



WHY DID THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE START?

A REALIST AND A SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH



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Abstract

International relations become a more and more important domain within our everyday life. Also in the academic world and professional life, there is an ongoing debate if the actions of one actor or another are based on one or more of the theories that describe the field. This paper tries to share some insight in the complicated web that entangles actors, be there states or other types. The background provided in the first part of this paper has the purpose to bring into light the changes that took place in the Ukrainian society, at the governing level and the decisional level. The facts are presented in detail, from a political science point of view, because the author wished to point out the undeniable changed that took place in the recent history of the Ukrainian state, but nonetheless also in the mentality of the people of Ukraine. The election results presented serve as proof of the change mentioned above.

From a theoretical point of view, every theory has the means to explain the timeline of events. From a realist point of view, Russia is searching to accumulate more power and assert authority in the world, trying to rebuild its own former glory. Its pursuit in doing so, as realists would argue, is being counterbalanced by the Western world by preventing it from following its own agenda. From a constructivist point of view, the Western world is pursuing to introduce and maintain its authority in terms of values. The clash of the identities is permanent, when two sets of values collide in the international system.

All in all, Ukrainian society is divided, that is a fact that no theory will change, and until that fact stands, there will be no solution to the crisis that emerged.

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Chapter I: Methodology

In this paper, firstly we will try to present some assumptions that constitute the background of the analysis which will be done later on in the paper and we will try to identify the characteristics found in the developments of a specific conflict, the one in Ukraine, from 2014, and explain the actions of the actors involved while trying to correlate them with two explicit theories of international relations.

The later analysis will endeavor in presenting the actions of the actors involved in the before mentioned conflict inspected through the lens of Realism as a theory of international relations, but also through the lens of Social-Constructivism. We will put into perspective the actions taken by the actors while interpreting them from a neo-realist stand-point of view. In the second part of the analysis, we will focus on the actions while interpreting them from a social-constructivist point. The analysis will be focused on two hypotheses that are centered on explaining the conflict that arose in Ukraine in 2014.

The first hypothesis that the paper will focus on is if John Mearsheimer's offensive version of realism can be used to explain the conflict that arose in Ukraine in 2014. The hypothesis pursues explicitly: Can offensive realism provide an explanation to the events leading to and during the conflict in Ukraine? The paper will focus on the three core principles of neo-realism and how the actors pursued the application of these principles when interacting before and during the conflict mentioned above. Later on, the analysis from the neo-realist point of view over the events that led to and happened in the Ukraine conflict, will focus on finding offensive realist arguments in the official statements from each state or actor involved in the Ukraine crisis and later conflict. The argument that we will try to establish is if the neo-realist offensive approach could explain the evolution of events and if one can appreciate in the new situation a new type of Cold War. Using Mearsheimer's approach of realism we will try to establish if the actors involved in the conflict in Ukraine from 2014 acted in offensive realism terms and how this type of acting from the part of each of the actors determined the course of events. We will try to establish if Mearsheimer's theory of one actor which is acting offensive, to protect itself from the threat of another actor, can be applied for the events in the conflict that started in Ukraine in 2014.

The second hypothesis that will be in the paper's focus is: if offensive realism does not hold its arguments in explaining the above mentioned conflict, then possibly another international relations theory can be applied. For having a straight and as narrow as it can be undergoing, we choose to use social

constructivism and search if its arguments can explain the conflict. The purpose of second part of the analysis provided by this paper, from the perspective of constructivism as an international relations theory, is to follow two specific principles agreed in the international interactions between actors and how the actors obeyed (or followed) the application of these two principles. The hypothesis in question here pursues explicitly: Were the international agreed norms on interaction between states disobeyed? And, furthermore, did this overlook of the norms in question triggered a conflict which caused a clash of identities in Ukraine?

In the final part, we will draw conclusions on which theory can be used to explain in the most comprehensive way the conflict started and reflect on some possible future outcomes that have the chance of being valid in the case analyzed.

Of course, the paper in focus has limitations. In terms of the analysis done, we have chosen to base it on only three principles for the first part and two principles for the second part because we consider it to be sufficient for a proper undergoing. One can argue that this would insert a flaw in the analysis and in the later conclusions, but we see it as a plus because it manages to help us funnel our research on an explicit point.

The other limitations are structured alongside the analysis and the measures used to collect the data which will be analyzed further on in the third chapter. The focus was on the data that could be collected from within the available literature: first hand sources, secondary sources and/or tertiary sources. Technical documents were used in arguing the two hypotheses which could make the measures used to collect them faulty in the sense that we choose to focus our research on official documents and statements and parallel them with academic literature that we could find on the matter we took into analysis.

Secondly, when conducting a qualitative analysis, the limitation of self-reporting data can come into question. The data collected and taken into analysis was taken as it was reported by the entities that issued the official documents. The analysis does not focus on the veracity of the measures stated in the official documents analyzed, but on their consequences.

Thirdly, the limitations regarding the researcher are to be also taken in consideration. The inability to travel to the region in which the conflict takes place causes an access limitation and inserts the possibility of regarding the paper as an outsider`s view. But nonetheless, a researched and substantiated view.

Also, one can altercate that the structure of the paper is bias to the arguments presented for the perspective of a westerner or an easterner. The choice of the structure is in accordance with the line of

thought of an explanatory research design, this being presented next and are not biased with the above mentioned perspectives in any way:

- identifying an exact event that happened (present in the title of this paper);
- elaborate hypotheses on what the research is meant to study in regard to the event in focus (see Introduction and Methodology chapter);
- provide background information for the event taken into analysis (see chapter Factual description of the evolution of democracy in Ukraine);
- making a choice on the theoretical perspective/s under which the event taken in question for analysis will be put through the lens of (see Theoretical approach chapter);
- making final remarks over the analysis established and present conclusions for the mentioned analysis and for the research underwent.

Chapter II: The evolution of democracy in Ukraine

The purpose of this chapter is to present the facts regarding elections that took place in Ukraine after the Ukrainian independence from 1991 and how these changes in the running elite made the democracy evolve in the country. These are more relevant in the context of being part of the current and near history surrounding the Ukrainian state and its model of democracy. For the later analysis to be a factual one and exact one, one has to first provide a timeline of the ever changing political ground in Ukraine and also present the events triggered the crisis in Ukraine and that led to the conflict in Crimea. The independence from Russia came with a cost for the newly established independent Ukrainian state. The period afterwards, from 1991 to 2004 – when the Orange revolution took place – are characterized by the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma. During this period Ukraine was in transition. It had to begin modernizing its economy and even though its independence came at a great cost, its rulers still maintained strong diplomatic relations with Russia (former USSR). Numerous political scandals thorn apart the newly established democracy and led to an economic downfall of 10% in the presidential term of Leonid Kravchuk and continued with the second elected president, who's first presidential term was filled with corruption scandals. But in the second presidential term of Leonid Kuchma the country and the economy showed signs of revival.

For the presidential elections in 2004, a fault line was clearly visible between the two primary candidates. Although in the presidential race a number of twenty-six candidates registered, it was clear from the beginning that the battle will be fought between Viktor Yushchenko, who was backed up by the pro-European party bloc and his opponent Viktor Yanukovych, who was the prime minister in office at that time and who was baking up on stronger ties with Russia both in economic terms but also in social terms. The first one promised in his manifesto that he will deliver: *"an honest, transparent and consistent foreign policy, complemented by good relations with Russia and the European Union."*¹ In opposition the second one, Yanukovych, was pledging for: *"much closer economic cooperation with Russia, especially in the production and export of arms, within the framework of the Single Economic Space; putting a hold on NATO entry; raising the Russian language to equal status with Ukrainian; and, slowing the pace of integration with the EU."*²

¹ Nathaniel Copsey, (2006), *Election briefing no. 16: Europe and the Ukrainian presidential election of 2004*, Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex, p. 3.

² Idem. p. 4

There were in total three rounds of elections. The first one, held on the 31 October 2004, was won by Viktor Yushchenko followed by Viktor Yanukovich and the other candidates who registered. But since none of the candidates got over 50% of the votes there was a second round between the first two candidates. In this second round, held on the 21 November 2004, Yanukovich came out winning. But since there were reported problems and inconsistencies by the international observers and also by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) the Ukrainian Supreme Court decided that the results were invalid and decided on repeating the second round on 26 December 2004. The results came to be invalidated because the scrutiny was rigged in favor of Yanukovich. Problems such as prison inmates and soldiers casting their vote for Yanukovich in 99% of the cases and deceased people being registered on voting lists days prior to the scrutiny were invoked.

In the immediate aftermath of this second round of election, the people of Ukraine, especially the citizens of Kyiv went on the streets to protest. That was the starting point of what now it is known as the Orange Revolution. There were reportedly 30.000 protesters every evening in Kyiv and rallies were held all over the country in cities such as: Lviv, Vinnitsa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkov and Poltava. Until December when the so called revolution ended there were mass protests in favor of Yushchenko and in favor of fair elections but also in favor of loosening ties with Russia and approach towards the European Union. People power helped Ukraine in one of the most difficult times in its history. The repeat of the second round was held on the 28th of December 2004 and when 100% of the votes casted were counted Viktor Yushchenko was the winner with 51.99% to 44.19% for Viktor Yanukovich. On the 1st of January 2005, the new president assumed office and pledged the oath.³ The president then appoints for the position of Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. She was the leader of Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc of parties and was highly approved by the parliament. Since the president was then Viktor Yushchenko, who won the previous presidential elections and gave the country a new fresh start in the revival of the democratic process, he acted accordingly and nominated a pro-Ukrainian, pro-Western, and pro-democratic person as to be the new Prime Minister. The first government headed by Yulia Tymoshenko lasted from February 2005, after the presidential elections, until September that year when Yushchenko dissolved the government sending the country into a new early elections process. The reasons for his actions were the inability of the team which won the *Orange Revolution* to work together. Corruption within the government and differences in the way of thought had made the president to affirm that: “*Separate blocs that emerged within the team began playing their own games behind closed doors, which was rather*

³ Nathaniel Copsey, pp. 6-10.

unpleasant.”⁴ and that: “*Interpersonal conflicts have grown into conflicts between teams and begun affecting state affairs.*”⁵ when interviewed by BBC journalists.

The next chapter in the history of Ukraine, regarding the furthering of the democratic process, comes in 2006 when the parliamentary elections took place. When the official elections campaign started in July 2005 there was no sign showing the developments after the future outcome of the elections. The campaign was struggle between the peoples wish and the politicians wish. The country, although nobody said this with a firm voice, was still divided between the East and West. The proof of this cleavage will come into light when the election process was at the end.

The events that followed the above described parliamentary elections were controversial and stand as proof that the country was divided and that the democratic process was yet to be one fully emerged. Since in the elections Viktor Yanukovich`s party was the first in the pools the discussions were started to form a majority with the second Yulia Tymoshenko`s party. Viktor Yushchenko`s party, who was the incumbent president at that time came in third. Although the bargaining process was a prolonged one, a deal was struck by the Orange Revolution backers (the Yushchenko and Tymoshenko blocs and the Socialists) but the socialists, which were also part in the negotiations for a majority, had backed out from the deal and agreed to form a majority with the Party of Regions and the Communist Party. President Viktor Yushchenko was forced to name his adversary from the previous presidential elections, from 2004, Viktor Yanukovich as Prime Minister.

After months of unrest, since the last parliamentary elections took place and moreover if the political crisis was not yet fully visible in Ukraine until this moment in time, it fully emerged in the middle of 2007 when President Yushchenko, being unable to mediate the differences between the government and the parliament majority and opposition, dissolved the parliament. The explanation of this action was outlined in the presidential decree from the 2nd of April 2007. In the decree president Yushchenko explained his decision on acting accordingly using the Ukrainian Constitution. In article 102 paragraph 2: “*the President of Ukraine is the guarantor of state sovereignty and territorial indivisibility of Ukraine, the observance of the Constitution of Ukraine and human and citizens' rights and freedoms.*”⁶ and since the political unrest was seen as a cause for: “*...neglect of the constitutional principle of people's*

⁴ BBC News, *Ukraine leader sacks government*, last updated on Thursday, 8 September 2005, 15:41 GMT 16:41 UK, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4225566.stm>, accessed in March 2016.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Decree of the President of Ukraine, No. 264/2007, *On the Pre-Term Termination of Powers of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*, available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=11656&lang=en>, accessed in March 2016.

sovereignty, provided for in Article 5 § 2 and 3 of the Basic Law of Ukraine.”⁷ the solution was to dissolve the parliament. The date for the new parliamentary elections was set to take place on the 30th of September 2007. This date came after harsh developments on the political front and after numerous consultations between President Yuschenko, Prime Minister Yanukovych and the Parliaments speaker, the parts finally agreed that the Parliament should promulgate new legislation regarding the election process and fixed the date.⁸ The official final results of the scrutiny were published on the 20th of October 2007 and the five main parties that reached the threshold of 3% to be able to be assigned a seat in the Parliament were Party of Regions, Yulia Tymoshenko Electoral Bloc, Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense Bloc, Communist Party of Ukraine, Lytvyn's Bloc.

The ruling coalition had been reached after debates and discussions and it was made up from the Yulia Tymoshenko Electoral Bloc and the Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense Bloc. The agreement was reached in the immediate aftermath of the elections when Yulia Tymoshenko had: ‘*quickly ruled out any idea of sharing power with the prime minister's party.*’⁹ Subsequently Yulia Tymoshenko was instated as Prime Minister with 226 deputies casting their vote for her.¹⁰

From this moment onwards the political crisis was believed to be over. But as history showed us, the Ukrainians will have to endure yet another difficult step after only a short, brief, period of arrest. In the next year 2008 the ruling coalition had to go through yet another political crisis. Following the voting on amendments for a law (Parliament of Ukraine; Act of 05.11.1991 number 1789-XII¹¹) the coalition broke up when the Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense Bloc, president Yuschenko’s party, stepped down from the governing coalition. The amendments to the law mentioned above would have changed the procedure of naming and placing in function the Attorney General by requiring a consent from the Prime Minister towards the acceptance of the person proposed or denial. The crisis showed that although the democratic process was developing in a good direction, there were still old debates between the politicians.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Korrespondent.net, *Outcome of the meeting Yushchenko: a special election held on September 30*, available at: <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/191968-itog-vstrechi-u-yushchenko-vneochednye-vybory-sostoyatsya-30-sentyabrya>, first published on the 27th of May 2007, 3:18 AM, accessed in March 2016.

⁹ BBC News, *Orange bloc edges to poll victory: Ukraine's Orange Revolution parties say they have won enough votes in tight early parliamentary elections to form a governing coalition.*, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7025382.stm>, accessed in March 2016.

¹⁰ Korrespondent.net, *Parliament appointed Tymoshenko as prime minister of Ukraine*, available at: <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/319536-parlament-naznachil-tymoshenko-premer-ministrom-ukrainy>, 18th of December 2007, 11:42, accessed in March 2016.

¹¹ Parliament of Ukraine, *Law on Prosecution*, available at: <http://zakon0.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1789-12>, accessed in March 2016.

But after the war between Russia and Georgia from 2008, which ended with the application sent from Ukraine's part to enroll as a NATO member, at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest which The Alliance welcomed, also The EU proposed in 2009 the Eastern Partnership Program which brought Ukraine, with its knowledge, in the West's sphere of influence, Russia proposed also to counter the West's actions a Eurasian Economic Union. It was in plain site that a conflict would be inevitable, if not a military one, then at least one of different approaches.

In the following years after the parliamentary elections from 2007, but prior to the 2014 crisis, a new election process had undergone in Ukraine. These elections were also fueled by internal conflict and the chasm between the West and the East in Ukraine was obvious afterwards. During the 2010 Presidential Elections two candidates had successfully went on in the second round. The two candidates were Viktor Yanukovich, backed by the Party of Regions and Yulia Tymoshenko, backed by the *Fatherland* party.

According to the Ukrainian Constitution from 2010, at article 103, it is stated that: "*The President of Ukraine is elected by the citizens of Ukraine for a five-year term, on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage, by secret ballot.*"¹² Viktor Yushenko's two terms ended and new elections to decide his successor for the highest position in the state, had to undergo.

The results of the elections were in favor of Viktor Yanukovich, who in the second round received 49% of the total casted votes and moved on to become the elected-president. Although also these elections were suspected of being rigged and in the months forthcoming the scrutiny both candidates accused each other of defrauding the upcoming elections^{13,14}, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine decided, after Yulia Tymoshenko's appeal¹⁵, that the scrutiny was fair and the candidate which won the most number of votes was to be sworn into office. The chasm between the West and the Est in Ukraine became obvious and was proved by facts. While the candidate that won the elections was in favor of closer ties

¹² Constitutional Court of Ukraine, *Constitution of Ukraine*, available at: www.ccu.gov.ua/doccatalog/document?id=12084.

¹³ Kyiv Post website, *Tymoshenko says she will prevent Yanukovich from rigging presidential election*, Dec. 17, 2009 14:52, available at: <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/politics/tymoshenko-says-she-will-prevent-yanukovich-from-r-55336.html>, accessed in March 2016.

¹⁴ Kyiv Post website, *Yanukovich sure Tymoshenko will try to rig results of presidential election*, Dec. 17, 2009 14:43, available at: <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/politics/yanukovich-sure-tymoshenko-will-try-to-rig-results-55333.html>, accessed in March 2016.

¹⁵ BBC News website, *Ukrainian election result suspended after PM's appeal*, from Wednesday, 17 February 2010, 13:13, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8519922.stm>, accessed in March 2016.

with Russia and building a cooperation agreement with Russia, Yulia Tymoshenko was in favor of building cooperation ties with the EU, this being the focus of her external policy campaign.¹⁶

The chasm would, as later we would be witnesses to, achieve in changing the regime in Ukraine. During 2013 while probing the public opinion, one of the leading firms, as quoted by Leonid Peisakhin¹⁷ presented the following results: “45 percent supported the signing of a trade accord with the EU, 35 percent opposed that initiative”¹⁸ and “about 38 percent of respondents expressed willingness in principle to participate in protests.”¹⁹ The flame for the protests that triggered the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014, could have been seen in those 38% of respondents who were willing to come into the streets and protest against the regime and its failure to act towards the people needs.

The starting point for the entire events that made up the Revolution mentioned above, was the use of force by the special police on the night of the 30th of November 2013, during a peaceful protest by some students regarding their rights. The reaction towards this, as Taras Ilkiv editor-in-chief of Newsradio.com.ua, the website for Voice of Capital radio and former editor at Korrespondent.net., described it in an article published by Business Insider, “*was that a million angry people took to the central square of the capital.*”²⁰ The protest transformed itself in a movement towards changing the regime. The protesters demanded the resignation of the government and the resignation of president Yanukovich. The details of how the events took place can be found on the European Parliaments interactive timeline on the official site²¹. Among the problems that were raised by the Euromaidan were corruption and the inequality of chances present in the Ukrainian society coupled with the change in the structure of power. From the parliamentary republic that was, Ukraine, during presidents Yanukovich term, has transformed into a presidential republic, power having a vertical structure. These problems affected the citizens in their everyday life.

The Ukrainian crisis did not help the consolidation of the democratic process in Ukraine either. Later, the annexation of Crimea, unilaterally by Russia, as a result of the protests and the opposition of

¹⁶ Dr. Taras Kuzio, Senior Fellow, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, *Yulia Tymoshenko vs. Viktor Yanukovich: What Differentiates Them From a Policy Point of View?*, Thursday, January 21, Washington DC, available at: http://csis.org/files/attachments/100121_ukraine_presentation_0.pdf, accessed in March 2016.

¹⁷ Leonid Peisakhin, *Euromaidan revisited: causes of regime change in Ukraine one year on*, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/5-kennan%20cable-Peisakhin.pdf>, accessed in March 2016.

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ Taras Ilkiv, *A Ukrainian Journalist Explains 10 Things The West Needs to Know About the Situation in Kiev*, Jan. 23, 2014, 2:48 PM, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/understanding-euromaidan-2014-1?IR=T>, accessed in March 2016.

²¹ European Parliament News, *Ukraine: timeline of events*, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20140203STO34645/Ukraine-timeline-of-events>, accessed in March 2016.

the regions leaders towards the signing of the associations agreement with the EU had a deep impact on the country's future.

The events that occurred after the 2010 presidential elections that were condemned as being unfair would proceed to trigger a crisis of the democracy. Yanukovich, who became president, was acting in accordance to achieving stronger ties with Russia, both economically and diplomatically. While in November 2013, president Yanukovich appeared to agree on signing the Association Agreement at the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, he later changed his mind and on the 21st of the same month, talks were suspended and a dialogue was started for a better and newer relation with Russia.

The reactions towards the ending of the talks regarding the Association Agreement with the European Union, came in dismay. The decision to end the talks to join the AA agreement and the DCFTA triggered mass protests in the Independence Square in Kyiv. In the months following the decision not to sign the AA and DCFTA agreements the protests in Independence Square, named 'Maidan Square' peaked. Western leaders urged president Yanukovich for deescalating the situation. Therefore, on the 21st of February 2014, Yanukovich met with opposition leaders and reached a settlement agreement to organize early elections and stop the violence in Kyiv. Right after the signing of the settlement agreement president Yanukovich fled to eastern Ukraine. The Parliament appointed as interim president, the speaker of parliament, Oleksander Turchynov.

During 2014, the protests continued throughout the country and in the eastern part pro-Russian protesters gathered and demanded a referendum in which they would choose their own faith by secession from Ukraine. While the developments in Kyiv were focused towards closer ties with the EU and in the end toping up with the revolution which ended up with president Yanukovich and the government fleeing, in the eastern part of Ukraine, mainly in the Crimean Peninsula, pro-Russian protesters supported by Moscow and helped by armed Russian military forces took over the buildings in which the Ukrainian leaders of the region held office.²² Newspapers around the world, but also international actors were forced to focus again on Ukraine.

President Yanukovich fled the country on the 22nd of February and a transition government was appointed until elections would to be held. After his fled Russian military forces invaded Ukraine, in the Crimean Peninsula, situated in the eastern part of Ukraine, in the Black Sea. This fact was recognized by

²² Andrew Higgins, Steven Erlanger, *Gunmen Seize Government Buildings in Crimea*, 27 February 2014, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/world/europe/crimea-ukraine.html>, accessed in March 2016.

Moscow in later declarations when Putin admitted that: “*the little green men*”²³, which were present in Ukraine, before the referendum in Crimea, were there to assure a smooth transition of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia and before that to prepare the referendum. Although considered to be an infringement in the democratic process of Ukraine, the referendum mentioned above and its results were not recognized by Ukraine and by the international actors, but Russia annexed Crimea de facto on the 14th of March 2014. Putin stated later that: “*There was no other way to hold the referendum in an open, honest and honorable way and allow the people to express their opinion.*”, when referring to the idea of Russian military in Crimea. While the protests in Kyiv stopped, in Sevastopol, protestors flushed the streets and asked for greater autonomy from Kyiv and closer ties to Russia. Mayor of Sevastopol was appointed a pro-Russian businessman, Alexei Chaliy. Later on, the Crimean Parliament voted on a referendum on “on the widening of the authority of the autonomous republic of Crimea.”, said Vladimir Konstantinov, the speaker of the Crimean Parliament. Following a vote in the Crimea region, which resulted in no support for the government in Kyiv, the Crimean Parliament appointed a new government which was pro-Russian. As a response to the internal processes that occurred, Russia started moving troops in Crimea from its base in Sevastopol. The Russian Foreign Ministry used as an argument for the moving of troops its agreement with Ukraine authorities to use the Sevastopol Naval base. The next step in the timeline of events was made when the Crimean Parliament voted on secession from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation. The support from the Russian side came when preparations for a bill of fast procedures for annexing new territories was announced. The referendum was held on the 16th of March 2014 and its results showed that the people of Crimea were in favor of reuniting with the Russian Federation. The conflict, which had been a political one until this moment, escalated and changed its nature into a military one. After the acknowledging of the referendum results by Russia and signing an Initial Reunification Treaty, the Russian military forces and pro-Russian militia present in Crimea stormed a Ukrainian military base in Simferopol and during the confrontation several military men were killed. The reports coming from different parts are conflicting, but one this was sure: there was a confrontation. In the end the Ukrainian government relocated all troops from Crimea and was willing to pursue a diplomatic solution. The aftermath of the referendum in Crimea had the consequences of other regions from eastern Ukraine to pursue their own secession. The Donbass region was faced with such a choice when protestors gathered in Donetsk asking for greater autonomy from Kyiv and the possibility of new elections. Protests

²³ Yuras Karmanau, Vladimir Isachenkov, *Vladimir Putin admits for first time Russian troops took over Crimea, refuses to rule out intervention in Donetsk*, The Associated Press, April 17, 2014, available at: <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/vladimir-putin-admits-for-first-time-russian-troops-took-over-crimea-refuses-to-rule-out-intervention-in-donetsk>, accessed in March 2016.

occurred also in other cities such as: Kharkov, Lugansk, and Odessa. The main theme within all the protests was greater autonomy from Kyiv. Militias started to form in the Donbass region and Luhansk region which were supported by separatists. They declared the Donetsk and Luhansk 'People's Republics'. Armed conflicts took place between the separatists and the Ukrainian forces. The first were backed up by Russia and events reached a high point, diplomatically speaking, when a Russian convoy had passed the border into Ukraine, with the aim of aiding separatists. This was viewed by Kyiv as an act of invasion and was blamed.

Subsequently, elections were held in Ukraine to fill in the position of president. The elections campaign was seen as a new hope towards calmer times in Ukraine. In the race for president 21 candidates successfully registered and were accepted by the Central Elections Commission. Election Day was set on the 25th of May 2014. Fifteen of the candidates were independent and not backed by any party.

Exit polls gave a sure winner, due to his ability in the campaign to convince the people of Ukraine that he will try to fix the countries problems. Petro Poroshenko won the first round of elections with 54.7% of all casted votes. He was at a long distance followed by Yulia Tymoshenko, who failed to convince. Poroshenko was seen as a new hope for Ukraine. He had an immense experience in leadership formerly being Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Trade and Economic Development. He managed to convince the people of Ukraine that he will fight for a fair and right democratic process. Furthering the economic ties with the EU but also managing the crisis in Crimea, were seen as factors of reconciliation and of deepening the democratic process.

During his inaugural speech he referred to the Ukrainian unity as being the most important element but also made an important statement when stating that the only way for Ukraine to further on and deepen its democratic process would be to sign an association agreement with the EU: "*We see the association agreement as only the first step towards Ukraine's fully-fledged membership in the European Union*"²⁴.

When Poroshenko became the newly elected president, he immediately proceeded in having negotiations with the separatists and agreed on the 5th of September for a ceasefire between the Ukrainian forces and the separatists. This is the first attempt to obtain a diplomatic solution. The agreement reached between the parts involved, including representatives from the separatist regions, is known as the *Minsk Protocol*. But the ceasefire was not honored by all the parts, fighting beginning again around the Donetsk

²⁴ Speech by President of Ukraine during the inauguration ceremony. Full text., Ukrayinska Pravda (in Ukrainian). 7th of June 2014, available at: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2014/06/7/7028330/>, accessed in March 2016.

airport. The diplomatic solution was still being pursued by the Ukrainian authorities which agreed, after the draft plan proposed by France, Germany, Belarus and Russia, with the self-proclaimed People`s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk to cease fire again which is known as the *Minsk 2 Agreement*.

Chapter III: Theoretical approach

As Spindler and Schieder mention in their book²⁵ the field of study of the international relations is governed by “*theoretical pluralism*”. What they are inferring is that actions between different actors at a super-national level can be explained using different sets of principles. The theories governing international relations as an academic field of study are multiple and vary one from other²⁶. What this means, is that there are multiple theories that try to explain from different approaches the reality within the system.

Because the focus of this paper is to try to explain the events that occurred in the system, from two different perspectives, also the theories, on which the later research and analysis will be constructed, will be systemic theories. The ones that bring arguments towards describing the system, here the international system, providing characteristics from different points of view.

In this extent, our research in terms of theoretical approaches has brought us to take into consideration two of the most well know theories of international relations: Realism and Socio-Constructivism. As a purpose of this paper is to be as actual as possible, also, we find it necessary to base our analysis from two separate points of view. The two theories mentioned above, make up the most recent debate in terms of structural approaches. Because of this debate between the two systemic theories, it is important to provide a description of each one`s theoretical framework while presenting the governing principles that the bring up front.

²⁵ Manuela Spindler and Siegfried Schieder, (2014), *Theories of International Relations*, New York: Routledge, p. 1.

²⁶ Idem. pp. 1 – 13.

Rational approach

The first theoretical approach that we will use will be Realism. With a long lasting history, that it has, and its first exponents being Thucydides and Machiavelli, realism as an international relations theory, had not appeared until in the 20th century. The ‘games of power’ find their origin as far back as, if not even further, 460 BCE. In the “*The History of the Peloponnesian War*”, the rise of power of Athens was seen as the first reason that caused conflict between the Greek city-states.²⁷ Power was seen then, as it is now, a constitutive factor in the relations between actors. As one can later see, in Machiavelli’s “*The Prince*”, his advice to his prince was to take into account the actual reality and act upon it. This became a governing principle of Realism that practicing a set of actions transfers later into a theory.

The first influencing writing on developing a theory of international politics based on the importance of the power principle was Carr followed by Hans J. Morgenthau who codified *Realism* as a theory which was brought as a critique opposed to *Idealism*. In “*Politics Among Nations*”, Morgenthau saw power as a mean in achieving national interest²⁸ and later on when he analyzed the confrontation between the two blocs of actors present in the international system he conceded that the cold conflict was not a matter of conflicting ideologies but the origins of it were in the struggle for power.²⁹

Maintaining Morgenthau’s assumptions, another key exponent of Realism has developed the *neo-realist* theory. While the focus of Morgenthau’s work in on the relations between actors, Kenneth Waltz in his “*Theory of International Politics*” from 1979, brings forward the assumption that the structure developed within the international system is the one who dictates the relations between actors. What Waltz assumed is that regardless of what political system, or ideology they have, states have the same behavior towards other actors. He changed the focus from the first two images of the world (*the level of the individual and the level of the political system*) as he described them in his book from 1959: “*Man, the State and War*”, to the third level: *the international system*. For Waltz, the world of international relations is made up from *actors* (mainly states) and the *structure* of the system. The elements that describe the actors are the fact that they are unitary and are characterized by three assumptions:

1. survival – actors will always try to maintain their geographical and political integrity;

²⁷ Spindler and Schieder. p. 22.

²⁸ Idem. p. 25.

²⁹ Morgenthau, Hans J., (1951), In *Defense of National Interest: A critical Examination of American Foreign Policy*, New York: Knopf. p. 78-81.

2. rationality – the actions of actors will always serve a means-ends game³⁰;
3. capabilities – power in terms of a measuring unit. (Although power it is not explained explicitly by Waltz, he concedes that not only military power, but also social and economic attributes count up³¹).

The structure of the international system, according to Waltz, is described by the ordering principle, the characteristics of actors and the resource distribution present between them. The ordering principle is viewed in two ways: hierarchically and anarchically. The characteristics of the actors are seen as different functions that states fulfill. When there is a hierarchical system, weaker states tend to subordinate to the authority, in this case the superior actor that has monopoly of violence, hence following a function. In an anarchical system, understood as a system where there is a lack of a such actor, states are left on their own and forces them to not rely on external help. “*Take care of yourself*”³², as Waltz unarguably puts it. When it comes to the power relations between actors, Waltz argues that this distribution is a feature of the system’s structure. ³³ In consequence the system can be unipolar, bipolar and multipolar. Regardless of how the power is divided within the system such a system that is characterized by self-help, will tend to be in balance: “*A self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves...will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer. Fear of such unwanted consequences stimulates states to behave in ways that tend toward the creation of balances of power.*”³⁴ In such a system states have two strategies in order for self-help themselves. They can upgrade their military capabilities or to form alliances with other states. This type of strategies can explain also war times and peace times. It is important here to distinguish between the three types of situations of how power is configured. Alliances can be formed in a bipolar system and a multipolar system in Waltz’s view. In the bipolar system the alliances are clearly comprehensible and based on balancing the other actor³⁵ when in a multipolar system the alliances are harder to reach and unstable in the sense that there are multiple actors, each with its own interest, intentions. So in this situations when being faced with the opportunity of an alliance, an actor will try to bandwagon with the actor that has the most power in the system.

³⁰ Although it is not mentioned explicitly in the Theory of International Politics by Waltz, in his later essays he acknowledges that he works on that premise. Evidence can be found in *Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics*, 1986 found in: *Neorealism and Its Critics* edited by Robert Keohane, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 330.

³¹ Ibid. p. 333.

³² Waltz, Kenneth, (1979), *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. p. 107.

³³ Idem. pp. 80-98.

³⁴ Idem. p. 118.

³⁵ Spindler and Schieder. p. 43.

The more recent debate within realism is the one between the defensive realists, such as Waltz and the offensive realists. One of the most prominent offensive realists, if not even the most important one within the current, is John J. Mearsheimer. While defensive realists believe in balancing the power of one actor by creating alliances that undermine or deter the more powerful actor; Mearsheimer believes in the offensive paradigm. In his work, firstly in *“Tragedy of Great Power Politics”* from 2001, he explains what his vision of offensive realism is all about. He argues that: *“In the international system there is always the possibility for aggression from the part of one actor or more than one and that this behavior, provoked by the anarchical nature of the international system, can be matched by acting first. In his view, acting means pursuing state interest and obtaining advantages and maximizing power.”*³⁶ Differentiating himself from Waltz, who proposed that the search for the increasing of power is limited because the tendency in the international system is to balance the existing power or maintain the existing status quo, Mearsheimer argues that the ‘thirst’ for power is endless for the actors present in the international system due to the nature of the system that makes states to always make themselves secure. Moreover, in Mearsheimer’s view, there is always a competition for more power in the anarchic international system which makes the existent states to be revisionist states while also existing ‘status quo’ states exceptions.³⁷

³⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, p. 21.

³⁷ Barry Posen, a defensive realist, writes that status quo states are “the rule rather than the exception.” See Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 69.

Critical Theory

The second theoretical approach is constituted by Constructivism as a theory of international relations. Being a systemic theory, it provides us with a different view on how the international system is shaped. Introduced by Nicholas Onuf in 1989, when he coined the term, it was developed further as a systemic theory by authors such as Alexander Wendt and Martha Finnemore. For our analysis we will look into how the later one's vision can be used to explain why the conflict in Ukraine has emerged.

As it was stated before, systemic theories work on explaining what are the 'rules' that shape the system and how they work. While neo-realists believe that interests, hence state interest, are pre-given³⁸ constructivist authors argue that the nature of one actor's interest is socially constructed from the interaction process happening within the international system between different actors. One of the prominent figures as theorists of international relations is Alexander Wendt. His articles and his later book (Wendt 1987, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1999) made an immense contribution in explaining how the constructivist approach towards international relations is different from other international relations theories. In the first account, constructivism proposes a different approach to rationalistic theories. It focuses on the social meaning of things.³⁹ Secondly, in Wendt's view, the interests of actors are defined by the interaction within the system: "...create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process".⁴⁰ Wendt argues that *"It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions. Actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understanding and expectations about self—by participating in such collective meaning."*⁴¹ While Wendt's analysis is systemic and analyses the nature of the international system it only focuses on how the interests and identities are shaped by the social interaction between states. Our focus, as stated in the hypothesis part, is to find an explanation if identities and norms played a role in the conflict in Ukraine. Identities and norms understood from a systemic point of view. Moving on, another way of interpreting the actions of the actors and the further developments in the conflict in Ukraine is by using the constructivist approach which tries to explain the identities of actors by focusing on the internationally accepted norms.

³⁸ Jackson, Robert and Sorensen, Georg, (2006), *Introduction to International Relations Theories and Approaches*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, p. 168

³⁹ Anne-Marie Slaughter (2011), *International Relations, Principal Theories*, p. 4. published in Wolfrum, R. (Ed.) Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Alexander Wendt, (1992), Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics found in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, MIT Press. pp. 391-425.

⁴¹ Idem. p. 397.

Martha Finnemore in her 1996 book: *“National Interests in International Society”* proposes a different approach to constructivism as a systemic theory. Her version of the theory is based on the assumptions that: *“States are embedded in dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in the world.”*⁴² Her assumption is that: *“States interests are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understanding about what is good and appropriate”*.⁴³ Her assumption is: *“that states are socialized to accept new norms, values, and perceptions of interest by international organizations”* the supposition being here that *“the international system can change what states ‘want’”*.⁴⁴ Her view of the structure of the international system is that it is a socially constructed one from the common shared view on rules, principles, norms of behavior and shared beliefs.⁴⁵ Her analysis is based on three case studies. First, how UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has influenced states into adopting science policy bureaucracies. Second, how states accepted rule-governed norms on warfare. The incentive here, being that the Red Cross International Committee has prescribed what is considered as ‘appropriate behavior’ of ‘civilized’ states involved in war. The last case study being focused on how Third World states accepted poverty alleviation as a central economic norm. She looks into what Rober O. Keohane stated: *“Preferences are strongly influenced and often constituted by social norms, culturally determined roles and rules, and historical contingent discourse”*.⁴⁶ As Martha Finnemore argued and proved in her second case study, we will try to make use of the principles (norms) of ‘appropriate behavior’ accepted internationally and in international law regarding the interaction between states and if they were respected or not in the events in Ukraine and if the break off of these norms generated a clash of identities between the East and the West. Explicitly, we will try to determine, in the later analysis, if the actors involved in the conflict in Ukraine, which started in 2014, acted in a way that was in accordance with internationally accepted and agreed norms and determine, using Martha Finnemore’s approach of constructivism in terms of norms that are accepted internationally, if the conflict in Ukraine led to a clash of identities between the West and East. When we are referring at a clash of identities we mean the different approaches of political culture. For example: The West, which performs under the internationally accepted principle of non-intervention in a sovereign state or territory and Russia which acted against this principle when annexing Crimea.

⁴² Martha Finnemore, (1996), *National Interests in International Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, p. 2

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 15.

⁴⁶ Robert O. Keohane, (1988), *International Institutions: Two Approaches*, *International Studies Quarterly* 32, pp. 379 – 396.

Chapter IV: Analysis of Ukraine conflict

From a realist point of view

When taking into consideration for the analysis in hand the nature of the interactions between the actors regarding the conflict in Crimea one has to look at all the actors, which are recognized internationally as entities and are part of the system of international relations. As mentioned in this paper actors in the international system are mainly states, namely self-sustaining entities, who through their interactions at a supranational level shape the nature of the relations between them.

In the conflict in Ukraine, the main actors involved are the following: states – Ukraine, Russia, The US and other entities such as – The European Union (‘The EU’ from now onwards) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (mentioned as ‘NATO’ from now onwards). This part of the paper will debunk and analyze the actions undertaken by them (actors here) from the theoretical perspective of realism. Furthermore, we will observe if John Mearsheimer’s theory of offensive realism can be used to explain why the conflict evolved into an open conflict and was not stopped at an early stage.

The EU’s actions in the conflict in Ukraine were at first only based on diplomacy. Through its European Council, which is the ‘executive body’ of the EU decided in March 2014 to cancel the preparations for the G8 Summit in Sochi. This was a diplomatic decision and for us it is accordance in the rationality principle that makes actors follow a distinct approach while asserting to their ends – which were to undermine Russia’s decision to the annexation of Crimea. Furthermore, The EU, suspended talks regarding visas for Russian citizens traveling to The EU and proceeded to impose individual restrictive measures for Russian citizens, such as assets freeze and travel bans.

The signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, on the 27th of June 2014⁴⁷ is also a diplomatic action. It was aimed at deterring Russia in its pursuit in destabilizing a neighboring country. The signing of the Association Agreement is in accordance with the principle of rationality and followed The EU’s aim.

⁴⁷ European Council 26-27/06/2014 Brussels Chaired by Donald Tusk, Conclusions, available at: <file:///C:/Users/tzunu/Downloads/143478.pdf>, accessed in April 2016.

The individual restrictive measures were transformed into a broader type of economic and trade sanctions towards Russia when on the 29th of July 2014, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission issued a statement regarding the extended economic sanctions:

“...measures targeting sectoral cooperation and exchanges with the Russian Federation. These decisions will limit access to EU capital markets for Russian State-owned financial institutions, impose an embargo on trade in arms, establish an export ban for dual use goods for military end users, and curtail Russian access to sensitive technologies particularly in the field of the oil sector [...] the suspension of EIB and EBRD financing, the restriction of investment and trade with Crimea and Sevastopol and the reassessment of the Russia EU bilateral cooperation with a view to reducing the level of the cooperation.”

From this moment onwards, The EU stopped reacting solely with diplomacy and took a step forward in imposing economic sanctions. These economic sanctions are in accordance with the principle of capabilities within realism. The EU acted in realist terms when imposing the restrictive economic measures, in the second round. If at first, the restrictive measures were oriented towards persons of interest from Russia and their assets, in the second round, The EU imposed targeted economic sectorial measures towards another actor in the international system, Russia. The EU also acted with imposing economic sanctions, such as assets freeze, on Ukrainian citizens.⁴⁸ Following claims of embezzlement of state funds, the former president Yanukovich had his assets frozen. The mentioning of this fact is relevant here to show that the EU is an unbiased actor when it comes to acting in the international system when a crisis is present.

The current status of the interactions between The EU and the other actors involved in the Crimean conflict is based on the diplomatic interactions and restrictive economic measures. The economic sanctions towards Russia have been extended⁴⁹, in the light of Russia`s involvement in the illegal annexation of Crimea and its role in destabilizing a sovereign state. The interference in a national sovereign state`s affairs by Russia, was seen as a threat, by The EU and so henceforth it acted in a realist nature. The imposing of economic sanctions can be seen as an assertion of capabilities by The EU, while the diplomatic solutions that were and are pursued can be regarded as in accordance with the means-ends game present between Russia and The EU.

⁴⁸ European Council, Press release 91/15 Foreign affairs & international relations, 5/03/2015 13:55, available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/150305-council-extends-eu-sanctions-over-misappropriation-ukrainian-state-funds/>, accessed in April 2016.

⁴⁹ European Council, *Ukraine territorial integrity: EU extends sanctions by 6 months*, Press release 116/16 Foreign affairs & international relations, 10/03/2016 13:30, available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/10-ukraine-territorial-integrity/>, accessed in April 2016.

Because the aim of this analysis is to prove if Mearsheimer`s theory of offensive realism can be applied to the conflict in Ukraine from 2014 and the later events, we will now take a look at the EU`s actions through the lens of offensive behavior. It can be argued that The EU when imposing the economic sanctions mainly towards Russia, reacted in front of a threat. Perceived in realist paradigm, Russia`s involvement in destabilizing Ukraine economically by increasing energy prices when the Ukrainian leadership was leaning towards a European perspective and supporting separatists and the unrecognized governing bodies in Crimea and, later, the Eastern regions of Ukraine (mentioned at p. 46), was a threat towards the integrity of the EU construction. Because of its social approach, present its establishing treaties, The EU used the instruments available for deterring a threat. Furthermore, arguably, balancing Russia`s power was intended by The EU. The prof is present in the Association Agreement signed with Ukraine.

When we focus the lens of the analysis on how Russia`s actions can be explained using realist arguments we find the arguments sustaining the idea that it acted also facing a threat. Although Russia has tried to cover the military involvement in Crimea in a cloth of ‘protection of the self-determination right’ of peoples⁵⁰, this way of explaining a military intervention in a sovereign state which undermined the territorial integrity of another actor can be argued using the rationality principle Russia followed a means-ends game. The aim, here, was for Russia to reassert itself as a strong pole of power. The best example for proving this is the increase in power for the Russian navy which established itself as a major player in the Black Sea region, inclining the balance towards itself.⁵¹ As presented by Carol Weaver in “*An Introduction to the Politics of the Black Sea Nations*”⁵² the actions of Russia were in accordance with *Putin`s Foreign Policy 2000*. One of the provisions stated in the public foreign policy was “*To ensure reliable security of the country...to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community...consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power*”⁵³ and “*To form a good-neighbor belt*”.⁵⁴ While the international system is anarchic in present times, having different poles of power – for example: The US, The EU, China, India – Russia intended to increase its perceptible power. This is also in accordance with the previously foreign policy principles mentioned: “*Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations*”.⁵⁵ Because of the Ukrainian leadership,

⁵⁰ President Vladimir Putin`s press conference, 4th of March 2014, minute 31:30, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KrRov8IR4M>, accessed in April 2016.

⁵¹ Vasily Kashin, Sergey Denisentsev, et al; BROTHERS ARMED. Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine Edited by Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov; ISBN: 978-1-879944-22-0, October 2014 English.

⁵² Carol Weaver, (2013), *The Politics of the Black Sea Region*, University of Leicester, UK, Ahsgate Publishing Company.

⁵³ Idem. p 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 29.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p 29.

which changed its perspective, from an Eastern approach to a European, more western approach, when the leadership change happened in 2014, when Poroschenko was elected president, Russia acted by managing military exercises close to the Ukrainian border. Described by *The International Centre for Defense Studies*, as a ‘a multidimensional subversion campaign’⁵⁶, Russia’s implication in the conflict in Ukraine can be understood, arguably, using the survival principle (p. 31) which observes actors pursuing their own survival as a sustainable entity in the international system. Russia, acted also in a realist paradigm, when it imposed also economic sanctions over some citizens from The EU and US but also when it imposed an embargo on food products from the US, the EU, Canada, Australia and Norway. Currently this embargo is extended until August 2016.⁵⁷

John Mearsheimer describes in his article from *Foreign Affairs* (Sep/Oct 2014)⁵⁸ that Russia acted offensively towards the increasing threat created by the West. His point is that the crisis in Ukraine and the following conflict, was the West’s fault. He describes the movements of the West by enlarging NATO after the end of the Cold War and the EU’s successive enlargement processes, which were pushing the “pro-democracy movement”⁵⁹ as being processes that threatened interest that are at the core of Russia’s politics and policies. We find this argument as being a strong one, but we need to clarify furthermore. Arguments can be found in the sanctions towards Russia imposed by The EU, The US and Ukraine. Putin, seeing the steps undertaken by the other actors in the system as offensive ones in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea, he started to act defensively, by imposing in its turn economic sanctions and embargos on products from the West. The situation created can be explained using the principle of survival (p.31) – Russia, after its economic underdevelopment after the end of the Cold War, was concerned about its survival in the sense of preserving its strategic interests. Also its behavior can be explained by the capabilities principle. Using soft-power, Russia adhered to the people in the regions as Donbas and Luhansk to form militias and to elect authorities that will pursue the self-determination right. Mearsheimer’s argument is a valid one, in our view, but not until the end. We observed that Russia was only acting in terms of ‘what the people wanted’ – at least this was the official version, therefore we have to conclude that Russia acted defensively, in the conflict in Ukraine, in the sense that it was in the defense of its people (here Russian speakers/minority in Eastern Ukraine) and also defensively to protect its own

⁵⁶ The International Centre for Defense Studies, *Russia’s Actions against Ukraine*, 10 June 2014, Background Paper, p.1 available at: [http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/ICDS - Russias Actions against Ukraine.pdf](http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/ICDS_-_Russias_Actions_against_Ukraine.pdf), accessed in April 2016.

⁵⁷ European Commission, Agriculture and Rural Development, *EU responses to the Russian import ban on agricultural products*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/russian-import-ban/pdf/2015-08-06-russian-import-ban_en.pdf, accessed in April 2016.

⁵⁸ John Mearsheimer, (2014) Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin, *Foreign Affairs*, 93.5, p. 77 – 89.

⁵⁹ Idem.

interests, those being to stop or slow down The EU's enlargement and NATO's increase of military capabilities closer to its borders.

In Ukraine's case, the arguments proposed by realists can be observed in the actions undertaken by its leadership. On the 16th of September 2015, the Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko signed a decree "on the personal use of the special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)"⁶⁰ towards Russian citizens and entities. This can be regarded as a defensive measure taken by Ukraine towards Russia's aggression. It undergoes with the survival principle. (p. 31). Although the economic outcomes of this decision are yet to be measured, because it affected the business relations between Ukrainian entities and Russian ones, the decree is also bound by the second principle, the means-aims game. Ukraine is a sovereign country and will follow on the aim of standing up to Russia.

Moving on, the Association Agreement signed with The EU⁶¹, can also be understood through the lens of realism. Moreover, it has all the characteristics of an offensive move, qualifying for offensive realism enunciated by Mearsheimer. The Association Agreement was signed by acting president Poroshenko and was seen by Russia as an 'offence' towards its cooperation and diplomatic relations with Ukraine. Since the 'Orange Revolution' (p. 12) and the shift that occurred in Ukraine's vision towards the future, Russia acted, as mentioned before (p. 48), to protect one of its core interest – to remain a pole of power in the international system and to strengthen that power. Its aggression towards Ukraine by annexing Crimea, was an action that Ukraine has tried to answer to by balancing the power of Russia. All in all, Ukraine's actions in the conflict that arose in 2014 and which is still continuing can be described as a mix of defensive and offensive actions. But, nevertheless, the attributes of offensive realism are still in play. Ukraine will continue to 'fight' Russia and its pursuit to dominate the Eastern part of Ukraine.

The US was another important actor in the international system that acted when the conflict in Ukraine started. The historic relations between The US and Russia are of cooperation in some areas, but during the Cold War there was a period in time when there were no relations at all. Since the fall of the USSR in 1991, the diplomatic and economic relations had the characteristics of cooperation between the two giants but when focusing on the facts using the lens of realism, one can observe that The US and Russia were continuing the 'play' of supremacy, at least regional supremacy. But because the purpose of this analysis is to observe the actions of others through the lens of realism and offensive realism we will

⁶⁰ Ukraine Presidential Decree №549 / 2015, available at: <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/5492015-19437>, accessed in April 2016.

⁶¹Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

Between the European Communities and their Member States, and Ukraine, 19.2.98 EN Official Journal of the European Communities L 49/3, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/downloadFile.do?fullText=yes&treatyTransId=659>, accessed in April 2016.

not focus on the relations between The US and Russia, but we will observe The US`s actions towards Russia`s aggression in Ukraine.

On the 28th of February 2014, President Obama, reacting to the Russian troops acting in Crimea, made a press statement on the situation. He condemned the Russian military actions in Ukraine and took a position of standing for the people of Ukraine and the democratic process. While acknowledging that “*Russia has a historic relationship with Ukraine, including cultural and economic ties*”⁶² he also pointed out that, in The US`s view, Russia is acting offensively: “*...It would be a clear violation of Russia`s commitment to respect the independence and sovereignty and borders of Ukraine, and of international laws.*”⁶³ The first step taken by The US came in March 2014 when President Obama issued a presidential order that seized and blocked all assets of persons that took control of the Crimean region without the authorization of the Government of Ukraine. Quoting from the presidential order itself, one can observe the phrase: “*...constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States...*”⁶⁴, referring to the action of people who took control in Crimea and were backed by Russia. From now on, The US considered the situation in Ukraine a threat which was to be dealt with accordingly. Moving on, The US supported the diplomatic version of ending the conflict. In most of the press briefings from the White House regarding the situation in Crimea, that can be found on the US Department of State website⁶⁵, there was always an urge towards having talks and supporting the democratically elected Ukrainian leaders to solve the issue. The second step taken by The US was when President Obama issued another presidential order which seized and blocked assets of Russian officials and Russian entities. Unarguably, “*the actions and policies of the Government of the Russian Federation with respect to Ukraine -- including the recent deployment of Russian Federation military forces in the Crimea region of Ukraine*”⁶⁶ were seen as “*an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States*” and “*undermine democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine; threaten its peace, security, stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; and contribute to the misappropriation of its assets*”⁶⁷.

⁶² *Statement by the President on Ukraine*, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, February 28, 2014, 5:05 P.M. EST, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/28/statement-president-ukraine>, accessed in April 2016.

⁶³ *Idem*.

⁶⁴ *Idem*.

⁶⁵ US Department of State Official Website, available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/index.htm>, accessed in April 2016.

⁶⁶ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Executive Order -- Blocking Property of Additional Persons Contributing to the Situation in Ukraine*, March 17, 2014, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/17/executive-order-blocking-property-additional-persons-contributing-situat>, accessed in April 2016.

⁶⁷ *Statement by the President on Ukraine*, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, February 28, 2014.

More than two years after the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, the sanctions imposed by The US are still in place. Arguably these economic sanctions imposed by The US towards unrecognized Crimean leaders, Russian separatists and also towards Russia for deploying troops in the region and illegally annexing Crimea can be observed as to be defensive measures because these measures came in the light of a preceding action undertaken by Russia (i.e. annexation of Crimea). Keeping in mind Mearsheimer's argument that the situation in Crimea was the West's fault, we can argue now that the continuing faltering response from The US is beginning to have a negative impact. While no decisive action is undertaken by The US in relation to the conflict, President Putin and Russia are asserting more and more power in establishing Russian regional supremacy. Combined with the infightings of Ukrainian leaders who cannot agree on a common way of restoring unity, the situation is in the downfall of Ukraine the most.

Appreciating the actions of The US until now, we can oversee that they obey the principle of rationality. The US is following a means-end game. The purpose of the prolonged state of indecisive action undertaken has the aim of deterring Russia through a wear and tear approach. Opposing direct military action, through the safeguard of the NATO alliance, using article 5, The US is aware of the not-yet-member state of Ukraine, in the alliance, and prefers a diplomatic approach. It would seem that, as stated above the lens of defensive realism would apply here, but by taken into consideration the economic damage that Russia is having after the coupling economic sanctions from The US and The EU together, the argument is still in favor of offensive realism. The US is acting as a pole of power that it is, in the anarchic international system, but prefers to act using diplomacy and soft power and less hard power.

Furthermore, when it comes to NATO's actions towards the conflict in Crimea it is more than obvious that the relations between the two are growing stronger. Since its accession to North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and after the joining to the Partnership for Peace in 1994, Ukraine has developed a steady relationship with NATO. Being a political and a military alliance with the scope of safeguarding the security and freedom of its members, and, at the beginning the Vest's response to the communist threat, NATO promotes democracy and cooperation in the area of defense and security in order to prevent conflict but also has as an objective the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In the case of the conflict in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea, NATO has pursued a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. Although it has blamed the use of force since the first street demonstrations in Ukraine, in 2013, by appreciating through its representatives that "*It*

is the right of people everywhere to express their views in a democratic way.”⁶⁸, when it came to the escalating military events in Crimea, it did not assert to take military action. The ‘diplomatic approach’ was and it is still pursued.

The next action was in accordance with Article 4 from the NATO’s treaty that convenes “*the parties will consult whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any of the parties is threatened.*”⁶⁹ The members met on the 4th of March 2014 and decided to still pursue the ‘diplomatic solution’.

The latest development in the actions undertaken by NATO towards the conflict in Ukraine, came in late 2014 when at the Wales Summit in September, the alliance issues the Wales Summit Declaration in which they condemned “*Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.*”⁷⁰ and proposed the *NATO Readiness Action Plan* which will provide solutions in terms of actions towards the shifting security environment in Europe.

The arguments when looking at NATO’s actions towards the conflict in Ukraine are in favor of the defensive realist approach and it would seem that Mearsheimer’s argument of offensive realism does not stand. But by agreeing on the above mentioned readiness plan, NATO is making preparations in assessing and upgrading its force in Europe, to be ready for a real security threat towards one of its members, by Russia. Moreover, the activation of the missile defense site at Deveselu, in Romania, by the US which has invested more than 800 million \$ in establishing and making the site operational, can be a strong argument in favor of the offensive realist approach provided by Mearsheimer. The actions undertaken by NATO and by The US through its NATO security umbrella assert to all three realist principles (p.39) but mainly to the last two. The principle of rationality is credited because NATO, the same as in the case of The US is following a means-ends game. Although it tries to pursue a diplomatic solution, it can and it would act with force if put in face of having no alternative to diplomatic dialogue, if an aggression is made towards one of its members. Also, the principle of capabilities is asserted by NATO. Being a military alliance it has to maintain a military force and military capabilities

⁶⁸ Statement by the NATO Secretary General on events in Ukraine, Press Release (2013) 137 Issued on 01 Dec. 2013, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_105302.htm, accessed in April 2016.

⁶⁹ The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm, accessed in April 2016.

⁷⁰ Wales Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, Press Release (2014) 120 Issued on 05 Sep. 2014, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?mode=pressrelease, accessed in April 2016.

through its member states involvement. The *Readiness Action Plan* mentioned above can be arguably a method of increasing the alliance's power.

Identities clashed because of Russia's disobedience in following the internationally accepted norms of conduct

Constructivist theory is becoming a widely pursued theoretical framework in the papers of scholars (see Lomtadze, 2015) for explaining different events in the international field. We can establish that, as Adler points out "*constructivists remain engaged and interested in studying the construction of social reality by norms*"⁷¹. Following the most prolific scholar within Constructivism as an international relations theory, Wendt argued that there are three ways of action under which, in an anarchical international system, identities could be changed. The first one is by referring to sovereignty, second: by cooperating and thirdly by converting national identities in collective identities.⁷²

When analyzing if the Constructivist theory of International relations can provide a solid point of departure in explaining the conflict in Ukraine from 2014, one has to look at the theoretical approach within the Constructivist theory itself and first put into perspective the information. Using the approach of Finnemore's norm internalizing, as explained before, we will point out how states acted during the period before the conflict in Crimea and during the conflict itself. Although the conflict which arouse is far from being over, the actors still pursue their interests (as analyzed in the subchapter before). The point that this subchapter will make is about what states are in agreement that are norms of interactions between actors and if these norms were or are followed.

To begin with, first we have to provide the basis of what international accepted norms of interaction between actors are. As before stated states (actors) are embedded in a network of transnational and international social interactions and states are socialized to accept these norms of interaction. But which are the accepted ways of interaction between states? As Stephen D. Krasner defines international norms, he states that: "*Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations.*"⁷³ Furthermore scholars agree that also internationally accepted norms of interaction between states are, as

⁷¹ Emanuel Adler, *Constructivism in International Relations: Sources, Contributions and Debates*, FSC in Handbook of International Relations, 2013, edited by Carlsnaes Walter, Thomas Risse, Beth A Simmons.

⁷² Wendt, (1992).

⁷³ Stephen Krasner, (1983), 'Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables', in Stephen Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 2.

described by Xuetong Yan: “*behavioral standards in terms of rights and obligations accepted by the majority of states.*’ This includes norms of both violent and non-violent conduct.”⁷⁴

But which are the fundamental principles of interaction between actors (states) that are internationally accepted? J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin⁷⁵ argue that states act in the international system under the principle of the “*community’s conception of justice*”⁷⁶ so therefore when one analyzes which are the principles mentioned above, one, arguably, must look at what is ‘just’ when interacting. Also, Finnemore argues that norms are “*shared expectations about appropriate behavior*”⁷⁷. The principles that are internationally accepted come from the field of *international law*, term first coined by Jeremy Bentham in 1780. Because of the purpose of this paper (see Introduction and Methodology) we will not go any further in expressing all the internationally agreed principles of interacting but we will focus on the two most relevant for the case of the conflict in Ukraine, arguably speaking. So, therefore the search brings us to the concepts of *sovereignty* understood as the principle of non-interference in a state’s affairs by another actor. As Wendt argues, *sovereignty* is an institution⁷⁸, what this means in this papers approach is that when one looks at it from the perspective of international relations, is that the principle of non-interference is agreed between the actors. The principle of non-interference or non-intervention as Oppenheim says “is a corollary of every state’s right to sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence”⁷⁹ and is part of the well-established customary international law, as the International Court of Justice reaffirmed it on multiple occasions but also it is stated in the UN, not implicitly but by referring to the principle of sovereignty. Article 2.1 of the *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice* states that: “*The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members*”⁸⁰. The principle of non-intervention was later introduced explicitly in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations which was adopted in 1970 by the General Assembly of the UN. This makes the principle to be agreed by all the members of the UN, which in turn means that all the actors involved in the conflict in Ukraine agreed on it, which makes it an

⁷⁴ Xuetong Yan, (2011), *International Leadership and Norm Evolution*, in Chinese Journal of International Politics 4 (3): 233-264. doi: 10.1093/cjip/por013, available at: <http://cjip.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/3/233.full>, accessed in May 2016.

⁷⁵ Barkin, J. Samuel, and Cronin Bruce, (1994) *The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations*, International Organization 48, no. 1: 107-30, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706916>, accessed in May 2016.

⁷⁶ Idem. p. 113.

⁷⁷ Martha Finnemore, (1996), *National Interests in International Society*. Ithaca: Cornell, Chapter 1.

⁷⁸ Wendt, pp. 391-425.

⁷⁹ Oppenheim L., (1905), *International law, a treatise*, Volume vol. 1-2, Publisher London, New York, Longmans, Green, and co., p. 428.

⁸⁰ Charter of the United Nations and statute of the International Court of Justice, San Francisco, 1945, available at: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>, accessed in May 2016.

‘institution’ among them. Another concept which we arrive to is *human rights*, understood as the right to security and the right to freedom of choice, hence here - self-determination. This is mentioned in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations* which makes it internationally agreed. All the nation state actors involved in the conflict in Crimea are members of the UN, which means that all of them have accepted and ratified the above mentioned declaration which makes it an ‘institution’ among them, also. The principles mentioned above also can be found in the *1975 Helsinki Final Act* and *1990 Charter of Paris* (which were agreed by all OSCE Participating States).

After establishing which are the two principles on which this second part of the analysis will be put under the lens of are, the next undergoing will be to present the actions of the actors involved in the conflict mentioned above and describe if these actions were in accordance with these principles or not. The actors that were involved in the conflict in Ukraine acted differently during the ongoing conflict.

Ukraine

In the case of Ukraine`s actions in the conflict in Crimea, from a constructivist point of view, it acted in correlation with its identity. This identity, of a sovereign and independent country, is in accordance with the principle of non-intervention mentioned above. From its independence from Russia in 1991, Ukraine has undergone a process of change and of defining its own identity. The elections presented in the second chapter underline this very transformation. Ending with the elections from 2014, when Poroshenko became the acting president, the process that started after it obtained its independence was strongly reinforced. During the conflict in Crimea, Ukraine as an actor acted following the principle of sovereignty. It tried to protect its territory and its people. By engaging Russia in order to stand up to it and protect its people (here we are referring to Ukrainians who are not separatist and pro-Russian) from the regions in the eastern part of the country: Donbass, Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea) Ukraine acted in accordance with the right to security and the right to freedom of choice. Moreover, the Ukrainian identity which has consolidated itself since the Orange Revolution took place in 2004, can be seen in the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. Ukraine acted as an independent actor, which possesses the ability to choose its own path within the international system.

It can be argued that also the “*emotional components*”⁸¹, which partake in the identity discussion of this chapter, of the bilateral relations between Ukraine and Russia are of importance. Since 1922 when it became part of the Russian SSR until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukrainian identity

⁸¹ Maria Semykoz, *Russia-Ukraine Relations: Trapped into Identity Conflict*, Miami University, p. 19, available at: https://www.academia.edu/523741/Russia-Ukraine_Relations_Trapped_into_Identity_Conflict, accessed in May 2016.

has been shaped by the Russian identity. So, unarguably, the bilateral relations between the two countries after the events in 1991, were still closely linked. But nevertheless, the discourses after the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma began to change. With the Orange Revolution happening, Ukraine took a path towards managing on its own the interactions between it and the other actors present in the international system. It did so by becoming member of numerous international organizations and in the recent future also focused itself towards a Euro-focused position. Of course, while balancing and managing in a diplomatic intercourse its relationship with Russia. Although the relation between the two has been harsh after the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine nevertheless continued to pursue to consolidate its own identity. It followed a diplomatic resolution of the conflict within its borders and condemned the ‘invasion’ done by Russia in the Crimean Peninsula.

Samuel P. Huntington argues that culture is defined “as the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society.”⁸² it is fairly easy to assume that also in Ukraine one can observe a Ukrainian culture. As Fofanova and Morozov (2009) argue that Russia is seen in the Ukrainian identity discourse as “*the opposite of Europe, democracy and civilization*”⁸³ and in the end, after the events that succeeded in the recent years 2014-2015, Ukrainians perceive Ukraine as being “*not Russia*”⁸⁴.

Moving onwards, when looking into recent reports from the transformation that Ukraine has undergone in recent time we can see that a change in its identity did happen. Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI from now onwards), in its report regarding Ukraine, from 2016, it gives the country a score of 8 in regards to the state identity: “*The Ukrainian nation-state is accepted by all relevant actors and groups in Ukraine, apart from Crimea and the territories in the east of the country under the control of pro-Russian insurgents.*”⁸⁵ Quoting the same source cited above, Ukraine has changed also its governing system. Until 2005 Ukraine was a semi-presidential republic, but afterwards amendments to the constitution were made and the governing system changed to a parliamentary-presidential system. In a way, one can argue that Ukraine had the chance to a reset of the status-quo with the Orange Revolution and took advantage of it. BTI gives a score of 6 for the functioning of the democratic institutions in Ukraine and when looking at the scores for civil society traditions it scores a 4 mark. What this means is

⁸² Huntington, Samuel P., *Foreword: Cultures count*, in Harrison & Huntington: Culture Matters, 2000, New York: Basic Books, p. 15.

⁸³ Fofanova, E. and Morozov V., (2009), *Imperial Legacy and the Russian-Baltic Relations: From Conflicting Historical Narratives to a Foreign Policy Confrontation*, in Identity and foreign policy: Baltic-Russian relations and European integration, by Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009, p.208.

⁸⁴ Semykoz M., p. 14.

⁸⁵ BTI, Country report: Ukraine, 2016, available at: <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/UKR/>, accessed in May 2016.

that Ukraine still has to perfect its democracy model and work on the change that restarted first in 2005. Of course, the main problem, as argued by some, is the fact that one can still see that most of the people who are decision makers in the government are oligarchs. This is true also for the present president. But nonetheless, the last reset happened during the conflict in the Eastern part of the country, when Poroshenko became president. He was seen by the people as a game changer and immediately pursued to bring the country on the right track, and having a massive support winning 54.7% of total votes in the election, the confidence of more than half of the people in its leader is arguably a sign of decline (as shown in a survey by Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2015).

As Zank points out: “A community feeling will develop when groups can cooperate in practical terms; when they can communicate sufficiently in making agreements; when they in practice prove that they act loyally as to these agreements; and when they develop common goals.”⁸⁶ We can assume that the culture of a Ukrainian identity has not fully developed yet and it is strongly influenced by other outside decision makers who follow their own goal. As until now the common goal for the Ukrainians does not exist per se. The decision makers from the government are keen to develop and undertake a stronger interaction with the EU. But the other major part of the population, the separatists and the people from the regions which are not under the control of Kyiv, do not agree to this goal. This makes the situation develop into a somehow impossible deadlock. The main aim for the elites should be to construct on the existing national identity a pro-European or a neutral goal. Although BTI appreciates that the consensus on common goals should score a mark of 7 on the index, one can argue that the country still needs to pursue the furthering of the democracy.

One can recall Huntington, where he argued that a state must pass the ‘two turnover test’⁸⁷ meaning that the first election winners turn over the power to the winners of a later election which in turn, turn the power over to the winners of a later election and this process happens peacefully, then a state, in his view becomes a consolidated democracy. In the case of Ukraine, his argument would not stand. Because of the latest reset of the political field, that happened in 2014, there is still a long way to go.

To conclude towards Ukraine`s actions in the still ongoing conflict, we argued that the country as an actor in the international field acted accordingly to the principle of sovereignty and respecting the right to self-determination of its people. It did not engage Russia in taking back the separatist regions and pursued a diplomatic solution. The proof for this diplomatic approach stands in the proactive action in

⁸⁶ Zank W. (2005), *The Politics of Eastern Enlargement: Historical Reconstruction and Theoretical Conclusions*, European Studies. Series of Occasional Papers, no. 38/2005, Aalborg University, available at: http://vbn.aau.dk/files/13907876/38_Zank_2005.pdf, p. 55, accessed in May 2016.

⁸⁷ Huntington Samuel P., (1993), *Democracy`s Third Wave*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993, pp.266-267.

establishing the Minsk Protocol and Minsk 2 talks. Also in the defense of the argument made comes Ukraine`s enhanced identity. It acted the way it did because of this democratic identity, described above and its pursuit of defending it. The constructivist argumentation is more than feasible in the case of this actor. Not only it acted by following what is ‘just’ when interacting with other actors, it made use of its established identity in the international system.

Russia

Moving on, when we take to analysis Russia`s actions in the conflict in Ukraine, we have to bear in mind its immense history and well-distinguished identity. Because of the purpose of this paper, we will not go into detailed historical events that helped at the forging of Russian identity. The focus will be on presenting the key elements of Russian identity as an international actor and how this identity was used during the conflict to explain its actions.

To start, one has to start by explaining what Russia means as an entity of international relations. Being the biggest country in the world, Russia has a prestige in the international field. Since the 2nd World War and until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has built on the great legacy of a strong nation. During the Cold War it faced the opposition of The US and after 1991 it remained a strong point in the international field. The identity that Russia has built on before the Cold War and during it was one that proposed a different approach to a democratic system, which was prevailing in the West. Becoming a communist nation, after a long civil war between the ‘Reds’ and the ‘Whites’ who were counter-revolutionary. Since the victory of the communists in 1922, Russia, then the Soviet Union, pursued its objectives in becoming a super-power. The cultural identity during the communist era went through different stages, fact which is important to mention here because it had a massive impact on the people of Russia. In the first years after the Revolution of 1918, when Lenin came to power, there was a relative freedom in expressiveness but later on when Stalin came to power, in the late 1920’s there was a shift in the paradigm. Socialism was imposed by Stalin and the communist machine in all the domains of life and communist party governed through terror and oppression. The economy became a planned one and the country transformed itself from an agricultural society into an industrialized one. In short, this was the identity proposed by Russia, then Soviet Union, in the 20th century. It was, on paper at least, arguably a democratic state as we can find it mentioned in the *1936 Constitution of the USSR*: “*ARTICLE 3. In the U.S.S.R. all power belongs to the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of*

Working People's Deputies.”⁸⁸ But in reality, every element of public life (and possibly private life) was controlled by the Communist Party.

Later on after the dissolution of The USSR in 1991 and after undergoing through the reforms proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980’s, with the ‘perestroika’, which means restructuring, and ‘glasnost’, which means openness, the newly, but still old in the way of thinking, Russian state once again pursued to build on the existing identity of a great nation state. The identity it built upon was one of an actor who helped win the 2nd World War, who stood its ground to the might of the democratic system in the West for half a century and who would again be the superpower that it was once.

During the presidency of Yeltsin, the governing elite was divided over ideologies, values and which policies have priority over others and foreign policy was set to be of a state that was cooperative and powerful. Another trend which is, even now, followed by its foreign policy, was geopolitical argumentation of actions. Having a foreign policy orientated to the West, then, Moscow focused its main resources in ‘proving’ to the international system that it has the strength to stand its ground. Quoting Georgi Arbatov: “... *our people have lived too long in a two-superpower world not to look carefully at American policy and international behavior, not to measure our policy against American policy.*”⁸⁹ one can establish that a great deal of attention went to the west. Following the first presidency after the dissolution of The USSR, the second president and the one in office right now, Vladimir Putin has shifted the approach in establishing a foreign policy and oriented the actions of Russia in international affairs by following a doctrine of security and establishing Russia as a regional power, as a priority and as a world center of power secondly. It pursued, and arguably succeeded, in including the elements of the great Russian cultural identity in shaping goals for the country.

The key elements of the Russian identity are found in the Preamble of the Russian Constitution from 1993:

*“preserving historically established state unity, proceeding from the universally recognized principles of equality and self-determination of peoples, revering the memory of ancestors who have conveyed to us the love for the homeland, belief in the good and justice, reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia and asserting the firmness of its democratic foundations.”*⁹⁰

The mentioning of the remembering of the ancestors makes direct reference to the Russian history and its identity of a great nation. Moreover, Putin’s foreign policy key points from 2000 mention

⁸⁸ Constitution of the USSR, adopted December 1936, available at: <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html#chap02>, accessed in May 2016.

⁸⁹ Arbatov, A., *Realnaya integratsiya: s kem i kakaya?*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1994, 24 June, p. 97.

⁹⁰ Weaver, C., (2013), p. 28.

explicitly “to uphold in every possible way the rights and interests of Russian citizens and fellow countrymen abroad”⁹¹ and “to popularize the Russian language and culture of the peoples of Russia in foreign states”⁹² meaning that president Putin has taken into account the enormous culture background of the people of Russia, which have many identities, and sought to establish the next actions of Russia in these terms. One can argue that Russia is following a doctrine in international relations that is governed by the phrase ‘different from the rest’.

The policy elements were continuously pursued even after the first two successive mandates that Putin had. His successor, Dimitri Medvedev followed the same guidelines set by Putin, but having a more underlined perception on cooperation. Multilateralism was the system that Russia will follow to achieve, as in Putin’s foreign policy. Secondly, to follow the UN Charter and the principles that make it and last but not least pursue regional superiority. The mentioning of preserving the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, is a strong argument towards maintaining and building the regional power. Another example in sustaining the argument that Russia follows to assure its regional power is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU from 1994 but also the later Common Space Agreements and the Partnership for Modernization established in 2010 after the Rostov Summit.⁹³

When Putin came to be president for a third mandate, he pursued on the well-established Russian identity in the international system. He started to apply the concept of ‘regionness’ and focused the foreign policy to perceive the West as a “near abroad”⁹⁴. The concept of balanced multi polarity, as argued by Weaver⁹⁵ based on Hyde-Prince, became followed by Putin in establishing Russia’s identity in foreign policy and actions in the international system. As Buzan and Weaver argue, “sovereign territorial states become the principal global players in security matters”⁹⁶ therefore “distinct regional security subsystems emerge”⁹⁷ which Russia sees itself part of one. Starting with the war in Georgia from 2008 and now, in recent times, with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Russia as an actor in the international system proved that its newly and enhanced identity is focused also on becoming a regional power. So, maintaining the lens of being a regional power, one can assume that Russia saw the NATO expansion from 2008 and earlier as a threat towards its identity of being ‘different from the rest’. The update of the

⁹¹ Idem., p. 29.

⁹² Idem.

⁹³ Idem. pp. 29 -32

⁹⁴ Idem. p. 28

⁹⁵ Weaver, C., (2011), Black Sea Regional Security: Present Multipolarity and Future Possibilities. *European Security*, 20 (1), pp. 1-19.

⁹⁶ Buzan B., Weaver O., (2003), *Regions and Powers: The structure of International Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

⁹⁷ Idem., p. 14.

Anti-ballistic missile system (ABMS) in Eastern Europe contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of conflict, Russia observing how the West, led by The US and The EU, continued to pursue their security goals. This was perceived by Russia as a threat because as Weaver argued, the European security arena came into direct contact with Russia's security area established by the above mentioned "near abroad" concept.

From a constructivist point of view, Rein Müllerson's, President of Tallinn Law School from Tallinn University, approach is the best fit in summarizing Russia's actions. He argues that the principle of non-interference, present in the international customary law, but also the U.N. Charter and the Charter of the International Court of Justice, stands valid until the international's system actors change. Moreover, Müllerson, brings into discussion the notion of 'aggression', which is defined in customary international law and in the 1974 Definition of Aggression and argues that the Russian troops ('green mercenaries') in Crimea did violate the sovereignty of the Ukrainian State.⁹⁸ Moreover, Russia's annexation of Crimea is illegal because it violated the Treaty between Russian Federation and Ukraine on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership⁹⁹ and nonetheless, violated the customary international law present in the U.N. Charter.¹⁰⁰

Concluding with Russia's actions from a constructivist approach, now, one can establish that the events that had undergone in Ukraine in 2014 are directly linked with the Russian identity as an actor of the international field. By establishing a foreign policy focused on the establishment of itself as a great power but also as a regional power, Russia acted accordingly by annexing Crimea. Because of the purpose of this paper, it will now try to establish if Russia acted obeying the two principles mentioned at the beginning of the current subchapter. Observing the events that took place, from the start, one can observe that Russia acted in the downfall of the principle of non-interference and its actions were guided only by following the principle of self-determination. When giving a speech to both chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, on the 18th of March 2014, Putin stated that the referendum in Crimea was a fair and democratic one and focused his arguments on the historical link between Russia and Ukraine. He also condemned the action of the West in response to the events that took place. But the action of incorporating Crimea back into Russia, after an official request made by the Crimean Parliament in this regard cannot be sanctioned. It followed the principle of self-determination, present in the UN Charter, but also it followed the foreign policy point of protecting its citizens. Also the military intervention in Crimea is explained by the Russians in regard with the same principle. Nevertheless, the

⁹⁸ Rein Müllerson, (2014) *Ukraine: Victim of Geopolitics*, in Chinese Journal of International Law, 1-13. Published by Oxford University Press.

⁹⁹ *Treaty between Russian Federation and Ukraine on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership*, Russ-Ukr., May 31, 1997, U.N. Doc. A/52/174.

¹⁰⁰ U.N. Charter art. 2.

actions of intervening in Crimea with troops without the permission of the Ukrainian Government, either because it was for protecting the rights of the Russian citizens, or of the pro-Russian Ukrainian citizens, comes into direct conflict with the principle of non-interference and respecting a country's sovereignty. The constructivist argumentation stands here, but not because of acting by following what is 'just' in international interactions, but by acting in terms of one's identity. Russia intervened militarily in Crimea because of its identity. We are referring to the identity expressively enhanced after Putin became for the third time president. Because of its historical background and because it seeks to maximize its regional power, this is why Russia intervened. The events that took place were in accordance with the trends that were set in the first Putin era (the first two presidential mandates).

The US

The already established identity of The US in the international field is undeniable. It became a superpower, in realist terms, during the beginning of the 20th century and arguably, it became a 'superpower' in constructivist terms. The argument here is that through its pursuit of the democratic values and the spreading of these democratic principles, it created its identity of a 'protector' of democracy. This is true now as it was also during the 2nd World War when the Americans entered in an alliance with Great Britain and The Soviet Union and won the war. But its already established identity in international relations goes even further than that. During the 19th century, The US pursued a doctrine of non-interventionism. In its inaugural address, from the 4th of May 1801, president Thomas Jefferson argued that The US should pursue, when it comes to foreign policy, "*Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political: peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.*"¹⁰¹ Afterwards this identity was built upon when *The Monroe Doctrine* was established which sustained the idea of not taking part in the war of the Europeans. The non-intervention principle was fully established in identity of The US, in regards to foreign policy, when president Woodrow Wilson managed to keep The US out of the 1st World War for the first three years of the war and only after proposing a well-thought plan, with clear objectives it intervened (see the *Fourteen Points* speech). In the period following The Great War, The US maintained its established identity of non-intervening nation but pursued to establish itself as a great power actor. As Adler argues, the signing of the Kellogg-Briand pact, underlined The US's adherence to maintaining international peace and stability.¹⁰² Before the 2nd World War, The Congress passed the *Neutrality Acts* which enforced the neutrality of The US and the non-intervention principle firmly established in its foreign policy. But this

¹⁰¹ First Inaugural Address, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 148 – 152.

¹⁰² Selling A., (1957), *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction*, New York: The Free Press, pp. 201 – 215.

pathway in foreign policy was abandoned in 1939, with the last of the Neutrality Act which enabled the trade with belligerent nations. The relevancy of mentioning these documents is that they helped establish part of the identity, in foreign policy, that makes The US today.

During the second half of the 20th century the approach in foreign policy changed. Winning the battle over the Nazis and having the most benefit after the conflict, the identity of The US in terms of foreign policy changed. Becoming a superpower and dominating the Western hemisphere, brought also a change in how The US perceived itself in the international field. The doctrine of non-interventionism and neutrality was changed with ‘intervening to protect the democratic principles’. This can be observed during the 2nd half of the 20th century, when the doctrines changed. The containment phase of foreign policy, as George F. Kennan phrased it, came into being with the presidency of Truman when addressing to The Congress he argued that: “*the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures*”.¹⁰³ The policy of containment was followed during the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. When president Carter took office he expressively oriented the containment policy towards the soviets. This was a change in perception regarding the threats oriented at The US. If until then the foreign policy revolved around containment of communism wherever the ideology surfaced now it was oriented strait at The Soviet Union.

The change in The US’s identity and its way of regarding itself as actor in the international field came when president Clinton came into office. By expressing in a speech in San Francisco: “... *The question we must ask is, what are the consequences to our security of letting conflicts fester and spread. We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so.*”¹⁰⁴ The phrase here which is important is “*where our values and our interests are at stake*”¹⁰⁵. President Clinton shifted the identity established until now, of containment of threats everywhere, in foreign policy, to acting and intervening only where The US’s interests are at stake. It was an important shift that triggered a shift in identity in the foreign policy of The US. With the 9/11 attacks on The US, president Bush pursued unarguably, clearly the new identity. The invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent war in Iraq are solid proof that argue this point. Furthermore, on the established identity of a protector of democratic principles

¹⁰³ Speech delivered by President Truman before a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947 available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp, accessed in May 2016.

¹⁰⁴ President Clinton and Vice President Gore, *American Leadership for peace, prosperity and freedom in the 21st century*, February 26, 1999, available at: <https://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/Work/022699.html>, accessed in May 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Idem.

and ‘values’, president Obama argued in a debate, that The US “*should view [its] security in terms of a common security and a common prosperity with other peoples and other countries*”¹⁰⁶.

Keeping the historical development of The US’s identity in regard to foreign policy and the changes it has undergone through the recent year, in mind, when analyzing the actions of The US in the conflict in Ukraine from 2014, this paper will establish the relationship between them and the principles on non-intervention and self-determination mentioned through the lens of constructivism. The actions described in the previous subchapter are in accordance with The US’s established identity in the international system. By imposing only sanctions from outside, it acted in accordance with the principle of non-intervention and respecting the sovereignty of both Ukraine and Russia. Of course the first round and the second round of sanctions imposed affected Russia, but the argument made here is that The US as an actor of international relations following its identity of a democratic nation which promotes the values of democracy acted solely to protect its interests in the region. Moreover, it pursues a diplomatic solution for the resolution of the conflict. It makes use of its soft power, but understood here using the constructivist approach by promoting peaceful reconciliation between the parties, no less by acceding to the ‘will’ of the Ukrainian people for change. The blaming of the use of force, but also the unrecognizing of the Crimean referendum because of the involvement of Russia, is in accordance with the self-determination principle mentioned. Concluding with analyzing the actions of The US, it is unarguably obvious that, using Finnemore’s approach of what is ‘just’ in the international system regarding actor interactions, The US acted in accordance with what it is generally agreed by the actors of the system. The constructivist argument stands when analyzing the actions of this act.

The EU

Analyzing the actions of The EU before and during the conflict in case, we can appreciate from the beginning that the actions were in accordance with the constructivist approach. By having a democratic identity from its establishment in 1958 with the Treaty of Rome, which created the communities that constitute its base and much later in 1993 with the Treaty of Maastricht, when the communities merged and became one solely international actor and with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 which gave The EU legal representation (see article 46A of the Treaty of Lisbon but also for the limits see Declaration 24 regarding the matter). In this part we will not refer to the explicit enumeration of the democratic values that The EU is based on, as they appear in the treaties, but we will specify in a general manner that they are, as stated in the Consolidated Version of the Treaty On European Union, as stated:

¹⁰⁶ *Democratic Presidential Debate on NPR*, The New York Times, Transcript provided by CQ Transcripts, 2007, December 4, p. 7.

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”¹⁰⁷

The concepts relevant to our undergoing, here, are the words ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘the rule of law’ ‘pluralism’, ‘non-discrimination’ and ‘the respect for human rights’. The concepts mentioned are deeply embedded in The EU’s identity as an international actor. Radaelli argues that: *“formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies”¹⁰⁸* makes the identity of The EU. Not only the cultural elements that are essential for every nation within the states that make the union, but the process described above, defined as ‘Europeanisation’, coupled with the democratization¹⁰⁹ process adds up to make the identity of The EU. Which in terms, makes up The EU’s soft power defining an identity in the international field of an actor which is non-military and democratic who tries to establish peace beyond its boundaries. Recalling Pridham, who argued that: *“democracy consolidation is in sight when a new democracy becomes institutionalized, its rules and procedures are being internalized, and democratic values are being disseminated through the activation of civil society and a process of remaking of the political culture.”¹¹⁰* One can appreciate that The EU is a democracy per se.

Furthermore, when analyzing the actions of The EU one can establish that the Union’s actions were in fully accordance with the principles under which this analysis is based on. When it imposed sanctions over Russia, the Union (The EU) acted under the provisions of non-intervention, respecting the sovereignty of Ukraine and Russia. Of course, others can argue that the OSCE’s involvement can be seen as an intrusion in Ukraine done from the European side, in terms of an external body being involved in the elections processes that took place before the conflict started per se. But one has to bear in mind that the OSCE is a neutral entity which is asked to evaluate situations and present reports. It cannot intervene in any way in changing the way actions succeed. Secondly, The EU acted also under the provisions of the principle of self-determination. Its main approach was to try to resolute the conflict in a peaceful and diplomatic way. Only afterwards it pursued in putting in place sanctions, first oriented towards Russian

¹⁰⁷ Article 2, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty On European Union*, 26.10.2012 Official Journal of the European Union C 326/13.

¹⁰⁸ Radaelli, (2003), p. 27

¹⁰⁹ Weaver, (2013), p. 42

¹¹⁰ Idem.

individuals and companies and afterwards oriented towards entire sectors from the Russian economy. Understood from a constructivist approach these sanctions are also part of The EU's soft power which makes its identity. In the conflict in Ukraine, regarding the way how it acted, the constructivist argument holds. It acted according to what is 'just' in international interactions and the its actions were defined by its identity established. Freyburg et al, argue that the European democratic system "*can be promoted via working together on sectoral projects such as transport and the environment (synergy sectors) as well as setting up legal standards approximating to the *acquis* which contain the basics for democratization*"¹¹¹, which sums up in general what The EU has tried to do by acting the way it acted and continues to do so. Furthermore, by making use of the 'democracy peace theory', as Weaver argues, stability will occur more likely in regions where there are already consolidated democracies, the point made here can explain the EU enlargement that happened in recent past.¹¹² And as pointed out in Zank's¹¹³ work, by quoting Schimmelfenning: "*Enlargement can be seen as an instrument to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe, to control the negative externalities of political and economic transformation in the East and to expand the borders of the EU zone of peace and prosperity.*"¹¹⁴

NATO and The UN

Because of the nature of NATO, being a military alliance which was firstly oriented to contain and stand up to the communist threat of The Soviet Union, its actions regarding the conflict in Ukraine, are more or less, arguably, without any real substance. From Russia's point, the enlargement of NATO was one of the key factors that triggered the conflict and this coupled with the last waves of enlargement of The EU, made Russia perceive the expansion of the West's model of democratic system and values, understood here as Western identity, as argued by Weaver¹¹⁵, made Russia perceive this as a threat and reacted towards it. In the last chapter, the paper argued that the arguments of offensive realism are not obvious when looking at how Russia acted in the conflict, but now when it comes to look at the actions of NATO through the constructivist lens, the paper argues that the constructivist arguments of identity played an important role in the actions of NATO. Being a military alliance between its members, as one can observe at Article 5 of The North Atlantic Treaty, the parties have a duty to react in case of an

¹¹¹ Freyburg, T., S. Lavenex, F. Schimmelfenning, T. Skripka and A. Wetzel. (2009), *EU promotion of Democratic Governance in the Neighborhood*, Journal of European Public Policy, 16 (6), pp. 916-934, quote from Weaver 2013 p. 59.

¹¹² Weaver, p. 61

¹¹³ Zank, W., (2005) *The politics of Eastern Enlargement: Historical Reconstruction and Theoretical Conclusions*, Aalborg: European Research Unit, Aalborg University. (European Studies: Series of Occasional Papers; No. 38. p. 45

¹¹⁴ Schimmelfenning, F., (2001), *The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, published in International Organization, 55, 1, Winter 2001 pp. 47-80.

¹¹⁵ Weaver, 2013. Pp. 65 – 78.

external actor's aggression towards one of its members although Article 1 of the same document mentions that:

“The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

This makes the identity of NATO to be one of an actor that is governed by the principles of democratic values on which its members govern themselves. But this identity is completed by the fact that at its core it is a military alliance which in the end means that it had to act to an armed threat near its borders. Because Ukraine is not yet a member of the alliance, it could not make use of the provisions of Article 5. So the way of acting, in accordance with its established identity in the international system, was to pursue a diplomatic reconciliation between the parties. Secondly, it also pursued to strengthen its armed force at its borders. By proposing the before mentioned *NATO Action Readiness Plan* and by improving the ABM in Romania. NATO, while observing the principles on which this part of the analysis is focused on – non-interference and self-determination (pp. 55 – 57), acted in accordance with both of the principles while maintaining a diplomatic approach in the eventual resolution of the conflict. The constructivist argument holds also in the case of NATO's actions in the conflict. It pursued what it is 'just' and agreed internationally.

Furthermore, we choose to analyze the actions undertaken by NATO alongside the ones undertaken by The UN because of their close linkage. The first action taken into discussion was the resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the UN towards not recognizing the change of status in Crimea and the annexation of it by Russia. Stating *“The General Assembly today 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.”*¹¹⁶ the representatives from the General Assembly urged the States and international organizations not to accept the changes undergone by Russia by accepting Crimea in the Russian Federation. The UN *“urged all parties immediately to pursue a peaceful resolution of the situation through direct political dialogue, to exercise restraint, and to refrain from unilateral actions and*

¹¹⁶ General Assembly Sixty-eighth session 80th plenary meeting, Thursday, 27 March 2014, 10 a.m. New York, A/68/PV.80, available at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/PV.80 and <http://www.spiegel.de/forum/politik/konflikt-zwischen-nato-und-russland-erst-wandel-dann-annaeherung-thread-290704-7.html>, accessed on the 16th of May 2016.

*inflammatory rhetoric that could raise tensions.*¹¹⁷ What this means in terms of acting is that The UN also pursued a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. While Ukraine and Russia are not members of NATO, they are members of The UN. So, therefore, The UN sanctioned the events that occurred in Ukraine by proposing a vote in the UN Security Council for the backing of the newly installed government in Ukraine, in March 2014. Of course, the resolution was vetoed by Russia which triggered the above mentioned resolution in which The UN urged its members to invalidate the referendum in Crimea. According to its identity, which is that of a forum of the nations that regards the peacekeeping in the world, its actions in the conflict were also, as the one of NATO's, based on diplomatic reconciliation and resolution of the conflict. The actions were in accordance with the democratic principles established by their charts.

¹¹⁷ Idem., available at: <http://www.cfr.org/territorial-disputes/un-resolution-res68262-territorial-integrity-ukraine/p32709>, accessed on the 16th of May 2016.

Chapter V: Applicability of the proposed theories

While observing the arguments used by Mearsheimer to explain why the crisis in Ukraine started, as they can be observed in his article *“Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin”*¹¹⁸ it can be noticed that he acknowledges that the fuse for the crisis has its origins in the Orange Revolution from 2004 but continued to be fueled during the period from 2004 until 2014, by the constant *“western affront”*¹¹⁹. The empirical elements that Mearsheimer is basing his argumentation that the west is to blame for the crisis and later conflict in Ukraine are found in the article mentioned. He argues that the NATO expansion, promoted by the Clinton administration, with its first round of enlargement in 1999 and second round, which occurred in 2004 are a sign that the West, until then pushed by The US approach, is following a realpolitik game that has its base in offensive realism. Moreover, coupled with the NATO summit in Bucharest from 2008, where the Bush administration admittedly, through NATO, endorsed Georgia and Ukraine as future potential candidates for joining the alliance and taking into consideration the European Partnership Initiative, promoted by The EU, since then evolved in the Association Agreement with Ukraine and with the *“final tool for peeling Kiev away from Moscow”*¹²⁰: the promotion of Western values and democratic model of the West, by adhering funds to individuals and organizations to promote these values; Mearsheimer concludes that it is the West’s fault for starting the crisis in Ukraine. But following his argumentative discourse, one can observe that his analysis starts from assuming that the West, in his view and from our understanding, has acted in terms of realist principles. Moving on, continuing to assume the realist position of the West and also from Russia’s part, he finds the proof for this assumption in the actions undertaken by the West (in his view: NATO, The US and The EU), continuing to relate his analysis by analyzing the actions using realist principles. As the in-depth analysis shows, the actions of the underlined actors which interacted in the conflict can be reviewed from an offensive realist approach. What the analysis, mentioned just before, provides us with, is that Mearsheimer’s arguments for offensive realism do explain why the conflict in Ukraine started. But nonetheless, one can still argue that the conflict did not arise based on realist way of thought. In our defense, we specify that we used Mearsheimer’s approach because it is the most recent one, but we believe that his argumentation is flawed in one regard. The empirical evidence is there to support his

¹¹⁸ Mearsheimer, J. J., (2014), *Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin*. September/October 2014, *Foreign Affairs*.

¹¹⁹ *Idem*.

¹²⁰ *Idem*.

argumentation, but, in our view, he fails to prospect the mutually beneficial difference, to his argumentation but also to our undertaking with this paper, in the way of ‘approaching’ the problem. As argued by his critics, in “*Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?*”¹²¹, where McFaul and Sestanovich present a different approach. They argue, that Mearsheimer’s analysis is flawed because, they believe, he assumes that the West’s way of thinking and continuous expansion in terms of NATO enlargement, EU enlargement and the West’s way of a democracy, is at the core of the crisis, thus being the West’s fault for the crisis. While the two mentioned above focus their argumentation on debunking Mearsheimer’s logic, with this paper we want to provide a different approach. Mearsheimer’s argumentation comes also under test when Lukin, in his article “*What the Kremlin is Thinking: Putin’s Vision for Eurasia*”, proposes, while maintain the realist lens, a different perspective on why the conflict in Ukraine started. Lukin’s argumentation is also based on analyzing the processes that took place since the aftermath of the Cold War, but he views the starting of the crisis and later conflict. as being a result of the different approaches used by, also, the West and Russia, during the years.

Lukin, as Mearsheimer, sees the events in Ukraine, in realist terms. In his paper “*Chauvinism or Chaos. Russia’s Unpalatable Choice*”¹²², Lukin argues that Russia, by annexing Crimea and taking it back has a difficult choice to make. In his view, it either can follow a logic of partnership with the West or it can follow a means-ends game. Lukin assimilates the West as the fulfillment of the democratic ideology which tries now to impose its characteristics over Russia. When Ukraine started to be included in discussions about NATO membership, in Lukin’s view, Russia perceived this as a threat towards it, but more than that, Russia perceived it as the West’s way of pursuing ideological imposition.¹²³ In another one of his works¹²⁴, Lukin, looking back at the relations between Moscow and the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the events in 2014, analyses that the two mentioned above acted in the paradigm of mutual strategic concessions, but that changed now, because of Moscow’s decision to not accept the Western affront anymore. The consensus that was made after the end of the Cold War, at least as Lukin puts it, was not respected by the West. While our analysis concludes that the defensive realist arguments stand when taking the account of all the parties involved, the paper ends its realist pursuit of explaining the events by arguing that, in the same way as in The US’s policy makers view there is a general

¹²¹ Michael McFaul; Stephen Sestanovich; John J. Mearsheimer, (2014), *Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?*, Foreign Affairs, November/December issue.

¹²² Alexander Lukin (2015) *Chauvinism or Chaos*, Russian Politics & Law, 53:1, 81 – 100, DOI: 10.1080/10611940.2015.1042339.

¹²³ Idem.

¹²⁴ Alexander Lukin (2016) *Russia in a Post-Bipolar World*, Survival: Global Politics and Strategy, 58:1, 91 – 112, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.1142141.

historical interest for pursuing and furthering the democratic system, the same is what president Putin has managed to construct in Russia's domestic support: an interest for 'maintaining their own identity'.

Moreover, as Mearsheimer, Harvard Professor Stephen Walt, viewed the actions of Russia in Ukraine in realist terms also. Both of them argue that what happened in Ukraine and Russia's aggression was a result of the ever expanding NATO borders. For the Europeans and Americans, NATO is a collective security agreement which consolidates the borders of the democratic states. Instead, for Russians, NATO and its expansion is viewed as an expansion that undermines its might. But nevertheless, as John M. Owen IV and William Inboden put it in their article "*Putin, Ukraine, and the Question of Realism*"¹²⁵: "*today's realists are correct in saying that the EU and the United States need to recognize that Russia has legitimate security concerns on its western borders*"¹²⁶. Realists argue that Ukraine is a "buffer state". It is perceived as being one from the West's side but also from Kremlin. But nevertheless, Ukraine is now an independent, sovereign state which does not regard itself as being described above. Owen and Inboden refer also the idea that the power that ideas have in our society and time. The West tries to spread the furthering of the democratic realm in Ukraine, while Russia perceives it as a threat to its current regime. Although being realists in their perception of the conflict in Ukraine, Owen and Inboden use a version of realism that puts accent on the idea that: "*power contests and assertion of self-interest occur at any level of life, from human relations to community and society to industry and government, extending outward to the international system itself.*"¹²⁷

Like Mearsheimer, Professor Emeritus Stephen Cohen, in his numerous articles from the newspaper *The Nation*¹²⁸ (referencing here just one of many), is viewing the Ukraine crisis also in realist terms. In a conference at the Commonwealth Club, Cohen explains his vision of how realistic arguments and the realist theory of international relations is the key one that stands behind all of the major actor's actions. He argues, the same as Mearsheimer, through offensive realism, that the conflict that takes places in Ukraine is a result of a means-end game, the actors being only concerned with their survival. Moreover, Cohen, as Mearsheimer¹²⁹, argue that the situation is the West's fault. The reason why the annexation of Crimea happened and the conflict started, is because of the West's foreign policy being orientated at encircling Moscow and in deterring Putin.

¹²⁵ John M. Owen, William Inboden, (2015), *Putin, Ukraine, and the Question of Realism*, The Hedgehog Review: Vol. 17 No. 1, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

¹²⁶ Idem.

¹²⁷ Idem.

¹²⁸ Cohen, Stephen, (2014), *US reaction to Russia in Ukraine: Time for Realism and Common Sense on Ukraine*. The Nation.

¹²⁹ Mearsheimer, John, (25 September 2015), *The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine Crisis*, UnCommon Core Conference, Chicago: The University of Chicago.

Later, using the arguments provided by Delanoë, Igor in his article “*After the Crimean crisis: towards a greater Russian maritime power in the Black Sea*”¹³⁰ : “*BSR [The Black Sea Region] has during its recent year attracted both regional as well as external actor’s such as Russia, Turkey, the EU, the US and NATO. This is mainly due to that the region is rich on natural resources, The BSR has in other words become a zero-sum game, in particular between Russia and the US.*”¹³¹ Then they argue that: “*the prominent reason why Russia annexed Crimea has primarily been in order to increase Russia’s maritime power in the BSR*”¹³², therefore we can relate this to Mearsheimer’s argument that: “*great powers aim to hinder potential rivals to become hegemonies in the same region.*”¹³³, so therefore The Black Sea Region has become a zero-sum game between rivals which means that Ukraine is the utmost importance to both sides. Furthermore, Delanoë argues that Russia’s plans are to build the Novorossiysk port which will “*ensure navigation and sea lines of communication in the Black Sea. Furthermore, it will increase the exercise of military and political control and thus hinder potential domestic conflicts to emerge that can threaten Russia. In such manner, Russia will achieve to promote and protect its economy as well as its security interests in the Mediterranean and thus improve its economical growth*”¹³⁴ which make Russia’s actions a part of a well calculated game, hence Putin is a good strategist. Delanoë argues that the annexation of Crimea was rather a profit-making interest in order to secure and to strengthen the Russian sovereignty using its fleet by invoking the Kharkov Agreement.¹³⁵ The zero-sum game is also argued by Taylor: “*The Ukraine crisis has thus become a zero-sum game in which a win for Russia is a loss for the West and vice versa.*”¹³⁶ and the only gain is an increase in power on either one of the sides.¹³⁷

We have to also provide that there are nuances that come into light when looking into all the realist explanations for the conflict in Ukraine:

Gideon Rose, a neoclassical realist states that: “*decision makers’ beliefs strongly affect the relationship between relative power and foreign policy*”¹³⁸ which would imply that Putin’s personal desires are the ones which triggered all the events. Secondly, Alexander Motyl in “*What’s Next for*

¹³⁰ Delanoë, Igor, (2014), *After the Crimean crisis: towards a greater Russian maritime power in the Black Sea*. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies. Vol. 14 Issue 3, pp. 367-382.

¹³¹ Idem. pp. 367 – 368.

¹³² Idem., pp. 367 – 379.

¹³³ Mearsheimer, (2001), pp. 140 – 141.

¹³⁴ Delanoë, (2014), pp. 371 – 374.

¹³⁵ Idem., p. 379.

¹³⁶ Taylor, D. Brian, (2014), *Crisis in Ukraine-Putin’s Own Goal: The Invasion of Crimea and Putin’s Political Future*. Foreign Affairs, pp. 97 – 98.

¹³⁷ Idem., p. 97.

¹³⁸ Rose, Gideon, (October 1998), *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, World Politics 51, no. 1, pp. 144 – 172

Ukraine?”¹³⁹ states that Putin: “Thanks to his mendacity, ruthlessness, and unpredictability, he has engaged Ukraine in a (thus far) limited war and made a massive war in Europe imaginable for the first time since the end of the Cold War.”¹⁴⁰ Would be in the same line of thought as Rose, arguing that Putin’s beliefs were the causes that triggered the crisis, but asserting that this behavior is due to NATO’s expansion which: “attempted to wrest Ukraine from Russia’s sphere of influence, thereby forcing Vladimir Putin to defend Russia’s legitimate strategic interests by going to war with Ukraine.”¹⁴¹ Thirdly, McFaul and Sestanovic, argue that the crisis did not arise because of NATO’s expansion but because of Putin’s beliefs: “Putin made impulsive decisions that subordinated Russia’s national interest to his own personal political motives.”¹⁴² Of course, it can be argued that Motyl, Rose, McFaul and Sestanovich are right in their assumptions about Putin, but we have to disregard the effect of their deductions and analyses because of the purpose of this paper, clearly stated in the introductory chapter.

Moving on, while taking into consideration the analysis done, using the constructivist lens, when observing the different identities that came into collision from the start of the crisis and during the, still ongoing, conflict, this paper has followed the provisions of constructivism and managed, arguably, to provide a different but yet feasible explanation on why the conflict started. The arguments of constructivism are easily observed in the colliding identities. As the analysis shows, the West is for following the international law and international treaties established within the international system between the actors, while Russia, using a different identity, provides its own model of democracy and its own model of interacting in the anarchy of the system.

Before we go into the last part of the paper, we have to acknowledge that Finnemore’s argument (Chapter III) is a valid one – internationally agreed norms between the actors of the international system (anarchic) can lead to changes when it comes to those processes of interactions; actors feel bound to follow what they before agreed in terms of what is accepted when interacting; The empirical evidence for the point made with the second hypothesis can be found in the second part of the analysis done. Moreover, the point made by our analysis, backed by the empirical evidence mentioned throughout it, leads us to assert the fact that the clash of identities is more than obvious given the context. One can argue, of course that the clash was there before, which would be a true point made, but the conflict

¹³⁹Motyl Alexander, (2014), *What’s Next for Ukraine?*, Wednesday 3 September, European Leadership Network, available at: http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/whats-next-for-ukraine_1850.html, accessed in July 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Idem.

¹⁴¹ Alexander J. Motyl, (2015), *The Myth of the West’s Threat to Russia: Did NATO Provoke a War By Trying to ‘Take’ Ukraine From Russia?*, Atlantic Council, March 5, 2015, available at: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-myth-of-the-west-s-threat-to-russia>, accessed on the 14th July 2016.

¹⁴² McFaul et al., *Faulty Powers*.

between the identities was brought out, yet again, and enhanced. The identities were updated and the clash mentioned, observed through the constructivist lens, is one of a Russia which is following its own updated identity and acts within the international system not bound by the previously agreed norms, like all the other democratic actors, arguably, but pursuing its own identity of being different from the other. Alexander Lukin, in his article¹⁴³ makes an interesting point. Although he uses realism as a governing theory while molding his argumentation when talking about the Eurasian Customs Union and the other regional organizations that are backed by Russia as balancers towards the western similar associations, he argues towards establishing identities as having a part in the crisis and the ongoing conflict. The second part of the analysis provided in this chapter does that and proves that constructivism is a feasible theory when analyzing the causes of the conflict in Ukraine. It answers undoubtedly the second hypothesis.

Moreover, Roy Allison, Professor of Russian and Eurasian International Relations at Oxford University is his paper: “*Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules*”¹⁴⁴ argues that the actions of Russia in the conflict in Ukraine were disguised in ‘legal rhetoric’. Russia made use to the already established argumentative discourse for ‘what is just’ and considered legitimate when it comes to interactions between international actors and the sole purpose of this attainment to the principle of ‘*self-determination*’ and the pursuit of Russia to explain its actions using the principle mentioned, was to bolster support for an intervention ‘for its people’ throughout the domestic opinion. Not only that the Russian propaganda managed to consolidate support for an intervention but it helped to mobilize support around President Putin’s leadership. The people of Russia agreed with Putin, evidence of this fact can be observed in the polls undertaken by the Levada Centre. Putin’s ratings and approval rose to an all-time high of 89% in June 2014.

The fact that Russia used legal rhetoric when debating its actions in Ukraine, by providing explanations such as protecting Russian citizens and arguing that human protection must be looked upon, but only focusing it inwards, for to convince its own people that the actions of their government followed a legitimate process. This model of argumentative discourse can be found at different points in history under different approaches. The Germans used it before the Second World War, the fascists used it in Italy, the Americans used it after 9/11. It can be argued also that the Ukrainians used it during the Orange Revolution. It makes appeal to the national identity in order to gather support. It is not something specific only for Russia so therefore one must conclude, arguably, that it is irrelevant in terms of international

¹⁴³ Page 64 of this paper for more referencing.

¹⁴⁴ Roy Allison, (2014), *Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules*, International Affairs 90:6, The Royal Institute of International Affairs. Published by Wiley & Sons Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148, USA.

relations and interactions between actors. Putin's regime, an authoritarian one, by making use of its control over the media and using the propagandistic methods, changed on the domestic level the meaning of the intervention in Ukraine and coupled it with the annexation of Crimea. As Lukin makes an important point in one of his papers, Putin has a vision for Eurasia. There is no doubt in assuming that President Putin is making use of the constructivist discourse, in pursuing realist goals. In *“What the Kremlin is Thinking”*¹⁴⁵, Alexander Lukin, makes a valid claim in assessing the idea of identity. Russia is pursuing to shape its already established identity into one of a regional power and influencer, hence Russia is using a constructivist argument but in realist terms.

Studies, as the one undertaken by Mikhail A. Molchanov, *“Political culture and national identity in Russian-Ukrainian relations”*¹⁴⁶ and many others after him, argue that the Ukrainian identity which is welded to the Russian one, cannot be separated. Putin's emphasis on incorporating religious values in shaping the domestic identity of the people of Russia can be seen as propaganda when looking at the Ukraine situation, the country being mostly Orthodox. By using this mechanism of religion and incorporating it in its discourse, Russia identified with Russian citizens from Ukraine. Moreover, domestic approval for the reunification of Crimea came when Putin presented the Russians and Ukrainians as a *“single people”*¹⁴⁷ and bringing into the argumentation the concept of ‘Novorossiya’. As Allison argues¹⁴⁸, all of these can be seen as an approach to establish the Ukrainian identity as being the same as the Russian one, with the same ethnic characteristics, language, cultural and historical rights. It is not the case, because when arguing in constructivist terms, as this part of the analysis shows, the identity pursued by the Ukrainians when describing the actions taken by Ukraine as an actor of international relations differs completely from the one the Russia has proposed. Furthermore, it can be argued, as did by Allison¹⁴⁹ that the events in Ukraine were a consequence of the domestic culture and political culture which is represented by Russia's leadership. For this to be a valid argument for our analysis, it would have to refer only to the leadership in Russia, mostly to Putin's entourage. It does not make a case here. Although the approval for President Putin is high, one has to bear in mind that almost all the media is controlled by the government. The Freedom House report regarding the freedom of the press in Russia gives it a score of 83, with 100 being the worst. As described by the report:

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Lukin, (2014), *What the Kremlin Is Thinking*, Foreign Affairs, July/August issue, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-06-16/what-kremlin-thinking>, accessed in July 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Mikhail A. Molchanov, (2002), *Political Culture and National Identity in Russian-Ukrainian Relations*, Eugenia & Hugh M. Stewart '26 Series on Eastern Europe, 1st Edition, Texas A&M University Press, 1st of September 2002.

¹⁴⁷ Allison, (2014).

¹⁴⁸ Idem. p. 87.

¹⁴⁹ Idem. p. 89

“The nationalistic tone of the dominant Russian media continued to drown out independent and critical journalism in 2015, stressing patriotic themes associated with Russia’s 2014 military incursions into Ukraine and the launch of air strikes in Syria in September 2015. Russian leaders and progovernment media outlets also sought to mobilize public support and suppress any dissent in the face of an economic downturn linked to falling oil prices and Ukraine-related sanctions. Deterrents to independent reporting and commentary included draconian laws and extralegal intimidation. Although no journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2015, the persistent threat of deadly repercussions for expressions of dissent was reinforced in February, when opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in central Moscow.”¹⁵⁰

Agreeing with Allison, who argues that Moscow’s pursuit to explain its actions in Ukraine using identity as the focal element, we conclude that, by asserting the identity card, Russia, in the international environment, not only downgrades its position, but it undermines its own domestic support in the long run. Yes, the cultural identity of the Russian people may be exactly the same as of those Russian citizens living in Ukraine, but it is not a feasible argument when taking into consideration the Ukrainian state and certainly not a standing argument when taking into consideration the Ukrainian people as a whole. The position in which Moscow finds itself now, in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, is a complex one. Not only that it acted against what it is internationally accepted, on one hand, which triggered a massive discontent among its economic partners, but on the other hand it bolstered its leadership to harvest domestic support for it.

Furthermore, it can be argued that when changing the paradigm of Russia’s foreign policy 2013, president Putin started to construct a new culture, but now it is clear that what he did was only to revive the culture of the soviet era. The ‘construction of a new identity’ argument is shared also by constructivist scholars who argue that during Putin’s third term a “*civilizational identity*”¹⁵¹ emerged in his speeches. What is certainly sure, there is a clash of security identities that were built over time and from a constructivist point of view, the crisis in Ukraine was a systemic event. While pushing the expansion and implementation of the values that it stands for, which were constructed through norms and patterns of interactions, the Western world started a clash of identities with Russia, mainly based on the collective security identity that each of the ‘camps’ has.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Freedom House, (2016), *Freedom of Press 2016 Report*, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/russia>, accessed in July 2016.

¹⁵¹ Ina Shakrai, (2015) *The Legitimization of Authoritarian Rule Through Constructed External Threats: Russian Propaganda During the Ukrainian Crisis*, March 1, *East European Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 29-54.

¹⁵² Tamta Lomtadze (2015) *The Constructivist Sources of the Ukraine Crisis*, Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Diplomacy and International Politics (MADIP), available at: <http://www.docfoc.com/constructivist-sources-of-the-ukraine-crisis-fREhV>, accessed in July 2016.

The constructivist arguments can be further deepened by coupling them with argument which appeals to the diaspora present in Crimea, which identity was constructed well before the events started to unravel and the rebel movement in Donbas and Luhansk, which created an identity for itself by molding it on the characteristics of the Maidan protesters.

Andrei Ilyich Fursov, a Russian historian, sociologist and journalist, in his article “*Thirty days that changed the World*”¹⁵³ debates the Ukrainian crisis and the events that took place in the beginning of 2014 were triggered and backed up by The US. He supports his argument by attaining to the idea that the West has built over the last two decades a network of nongovernmental organizations through which the Ukrainian intelligentsia’s way of thought is molded to be favorable to western values. The arguments presented in the cited article are of a constructivist origin. He speaks about the creation of a *state* that will be anti-Russian, which will help, at least in the West’s eyes, achieve the ultimate “*maximum program*”¹⁵⁴ of annihilation of Russia. Moreover, he assumes that the American elite has only one planned course of action, to cripple Russia. Fursov, argues that Ukraine will become a quasi-state which will serve the West’s interests and achieve the program mentioned above. “*Bandero-Ukraine*”¹⁵⁵ as he names it, will be an oligarchic state, because of the external control that the West is trying to achieve in Ukraine. Furthermore, he argues, wrongfully we believe, the importance of the double discourse used by the West, mainly The US’s, towards the events in Ukraine. In his view, “*the Western media of mass information [...] have interwoven lies with hysterical and malicious Russophobia*”¹⁵⁶. We regard his views as Russophile. His arguments disregard the fact that Russia did step over the international law and broke the rule of what is agreed and accepted in the interaction between states. He argues also that, by being under external control (of the West), Ukraine is not a sovereign country per se, anymore, which makes The US’s concerns over the sovereignty of Ukraine, be a ‘*double standard*’¹⁵⁷. In the end of his paper, he portraits Russia as a state that searched for its long forgotten historical mightiness. We are in agreement with this idea. Yes, Russia is rebuilding its identity of a great nation which helped shape the world as we know it today. It is making use of constructivist arguments for doing so by appealing to its people and its and their identity.

Although McFaul, uses liberal way of thinking to explain the events in Ukraine, he nevertheless refers to some characteristics of the Russian identity. In his view, the change of paradigm towards foreign

¹⁵³ Andrei Fursov (2015) *Thirty Days That Changed the World*, in *Russian Politics & Law*, 53:1, 47-72, p. 54.

¹⁵⁴ *Idem.* p.54

¹⁵⁵ *Idem.* p. 56

¹⁵⁶ *Idem.* p. 58

¹⁵⁷ *Idem.*

policy within Russia changed in 2012 when Putin, following the results of the parliamentary elections observed the wave of protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg and started to follow a strategy of regime protection. The takeover of the media and the change in the paradigm, according to McFaul, are strategies to maintain popular support internally. He argues, in “*Who Lost Russia (This Time)? Vladimir Putin*”¹⁵⁸, that at the end of the Cold War there was an export of democracy to Russia and that the Russians were not ready for it. Nonetheless, he is right, but in one regard. Democracy needs time to evolve and develop, but more importantly it needs time to deepen. Arguably, there are democracies in the international system which after more than two centuries, are still in the development phase (we are referring here at The US, in the authors personal view). The people of Russia, as a whole, are still getting accustomed to what democracy means. During the ‘reset’ period of relations between The US and Russia, McFaul argues, the people of Russia were positive towards its leadership, which meant that the Russian leadership could continue its path in following an autocratic doctrine, which is specific for Russia, at least history shows this pattern. When the people voted, in the Parliamentary elections in Russia from 2012, and the leadership was accused of fraud and moreover protests rose and consequently the leadership finding out that it did not had the support it used to have during Putin`s first two mandates, triggered a change of paradigm. If problems such as NATO expansion and the EU expansion were not problematic, during the period of economic stability and domestic support of policy, by having autocratic characteristics deeply imbedded in its history and way of being, the Russian leadership and consequently the government changed policy and fabricated an ‘enemy’ by using identity argumentation, which is in some extend constructivist. By reviving an old argument from the long past era of the Soviet Union, “*defense of the motherland against the evil West*”¹⁵⁹ the leadership with president Putin in front, tried to achieve domestic support for its regime. These are constructivist arguments that were put in play here. For McFaul, the domestic lack of support and economic slowdown, and if we could add – the deepening of democracy, triggered the change in Russian foreign policy and attitude which in terms triggered the events in Ukraine.

Chris Dunnett, from the Ukraine Crisis Media Center, argues that: “*the West’s role in the conflict and incorrectly define Russia’s long-term interests as that of Putin’s interests. The Crimea annexation and ongoing intervention in eastern Ukraine has little to do with NATO or the West, but has everything to*

¹⁵⁸ Michael McFaul, (2015), *Who Lost Russia (This Time)? Vladimir Putin*, The Elliott School of International Affairs, The Washington Quarterly • 38:2 pp. 167–187.

¹⁵⁹ Michael McFaul; Stephen Sestanovich; John J. Mearsheimer, (2014).

do with retaining a kleptocratic system."¹⁶⁰ which can be taken in, arguably, as a constructivist argument, where the system mentioned above falls under the Russian proposed identity.

In the end of this chapter there is only one more issue to debate: do the theories fit the situation taken into analysis? or do they apply and work with the developments that take place in the ongoing crisis? The critical lens that we used when focusing on doing the analysis part of the paper, upon how the two theories chosen, verify their applicability, made an illogical fact emerge. As my supervisor clearly stated in his helpful feedback, the two theories, both of them fit the situation in question. But do they work in this context? After reviewing the facts and the analysis undertaken, only one theory from the proposed two works in this context. We are referring here to realism. Because of the failure of the First Minsk Agreement and with the second one barely holding, now that the almost two-year anniversary is approaching, make realism the theory that works in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The actors that are debating sides in this situation are nation states and entities that have sovereignty, each one of them characterized by its own identity, but the conflict, although enhanced by the clashing identities, is in the end a struggle for asserting more power and influence. All the actors present in the conflict follow the principles of realistic behavior. But yet still, the answer to this question requires a far more developed understanding of how the theories are constructed and even possibly, the development of a new 'grand' theory. While looking with both of the constructivist lens and realist one, at the same time, one can discover that although an event can be explained in the same time by two theories, and the concluding analysis stands, there might be need of further research in the matter.

What the analysis shows, and a fact towards which the feedback I have received from my supervisor points me to, is that there is an ongoing debate whether a particular theory can explain an event, or another theory can explain it but also work in the given context. The fact of the matter is, by putting into perspective the two hypotheses stated in the first chapter of this paper, is: realism explains the causes that hold the base for succeeding events that followed the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The conflict started from a realist base of thought: Ukraine, backed up by the West opposed Russia in the annexation of Crimea. But while realism explains the current conflict and crisis, it fails to take into account all the characteristics of the present international system. I do believe that the 'rule book' of theories of international relations must be reset. The 'meaning' of the concept 'actor' within the international system, has changed in the recent years. Systemic theories, at least the two discussed in this

¹⁶⁰ Chris Dunnett, Ukraine Crisis Media Center 11.09.2014 / Materials, Articles, Opinions - A Reply to John Mearsheimer: Putin is Not a Realist

paper, fail to take into account the base levels that make the ‘actor’. As we have seen in the event analyzed, an actor can be defined also as a unified ‘around an idea’ mass of people who do not have a legal entity. One example could be the mass of protesters in Kyiv or the newly created entities from Donetsk and Luhansk. Furthermore, the change in the governing systems that exists throughout the system, must be re-examined. Being a democratic system, does not mean the same thing as it used to be. We can see this in the Russian society. They are characterized by being democratic, having democratic institutions, but the democratic values are applied less. I believe this could be a good starting point for further research into the development of democracy.

Chapter VI: Conclusions and future provisions

When it comes to the two established hypotheses we have to recall the first hypothesis, which explicitly pose a question in relation to realism. We have established now, after the first part of the analysis done in the previous chapter that the version of offensive realism proposed by Mearsheimer when arguing that the crisis in Ukraine started from the behavior of the actors involved being guided by the realist principles. We analyzed which were the action of the actors involved in the conflict in Ukraine and how their actions were shaped by principles of the realist international theory. Furthermore, the paper addresses the explanation provided by offensive realism, as in Mearsheimer's argumentation for why the conflict in Ukraine started. The paper establishes, arguably, a good relationship between the facts, that describe the actions of the actors, and the theoretical approach considered for the explanation. For our second hypothesis we choose to focus our analysis on a different theoretical approach, which, as one can later take into notice, provides also a fair explanation on why the conflict arouse. Explicitly about how the hypothesis in question is answered the reader can observe that we choose to focus on Fennimore's approach to social-constructivism. The analysis part which relates to the second hypothesis presents the link between the established identities that the actors of the anarchic international system already have developed and how this diverging identities shape the way they interact and how that way of acting brings into light a conflict of identities.

In the final stage of the proposed two parts of the analysis chapter the paper explains how each theoretical approach finds its arguments in the conflict analyzed. Furthermore, one has to establish that after undergoing analysis, each of the two theories can explain why the crisis started and why the conflict is still continuing. Although both of the theories can explain why the conflict has started, only realism works in the context. The actors involved in the conflict are nation states, that enjoy all the characteristics of the actors described by realism. But, as my supervisor outlined, it can be argued that the paper 'constructs' its argumentative discourse in such a way to make the theories fit the event in question, it is undeniable that the analysis is conclusive. The reasoning behind the conclusiveness of the analysis can be found in the explanation of why the paper only focuses on two theoretical approaches and from the two theoretical approaches it chooses to focus on only analyzing the key principles that those theoretical approaches are based on. Furthermore, as mentioned in the first chapter and in the title, the purpose of this paper is to explain why an event takes place by focusing on exact facts which are put through different theoretical lenses. But the fact of the matter is that while both theoretical approaches explain why the

events in Ukraine did happen, only one of the theories explains why the conflict is still without an end and the situation still persists. Further research, as the one mentioned at the end of the previous chapter would be a wise choice in furthering the debate on the matter.

In conclusion, when presenting future provisions, one should be assertive to the fact that he or she provides only possible outcomes of one given situation. The research made by this paper inclines one to assess the situation regarding the conflict in Ukraine as a grim one. Being more than two years old and the violence is still far from over, from the point of view of international relations theory, the conflict has frozen. Neither Ukraine, or the West want to acknowledge the existence of the two newly self-created regions in the eastern part of the country while Russia is supporting their efforts. The conflict can be compared to the one in Transnistria. Nevertheless, the transition of Ukraine is undergoing, but looking at the history from the recent twenty years and the events that took place, it would seem for an outsider, as I am (the author of this paper), that the democracy is still only ‘on paper’ in the case of Ukraine.

Nonetheless, the progress made by the country in furthering and deepen its democratic process is undeniable. As the second chapter presents, only looking no deeper than the elections that had taken place since its independence, it can assure one qualified eye that the transformation process has begun and it takes place at all levels.

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