸ The competing political forces in Crimea have opted for different paths for the peninsula, some supporting an independent Crimean Tatar state and others calling for Ukrainisation while the third group have favoured the Russian connection. In addition there are other groups or political figures who have advocated still another versions of identity. Proponents of these different political views all ground their stances in appeals to the local history¹⁹⁹, which is exceptionally complicated as explained earlier in this chapter.

An important factor in identity formation in Crimea is the politics of memory, which in turn relates to the territorial claims put forth by each of the main ethnic groups,²⁰⁰ including what Max Weber calls ‘memories of colonization and migration’.²⁰¹ Kuzio has emphasised the importance of studying nationalism, maintaining that within ‘studies of nationalism in political science, anthropology and postcolonial studies the rewriting of history and historical myths is

¹⁹⁷ Tatyana Parkhalina, "Was treibt Russland an? Ein Blick auf innere und äußere Faktoren," [What is driving Russia? A survey of internal and external factors], *Sicherheit und Frieden* 3 (2014): 218.

¹⁹⁸ Jane I. Dawson, "Ethnicity, ideology and geopolitics in Crimea," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30, no. 4 (1997): 427-428. [Insertion here].

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁰⁰ Yuliya Biletska, "'Politics of Memory" in the Process of Shaping Ethnic Identity of Crimean Tatars, Russians and Ukrainians in Crimea," (2014), 45.

²⁰¹ Max Weber, "Economy and Society," in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of Caroline Press, 1978), 389.

often treated in different ways'. He further claims that 'in all three scholarly studies (although not in mainstream political science) the issue of myths and history writing is largely understood as part of the nation-building aspects of nation-states'.²⁰² Ethnicity, for constructivists, is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, rooted in 'the minds' of individuals of that particular ethnicity, rather than in 'the blood' or in 'the heart',²⁰³ which is why it is so arduous to come to grips with it. Nonetheless, it is crucial to measure carefully the complicated ethnical situation in Crimea, its conflictual history and the perception of identity of the ethnic groups, since it would otherwise be extremely difficult to understand and explain developments in the region after the collapse of the Soviet empire, including Russia's annexation in 2014.

Here, the *punctum saliens* is that by virtue of the dramatic fluctuations in the composition of the Crimean population through centuries, the current composition does not adequately represent the compound ethnic environment, and consequently a national identity proper has not developed: rather, there is a mixture of different ethnic groups constituting diverse identities. In spite of Crimea being spared from armed conflicts, the present dispute between Russia and Ukraine over the peninsula constitutes 'one of the major crisis of the post-Soviet period' with all its many facets, as listed by Marples and Duke:

the historical background; the case of the Crimean Tatars as an *ipso facto* aboriginal population deported *en masse* toward the end of the Second World War; the military-strategic question, with Crimea as the base for the Black Sea Fleet; economic and social developments; and the legality of the 1954 transfer of the peninsula from the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) to Ukraine in 1954.²⁰⁴

As it happens, all these factors were already patent by the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as the many academic contributions from the 1990s witness. Suffice it here to cite the American scholar and expert in Ukraine's political history, Paul d'Anieri, who back in 1997 stated that 'concerns over national identity, and the link between international politics and national identity, drive contemporary Ukrainian-Russian relations. The intertwined history and

²⁰² Taras Kuzio, "Nation building, history writing and competition over the legacy of Kyiv Rus in Ukraine," *Nationalities papers* 33, no. 1 (2005): 29.

²⁰³ Biletska, "'Politics of Memory" in the Process of Shaping Ethnic Identity of Crimean Tatars, Russians and Ukrainians in Crimea". (2014) 46.

²⁰⁴ David R. Marples, And David F. Duke, "Ukraine, Russia, and the question of Crimea," *Nationalities Papers* 23, no. 2 (1995): 261. [Emphasis in original].

contested identities of the two states are sufficient to keep relations between the two states prickly, even without an active revanchist movement in Russia'.²⁰⁵

3.7.2 Sovereignty and 'the will of the people'

In his seminal book, Samuel Huntington describes Ukraine as a 'cleft country' and explains that '[H]istorically, western Ukrainians have spoken Ukrainian and have been strongly nationalist in their outlook. The people of eastern Ukraine, on the other hand, have been overwhelmingly Orthodox and have in large part spoken Russian.' Huntington also noted that the division between the eastern part and the western part had stimulated some people to raise the question whether Crimea would become the next Nagorno-Karabakh or Abkhazia.²⁰⁶ He may have been clairvoyant or just realistic: but the truth is that Ukraine is in many regards a divided country, in spite of being populated by closely related peoples. Crimea, as we have seen, is a cauldron in its own right.

Jack Snyder writes that '[N]ationalism is one of the gravest but least understood issues facing the international community today',²⁰⁷ yet the (unresolved) issues of national identity and nationalism are barely given attention in extant International Relations theories. This is all the more detrimental since these issues 'play a pivotal role in shaping the region's politics' as Paul d'Anieri points out.²⁰⁸ He further argues that mainstream IR theories, such as liberalism, realism, and Marxism, do not deal with issues of identity and nationalism, adding that by contrast '[S]ocial construction theories of international politics provide the necessary bridge between nationalism and international politics, but so far they have not been applied to questions of nationalism and national identity'. D'Anieri throws light on the important issue of state sovereignty, which according to him, has 'ceased to be a focus of analysis' because in world politics state sovereignty is more or less unquestioned. However, 'questions of sovereignty are a driving force in the politics of the former Soviet Union. Understanding why sovereignty is contested, and why it is so important, helps explain why the states in this region behave in ways

²⁰⁵ Paul D'anieri, "Nationalism and International Politics: Identity and Sovereignty in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 3, no. 2 (1997): 21.

²⁰⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), 137-138, 166-167.

²⁰⁷ Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the crisis of the post-Soviet state," *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993): 5.

²⁰⁸ D'Anieri, "Nationalism and International Politics: Identity and Sovereignty in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," 1.

that seem unexplainable in terms of conventional international relations theories'.²⁰⁹ The concept of sovereignty has played a key role in Russia's foreign policy, and in theoretical terms it is first and foremost constructivism that addresses this major issue. According to Ziegler, Russia's approach to sovereignty 'reflects a close linkage between Vladimir Putin's recentralizing project domestically, and his reassertion of Russia's position as a great power on the international scene'.²¹⁰

One of the key problems in Russia-Ukraine relations is precisely linked to the question of sovereignty and identity. As we have already shown, the two nations have common historical roots, yet there are legitimate questions about their relations: 'Are Russia and Ukraine older and younger brother, as in the Russian nationalist tradition? Are they fraternal twins, separated sometime after birth, but miraculously reunited, as in the Soviet tradition? Or are they unrelated neighbours, whose superficial similarities hide their fundamental difference, as Ukrainian nationalists assert?'²¹¹ Kuzio notes that the 'majority of Russians believe that their fellow Eastern Slavs are merely wayward "Russians" who should either be absorbed by Russia [...] or function under Russia's wing as a "little" or "younger brother"'.²¹² By virtue of a common history originating in the Kievan Rus', most Russians regard Kyiv as 'the cradle of their civilization' – the true foundation for their nation-state – and thus have difficulty in conceiving of Ukraine as an independent state in a proper sense: this view naturally calls in question its right to sovereignty.²¹³ Astonishingly, the event when the Ukrainian Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky signed the Treaty of Pereyaslav with the Russian Tsar in 1654 still perplexes the two nations' relations, as the Russians regard it as an act of 'reunification', while the Ukrainians rather see it as a move to secure their independence and freedom from Poland.²¹⁴ These conflicting views notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that any attempt at an anti-Russian policy has been met with substantial resistance within Ukraine – except perhaps recently – as Andrew Wilson notes:

Ukraine's large Russian community [...] and a substantial number of ethnic Ukrainians do not share the nationalists' vision, and see Ukraine and Russia as intimately linked by a

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 2.

²¹⁰ Ziegler, "Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: Realist and constructivist perspectives," 401.

²¹¹ D'Anieri, "Nationalism and International Politics: Identity and Sovereignty in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," 7.

²¹² Kuzio, *Ukraine - Crimea - Russia*, 19. [Omission here].

²¹³ D'Anieri, "Nationalism and International Politics: Identity and Sovereignty in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," 7, 10.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

common history of mutual interchange as much as by colonial dependency. Moreover [...] the latter point of view is as much a part of the Ukrainian intellectual tradition as nationalism, with a pedigree stretching back to Gogol, Kostamarov, and beyond.²¹⁵

It should be mentioned here – because it has relevance for the Russians’ view on their ‘duty’ to protect Russians in other countries – that the traditional notion of the ‘nation-state’ does not fit very well with Russia. Instead, it would be more appropriate to employ Barry Buzan’s idea of ‘state-nation’, where ‘the state plays an instrumental role in creating the nation, rather than the other way around. The model is top-down rather than bottom-up’.²¹⁶ As for the Soviet period, Buzan uses the term ‘multination-state’ and ‘imperial state’, because ‘one of the nations within the state dominates the state structures to its own advantage’.²¹⁷ The disintegration of the Soviet Union left the Russians in a vacuum – Putin has spoken about the largest divided people in the world²¹⁸ – and it has largely been the role of the state to (re-)build a national identity: hence also the emphasis on Russians abroad, most notably in the ‘near abroad’.

The limitation of international theories such as liberalism and realism is that they focus on material incentives, such as economic and security issues, while failing to deal with questions of national identity and nationalism. The fact that Ukraine eventually surrendered its nuclear arsenal in relation to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum was unconceivable in the realists’ eyes; in fact it was predicted by leading realist scholars, such as Mearsheimer, that Ukraine would keep its nuclear weapons ‘regardless of what other states say and do’.²¹⁹ This only buttresses the argument that realists are trapped in an impasse of their structural mind-set, because they give such limited elbow-room for impalpable factors such as history and culture, not to speak of national identity and contested sovereignty. Although d’Anieri’s seminal article on Ukrainian-Russian relations was written in the late 1990s, it is still relevant because the two nations’ relations are even now driven by the ‘intertwined history’ and ‘concerns over national identity’.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173. [Omission here].

²¹⁶ Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear* (Colchester: The ECPR Press, 2009), 76-77.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

²¹⁸ "Putin: 'Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia'," *Telegraph.co.uk* (2014).

²¹⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, "The Case for a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 57-58.

²²⁰ D’Anieri, "Nationalism and International Politics: Identity and Sovereignty in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," 21.

History plays a crucial role in identity-formation and nation-building and the case of Ukraine makes no exception in that regard: on the contrary. It must be borne in mind, however, that Ukraine only embarked on its path as an independent state some 25 year ago. Having been under Russian rule – in one form or another – for centuries, it now had to make its own choices, *inter alia* with regard to foreign and security policy. The national identity has also been marked by this development.²²¹ The question of whether Ukraine should lean towards Western Europe or rather opt for closer ties with Russia is at the very core of the identity and nation-building debate. Meanwhile, the concept of a Ukrainian nation ‘remains undefined’. Scholars have also debated fiercely the identity question: some have argued that the endeavour to build Ukraine as a non-ethnic society has failed, while others have emphasised that ‘ethnic nationalism should not be perceived as a vital interest of the nation’.²²² In this regard it should be recalled that the language issue further complicates the issue of ethnic nationality, since – as pointed out in §3.6 – a larger proportion of the population consider Russian as their native language than those who see themselves as Russian by ethnicity. Further, as Karina Korostelina points out, ‘[P]resent-day Crimea is like a mirror of this situation, which reflects the current political, social and economic changes taking place in Ukraine...’.²²³ President Putin encapsulated this important historical tie when he, in his March 18 2014 speech to the Parliament, said:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride [...] The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valour.²²⁴

As for the Crimean Tatars in particular, the situation is somewhat odd, because the majority of those who returned to the region from exile have not obtained Ukrainian citizenship; instead they hold mostly Uzbek passports, as dual citizenship is prohibited according to Ukrainian law. Also, the Crimean Tatars’ living conditions ‘have been significantly worse than

²²¹ Korostelina, "The multiethnic state-building dilemma: national and ethnic minorities' identities in the Crimea," 142.

²²² *Ibid.*, 143.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation." [Omission here].

those of the rest of the population'.²²⁵ The yearning for a Slavic Great Russia has, in the meantime, been prevalent among ethnic Russians in the Crimea. Nonetheless, a majority of the Crimean population voted in favour of Ukrainian independence in 1991, chiefly on economic grounds, although the 'consanguineous bond' of the two brethren Slavic peoples must have played a role too. Already in the early days of Ukrainian independence in the 1990s, ethnic questions became salient as the groups concerned pledged allegiance to either Russia or Ukraine, while the Crimean Tatars still nourished hope of a re-established Crimean Tatar autonomy. For instance, a survey carried out by Korostelina in 2000 'confirms the presence of a salient Soviet-Russian identity linkage, which makes Russians in the Crimea identify with Russia'.²²⁶

Hence, it is safe to say that the population in the Crimea, in spite of voting in favour of independence in 1991, does not align itself with Ukraine to the same extent as the population elsewhere in the country. Consequently, it should not have come as a surprise that the majority of the Crimeans voted in favour of secession from Ukraine, and re-joining Russia, in the referendum of March 2014. However, as Wilson points out, it is not very credible that 96.7% voted for the union with Russia on a turnout of 83.1%, because '24 per cent of the population were Ukrainian and 13 per cent Crimean Tatar' so such an outcome 'wasn't even ethnically plausible'.²²⁷ Wilson also provides evidence that the turnout as well as the support for re-joining Russia was much lower than claimed, even if a majority may well have chosen the path of reunification. It is relevant here, however, that the choices the Crimean population were given in the plebiscite were limited to reunification with Russia or to restoring the 1992 Crimean Constitution, which granted the region extensive autonomous powers (including in external relations) that ultimately would have resulted in a separation from Ukraine. The *status quo* was not an option in the ballot and there was no mission of international observers.²²⁸ Hence, it is questionable whether it was a *bona fide* referendum in a proper sense, although Russia constantly refers to it as demonstrating the 'will' of the Crimean people.

²²⁵ Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, 190.

²²⁶ Korostelina, "The multiethnic state-building dilemma: national and ethnic minorities' identities in the Crimea," 144, 158.

²²⁷ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it means for the West* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 113.

²²⁸ Anne Peters, "The Crimean Vote of March 2014 as an Abuse of the Institution of the Territorial Referendum," in *Staat und Mensch im Kontext des Völker- und Europarechts: Liber amicorum für Torsten Stein*, ed. Christian Calliess (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2015), 255.

4 IS THERE A SPECTRE HAUNTING EUROPE? – RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

WESTERN SPECTATORS OFTEN CONSIDER Russian foreign policy as somewhat mysterious. It is not always quite clear what the driving-forces or motives are: or rather, they are not easily conceivable for the Western mind. It is true that Russia's history, culture, identity and self-image mould its foreign policy, shaped by domestic as well as external factors. Even if the Marxist-Leninist ideology was abandoned as a consequence of the collapse of communism, its ubiquitous impact on the mentality and way of thinking is not so easily erased – some would perhaps say that the spectre of communism is still haunting Europe as a result. Such considerations aside, however, we must delve deeper into the background in order to understand the current Russian leadership's motives and foreign policy decisions, because the roots of today's actions are likely to lie in the past. Russian behaviour is a creation of identity, ideas, and norms – or in other words, socially constructed.

This chapter, therefore, explores Russian foreign policy and its development since the breakthrough of the *perestroika* years. A considerable space is dedicated to the end of the Cold War: its antecedents and the conflict between theoretical explanations – or lack of such explanations. The presidencies of Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev are discussed, followed by the so-called 'Putin redux'. Then an account is given of Russia's relations with the West, as these are of importance for the current issue of the annexation of Crimea and Russia's relations to Ukraine. Lastly, some considerations are offered about change and/or continuity in Russian foreign policy.

4.1 *The Soviet Legacy and the end of the Cold War*

THE END OF the Cold War marked a great watershed in international relations. For four decades the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, were trapped in a competition and their relations reached a historical nadir in 1984. Only three years later, their relations were well on the way to a stronger *détente* than ever seen during the Cold War period. In 1989, *détente* policy flourished and the superpowers were revealed to have more in common than what separated them. Scholars were thunderstruck by this development; from hard-core realists to utopian new world order proponents, they had taken the superpower rivalry and balance of power as given.

How could what was now happening be reconciled with the theories? It is only natural that scholars should strive to explicate these events. When the major ally of realism went extinct, its primary antagonists argued that this theory – the mere existence of which was based on a thriving Cold War – should suffer similar defeat. Realists, by contrast, argued that the outcome was clearly in conformity with their theory, namely the exhaustion of the Soviet Union in its competition with the United States.²²⁹ The reasons for the end of the Cold War remain, essentially, much disputed. The success of a containment policy, nuclear deterrence, policy shifts in the Soviet Union and its declining economy are all factors that have dominated the academic discourse within IR on the causes of the Cold War's end.

When the Soviet Union was dissolved, the Russian Federation more or less inherited its role in the international arena. Thus, Russia unopposed occupied the permanent seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The remaining Soviet republics also became independent states, entering international organisations in their own right. Further, Russia gained possession of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and thus can safely be said to have become one of the 'superpowers', although 15 independent states emerged from the Soviet ruins. By the time of the Soviet Union's collapse its population had reached 290 million, whilst the inhabitants in Russia were approximately 150 million, just above the half of the Soviet population in 1989.

It is a pressing question whether the Russians should be considered a European or an Asian nation: whether Russia belongs to Europe, Asia or perhaps a Eurasian *mélange*. Formally, Russia is situated in both Europe and Asia: '[h]alf of Europe *is* Russia; half of Russia is *in* Europe'.²³⁰ Russia participates in a variety of multinational cooperation systems in both continents, but allegedly the national *genius* is largely European rather than Asian. Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader, in his book *Perestroika – New Thinking for our Country and the World*, writes:

Some in the West are trying to "exclude" the Soviet Union from Europe. Now and then, as if inadvertently, they equate "Europe" with "Western Europe." Such ploys, however, cannot change the geographic and historical realities. Russia's trade, cultural and political

²²⁹ William C. Wohlforth, "The Search for Causes to the End of the Cold War," in *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War*, ed. William C. Wohlforth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 191-193.

²³⁰ Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: a part of Europe or apart from Europe?," *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2000): 443.

links with other European nations and states have deep roots in history. We are Europeans. [...] The history of Russia is an organic part of the great European history.²³¹

Thus Gorbachev's chosen identity was European, and apparently his description is typical and true for most Russians. Incumbent president Putin has also reiterated this view, i.e. that Russians are first and foremost Europeans, regardless of where they live.²³²

It might be tempting to argue that Russia should not have taken it for granted that it would inherit the Soviet position as a 'superpower'; however, in the eyes of the Russians nothing else would have been acceptable. The Russians are, were and have always been occupied with their status in international affairs, and determined to be accepted in accordance with their size and power; for them this is self-evident, their considerably decreased economic strength notwithstanding. The Russians are eager to demonstrate their standing in international relations and they take pains to retain it. When the Soviet superpower collapsed Russia was literally on its knees, but that situation has reversed, particularly after the turn of the twentieth century.²³³ There is little doubt that Russia's position and actions internationally can almost always be explained on the basis of this 'superpower' mentality, i.e. the view that Russia matters and must be listened to, although – of course – today's Russia is weak in comparison with the Soviet Union.²³⁴

IR scholars have disputed vividly the theoretical foundation of Russia's foreign policy. Constructivists, like e.g. Andrei Tsygankov, frequently emphasise the notion of the '*Significant Other*',²³⁵ that is to say, how Russians consider themselves in relation to others, and whom they define as 'the Other' in the 'we-them' relationship. Such superpower-thinking and the corresponding identity, with the conviction that Russia should and could matter and even play a major role on the chessboard of world politics, is something Russia inherited from the Soviet Union, which in turn inherited it from Tsarist Russia. This self-image has not changed; on the contrary. It is this clear and simple perception of the Russians' ideas and identity – as it appears to us – that we might label the 'Soviet legacy'.

²³¹ Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (London: Collins, 1987), 191. [Omission here].

²³² Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post Soviet Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 17.

²³³ Mathias Kjær Jakobsen, "Rusland og Ruslands udenrigspolitik" [Russia and Russia's Foreign Policy], (Copenhagen Business School, 2010), 7.

²³⁴ Peter Pomerantsev, „Yes, Russia Matters,“ *World Affairs* 177, no. 3 (2014), 16.

²³⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 15.

4.2 Was Gorbachev the first Constructivist?

MIKHAIL SERGEYEVICH GORBACHEV was elected Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and thus the leader of the Soviet Union, in March 1985. Gorbachev belonged to a new generation of Soviet leaders – literally but also ideologically. As soon as he came to power, the new Soviet leader repeatedly hammered on the necessity of disarmament and spoke out clearly about the great fear humanity was faced with as a result of the arms race, particularly between the two superpowers. He therefore advocated a radical change in politicians' way of thinking.²³⁶

With Gorbachev a policy change in the Soviet Union's position *vis-à-vis* the West followed, rooted *inter alia* in his policy of *perestroika* and *new thinking*. His policy was linked not least to his ideas about the identity of the 'Soviet man', but also stemmed from the economic situation in the country.²³⁷ Foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze also declared that it was against Soviet national interests to attempt to reach military parity with all the potential enemies.²³⁸ Personally, Gorbachev strongly emphasised the cultural and political relations between the Soviet Union and Europe, and his expression about a 'common European home' is well-known.²³⁹ It must be stressed, however, that dissenters' activities were rife at the time all across Eastern Europe and they spread ideas through various channels, such as *samizdat*, plays, literature, meetings etc., conducted more or less underground but nevertheless widespread and diffusing – a tacit knowledge. Notwithstanding the poor predictive capacity of IR-theories, the end of the Cold War was pretty much foreseen within these circles of civil society; they knew that change was underway, as presciently described by E. P. Thompson in his book, *Beyond the Cold War*, from 1982: '... The Cold War road show, which each year enlarges, is now lurching towards its terminus.'²⁴⁰ The Hungarian novelist György Konrád also wrote in 1984 about a historic compromise that could be made by lifting the Iron Curtain, whereby the communist regimes would accept a pluralistic political system and the Soviet Union would withdraw from other Eastern European countries: this in his words would be 'a fundamental and far-reaching political

²³⁶ Gorbachev, *Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, 11.

²³⁷ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 31.

²³⁸ Stephen Sestanovich, "Inventing the Soviet national interest," *The National Interest* 20 (1990): 6.

²³⁹ Gorbachev, *Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, 194-195.

²⁴⁰ Cited in: Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 70-71.

decision for the Soviet leadership'.²⁴¹ Foreign minister Shevardnadze has asserted that the communist leaders across Eastern Europe confidently questioned the Soviet military presence in their countries 'long before the start of events in 1989-90'.²⁴² Gorbachev's notion of *New Thinking* was most notably reified in the abandoning of the *Brezhnev doctrine*.²⁴³ In so doing, Gorbachev literally undermined the realists' assumption that power was the *ultimo ratio* in the international system.²⁴⁴

Although the Gorbachev era is not the objective of the current study, it must be borne in mind that during his leadership, profound changes occurred in Soviet society and in its relationship to the West; changes that were decisive for the end of the Cold War. In his resignation speech to the nation on December 25th 1991, Gorbachev admitted that many mistakes had been made, some of which might have been avoided, but he also underlined the many achievements of his leadership including 'the ending of the Cold War, the liquidation of the "totalitarian system", the breakthrough to democratic reforms, the recognition of the paramount importance of human rights, and movement towards a market economy'.²⁴⁵ Archie Brown believes that Gorbachev indeed did more than any other to end the Cold War: that he could undoubtedly have a claim to be counted as the greatest reformer in Russian history, and that he most profoundly influenced the world history in the latter half of the 20th century.²⁴⁶

This point of view reflects the fundamental tenet of constructivism: the influence of ideas rather than of material incentives on the structure of the international system and human interaction. In this light, it may be argued that Gorbachev's policy was based on the same foundation as constructivism, although constructivism had not at the time emerged as a theory

²⁴¹ György Konrád, *Anti-Politics* (London: Quartet Books, 1984), 50-61.

²⁴² Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Int'l, 1991), 122.

²⁴³ The Brezhnev doctrine refers to the statement by then Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1968: 'When external and internal forces hostile to socialism try to turn the development of a given socialist country in the direction of the restoration of the capitalist system, when a threat arises to the cause of socialism in that country ... this is no longer merely a problem for that country's people, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist countries.' Cited in: Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 67.

²⁴⁴ Rey Koslowski and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire's Demise and the International System," in *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, and Thomas Risse-Kappen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 128-129.

²⁴⁵ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 304-305.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 317.

proper within IR. Hence, one can argue that Gorbachev was – in his *Realpolitik* – the first constructivist.

4.3 *The End of the Cold War*

GENERALLY SPEAKING, IT is a common perception that the Cold War ended when the physical division of Europe between east and west ceased to exist by the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The causes for the end of the Cold War are, by contrast, much more debated. The policy of containment, nuclear deterrence, policy shifts in the Soviet Union, and the decline of the Soviet economy are all factors that are invoked in the scholarly discourse.²⁴⁷

Academics have obviously approached the debate from different theoretical vantage-points. Nonetheless, it may be argued that the scholarly contribution in this regard is modest, taking into account the dramatic watershed in the superpowers' relations that this event constituted. For the purposes of this study on Russia's foreign policy, it is appropriate to take a closer look at the main arguments put forward by realists on the one hand and constructivists on the other hand.

4.3.1 The Realist vantage-point

William Wohlforth maintains that the end of the Cold War can be explained with the help of realism and theories on hegemonic rivalry, although he also acknowledges that neorealism has to some extent overshadowed the former. Essentially he argues that the core basis of realism – the notion of relative gain – holds water with regard to the end of the Cold War and the decisions made by the Soviet leadership in the latter half of the 1980s. Wohlforth does not believe that the changes in world politics brought by the end of the Cold War invalidated realism as a theory; on the contrary he believes that realism can explain much of that story, although neorealism does not offer compelling explanations. He further maintains that a thorough realist explanation can surpass other theories' extensive accounts. Wohlforth admits that the development around 1990 highlighted realism's weakness in predicting states' behaviour, but argues that its strength most

²⁴⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts* (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 131-136.

notably appears when compared with other theories that possess less compelling explanation power than realism.²⁴⁸

According to Wohlforth, there are three main elements that help in understanding the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union: firstly, policy-makers' assessment of power matters. Balance-of-power theories must specify how power translates into policy if they are to explain states' behaviour. In fact, there are many factors that can influence the assessment of power and this, *inter alia*, is why balance-of-power theories have problems in predicting states' behaviour. Secondly, declining challengers are more likely than declining hegemons to endeavour to retrench rather than choosing a preventive war. In the 1980s the Soviet Union was a declining challenger and not a declining hegemon. Thirdly, a sudden decline or even civil conflict on the losing side is less likely to be destabilising than a corresponding decline or conflict on the winning side. If the hegemonic state had been the declining one, it would have led to a race to overtake it on the part of the challenger, which would have provided a much more dangerous situation than when the challenger was the declining one. According to this presumption the Soviet Union occupied a different position on the international stage from that of the United States, and therefore the consequences of altering relative power would be different from that posited by neorealism,²⁴⁹ which - by contrast - considered the two superpowers as 'sensible duopolists'.²⁵⁰

Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth maintain that Gorbachev's changes in foreign policy can be explained on the basis of materialism and not idealism. They underpin their opinion by reference to the development of the Soviet economy and related debates within the Soviet leadership, and claim to demonstrate that the foreign policy shift was all but undisputed in view of economic difficulties that made foreign policy retrenchment an economic necessity. Their viewpoint provides plausible evidence of how realism approaches the end of the Cold War, showing that it can explain the changes in Soviet foreign policy in terms of changes in relative capability. According to them, however, further research on the real economy of the Soviet Union would be needed in order to determine whether the economy was the actual reason for the leadership's decision. Scholars have considered the balance of capabilities as the only material factor to be examined, thus excluding crucial changes in the material environment, which is of

²⁴⁸ William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994-1995): 92.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-99.

²⁵⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 203.

vital importance in understanding the material incentives in international relations in general.²⁵¹ The material pressures on the Soviet Union's foreign policy at the time were more severe than previously imagined, and the ideational changes were caused endogenously by a changed economic environment. Thus, as Brooks and Wohlforth argue, changes in the economic environment can explain alterations in states' fundamental goals and identities.²⁵² As a consequence, the Soviet Union reoriented its foreign policy 'in large part in response to changing material incentives'.²⁵³ It is necessary, according to Brooks and Wohlforth, not only to explore the balance of power, but rather to look beyond the narrow structural realist conception of states' preferences whereby security vanquishes other priorities, including that of economic capability. The situation in the Soviet Union was such that it was meaningless to distinguish between economic capability and security as the state's objectives, because 'Moscow's changing material fortunes undermined both goals simultaneously'.²⁵⁴ The fundamental questions relate to the fateful changes in the Soviet Union's *grand strategy* in the latter half of the 1980s: why did the Soviet Union choose a policy of retrenchment instead of a policy of *status quo*, and why did it pursue a policy of retrenchment at the same time as it was engaged in opening up to the global economy?

4.3.2 The Constructivist vantage-point

Constructivists argue that realists have completely ignored the ideational reasons for foreign policy changes. Robert English, for instance, contradicts the realist assumption that the Soviet Union's foreign policy changes in the late 1980s were undisputed. He argues that the end of the Cold War was brought about as a result of the new policy that Gorbachev and his closest allies enforced; the economic problems were only partly an explanation and not at all predominant. English, in a constructivist vein, emphasises the new ideology as the main explanation for the end of the Cold War.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, globalization, and the end of the Cold War: reevaluating a landmark case for ideas," in *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals*, eds. Gary Goertz and Jack S. Levy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 196.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁵⁵ Robert D. English, "Perestroika without politics: how realism misunderstands the Cold War's end," in *Explaining War and Peace: Case Studies and Necessary Condition Counterfactuals*, eds. Gary Goertz and Jack S. Levy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 237.

Further, English refuses to accept that the identity and the legitimacy of the politburo members revolved around Soviet power and the arms race against the US, as Brooks and Wohlforth claim. On the contrary their 'basic reference point' lay in the past, primarily related to the experience of WWII and the post-war 'privations, which the leadership frequently invoked to rationalize current economic difficulties'.²⁵⁶ English criticises the realists for founding their arguments on the hardliners' memoirs, because they would obviously have embellished their own contributions. The fact was, according to English, that they constantly tried to undermine Gorbachev's and his allies' endeavours to implement the policy of perestroika and new thinking: a subversive activity that culminated in the failed *coup d'état* in August 1990.²⁵⁷ In addition, English points out, the realists do not pay attention to clear indications of true mentality changes in the supreme leadership of the Soviet Union, e.g. the 1985 unilateral nuclear test moratorium, Gorbachev's disarmament plan and proposals at the 1986 Reykjavik summit, 'and his pathbreaking ideological revisions'.²⁵⁸ Gorbachev's Reykjavik proposals were devised by a small group of liberal advisers, because the hardliners in the Politburo, the army and the Defence Ministry were trying everything to stymie his policy. One of Gorbachev's closest advisors, Anatoly Chernyaev, maintains that Reykjavik was indeed 'a step in a very complex and difficult dialogue, in a search for solution' and 'helped us in the critical process of realizing where we stand'.²⁵⁹ The notion that the Soviet Union would have pursued exactly the same policy without Gorbachev is – according to English – not credible, bearing in mind that the old way of thinking still prevailed in the Soviet bureaucracy. Also – and not unimportantly – it should not be forgotten that Gorbachev ultimately abandoned Eastern Europe, considering it first and foremost as an economic yoke instead of a key Soviet sphere of influence in the power struggle against the US.²⁶⁰

Constructivism assumes that policy-makers' ideas are seminal for the policy changes that led to the end of the Cold War, whereas realists tend to argue that 'strength won the cold war'. English claims that the arms race in the early 1980s, initiated by the West – most notably the Reagan administration in the US – actually made it more difficult for the reformers to ascend to

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 240.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 241-242.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 245.

²⁵⁹ Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 87.

²⁶⁰ English, "Perestroika without politics: how realism misunderstands the Cold War's end," 245-246.

power in the Soviet Union. Although the ‘effort to tilt the military balance sharply in the West’s favor certainly heightened Soviet perceptions of deepening problems and a need for change [...] such change could, and arguably almost did, take the form of a repressive-confrontational turn at home and abroad’.²⁶¹ In English’s view the liberalisation was hardly ‘necessary’, and a collapse was certainly not looming, but ‘when it did come, it was an unintended by-product of reforms, not something that their preconditions had preordained’.²⁶² Therefore, the constructivists believe that Gorbachev’s contribution, supported by the foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and the ideologist Alexander Yakovlev, was indispensable for the foreign policy changes that occurred in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, and which subsequently resulted in the end of the Cold War.²⁶³

4.4 Four Presidencies and their Foreign Policy

WE HAVE NOW depicted the legacy that the newly established Russian Federation inherited following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. How did Russia tackle this situation? What were the consequences for Russia’s foreign policy and position in world politics? Has policy been continuous or changing during the four presidencies since 1991: first with Yeltsin as president from 1991-1999, then with Putin from 2000-2008, followed by Medvedev for one term until 2012, and lastly the return of Putin in 2012 (see Table 4.1). It is useful for the purpose of this study to examine the foreign policy pursued under each of these presidencies.

Table 4.1 Presidents and Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation

President	Term	Foreign Minister	Term
Boris N. Yeltsin	1991-1999	Andrey Kozyrev Yevgeny Primakov Igor Ivanov	1991-1996 1996-1998 1998-1999
Vladimir V. Putin I	2000-2004	Igor Ivanov	2000-2004
Vladimir V. Putin II	2004-2008	Sergey Lavrov	2004-2008
Dmitry D. Medvedev	2008-2012	Sergey Lavrov	2008-2012
Vladimir V. Putin Redux	2012-	Sergey Lavrov	2012-

²⁶¹ Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West - Gorbachev, Intellectuals & the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 13; *ibid.* [Omission here].

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ English, "Perestroika without politics: how realism misunderstands the Cold War's end," 245.

4.4.1 Yeltsin's fragmented foreign policy

Boris Yeltsin was elected as the new Russia's first president; in fact he was elected president of the RSFSR in June 1991, and when the Soviet Union was dissolved he continued as president of the Russian Federation, re-elected in 1996 until he stepped down at the turn of the millennium. Yeltsin was popular, particularly because of his role during the hardliners' *coup d'état* against Gorbachev, and this popularity kept him afloat for a good while; but he was far from being flawless. It is beyond all doubt that he enjoyed support from the West, including the US, and that many had high expectations of him. Soviet foreign policy had changed considerably under Gorbachev and his foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who replaced the long-serving Andrey Gromyko when Gorbachev came to power. Both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were eager to improve Russia's relations with the West, and they succeeded in many regards. To that extent, Yeltsin and his first foreign minister, Andrey Kozyrev, inherited a solid footing.

Yeltsin belonged to the so-called Westernizers (*r. zapadniki*) in Russian politics, who considered Russia as a European superpower, and who claimed that it was the Bolsheviks and the Soviet system that deprived Russia of that position.²⁶⁴ A similar view was promoted by the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, who once said that the Soviet Union during the Cold War, deprived Eastern and Central Europe of her 'essence', of her legitimate and normal position in Europe.²⁶⁵ The Westernizers' idea was to pursue a radical and severe economic policy, which should eventually lead to Russia's becoming a member of some Western organisations, such as the EU, NATO, the IMF, and the G-7 Group. Russia would thus secure a deserved seat in the European family and thereby revert to its true standing after the 70-year long (under communism) lost era.²⁶⁶ Kozyrev soon became the most prominent instigator of this policy, which is sometimes labelled *pragmatism* and sometimes *liberalism* in Russian foreign policy. In short it must be said that this policy more or less went aground, and even Yeltsin admitted that Russia had failed in occupying a worthy seat in the international community.²⁶⁷ It has also been pointed out that Yeltsin never mastered the art of implementing a harmonious, integrated

²⁶⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 14. Tsygankov speaks about three main political strands in Russian foreign policy: *Westernizers*, *Statists* and *Civilizationists*. See also §2.5.

²⁶⁵ Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *The New York Review*, April 26, 1984.

²⁶⁶ Jørgen Staun, "Ruslands udenrigspolitik - Fra Jeltsins Vesternisering til Putins Nyliberalisme," [Russia's foreign policy: from Yeltsin's westernising to Putin's neoliberalism], *DIIS Report, Danish Institute for International Studies* 12 (2008): 10.

²⁶⁷ Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post Soviet Era*, 13.

national foreign policy. The fact that towards the end of the century, approximately 30 regions of Russia were pursuing their own foreign policy – eleven of which operated their own diplomatic missions abroad – bears that assertion out. The regions had signed about 130 international conventions, some of them legally binding by international law. It was only in 1999, when the president of the Mari El region proposed the sale of an air defence system and other armaments to Kuwait, that the central authorities cancelled the ‘offer’ and forbade the regions to trade with weapons.²⁶⁸

The same can be said about Russian security and defence policy in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union. As the Marxist-Leninist ideology had now been abandoned, Russia needed a new policy doctrine. As previously mentioned, Russia itself inherited the Soviet Union’s position on the international stage as its successor state, but both its political and the military leadership also expected the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS – *r. Sodružestvo Nezavisimyh Gosudarstv, SNG*) to develop into some kind of Soviet-style federation under Russian supervision. However, it did not take long until the CIS member states made different decisions, established their own armed forces, and implemented their own independent foreign and security policy.

The pragmatism that characterised Russian foreign policy-makers extended into the highest ranks of the military in the early 1990s and consequently a National Security Concept (NSC) was prepared, on the basis of which a Foreign Policy Concept (FPC – *r. koncepcija vnešnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii*) and a Military Doctrine were published. However, it took until the end of the 1990s before Russia ratified a comprehensive security and foreign policy. In short, it may be argued that ‘tsarist, Soviet and the successive Russian Federation security thought tended to be quite akin, in spite of different state-building systems’. Although ‘the non-military, internal social–economic situation’ was considered the greatest threat in the early years of the re-born Russia, both internal and external military threats soon became particularly pressing, as a consequence of the Chechen conflict and the war in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s.²⁶⁹

The Russian executive power in Moscow was weak during the Yeltsin era, in particular in the beginning, and it was not in a position to present itself as an unbroken whole in international

²⁶⁸ Samuel Charap, "Inside Out: Domestic Political Change and Foreign Policy in Vladimir Putin's First Term," *Demokratizatsiya* 15 (2007): 338.

²⁶⁹ Marcel De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Policy in the 21st century - Putin, Medvedev and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2010), 4-7.

relations. Abroad, this fragmentation (*r. razgosudarstvenie*) in Russia's foreign policy created some confusion. The picture that emerged was that there were many policies and many governments prevailing in Russia.²⁷⁰ The alleged failure of Yeltsin's foreign policy was pinpointed for example by Alexei Arbatov, director of the Moscow Center for Geopolitical and Military Forecasts, when he said that in spite of 'good intentions and even achievements' the Russian foreign policy in 1992-93 had 'failed to address consistently Russia's relations with Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, and has too easily made unilateral concessions to the West on a number of important issues'. He argued that as a result, Russia's 'foreign policymakers will be under increasing pressure from within to be much more assertive regarding Russia's own interests and priorities'.²⁷¹

The picture of a weak Russia, however, started to change; in the West it is commonly argued that a new phase began in 1993,²⁷² whilst Russian scholars are more of the opinion that it was first triggered when Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister in early 1996.²⁷³ It was then that 'foreigners began to find Moscow's policies either hostile or unpredictable'.²⁷⁴ In his address to the Russian Parliament in February 1996, Yeltsin admitted that his foreign policy had not been sufficiently successful because it had been problematic to define policy objectives and to coordinate the policy and its implementation. In particular, Yeltsin mentioned NATO enlargement as a development directly against Russian interests, together with the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the military race in Europe, including the US repudiation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). But he did also emphasise some positive achievements such as the improved cooperation within the CIS.²⁷⁵ While his address overall was rather taciturn on foreign policy, Yeltsin was obviously referring to the fragmentation within the state and some regions' tendency to pursue their own foreign policy, and the Kremlin's powerlessness to deal with that problem.

²⁷⁰ Charap, "Inside Out: Domestic Political Change and Foreign Policy in Vladimir Putin's First Term," 338.

²⁷¹ Alexei G. Arbatov, "Russia's foreign policy alternatives," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 5.

²⁷² See e.g.: Margot Light, "In Search of an Identity: Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Ideology," *Journal of Communist Studies & Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (2003): 45. Also: Margot Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking," in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, eds. Neil Malcolm, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33.

²⁷³ Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post Soviet Era*, 4.

²⁷⁴ Olga Oliker et al., *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp., 2009), 4.

²⁷⁵ Boris N. Yeltsin, 'Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Jelt'sina Federal'nomu Sobraniju RF: 'Rossija za kotoruju my v otvete', [Address of the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation: Russia for which we are responsible], *President of Russia* (Moscow: Intellektual'naja Rossija, 1996).

Yeltsin's goal was undoubtedly to create a strong Russia that could follow the same course as the West, both in foreign policy and in economic and trade issues; but when Putin ascended to the presidency it became evident how Yeltsin had failed.²⁷⁶ By the end of Yeltsin's presidency relations with the West were chilly, not least after he had criticised the West forcefully – at a NATO summit where he participated – over NATO's bombing in Serbia.²⁷⁷ Perhaps Yeltsin's presidency could best be limned by the proverb: haste makes waste!

4.4.2 Putin I and II

It is safe to say that the Russian government underwent great change when Vladimir Putin replaced Yeltsin as president. That is not to say that the government's policy made a 180° turn; but rather, that the state was now governed properly. By the turn of the millennium the Kremlin appeared as a fragmented and powerless body, unable to influence world politics, but with Putin as president it appeared that Russia's government had been reinvigorated. Gone was the time of the bewildered and inebriated president who depicted Russia as a doddering bear; instead the leadership of this great country was determined and resolute.²⁷⁸ It has been maintained by some scholars, however, that the change from Yeltsin to Putin did not concern the contents of foreign policy: rather, it was about the style. The basic features of the Yeltsin period – 'mythmaking, the geopolitical mentality, Westerncentrism' – remained unchanged under Putin, only with a dash of a face-lift.²⁷⁹

Putin's main objective was to restore Russia as a superpower on the international arena, a modern great power that would not only build its strength on military capacity but also on economic capability. He wanted foreign policy to serve domestic political goals, particularly the economic goals, thereby anew acquiring a strong position for Russia in world politics – a kind of a 'come-back'.²⁸⁰ In order to achieve such results, Putin would have to focus on economic reforms and achievements, e.g. in increasing foreign investment, combating corruption, taking on

²⁷⁶ Stanislav Secieru, "Russia's Foreign Policy under Putin: 'CIS Project' Renewed," in *UNISCI Discussion Papers* (Madrid: UNISCI, 2006), 291.

²⁷⁷ Jakobsen, "Rusland og Ruslands udenrigspolitik," 12.

²⁷⁸ Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post Soviet Era*, 3.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁸⁰ Helge Blakkisrud, "Russisk utenriks-, sikkerhets- og forsvarspolitik og fremtidige hovedutfordringer i Norges forhold til Russland," [Russian foreign, security and defence policy and future challenges in Norway's relations to Russia], (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2007).
<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/kampanjer/refleks/innsjikt/sikkerhet/blakkisrud.html?id=493970>.

the oligarchs, and ensuring that the wealth that had been accumulated in their hands under Yeltsin would be distributed more equally among the citizens. It has been argued that Putin never fully succeeded in achieving these goals, and even that he was incapable of reconstructing the economy, the politics, and the social system that would 'optimize the potential of his foreign and security policies'.²⁸¹

Putin's first presidential period was characterised by his sincere intention to enjoy good and close relations with the West. The attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 offered a welcome opportunity, in this context, to proclaim full support for the US and to offer all the assistance that Russia was capable of in the 'war on terror'. However, this response did not merely reflect concern for the United States; there was more to it than met the eye. Putin's aim was that the international community should have to recognise the fight against separatists in Chechnya as a part of that 'war'. To some extent, the US criticism of Russia's actions in Chechnya did ease after 9/11 but that did not last for long, and soon the east and the west were having troubles in their relations. The reasons were chiefly threefold: the US reluctance to prolong the ABM Treaty, NATO's enlargement to the east, and the projected invasion in Iraq.²⁸²

When Putin took over as President Igor Ivanov was foreign minister, the third to hold that position in post-Soviet Russia. Under his supervision a new FPC was adopted, where one of the main emphases was on the so-called 'formation of new world order' (*r. formirovanie novogo miroustrojstva*). What this meant was basically that a variety of factors, such as economy, politics, environment, science, technology, and information, should play an important role in international cooperation, also in the military field.²⁸³ Hence, defence and security issues occupied a considerably stronger place in external policy, and more than that: they and foreign policy were unbreakably interwoven. The new concept also highlighted defence cooperation within the SCO structure (Shanghai Co-operation Organization, *r. Šankhajska organizacija sotrudničestva*), which comprised China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition a specific defence organisation was established, viz. The Collective Security Treaty Organization CSTO (*r. Organizacija dogovora o kolektivnoj bezopasnosti*),

²⁸¹ Steven Rosefielde, *Russia in the 21st Century - The Prodigal Superpower* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120.

²⁸² Blakkisrud, "Russisk utenriks-, sikkerhets- og forsvarspolitik og fremtidige hovedutfordringer i Norges forhold til Russland".

²⁸³ 'Konceptija vnešnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii 2000', [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2000], (Moscow: Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, 2000).

comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The parties to this organisation committed themselves not to use force against each other and not to participate in any other military or defence alliances with other states.²⁸⁴ The 'colour revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, however, caused a certain backlash against the idea of cooperation among the post-Soviet states.

Although Russian foreign policy did not essentially change much with Putin, it became much more resolute, streamlined, purposeful, and coordinated; and importantly, there was a strategic focus. The regions were not allowed to act as they wanted. It was a picture of a Russian foreign policy that the world had not seen since Gorbachev's days.²⁸⁵

When Putin started his second term as president in 2004, he continued to proclaim that foreign policy should serve domestic interests, and the development and modernisation of Russian society. This was made clear in his inaugural address to the Parliament.²⁸⁶ Putin also appointed a new foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, who still holds this position today. Handpicked by Putin, he has stood his leader in good stead and been successful in many regards. Prior to his post as foreign minister, Lavrov was a man with experience from the diplomatic service, e.g. as Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN where he sat on the Security Council. At the outset, Lavrov put strong emphasis on combating terrorism and advocated extensive international cooperation on that pressing issue.²⁸⁷ This emphasis was apparently triggered by the brutal terrorist attack on a school in Beslan in North Ossetia, carried out by Chechen separatists, which inflicted heavy losses of life, mostly children. This cowardly ferocity would colour the Russian political discourse for quite a while, also in the international context.

To a certain extent, it can be argued that what Yeltsin and Putin had in common was the inability to achieve special treatment to Russia from the West as a partner and collaborator. This was obviously a blow to their foreign policy, but the difference was that Russia was much stronger internally under Putin. Putin had utilised his first four years of his presidency to attain stability and to strengthen the state. The risk of any kind of disintegration or chaos, which hung over the whole Yeltsin period, was certainly not imminent now. The economic recession of the

²⁸⁴ de Haas, *Russia's Foreign Policy in the 21st century - Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, 40-41.

²⁸⁵ Charap, "Inside Out: Domestic Political Change and Foreign Policy in Vladimir Putin's First Term," 346.

²⁸⁶ Tatiana Zakaurtseva, *The Current Foreign Policy of Russia* (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2007), 88.

²⁸⁷ Sergey Lavrov, "Pered licom obščej ugrozy," [Face to face with a common threat], *Diplomatičeskij ežegodnik* 2004 (2005), 17-20.

1990s had been reversed into economic growth and a substantial surplus in state finances, predominantly thanks to high oil prices. This meant that Russia was now much better equipped to meet the challenges on the international scene. However, there were many conflicting interests in international affairs that confronted Putin in his second term: opposition to the missile shield in Europe, disagreement over Iraq policy, and the question of the independence of Kosovo to name but a few. Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, in fact, sparked off a debate in Ukraine and abroad on the possibility of a 'Kosovo scenario' for Crimea,²⁸⁸ so it should have been expected that Russia would make a point of that event – which it did – as discussed in §5.4.1. Relations with the EU were also rather tense, particularly after its enlargement to the east in 2004. Instead, the Kremlin emphasised cooperation with individual EU states within particular issue areas.²⁸⁹

Russia's vast energy resources have proved to be an important tool in the design of its foreign policy and in the struggle to become a 'superpower'. It is safe to say that Russian energy policy and foreign and security policy are an organic whole. The disputes over energy prices with Ukraine in 2006 and Belarus in 2007 resulted in energy security in general, and Russia's ambition to become an 'energy superpower' in particular, occupying a considerable space in the discourse within the EU and Russia's 'near abroad'. On the other hand, Russia has strived to minimise the risk of having to transport large parts of its exported oil and gas through Ukraine, Belarus and Poland by building new pipelines that circumvent those countries, while simultaneously doing its utmost to achieve monopoly over oil supplies from Central Asia. Consequently, Russia's energy resources are virtually its strongest weapon in international politics. At the G-8 meeting in 2005 Putin boasted about the leading role Russia had attained in the world oil market, claiming that it was in control of the largest gas and uranium resources in the world, approximately 10% of global stocks. Russia's energy strategy from 2003 specifically underlines that the energy resources are a political vehicle, and similar assertion can be found in the foreign policy concept and the military doctrine. The major energy companies, such as Transneft and Gazprom, are under state control, which underpins their political significance. About 30% of EU's imported energy comes from Russia and in individual countries this figure

²⁸⁸ Tetyana Malyarenko and David J. Galbreath, "Crimea: Competing Self-Determination Movements and the Politics at the Centre," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 5 (2013): 912.

²⁸⁹ Blakkisrud, "Russisk utenriks-, sikkerhets- og forsvarspolitik og fremtidige hovedutfordringer i Norges forhold til Russland".

exceeds 90%. But Russia is also dependent on the EU because about 80% of its oil exports goes to the EU and the equivalent figure for the gas export is about 60%. The interdependence thus goes in both directions.²⁹⁰

In conformity with the so-called multipolar approach in international affairs, Russia diligently pursued relations with emerging powers such as China, India, and Iran, thereby also underlining the bilateral emphasis in its foreign policy concept. Such a policy was in agreement with Putin's resolute intention to utilise foreign policy for the benefit of domestic politics and economic growth, thereby consolidating Russia's comeback as a great power.²⁹¹ Once again we see that the Russian foreign policy is very much governed by internal factors, ideas, and identity, but also material factors, such as oil and gas.

4.4.3 The interim rule of Medvedev

After two consecutive terms as president, Putin was not eligible for a further term according to the Russian constitution. His power base, the *Edinaja Rossiya* party (*e. United Russia*), was and still is the largest and dominating party in the political Russia. It was therefore not a surprise that a successor as president was selected by Putin himself among his closest allies. The chosen one was Dmitry Medvedev, then Prime Minister, and these two allies and leading figures in the party simply swapped positions as Putin became Prime Minister under Medvedev's presidency. This highly unusual power exchange immediately won the dubious label 'tandemocracy'. What it apparently entailed was that 'Medvedev as head of state had full formal authority in the country, while Putin as the head of government enjoys the status of an informal leader of the nation who is still immensely popular'.²⁹² Not surprisingly, Medvedev won the presidential election in March 2008 overwhelmingly, with 71% of the votes cast. Prior to the elections, Medvedev revealed his views on foreign policy and Russia's place in world society *inter alia* in a speech in January 2008 with the title *Russia forward* (*r. Rossiya vperëd*), a slogan that he was to use repeatedly. His vision was that Russia should further develop as an active and influential party on the international scene and should be open to discussion and cooperation with other countries,

²⁹⁰ Ingmar Oldberg, "Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev," (Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet, 2010), 19.

²⁹¹ Blakkisrud, "Russisk utenriks-, sikkerhets- og forsvarspolitik og fremtidige hovedutfordringer i Norges forhold til Russland".

²⁹² Fyodor Lukyanov, "Putin's Russia: The Quest for a New Place," *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 117.

although he underlined the importance of an independent foreign policy.²⁹³ He would repeat this position on many occasions: it was his aim that Russia should retain its place in the world. Further, he emphasised the wide-ranging consensus within Russia on foreign policy and warned the Russian people against nostalgia: modernisation and long-term interests should govern policy instead. Once again, Russia's economic strength as a nuclear power and a permanent member of the Security Council was accentuated.²⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that Medvedev highlighted cooperation to the east, with China and Asia in general, the BRIC states and Central Asia, which basically implied down-scaling the significance of cooperation with the US and the West.²⁹⁵ To an extent this was a policy change from the Putin period, but not necessarily a sign of a disagreement between the two men: rather, the political circumstances internationally called for such a policy shift.

Some scholars maintain that there was no substantial difference between Putin and Medvedev in terms of foreign policy; instead the change was merely cosmetic.²⁹⁶ Russia would still portray itself as a superpower, preserving a paternal attitude towards its neighbours and demanding a key position in all internationally vital issues, even where Russia's vested interests were small; it would continue to struggle against the West's interference in Russia's near abroad. Nothing of this was a deviation from Putin's policy. In that vein one could argue, as Andrew Monaghan did for instance, that Medvedev in fact had very little room for manoeuvre because Putin had established foreign policy consensus among both political elite and public.²⁹⁷ Others proclaim that Medvedev was more liberal, that his policy indeed deviated from Putin's hawkish style, and that some leading figures in Russian politics accordingly 'softened' their discourse to an unrecognisable degree when Medvedev became the United Russia's presidential candidate.²⁹⁸ Andrei Tsygankov argues that 'Medvedev's initial emotional disposition after assuming power is difficult to separate from that of Putin' and he maintains that Russia in fact in 2005 and

²⁹³ Andrew Monaghan, "An enemy at the gate or from victory to victory?," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 717.

²⁹⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, "Rossija vperëd," [Russia forward], *Gazeta* (2009).

²⁹⁵ de Haas, *Russia's Foreign Policy in the 21st century - Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, 110-111.

²⁹⁶ Bobo Lo, *Atlantic-Community.org*, April 2, 2012.

²⁹⁷ Monaghan, "An enemy at the gate or from victory to victory?," 718, 728, 732.

²⁹⁸ Viktor Yadukha, "'Obrezanie' otmenjaetsja," [The "circumcision" is cancelled], *RBK Daily* (2008).

henceforth 'adopted a more assertive stance'.²⁹⁹ Therefore, it would have been optimistic to expect a substantial or definitive policy change with Putin's closest ally at the wheel.

Nonetheless, Medvedev initiated a new foreign policy concept, adopted in 2008 and replacing the concept from 2000. In addition a national security concept was adopted in 2009 followed by a military doctrine in 2010. The new FPC emphasised the changing international environment and Russia's strengthened position since the turn of the millennium, which demanded an upgrading and revision of the former concept. National security, safeguarding sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of the state were the main focal points, as well as Russia's influence in the world society. These were all issues of utmost importance for the purpose of strengthening the country's political, economic, and human resource capacity.³⁰⁰ This policy concept also underlined the importance of good relations with other countries to serve the modernisation of Russia, where the aim was to improve the general living standard and strengthen the societal infrastructure, with due regard to democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedom, but also to strengthen the country's competitiveness in a global world. It goes without saying that Russia's responsibility in international affairs was stressed in this document, together with its will to participate in multinational operations to ensure security. Medvedev was keen on enjoying close cooperation with neighbouring countries, particularly the post-Soviet states (excluding the Baltics), while NATO's enlargement to the east was seen as a provocation to Russia's security. Strikingly, Russian foreign policy is extremely egocentric around Russian interests and the opposition to the US's unilateral influence is apparent. This is particularly evident through the vocabulary used, e.g. the frequent use of a word like *multilateral* (r. *mnogostoronnyj*). Of course the Russians do not understand notions such as 'democracy' and 'human rights' in a Western way; when they claim that 'Russia is a sovereign democracy' the intent is that it should be respected by other countries 'as it were an alternative value centre to Western democratic "Messianism"'.³⁰¹ – also implying that other states should not interfere in Russia's domestic affairs.

²⁹⁹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "The frustrating partnership: Honor, status, and emotions in Russia's discourses of the West," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 348.

³⁰⁰ 'Konceptcija vnešnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii 2008', [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2008], (Moscow: President of the Russian Federation, 2008).

³⁰¹ Oldberg, "Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev," 3. See also: Sergey Karaganov, "Rossija - SŠA: Obratno k mirnomu sosuščestvovaniju?," [Russia - USA: Back to a peaceful coexistence?], *Rossijskaja gazeta* (2006).

Even if we conclude that Medvedev's presidency barely represented a policy shift in Russia that does not mean that he did not matter. His softer countenance is almost undisputable, and his emphasis on Russia's modernisation for a time ensured a favourable wind for his country in the international arena.³⁰²

4.4.4 Putin Redux

When Putin stepped down as president in 2008 and Medvedev replaced him, the common view was that this was merely an interim period, after which Putin would return as president. Some hoped at least that Medvedev would take the initiative and try to strengthen his position, so that it would be impossible to push him out. He might even have 'harboured hopes for a second term', although he 'subordinated himself to the decision'.³⁰³ It turned out, however, that Putin was all the time the strong man, and so he returned to the post as president in 2012 albeit the support for him was not as enthusiastic as he would have expected – officially he got roughly 63% of the votes. Although he most certainly won more than half of the ballots in the country as a whole, his support in the capital city of Moscow was apparently below 50%.³⁰⁴ The results show that backing for him had somewhat ebbed away, which almost certainly was of concern for him; but as Richard Sakwa points out, the announcement of his candidacy in September 2011 'provoked a neuralgic reaction across society'.³⁰⁵

What is then the effect of Putin's 'redux' for Russia's foreign policy and its position in global affairs? It has already been pointed out that Medvedev's presidency did not entail any profound or real changes; consequently one could argue that having Putin once more as leader would mean no change of course. Some might even question whether Putin ever truly left the post! It must be borne in mind, however, that when Medvedev took over a number of powerful people – chosen by Putin – were already in place: the foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, the President's advisor Sergey Prikhodko, the head of the intelligent service and former Prime Minister Mikhail Fradko, and others. All these (men) were – and still are – very influential as regards foreign policy. With Putin back at the wheel, the 'hardliners' might have hoped for a

³⁰² Oldberg, "Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev," 23.

³⁰³ Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux - Power and contradiction in contemporary Russia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 134.

³⁰⁴ Maria Lipman et al., "Russia on the Move," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Policy Outlook* June (2012): 2.

³⁰⁵ Sakwa, *Putin Redux - Power and contradiction in contemporary Russia*, 134.

firmer policy *vis-à-vis* the US and other Western countries, e.g. in relation to Iran and the Middle East. Nikolay Kozhanov, an IR scholar who worked for many years in the Russian embassy in Tehran, argues that those who hoped for a more resolute policy must have been disappointed with the course on the part of Putin.³⁰⁶ Arguably, it is debatable whether Kozhanov's prediction has come true.

Putin's second term (2004-2008) had been in many regards characterised by chilly relations with the West. That was certainly not the case during Medvedev's presidency, in spite of the war with Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008. Therefore, many feared that Putin's return would lead to a new chill in the east-west relations. That fear was greatly overestimated. There was no reason to believe that changing shifts in the Kremlin would entail fundamental changes in the foreign policy, chiefly because the Russian authorities' view of the world had not changed considerably. Russian foreign policy and the general perception of the outside world is a more complex phenomenon than would make it possible for one man in the Kremlin to revolutionise it in a short period of time. Russia will continue to emphasise participation in global affairs on equal footing with other important states and alliances, and to present itself as a state with its own 'sphere of influence' that must be defended and safeguarded. Hence, Russia will continue to endeavour to prevent EU's and NATO's enlargements towards the Russian borders, but will simultaneously initiate and maintain cooperation with such states and alliances on issues of crucial weight for Russia's security. The struggle against terrorism is a case in point. The *raison d'être* for Russian foreign policy is, as it happens, profoundly rooted in the Russian national spirit and identity, and there is a relatively broad consensus around it. Hence, Russia's relations to the West will intermittently be chilly in issue-areas where Russia feels threatened, but quite close and strongly attached in other areas.³⁰⁷ Some academics have pointed out that Putin's return was likely to affect US-Russia relations in particular, because Medvedev's attitude towards the US had been quite liberal as a part of his modernisation program.³⁰⁸ However, there were quite a few problems involved in the US-Russia relations under Medvedev, as already mentioned.

³⁰⁶ Nikolay Kozhanov, "Russian Foreign Policy after Putin's Return," *Washingtoninstitute.org* (2012).

³⁰⁷ Jana Kobzová, And Janek Lasocki, "Russia and the West after Putin's comeback," *Transatlantic Policy Briefs* September (2012).

³⁰⁸ Jana Kobzová, And Tomáš Valášek, "Putin Redux: Foreign Policy under Russia's Comeback President," in *Nordic-Baltic-American Cooperation: Shaping the US-European Agenda* (Washington DC: The Johns Hopkins University, 2012), 92.

Putin stressed when returning as president that Russia would only be respected and have its interests considered by the outside world if it was strong; he underlined that the foreign policies 'reflect Russia's unique role on the world map'.³⁰⁹ As before, he considered economic development an influential factor in the conduct of the foreign policy. There was a certain fear abroad that an economically weak Russia, and the Russian people's waning tolerance for Putin's so-called 'managed democracy', would ultimately direct Putin towards a more hawkish foreign policy: that he would abandon the 're-set' in US-Russia relations, introduced by Medvedev and US President Barack Obama after the latter's election in 2009. This in turn could lead to conflicts in the most vulnerable post-Soviet states, such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and even Belarus, particularly since Europe was going through a period of relative weakness as a consequence of the financial crisis. Some political analysts warned that armed conflicts could break out again in 'frozen' regions of dispute such as Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Transdnestria. Ukraine is – of course – a special case. On the other hand it is also important to remember that Russia and the West have continued to work closely together on Afghanistan, in spite of Russians being partly critical towards NATO's conduct of warfare. Enhanced collaboration within the framework of the Security Council would further increase the prospects for agreement on Syria and Iran.

As we have seen, Putin Redux has mostly continued the foreign policy path that Medvedev followed, which in turn had largely been moulded before the turn of the millennium and was cemented by Putin during his first and second terms. This held good, at least, until Ukraine and Crimea emerged and boded ill for Russia's reputation in international affairs, specifically its relations to the near abroad and the West.

4.5 Russia's relation to the West – NATO and EU enlargement

RUSSIA'S POLICY in regards to Ukraine and Crimea is closely related to its grievances against the eastward enlargements of the European Union and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO. Therefore, a due account of its policy and its relations to the West will serve the purpose of this dissertation by helping to understand the driving forces behind Russia's Ukraine policy.

³⁰⁹ Carol R. Saivetz, "Medvedev's and Putin's foreign policies. Introduction," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012): 375.

In the Cold War era, relations between east and west were characterised by shifting periods of thaw and frost. It was a struggle between two poles: political, ideological, military, geopolitical, economic, cultural, and scientific and technological.³¹⁰ Towards the end of the Soviet era, Gorbachev and his foreign minister Shevardnadze had pursued a policy of détente, as witnessed by the Reagan-Gorbachev summits. A new reality emerged as a consequence of the demise of the Soviet Union, in Moscow and the West alike. Russia was forced to define its own foreign policy, but also to establish institutions and know-how in conformity with the new reality. This was not an easy task. It has been argued that the foreign policy objectives of the new Russia were, at the outset, blurred – the question was even raised whether Russia had any coherent foreign policy at all. It was not only western representatives who aired this view; Russian political analysts were equally critical. For instance, Sergey Rogov, director of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada in Moscow, claimed that the first three years under Yeltsin were ‘three years of problems and mistakes’. The same view was taken by Sergey Karaganov, a member of Yeltsin’s Presidential Council.³¹¹ In the West there was a certain uncertainty regarding developments in Russia, and also over how the West could make it easier for Yeltsin to move Russia politically in a westward direction. While Yeltsin’s tenure as Russia’s leader was mainly positively regarded in the West, the Russians rather see it ‘as a time of economic decline, political chaos, and foreign policy weakness’.³¹²

Yeltsin’s aim was to establish good relations with the US and its allies: not only because he sincerely wanted good relations with the West, but also because it was a pressing economic necessity. Russia desperately needed good-will and support from the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the West, many fancied Yeltsin’s ‘shock-therapy’³¹³ and suggested that by such a method Russia would soon enter the group of market societies. However, that prediction was not to come true. Yeltsin became weaker and weaker, literally and figuratively. He never mastered the business of foreign policy very well, and his first foreign minister Kozyrev was not

³¹⁰ L.G. Ivashov, "Ruslands plads i verden af i dag," in *Rusland før og nu: essays tilegnet Karsten J. Møller*, [Russia's place in the world of today], ed. Kartni Winther (Copenhagen: Forsvarsakademiet, 2007), 23.

³¹¹ Stephen Larrabee and Theodore W. Karasik, *Foreign and Security Policy Making under Yeltsin* (Washington DC: RAND, 1997), 1-2.

³¹² Stephen Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2010): 34.

³¹³ Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "Russian theory of international relations," 6380. The ‘shock therapy’, which included radical economic reform, also implied, according to the authors, ‘gaining a full-scale status in transatlantic economic and security institutions’.

precisely strong either – a kind of dreamer. Criticism at home waxed and Yeltsin was accused of being too much a Westerniser and incapable of taking care of Russia's interests on the international stage.³¹⁴ His performance with regard to the issues of Bosnia and CIS was particularly criticised. The conflict in Chechnya was especially burdensome for Russia in its dealings with the West, although the latter did not intervene directly in the conflict – which by the way was never an option. The Foreign Service was said to be ineffective and haphazard under Yeltsin's rule. Yeltsin himself took the criticism seriously and reshuffled his government in early 1996, replacing both the foreign minister and the defence minister. Yevgeny Primakov became foreign minister, an arrangement that led to considerable changes in relations with the West. Primakov focussed primarily on relations with the CIS states, China, and the Middle East. This was a policy change both in theory and practice.³¹⁵ Simultaneously, a firmer position was taken against NATO's enlargement. To some extent, the messages from Moscow were misleading: some high-ranking officials still believed that Russia could become a member of NATO, but Primakov instantly suppressed such ideas. In general and unlike his predecessors, he did have the knack of foreign policy making, as is evident i.a. from the fact that it was his view on the NATO-membership question that ultimately prevailed within the Russian political elite.³¹⁶

East-west relations thus had their ups and downs not only during the Soviet time, but the same applies for the post-Soviet period. This was mainly by virtue of the fact that Russian foreign policy is profoundly anchored in the Russian identity and self-image and is not to be changed so easily in a short period of time. Further, the situation in global affairs and in the domestic administration made it inevitable for Russia, during Yeltsin's second term, to pursue a more militant position *vis-à-vis* the West. The Balkan war was one of the main reasons, in addition to NATO's enlargement and the projected missile defence shield system in Europe. Moreover, the Russians were hugely disappointed by the relatively little economic support they obtained from the West for rebuilding their society out of the Soviet ruins, as for example Parkhalina points out.³¹⁷ On top of this there was a disagreement, or at least different views in the Russian power structure between those who wanted to lean towards the West and those who favoured increased cooperation with the post-Soviet states and Asia.

³¹⁴ Larrabee and Karasik, *Foreign and Security Policy Making under Yeltsin*, 5.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

³¹⁷ Parkhalina, "Was treibt Russland an? Ein Blick auf innere und äußere Faktoren," 219.

When Putin rose to power in the Kremlin, east-west relations were at their coolest temperature since the Soviet collapse, *inter alia* because of the conflict on Kosovo.³¹⁸ The foreign policy Putin introduced emphasised *multipolarism*, which demanded an equal focus on east, west, north and south. At the same time, Putin was well aware of the importance of enhancing relations with the US – most notably because of its superiority – and this coincided very well with his special field of interest, namely the struggle against terrorism.³¹⁹ There were several major reasons for Putin to adjust this foreign policy emphasis in his first term, as the disagreement with the West grew. Firstly, the power balance in the Kremlin altered around 2003, in that the so-called *siloviki* (*e. strongmen*) – people from the army and the intelligence service – became more influential at the expense of more liberal figures. This became specifically evident in the Yukos case, related to the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The *siloviki*'s world view did not give latitude for enhanced relations with the West. Secondly, as a result of rapid economic growth in 2005-2006 by virtue of high energy prices and a rigid monetary and fiscal policy, the opinion that Russia was again a superpower gained the upper hand in Russian politics. Russia managed to amortise its foreign loans before they became due, and it established a stability fund with the primary objective of countering economic depression. By the end of 2007 this fund amounted to \$157 billion. At the same time Russia strengthened its position internationally, not least because the US, the UK, and in fact NATO as a whole were occupied with Iraq and Afghanistan, while the US economy experienced a down-turn. Thirdly, there was a perception of fatigue in Russian politics towards the West, due to the latter's lack of recognition of Russian legitimate interests *inter alia* in the context of NATO enlargement. Also, the US in 2001 withdrew from the ABM Treaty and started the preparations for a missile defence shield including bases in close vicinity to the Russian borders, in spite of Russia's fierce protests. The US-led invasion in Iraq added further to this fatigue. Lastly, the lack of recognition for Russia's claims and the West's inertia over supporting its alignment and participation in political and military cooperation added fuel to the flames, encouraging the anti-Westernisers, and having a negative effect on Putin's endeavour for rapprochement with the US after 9/11. In the wake of Khodorkovsky's trial, aspects of Russian domestic and the external policy also led step by step to conflicts with the West. The NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004, along with increased US

³¹⁸ Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post Soviet Era*, 157.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167-174.

and European influence and covetousness in Central Asia and in some post-Soviet states, did not make the situation any better; on the contrary. The opinion grew stronger among Russians that western values, such as human rights and democracy, were first and foremost a pretext for pursuing western interests and power politics.³²⁰ The supposed Western role in the ‘colour revolutions’ added further to the grievances in Russia, as will be explained in §5.1.1. Lilia Shevtsova, who is a co-chair at the independent Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow, argues that the first NATO enlargement ‘was a sign that the West had made its goal the integration of Eastern and Central Europe, *though at the expense of its relationship with Yeltsin’s Russia*, which meant that the leading Western political circles had reconciled themselves with the idea that Russia could not be embraced’; rather it ‘would have to swim alone’.³²¹

Russian politicians often speak about the common security and defence interests of Russia and NATO. In that regard they point at the common threats: organised crime and terrorism, drug and human trafficking, against which they must fight together. Nonetheless, the experience of cooperation has been rather challenging. NATO’s enlargement, particularly Georgia’s and Ukraine’s desire to join the organisation, the missile shield in Russia’s backyard, and NATO’s intervention in regional conflicts across the world have ‘added to Russia’s sense of being vulnerable and politically isolated by the West’.³²² Thus Russia’s repeated demand that Georgia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states should be recognised as belonging to its sphere of influence³²³ was to no avail: a fact that may easily have evoked inferiority complexes in the Kremlin. The British-Polish academic Richard Sakwa, who is an expert in the field of Russian and Eastern European communist and post-communist politics at the University of Kent, notes that the ‘momentum of NATO enlargement continued’, notwithstanding that Russia had repeatedly signalled that it perceived such an expansion as a strategic threat ‘of the first order’.³²⁴ In Sakwa’s view, Russia became ‘increasingly alienated’ in the wake of the Iraq War, after having ‘sought to align itself with the EU and NATO’ in the 1990s and early 2000s; thus, it

³²⁰ Staun, "Ruslands udenrigspolitik - Fra Jeltsins Vesternisering til Putins Nyliberalisme," 6-8.

³²¹ Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia - Lost in Transition* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2007), 23. [Emphasis added].

³²² Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling honors: Power, identity and the Russia–Georgia divide," *Foreign policy analysis* 5, no. 4 (2009): 321. See also: Roger E. Kanet and Maxim Henri André Larivé, "NATO and Russia: A perpetual new beginning," *Perceptions* XVII, no. 1 (2012): 75. And: Maria Raquel Freire, "Russian foreign policy in the making: The linkage between internal dynamics and the external context," *International Politics* 49, no. 4 (2012): 475.

³²³ Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," 35.

³²⁴ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2015), 4.

embarked on a 'neo-revisionist' course, which in turn set the scene for the current Ukraine conflict.³²⁵

NATO itself experienced a certain existential crisis as the Cold War ended: the enemy had disappeared. The organisation managed, however, to underpin a justification for its existence by changing its strategy from being a regional defence alliance into that of a collective security alliance. This strategy shift irritated the Kremlin, because it saw it as NATO's and the West's attempt to impose its world-view on other countries and regions, including Russia. That was clearly contrary to Russia's aim of increasing its share and influence in international affairs.³²⁶ Russia perceived NATO's attitude as ambivalent, as Baranovsky points out: 'By and large the Cold war logic of "keeping Russians out" seems to many of them [Western countries] to have mutated into a double-track task: how to prevent Russians from becoming disengaged, without however actually letting them in'.³²⁷ As the most recent example, the 2011 UN-backed military intervention in Libya caused a conflict between Russia on the one hand and the US and NATO on the other, with Russia time and again claiming that NATO exceeded the mandate in UNSC Resolution 1973.³²⁸ Yet again, this reflects the grievances that are graven in the Russian mentality and the perception of the West as the 'significant Other'.

As for Russia-EU relations, very much the same applies as regarding NATO. However, Russia tends to view NATO cooperation as purely military, whereas cooperation in and with the EU is political and economic. This means that there are not always the same institutions involved in Russia's relationships with these two important Western organisations, and there can be – and most likely are – different interests at stake. In particular, the Russo-German relations have for long been and still are quite close, even to a degree that some EU countries – chiefly the Central and East European Countries (CEEC) – find inappropriate.³²⁹ As Stephen Larrabee wrote back in 2010: 'Germany has strong economic and political interests in maintaining stable relations with Russia. Thus, Berlin is going to react cautiously to proposals that could lead to a deterioration of relations to Moscow'.³³⁰ We have seen most recently, in the current Ukraine crisis, that Larrabee may have hit the nail on the head: it also helps that President Putin and the *Kanzlerin* Merkel

³²⁵ Ibid., 30.

³²⁶ Kanet and Larivé, "NATO and Russia: A perpetual new beginning," 78-81.

³²⁷ Baranovsky, "Russia: a part of Europe or apart from Europe?," 446. [Insertion here].

³²⁸ Kanet and Larivé, "NATO and Russia: A perpetual new beginning," 88.

³²⁹ Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," 46-48.

³³⁰ Ibid., 48.

have been on rather good terms personally, and they speak each other's language fluently. Even so – it must be argued – the relatively close relations between Russia and Germany have suffered a setback as a consequence of Russia's annexation of Crimea and its assertive policy towards Ukraine.

The FPC is positive on relations with the EU,³³¹ and the EU and Russia are – as we have seen – mutually interdependent with regard to trade, particularly in energy. Of special importance is the trade with Germany, but also the Baltic States and Poland are hugely dependent on Russian energy. However, the latter are very distrustful of Russia for obvious historical reasons.³³²

In conclusion, it is safe to say that in spite of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc, a great deal of suspicion still prevails in Russia *vis-à-vis* the West and *vice versa*. Presumably, this mistrust is grounded not only on the ideological rift that certainly existed during the Soviet period, but might have had deeper and longer-term roots. However, Russia and the West will – in spite of relentless disagreements and conflicts – enjoy cooperation on issue areas where their interests coincide, and will continue to fight over issues where each feels threatened by the other. Whether the current Ukraine crisis will permanently alter this remains to be seen.

4.6 Continuity or change in Russia's foreign policy?

EDWARD H. CARR in his seminal *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* wrote that all human action 'must establish a balance between utopia and reality, between free will and determinism'.³³³ This aphorism also applies to foreign policy and states' action in their international relations, because they define their national interests – endogenous and exogenous – in relation to a given reality or political circumstances. This does not mean, however, that states' policies are static or that they define their interests once and forever, as 'realists and liberals often assume'. As Tsygankov points out, states' interests more typically 'fluctuate with changes on the domestic and international political scene'.³³⁴ This is highly applicable to

³³¹ 'Konceptcija vnešnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii 2013', [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013], (Moscow: Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, 2013).

³³² Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 309, 316.

³³³ Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 11.

³³⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 221.

Russia's foreign policy, as described above, in the case of its orientation towards the end of the Cold War and its development under Russia's four subsequent presidents. We have seen that the foreign policy direction is hugely dependent on domestic political priorities as well as on Russia's perception of the external environment, specifically *vis-à-vis* 'the significant Other'.

Mikhail Gorbachev launched his *New Thinking* as a part of his *perestroika* project, in order to enhance the country's international cooperation by reviving 'socialist values at home'. His contribution to disarmament and the abandoning of the *Brezhnev doctrine*³³⁵ made the demolition of the Berlin Wall possible. Here it would be appropriate to mention, that it has been claimed that the Soviet Union got assurance from the West that NATO would not be extended to the east as a result of the tearing down of the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union's – and in particular Gorbachev's initiative and – unconditional support of the unification of Germany.³³⁶ This alleged assurance is in turn also said to explain and justify Russia's grievances against NATO's enlargement and broken promises on the part of the West. Towards the end of his tenure, Gorbachev eventually understood that it would be impossible to sustain the Soviet unity. Yeltsin, by contrast, sought true integration with the West by joining the IMF and the World Bank, and had further aspirations to join the G-7 group and even NATO and the EU. This policy, however, met formidable opposition domestically. By replacing his foreign minister Kozyrev with Primakov, Yeltsin aligned himself with this opposition and the latter vision of Great Power Balancing became the major foreign policy direction, with strong emphasis on eastward-looking cooperation to balance against US hegemony. Then Putin took yet another stand by drawing attention to common threats, notably terrorism, and seeking the West's recognition of Russia's meaningful role in combatting it. Most notably, he was eager to strengthen US-Russia relations in the wake of 9/11 – a position reiterated by foreign minister Lavrov in his address to the United Nations³³⁷ – and in general he favoured pragmatic bilateral relations instead of Primakov's policy. Putin's second term was characterised by 'assertiveness' in that he rejected the US's unilateralism and the Great Power vision made its entry once again. Schematically, Tsygankov identifies five steps in this connection from Gorbachev to Putin II (see Table 4.2).

³³⁵ See fn. 243.

³³⁶ Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, 4.

³³⁷ Lavrov, "Pered licom obščej ugrozy". (2005).

Table 4.2 Russia's Five Visions of the World and National Interest

	Perceived World	National Interest
Gorbachev	Cold War crisis	New Thinking and cross-cultural dialogue
Yeltsin/Kozyrev	Western institutional dominance	Integration with the West
Primakov	US power hegemony	Balancing against the US
Putin I	Terrorism and economic competition	Pragmatic cooperation with the West
Putin II	US unilateralism	Assertiveness

Source: Tsygankov (2010), Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity, p. 226.

In explaining Russia's first foreign policy concept in 2000, foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated that '[t]he substance of the document reflected the truth that, no matter how deep internal changes may be, the foreign policy of any state cannot begin with a clean slate, but bears the imprint of continuity determined by the country's geopolitics, history, and culture'. He also declared, however, that 'the Russian Federation is a new state functioning'. By stressing that Russia had resolutely 'broken with the ideological legacy of the Soviet Union while proclaiming its legal status as the successor state to the USSR',³³⁸ and that 'Present-day Russian diplomacy objectively has emerged as a complex synthesis of elements of the Soviet legacy, the now-revived diplomatic traditions of the old Russia, and the new attitudes emerging from radical democratic changes both in the country and on the international scene',³³⁹ Ivanov underlined both the change *and* continuity in Russian foreign policy.

Although Russia undisputedly inherited the Soviet Union's place on the world scene, the latter's Marxist-Leninist ideology had been jettisoned altogether, 'leaving a vacuum in ideas and in political discourse'.³⁴⁰ This required a new identity formation because Russia had never existed as a nation-state proper. Rather, it had been 'a multinational empire with messianic ambitions', both during communism and in the pre-revolutionary time. While post-Soviet Russia has remained a multi-ethnic and composite state, the fact is that ethnic Russians now compose 80% of the total population, as against around half the population in the Soviet Union. It adds

³³⁸ Igor Ivanov, "The new Russian identity: Innovation and continuity in Russian foreign policy," *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2001): 7.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴⁰ Light, "In Search of an Identity: Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Ideology," 43.

further to the complexity of defining the national identity that 25 million ethnic Russians lived outside Russia at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.³⁴¹

The competing ideas for defining Russia's national interests at this time were embodied in three main strands: liberal Westernist, pragmatic nationalist, and fundamentalist nationalist. Despite a fierce confrontation on domestic policy orientation that culminated in the attempted coup against Yeltsin in 1993, consensus was eventually reached – by and large – on a foreign policy that implied the survival of pragmatic nationalist ideas, admittedly as a compromise. This policy entailed a more assertive perception of Russia's role – *inter alia* in the 'near abroad' – and 'portrayed a far less benign view' about the international environment than the liberals would have preferred.³⁴²

Putin has also himself emphasised the continuity of Russian foreign policy: 'Russia's foreign policy has always been independent and it will remain so. We follow a consistent policy based on continuity and the unique role our country plays in world affairs and in global civilisation's development, a role that has taken shape over the course of centuries.'³⁴³

Russia has ever been – and still is – extremely occupied with its status as a great power. 'The idea of greatpowerness is understood as forming the core of Russia's state identity throughout centuries, including what we can observe today.'³⁴⁴ This has been reiterated on many occasions by leading Russian politicians. Thus Primakov proclaimed that 'Russia always was, is and will be a great power,'³⁴⁵ and more recently Lavrov said: 'I am convinced that Russia simply cannot exist as a subordinate country'.³⁴⁶ Iver B. Neumann has pointed out that Russia is particularly concerned about its status in its relations with the West, which historically is considered as 'the Other'.³⁴⁷ Moreover, considerations of status and honour have often motivated Russia's calculations on whether to go to war or to cooperate with the West, and these factors

³⁴¹ Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* (New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 110.

³⁴² Light, "In Search of an Identity: Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Ideology," 44-47.

³⁴³ Vladimir Putin, 'Russia's Foreign Policy Has Always Been Independent and It Will Remain So', (Moscow: 2012).

³⁴⁴ Tuomas Forsberg, "Status conflicts between Russia and the West: Perceptions and emotional biases," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014): 323.

³⁴⁵ Yevgeni Primakov, "International Relations on the Eve of XXI Century: Problems and Prospects," *International Affairs* 10 (1996). Cited in: Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence," *The Washington Quarterly* October (2009): 10.

³⁴⁶ Sergey Lavrov, "Russia in the 21st-Century World of Power," *Russia in Global Affairs* 4 (2012).

³⁴⁷ Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003), Kindle: 207.

can explain many difficulties in their relations.³⁴⁸ Hence, the main problems in Russia's relations to the West are not primarily about security; rather, they revolve around Russia's perception of the status and respect it receives from the Western side.³⁴⁹ In the same vein, Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko have contended that Russia [and China] 'have been more likely to contribute to global governance when they believed that doing so would enhance their prestige'.³⁵⁰ Therefore it can be argued, that Russia would make a more stable and reliable partner for the West if it were 'sure of itself and its standing in the world'.³⁵¹ Even such a realist as Morgenthau admits the significant role of status and prestige, although he claims that they are rarely the primary aims of foreign policy and should not be.³⁵²

In conclusion, therefore, Russia's foreign policy can be characterised by a certain continuity that is firmly ingrained in the country's and the nation's history and identity. It is clearly a legacy of the past. Simultaneously, the foreign policy has been subject to changes, caused endogenously and exogenously – by the domestic political and economic circumstances as well as the international context – most notably in the development of Russia's relations with the West.

³⁴⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Part I, particularly ch. 4.

³⁴⁹ Richard Sakwa, "'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and international politics," *International Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2008): 250-251, 261-263.

³⁵⁰ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 93.

³⁵¹ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia and the west: taking a longer view," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 133.

³⁵² Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The struggle for power and peace*, 85.

5 NOTHING VENTURED – NOTHING GAINED: THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

MAIDAN NEZALEZHNOSTI (e. *INDEPENDENCE SQUARE*) in the centre of Kyiv was the venue for the November 2013 protests that eventually led to the ousting of the Yanukovich regime and his escape from the country in February 2014. On March 16th, as we have seen, a hastily arranged (unconstitutional according to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine) referendum was held in which roughly 95% of participating voters in Crimea voted in favour of joining Russia. Russia then formally declared the annexation of the territory on March 21st. In Russian discourse on this event, the word *annexation* (r. *annekcija*) is categorically avoided in favour of words like *joining* (r. *vkhoždenie*) or *reunification* (r. *vossoedinenie*) – not surprisingly. The annexation of Crimea, it has been argued, marked the end of the European order that emerged after the end of the Cold War.³⁵³

In order to approach a conclusion, i.e. to understand and explain the causes of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the main motives behind its foreign policy choices, it is necessary here to explore some important features in Russia-Ukraine relations that may help shed light on the calculations and motives behind Russia's decision. The common historical roots of the two peoples in question, and the way these relate to the important question of identity, have already been covered in chapter 3 above. While not pretending to give an exhaustive account of other factors, this chapter starts by addressing the tug-of-war between Ukraine and Russia in the 2000s – more specifically the 'colour revolution', and the question of why Russia did not respond to Ukrainian political turmoil in the millennium's first decade. Secondly, it focusses on two key issues pertaining to the annexation, namely its economic implications and the impact in terms of the Black Sea Region. Next follows a discussion on the incumbent President's role and personal leverage in face of this momentous event. Lastly, the chapter gives an account of some significant dimensions of discourse surrounding the annexation, starting with legal aspects and the position in international law – in which both parties have claimed to have the right on their side. Finally, the chapter offers a sample and summary of general discourse about the annexation

³⁵³ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, "Novyj evropejskij besporjadok: Otnošenija s Rossiej kak vyzov otvetstvennosti dlja vsej Evropy," [New European mess: Relations with Russia as a challenge of responsibility for the whole of Europe], *Gefter* (2014).

and the connected public debate, which may or may not provide corroborating hints at the various sides' underlying motives.

5.1 Political turmoil in Ukraine in the 2000s

5.1.1 The Colour Revolution

In the wake of the collapse of the communist regimes across Europe, a hope of broad democratisation arose. It took some time, however, to be realised and then – in effect – only in some of the relevant countries. By contrast, we saw in some countries a continuation of authoritarian and hybrid- or semi-authoritarian regimes, in spite of several attempts to overthrow them. The so-called 'bulldozer' revolution in Serbia in 2000 was the first such attempt and sparked off a development that spread to other post-communist countries, most notably to Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.³⁵⁴ Common features for all these three countries were particularly weak and fragile regimes, as well as 'stolen' elections. At the same time, the incumbent elites in Belarus and Russia were able to prevent such a development, not least by learning from the 'mistakes' made by leaders in countries where the 'colour revolutions' were successful, and hence taking pre-emptive steps.³⁵⁵

The term 'colour revolution' normally refers to the episodes of political unrest that eventually led to regime-transition in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively: although the term is widely used for analogous events outside the post-Soviet area, most notably in Serbia. It describes a phenomenon of 'non-violent protests that succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian regimes during the first decade of the twenty-first century'.³⁵⁶ Although the term is first and foremost associated with events in the former Soviet Union, the opposition in the post-Soviet states also learned from and took advantage of the Serbian experience.³⁵⁷ In this study the focus will for obvious reasons be exclusively on Ukraine and Russia. In Ukraine, the colour was Orange, deriving from the colour of the Yushchenko-led

³⁵⁴ Stephen White, "Is There a Pattern?," in *Rethinking the 'Coloured Revolutions'*, eds. David Lane and Stephen White (London: Routledge, 2010), 284.

³⁵⁵ Paul D'anieri, "Explaining the success and failure of post-communist revolutions," *Communist and post-communist studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 349.

³⁵⁶ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, And Abel Polese, *The colour revolutions in the former Soviet republics: successes and failures* (Routledge London & New York, 2010), 1.

³⁵⁷ Valerie Bunce and Sharon L Wolchik, "Favorable conditions and electoral revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 4 (2006): 12.

coalition in the 2004 Presidential elections. The colour revolutions constitute what has been labelled ‘the second wave of democratisation’ in the post-Soviet region.³⁵⁸ What they had in common was ‘a proposed socio-political transformation intended to introduce “democracy from below”’.³⁵⁹ From a Russian viewpoint it has been pointed out that although the colour revolutions were not ‘profound social revolutions’, they can safely be assessed as ‘political revolutions’.³⁶⁰

Apparently, the Orange revolution in Ukraine had a real influence on debates within Russian society, where the leadership and its adherents considered it a deceitful plot by the West to isolate Russia – sometimes referred to as the ‘orange plague’ – and to tear Ukraine away from it. The Kremlin therefore took steps, both at home and abroad, to ensure that no colour revolution would occur in Russia.³⁶¹ Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak Brudny – for instance – in their research on the colour revolutions, focus on individual actors and their decisions, psychological factors and motivations for participations in mass protests.³⁶² With reference to Vitali Silitsky, they maintain that the ruling elites conducted a policy of so-called ‘pre-emptive authoritarianism’, with the aim of preventing colour revolutions from the start. The main strategies that such leaders relied on were and are ‘isolation, marginalization, distribution, repression, persuasion’. These authors’ findings show that limitations on the civil movements, the almost complete absence of independent election monitoring, and ‘anti-liberal state ideology’ added up to a successful strategy in Russia, ‘driven by the fear of further colour revolutions in the region’.³⁶³

Russian leaders have persisted in their efforts to counter any attempt at a colour revolution, by focusing precisely on the factors that are likely to secure a successful revolution. This includes e.g. restricting NGOs and weakening the opposition, a policy that arguably has shifted

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 5. The first wave in the post-communist region took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s in connection with the end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union.

³⁵⁹ David Lane, “‘Coloured Revolution’ as a Political Phenomenon,” in *Rethinking the ‘Coloured Revolutions’*, eds. David Lane and Stephen White (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.

³⁶⁰ V. D. Solovej, “Cvetnye revoljucii i Rossija,” [The colour revolutions and Russia], *Sravnitel'naja politika* no. 1 (2011): 34.

³⁶¹ Thomas Ambrosio, “Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends,” *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (2007): 237. See also: Dmitri Trenin, “Russia's Perspective on the Wider Black Sea Region,” in *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century*, eds. Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, The Johns Hopkins University/Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 2008), 108.

³⁶² Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny, “No more colour! Authoritarian regimes and colour revolutions in Eurasia,” *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (2012): 5.

³⁶³ Ibid., 7.

Russia from a semi-authoritarian regime towards a full authoritarian one.³⁶⁴ State representatives have even declared that 'NGOs were in fact covers for foreign espionage networks',³⁶⁵ which clearly points to the serious anxiety the colour revolutions provoked in the Kremlin. In particular, Moscow distrusts civil society and has therefore taken measures to diminish its role and latitude. Instead, Putin launched what he labelled 'sovereign democracy' (*r. suverennaja demokratija*), and underlined civil society's role in consolidating it; it should serve to 'defend the national interest and independence of Russia'.³⁶⁶ In his view, civil society in Russia is different from civil society in the 'so-called' traditional democracies, as he put it in a speech to Russian NGOs.³⁶⁷ Brudny and Finkel further argue that

Russia's slide toward authoritarianism was to an important degree an outcome of the notions of national identity adopted by the main political players and society at large. In Ukraine, on the other hand, a hegemonic identity failed to emerge and the public discussion of issues of national identity led to the adoption of much more liberal and democratic notions of identity by a considerable part of the political elite. Adoption of this more liberal identity, in turn, was one of the main reasons for the Orange Revolution.³⁶⁸

By strategy, or through policy choice that basically consists of a political, administrative and intellectual assault on the opposition and the pro-Western notion of democracy, as well as denouncing liberal ideas of democracy, calling them alien and hostile to the national character,³⁶⁹ the incumbent autocrats in Russia have so far been able to control developments within the country. However, the very fact that colour revolutions did occur in Ukraine (and elsewhere in the post-Soviet space), constituted a major blow to Russia's self-image as a regional and world power, and contributed to damaging the relations between these neighbouring countries and brethren nations.

³⁶⁴ Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M Brudny, "Russia and the colour revolutions," *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (2012): 16.

³⁶⁵ Vicken Cheterian, "From Reform and Transition to 'Coloured Revolutions'," in *Rethinking the 'Coloured Revolutions'*, eds. David Lane and Stephen White (London: Routledge, 2010), 44.

³⁶⁶ Jeanne L. Wilson, "Coloured Revolutions: The View from Moscow and Beijing," in *Rethinking the 'Coloured Revolutions'*, eds. David Lane and Stephen White (London: Routledge, 2010), 270.

³⁶⁷ Vladimir Putin, 'Vystuplenie na vstreče s učastnikami Meždunarodnogo foruma nepravitel'stvennykh organizacij "Graždanskaja vos'měrka - 2006"', [Speech at a meeting with members of the International NGO Forum "Civil Eight - 2006"], *President of the Russian Federation* (Moscow: 2006). [In the Russian original: U našego rossijskogo obščestva, v otličie ot drugix, tak nazyvaemyx tradicionnyx, demokratij...]

³⁶⁸ Yitzhak M. Brudny and Evgeny Finkel, "Why Ukraine Is Not Russia: Hegemonic National Identity and Democracy in Russia and Ukraine," *East European Politics & Societies* 25, no. 4 (2011): 813.

³⁶⁹ Finkel and Brudny, "Russia and the colour revolutions," 15, 30.

5.1.2 Why did Russia not respond to the political turmoil in the 2000s?

When the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus signed the Belovezha Accords on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the CIS in 1991, the Russian and the Ukrainian presidents already had completely different perceptions of the challenges and prospects of the CIS. While Yeltsin saw the CIS as a tool to maintain the post-Soviet region as a single geopolitical space, his Ukrainian counterpart saw it rather as a platform for multilateral international contacts and a vehicle for implementing individual agreements in developing multilateral cooperation on specific issues. Ultimately, the Ukrainian view prevailed.³⁷⁰ This was a challenge for the Russian policy, because Russia had nourished hope to become a leading power in a continued close cooperation in the post-Soviet space – a true regional hegemon. Instead, the following decade was characterised by repeated clashes between Russia and Ukraine in particular, since the Ukrainian leaders wanted to pursue an independent foreign and security policy, based on good relations with both Russia and the West.

Arguably, it is a conundrum why Russia – given the developments in Ukraine and the consequence for bilateral relations – did not respond to the political turbulence in the wake of the Orange revolution, or tried to prevent its happening. The fact is, however, that in spite of not responding militarily, Russia did take action *vis-à-vis* the events in Ukraine. Firstly – in an unprecedented way – Russia supported the Yanukovich candidacy in the 2004 Presidential elections.³⁷¹ This had not happened ‘in any election outside Russia and did not take place in any other democratic breakthrough’.³⁷² Secondly, as explained above in §5.1.1, Russia did successfully take measures at home in order to prevent a dissemination of the colour revolution. Presumably, this policy was also directed at ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Thirdly, Russia blatantly used Ukraine’s vulnerable dependence on its energy resources in pressing for a more amenable attitude. Russia benefitted from rising energy prices in the 2000s, whilst Ukraine wrestled with deep-rooted economic difficulties. Fourthly, Russia used every opportunity to voice its opposition to eastward extension of Western organisations, such as the EU and NATO. In addition, the South Ossetia war and Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008 was an

³⁷⁰ S.V. Bespalov, "Politika Rossii na postsovetском prostranstve: osnovnye ètapy i sovremennoe sostojanie," [Russian policy in post-Soviet space: Milestones and current status], *Modern Research of Social Problems* 3, no. 35 (2014), No paging.

³⁷¹ Taras Kuzio, "The opposition's road to success," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 123.

³⁷² Taras Kuzio, "Nationalism, identity and civil society in Ukraine: Understanding the Orange Revolution," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010): 286.

unambiguous indication – some would say warning – that the Kremlin would not hesitate to defend its interests in the near abroad with military means, if necessary.

Hence, the argument here is that although Russia did not use conventional force to influence developments in Ukraine in the millennium's first decade, it did apply a range of 'soft power' instruments (in addition to the 'hard power' energy policy) to make its position public and crystal clear, with consequent impacts upon Ukraine's politics and its foreign policy orientation.

5.2 Strategic and economic considerations

5.2.1 The Black Sea region – strategic importance

The Russian Black Sea fleet is stationed in the city of Sevastopol on Crimea (see Map 5-1). As an important part of the Russian navy and by virtue of its strategic location it provides Russia with a potential source of leverage over Ukraine. In 1997 an agreement was reached between Russia and Ukraine that granted the Russian fleet porting rights in Sevastopol until 2017,³⁷³ an arrangement that was prolonged until 2042 in an agreement signed by Russia's Medvedev and Ukraine's Yanukovich in 2010 – an act that former president Yushchenko labelled 'the second Chernobyl'.³⁷⁴ Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership would have complicated things for Russia in Sevastopol, and conversely: Russia's presence would have caused headaches for NATO with regard to potential Ukrainian membership – although such a membership was presumably more distant than sometimes suggested. Larrabee argues that it would have been virtually impossible for Putin to reach an agreement on prolonging Russia's porting rights under Yanukovich's predecessor, Viktor Yushchenko,³⁷⁵ so Russia's support of Yanukovich is comprehensible – in spite of their personal relations being very poor, as Sakwa notes.³⁷⁶

Geopolitically, the Black Sea region is of the utmost strategic significance and history preserves many examples of conflicts and disputes in and around the region. Charles King summarises this importance, particularly from a European perspective, as follows:

³⁷³ James Sherr, "Russian-Ukraine Rapprochement?: The Black Sea fleet accords," *Survival* 39, no. 3 (1997): 33.

³⁷⁴ Viktor Yushchenko, *Rosbalt*, May 6, 2010 2010.

³⁷⁵ Stephen Larrabee, "Ukraine at the Crossroads," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2007): 53.

³⁷⁶ Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, 210.

Map 5-1 The Black Sea Region



Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/68234/Black-Sea> (accessed April 18, 2015).

At various points in history, a distinct region defined by the Black Sea and its hinterlands has been a commonplace of European affairs, although the limits of that region have fluctuated over time. Over the last two decades, there has been considerable effort to revive Black Sea regionalism, in part through the establishment of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation forum (BSEC) in 1992 and its upgrade to the status of a full-fledged organization in 1999. Furthermore, the process of EU enlargement, the EU's need to develop a clear set of policies regarding the future of its "neighborhood" to the east, U.S. dependence on allies around the sea during the Iraq war, and Russia's revived desire for influence across Eurasia have all made the Black Sea region of considerable strategic interest.³⁷⁷

The post-Cold War period constitutes no exception in that regard, as there have been 'constant geopolitical tensions' in which Ukraine as a littoral state is one of the key players, and so is

³⁷⁷ Charles King, "The Wider Black Sea Region in the Twenty-First Century," in *The wider Black Sea region in the 21st century: Strategic, economic and energy perspectives*, eds. Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, The Johns Hopkins University/Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 2008), 2.

Russia with its Black Sea fleet.³⁷⁸ So important is the Black Sea fleet to Russia that it was unable 'to recognise Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea and Sevastopol' after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until 1997: and it is noteworthy that when the Ukrainians spoke about the 'Russian naval base *in* Sevastopol' the Russians said that the 'Russian naval fleet *is* Sevastopol'.³⁷⁹ This might seem a minor point, but it clearly shows how valuable the Sevastopol location is in the eyes of the Russians.

As it happens, many of the main Russian concerns in relations with the West reverberate in the Black Sea region: the 'frozen conflicts' in the post-Soviet space, the prospects of NATO and EU enlargements, the future of the CIS, and energy politics.³⁸⁰ Russia, thus, has great vested interests in the development of the Black Sea region and is vastly dependent on its access to the naval port of Sevastopol, but also to the policy-making bodies and cooperation frameworks in the region. For Moscow, a NATO-leaning government in Kyiv would strongly jeopardise its position in these respects and impair its geopolitical interests, thereby degrading its coveted great-power status. In 2014 with Yanukovich overthrown and the ubiquitous Maidan spirit soaring, Russia had no choice but to intervene and resort to strong measures to secure its position and interests: Sevastopol had to be rescued.

5.2.2 Crimean economy – how crucial for Russia?

One of the main questions pertaining to Russia's decision to annex Crimea concerns the economic costs – and/or benefits. Most strikingly – and perhaps unwisely as Wilson argues – Prime Minister Medvedev in March declared that Crimea now was Moscow's 'headache'.³⁸¹ The Russian authorities might well have been filled with elation over the annexation, but then the reality struck. The Russian newspaper *Vedomosti* estimated that Crimea and Sevastopol would receive about 50 billion roubles annually (approx. €725 million³⁸²) to balance their budget for 2015-2017. In addition, the region would receive 100 billion roubles (€1.5 billion) for

³⁷⁸ Sergey Glebov, "Ukraine's Changing Foreign Policy: Implications on the Black Sea Security," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2 (2011): 129.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

³⁸⁰ Trenin, "Russia's Perspective on the Wider Black Sea Region," 105.

³⁸¹ Alyona Luchistaya, "Medvedev: Krym stal golovnoj bol'ju rossijskoj vlasti," [Medvedev: Crimea became a headache for the Russian authorities], *Novyj region*, March 24, 2014. See also: Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it means for the West*, 114.

³⁸² The value of the Russian rouble has fallen against the US Dollar by 40% and against the Euro by 28% from March 2014 to March 2015 so figures in foreign currency may vary from source to source. Figures in this dissertation are based on the exchange rate of the Russian rouble in the beginning of March 2015.

development, primarily for renovation and construction of infrastructure over the next three years. These figures are based on sources within the Ministry of Finance,³⁸³ which means that they should be relatively reliable or at least not exaggerated. The investment required in Crimea, according to former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, will exceed the costs that Russia bore in North Caucasus following the Chechen wars. At the same time, the Kremlin is keen on demonstrating that the Crimeans will be better off economically as a part of the RF.³⁸⁴ Perhaps 'Russia has let its heart take precedence over its head as far as Crimea is concerned' as a New York University Professor, Mark Galeotti, commented.³⁸⁵

The fact is that the Crimea, since Ukraine's independence in 1991, has received more subsidies than its contribution to the state budget in terms of taxes paid, as it was the least wealthy region of the country: and the levels of social spending are higher in Russia than in Ukraine.³⁸⁶ The dilemma that faces the authorities, however, is that since the Russian exchequer is currently short of funds, development and reconstruction in Crimea will come at the expense of investments in other regions. For instance, the Ministry of Finance has already proposed to reduce the cost of a highway and a bridge over the river Lena from Yakutsk to Never, on the eastern section of the Trans-Siberian Railway.³⁸⁷ As supplies of energy and drinking water were hitherto delivered to Crimea from Ukraine, huge investments are foreseen in alternative ways of meeting the population's needs; insufficient irrigation of fields has also caused Crimean agriculture to suffer significant losses.³⁸⁸ As pointed out in the newspaper *Vedomosti*, the support to this new Russian region already in 2014 has exceeded 100 billion roubles, and this will not be enough.³⁸⁹ Essentially, all this means that the retardation of investments and developments elsewhere in Russia will most probably cause annoyances and grievances among Russians at large, so eventually the domestic support for Russia's foreign policy in Crimea and Ukraine may gradually wane.

³⁸³ Margarita Liutova and Maksim Tovkailo, "Krym mozh et stat' odnim iz samykh dotacionnykh regionov," [Crimea could become one of the most subsidised regions], *Vedomosti* (2014).

³⁸⁴ Ewa Fischer and Jadwiga Rogoża, "A bottomless pit: the costs of Crimea's annexation by Russia," *OSW Commentary* 142 (2014).

³⁸⁵ Will Englund, "Crimea as consolation prize: Russia faces some big costs over Ukrainian region," *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2014.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Margarita Liutova, "Den'gi na dorogu do Yakutsk mogut perebrosit' v Krym," [Money on the road to Yakutsk can be throw into Crimea], *Vedomosti* (2014).

³⁸⁸ Fischer and Rogoża, "A bottomless pit: the costs of Crimea's annexation by Russia". (2014).

³⁸⁹ Margarita Liutova and Maksim Tovkailo, "100 mlrd ne khvatit," [100 billion is not enough], *Vedomosti* (2014).

These facts were incontestably well known to the Russian leadership when taking its decisions. So was the geographical reality: as a peninsula, Crimea is only connected to mainland Ukraine through the isthmus of Perekop. To connect it with Russia would require a bridge over the Strait of Kerch – a 4-5 kilometre span – which separates the Azov Sea from the Black Sea. This is obviously a mega-project and is already on the drawing board of the Russian government with a cost currently estimated at between 200 and 250 billion roubles (€3.0-3.6 billion), according to Russia's Finance Minister Anton Siluanov.³⁹⁰

Crimean demography is also an issue. Crimea has long been popular, particularly the southern coast, as a retirement home for pensioners, accounting for a quarter of its current population. Furthermore, tourism, which is the region's most important industry, has traditionally relied vastly on unofficial income as 'people let their flats out to visitors'. The Russian annexation has been a blow to this important income-source, as seen by the fact that 70% of tourists normally came from the rest of Ukraine.³⁹¹ The authorities' campaign to promote Crimea as a holiday resort will inevitably affect the neighbourhood's hitherto most popular Russian resort, namely Sochi, which has in recent years seen tremendous development, *inter alia* when it hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics.³⁹²

Although well aware of the demonstrable costs of incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation, the Russian leadership nevertheless decided to embark on the risky voyage of annexation in a 'whatever-it-takes-euphoria'. However, as pointed out by Ewa Fischer and Jadwiga Rogoża, '[t]he benefits for Russia include taking control over the sea and air space of the Black and Azov Seas', securing Russia 'full control of the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, along with its military and maritime infrastructure, and [...] access to Ukrainian military bases in Crimea', which in turn 'translate[s] into annual savings of nearly \$80 million from the abolition of fees'. Moreover, the abolition of customs duties will save the Russian budget a considerable number of billions. Likewise, as a result of the annexation, 'Russia gained access to natural gas deposits located on the continental shelf of the Crimean peninsula'.³⁹³ It

³⁹⁰ A.O. Uržumceva, "Ukraina, Rossija i Evrosojuz v nojabre 2013 goda: metaforičeskij obraz stran i ix vzaimootnošenij v ispanskoj gazete 'El Pais'," [Ukraine, Russia and the European Union in November 2013: The metaphorical image of countries and their relationships in the Spanish newspaper "El Pais".], *Političeskaja lingvistika*, no. 2 (2014).

³⁹¹ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it means for the West*, 114.

³⁹² Fischer and Rogoża, "A bottomless pit: the costs of Crimea's annexation by Russia". (2014).

³⁹³ Ibid. [Omission here].

must therefore be assumed that the financial side of annexing Crimea was not primarily an issue for Putin and his regime. Instead – as argued here – strategic and geopolitical considerations, well anchored in the idea of Crimea as a Russian land, combined with the grievances over Russia's potentially lost 'sphere of influence' and status as a superpower provided the driving forces behind the decision to annex Crimea. The costs – financial and in terms of lost prestige in the eyes of 'the Other' – were thus overshadowed by the overall necessity of preserving Russia's perceived vital interests in the matter: embodied in the geopolitical importance of the region, considerations of self-image and perhaps *amour propre*, and the assurance that Russia's 'legitimate' interests must be taken into account and be respected.

5.3 Did Putin make the decisive difference?

FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS, as earlier mentioned, emphasizes the role of individual actors in foreign policy making. Clearly, domestic factors have been influential in shaping Russia's foreign policy, most notably those related to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the socio-economic hardship that followed in the 1990s.³⁹⁴ From the beginning foreign policy has been the prerogative of the President of the RF, since the 1993 Constitution entrusts the President with full powers within the foreign policy realm. However, several agencies are involved in foreign policy making in Russia, such as the ministries of foreign affairs and defence, as well as security and defence agencies and the intelligent service.³⁹⁵ Within the bureaucratic structure there has also been inter-agency rivalry – hardly unknown in other countries such as the US! – offering the President even more leverage over policy formation, as he must adjudicate such disputes and finally decide the issue. This basically means that the presidency has been largely personalised, as Shevtsova notes:

The first turning point was the shelling of the Russian parliament in October 1993, which led to the establishment of the personalized power system, reflected in the adoption of a Constitution that legitimized top down rule. In fact, Putin's one-man

³⁹⁴ Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking," 81-83.

³⁹⁵ Neil Malcolm, "Foreign Policy Making," in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, eds. Neil Malcolm, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 107, 117-135.

regime was born not when Yeltsin gave him power but in October 1993, when the grounds for political struggle and political pluralism were liquidated.³⁹⁶

Hence, it is safe to claim that the Russian President has great latitude in foreign policy making. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that the incumbent, President Putin, has not made use of this extensive elbow-room. He would obviously confer with the relevant agencies, ministers and advisors, and he would also have to take domestic factors and circumstances into consideration; but ultimately the President will be held accountable for the country's policy choices, for good and ill.

As for Vladimir Putin specifically, there is no doubt that he has a firm grip on the political course pursued by the Russian government, both on domestic issues and most certainly in international affairs (cf. §4.4 above). As Shevtsova has noted, Putin 'is not the new Stalin, he cannot mobilise Russia for a Great Patriotic War'.³⁹⁷ Nonetheless it must be borne in mind that domestic factors always have great impact on politicians' popularity, even in a country that does not fully abide by the principles of pluralistic democracy. In fact, all national governments, not only in Russia, are, 'to a certain extent, open to the influence of ideas across the political and intellectual spectrum'.³⁹⁸ Putin's popularity has, as it happens, gone up and down over time – possibly in proportion to oil prices, which are so momentous for the health of the Russian economy and consequently for the living-standard of ordinary Russians. For instance, in 2008 'the colossal revenues from the currently high-energy prices' meant that 'the standard of living for many Russians is improving noticeably and most of them attribute that prosperity to Putin personally'.³⁹⁹ The situation was completely different prior to the Presidential elections in 2012, when backing for Putin was waning as shown by the relatively low support he got in the elections, and also by the repeated demonstrations against his leadership following his redux.⁴⁰⁰

Given the importance of Ukraine for Russia and its policy in the near abroad as a regional hegemon, all major decisions regarding the two countries' relations are taken at the President's table. Shevtsova argues that it became evident already in 2004 – when Putin openly backed the

³⁹⁶ Lilia Shevtsova, *Interregnum: Russia between Past and Future*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014), 25.

³⁹⁷ Lilia Shevtsova, "Putin has fought his way into a corner," (2014).

³⁹⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Contested Identity and Foreign Policy: Interpreting Russia's International Choices," *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 1 (2014): 22.

³⁹⁹ Alec Rasizade, "Putin's Place in Russian History," *International Politics* 45, no. 5 (2008): 549.

⁴⁰⁰ Bo Petersson, "Taking the Shortcut to Popularity: How Putin's Power is Sustained through Ukraine," *Russian analytical digest* 148, no. 2. May (2014).

candidature of Viktor Yanukovich in the Presidential elections – that Ukraine ‘had become Vladimir Putin’s personal project’.⁴⁰¹ Putin was not satisfied with the development in Ukraine following the 2004 elections and the Orange revolution, and he was firmly resolved to prevent Ukraine becoming a member of Western organisations. Moreover, he could not accept an anti-Russia government in Kyiv, because it would dangerously undermine Russia’s interests in the Black Sea region. What Putin and the Russian leadership saw was that ‘[T]he armed uprising in Kiev brought to power a coalition of ultranationalists and pro-Western politicians: the worst possible combination Moscow could think of. President Putin saw this as a challenge both to Russia’s international position and to its internal order’.⁴⁰² In spite of economic and political sanctions and international isolation – and due to Ukraine’s importance for Russia – Putin therefore ‘decided to throw caution to the wind. Anger is one of his reasons for doing so’.⁴⁰³

In fact, Putin made it quite clear already at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 that Russia would follow an ‘independent foreign policy’, implying that he was prepared to pursue an assertive and confrontational line if needed. This was largely seen as a ‘balance of power, realist exposition’,⁴⁰⁴ whereas his emphasis on sovereignty represents a constructivist approach to foreign policy. Taking into consideration that Medvedev was more liberal and softer than Putin (although he had newly taken over the presidency during the 2008 war in Georgia – *nota bene* with Putin at the wheel as Prime Minister, and with inherited Putin’s men as advisors), that Yeltsin never mastered foreign policy very well, and that Gorbachev initiated a policy of peaceful coexistence with the West (although he has defended the Crimea take-over), it becomes evident that Russia’s key foreign policy choices are determined by the President of the moment. Hence, it is tempting to conclude that the annexation of Crimea was Putin’s sole decision: that it was Putin himself that charted the course. It does not necessarily follow that other individuals holding the post of President would have taken different decisions with regard to Ukraine and the Crimea, but in all probability Putin actually made the difference – at all costs. As Alexander Motyl points out: ‘Putin’s twisted logic, militarist rhetoric, and neo-imperial ambitions may doom Russia to cold war, even though the benefit Russians would derive from being on a

⁴⁰¹ Lilia Shevtsova, "The Russia Factor," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 75.

⁴⁰² Dmitri Trenin, "Europe's Nightmare Coming True: America vs. Russia ... Again," *The National Interest* (2014).

⁴⁰³ Ivan Krastev, "Russian Revisionism: Putin’s Plan for Overturning European Order," *Foreign Affairs* (2014).

⁴⁰⁴ Ziegler, "Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: Realist and constructivist perspectives," 405.

constant war footing is nil and the costs increasingly high'.⁴⁰⁵ As we have seen in the aftermath, the annexation of Crimea and Russia's assertive policy toward Ukraine generally have once more – at least in the short term – augmented Putin's popularity at home and reinforced confidence in him, which ultimately is what counts.⁴⁰⁶

5.4 The Verbal War

AS IS COMMON knowledge, wars are not exclusively waged on the battle ground; on the contrary, the propaganda part is of no less importance, because – as the US Senator Hiram W. Johnson said in a speech in 1918 – 'the first casualty when war comes is truth'. Thus, the 'verbal war' contributes to the establishment of an aura of either justice or encroachment. By elucidating the discourse, we can better understand the underlying causes and motives on either side of a conflict. For the purpose of this study, it is therefore pertinent to take a brief look at the vigorous (s)wordplay that has taken place on two fronts: the legal dispute on the one hand and the public and political debate on the other hand.

5.4.1 International Law – Some Legal Aspects

In the quarrel between East and West that have followed the annexation of Crimea, mutual accusations of breach of international obligations have sounded vociferously. As the German Law Professor Christian Walter writes:

While many states believe that the "reunification" between Russia and the Crimea violates international law, Russia and the relevant actors on the peninsula argue in terms of self-determination and the protection of civilians. [...] In other words: the legal aspects of secession and self-determination have been propelled to new heights in

⁴⁰⁵ Alexander J. Motyl, "Putin's Zugzwang," *World Affairs* 177, no. 2 (2014): 61.

⁴⁰⁶ Licinia Simão has compared the presidencies of Putin and Medvedev with regard to their hold on foreign policy. She has proven that 'unlike Putin who managed to combine personal style of leadership with a certain strategic view and the necessary domestic political structures, Medvedev lacked the domestic support and the leadership skills to push forward a different solution', referring to two important foreign policy matters, namely Putin's support to the US-led War on Terror and Medvedev's War with Georgia. See: Licinia Simão, "Do leaders still decide? The role of leadership in Russian foreign policymaking," *International Politics* 49, no. 4 (2012): 495.

international politics, most probably even beyond their importance during the Kosovo crisis.⁴⁰⁷

Thus, on the one hand, Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of breaching the UN Charter Article 2(4) which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any state – reaffirmed in a 1970 UN General Assembly (GA) resolution, which stated that ‘no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal’.⁴⁰⁸ Russia, by contrast, has accused the other parties of hypocrisy and double standards by refusing to recognise the Crimean people’s right to self-determination in conformity with the UN Charter Article 1(2). These two fundamental provisions in the UN Charter can be – it cannot be denied – *ipso facto* contradictory. While this dissertation does not deal with international law – and this sub-chapter might thus seem a detour – a brief examination of the legal discourse may however shed light on the parties’ interpretation of their obligations and the legal framework, applicable for the current case. It also helps explain Russia’s motives and calculations when deciding to annex Crimea.

We have already explained the prelude to Crimea becoming a legitimate part of Ukraine in 1954 (see §3.5). Apparently, that act was not disputed at that time and it was allegedly strictly in conformity with the then valid constitution of the Soviet Union. Consequently, it is not possible to endorse claims such as were raised e.g. by the Russian Duma almost four decades later, in the aftermath of the Soviet dissolution. The legal dispute, thus, concerns whether the people of Crimea could rightfully decide on secession from Ukraine and if so, under which circumstances. Burke-White has encapsulated the dilemma in question:

The relationship between these principles is critically at stake in Crimea. Is the Russian-speaking population there entitled to its own state, due to a systematic oppression by the Kiev government? Is Russia entitled to assist its co-nationals in achieving independence? Or is Ukraine as a sovereign, independent state entitled to the inviolability of its borders? More generally, under what circumstances may a population claim a right of international

⁴⁰⁷ Christian Walter, "Postscript: Self-Determination, Secession, and the Crimean Crisis 2014," in *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law*, eds. Christian Walter, Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, and Kavus Abushov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 293-294. [Omission here].

⁴⁰⁸ William W. Burke-White, "Crimea and the International Legal Order," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 4 (2014): 66.

independence and to what degree are third states entitled to assist, even where doing so may violate another state's territorial integrity?⁴⁰⁹

The relevant provisions in the UN Charter, referring to the principles and purposes of the United Nations, read as follows:

Art. 1(2)

To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;

Art. 2(4)

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.⁴¹⁰

The notion of 'self-determination' is closely linked to the notion of democracy, rooted in the French revolution of 1789. Later, with the prominent leaders Woodrow Wilson in the US and Vladimir Lenin in the Soviet Union, it emerged in world politics. For Wilson, self-determination was the 'key to lasting peace in Europe', while for Lenin 'it was a means of realizing the dream of world-wide socialism'.⁴¹¹ It was the 1945 UN Charter, however, that first established the notion as a legally binding instrument; and in consequence it was also very closely linked to the nation-state, aimed at 'promoting equal rights of established states', (i.e. the UN's own member states) because 'it was not yet fashionable to think about the rights of those not yet independent' as Rosalyn Higgins, former President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) puts it.⁴¹² Antonio Cassese points out that 'self-determination remained a political principle, nothing more. State sovereignty and territorial integrity remained of paramount importance', notwithstanding what statesmen like Wilson and Lenin proclaimed.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁴¹⁰ *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 1945. United Nations.

⁴¹¹ Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples - A Legal Reappraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13.

⁴¹² Cited in: Pétur Dam Leifsson, "Peoples' Right to Self-Determination According to Public International Law," in *Afmælisrit Háskólans á Akureyri 2007*, ed. Hermann Óskarsson (Akureyri: University of Akureyri, Iceland, 2007), 269.

⁴¹³ Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples - A Legal Reappraisal*, 33.

Therefore, self-determination cannot be applied by any ‘people’ at any time without limits. The context in which the notion was conceived must, it appears, be taken into account.⁴¹⁴ However, it has been pointed out that after the ICJ’s Advisory Opinion concerning the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo, rendered in 2010, ‘many questions of self-determination and secession remain open’.⁴¹⁵ The problem is that the ICJ neither prohibits nor authorises secession: and clearly, secession can contradict the ‘strong commitment to the “territorial integrity” of states that goes along with most commitments to self-determination’.⁴¹⁶ The important thing, however, is that the ICJ – in line with the *ex injuria jus non oritur*⁴¹⁷ principle – ‘refers to limits and conditions, notably the absence of use of force by third states’,⁴¹⁸ which buttresses the argument that Kosovo cannot *mutatis mutandis* constitute a precedent for the Crimean situation.

From Ukraine’s viewpoint, Russia did violate the country’s territorial integrity and political independence by seizing power in Crimea. The West supports this view and on 27 March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution by 100 votes against 11 in which it ‘affirmed its commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, underscoring the invalidity of the 16 March referendum held in autonomous Crimea’.⁴¹⁹ Additionally, Ukraine and the West also hold that Russia breached the Budapest Memorandum,⁴²⁰ signed in 1994 in the context of Ukraine’s giving up nuclear weapons, in which the signatories – including Russia – committed themselves to recognise the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the existing borders of Ukraine. Article 2(4) does not only prohibit use of force *per se*, but also any *threats* of such use. As Roy Allison points out, it is difficult to deny that Russian aggression was imminent in the given case,⁴²¹ thus infringing the UN Charter.

⁴¹⁴ Leifsson, "Peoples' Right to Self-Determination According to Public International Law," 275-276.

⁴¹⁵ Christian Walter and Antje Von Ungern-Sternberg, "Introduction: Self-Determination and Secession in International Law - Perspectives and Trends with Particular Focus on the Commonwealth of Independent States," in *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law*, eds. Christian Walter, Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, and Kavus Abushov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹⁷ Latin phrase, commonly used in legal studies, meaning: ‘law does not arise from injustice’.

⁴¹⁸ Walter, "Postscript: Self-Determination, Secession, and the Crimean Crisis 2014," 299.

⁴¹⁹ Henry Meyer, "Russia's Growth Was Already Slowing - Then Came Crimea," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, no. 4373 (2014).

⁴²⁰ See fn.10.

⁴²¹ Roy Allison, "Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1261.

Ukraine, supported by many Western states, has declared that the plebiscite-initiated secession of Crimea violates the constitution and was thus unlawful. Ferdinand Feldbrugge, on the other hand, argues that this 'point is valid, but worthless, because almost all secessions are unlawful, until they are successful. Then, in the end, everybody recognizes them or at least acquiesces'. He further notes that the Ukrainian government is 'not unassailable' on this question, because it was itself an illegitimate government at the time in question, seizing power after having overthrown a legitimate incumbent president.⁴²² The weakness of such an argument is, however, that one cannot simplistically compare states which the international community has more or less unanimously recognised (Montenegro or East Timor), with states that have only gained recognition from a limited number of countries (Abkhazia or South Ossetia).

The right to use force – *jus ad bellum* – is generally prohibited in contemporary international law, as article 2(4) of the UN Charter clearly reflects. Instead, it obliges states to settle their disputes in a peaceful manner.⁴²³ This rule has attained the so-called *jus cogens* character, which means that it has acceptance among the international community as a whole, also endorsed by the ICJ.⁴²⁴

Russia, in contrast, has stated that the ousting of Yanukovich and the subsequent seizure of power by an interim president and government was an unconstitutional coup, which thereby from Russia's viewpoint 'overrode traditional legal constraints on the use of force'.⁴²⁵ The dominance in Kyiv of 'rampant radical nationalist elements' that neglected the interests of Ukrainian regions and the Russian-speaking population is a prominent point in Russia's arguments.⁴²⁶ In addition to referring to the UN Charter Article 1(2), Russia points out that the right of self-determination is further affirmed in Article 1 in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in Article 1 in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both from 1966.⁴²⁷ Also, Russia makes reference to the abovementioned 1970 UN GA resolution, which *inter alia* states that '[t]he establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free

⁴²² Ferdinand Feldbrugge, "Ukraine, Russia and International Law," *Review of Central & East European Law* 39, no. 1 (2014): 95.

⁴²³ Rebecca M.M. Wallace and Olga Martin-Ortega, *International Law* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 2013), 293.

⁴²⁴ See fn. 5 in *ibid.*, 295.

⁴²⁵ Allison, "Russian 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules," 1257.

⁴²⁶ 'Pravovye obosnovaniya pozicii Rossii po Krymu i Ukraine', [The Legal Foundations of Russia's position on Crimea and Ukraine], (Moscow: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014). In the Russian original the cited wording is: '... pered licom razgula nacional-radikal'nykh elementov...'

⁴²⁷ Bespalov, "Politika Rossii na postsovetском prostranstve: osnovnye etapy i sovremennoe sostojanie". (2014).

association or integration with an independent State or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the right of self-determination by that people'. Moreover, Russia claims that the Russian troops present in Crimea in 2014 were there lawfully, in accordance with the agreement between the two countries on the special status of Sevastopol. It was Russia's intention to protect ethnic Russians in the peninsula – 'though there was no persuasive evidence of what they needed to be protected from'.⁴²⁸ Besides, Russia claims that the aforementioned Budapest Memorandum does not impose obligations on the Russian Crimea to remain a part of Ukraine.⁴²⁹ Underlying the last arguments is Russia's belief that it has the right to claim territory everywhere that ethnic Russians live: but this can hardly hold water in legal terms. The case is clear if we translate such an argument into Americans' mouths: the US could in that case make claims on territory almost across the whole globe.⁴³⁰

Russia has on many occasions stressed that the Kosovo case in particular constitutes a precedent for the Crimea: and the West's counter-argument that Kosovo was in fact *sui generis*⁴³¹ is not fully compelling, except as political rhetoric. The difference, however, is that neither the US nor any NATO country acquired Kosovo for itself – as clearly occurred in the case of Russia in Crimea. On the other hand, the plebiscite in Crimea did not necessarily violate international law: here Kosovo could constitute a precedent, as the ICJ upheld that no international norm prohibits a unilateral declaration of independence. But, and there is a but: the 2014 referendum did violate Ukrainian law, because the constitution of Ukraine requires such a referendum to be country-wide, which was not the case in Crimea.⁴³² Russia has further drawn attention to other examples, such as the referendum on secession of Quebec from Canada, the case of the Åland Islands after the collapse of the Russian Empire, and Bangladesh.⁴³³ Here, one must enter a caveat: in the case of Quebec (and Scotland for that matter) the referendum was arranged in agreement with the national government, which was not the case in Crimea.

⁴²⁸ Simon Chesterman, "Crimean War 2.0: Ukraine and International Law," *Straits Times*, 15. March 2014.

⁴²⁹ Bepalov, "Politika Rossii na postsovetском prostranstve: osnovnye ètapy i sovremennoe sostojanie". (2014).
The Russian text reads: 'Budapeštский memorandum ne nakladывает na Rossiju objazatel'stva po prinuždeniju Kryma ostavat'sja v sostave Ukrainy'.

⁴³⁰ Robert W McGee, "The Crimean Secession: A Comment on Chesterman's 'Crimean War 2.0: Ukraine and International Law'," *Social Science Research Network* (2014), 3.

⁴³¹ Latin legal term, meaning: 'of its own kind'.

⁴³² Chesterman, "Crimean War 2.0: Ukraine and International Law." McGee argues that international law is irrelevant when it comes to plebiscites on secession

⁴³³ Tomsinov, "'Krymskoe pravo" ili Juridičeskie osnovanija dlja vossoedinenija Kryma s Rossiej," 5-6, 16-18.

Although the UN Charter includes respect for the right of self-determination of peoples, the preponderant purpose of the UN as laid down in article 1(1) remains ‘to maintain international peace and security’.⁴³⁴ Even if the right to self-determination is widely accepted, it does not entail a universal right of secession.⁴³⁵ Donald Horowitz maintains that the ‘right to secede is to be held by ethnic groups and is derived from a reinterpretation of the principle of the self-determination of nations’. He further asserts that theorists, irrespective of their stance towards secession in general, ‘see secession as an answer to problems of ethnic conflict and violence’, while at the same time arguing that secession does not reduce conflict or violence.⁴³⁶ In the same vein, the British jurist James Crawford concludes: ‘State practice since 1945 shows very clearly the extreme reluctance of States to recognize or accept unilateral secession outside the colonial context. That practice has not changed since 1989, despite the emergence during that period of 22 new States. On the contrary, the practice has been powerfully reinforced’.⁴³⁷ Likewise, Cassese emphasises that international law ‘does not grant autonomous regions or States within a federal government the right freely to determine their international status, regardless of whether or not they represent ethnic and cultural groups distinctly different from the rest of the population’.⁴³⁸

The legal discourse, as we have seen, is thus very conflicting: even identical cases, treaties, and the ICJ’s opinions are interpreted in opposite directions. It is therefore no wonder that both parties in the present case believe they have the law on their side. Grounded on the discussion above, however, it must be concluded that even though the inhabitants of Crimea constitute a ‘people’ in the sense of the UN Charter article 1(2), as acknowledged by e.g. Anne Peters,⁴³⁹ their right to secede from Ukraine is ambiguous to say the least. Through the lenses of IR theory, realists might well argue – in a Hobbesian manner – that Russia *may* annex Crimea because it is *able* to annex it.⁴⁴⁰ Constructivists, by contrast, would presumably endeavour to explain the

⁴³⁴ Wallace and Olga Martin-Ortega, *International Law*, 295.

⁴³⁵ James Summers, "Kosovo," in *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law*, eds. Christian Walter, Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, and Kavus Abushov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 248.

⁴³⁶ Donald L. Horowitz, "The cracked foundations of the right to secede," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 5-6.

⁴³⁷ James Crawford, "State Practice and International Law in Relation to Secession," in *British Yearbook of International Law 1998* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 114.

⁴³⁸ Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples - A Legal Reappraisal*, 251.

⁴³⁹ Peters, "The Crimean Vote of March 2014 as an Abuse of the Institution of the Territorial Referendum," 258.

⁴⁴⁰ Juan Martir, "Hobbes and Vattel in Crimea: A Natural Law Critique of the Russian Annexation," *XJUR* 2 (2014): 64.

annexation with reference to identity, culture, history, and language – which in the eyes of this author makes more sense. Russia's legal arguments apparently serve the cause of an annexation or 'reunification' (as against spontaneous secession), and the fact that the argument is being conducted mainly between Ukraine and Russia, and not between Ukraine and the Crimea, bears that assumption out. However, Russia may well be right when accusing the West of double standards, because international law and judicial opinions are, to some extent, ambivalent, and may be – and often are – used in the cause of geopolitics on either side.

5.4.2 The political and public discourse

The discourse on the Ukraine crisis to large extent revolves around *ideas* and *perceptions*, a fact that in turn underpins the constructivist character of the problem at hand. To a certain degree, Ukraine itself appears to be absent or at least play a passive role in the struggle between Russia and the West, the role of the 'trophy'. In Western parlance Ukraine is repeatedly labelled as a 'Central' European country instead of 'East' European, thereby bringing it metaphorically closer to Western Europe.⁴⁴¹ (Here we must bear in mind the difference between the eastern part and the western part of Ukraine, as discussed in §3.7). Russia is readily described as the initiator of the conflict, because it has taken unprecedented steps to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence.⁴⁴² The attitudes, wording and phrasing seen in the press clearly demonstrate preconceptions or even prejudices that are closely linked to our world-view, our ideas and *identity*. The Western 'free' press is not lacking in such preconceptions, which are often ingrained in our subconscious. The Russian media, in turn, is still a product of the Soviet era and highly dependent on the Kremlin. While journalism in Russia has been changing and developing, the transition from a party press to a democratic media is not completed: on the contrary, the media remain under the economic – if not editorial – control of the authorities.⁴⁴³ In Ukraine, the Russian media are widespread although not necessarily correspondingly influential. It has been shown that Ukrainian news providers 'that had a Russian shareholder or partner tended to be more restrained in their

⁴⁴¹ Uržumceva, "Ukraina, Rossija i Evrosojuz v nojabre 2013 goda: metaforičeskij obraz stran i ix vzaimootnošenij v ispanskoj gazete 'El Pais'," 197.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 199.

⁴⁴³ Alevtina Polyakova, "Putins image i den russiske pressen - retoriske strategier og virkemidler: en analyse av fire russiske aviser" [Putin's image in the Russian press - rhetorical strategies and instruments: an analysis of four Russian newspapers], (Master Thesis, University of Oslo, 2013), 57.

criticism of Russia than comparable news providers without such Moscow connections'.⁴⁴⁴ Joanna Szostek claims that Russian TV news 'has been less widely *watched* in Ukraine in recent years than widely *available*', and that in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, Russian news might have been more 'polarizing' than 'persuasive'.⁴⁴⁵ The bottom line is that what we see depends on where we stand. We, as human beings, and the environment in which we exist, are socially constructed.

In a Russian edition of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, the referendum – held at gunpoint by Russian soldiers – was called a 'formality' because Moscow had already carefully prepared the take-over, and Putin's behaviour was considered unreasonable but at the same time said to fit perfectly into the 'revanchist logic' of a former KGB agent.⁴⁴⁶ Conversely, Putin contradicted that any annexation had taken place: 'we only asked the people what they wanted, if that is not democracy, what is then democracy?' he said in an interview in *Pravda*.⁴⁴⁷

The political discourse is even more dispersed, depending on whose turn it is to speak. President Putin has asserted that 'states like Ukraine must ally with Russia because of history and culture', but Wilson argues that such a view is 'a mask for the underlying belief that they are small and 'uncompetitive', and so do not actually deserve sovereign foreign policy choice'.⁴⁴⁸ Even an academic and commentator like Boris Mezhuev argues that a 'buffer zone' is both a possible and reasonable scenario, and he adds that the 'reunification' of Crimea is not only a reunion of the Russian nation, but that it is also the beginning of a geopolitical division of Europe.⁴⁴⁹ Jeffrey Mankoff, for instance, speaks about Russia's 'land-grab',⁴⁵⁰ and in the same vein Ivan Krastev maintains that Putin's strategy is 'one of a state-re-building', i.e. the 'land-

⁴⁴⁴ Joanna Szostek, "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine A Case of "Soft Power"?", *East European Politics & Societies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 463.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 483. [Emphasis in original].

⁴⁴⁶ Mari Zhego, "Rossija zaplanirovala anneksiju Kryma," [Russia did plan the annexation of Crimea], (2014).

⁴⁴⁷ "Putin anneksii Kryma v upor ne vidit: My prosto sprosili u ljudej...", [Putin does not see an annexation: We only asked the people], *Pravda* (2014).

⁴⁴⁸ Andrew Wilson, "The Ukraine crisis brings the threat of democracy to Russia's doorstep," *European View* 13, no. 1 (2014).

⁴⁴⁹ Boris Mezhuev, "Razdelenie civilizacij?," [Separation of civilisations?], *Izvestija*. The Russian original reads: 'Prisoedinenie Kryma – èto ne tol'ko vossoedinenie russkoj narii, no èto eščë i načalo geopolitičeskogo razdelenija Evropy'.

⁴⁵⁰ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Latest Land Grab - How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2014).

grabbing' is not a goal in itself; instead it is a vehicle to achieve a reunification of the Russian people, as seen from the Kremlin's vantage-point.⁴⁵¹

Sergey Karaganov, who is the Chairman of the non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defence Policy in Moscow, an ally of Yevgeny Primakov and former advisor to both Yeltsin and Putin, places the responsibility of the crisis largely on Western shoulders by claiming that '[u]ntil 2008 Western expansion had been aggressive. At a certain point in 2007-2008 the West was ready to admit Ukraine into NATO'. In Karaganov's eyes, such a development would 'create an intolerable military-strategic situation, fraught with *casus belli*'.⁴⁵² Furthermore, he contends that the EU's Eastern Partnership was designed to 'annoy Moscow, to retaliate for defeats suffered in the past, to bind it hand and foot, and to push Russia into a crisis', and to spoil Russia's Eurasian project.⁴⁵³ These are strong words, but they represent a view that has a solid foothold in Russia: certainly within the elites, but also widely throughout society at large, as has been confirmed in opinion polls. These views notwithstanding, the fact is that even though the US was to some extent willing to keep the doors open for Ukraine's entry into NATO, it met strong resistance in many powerful European NATO-countries. Nonetheless, Russia has, for its part, felt threatened by the eastward enlargement of the EU and NATO as discussed above. In that light, the annexation of Crimea can be understood as Moscow's 'defiance of NATO's further enlargement into Russia's backyard', a 'renunciation of the balance of power in the Euro-Atlantic area', and as 'a demand for a redefinition of legitimate "zones of interest" in Europe' as Anton Bebler argues.⁴⁵⁴ Putin's yearning for a strong post-Soviet space would also be threatened by such a development.

Moscow's rhetoric, however, did change in just a few weeks from the end of 2013 until the annexation took place. Thus Putin categorically ruled out the possibility of Russia's moving troops into Crimea when he stated in December 2013 that the Russians were not 'going to brandish the sword and move our troops somewhere. That's complete rubbish. Nothing of the

⁴⁵¹ Ivan Krastev, "What does Russia want and why?," *Prospect* (2014).

⁴⁵² Sergey Karaganov, "Europe and Russia: Preventing a New Cold War," *Russia in Global Affairs* (2014). [Emphasis added].

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Anton Bebler, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2015): 50.

kind is the case or can be'.⁴⁵⁵ In a speech on 16th of March, however, Putin declared that in 'people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia'. In addition, he even posited that Ukraine did not in a legal way leave the Soviet Union.⁴⁵⁶ On 18th March 2015, on the one year anniversary of the 'reunification' Putin reiterated this view when proclaiming that 'the Russians and the Ukrainians are one people'.⁴⁵⁷ On the same occasion the ultranationalist leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, said that the people of Crimea had been under occupation for 23 years, and that 'they had been scoffed at' within Ukraine.⁴⁵⁸ Putin also accused the West of cheating Russia ever since the Soviet collapse, saying that '[T]hey have constantly tried to drive us into a corner for our independent stance, for defending it, for calling things by their proper names and not being hypocritical ... [B]ut there are limits. And in the case of Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed a line. They have behaved rudely, irresponsibly and unprofessionally', adding that the dissolution of the Soviet Union made Russians 'the largest divided people in the world'.⁴⁵⁹

In his speech to a joint session of both chambers of the Russian Parliament on 18th March 2014, Putin further explained the geopolitical rationale for the annexation of Crimea. He made a particular point of the common historical legacy and referred to Kyiv as 'the mother of Russian cities'. Further, he claimed that it was unthinkable that Crimea would be lost completely into the hands of NATO, thereby emphasising the strategic importance of the peninsula.⁴⁶⁰

In Kyiv, the Ukrainian interim leadership called 'for dialogue with Crimea's lawmakers even while denouncing their moves'. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk proclaimed the projected plebiscite 'an illegitimate decision, and this so-called referendum has no legal grounds at all', and at the same time he called on the Russian government 'not to support those who claim separatism in Ukraine'.⁴⁶¹ On top of this, the Crimean Prime Minister Sergey Aksyonov, proclaimed on the day after the referendum that Crimea was to join Russia 'as soon as

⁴⁵⁵ Uržumceva, "Ukraina, Rossija i Evrosojuz v nojabre 2013 goda: metaforičeskij obraz stran i ix vzaimootnošenij v ispanskoj gazete 'El Pais'."

⁴⁵⁶ "Putin: Ukraina vyšla iz SSSR ne sovsem zakonno," [Putin: Ukraine did not quite leave the Soviet Union in a legal way], *Grani.ru* (2014).

⁴⁵⁷ "Putin nazval russkikh i ukraincev odnim narodom," [Putin called Russians and Ukrainians one people], *Dožd'* (2015).

⁴⁵⁸ "Zhirinovskij o Kryme: "Oni 23 goda byli pod okkupaciej, nad nimi izdevalis"," [Zhirinovskij on the Crimea: They have been under occupation for 23 years, and they have been scoffed at], *Dožd'* (2015).

⁴⁵⁹ "Putin: 'Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia'". (2014).

⁴⁶⁰ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

⁴⁶¹ Carol Morello and Anthony Faiola, "Crimea sets referendum on joining Russia," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2014.

possible⁴⁶²: the Ukrainian interim government followed suit, and bowed to the realities of the annexation by declaring that it would evacuate all of its military personnel and their families.⁴⁶³ From Ukraine's point of view the annexation was such a serious move that the current President Petro Poroshenko draw a parallel between it and the events of 9/11 in New York.⁴⁶⁴ Putin's volte-face was striking but not compelling, because if in March Crimea had 'always' been a part of Russia in the minds of the Russians, that would also have been the case in December.

The fact is that the view that Crimea has always been a part of Russia tallies well with the notion of identity and ideas, culture and history, as determinants of Russia's foreign policy. In addition, its quest for a status as a great power has, as Neumann points out, been a concern for Russia's leaders ever since Peter the Great.⁴⁶⁵ Since the demise of the Soviet Union Moscow has constantly sought to regain its status and hence, Russian foreign policy has entailed the return of great power politics.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² "Crimea to join Russia as soon as possible - Crimean PM," *Kyiv Post*, March 17, 2014.

⁴⁶³ David M. Herszenhorn and Andrew E. Kramer, "Ukraine Plans to Withdraw Troops From Russia-Occupied Crimea," *New York Times*, March 20, 2014.

⁴⁶⁴ "Poroshenko provel paraleli meždu tragediej 9/11 i situaciej v Ukraine," [Poroshenko draw a parallel between the tragedy of 9/11 and the situation in Ukraine], *Ukrainskaja Pravda* (2014).

⁴⁶⁵ Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815-2007," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11 (2008): 128.

⁴⁶⁶ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy - The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2012), 63-65.

6 LOST IN ANNEXATION? - CONCLUSION

THIS STUDY DEALS WITH the fundamental question of the causes of Russia's foreign policy choice to annex the Crimea, thereby infringing upon Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and provoking enmity with important partners, most notably the United States and Europe, not to mention Ukraine itself – one of Russia's most significant allies in historical and strategic terms through the centuries. To that end the dissertation has built its arguments on two main International Relations theories, realism and constructivism. It has applied foreign policy analysis as a meaningful tool for shedding light on the role of individual actors, first and foremost the President of Russia, in the relevant decision-making. To set the scene for this dramatic event, the dissertation has summarised the common history of Russians and Ukrainians, particularly in the Crimea, but also in a more general context. The fate of the indigenous Crimean Tatars was also elucidated. The dissertation has provided a detailed account of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, with particular emphasis on the four presidencies of Yeltsin, Putin, Medvedev and what has been called *Putin redux*. Russia's experiences in relations with the West, and the question of assessing change versus continuity in Russia's foreign policy, have been separately discussed. Lastly, the more specific background to the annexation in a setting of Russia-Ukraine relations has been explored with reference to the questions of political developments in Ukraine, the region's strategic importance and economic consequences, and the general discourse on the legality and legitimacy of the Russian move. This author believes that Russia's decision and its foreign policy choices cannot be fully understood and explained – let alone justified – except against such a complex background. In order to approach a conclusion, one must consider the empirical as well as theoretical evidence the dissertation has produced.

6.1 *Empirical considerations*

HISTORY HAS ON many occasions been used – or misused – as a pretext for political manoeuvre in achieving certain goals. This dissertation has looked closely (in chapter 0) at the context of history and identity, which to a certain degree frames the Russian move in Crimea anno 2014. The factors in play are – as has been pointed out – the common legacy, fate and fortune of these two countries and their peoples, through many centuries. For it is true, as the British Marxist Eric

Hobsbawm once wrote, that: ‘We cannot help situating ourselves in the continuum of our own life, of the family and group to which we belong. We cannot help comparing past and present ... We cannot help learning from it, for that is what experience means’.⁴⁶⁷ As for Crimea specifically, we have seen that the peninsula has been a part of Russia for centuries, although not entirely as the Crimean Khanate witnesses. Further, Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians constitute the vast majority of the population, even after the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. From the point of view of demography, it can be argued, it is illogical that the peninsula should belong to Ukraine and not Russia, and the Russians have for obvious reasons made a special point of this fact. History can therefore contribute to the understanding of the causes of Russia’s policy choices. This holds good in all probability regardless of which theoretical lenses we apply, and certainly when using a constructivist lens, as ‘the past has been used to build national identities’.⁴⁶⁸ However, the end should never justify the means, and therefore we must be on guard when a political leadership resorts to history as a justification for its actions.

Strategically, Crimea is of utmost importance for Russia. Ukraine, not to speak of the Crimea, does not only belong to what Russia sees as its ‘sphere of privileged interests’ – as was also the case with CEEC’s before the fall of the Iron Curtain – but it is, as we have seen, firmly interwoven with Russia’s identity, history, language, and culture. Thus, on the one hand, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its foreign policy choices regarding Ukraine in 2014 may be seen as springing primarily from Russia’s – and the Russians’ – grievances over lost status as a great power and regional hegemon, their acrimony over non-recognition of Russia’s ‘legitimate’ interests, and their resentment over alleged broken promises in connection with the demolishing of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. Russia, or should we say the Soviet Union, was reputedly promised that the ‘loss’ of East Germany would not entail an eastward extension of NATO. Further, the Black Sea region is eminently significant for Russia, and as a regional hegemon, if not a superpower, and it should not come as a surprise that it would vie for the sway of this strategically crucial area, all the more so when it was an imminent threat that the region would fall to the antagonist’s lot. The (extended) agreement between Russia and Ukraine on the status of Sevastopol – the heroic city – clearly spells out the very importance of the Black Sea: it

⁴⁶⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 2002), 32. Cited in: Michael Cox, "The uses and abuses of history: The end of the Cold War and Soviet collapse," *International Politics* 48, no. 4-5 (2011): 627.

⁴⁶⁸ Miguel Vázquez Liñán, "History as a propaganda tool in Putin’s Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 167.

is the Russian fleet's gateway to the south. In spite of the economic ramifications of the take-over of the Crimea, Russia has apparently judged that the strategic benefits would outweigh the financial costs, and therefore the expenditures could be justified. As Andrey Makarychev notes:

Putin and his ideology increasingly prefer to accentuate identity rather than material interests. This is well illustrated by Russia's annexation of Crimea, which is overwhelmingly portrayed by the officialdom as an indispensable element of retrieving Russian territories and reassembling the fragmented world of Russian-speakers. Russia's "normative offensive" is more identity-driven than grounded in rationality and economic calculus.⁴⁶⁹

The Communist Soviet Union was incontestably an autocracy. Despite the collapse of that autocracy it is debatable whether a democracy in a proper sense has risen from the ruins of Bolshevism. Therefore, it is difficult to decide to what extent the annexation of Crimea is democratically anchored in Russia. However, surveys have shown that Putin's popularity has increased in the wake of the annexation, and that vast majority of the Russian people support the Russian move. We also know that foreign policy is the prerogative of the President, and this study argues that it was Putin himself who took the decision to annex the Crimea.

For Putin and other Russians, Western political intervention in the latest developments in Ukraine – most notably embodied in senior members of the US government – evoked associations with the Orange Revolution. Their mission was, it appears, ill-conceived and somewhat short-sighted and provocative as it seemingly prompted the Russian leadership to re-evaluate the whole situation, persuading it to interfere. For Russia, the West's behaviour was almost certainly a token of disrespect of Russia's 'legitimate interests' and disregard for the historical, cultural, and societal ties between the two Slavic nations. Further, the developments in Ukraine were something that Russia could not ignore because of the vital interests at stake, as Trenin pointed out: 'The armed uprising in Kiev brought to power a coalition of ultranationalists and pro-Western politicians: the worst possible combination Moscow could think of'.⁴⁷⁰ He describes these dramatic developments as 'traumatic' for the Kremlin.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Andrey Makarychev, "Russia, Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership: From Common Neighborhood to Spheres of Influence?," *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 3 (2014): 186.

⁴⁷⁰ Trenin, "Europe's Nightmare Coming True: America vs. Russia ... Again". (2014).

⁴⁷¹ Dmitri Trenin, "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry," *Carnegie Moscow Center* (2014).

6.2 *Theoretical considerations*

AS ARGUED ABOVE, IR theories form a powerful vehicle for analysing and explaining certain events in international relations. Although theories make use of different narratives and approaches, this does not mean that one can only apply one particular theory to each case. Instead, it may often best serve the purpose to apply two or more such approaches to reveal the full dimensions of the case in question, not least when the issue is as enigmatic as the fabric of Russia's foreign policy. Notwithstanding the view of this author that constructivism is best fitted to explain the causes of Russia's annexation of the Crimea, the contribution of realism should not be underestimated. Therefore, this study has conscientiously applied the two main adversaries among IR theories, aiming to show how they can complement each other.

Realists, not least offensive neo-realists, should logically view the annexation of Crimea as a typical case of a large country flexing its muscles in a power-balance struggle, and would be likely to interpret it as an offensive policy. The picture, however, is more complex than first meets the eye. The renowned American offensive realist Mearsheimer, for example, argues that Putin's response has been defensive, not offensive.⁴⁷² The defensive character of Russia's 'invasion' in Crimea and the importance of domestic factors has also been underlined by Julian Lindley-French.⁴⁷³ Mearsheimer sees NATO's enlargement as the taproot of the Ukraine crisis, pointing out that 'the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests'. Further, he reminds us of what the President Boris Yeltsin in 1995 said when NATO bombarded the Bosnian Serbs: 'This is the first sign of what could happen when NATO comes right up to the Russian Federation's borders ... The flame of war could burst out across the whole of Europe'.⁴⁷⁴ According to Mearsheimer, the 2008 war in Georgia over the break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, should have been an unmistakable signal of Russia's resolve not to tolerate post-Soviet states, such as Georgia and Ukraine, being torn away from Russia's orbit. It is beyond all doubt that the West, in particular the United States, bankrolled the Ukrainian opposition's activities, just as they did in relation to the Orange Revolution, with the

⁴⁷² John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014).

⁴⁷³ Julian Lindley-French, "Ukraine: Understanding Russia," *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 3 (2014): 38.

⁴⁷⁴ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault". (2014).

aim of triggering regime change; therefore it was no wonder, as Mearsheimer notes, that ‘Russians of all persuasions think the West played a role in Yanukovych’s ouster’.⁴⁷⁵

Referring to the US diplomat George Kennan in a 1998 interview, Mearsheimer further argues that NATO’s expansion was a ‘tragic mistake’, because, as Kennan argued, ‘... Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies’. As explained above, Russia has on repeated occasions adamantly resisted the Western encroachment upon Russia’s ‘near abroad’: hence, the Western-backed overthrow of a legitimate government in Kyiv ‘was the final straw’ for the Kremlin, in whose view ‘Western partners have crossed the line’, as Putin proclaimed.⁴⁷⁶ Mearsheimer argues that the West, since the Clinton administration in the 1990s, has been guided too uncritically by a liberal current, and goes as far as to claim that the Ukraine crisis ‘is the West’s fault’⁴⁷⁷: the crisis would not have occurred had the West pursued a realist policy and left Russia’s sphere of influence in peace. Similar views have been aired by other realists, such as Henry Kissinger and Stephen M. Walt.⁴⁷⁸

As a result of the demise of the Soviet Union, as described above, Russia nourished aspirations to become a member of Western organisations. For Russia, the West’s lack of interest in offering such membership, and Western reluctance to provide Russia with economic assistance in face of severe economic strains, were disappointing. NATO’s assertive plans to deploy missile shields in Russia’s vicinity – in its historical territory as Putin put it – and to extend its orbit eastward were seen by Russians as a major threat to their security. Such a development would alter the balance of power at the expense of Russia’s security, and deprive Russia of a buffer zone between itself and NATO.

However, this development has been on-going for at least two decades, whereas Russia has never before resorted to such desperate measures as the annexation of the Crimea, and has in fact shown much forbearance *vis-à-vis* the West’s negligence of Russia’s national interests and developments in its backyard in general. Therefore it may be argued that Russia’s policy does not constitute an offensive (realist) reaction, for which many earlier opportunities might have been seized; instead it is a defensive response to the cumulative effect of NATO’s and the EU’s

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

⁴⁷⁷ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault". (2014).

⁴⁷⁸ See: Henry A. Kissinger, "To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End," *Washington Post* (2014).; and Stephen M. Walt, "Top Ten Questions about the World’s Biggest Problems," *Foreign Policy* (2014).

impact on the affairs of the post-Soviet zone that could not be left unheeded on the part of Russia. It is tempting to believe that the US, for example, would not have tolerated a similar course of events in its own backyard: suffice it to point at decade-long sanctions against Cuba. It goes without saying that this is at least a mind-set that should be familiar to NATO, let alone a unipolar hegemon on the international scene. It is true, as the old saying goes, that it is easier to see the speck of sawdust in other's eye than the plank in one's own eye.

In contrast, constructivists would primarily concentrate on the question of identity and ideas, the perception of 'Self' and 'Other', and the common history and culture of the peoples in the region, in Russia and Ukraine in general and in Crimea in particular. From this vantage-point, the annexation of Crimea can be explained with reference to the fact that the Crimean population is largely Russian, and that Crimea has through centuries been an integral part of Russia, belonging to Ukraine only since 1954. To be sure, Russia is frequently 'depicted as an international actor whose behaviour matches well to the theoretical expectations of realist theory', whereas the European Union – which in the conflict over Crimea and Ukraine must be considered Russia's main adversary – has often been conceived of in liberal institutionalist terms.⁴⁷⁹ However, as Joan Debardeleben points out, a constructivist approach allows us to dive under the veneer by examining interests, identity, and norms. Further, as Neumann explains, Russian national interests are very much driven by value-based assumptions that have to do with the underlying meaning of 'state sovereignty, legitimate "spheres of interest", and Eurasian or European identity',⁴⁸⁰ (although Russia's own action in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and now Crimea might well be seen as undermining the viability of the notion of 'state sovereignty'). Thus, on the surface, Russia's foreign policy might seem coloured by zero-sum thinking, not least with regard to its geopolitical interests in the 'near abroad', which the then President Medvedev famously labelled 'privileged interests'.⁴⁸¹ From a realist point of view the definition of interest should be straightforward – it is all about balance of power, relative gains and zero-sum, and self-help – but

⁴⁷⁹ Joan Debardeleben, "Applying constructivism to understanding EU-Russian relations," *International Politics* 49, no. 4 (2012): 419, 422.

⁴⁸⁰ Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. Cited in: Debardeleben, "Applying constructivism to understanding EU-Russian relations," 428.

⁴⁸¹ Dmitry Medvedev, interview by A. Vernitsky *NTV*, Aug 31, 2008. In Russian the cited phrase is: 'U Rossii, kak i u drugikh stran mira, est' regiony, v kotorykh nakhodjatsja privilegirovannyje interesy'.

the fact is that '[I]nterests are not fixed and absolute; they themselves flow from the larger understanding that actors have about the world'.⁴⁸²

Constructivism, in contrast to realism, highlights the important role of both agents and structures in the international system, thereby granting identity, language, norms, and ideas a significant place in explaining foreign policy choices. This may explain why the underlying *causes* of a conflict or foreign policy action – in this case the annexation of Crimea – are not necessarily equivalent to the *reasons* provided by the authorities, because 'language can be manipulated or used to consciously frame the public construction of an issue for political purposes'.⁴⁸³ Thus, the authorities may well justify their actions by providing certain reasons, while the real causes may only be deciphered by analysing their perception of 'Self' and 'Other', identities and emotions, and their definition of the state's core interests.

As we have seen above, Russia has long been preoccupied with its status as a great power, and has nourished a feeling of non-recognition on the part of the West. This is vital not least in understanding Russia's relation to Europe, because, as Oldberg has underlined, 'Russia's foreign policy is defined by its relationship to Europe'.⁴⁸⁴ Larson and Shevchenko have depicted Russia's perception of, and anger about, a lost status and how it responds to such a condition:

Denial of respect to a state is humiliating. When a state loses status, the emotions experienced depend on the perceived cause of this loss. When a state perceives that others are responsible for its loss, it shows *anger*. The belief that others have unjustly used their power to deny the state its appropriate position arouses *vengefulness*. If a state believes that its loss of status is due to its own failure to live up to expectations, the elites will express *shame*.⁴⁸⁵

It is quite plausible that the Russian leadership has felt both anger and vengefulness as a result of developments in Ukraine. In fact, there have been mounting tensions in Russia-Ukraine relations ever since Putin came to power at the turn of the millennium, particularly related to Kyiv's aspirations to join the Euro-Atlantic security structures and its unwillingness to cultivate the fraternity of the former Soviet space (Ukraine has emphasised cooperation within the GUAM

⁴⁸² Hiski Haukkala, "Debating recent theories of EU-Russia interaction," *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 1 (2008): 117.

⁴⁸³ Debardeleben, "Applying constructivism to understanding EU-Russian relations," 425.

⁴⁸⁴ Ingmar Oldberg, "Foreign policy priorities under Putin: a tour d'horizon," in *Russia as a Great Power - Dimensions of security under Putin*, eds. Jakob Hedenskog, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 30.

⁴⁸⁵ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 3 (2014): 269. [Emphasis in original].

grouping instead of fostering CIS collaboration).⁴⁸⁶ A constructivist approach helps us in understanding Russia's underlying motives and foreign policy choices when deciding to annex the Crimea, and in more general terms its response to the projected EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which could at the end of the day have led to membership for Ukraine in the European Union and even in NATO.

From a theoretical vantage-point, this author has argued that both realism and constructivism contribute meaningfully to explaining the causes of Russia's annexation of the Crimea. However, realism is limited in that it only focus on material incentives and ignore ideational factors, such as history, culture, identity, self-image, perceptions and so forth. If these elements had not been present, Russia would presumably not have responded to the developments in Ukraine in the way it ultimately did. Russia was not in essence against Ukraine's enhanced relations with the West, but to see Ukraine recede altogether from Russia's 'sphere of influence' was not acceptable; and the reason for this is utterly based on the abovementioned ideational factors. Hence, constructivism is best fitted to explain Russia's motives and foreign policy choices in relation to the dramatic annexation of Crimea. This action cannot convincingly be fully understood unless due consideration is given to the ubiquitous ideas, identity, history and culture that hover over this fateful event.

6.3 Russia's cause in the Borderland – the research questions answered

BASED ON THE application of International Relations theories, in addition to the discussion of Russia's foreign policy in chapter 4, we can now argue that the foreign policy orientation of the Russian leadership has alternately and yet simultaneously been guided by realism and constructivism. Accordingly, both theories can help in explaining the decision to annex Crimea. In short, realists would focus on the power struggle: the fact that Russia sees the Westward-leaning development in Ukraine as a threat, reducing its relative capabilities in favour of the capabilities of the West. Moreover, a hostile government in Kyiv could conceivably have jeopardised the favourable agreement on the strategically important Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, which Russia could not have afforded from a (regional and general) strategic

⁴⁸⁶ Jakob Hedenskog, "Filling 'the gap': Russian security policy towards Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova under Putin," in *Russia as a Great Power - Dimensions of security under Putin*, eds. Jakob Hedenskog, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 137.

standpoint. From Russia's vantage-point, Ukraine's projected EU membership, not to mention NATO membership, would have deprived it of a 'buffer zone' between itself and its adversaries, thus undermining Russia's role as a regional hegemon, and would in turn have strengthened the perception of the US as a hegemon in a unipolar world. Conversely, constructivists emphasise the common historical legacy of the two peoples, their shared identity, and the important role played by the Russian incumbent President. Furthermore, status and honour in international relations are of vital importance, and – given the developments in Russia's relations to the West as 'the significant Other' – Russia's perception was that of humiliation, which, in the eyes of the Russian government, demanded countermeasures that were both justifiable and legitimate.

The main arguments in the public debate, the strategic angle, and the historical reference show empirically that the main causes of Russia's annexation, and the motives for it to resort to this dramatic action, were

- first, that Russia conceives of Ukraine – and certainly Crimea – as belonging to its own sphere of influence, if not directly a part of Russia, and that the Russians and the Ukrainians have common identity and historical roots;
- second, Russia felt threatened by NATO's eastward expansion;
- third, Russia felt anger over losing Ukraine to the outstretched arms of its adversaries;
- fourth, Russia was offended by the lack of recognition and status as a great power with legitimate interests that were not respected, not least in regard to its own status in Western institutions; and
- fifth, Russia was convinced that the West had failed to keep promises given to Russia in relation to the reunification of Germany.

Further, based on the discussion and findings provided above, we can also posit that:

- Russia's actions were partly a reflection of (defensive) power calculations and partly driven by cultural/historical/identity factors arising from the age-old relationship with Ukraine;
- In the eyes of Russia's leadership the advantages of its Crimea move outweigh the political and economic consequences it entails;
- Russia's foreign policy can be characterised by continuity, anchored in the country's and the nation's history and identity; but it has simultaneously been subject to changes caused

by domestic political and economic factors, as well as the development of its relations with the West;

- Russia's incumbent President plays a vital role in the country's foreign policy decision-making and choices, including in this case.

6.4 Concluding remarks – what may the future hold in store?

THE PROCLAMATION OF sovereignty of the RSFSR in 1990 was welcomed by most Russians even if they did not approve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This contradiction is related to the question of identity and self-image, because 'the identity of Russia and the idea of Russian statehood have always been closely associated with the existence of an empire. There has never been a Russian nation-state', as Margot Light emphasises.⁴⁸⁷ The Russians were forced to come to terms with the lost empire as a consequence of the demise of the Soviet Union. Yet they still foster the idea of Russia as a Great Power.

Russia's policy toward Ukraine since the 2004 Orange revolution has been characterised by 'zigs and zags' as Tsygankov puts it, referring to the frozen ties with Yushchenko, the limited partnership with Yanukovich, and finally the confrontation that led to the annexation of Crimea.⁴⁸⁸ Further, Tsygankov argues, that '[W]hat made Russia's conflict with Ukraine possible, even inevitable, was the West's lack of recognition for Russia's values and interests in Eurasia, on the one hand, and the critically important role that Ukraine played in the Kremlin's foreign policy calculations, on the other.'⁴⁸⁹ Russia's relations with Ukraine, as Putin reiterated in his aforementioned speech to the Parliament on 18th March 2014, 'have always been and will remain of foremost importance'.⁴⁹⁰

The analysis supports the view that Russia pursues an essentially defensive foreign and security policy, which makes it questionable to predict that it will, *mutatis mutandis*, act equally aggressively towards other former Soviet states. Nothing can be ruled out, however, in this respect. Further research is required to shed broader light on developments and prospects in Russian foreign policy in general and in the Russia-Ukraine relationship in particular. Therefore,

⁴⁸⁷ Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking," 35-36.

⁴⁸⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2015), 3.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹⁰ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

it is tempting to argue that Russia's policy in Crimea and *vis-à-vis* Ukraine and the West constitutes a defensive reaction to the Maidan developments: that Russia's foreign policy has been consistent with the aim of ensuring *status quo* rather than being regressionist. An even more compelling explanation could, however, be that Putin's Russia pursues a 'third way' policy that goes beyond the *status quo* but not as far as the regressionist one, entailing a restoration of political and economic cooperation in the post-Soviet space under Russia's leadership. It means that Putin is likely – in spite of the annexation of Crimea – to recognise irreversible changes in Russia's neighbourhood, and seek to cement a Eurasian community in other ways, including through allied leaders, economic dependence etc., rather than through straightforward Russian ownership and military occupation.

Russia's annexation of Crimea has already had tremendous repercussions and triggered a severe deterioration of the relations between East and West – to a degree that has evoked associations with the Cold War, or even much more ferocious atrocities in world history. However, one should not overrate the consequences of the Ukraine crisis for world politics, and the implications it may carry with regard to other regions or cases. Russia's and Ukraine's common and shared fate and fortune through centuries – chiefly within the same state structure – constitute a special relationship in its own right, which (among other things) makes it difficult to apply the same yardstick to other former Soviet republics' relations with Russia. Nothing can be excluded, though, in the latter regard. The most vulnerable countries in this context would undoubtedly be Belarus and Moldova, and to some degree the Caucasus, most notably Georgia. Further investigation would be needed to deal with that issue, but it clearly falls beyond the confines of this dissertation.

Whether Russia is 'lost in annexation' or not remains an enigma in its own right. However, the most likely scenario is that Russia's relations with Ukraine and the West will improve gradually – without necessarily retrieving the pre-Crimea situation (it is unlikely that Crimea will ever become a part of Ukraine again) – as there are compelling interests at stake for all parties. Ukraine desperately needs a peaceful solution in order to come to terms with its huge domestic challenges, both with regard to its economic hardships and in tackling the outrageous corruption that is rife in the country, not to mention the importance of keeping the bulk of the country together. Consequently, Ukraine has no other option than to engage both Russia and the Western community in a cooperative way. Russia cannot afford to be infinitely at loggerheads with the

West, neither economically nor politically. Likewise, the West needs Russia as an important partner in the many unfolding problems on the international scene, but is also reliant on Russia as a trade partner. Important factors of co-dependence exist between Russia and particularly powerful EU/NATO states, such as Germany, France, and Italy. Should the animosity in East-West relations, on the other hand, become protracted it would ultimately bode ill for all parties, perhaps most for the Ukrainians: they would in that case risk to become the innocent victims of superpower rivalry. Nobody would benefit from such a development. Therefore, we should hope that Russia is not 'lost' in the annexation trap, and that it will eventually find the right track towards normal relations with its fraternal nation in the 'Borderland', as well as the 'significant Other' in the West.

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