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M.Sc. thesis in European Studies

Russia and the west

An analysis of Russia's relations with the West
during the Georgian War and Ukrainian Conflict



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Abstract

This master thesis is concerned with Russia's relationship with the West by analyzing the Kremlin's foreign policy towards Western countries and organizations like NATO and the EU. In this respect, the study will discuss how the Georgian (2008) and Ukrainian (2014) conflicts shaped the relationship between Russia and the West. Additionally, the Russian intervention against its two neighbors would be analyzed through the lens of social constructivist and defensive realist theories.

The Rose Revolution in 2003 started a new conflictual phase of Russian-Georgian relations. To great irritation for the Kremlin, the revolution resulted in the formation of a new pro-Western government in Tbilisi. Led by president Mikhail Saakashvili, the new government aimed for integrations into NATO and the EU (Sadri & Burns 2010, 138). Due to security concerns, Russia ramped up its support for separatist forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Fearing for the disintegration of the country, Saakashvili attempted to regain control over separatist territory. In August 2008, clashes between the Russian backed canton of South Ossetia and Georgia erupted. Russia responded by invading Georgia and destroying most of the country's military infrastructure (Sadri & Burns 2010, 138). The Russian incursion led to Western criticism over breach of Georgia's sovereignty.

The crisis in Ukraine was triggered by a mass protest against cancellation of negotiations over the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. For the protesters, the agreement with the EU was important because it would provide an opportunity to economic improvement and offer an incentive to reform the country politically, as many Ukrainians were dissatisfied with low economic growth and widespread corruption (Zank 2016, 74). Instead, former president Viktor Yanukovich decided to start negotiations to join the Eurasian Economic Union (Zank 2016, 74). Consequently, pro-Western demonstration intensified leading to the ousting of Yanukovich.

Two days later, Russian forces in green military uniforms without insignia, seized the governments in Crimea. Russian flags were raised over the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Council of Ministers in Simferopol. By March 18. 2014, Russia had formally annexed the Crimean Peninsula (Zank 2016, 73). At the same time, violent separatist movements erupted in eastern Oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk, leading to the expulsion of government forces and the declaration of independence from Ukraine. Unlike to the reaction of the Georgian scenario, the West more explicit in their criticism toward Moscow, condemning the country for breaching Ukraine's territorial integrity and decided to put sanctions against Russia.

The conflict in Georgia and Ukraine is a complex theme to analyze due to the cultural, historical and political dimensions. This thesis focuses on Russia's foreign policy towards the West's and its role in the two conflicts. Additionally, the role of Western actors like the US, EU, and NATO would also be discussed.

Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the famous American author Francis Fukuyama declared that the end of the Cold War between communist and liberal forces wasn't only an end to a conflict, but an end to history itself. Fukuyama argued at that time that the triumph of the West against the Soviet Union was the end of "mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1992, 3).

Yet the pre-Cold War history proved Fukuyama wrong. Although the end of the Cold War diffused the prospect for war between nuclear superpowers, the relationship between the West and Russia didn't develop as the American scientist predicted. Neither did liberalism really triumph against the authoritarian form of governance in Russia.

In 'fact', in the aftermath of the Georgian War and later the Ukrainian Crisis, relations between Russia and the West has been on the lowest since the end of the Cold War, which has sparked a political and intellectual debate on whether the Cold War really ended, which demonstrate the political relevancy of this study. The purpose of the thesis is to investigate:

Why did Russia's foreign policy towards the West develop as it did during the Georgian War (2008) and Ukrainian Conflict (2014)?

To answer this research question, I will use the theories of defensive realism and social constructivism as tools of explanation of Russia's intervention, and the Kremlins relations with the West. The first chapter of this thesis will summarize the historical development of Russia-West relations from 1991 until 2008. This part of the study will review how the Kremlin shifted from being generally positive towards liberal governance and closer relations with the West to a more realist political course, where relations with the West were defined in the zero-sum terms. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how the historical development laid the foundation to the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the West.

The second chapter of this thesis will apply the theories of defensive realism and social constructivism. This chapter will analyze why the Russian intervention against its two neighbors in 2008 and 2014 reflects Russia's commitment to preserving the balance of power against what Moscow perceived as an increasing hegemony-seeking West. In this part, I will discuss how the Kremlin's own political culture and identity is reflected in its foreign policy towards the West. To

summarize the theories hypothesis and argumentation. a partial conclusion of each theories findings will be presented respectively.

Methodology

Literature review

Since the end of the Cold War, the topic of Russia-West relations has been widely discussed in this field. Hence, the already existing literature is vast and continue to grow in modern times, undoubtedly stimulated by the outbreak of the Georgian War and Ukrainian Conflict. In this part, the academic literature used in this thesis is presented. It's mainly focused on more recent literature, which covers the Russia-West relations with regard to the two conflicts. However, older literature is also used in order to understand relations in a broader context.

The works of the Russian scholar professor Andrei Tsygankov are included in this thesis as Tsygankov provides social and cultural aspects of the relationship between Russia and the West. In "Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity" (2006), and "Dueling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide" (2009), Tsygankov provides an extensive chronology of the development of Russia-West relations and analyses the Russian intervention in Georgia through a constructivist perspective. In his work from 2006, the scholar discusses how the Kremlin's foreign policy towards the West has developed from being pro-Western during the early years of president Boris Yeltsin government, and later changed to pragmatic great power politics with the arrival of president Vladimir Putin in 1999. According to Tsygankov, the key reason for the short duration of pro-Western politics is rooted in Russia's tradition of being a great power, and the negative historical interactions with the West during the Cold War (2006, 167-170). In his second work from 2009, Tsygankov concludes that the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 can be seen as a dimension of great power politics between Russia and the West. The author argues that NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe and the loss of Russia's superpower status made many Russians feel humiliated and their prestige degraded (2009, 16). According to Tsygankov, Russia's intervention in Georgia was a signal to the West that the Kremlin would not give any concessions to the West and that the leadership would act whenever it perceived Russia's honor of a great power was at stake (2009, 19).

Another important scholar is John Mearsheimer. In his work 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault' (2014), the American author argues that Russia's intervention in Ukraine was entirely provoked by the West through the expansion of NATO and the EU. Analyzing the Ukrainian Crisis in the lens for realism, Mearsheimer believes that the annexation of Crimea and the support for separatist forces in the East was a mere reaction to the Western efforts "to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border" by unofficially offering Ukraine (and Georgia) the prospect of NATO

membership in NATO summit in 2008 (Mearsheimer 2014). To solve the conflict between Russia and the West, Mearsheimer suggests to transform Ukraine into a neutral buffer zone, thus abandoning aspiration to join Western-led institutions like the EU and NATO. In terms of theoretical discussions, Mearsheimer concludes that “Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics” (2014). In this respect, professor Wolfgang Zank (2016) from Aalborg University ‘agrees’ with Mearsheimer. Zank discusses the EU’s foreign policy in Ukraine from a liberal perspective, where he believes that the EU’s engagement with Ukraine didn’t have any intention to threaten Russia. The author adds that EU foreign policy towards Ukraine was conducted in line with liberal thinking, thus paying little regard to Russia’s realist concept of interest (Zank 2016, 72). The aim of EU’s policies in Eastern Europe was to give the country a stake in the EU’s internal market by giving various types of assistance through economic aid and development of democratic governance. According to Zank, “Putin and his ruling group” felt threatened of the EU’s promotion of liberal thinking near its sphere of influence, “because the majority of the Russian population had acquired an authoritarian mindset” (2016, 73). In line with the theoretical discussion of the West’s liberalism and Russia’s realist-based policies, the political scientist Joan BeBardeleben argues that the dispute between Russia-EU relations lies within the actor’s inability to develop common interests and rules of conduct (2012, 426). Debardeleben’s argues that the differences between Russia’s and the EU’s political culture leave little room for successful inter-subjective understanding, whereas Russian leaders emphasize on ‘interests’ through realist terms, the EU ‘interest’ with Russia is on the other side articulated through liberal policies (2012, 428).

This literature review has presented some of the scholar's works and claims that would be further discussed in the analysis of this study. The purpose of the review is not to provide an inexhaustible summary of the broad range of existing literature about Russia-West relations. The purpose is rather to illustrate some multiple perspectives in which the analysis of the topic can be addressed, thus contributing to a broad understanding and to avoid one-sidedness.

Presentation of qualitative data

The qualitative data used in this thesis consist of three addresses by the president of the Russian Federation (RF) to the Federal Assembly.

- Appendix 1, Federal Assembly address by President Dmitry Medvedev 05.11.2008 (19 pages)
- Appendix 2, Federal Assembly address by President Vladimir Putin 18.04.2014 (9 pages)
- Appendix 3, Federal Assembly address President Vladimir Putin 04.12.2014 (15 pages)

I intend to use these speeches by the president of the RF to analyze how relations between the Russian state and the West has developed since 2008 until 2014. All of the above-mentioned addresses originate from the Russian President's official website (en.kremlin.ru) and are translated from Russian to English. The addresses are not intended to be produced for the purpose of social research, but they are preserved to be read and thus making them available for if they become relevant for research as they are in this thesis (Grbich 2013, 190).

There are several reasons this choice of data as a source for analysis to answer my research question. The first reason, speeches constitute a rich source of material for analysis when doing a content analysis of the data (Grbich 2013, 190-193). I will elaborate later how I intend to do a content analysis in the next chapter of this thesis.

The second, it's important to take the speaker's identity into account, and the role in which the speaker has performed in during his statements (Kristensen 2007, 82). The addresses presented are all articulated by the Russian President in his role as a government official, which make any opinion or policy expressed, highly binding and representative for the policies of the Russian state because the president is the highest-ranked official of the Russian state¹.

The third, in order to understand the rationale of the data, it's important to take into account the environment and the timeframe in which the sources were produced, as an individual's actions are highly determined by the environment and time which the person are located (Kristensens 2007, 83). For example, there's a difference in how a certain statement is articulated depending on whether it's stated before or after a certain event, as the latter gives an opportunity for the speaker to make rationalizations. Subsequently, I have chosen sources which differentiate in time, to reveal whether arguments expressed are consistent or changes over time. In sum, a proper analysis of the presented

¹ In republic states like Iraq, it's the prime minister who is the highest ranked official of the state, whereas the title of being president is ceremonial and honorary.

data requires an understanding of the connection between the sources and the events in which the sources addresses (Kristensen 2007, 83). For this reason, all of the presented sources possess data which relates to the events of Russia's relations with the West, the Georgian War, and Ukrainian Crisis. The first speech is from 2008 and is a yearly annual address that reports the foreign policy developments of that year – thus highlighting the events of the Georgian War. The second speech is addressed on the same day that Russia formally annexed the Crimean Peninsula. The third speech from 2014 is similar to the first.

Traditionally, the annual state of the nation address to the Federal Assembly, presents the government's vision for next year ahead. The speech is accommodated by members of both houses of parliament and the Russian elite. Some of the themes which the president usually highlights are foreign policy strategies, Russia's role on the international scene, and the state's relations with other foreign actors. Other topics of the speech concern the domestic development in Russia such as social reforms, business climate, and governance.

There are also some challenges that exist with doing a content analysis of speeches. One challenge is that it takes considerable interpretative skills to figure out the meaning of words (Grbich 2013, 190-193). An additional disadvantage of using these addresses is that I can't understand or read the Russian language. Even though that the addresses are translated into English from an official source, I can't be certain that every word and sentence is translated correctly in the exact context. As a consequence, I might misinterpret the data I have presented for the analysis.

Discussion of sources

One the hand, it could be argued, that official government sources have a high degree of reliability, as their content is approved by the publishing entity, thus provides reliable information. On the other hand, content which is available in public domains serves a specific purpose, which is in this case determined by the Kremlin. Subsequently, the sources which I presented cannot be considered unbiased. As a result, one can't be certain that the source is not published to serve a specific interest. The content of the data might therefore be 'false' or 'distorted' by only highlighting elements that support own claims while ignoring other factors which might oppose the interests of the publisher. For example, the president of Russia might have a great interest in publishing speeches or press statements that serve the purpose to justify his government's policies.

There are three options which can be used in order to assess the reliability of the sources (Kristensen 2007, 167). Firstly, I could analyze the sources provides consistent information, or whether it

contains contradictory assertions. Secondly, I could examine whether the sources are consistent with the development on the 'ground'. Last but not least, I could compare the information provided in these sources with other sources. One could argue that the sources are more reliable if it provides information that is consistent with other sources. On the other hand, a source becomes less reliable if its information cannot match with other sources.

As a result, I would prefer to use classified internal documents from the Kremlin. Such data (which is generally not available for public reading) might have given nuances to the analysis, as it would shed light on other hidden motivations behind Russia's foreign policy and relations with the West. Unfortunately, as a student with no formal relations to the Kremlin, I don't possess any confidential material, besides what I already have presented, which are accessible to the public. Nor do I have the required contacts or resources to conduct in-depth interviews with relevant officials, such as the president or foreign minister of Russia. Even if I had such opportunity, there's no guarantee that the obtained information would be free of distortion, as the interviewee is not obliged to tell the 'truth' or even answer a certain question. Similarly, the interviewer could also misrepresent the answer given by the interviewee if the interviewer is partial and asks questions in a certain way, which could produce a specific subjective view on the interviewee (Valentine 2005, 112).

It's important to underline that an 'adequate' academic study depends on the on the 'objectivity' of the researcher, and not only on the reliability of the sources. According to the social constructivist scholar Alexander Wendt, the role of the researcher is not a matter of being an objective observer, but a subjective interpreter (Wendt 1992, 183). According to Wendt, the unavoidable subjective interpretation of sources would have significant implications on the process and conclusion of the research.

The subject of Russia-West relations might be a sensitive issue for a Danish citizen, which is considered a part of the West. This could manifest in the researcher's reliance on own background knowledge and prejudices in the process of analysis. Consequently, this might lead to the possible critique of partiality. Therefore, the awareness of the possibility of the researcher's bias adds to the advantage of the research outcome.

Secondary sources

To complement the primary data presented above, I will use secondary data such as academic articles in journals, books, and other relevant newspaper articles.

Using secondary data has some limitations as some of the literature has already been processed which conditions the source to be to a certain extent an interpretation of other primary data. Using news articles requires an investigation of the sources presented in the article to avoid analyzing on the basis of false information. Some newspaper articles are rather limited in terms of length, and thus depth. I prefer therefore to use articles published in academic journals as they (generally) presents more profound investigations and scientific inquiries.

Directed content analysis

Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorizing approach, which can be used to analyze textual data for the purpose of ascertaining the trends and patterns of the words used, their frequency, relationship and the context of communication (Grbich 2013, 190). The creation of coding strategy is made by the application of defensive realism as a sampling strategy. This form of coding strategy highlights a certain aspect of the text providing the reader with an analysis from a realist point of view. It's possible to use other theories than realism such as liberalism, which codes texts from a different aspect that highlights other nuances in the analysis.

This chapter will address the methodology used to analyze the addresses of the Russian president. I will use the enumerative version of directed content analysis (DCA) for my approach. The enumerative content analysis focuses on the imposition of categories and the use of computer software Nvivo to count word frequencies and keywords in context (Grbich 2013, 189).

The researcher of DCA has to develop a coding strategy that consists of rules that tell coders how to identify the correct codes (Potter et al 1999, 266). The strategy here is to deduce from the theory the important manifest characteristics in the content (Potter et al 1999, 266). In addition, the researcher must prescribe some sort of calculus that the coders can uniformly use in assembling the manifest cues into a pattern that forms the basis of the coders' findings. The coding strategy guides the coders on which codes are necessary, sufficient and substitutable elements. Hence, the coding strategy used provides the recipe for weighting the different elements so that the researcher will tell how to sort through different sets of references as well as how to handle other coding challenges (Potter et al 1999, 265). With regard to the validity of the study, the coding scheme and theory are needed to inform on which concepts are related. To increase the validity of the study, the coding strategy needs

to be as uniform as possible across all coders so that the coding process can be regarded valid and scientific (Potter et al 1999, 265). The advantage of content analysis is that it has a great replicability if such coding strategy is implemented 'correctly'.

The count of word frequency is regarded as an important factor when doing a content analysis of texts. This is due to the assumption that words that are frequently repeated are of great importance to the analysis (Grbich 2013, 191). This is one reason to why the enumerative approach is favored. The coding software Nvivo will be used to facilitate enumerative content analysis of the presented data. The count of word frequency helps to identify the often words are being repeated in the texts. Words such as 'a', 'the', 'of', 'and', 'in', 'like', 'because', and 'which' (as well other joining words) will be excluded as they are widely used in texts (Grbich 2013, 191). I will code the top 10 most articulated words in the three addresses and attach the lists to the thesis as Appendix 4.

When the frequency of a word is identified, it's important that the identified word is contextual to the coding strategy, which derives from the realist theory. For example, words like 'state' (or Russia), 'anarchy', 'war', and 'hegemony' will be coded as they are terms that are contextual to the realist theory. Other related words or synonyms that are contextual to realism such as 'security', 'threat', 'competition', 'we', and 'them' etc. will also be coded. Depending on the breadth of the coded themes, there might also be a need to separate the realist codes into sub-themes. For example, some codes might be separated into subcategories, depending on the context they were articulated in. It's also important to analyze the identified coded words in the context, which they appear. For example, coded words like 'Russia' or 'anarchy' have to be analyzed in either side of the code, in order to analyze the code in relation to sentences where the word is mentioned. One could argue that the role of the theory in the directed content analysis is to guide the development of the coding strategy, by making the researcher focusing on certain aspects and helping derive coding guidelines and values by the way the concepts are defined in the theory.

In theory, the combination of content analysis in the lens of realism fits well, as the theory provides great explanatory tools for explaining why conflicts between states occur. Yet, the implementation of the coding strategy can vary from each individual, as different persons might have a diverse interpretation of the meaning of the content. This can result in readers being confused by the conclusion of the study (Potter et al 1999, 261). For example, realism argues that striving for power is the only viable strategy to survive in the anarchic international system (Waltz 2000). Consequently, state that doesn't act on neorealist grounds would likely lose power and be defeated by other

competitors. However, it's much more complex to define neorealist strategies. Does an increase in military capabilities, an improvement on the economy, or technological development counts as a power variable in neorealism? This might suggest that there exists more than one strategy to survive in the international system. For example, some researchers might interpret and code, the Kremlin's focus on domestic liberalization in the early 1990s (Tsygankov 2006, 55) as a realist attempt to generate economic capabilities, thus transferring its economic power into political influence on the international stage. Other researchers might not code such developments, as the Kremlin's pursuit of domestic liberalization might not converge their interpretation of realist thinking.

The strength of a directed approach in content analysis is that the theory can be validated or extended when analyzing the data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 7). Such approach has several benefits. Using theory in the research can be helpful in narrowing the focus of problem formulation. Another advantage is that theory in DCA helps to provide preconditions about the variables of interest in data, which is key in determining the coding strategy or relationships between codes. In this sense, the theory, the coding strategy, and the identified codes will guide the analysis of the data and problem formulation.

The disadvantage of directed content analysis – an alternative strategy

The approach of directed content analysis has its limitations because the data are processed through strong theoretical bias. As a result of this, I might be more likely to find evidence that it's supportive rather than non-supportive of the theory. In this sense, the bias of a directed content analysis might be an obstacle to a nuanced analysis, as it overlooks alternative explanations and makes use of a limited coding strategy. In sum, theories encounter anomalies because they simplify reality by emphasizing certain factors while ignoring others. For example, defensive realism argues that the structure of the international system forces states to behave in a certain way. For neorealists Kenneth Waltz (2000), it's the structure of the international system, anarchy, and distribution of power that matters when explaining international relations. Moreover, the neorealist theory has high generalizability, thus making the theory applicable to use it to explain another conflict in international relations, and not only those between Russia and the West.

To overcome such theoretical bias, an ethnographic content analysis could be used. Cultural context is the key interpretive aspect of ethnographic content analysis. Such approach provides more depth and nuances as to why and how words have been used in particular cultural context, which alternative explanations that would have been missed in a directed content analysis (Grbich 2013, 195). Because

of that ethnographic content analysis is rooted in the inductive approach, the approach would analyze the problem formulation as a unique case rather than making conclusion through a generalizing theory as in deductive reasoning (Grbich 2013, 1995). The cultural content analysis is also relevant when considering that neorealism has little regard for individuals or domestic political considerations such as ideology. For Neorealism, it doesn't matter whether a state is led by Adolf Hitler or Angela Merkel, or whether a state is democratic or autocratic. What matters for realism is how much relative power a state possesses, because democracies care about security as much as authoritarian states do (Waltz 2000). The ideology of the state or its leaders can sometimes be crucial in explaining state policies. However, one of the key assumptions of the neorealist theory is that great power policies are influenced by their external environment, and not their domestic characteristics. In this sense, the directed content analysis in the lens of realism doesn't distinguish between great powers regardless of their ideology, culture, or leader, because every state follows the logic of self-help in order to survive (Waltz 2000).

Deductive approach

In contrast to the inductive method, which doesn't include the use of theory, the deductive method requires the use of theory to design the coding strategy. I use a deductive approach because as, the research question and the conclusion are reached by applying the theory of defensive realism. One of the advantages of such approach is that deductive method provides consistency and coherence when analyzing matters of international relations (Bryman 2012, 24). In this sense, the deductive approach gives a great certainty and reliability, as the conclusion is contained within the premises of the theory presented.

However, the disadvantage of such approach is that it's unable to provide new information, as the deductive method makes generalization through limited experience. As a consequence, I might risk giving an unbalanced and unnuanced analysis of the research question (Bryman 2012, 24). In sum, the deductive method overlooks the uniqueness of the specific case, thus making the research of the study too simplistic. Therefore, using an inductive method might have been more appropriate and nuanced, nevertheless, the deductive method is more feasible given the present time and resources.

The question of validity and reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability are entwined. In academic literature, the concept of reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher's study. The main concern whether the outcomes of the study would be repeated in case the study's methodology is replicated by different researcher's (Potter

et al 1999, 266). Validity is associated with the integrity of the conclusions generated from a study. Two concerns exist when establishing validity. The first is whether the coding strategy used in the research is true to the theory in its orienting coders to the central concepts. The second is whether the identified codes matches the 'dictionary' of the theory used. If the identified codes are convergent with the theory, then the coding is regarded as producing valid data (Potter et al 1999, 266).

With DCA, the misapplication of the coding strategy constitutes the greatest threat to the reliability of the study (Potter et al 1999, 271). Another equal threat to the reliability of research lies with the coders' personal interpretive schemes. There would be little consistency between application of coding strategy if coders have different interpretive schemas (Potter et al 1999, 271). However, as I will elaborate later, this is unavoidable according to the constructivist approach.

In order to achieve greater reliability, the researcher of the DCA may write detailed rules for coding strategy, in order to make 'sure' that other coders would make follow the guidelines, thus generating similar outcomes (Potter et al 1999, 272). However, the study might become less accessible to other readers and difficult to understand as it will increase confusion about what's exactly being coded (Potter et al 1999, 272). Consequently, the study might lose its potential resonance with the reader's experiences. In addition, detailed rules of coding strategy may end up shifting attention away from the essence of the phenomenon of interest. However, if the coding strategy is too simplified, coders might only identify the elements which are easily coded, thus refraining from taking a difficult decision on certain elements in the data, which would reduce the validity of the study.

According to the constructivist approach, it's not possible for the researcher to study the social reality outside of meanings and ideas attached to it (Wendt 1992, 396). Constructivism emphasizes the subjectivity of the researcher, thus making different interpretations and outcomes equally credible (Burr 1995, 160). In this sense, each researcher codes and analyze the data by making a subjective interpretation, thus producing different conclusions. According to Dr. Vivien Burr, "the researchers must view the research as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching' and that 'objectivity' is an impossibility, since each of us, of necessity, must encounter the world from one perspective or another" (Burr 1995, 160). Consequently, the constructivist view rejects the criteria of validity and reliability.

Theoretical framework

Defensive realism

Realism is a school of thought in IR theory. The theory aims to explain the competitive and conflictual side of international politics. For this reason, realism is often contrasted with liberalism, which tends to focus on cooperation and peace between states. Some scholars argue that the roots of the realist tradition date back to 460-400 B.C., where Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431-404 BC), describes how Athens prioritize the preservation of self-interest over morality (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2017). Classical realism as a formal school of thought took shape after World War II. One of the major figures of classical realism was the German/American scholar Hans Morgenthau. In his *Politics among Nations* (1948), Morgenthau argues how the nature of humans causes conflict and competition of power between states. One of Morgenthau's main assumption, which distinguishes it from neorealism, is that human beings have an innate lust for power and desire to control others, which causes conflict between states.

This chapter will introduce the theory of defensive realism by Kenneth Waltz. I will present the main assumptions of the theory about the role of the state in the international arena, its policies, and the causes of conflict between states.

Waltz: Theory of international politics

As the Cold War ended by the Soviet Unions dissolve in 1991, many liberal thinkers of IR considered realism as an outdated theory to explain the new development of the post-Cold War order (Waltz 2000, 5). Liberals foresaw that the dissolve of communism across the globe would pave the way for a democratic wave in the former autocratic states. As the liberal system expanded throughout the world and former autocratic states developed to democracies, the liberalist argued that such development would lead to a democratic peace (Doyle 1983). The theory of democratic peace holds that democratic states don't go to war against each other as "democracies constitute a zone of peace rests on a perceived high correlation between governmental form and international outcome" (Waltz 2000, 6). However, Waltz present two key arguments to why the democratic peace theory is not holding. The first argument is that even though that changes in units (or states) of the international system have changed, the system hasn't. Defensive realism regards the international system as anarchical, as there is no supranational government above the states to enforce laws that would provide security for the states of the system (Waltz 2000, 5). As a result, the units of the international system acquire a self-help mechanism, where states are motivated by a desire for security. Secondly,

states act on the basis of rational choice² and not on moral grounds or ideology (Waltz 2000, 12). Even though many changes have occurred at the unit level since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the overall system hasn't changed. The absence of a supranational authority leads states to fear each other, where great powers can never be fully certain about other states' intentions.

In the lens of defensive realism, anarchy is not a synonym for chaos, disorder or conflict. It's important to underline this distinction because it might be easy to misunderstand, since realism portrays the international system as a competitive arena for power and security between great powers. The realist interpretation of anarchy has no relation to conflict. However, anarchy is an ordering principle, which means that the international system consists of independent states that have no higher authority above them (Waltz 2000, pp. 88-93)³.

Fukuyama considered the correlations between democracy and peace as perfect because the democratic state has never gone to war against another democracy (Fukuyama 1992). However, the weakness of such assumption lies in the vague definition of what a democratic state is. For example, the state of the Russian Federation promotes itself as an official democracy, yet, several western governments and NGO's have repeatedly accused Moscow of developing autocratic tendencies (Huffington Post 2013). In 1965, the American government toppled the democratically elected government of Dominican Republic, as Washington feared that the socialist elected president Juan Bosch, would turn his country to another Cuba (Waltz 2000, 9). In a similar case from 1970, the US undermined the democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende (Waltz 2000, 9). According to Waltz, these examples demonstrate that peace is not maintained by ideological alliances, but rather by a delicate balance of power between the states. Consequently, an unbalanced distribution of power between the units will lead to conflict as states with a surplus of power are more willing to use it to preserve its status (Waltz 2000, 13). This illustrates that the structure of international politics would still be anarchic regardless of the political system of the state (Waltz 2000, 10).

The strategy for survival: Power balancing

Waltz argues that Peace is possible if there's exist a balance of power and external restraints of great powers (Waltz 2000, 13). However, the peace may be disrupted if a certain state becomes more

² Realism perceive states as rational actors. This mean that they are act strategically about how to survive. States are fully aware of their external environment, and always analyzes other states behavior, and compare other states interest to their own in order to predict how a certain policy might affect the behavior of other states. (Waltz 2000, 12)

³ The concept of anarchy and its consequences for the international politics was first articulated by G. Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (New York: Macmillan, 1916)

powerful than others, thus tilting the balance of power into its favor, where it becomes tempted to use it to further weaken other powers (Waltz 2000, 13). As a result, weaker states would try to balance the structure of power as they fear such a scenario.

As the Cold War ended with the Soviet Union dissolution, the structure of the international system became unipolar with the US as the most powerful state. Such structure of power is the least durable in the lens of defensive realism. However, this type of structure of power is always short-lived because of two reasons. Firstly, the units of the international system abhor unbalanced power structure. Units that are faced with unbalanced power would eventually attempt to balance the structure by increasing its own strengths or by allying with other units to bring the balance to the structure of power (Waltz 2000, 28). Secondly, even though the unipolar power tried to behave with restraining and moderation towards weaker units, the weaker units are not guaranteed that it would continue doing so in the future (Waltz 2000, 28). Most importantly, there is no supranational authority to protect weaker states or constrain the unipolar power. Therefore, the only constraint to great power is another state with equal capabilities that could balance the structure of power. Because states can never be fully certain about how another powerful state may behave in the future, and with the lack of an external power to constrain great powers, unbalanced power is a potential threat to other states whoever may wield it. In sum, the causes of war are rooted in the unbalance of power and the uncertainty and miscalculation between the units of the international arena.

As a consequence of anarchy, Waltz argues that survival is the primary goal for states (Waltz 2000, 29). The reason for why the objective of assuring the survival of the state dominates other objectives is that once a state is defeated in conflict, it would be unable to pursue any other policies. In this sense, survival of the state lays the fundament to pursue other goals. If survival is guaranteed, some states may begin to pursue non-security goals like promoting their political ideology abroad, as the Soviet Union (with communism) and the US did (with liberalism) during the Cold War. The importance of states' survival was well illustrated by the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1927 when he stated; "We can and must build socialism in the [Soviet Union]. But in order to do so we first of all have to exist" (Jacobsen 1994, 271).

Structural realism argues that great powers that upset the balance of power in its favor, would cause other weaker states joining forces against them, thus leaving them in a weaker position than if they would have refrained from power maximizing (Waltz 2000, 38). The constraints of a unipolar world order are so strong, making it rare for power maximizing state to succeed. As a result, the strategic

alliance between threatened states against a (potential) hegemon, is an example on how threatened states ally against stronger powers, in order to maintain their position in the system and bring balance to the structure of power. This indicates that there are several strategies for power balancing. Whereas some threatened states balance alone and accept the economic burden that comes with it, other states try to share the burden of deterring their rival by buck-passing with other threatened states. The strategy of buck-passing may be economically cheaper and have a stronger deterrence effect against rivals. The defensive logic of structural realism concludes that there's little reason for units to maximize their share of power because the survival of the state is best achieved with the preservation of power and maintenance of the balance of power. It's important to keep in mind that states act on the basis of self-help logic, where they act only in accordance with their own interests. In the absence of a supranational authority, states have nobody to depend on anybody for their own security if potential aggressor attacks it. As a result, even though states sometimes form alliances together against greater threats, they can't rely on allies permanently as such relationships shifts over time, where today's friend might become the future enemy. The temporary alliance between the US and the Soviet Union illustrates that well, where both countries fought as allies against Nazi Germany and Japan during World War II. However, the short-lived marriage between these two ended just after the war, where the US became a close ally of Japan and an enemy to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In sum, even though some states cooperate in the competitive world of realism, cooperation between great powers is not enough to eliminate anarchy and the logic of security competition that comes with it.

Even though that the anarchic structure of the international arena might seem as tragic and depressing, it's not intended to be this way. Great powers might have no reason to fight each other, but the combination of an anarchy and uncertainty in the international arena forces great powers to pursue power and dominate other competitors. This dilemma is well illustrated in Otto von Bismarck's statement in 1860 about Poland regaining its sovereignty, as it was not an independent state at this time. Bismarck stated – "restoring the Kingdom of Poland in any shape or form is tantamount to creating an ally for any enemy that chooses to attack us," Prussia should, therefore "smash those Poles till, losing all hope, they lie down and die; I have every sympathy for their situation, but if we wish to survive we have no choice but to wipe them out" (Gall 1986, 59).

The main avenue of criticism centers on Waltz's presentation of states' preferences as given. As explained above, the theory does not try to explain why states' main preference is to survive. Instead, Waltz tries to make predictions about the states' preferred actions by mingling hypothesis about the

states' preferences over outcomes with other assumption about the structural constraint. As a result, Waltz structural approach is more about assuming states' preferences over actions. The American scientist Robert Keohane criticize Waltz's theory for being weak theory to explain why a state chooses to act in a defensive realist way, as Waltz assumes that states seek to ensure their security, rather than actually describing how such preferences has been shaped (Powell 1994, 3018).

Social constructivism: Alexander Wendt

The constructivist approach emerged in the 1980s as part of the so-called 'third debate', which attempted to challenge the dominant IR theory of that time – namely the neorealist and liberal approaches. Constructivists took a balanced approach in the debate between realism and liberalism. The 'new' approached linked the gap between positivist, who claimed that 'truth' is accessible through empirical examinations, the post-positivist, who believed that there no objective test of 'truth'. As mentioned earlier, the constructivists approach claims that 'truth' is a constructed through people's perception of what's 'reality', while the environment (the 'real' world) continuously contributes to the shaping of those perceptions. Since its introduction, the constructivist approach has been widely recognized in the academic field of IR, and developed further to include new embranchments, resulting in a wide variety of interpretations. This thesis will make use of Alexander Wendt's branch of constructivist approach. In his article "Anarchy Is What States Make of It", Wendt discusses his view in relation to liberal and realist theories, where we position his work between rationalist and reflective approaches (Wendt 1992 391-424).

Wendt argues that the structure of international system is a social construction, not given, because identities and interests are constructed and support by the intersubjective practice (Wendt 1992, 183). The approach of Wendt evolves around identity making, which is constructed as more basic than interest. As a result, the identity of the 'self' or the state and the surrounding environment shape interactions with other states. Subsequently, Waltz believes that the competitive structure of the international system could be reformed. This claim derives from Wendt's engagement with realism, and Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Wendt 1987, 335).

Wendt's engagement with structuration theory is significant from two aspects. Firstly, Wendt's follows Giddens in his conclusion to the agent-structure issue, where Giddens believes in the duality of structures. To Giddens, the social structure is both the medium and the outcome of social interaction, and that agents and structure are mutually constitutive entities with equal ontological status (Giddens 2003 in Wendt 1987, 335-70). Secondly, the notion of the structures existing is

incompatible with empiricism. Wendt introduces scientific realism as the philosophical foundation of structuration theory, where he argues that scientific realism consists in the belief that both the world of everyday objects and such unobservable entities and causal mechanism as are posited by scientific theories exists independently of the mind (Wendt et al 1992, 1997-223). Wendt assumes that there exists a reality independent of mind in terms of the material and social world. As a result, Wendt concludes that scientific explanation consisting of the identification of causal mechanism is applicable to the social sciences (Wendt 1987, 335). In sum, there is a constructed social reality, which is independent of our thoughts, and constructivism want to examine it (Wendt 1991, 391).

Using symbolic interactionist and structurationist sociology, Wendt presents an argument intended to show how self-help and power politics are socially constructed in a state of anarchy. This claim is based on two principles of constructivism taken from symbolic interactionism (Wendt 1992, 391-425). Firstly, Wendt argues that agents (in this case states) acts on the basis of meanings that objects and other actors have for them (Wendt 1992, 396-397). Secondly, these meanings are not given or inherent for the states but are developed through interaction with other actors (Wendt 1992, 403). Wendt believes that conceptions of security under conditions of anarchy do not have to be self-interested, but behavior is influenced by intersubjective rather than material structures (Wendt, 397). Identity making provides the basis for interests which are defined in the process of conceptualizing situations (Wendt 1992, 398). Identities are not only developed and preserved through interactions between states (Wendt 1992, 491), they also determine what kind of anarchy or security environment will prevail (Wendt 1992, 491). As a result, a self-help situation need not arise from the interaction of agents seeking their own survival under the condition of structural anarchy. For example, if there is no positive identification between the Russia and another state, the other state becomes relevant to the identification of interests only insofar as it may be used for the purposes of the Russia's own interests (Wendt 1992, 405). This is the core of self-interest according to Wendt. On the other hand, collective identity refers to positive identification between a certain state with another state (or organization), where the welfare of each other becomes a concern for both states (Wendt 1992, 407). Actors who have a collective identity define their interest on a higher level of aggregation, based on feelings of solidarity, community, and loyalty. This does not mean that self-interested identities will be substituted by collective ones but it demonstrates that cooperation between states can affect the identities of states, and by that, change the security environment (Wendt 1992, 407). As Wendt describe, "if states find themselves in a self-help system, this is because their practices (interaction with others) made it that way. Changing the practices will change the intersubjective knowledge that

constitutes the system” (Wendt 1992, 407). In other words, as Wendt describe it, “the distribution of power may always affect states’ calculations, but how it does so depend on the intersubjective understandings and expectations on the distribution of knowledge, that constitute their conceptions of self and other” (Wendt 1992, 397). In sum, states act differently towards an ally compared to a competitor, which makes anarchy and the distribution of power in the international system inadequate to tell how a state may act towards another actor. For example, 100 U.S. nuclear missiles have different significance for South Korea than 1 North Korean nuclear missile despite their similar structural positions. This is due to the positive identification between South Korea and the U.S., which forms a collective identity between the two powers on the basis of mutual interest or cultural and ideological links. As a result, research about international relations should, therefore, put a greater emphasis on “the relationship between what actors do and what they are” (Wendt 1992, 424). This illustrates that the self-interested identities of states lie at the core of the self-help system and identity change through positive identification and cooperation with other states is the way to get out of this cynical environment.

A historic review of Russian-Western relations since 1991-2008

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a coherent analysis of Russia-West relations by presenting an adequate review of historical development in relations from 1991 until 2008. This chapter will highlight the most central aspects of the Kremlin's foreign policy towards the West.

With the end of the Cold War, the inheritor of the Soviet Union - the Russian Federation devolved new visions for national interests. The new president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, together with his foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, believed that the new Russia had to adopt a Western style of development with democracy and capitalism marked (Tsygankov 2006, 56). In line with Fukuyama, the new government argued that Russia had no alternative to Westernization, and to give up geopolitical aspirations as democratization build on nonconfrontational relations between states. The liberal government saw their country as part of Western civilization, which the Soviet state has "wrongfully developed" (Kozyrev 1995, 16) to backwardness and authoritarianism.

In the spirit of liberalism, Kozyrev believed that Russia had to change its system of values towards democratic institutions, free market, and the guarantying of human rights (Kozyrev 1992, 51). For this purpose, the Westernizers counted on their 'natural allies' in the West for moral and economic support (Breslauer 2002, 157). With such drastic reforms, Yeltsin aimed to integrate Russia in Western institutions as the EU, NATO, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the G-7 (Tsygankov 2006, 59). The liberals argued that, Russia should prepare itself for a decrease of its great power status, as great power aspirations have become irrelevant, because the new world order was based on Western institutional predominance and economic interdependency, where the "community of the civilized nations" (Kozyrev 1992 (2), 9-10) solved their disputes through non-confrontational means.

The liberal concept of national interests was unprecedented, as never before had Russian leaders been so keen to dismantle the authoritarian imperial state, or been critical to their historical policies, and as supportive of the West. For the liberals, it wasn't enough for Russia to aspire for friendly relations with the West, but Russia had to become an integrated part of the West. Even the social democratic Mikhail Gorbachev, the last president of the Soviet Union didn't go as far as Yeltsin. In the West, Gorbachev was highly praised for his New Thinking, as his foreign policy aspired for peaceful relations and mutual respect between states (Tsygankov 2006, 60). However, Gorbachev still maintained that Russia should be an independent socialist state, with its own national interests even though Russia shared common interests with other nations (Tsygankov 2006, 61). Yet for Yeltsin and Kozyrev, there was no alternative to the Western style of development and claimed that the non-

Western civilization couldn't contribute with a better alternative to the liberal form of governance (Tsygankov 2006, 61).

Until 1993, the liberal government of Russia was a loyal supporter of the West's security agenda for Europe. Russia raised no objections when NATO expanded in Eastern Europe (Tsygankov 2006, 71). Moscow even sided with West against Yugoslavia and condemned the Serbs for committing atrocities against the Muslims during the Balkan War (Tsygankov 2006, 71). Moreover, the Kremlin didn't veto the United Nations Security Council's resolution on authorizing the use of military power against Yugoslavia (Tsygankov 2006, 71). In 1999, Moscow and Washington signed the START II agreement which cut Russia's nuclear arsenal by half and removed all land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles armed with multiple warheads, while the US kept maintained their warheads in submarines (Donaldson & Noguee 2002, 193). For the first time in history, Russia was willing to abandon the core of its strategic arsenal, while the US was allowed to preserve its own.

The pro-Western mindset of Yeltsin and Kozyrev meant that healthy relationship with the West was a primary importance for Russia's foreign policy objectives. The relationship with ex-Soviet and other non-Western nations came of secondary importance, as these countries were often associated with backwardness and authoritarianism, which stood in opposition to Western values. In line with Fukuyama, many Russian liberals believed that the non-democratic countries in the east like China would collapse as the Soviet Union did. The relationship with China was especially tense as Moscow was critical of the Tiananmen massacre of Chinese democrats in 1989 and for Beijing's support of the anti-Gorbachev coup in Moscow in 1991 (Tsygankov 2006, 72). As a consequence, Russo-Sino relations was on hold and Russian liberals were even avoiding meeting Chinese officials. In 1992, Kozyrev traveled to China in an attempt to restart relations, but the visit failed to make any breakthrough in the two countries relations as two sides disagreed on human right and "different approaches to some quite significant issues" (Bazhanov 1995, 170).

In the security sphere, Moscow wanted to reduce its foreign military activity to a minimum. The liberal government favored that foreign organizations to participate in settling conflicts, thus reducing Moscow's responsibility. Russian troops withdrew its military from Nagorno-Karabakh and invited NATO to deploy peace-keeping forces there instead. When Chechnya declared independence from Russia in 1991, Yeltsin refused to respond militarily until in 1994, when pressure from opposition mounted (Tsygankov 2006, 67). Moreover, Moscow showed little concern for millions of ethnic Russian's living in the former Soviet republics and the potential for an ethnic conflict. Similarly,

Yeltsin preferred the deployment of UN or NATO peace-keeping forces in the areas of potential ethnic conflict (Tsygankov 2006, 71).

The liberal policies of early post-Soviet Russia expose the limits of neorealism as an explanatory tool to analyze the above mentioned political developments. There are two important Westernist policies, which defensive realism can't explain. Firstly, the theory contributes little when explaining why the Westernizers would base their foreign policy on an irrational desire of integration with the West, which is grounded on a feeling of commonality of culture and political identity. Secondly, the theory fails to explain, why the Westernizers would give up its relations with ex-Soviet Republics, thus weakening Moscow's ability to influence and project power on the international arena. Using another theory as liberalism might have been more appropriate to analyze such policies. Unlike realism, liberalism puts more emphasis on democratic peace and economic interdependency.

The rise of statism and the change of the concept of national interests

By the end of 1992, relations between Moscow and the West began to stall as the Kozyrev accused the US of trying to dictate the relationship with Russia on its own terms, and not perceiving his government as an equal partner (Tsygankov 2006, 67). Moreover, even though Moscow received financial aid from the West, and the two parties were able to cooperate on a wide range of issues, the Russian liberals had much higher expectation for from their relationship with the West. After all, the Yeltsin government wanted to integrate fully with the West, but by 1992, Moscow didn't make any progress in gaining NATO membership, and even though Russia gained a nominal standing within an expanded G-8, it's formal inclusion formalized only later in 1994. Additionally, public support for the liberal visions dropped significantly, as poll shows that that the support for a US model of society fell from 32% in 1990 to 13% in 1992 (Sogrin 1996, 32). Other studies showed similar trends towards Japanese and German models of society (Sogrin 1996, 32). The Yeltsin government was also harshly criticized by the Supreme Soviet of the pro-Western policy in the Balkan, where the Russian parliament accused the liberal government of neglecting their traditional ally, the Serbs. By December 1992, the Supreme Soviet passed a resolution calling on sanctions on all warring sides and demanding that Russia use its veto in case of UN proposal of military intervention in the Balkans (Tsygankov 2006, 74). The same year, Russia abstained from UN voting on additional sanctions on Yugoslavia and then refused to deploy peace-keeping forces from Croatia into Sarajevo to assist a UN-brokered peace agreement (Tsygankov 2006, 74). Domestic pressure intensified when in 1994 when NATO launched air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. As a result, Yeltsin and Kozyrev found themselves in

a complex situation. On the one hand, Moscow wanted to avoid a political dispute with the West, which could possibly cause a setback for the goal of Russia's integration with the 'civilized nations'. On the other hand, their pro-Western visions for Russia had lost its public appeal (Tsygankov 2006, 75). In this sense, the liberal government had to make some serious concessions to a more West-sceptic opposition.

In late 1995, Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeny Primakov. In line with statist thinking, Primakov shifted the notion of national interest towards Eurasia, great power politics, and rebuilding Russia's influence in areas which it had traditionally dominated – the ex-Soviet republics. All this meant that Moscow began to add geopolitics as a matter of national interests. In Primakov's own words, "Russia has been and remains a great power and its policy toward the outside world should correspond to that status" (Donaldsen & Noguee 1998, 119). Unlike Kozyrev, Primakov was much more pragmatic when dealing with the West, where Moscow's policies were based on the promotion of 'rational' interests. The statist underlined the historical role of Russia as a *Derzhava*, which means the holder of international equilibrium of power (Tsygankov 2006, 93). The main characteristics of a *Derzhava* are its capability to defend itself against any potential aggressor, and its ability to preserve its interests and power. To achieve this, Primakov argued that Russia had to bring balance to the distribution of power, by acting as a counterweight to the US, which he accused of trying to create a unipolar world order (Tsygankov 2006, 95). The new discourse came with the emerging threats from instabilities and ethnic conflict in Moldova, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the expansion of NATO which was highly opposed by Russia. The expansion of NATO soured the Russian-Western relations as many statist viewed these policies as lack of regard or respect for Moscow's geopolitical interests. The statist perception of international relations was now being shaped by great power competition, as Moscow felt that the West was taking advantage of Russia's weakness to expand its geopolitical influence. In line with realist thinking, statist like Primakov perceived NATO's expansion as a threatening development to Russia's national interests. In this sense, Primakov didn't share the Westernizers believe that the spread of liberalism and the democratic peace would shape international relations.

While perceiving international relations in line with realist great power competition, Primakov didn't argue that Russia should become hostile towards the West but emphasized that Moscow should cooperate with the West on matters of mutual interests. However, because of Russia's responsibility to bring balance to the distribution of power, Moscow couldn't be integrated with the West as Kozyrev suggested. Statist had also different opinion than the liberals when dealing the non-

democratic states. For Primakov, the objective to create a multipolar world order meant that Russia had to re-engage with the non-Western world, and if necessary, Moscow should form contra-alliances against opposing coalitions like NATO (Tsygankov 2006, 95). To materialize such balance tactic, Russia had to capitalize on disputes that already existed in international relations within the Western states themselves, or between the West and Muslim or Asian countries. In this sense, Russia should cease its one-way orientation towards the West, and instead establish multilateral relations with all relevant actors of the international system, as Primakov says himself – “Russia is both Europe and Asia [...] (Russia’s national interests includes) China, India, and Japan and not just the United States or Europe. They also include the Middle East and the ‘Third World’. Without such geopolitical scope, Russia cannot continue to be a great power” (Tsygankov 2006, 95). Subsequently, rapprochement between Russia and non-Western states like China started to accelerate during Primakov’s era. In 1996 the two countries signed a “Joint Declaration on a Multi Polar World Order and the Formation of a New International Order” (National Interests 2018)

Resisting NATO

For Russia, the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was the favored instrument to achieve European security, as many believed that NATO has become irrelevant since the threat from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact has been eliminated with the end of the Cold War. In this sense, NATO has become irrelevant as its original purpose to exist has diminished. However, with the expansion of NATO in 1994 illustrated for Moscow that the OSCE wasn’t going to play the role that they looked for. As a consequence, both Westernizers like Kozyrev and statistes saw NATO’s eastward expansion as a challenge to Russia’s national security, and a violation of the democratic peace spirit of the post-Cold War transformation (Macfarlane 1999, 242).

Even though Primakov was rhetorically against such developments, he acknowledged that there’s little Moscow could do against NATO expansion. The strategy for Russia was therefore to limit the potential damage, adapt to the new realities, and try to cooperate with the West on a diplomatic basis to protect its interests. In 1997, the two parties signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between Russia and NATO. Primakov praised the treaty as a major achievement in Russian diplomacy, as Moscow got the opportunity to be part of join the West in decision making and taking joint action in matters of European security. However, the Founding Act didn’t give Russia the influence to shape European security politics as Primakov hoped, which the conflict in the Balkans later demonstrated (Tsygankov 2006, 105). According to Tsygankov,

NATO's attack on Serbia, the traditional ally of Russia, reflected the harsh realities of Russia's junior-partnership with the West (2006, 105). Fearing that relations would worsen, Yeltsin ended up accepting the conditions for peace negotiations in the Balkans, despite being strongly opposed to the attack, and the terms for peace (Tsygankov 2006, 105). Moreover, NATO had already expanded further into Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and laid further plans to expand into the Baltic states, which had been a part of the Soviet Union.

The arrival of Vladimir Putin: Shifting from geopolitics to geo-economics

With Putin's inauguration in 1999, Russia-West relations took yet another turn. Highly influenced by the threat of terrorism in Russia, and the Al Qaeda terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001, Moscow shifted its concept of national interests. The danger from terrorism changed the perception of the 'threat to national security' both in West and in Russia, as Putin saw such threat coming from non-states actors such as Al Qaeda, rather than state-sponsored organizations like NATO. President George W. Bush argued that terrorism was 'pure evil' and that the US had to combat this threat in the new War on Terror, in which other states were either "with us (the US) [...] or you are with the terrorist" (The White House 2001). For Putin, the common threat from terrorism presented a new opportunity to bolster domestic support for Moscow's own war in Chechnya and improve relations with the West.

With such developments on the world stage, Putin introduced a new form of pragmatism in great power politics, which combined Westernist and Statist elements. Unlike Primakov that viewed Russia's relations with the West in terms of potential threats, Putin had a greater focus on the opportunities in his relations with foreign powers. For Putin, Russia had to adapt to the new world order, in which power wasn't only measured through military capabilities, but also through economic measures, in which states competed for markets, investments and geo-economic influence. In Putin's own words – "It is well known that international security comprises much more than issues relating to military and political stability. It involves the stability of the global economy, overcoming poverty, economic security and developing a dialogue between civilizations" (The Washington Post 2007). Another key difference between Putin and Primakov is that the new president believed that Russia had to defend its national interests through economic influence, and not power balancing by military means. By 2005, Putin declared that integration in the CIS, in the frame of Common Economic Space was a top priority for Moscow's foreign policy (Zank 2016, 73). The same year, the Kremlin created a special department to promote Russian influence in the former Soviet Union through the energy

sector, trade, investment, cultural ties, migration, and language programs (Zank 2016, 73). Putin wasn't a liberal like Yeltsin and Kozyrev. The new president perceived Russia as an independent great power and wasn't committed to integrating his country with the West. In line with statist thinking, Putin prioritized the strengthening of state institutions and political stability, whereas democratic development was of secondary importance (Tsygankov 2006, 132).

Putin achieved in what former liberals and statist couldn't, as his new vision for Russia's relations with the West, succeeded in rallying both political wings for his support. For liberals, the president's ideas of economic development were a special element for his support. Statist supported Putin because of his desire to strengthen the state and its ability to project power.

The September 11 attacks provided Putin a great opportunity to reset relations with the West after souring relations caused by the dispute in the Balkans. The president reacted quickly by offering the US broad support for anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan. Such measures included sharing of intelligence, opening Russian airspace for relief operations, taking part in search- and rescue mission, uniting central Asian countries for the support of US operations, and arming forces fighting Taliban in Afghanistan (Tsygankov 2006, 138). In February 2002, the honeymoon between the US and Russia reached a new peak, as the two parties signed a joint declaration on energy cooperation. Later in May the same year, the two countries agreed on energy deal that would enable Russia to export a million barrel a day within five years (New York Times 2002). For the British magazine *The Economist*, these developments demonstrated that "America's relations with Russia are now better than at any time since the end of the Second World War and are improving" (Economist 2002).

In addition to the improving relations with the US, Putin also emphasized on capitalizing on ties with the EU. This was especially important as Russia's energy markets were primarily in Europe, which accounted for 55% of Russia's foreign trade, whereas Russia-US trade was only of 5% (Tsygankov 2006, 139). In addition to economic cooperation, Russia was also more in line with the great European powers like Germany and France than the US when it came to matters of global security, as the rejection of the US invasion of Iraq illustrated. In 2003, Putin suggested that visas between the EU and Russia should be abandoned altogether by 2006 (Tsygankov 2006, 139). However, these efforts to improve relations with the West was driven by pragmatic thinking. For instance, there was relatively little cooperation on security issues, and Moscow was even mistrustful of the EU's proposal for joint peacekeeping missions in the former Soviet Union, such as Moldova (Carnegie 2017). In 2003, the Kremlin ended the program of the US Peace Corps volunteers in Russia (SFGATE 2003).

Opposing the US's regime change strategy

By 2005, President Bush made the promotion of democracy as the main goal for US foreign policy objectives. For Moscow, these policies made it clear that the War on Terror wasn't only limited to fighting terrorist groups, and the promotion liberalism wasn't only limited for the Middle East. The Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 replaced the old regimes by a civil protest over corruption allegations, which emboldened the US's strategy in the former USSR (Tsygankov 2006, 152). Even though the US didn't intervene militarily, these events provided Washington an opportunity in training and financing groups who sought regime change. In the eyes of the Kremlin, this strategy broke up with the initial purpose, which was to combat terrorism, as terrorism wasn't a state-based phenomenon. Moscow reaction was therefore consistent with that of the Iraq invasion, as many Russians felt that the US-backed political movements in the former USSR as a threat to country's own sphere of influence (Tsygankov 2006, 152). For example, as the West stepped up its for the pro-EU candidate Viktor Yushchenko, Russia threw all its support for the candidate of the ruling regime. Similarly, Moscow maintained close relations with Belarus, Armenia and the central Asian countries, which was highly criticized by the West (Tsygankov 2006, 153). Considering the Kremlin's reaction in realist terms, Moscow had a reason to suspect geopolitical desires behind the West's strategy of regime-change in the post-Soviet space, which might have led to the extension of the EU, NATO and greater control of natural resources in the region. Consequently, the Kremlin has consistently been suspicious and opposed to Western regime change through humanitarian intervention. In 2000, the former Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Ivanov stated that the "doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention' can destabilize international order to", adding that foreign intervention can only be possible through the permission of the UN Security Council (Merzekho 2015, 190). Despite the diplomatic opposition, Russia and the West still able to cooperate on issues of mutual interests. However, the pragmatic relationship faced some serious challenges with the war in Georgia, which became much tenser with Ukrainian Conflict, as I will elaborate later in the next chapters.

Relations with the EU

In 1997, Russia and the EU ratified the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). Even though the agreement expired in 2007, the treaty is still honored today. The PCA covers a wide range of policy areas, including political dialogue, trade, investment, science environment and etc. Moreover, the PCA recalls the parties to 'respect' democracy, human rights, freedom of movement, legislative cooperation, and last but not least – a shared commitment to maintaining peace and security (EU delegation to the RF 2018). In 1999, the EU articulated a common strategy toward Russia, and the

Kremlin reciprocated in 2000 with a ten-year Medium-Term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the EU (DeBardeleben 2012, 421). The EU and Russia agreed on Four Common Spaces of cooperation in 2003, and on associated Road Maps. For Russia, relations with the EU should promote mutual beneficial cooperation in every sphere and with a view to establishing a visa-free regime (Idem). Furthermore, Moscow's foreign policy concept towards the EU articulated an importance in developing bilateral relations with individual European countries (DeBardeleben 2012, 421).

For Putin, relations with the EU are perceived as central for Russia's foreign policy. In 2007, the president had stressed that relations with Europe should be based on equality, without any attempt to impose 'foreign' norms on Russia (DeBardeleben 2012, 421). Yet while recognizing the importance of deepening cooperation with the EU, Moscow was equally focused on respect for sovereignty, underlining that Russia would not tolerate being treated as a junior partner by being an object for the imposition of Western norms.

The issue of harmonizing Russia's legal system with the EU law has often been viewed by Moscow as undermining of the country's role as an independent state (Bordachev 2003, 51-52). Even though that the EU is not perceived as a military threat to Russia, Moscow has often viewed the EU's promotion of normative values in the former Soviet Union as undermining (Bordachev 2003, 51-52). As a result, Moscow has often observed EU's policies in Eastern Europe with mistrust and suspicion, fearing that the EU is trying to indirectly impose its worldview and norms on Russia, thus breaching the sovereignty of the Russian state. The mistrust towards the EU is especially illustrated in the Kremlin's Medium-Term Strategy from 2000, which concluded that Russia would not approve special relations between the EU and "individual countries of the Commonwealth (CIS) to the detriment of Russia's interests" (Zank 2016, 73).

Concluding Russia's foreign policy towards the West from 1991-2008

Since arriving in power, liberals like Yeltsin and Kozyrev strived for integrating Russia with the West, that Russia belonged to the Western democratic civilizations. Judging from a realist perspective, the visions of the liberal era ended in failure, as Westernizers was too eager to make concessions on national interests in order to acquire recognition of the West. During this era, Russia was highly dependent on Western economic assistance. As the Balkan Wars illustrated, the West was able to dictate the agenda of European security due to Moscow's incapability to play a decisive role in shaping international relations. With regard to the former Soviet Republics, the Westernizers

wanted to cut ties with authoritarian states, as the liberals didn't want to be associated with undemocratic governments.

With the arrival of statist thinkers like Primakov, the concept of Moscow's national interests changed towards reemerging Russia as a great power. The great power politics of Primakov meant that Russia had to balance the distribution of power on the world stage and combating unipolar aspirations. Consequently, Moscow began to re-engage with the non-democratic states like China. Despite that Primakov's policies was close to the thinking realism, it's difficult to explain why he favored an assertive foreign policy, as realism explains that an activist foreign policy is followed by a growth material capability. At that time, there was no material basis for balancing against the West, as the country faced economic decline, and Russia's capabilities didn't improve.

As Putin took office in 1999, the Russian concept of national interests took yet another turn. Capitalizing on the threat of terror, Putin quickly reengaged with the West on the basis of combating the mutual security challenges. Unlike the Westernizers, the improvements of relations didn't derive from Putin's desire to integrate with the West. Putin was still committed to reviving Russia as a great power, and he wasn't willing as the liberals on giving foreign policy concessions to the West. With regard to the EU, Moscow believed its relations with its neighbor was of strategic importance and promoted cooperation in several spheres. At the same time, the Kremlin stressed that such relations should be built on mutual interests, and not compromise the interests and sovereignty of the Russian state. Yet besides the PCA, progress between the two parties has faced serious challenges, as Moscow has often observed EU's policies in Eastern Europe with mistrust, regarding the West's promotion of normative values as a 'soft power' intervention against a sovereign Russian.

Analysis: Georgia and Ukraine conflicts through the lens of defensive realism and social constructivism

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia retreated for a while due to economic and political struggle, which left the country in chaos. However, with the speedy economic recovery and dominance of statist thinking in the Kremlin, Russia sought to reclaim its former great power status and once again reclaim power over areas, which it used to dominate. From a defensive realism and constructivist perspective, this chapter will discuss why the Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine, two former Soviet Republic, reflects Moscow's identity and commitment to act as Derzhava or power balancer against what's the Kremlin perceives as Western (and particularly the US) attempt to establish a unipolar world order. To summarize the theories hypothesis and argumentation. a partial conclusion of each theories findings will be presented respectively.

Defensive realist approach **Georgian War**

The West's relation with Georgia has since the republic's independence been motivated by the promotion of liberalism (Sadri and Burns 2010, 127). In its relations with Georgia, the West have cooperated on security and energy matters. Aiming for integration in NATO, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994 (NATO 2018). Through this mechanism, Georgia became involved in the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAD's) (Priego 2008, 2). Eager to strengthen ties further, Georgia joined the US coalition against Iraq in 2003, by sending the third largest contingent of foreign troops, which is remarkable for a country of Georgia's size (Cornell 2008, 313). Another notable development of Georgia's relations with NATO occurred in 2007. With great support by Washington, Tbilisi was endorsed in the NATO Freedom Consolidation Act, which paved the way NATO membership (NATO 2018). Despite facing European opposition, the US was the most committed country among Western powers in support of Georgia's NATO membership (Sadri and Burns 2010, 128).

The most important historical development in West-Georgia relations came with the democratic Rose Revolution in 2003, which ousted President Eduard Shevardnadze from his presidency. Mikhail Saakashvili was then elected as president, and the popular protest of the Rose Revolution was hailed as a great democratic victory in the West (Sadri and Burns 2010, 129). One of Saakashvili most important political objectives was to accelerate and deepen relations with the West, and particularly NATO (Sadri and Burns 2010, 129).

Despite deepening ties, NATO was unwilling to take in new members that had ‘domestic’ political and military disputes, especially if it involved Russia. Knowing this, Saakashvili was committed to reclaiming sovereignty over the de-facto separatist states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tbilisi boosted its military presence on the border with South Ossetia in early August 2008 (Sadri and Burns 2010, 132). By that time, skirmishes on both sides had already been on for months. On August 8, war broke out between separatist forces and government troops, which ended the fragile cease-fire. Just hours later, Russian military invaded Georgia with overwhelming force, penetrating deep into the undisputed area, which went beyond the conflict zone (Sadri and Burns 2010, 132). In the aftermath of the war, Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and established a permanent military presence in the disputed zones.

As further escalation between nuclear powers was undesired by both Russia and NATO, Moscow with other Western powers committed themselves to political negotiations to end the conflict. On August 15, Russia and Georgia accepted a proposed ceasefire agreement by US, UK, Italy, France, Germany, Canada, And Japan (BBC 2008). Besides widespread Western criticism of Russia for its role in the conflict, Moscow suffered few punitive measures from the West. In this sense, the Georgian war soured relations between Russia and the West, but the diplomatic conflict didn’t escalate to the levels of the Cold War.

Ukrainian Crisis

Like Georgia, Ukraine, and NATO had cooperated in various fields since the country’s independence from the Soviet Union. In 1994 Ukraine joined the Partnership for Peace with NATO, and ties had gradually been strengthening by the time through the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC). By 2002, the former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, announced interest for his country to join NATO. However, Kiev shelved plans for NATO membership with the election of Viktor Yanukovich as president in 2010. The same year, the Ukrainian parliament excluded the country’s goal of integration into the Euro-Atlantic Security and NATO membership as a matter of national interest, giving the country a non-aligned status. Unlike with Georgia, NATO showed no interest in offering Ukraine membership. With considerable pressure from Germany and France, NATO reached the decision to not include Ukraine into a ‘Membership Action Plan’ (MAP), which by time would lead to admission (NATO 2016).

Following the Ukrainian revolution, which ousted February Yanukovich in 2014, Ukraine once again renewed its desire for NATO membership. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the same year,

and the war against pro-Russian separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian parliament abolished Ukraine's non-aligned status (BBC 2014). In response, NATO increased its diplomatic support for Ukraine, but any talks of possible membership were excluded. Similarly, to the Georgian scenario, many member states like Germany and France feared that Ukraine's admission into NATO would consequently ratify Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which would result in a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russian forces.

Prior to Moscow's intervention, the political environment in Ukraine was very fragile. Demonstrations erupted in several parts of the country, known as the 'Euromaidan' protest, was triggered against Yanukovich's decision to cancel proposed preparations for an Association Agreement (AA) and a Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. Talks about an AA agreement between the two had been initiated in 2012 by the government of Yanukovich and was anticipated to be signed in 2013. With great pressure from Moscow, Yanukovich chose instead to end negotiations of AA, in favor of another deal with Russia, which would provide Ukraine a 15\$ billion loan, with a substantial discount in gas price in addition (Zank 2016, 75). The decision to suspend negotiations with the EU sparked outrage among large segments of the Ukrainian population who favored closer cooperation with the EU. As a consequence, mass protests broke out against the central government, demanding the resignation of the president and prime minister (Zank 2016, 75). In response, Yanukovich announced early presidential elections to be set for December 2014. Yet protest continued, resulting in Yanukovich fleeing to Russia.

Results of early presidential elections in June 2014 brought a new pro-Western government in Kiev led by Petro Poroshenko. Together with the EU, the new government in Kiev signed the AA and was later ratified by both EU and Ukrainian Parliaments in September 2014 (Zank 2016, 76). Russia retaliated doth diplomatically and military. Moscow declared the new government as illegitimate and articulated the Euromaidan which ousted the former president as a coup sponsored by the West (Appendix 2, 102-108). Militarily, Russia intervened by annexing Crimea, arguing that the security of ethnic-Russian civilians was threatened by the new government in Kiev (Appendix 2, 107-108). Though not admitting it, Russia was accused also accused by the West of deploying troops in Eastern Ukraine to fight along with separatist forces. By 18 March, the Kremlin admitted Crimea as formal territorial of the Russian Federation. Separatist also declared independence of the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Beside wide spread condemnation of Russia's intervention in Ukraine, the West adopted economic sanctions against Russia, targeting individuals and businesses close to President's Putin 'inner circle' (DW 2018). In response to the Western sanctions, Moscow put a

restriction on Western export of food products to Russia (Reuters 2014). With regard to Ukraine, the Kremlin chose to disband the Free Trade Agreement it earlier had with its neighbor and imposed broad trade restrictions on Ukrainian export (Financial Times 2015).

In 2015, the head of states of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany agreed to sign the Minsk Agreement 2 (MA), as a roadmap for ending the conflict. The protocol of the MA consists of 13 measures to be implemented by Kiev and the pro-Russian separatist (Telegraph 2015). The most central element of the MA is point 9, which require the restoration of the Ukrainian government control over the state borders (Telegraph 2015). However, point 9 of the MA does not explicitly refer the return of Crimea to the Ukrainian authorities as a condition for the fulfillment of the agreement. The EU ties sanctions to demands for a political solution through the implementation of the MA in order to reverse the sanctions against Russia. During a press conference in 2016, president of the EU Council Donald Tusk stated that the EU sanctions against Russia are “linked with the complete implementation of the Minsk Agreement” (European Commission 2017). In addition, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel also stressed in a state visit to Sochi in 2017, that the aim is “to reach the point in the implementation of the Minsk accords where we can lift the European Union’s sanctions against Russia” (Reuters 2017).

The geopolitical dimension of Russia’s interventions in Georgia and Ukraine

As defensive realism would argue, the state can only survive in the anarchic international system if it succeeds in maintaining its sovereignty and power. To achieve this, states have to be strong enough to deter a competitor from breaching its sphere of influence. In all of the presented addresses, the president of Russia has put great emphasis on the creation of a multipolar world order. This chapter discusses why it’s important for Russia to preserve its position in the international system

The most articulated term in all of the presidential addresses, is ‘Russia’ (34), ‘Ukraine’ (14), and ‘United States’ (US) (12). All three terms were generally intertwined and articulated in context of sovereignty, unilateralism or multipolarity, national interests, and threats to Russia. I will highlight a few examples, as it’s not possible to go through all of the statements regarding these issues.

For example:

*“I would note that the issue of establishing a new global security regime is grossly overdue. And it is especially important that we achieve results in the North Atlantic territory that comprises **Russia**, the European Union and the United States” - Medvedev (Appendix 1, 639-641)*

*“They (the West) are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it [...] But there is a limit to everything. And with **Ukraine**, our western partners have crossed the line” – Putin (Appendix 2, 219-221)*

“Since 2002, after the US unilaterally pulled out of the ABM Treaty, which was absolutely a cornerstone of international security, a strategic balance of forces and stability, the US has been working relentlessly to create a global missile defence system, including in Europe. This poses a threat not only to Russia, but to the world as a whole – precisely due to the possible disruption of this strategic balance of forces” – Putin (Appendix 3, 133-138)

From a defensive realist perspective, there's little surprise in the consistency of the Kremlin's position regarding importance of maintaining sovereignty and opposing unilateral 'security regimes', as the theory predicts that states pursue power politics regardless of the leadership. However, what's important to note is the escalation of aggressive rhetoric, which indicates that relations between the Russia and the West has deteriorated further since the Georgian War. The Ukrainian Crisis can be interpreted as a continuation and escalation of existing disputes regarding national interests. Compared to Putin, Medvedev was much 'friendlier' is this critique against the West. For example, Putin accused the European states for being vassals of the US, implying that sanctions against Russia was engineered by Washington, in which they just followed (Appendix 3, 55-58, 99-103). Putin even implied that the West had supported terrorist groups and separatism in Russia during the Chechen Wars, in order to destroy the country (Appendix 3, 109-110), and warned that the West won't succeed – “just as it did not work for Hitler to destroy Russia [...] Everyone should remember how it ended” (Appendix 3, 124-125).

In the lens defensive realism, Russia's intervention can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge what it perceives as Western attempt to achieve hegemony and unipolarity. Therefore, the Kremlin's advance of a multipolar idea and defense for national interests, demonstrates the country's commitment to preserve its significance as international player. As a result, it can be argued that Moscow's intervention against pro-Western regimes is an act to counterweight the West. According to Dr. Elena Chebankova, Russia doesn't have the adequate material capability to balance against the West by itself, as the country is outmatched in economy, technological development, military power, and number of population (Chebankova 2017, 225) In this light, Chebankova argues that Russia have to form alliances with other critics of the so-called Western led-unipolar world order (like China), in order for the country to preserve its ability to assert global influence (Chebankova 2017, 225). The

terms ‘Missile’ (11), ‘Security’ (11) and ‘Interests’ (11) is often articulated into context with Moscow’s dissatisfaction of the unbalanced distribution of power among states. In annual address of 2008, Medvedev states that the US’s plan to deploy missile defense system in Europe, poses a threat to Russia and the “world, due to the possible disruption of this strategic balance of forces” (Appendix 2, 137). Putin again stressed that “like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has happening in the world the pas several decades”, adding that the dissolution of the Soviet Union (the counter balance to the West or the US), has ended the bipolar structure of the international system, thus resulting in instability across the globe (Appendix 2, 176-177).

As a result of Russia’s perception of Western’s power maximizing policies in its ‘backyard’, Moscow sought to deepen its relations with another strong advocate for a multipolar world order - Beijing. Putin also thanked “the people of China” for their position on Russia’s intervention (Appendix 2, 231). Cooperation between the two countries has increasingly grown, reaching unprecedented levels in economic and political spheres. During a state visit to Russia in 2018, the defense minister of China stated that he wanted to support the Russians and to show the “Americans the close ties between the Armed Forces of China and Russia, especially in this situation” (National Interests 2018), further adding that China want to show solidarity with Moscow in their “common concerns and common position on important international problems at international venues as well” (National Interests 2018).

Alexander Lukin, a Russian scholar of China, argues that the Ukrainian Crisis further accelerated the two countries rapprochement, as unlike the Georgian crisis, Russia were now facing economic sanctions, which pushed Moscow to compensate for its economic losses through strengthening ties further with Beijing (Financial Times 2018). By 2015, Russia fell into recession, and confidence indicators in the service and manufacturing sectors dropped to five-year lows, pointing to a large contraction in activity. Data from the World Bank illustrate that the Russian economy declined by 2.8% in 2015 (World Bank 2018). The primary reason for this was the sharp decline in oil prices, whereas the Western sanctions added further to the economic decline of the country. The deterioration of oil prices has been the harshest economic blow to Moscow, as the economy relies on fossil revenues to finance half of its budget. In 2015, the budget of Russia was based on oil prices of 100\$ per barrel, whereas the market prices were at 50\$ per barrel (Aalto 2016, 39). Yet despite that the fall of the oil prices is not directly connected to the Western sanctions, the energy sector of Russia has been severely

affected by sanctions as they restrict access to crucial technology for deep sea drilling and shale oil extraction (Jan et al 2015, 10). Consequently, major Western energy companies such as Exxon Mobil, Total, and Shell have all abandoned joint ventures with Russian companies like Gazprom, Lukoil and Rosneft (Aalto 2016, 41).

Responding to the threat of NATO missile defense system

Other central terms of the addresses are ‘missile’ (11), ‘Military’, and ‘NATO’. When mentioned, the terms are often articulated in the context of developments regarding NATO’s installation of missile defense system in Europe. For example:

*“The conflict in the Caucasus was used as a pretext for **NATO** naval vessels to enter the Black Sea and then to speed up the imposition of an American **missile defence** system on Europe”* (Appendix 1, 18-19)

*“They have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with **NATO’s** expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of **military** infrastructure at our borders [...] It happened with the deployment of a **missile defence** system. In spite of all our apprehensions”* (Appendix 2, 206-210)

A closer examination shows that the term ‘missile’ illustrate that the issue of missile defense system played a much more prominent role in shaping Russia’s policy in Georgia than in Ukraine. In comparison, the term was mentioned nine times in Medvedev’s address in 2008 (Appendix 1), whereas it was mentioned only once at the yearly annual address of 2014 (Appendix 3), and twice in the address regarding Crimea’s ‘reunification’ with Russia (Appendix 2). As I will discuss in the next chapter, the reason for this unbalance is caused by a greater focus on geo-economical disputes between Russia and the EU, than on geopolitical issues with NATO, when explaining the rationale behind the Kremlin’s intervention in Ukraine. Even though there’s little emphasis on the military dimensions in Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly from 2014 (Appendix 2 and 3), the expansion of NATO continues to play a significant role in shaping Russia’s foreign policy in Ukraine and towards the West. For example:

*“Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about **Ukraine** soon joining **NATO**. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that **NATO’s** navy 261 would be right there in this city of **Russia’s military** glory, and this would*

*create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern **Russia***” – Putin (Appendix 2, 259-262)

From a defensive realist perspective, the term is central for the analysis of Russia-West relations because the NATO is articulated as a threat to Russia’s own security interests. This is especially important as NATO’s possesses the material basis like missile systems that enables the alliance to project power inside Russia’s sphere of influence. As states use their military to compete for survival and influence, threatened states would be forced to take countermeasures to such dangers.

According to Tsygankov, NATO’s geopolitical expansion into what Russia views as its sphere of interests has exacerbated Moscow’s sense of vulnerability to such the military alliance (Tsygankov 2009, 18). Already before the Russian intervention, the Kremlin reiterated that it would work against NATO’s expansion in Georgia and Ukraine (Tsygankov 2009, 18). The Russian scholar adds that the Kremlin uses frozen conflict in the two countries as leverage against Tbilisi and Kiev and keeps them frozen until NATO scuttle its plan to extend along Russia’s borders (Tsygankov 2009, 18).

In the lens of defensive, the Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine is reasonable in the sense that if Moscow had abstained from intervening, Tbilisi and Kiev might be even more emboldened to continue to pursue pro-Western policies. Furthermore, Russia might risk that a military confrontation between government forces and separatist militants would result in the defeat of the separatist, thus losing its political leverage over the two countries, and consequently make them much closer to NATO membership. However, as Tbilisi’s was defeated and Ukraine destabilized through annexation of Crimea and military support of separatist forces in the East, both countries plan to join NATO stalled. As mentioned earlier, one could argue that Russia’s interventions tamed NATO’s appetite to admit Georgia and Ukraine, as this would result in NATO joining forces with Tbilisi and Kiev in its military dispute with Russia under Article 5 of the NATO Charter. The scenario of a potential clash between nuclear superpowers was therefore undesired.

Yet unlike in Georgia, NATO little interest in formally admitting Ukraine. The German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier even excluded the possibility for a military solution to the conflict. Additionally, the EU’s Commission (COM) President Jean Claude Juncker even stated that “Ukraine will certainly not join the EU in the next 20 to 25 years. Nor will it join NATO” (European Commission 2016). Neither did NATO offer Ukraine a clear and explicit membership prospect, as pressure from member states like Germany and France resulted in a decision to not offer Ukraine a MAP, that would ultimately lead to its admission (Taylor 2014).

Nevertheless, Russia's intervention in Ukraine and Georgia could still be 'defended' from two aspects. Firstly, the two countries admission into NATO would constitute a serious breach to the concept of Moscow's strategic interest – which is the former Soviet space. Such development would damage Russia's ability to project power through military and economic means, as the countries would join forces with rival powers. This is especially 'true' when considering that the government of Saakashvili and Poroshenko has been anything but pro-Russian since the revolutions in the two countries. In general, the democratic movements in the former Soviet Union has unsettled the Kremlin, as their outcome has brought new pro-Western leaders to power, which sought membership in the EU and NATO. Secondly, even though that there was no formal indication that NATO would admit Ukraine, there's no guarantee that this would continue to be so. As Waltz would argue, the Kremlin couldn't be certain about the West's true intentions because states lie, cheat and deceive to achieve their goals.

The anarchic structure of the international system results in uncertainty and mistrust among states, which leads states to pursue self-interested policies in order to survive. The dispute over the deployment of NATO missile defense system illustrates the how mistrust of uncertainty is important in shaping Russia-West relations. For example, the West has continuously repeated that Moscow shouldn't be concerned for its safety, as NATO had no intentions of threatening Russia with deploying such missile systems (Kramer 2016). Nor do the missile system serve to protect Europe from Russia's own arsenal of nuclear missiles. Instead, Western powers had underlined that such deployments would serve to protect Europe against 'rogue' state's nuclear weapons, particularly Iran (Kramer 2016). Yet despite these verbal assurances, Moscow can't be certain of the West's 'true' intentions. What's important for the Kremlin is not the trustworthiness of the West, but rather the actual capability of the missile defense system. Regardless of the intentions, the missile system is a potential threat to Russia's security because of its ability to limit Russia's own nuclear deterrence and in worst case neutralize it. Consequently, the deployment of such systems would change the balance of power into the West's favor, thus disrupting the balance of forces between nuclear powers.

The realist argumentation that great powers are sensitive to threat near their home territory might be reasonable. This does especially apply to the potential deployment of NATO missile defense system close to Russia's border. Following this logic, the US wouldn't tolerate if Russia had deployed their forces in Canada or Mexico either. The Western argument that the missile defense system is intended to defend against Iran's nuclear weapons is not convincing since the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN's

Security Council prevented Iran building nuclear weapons. Since its implementation, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear watchdog, has continuously monitored Iran's declared nuclear sites and has several times verified Iran's commitment to the JCPOA (BBC 2018). As a result, Russia expected the West to review its missile defense plans, as the Iranian nuclear threat has been resolved, thus ending the need for such military installations in Europe. Yet the West continued to pursue plans to deploy such military installations close to Russia's border. According to research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies Dr. Azriel Bermant, the Russian reaction toward NATO's missile defense system is not unreasonable, as the system is intended to defend against nuclear threats, which makes it irrational to invest vast amount of resources and political capital to defend Europe from a threat that doesn't exist – unless if its intended to intercept Russia's nuclear capabilities (INSS 2015).

In this light, Russia's intervention in Georgia and Ukraine can be regarded as a defensive realist attempt to bring balance to the distribution of power. In addition, both countries are part of Russia's concept of national interests, which make them an important value for the Kremlin. Crimea is of considerable importance for Russia, as Sevastopol has a port that gives the Russian fleet direct access to the Black Sea, which allows the country to maintain its presence in Eurasia. Moscow's growing insecurity about democratic revolutions and NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe and the deployment of missile defense system has consequently played an important in influencing Russia aggressive behavior towards its neighbors. Fearing to lose Georgia and Ukraine and all the strategic benefits, the Kremlin decided to invade both countries, in order to preserve the country's power and influence in the region.

The geo-economic dimension of Russia's struggle with the West

The US has in many years regarded energy exports through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines, as an important source of import of energy to Europe. Although profiting from energy contracts, Washington's interests in the Caspian Sea energy business have been primarily been driven by weakening Moscow's monopolization of the energy sector in the Caspian Sea (Nuriyev 2007, 243). In the lens of defensive realism, such monopolization has two dependent consequences. Firstly, by achieving a monopoly over the energy sector, Moscow would have the ability to manipulate energy prices as OPEC. Secondly, having gained control of the energy sector, Moscow would be able to translate its material gains into political dominance in the region, as Russia would control both the BTC and the BTE. Unlike the US, the EU has an interest in import

of Caspian energy for domestic consumption, and even in trade. For the EU, import of Caspian energy provides an opportunity to diversify import routes in order to avoid being dependent on a single distributor. By 2006, 33% of the EU's oil and 40% of its gas imports came from Russia (Sadri and Burns 2010, 129). In this sense, the BTC and BTE pipelines are important for Europe's energy security, as they provide an alternative source to Russian energy imports. In sum, the diversification of energy source is a strategic objective for the EU.

Like the US, Russia doesn't need Caspian energy for domestic consumption, as the country possesses the world's largest gas reserves the world's eighth largest oil reserves (Sadri and Burns 2010, 134). Data from 2007 conclude that Russia's produced roughly 9.87 million barrels per day (mbd), and at times even surpassed Saudi Arabia's production (Sadri and Burns 2010, 135). Other statistics show that Russia's domestic consumption amounts to 2.85 mbd, which allowed the country to export ca. 7 mbd in 2007 (Sadri and Burns 2010, 135). With regard to the country's gas production, Russia consumed 16.6 trillion cubic feet tcf of the 23.17 tcf that it produced in 2006 (Sadri and Burns 2010, 135). However, Caspian and Central Asian energy constitute a strategic importance for the Kremlin, as it enables the country to expand its economic leverage in the energy market. This is especially due country's aging oil fields, which have slowed production (Rumer 2002, 56). Developing additional reserves will take significant time and economic and technological investments. Therefore, in order to maintain its dominant position in the energy market, Russia requires around 3.531 bcf of Central Asian gas per year, for some years (Sadri and Burns 2010, 135). If Russia's succeed in securing its share of Central Asian energy, it could achieve economic gains from transit fees, sustain its energy export to Europe, and supply China's growing demand for energy. As a result, Russia would lose economically, thus politically, if foreign states and companies get a foothold in the region.

One important term that is repeatedly mentioned in the addresses is 'Interests' (11) and 'Economic' (11). The significance for Russia to preserve its interests in maintaining dominance in the energy sector wasn't explicitly articulated in Medvedev's address from 2008. Yet Medvedev stressed that Russia's intervention in Georgia proved to the those "who sponsored the current regime in Georgia", that Moscow was "able to effectively defend our national interests" (Appendix 1, 591-593). The president further added that the Kremlin should work for "renewing our activities in external economic policy (and) [...] protect our economic interests while attracting external resources" (Appendix 1, 701-704). Nevertheless, defensive realism argues that economic interests should be taken into consideration when analyzing a certain state's foreign policy because it constitutes the material basis for the preservation and projection of state power.

The main threat to Russia's energy dominance comes from the Caucasus. The Western energy passage through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey gives the West the opportunity to end Russia's iron grip on Caspian and Central Asian energy (Ismail 2009). While the BTC and the BTE allow Caspian energy to flow westward, the corridor might be expanded by trans-Caspian pipelines to tap Central Asia's large deposits (Ismail 2009). Even though that such energy route would be a feat of both engineering and politics, the possibility of such scenario would constitute a serious geo-economic threat to Russia.

The EU and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union

In continuation of Moscow's strategy to expand Russia's influence in the former Soviet space, Russia initiated negotiations on the creation of a 'Eurasian Economic Union'. In May 2014, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus signed the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty. The EEU entered into force by January 2015, adding Armenia and Kyrgyzstan as members (ICG 2016, 3).

Like the EU, the purpose of this union was to promote closer economic integration and freedom of movement for labor and capital (ICG 2016, 3). Moscow stressed that there were no geopolitical motivations behind such union. Yet the EEU's governing requirements were much less modernized, where much more similar to those of the Soviet-era technical standards (GOST) and went beyond those of the EU (ICG 2016, 3). Ukraine's entrance into the AA would have much more potential in making economic reforms, promoting sustainable governance, and cracking down on corruption. On the other hand, membership in the EEU would likely have little impact on the abovementioned, thus posing little threat to existing political and business elites.

Despite the emphasis on the economic aspects, the organizations demonstrated clear realist geo-economic aspirations during the Ukrainian Crisis. This is mostly reflected in Russia's objection to Ukraine signing the AA with the EU. In realist terms, Russia's opposition towards the AA is reasonable, as the AA would facilitate Ukraine's access to the EU's internal market that would make the deal incompatible with another arrangement. In sum, the AA with Ukraine would mean that the country couldn't join the Russian-led EEU. This was also stressed by the former president of the EU Commission, who underlined that Ukraine couldn't be a member of the EU's Free Trade Area (FTA) while at the same time being a member of the EEU (Kyiv Post 2013).

The continuous repetition of the term's like 'Russia', 'Ukraine', 'Economic' should, for this reason, be analyzed in context with of the dispute between the EU and the Russian led-EEU. For example, Putin argues that "in the case of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, there was no dialogue at

all”, and the EU showed little respect for Russia’s national interests, as “Russia and Ukraine are members of the CIS free-trade zone [...] (And have) deep-rooted cooperation in industry and agriculture, and basically share the same infrastructure” (Appendix 3, 59-61).

Consequently, Russia perceived the AA as threatening to the country’s own geo-economic interests. As the Russian-led union was born in the midst of rising regional instability inside Ukraine, some analyst argued that the opposing interests of the EU and the EEU would further undermine relations between Russia and the West (ICG 2016, 5). It could therefore be argued that the rationale behind Russia’s intervention in Ukraine is reflected in its fear of losing power by binding Ukraine to the EU.

In sum, one could regard the EEU as a mechanism for Moscow to gain more power in the region. In this sense, the support for separatist forces and the annexation of Crimea can be regarded as an attempt to destabilize Ukraine and make it as costly as possible for Kiev to continue pursuing policies against Russia’s interest. As a result, it could be argued that Russia’s desire to admit Ukraine into the EEU and its willing annex foreign territory demonstrate Moscow’s ambition to preserve its power in the region of the former Soviet Union against increasingly ‘expansionist’ Western-led institutions.

The argumentation that Moscow’s intervened in Ukraine because it perceived EU’s policies in Ukraine as a threat to the balance of power in the region, is not convincing from certain aspects. Firstly, since Russia’s and Ukraine’s independence from the Soviet Union, the EU has shown equal support of Kiev and Moscow through the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994 (PCA). Through the PCA, Russia (like Ukraine) was offered trade and investment promotion, sustainable development, and support for the transition to market economics, etc.

In 2004 the EU proposed a deal with Russia that was similar to the so-called European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Similarly, to the AA, the aim of such agreement was to give other countries a ‘stake’ in the EU’s internal market, thus improved access. By signing such agreement, Russia would gradually become institutionally so close to the EU that it approaches Norway’s status, which is a full member of the Internal Market and its regulation (Zank 2016, 72). Yet whereas Ukraine was receptive to such deals with the EU, Russia was not. For these reasons, it cannot be argued from a defensive realist perspective that the EU wanted to weaken Russia by forging closer relations with Ukraine through the AA. In this sense, it can be argued that it was the Kremlin’s own isolationist policies that resulted in Russia’s ‘containment’.

Nevertheless, it could still be argued from a defensive realist perspective, that the AA constituted a threat to Russia’s own power in the region, as it serves as an instrument to drag Ukraine away from

the EEU, thus making Ukraine an area out of Moscow's sphere of influence. Consequently, the AA would increase the power of the EEU's competitor – the EU, thus upsetting the balance of power in Europe. According to Zank, the Kremlin perceived the EU's engagement with Ukraine as a continuation or extension of NATO's policies in Eastern Europe, with the exception that the EU acted by non-military measures (Zank 2016, 65). Consequently, the AA was launched by the EU with no regard for Russia's own interests by challenging the EEU's integration plan with Ukraine.

The West in the 'eyes' of Moscow: Different perception of Europe and the US

One of the important and consistent themes of the presented addresses is Russia's relationship with the 'US' (12). In Medvedev's address from 2008 (Appendix 1), relations with the US is mostly mentioned when referring to the importance of developing relations on equal and mutual interests, where he emphasized the importance of reforming "the political and economic systems" and cooperate with other actors like "the United States, the European Union, the BRIC countries and all parties with an interest in reform" (Appendix 1, 44-46). In line with defensive realist thinking, Medvedev's statements could be regarded as a 'soft' way of implying that Russia seeks to balance the distribution of power among great powers. As tensions escalated, rhetoric did too. Six years later, the president of Russia was more explicit in this criticism of the US, stating that:

“(Russia's) western partners, led by the *United States of America*, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle “If you are not with us, you are against us” (Appendix 2, 179-183)

With regard to the Western imposed sanctions against Russia, Putin argued that “the sanctions, they are not just a knee-jerk reaction on behalf of the United States or its allies” against Russia's independent position international politics, adding that the Ukrainian crisis was just an excuse for the US and their allies to contain his country, thus if the conflict in Ukraine didn't happen, the US would “have come up with some other excuse to try to contain Russia's growing capabilities, affect our country in some way, or even take advantage of it” (Appendix 3, 99-103). These articulations of the US, portrays Washington as the main driver behind the Western 'anti-Russian' policies, thus applying little importance to the role of European countries. Putin even accused the European states of being

merely America's "patrons and sponsors", arguing that it was confusing for the Kremlin whether to talk to the US or their 'vassals' in Europe (Appendix 3, 55-58).

According to Tsygankov, the Kremlin has since the Putin arrival prioritized its relations with Europe over relations with the US (Tsygankov 2006, 134). Whereas the relations between Moscow and Washington is merely portrayed in the realms of power balancing politics, the relations with Europe stretched beyond geopolitical struggle. For example, relations with Germany (a major power of the EU) is highly important for Russia, as the country is a significant market for Russia's energy export. Similarly, Russia is also an important for Germany, as the Russian market is important for Germany's own export and direct investment (Krickovic 2015, 7). In contrast to the US and other EU' member states (particularly Eastern European countries), Germany has shown little interest in diversifying Russia's energy imports, where Berlin has shown support for the North and South Stream pipelines (Krickovic 2015, 7). This development of cooperation between Germany and Russia has sparked outrage in Eastern European countries, who is highly dependent on Russian energy import. Defense Minister of Poland, Radek Skorsky called the North Stream the "new Stalin-Rippentrop Pact", accusing Germany and Russia of trying to occupy Poland and other Eastern European countries (The New York Times 2009). Over 50% of Russian foreign trades with the EU, and Russia is the EU's third largest trading partner. The EU is also Russia's primary source of foreign direct investment (FDI), with up to 75% of the Russian FDI coming from the EU (Permanent Mission of the RF to the EU 2018).

In 2017, the US Congress passed a legislation about further sanctions on Russia for its alleged interference in the 2016 US presidential election. The legislation would penalize companies, that contribute to Russian energy development (BBC 2017). Such sanctions would affect European companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany. This move has raised concern among German businesses and EU officials, which led to a diplomatic standoff between the EU and the US. The EU commission president Jean-Claude Juncker stated that "America first cannot mean that Europe's interest comes last", where he criticized Washington for not taken European interests into concern when implementing policies (BBC 2017). Juncker further added that the US must consult its allies before making any legislation that might affect Europe. In a joint statement, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern stated that Europe's energy supply is a matter for European security (BBCa 2017). The two officials said that "to threaten companies in Germany, Austria and other European firms with US fines in the US if they

take part in or finance energy projects like Nord Stream 2 represents a new and negative dimension to the US-European relations” (BBCa 2017).

One of the weaknesses and limitations of defensive realism is that the theory pays little attention to how economic ties between states can create a relationship of economic inter-dependency, which can have a deescalating effect on conflicts between states, as the material benefits for cooperation outweigh the benefits of great power assertiveness. Russia’s economic cooperation with Europe’s strongest economic power – Germany, is of vital strategic importance, as these economic ties constitute the material basis for the preservation of the Kremlin’s power in the region. As a result, Moscow can’t afford a wider diplomatic confrontation with the Europe, which makes Medvedev and Putin keener to explicitly point the blame at the US for the Georgian and Ukrainian Conflicts. Yet, on the other hand, it’s unclear how Putin’s accusation of European states of being vassals can be regarded as a strategic or cautious move that won’t worsen relations with the EU. Mearsheimer argues that ‘harsh’ sanctions are not in the interests of the EU or Russia, as this would cause damage for both parties. He argues that Germany has especially resisted escalation with Russia over such fears (Mearsheimer 2014). Additionally, senior fellow Judy Dempsey argues that Putin the distinction of the US and Europe, and his ‘blame-game’ against Washington, serves to divide the West, as Russia is too weak to face a united front (Carnegie 2015).

Partial conclusion of defensive realist analysis

In the Georgian and Ukrainian case, the Russian intervention boils down to a struggle for the preservation of Russia’s influence in the in the former Soviet Union. For Moscow, the maintenance of Russian energy dominance in the Caucasus was a strategic importance because the monopolization of the energy sector could translate into economic and political leverage when dealing with other states. Georgia’s Western orientation was perceived as a threat to Russia’s energy security, as the US and the EU sought to lessen Europe’s dependency of Russian energy flow by diversifying the fossil fuels import through the BTC and BTE pipelines that go through the Caspian basin.

With regard to the expansion of NATO into Georgia (and possibly) Ukraine, the Kremlin has been consistent in its criticism that the West’s expansionist policies would cause disorder in the strategic balance in Europe. In this sense, it could be argued that Russia’s intervention against its two neighbors was an attempt to reset the balance again. Despite that these military interventions have successfully stalled NATO integration plans with Georgia and Ukraine, Russia is still too weak to engage in a wider power struggle against a far superior West. To combat what Russia’s perceives as the creation

of a 'Western' or US-led unipolar world order, the Kremlin has deepened its relations with another critic of 'unilateralism' – China.

The issue of NATO's deployment of missile defense system in Europe played a prominent role in shaping Russia's policies against the largely pro-Western governments of Tbilisi and Kiev. The dispute of the military installation was largely rooted in mistrust and uncertainty about the West 'true' intentions with such deployments. The verbal assurances of the West that the missile defense system was intended to protect against nuclear Iran was unconvincing for Moscow, as the JCPOA agreement ended Iran's potential to build nuclear weapons. As a result, the Kremlin expected that the West would cancel the deployment of such weaponry close to Russia's border. However, deployments plans were still proceeding despite the original incentives were no longer valid. Consequently, the Kremlin perceived that such installations were a threat to Russia's own national security.

The importance of the geo-economics in the Ukrainian crisis is equally important to the military dimension. This was well reflected in Moscow's strong opposition to the AA between the EU and Ukraine. It's true that the AA agreement was an obstacle to Russia's own aspirations for having Ukraine to join the EEU, as the AA was not incompatible with the EEU. For this reason, the Kremlin perceived AA as a mechanism for the EU to drag Ukraine away from Russia and consequently contain the country. As a result, it can be argued that Russia perceived the EU engagement with Ukraine as a geo-economic extension of NATO, whereas the former acted through 'soft power', and the latter through military means.

Nevertheless, the defensive realist rationale could still be challenged with regard to the dispute between Russia and the EU. The argumentation that the EU engaged with Ukraine in order to weaken and contain Russia is not too convincing, as the EU has since the dissolve of the Soviet Union showed equal support for both Moscow and Kiev through the signing of PCA and deals similar to the ENP. Yet it was Russia that choose to distance itself from further cooperation with the EU, as Putin feared that integrationist policies with the West would lead to the undesired promotion of liberal values in Russia, thus challenging his authoritarian leadership.

Despite the above, both Medvedev and Putin were keener to underplay Europe's role in the deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, where the US was often portrayed as the 'mastermind' behind the trouble. It could be argued that the economic cooperation with Europe was too important for Russia's own economic security, thus making it undesirable for the president to escalate their rhetoric against the West as a 'whole', which risks to further isolate the country.

Social constructivist approach

When analyzing the Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine in the lens of constructivism, it's important to discuss the role of history and identity in determining Moscow's foreign policy decisions. As Wendt state, "the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material" (Wendt 1995, 71-81), and these structures are shaping Russia's identity and interests. By underlining the social aspect of the international system, constructivism is emphasizing the identity of state to understand why Russia invaded Georgia and annexed Crimea.

The notion of identity and culture plays an equally significant role in shaping Russia's relations with the West. In a condition of identity building, such as exists in and between the parties, the formation of inter-subjective meaning may not only be problematic but also transformative. By going back to the historical development of the relationship between NATO and Russia, dominant traces of constructivist elements could be marked in shaping the roadmap of the subsequent disputes over Georgia and Ukraine between the two parties. According to Tsygankov, the culmination of the events of interaction between early pre-Soviet Russia was key in shaping the identity and perception of NATO in the eyes of Moscow. Going back to the historical review, the NATO bombing of the Bosnian Serbs in 1994, and the continued expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe happened all despite Russian opposition. It's important to take into consideration that the liberal Yeltsin government wanted Russia to be integrated with the West on the basis of equal partnership and mutual 'respect'. Yet the West's policies in Eastern Europe made many Russian officials feel that their concerns were being ignored and their country belittled (Tsygankov 2012, 171). Furthermore, because Russia was in economic and political chaos at that time, influential officials like Primakov perceived that the West was taking advantage of Russia's weakness pursuing policies which the Kremlin was opposed to. Tsygankov argues that these developments made Moscow feel that its identity as a great power and *derzhava* were being threatened and even humiliated (Tsygankov 2012, 175). The negative historical interactions continued to shape a realist confrontational relationship between Russia and the West that lead to disputes over NATO's missile defense system in Europe, and its engagement with Georgia and Ukraine. From a constructivist perspective, the unfriendly relations between the two parties is directly caused by the historical and cultural developments that took place during the Cold War, and through NATO's continuous military interventions in the pre-Soviet era, which Moscow was largely opposed to. The result of these negative experiences has consequently made both sides regard each other as rivals and potential enemies, thus constructing NATO a threat to Russia's identity – *derzhava*.

The construction of relations and interests

The difference in governance structures between the Western democracies and Russia provides a weak basis for inter-subjectively common rules for governing the relationship itself. As a result, unclear or contradictory governance structures can result in an escalation of problems for communication and problem-solving. With regard to the EU, the Copenhagen Criteria that includes human rights, democratic governance, rule of law, and minority protect, is the core value for relations with the former Soviet countries (DeBardeleben 2012, 427). To be a member of the EU, a state must fulfill such criteria, but they have also been applied when dealing with Russia as well. These values are concretely embodied in customs of state behavior that the EU has sought to encompass to Russia and other actors, among other things, its policy of conditionality that is, demanding fulfillment of such criteria in exchange for concessions, cooperation or aid (DeBardeleben 2012, 428).

From a realist point of view, definitions of national interest may seem objective and easily defined. On the other hand, national interest from a constructivist view is formed by identity and normative frames, which often have value foundations. The Russian president(s) emphasize on defending national interests in the Georgian and Ukrainian crisis are strongly influenced by certain value-based assumption relating to the meaning of state sovereignty and spheres of interests. The construct of the Kremlin's concept of national interests affects foreign policy positions and relations with the EU in return. The lack of shared interests and understanding between Russia and the EU is therefore resulting in disputes over Georgia and Ukraine. According to Zank, the difference between the EU's and Russia's political cultures and identities is key when explaining the reason for their disputes. He elaborates that Russia's political system has a top-down hieratical structure and that the country's type of governance is more authoritarian than those of the Western countries (Zank 2016, 73). From a constructivist view, one could argue that the authoritarian identity of the Kremlin reflects its realist worldview and policies in Georgia and Ukraine, which makes the country keener to act on behalf of its self-interested desires rather than recognizing its neighbor's freedom to choose their own policies.

According to DeBardeleben, Russia prefers to deal with European states bilaterally, as the EU's rules of interaction are harder to decode (2012, 428). She argues that this not only rooted in a realist "divide and conquer strategy in relation with the EU" (DeBardeleben 2012, 428), but also because that the rules of interaction applied by individual states are more comprehensible and comfortable for the Kremlin than interaction with the EU. This is mainly caused by the understanding that EU member states have a tendency to act in ways that converge with a realist view of international politics, thus

mirroring Russia's own identity and worldview (Debardeleben 2012, 428). In sum, the key reason to the disputes between Russia and EU are rooted in their inability to construct a shared interest in the relationship, as Russia's normative preferences with regard to Georgia and Ukraine are often articulated in realist terms, whereas the EU's is articulated in liberal norms.

This problem is well illustrated in the diplomatic dispute between the West and Russia. As illustrated in the former chapter, the Kremlin's justification over its intervention in Georgia and Ukraine is repeatedly being articulated through realist sentiments, where Russia focuses on geopolitical and economic concerns over its neighbor's orientation towards the West. On the other hand, the Western criticism over Russia is primarily focused on condemnation of Moscow's breach of Georgia's and Ukraine's sovereignty, and the lack of respect for the democratic rights of other countries to choose their own independent policies (Zank 2016, 76, BBC 2008). The Kremlin's identity as a historical power balancer is important in explaining Russia's behavior in the former Soviet Union. In the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, the West perceive the two country's as independent states, that have the right to their own decision making. Any entity that seeks to breach this independence is perceived to be acting against the countries legitimate interests. Yet Russia views its policies as legitimate because the interventions balance the distributions of power in an anarchic system, thus preventing broader instability in the region.

Partial conclusion of social constructivism

The constructivist theory illustrates that the realist zero-sum game approach towards the West is rooted in the early interactions between Russia and the West in the pre-Soviet era. The NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and the bombing of Yugoslavia in the face of Russian opposition made the Kremlin feel that it the West was taking advantage of Russia domestic problems. Consequently, the characteristics of the Russia-West relationship began to be dominated by mistrust and rivalry, thus shaping national interests in realist terms that lead to the Georgian and Ukrainian intervention.

The difference of government structures between organizations like the EU and Russia is also key in shaping Russia-West relations. The EU's liberal worldview is incompatible with the realist view of Russia, thus leading to the contradictory perception of national interests. The two parties' inability to comprehend each other's concept of interests leads therefor to contradictory policies in their common neighborhood, thus resulting in a confrontation in countries like Georgia and Ukraine.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of the study are summarized to answer the research question. In addition, the applicability of the theories used in the analysis is evaluated.

This study has demonstrated that Pre-Soviet Russia's historic relations with the West have been very dynamic, changing from liberal integrationist visions with the West towards pragmatic great power politics. The constructivist analysis of the historical interactions between Russia and the West demonstrated that NATO's expansion in the former Soviet Union and the bombing of Yugoslavia was significant when explaining changes in Moscow's foreign policy. At a time of domestic hardship, the Kremlin felt that the West was taking advantage of Russia's weakness to pursue expansionist policies. These developments strengthened statist statemen like Primakov and Putin, which perceived national interests in the lens of realism. Consequently, the Kremlin observed the subsequent policies of the West in Europe with suspicion and mistrust.

The final conclusion of the research questions:

Why did Russia's foreign policy towards the West develop as it did during the Georgian War (2008) and Ukrainian Conflict (2014)?

The constructivist approach explains that the Kremlin's realist worldview derives from its own authoritarian political identity and negative experience of interaction with the West. The historic experiences nurtured a relationship of rivalry, where the concept of national interests were defined in cynical great power politics and spheres of influence.

Such worldview meant that Russia had achieved its security through power balancing against the West. In this course, the Kremlin capitalized on domestic disputes in Georgia and Ukraine, thus destabilizing states that sought closer relations with the West at the expense of Russia's own geo-economic and political interests. The outcome of the realist thinking is that relations between Russia and the West's worsened and escalated during the Georgian and Ukrainian Conflict because the anarchic system of realism leaves little room for solving disputes through peaceful diplomacy and cooperation.

The outcome of the realist analysis reveals that the Kremlin intervened in Georgia and Ukraine because it perceived their Western-orientated policies as undermining for Russia's own national interests. With regard to Georgia, Moscow has a great interest in preserving dominance over the vast

energy resources of the Caucasus, which potentially could be broken through Georgia's integration into Western institutions. Consequently, Russia would not be able to use energy resources as political leverage if the West succeeds in diversifying their energy imports through Caspian energy. Furthermore, Tbilisi's admission into NATO would exacerbate Moscow's sense of military vulnerability towards the West, as the country could be surrounded by a rival force along its border.

The same realist logic could be applied to the Ukrainian intervention, where the significance of geo-economical and political concerns is clearly demonstrated. This is reflected in Putin's strong opposition towards the AA with Ukraine, which essentially meant that their neighbor wouldn't be able to join the EUU. This enhanced the logic of 'siege' mentality, where the Kremlin perceived its national interests was belittled, thus making the country keener to use military force in order to prevent developments that were opposed the country's national interests. Fearing that the West's growing influence would weaken Russia's own power, thus disrupting the balance of power, Moscow acted aggressively in accordance with its traditional role as a *derzhava*. In this sense, the overall objective was to preserve Russia's power in the international system by counterbalancing the West.

Nevertheless, the theory of defensive realism faces serious limitations when explaining the geo-economical dispute between the EU and Russia over Ukraine. The realist logic that the EU's policies were a threat to the balance of power is inadequate to explain Russia's intervention, as the EU has generally shown equal support to both Ukraine and Russia, through the signing of the PCA and the offering of a similar agreement to the ENP. In this respect, the approach of constructivism is more convincing, where the theory highlights the contradictory identities and political cultures of the EU and Russia when explaining the Kremlin's dismissive policies towards the EU. The claim here is that the contradictory governance structures of the EU and Russia lead to an inability to construct common rules for governing the relationship. Consequently, the lack of inter-subjective understanding results in an escalation of disputes. For the EU, the national interests are often articulated in liberal terms, whereas Russia perceives national interests in the lens of realism. As a result, the EU's contradictory political identity makes it hard for Russia to decode and comprehend Europe's engagement with Ukraine. Another important limitation of defensive realism is that the theory pays little regard to the 'causes of peace'. The theory provides great explanatory power to explain geopolitical and economic disputes but faces serious limitation to analyze how economic cooperation and inter-dependency can make states refrain from escalating conflicts between them. This is demonstrated in Russia's relations with Germany, where the two countries share mutual interests from economic cooperation in the energy sector and more. Consequently, Medvedev and Putin have been keener to blame the US's for

the deteriorating relations with the West, thus downplaying the European countries role. This illustrates that Russia-West relations are much more complex and dynamic than defensive realism suggests, where the realist interpretation is 'only' one dimension of many when analyzing international relations.

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