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## **Russian National Interests Formation**

MA thesis

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This thesis conforms to the requirements for a Master's thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This master's thesis aims to unpack the discourses on Russian national interest (RNI) formation. Referring to the timeframe from 2012 to 2017, this thesis tries to answer questions regarding the construction of Russian national interests and seeks to understand how the annexation of Crimea changed discourses on national interest formation. As a territory represents one of the most important constitutive parts of each state, when a government decides to change the borders, it goes through the process of legitimisation for the particular move. This legitimisation is usually done through the reference to national interests therefore additional focus of the research is on the discursive coherence behind RNI. Rejecting the realist assumptions on national interests, and by combining a constructivist approach in foreign policy analysis and poststructuralist methods of discourse analysis, this thesis seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the RNI during Putin's third term. The main analysis refers to the official speeches and interviews of the Russian President, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. This thesis finds that several changes have occurred. Firstly, Russia has changed discourses on national sovereignty. Secondly, Russian world doctrine in its expansionist form has played an important role in national interests redefinition. Thirdly, discursive portrayal of Russia as a great power after the annexation of Crimea went into status maintainer direction. Finally, the annexation of Crimea has accelerated Russian devotion to Eastern dimension of foreign policy. Russia has moved into uncertain direction both internationally and domestically with no clear idea of its nation which leaves the concept of national interests as vague and uncertain.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Research Puzzle</i> .....	2
<i>Research Structure</i> .....	3
LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK .....	5
<i>Reviewing research on Russian national interests</i> .....	5
Views on Russian national interests from a realist perspective.....	5
Views on Russian national interests from constructivist perspective.....	9
<i>Theory on identity and national interests</i> .....	14
Constructing identity.....	16
Constructing national interests.....	21
<i>Poststructuralist Methodological Approach</i> .....	24
Research Design.....	25
Data collection and data analysis .....	26
Limitations and potential problems.....	28
RUSSIA HAS REDEFINED NATIONAL INTERESTS.....	30
<i>Changing domestic circumstances</i> .....	31
Changed understanding of national sovereignty.....	32
The role of Russian world in national interests formation.....	36
Divided nation?.....	40
<i>Changing international circumstances</i> .....	43
Russian place in international system.....	44
Identity in the official discourse .....	47
Distancing from Europe (relational position) .....	51
Turn to East: Change of policies?.....	53
CONCLUSION.....	56
<i>How has the annexation of Crimea changed discourses on Russian national interests formation?</i> .....	56
REFERENCES .....	60

## INTRODUCTION

Recent events in Russian foreign policy, such as intervention in Ukraine, have sent dynamics of international relations down a track different from what would have occurred otherwise. The annexation of Crimea has become a significant event as it represented a step in undermining post-cold war system. Additionally this tested boundaries of Western non-interference and caused the feeling that the structure of East-West relations has permanently changed. Andrei Tsygankov in his book wrote that Winston Churchill once famously observed that the key to understanding Russia's enigma is its national interest. However, Churchill failed to explain what that interest was. Therefore I agree with Tsygankov when he states that it is our scholarly task to uncover what Russians themselves understand to be their foreign policy interests and objectives (Tsygankov 2010). Unfortunately, to identify Russian national interests clearly is not an easy task due to differing perspectives within the Russian governing structures and Kremlin's tendency to focus on immediate tactical issues at the expense of strategic thinking (Allison et al. 2011). According to Mankoff, the debate about what constitutes Russia's national interest remains vigorous despite the greater political centralization of the Putin years (Mankoff 2009).

For the international community, it almost appeared as a shock, when Russia decided to interfere in Ukraine in order to achieve its national goals (Becker et al. 2016). The decision to annex Crimea was unexpected and we are still agnostic if Russian leadership had a well-organized plan or just decided to improvise and to use the window of opportunity. However, there was nothing obvious that should have triggered this particular decision on Putin's part, and no one had, at least publicly, predicted this in advance (Marten 2015). Only after interference could we hear that this was self-evidently a matter of national interest of the Russian Federation.

Furthermore in his Crimea speech Putin said that those who did not foresee the situation in Ukraine lacked political instinct and common sense because Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from (Putin 2014a).

### ***Research Puzzle***

Scholars have tried to understand Russian national interest from different perspectives, but none of them is entirely satisfactory. It has been difficult for academics to reach a definitive answer regarding what Russian national interests are. Probably one of the main reasons behind this problem is the very nature of the concept. Aside from this issue, there is a scarcity of research on the discursive structure of Russian interests which may offer us a better understanding.

Wendt observed that it is striking how little empirical research has been done investigating what kind of interests state actors actually have (Wendt 1999, p.133). Even though the vast amount of literature on national interests from different international relations (IR) perspectives is written I argue that if we want to understand complex forces around national interests formation we need to study discourses. Studying discourses can give us structured knowledge on changes and coherence. For this purpose I find approaches argued by Ole Waever and Lene Hansen useful. They claim that foreign policies are legitimized as necessary through the concept of national interest and through reference to identities. States do not have identities operating underneath discursive articulations and they will always be constructed through processes of differentiation and linking (Waever 2002, Hansen 2006). This approach focuses on the constitutive relationship between representations of identity, interests and foreign policies.

Instead of assuming that national interest is about power or modernization, as theories of realism and liberalism in international relations tend to do, this project maintains that we need to study what hides behind its formation. Therefore I argue that the national interest is still important to explanations of international politics, but it requires adequate theorization and methodological approach, quite simply because “the internal language on decisions on foreign policies is the language of national interest” (Weldes 2011, p.182).

When we are discussing what triggered the redefinition of Russian national interests and how this change was possible we should keep in mind both the academic and political fluidity of the concept. For example, for Putin national interest is what is good for Russians and for the Russian people (Putin 2016d). Furthermore he claims that national interests should be pursued peacefully based on the rules of international law. However, he also argues that even though it is not in Russia's interest to be in confrontation with other countries, when Russia is forced to protect its interests, Russia will undoubtedly defend them (Putin 2017b). Therefore this kind of understanding of national interests requires unpacking.

Additionally, definitions of national interests can be very dissimilar. For example, in 2008 Putin claimed that Crimea is not a disputed territory (Putin 2008) but six years later the Crimean peninsula was annexed. Therefore in 2014 Russia had found itself in a position to choose between different visions of national interests. One option was to comply with the existing borders and regulations, another option was to revise and challenge them, the third possible option could have been to respect international borders politically, but to try to penetrate them in terms of cultural diplomacy. Russia chose the second option followed by revisionist policies conditioned by the drastically changed understanding what is in the best interests of Russia. How this change happened and how it was articulated, and how coherent are discourses on national interests represented, will be the focus of my research.

### ***Research Structure***

Built around a research question *How has the annexation of Crimea changed discourses on Russian national interests formation*, with a sub question *How coherent are discourses on national interests represented by Russian officials*, this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of the national interest formation in Russia's foreign policy. The timeframe under analysis is short, from 2012 - 2017 and covers President's Putin third term. However, as the annexation of Crimea occurred in 2014, it represents a middle point which is an important moment for analysing changes. The research adopts the view that national interests are discursively constructed in documents produced by officials, and that language is an integral part of national interest itself. I argue that the language employed in foreign policy documents,

military doctrines, defence strategies, and in interviews and speeches of the President, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs thoroughly intervene with the language of national interest.

The goal of this thesis is to unpack the meanings and discuss the discourses on Russian national interests. I will specifically analyse the discourses around certain principles like respect for sovereignty and non-interference in other states' internal affairs as they were constantly repeated in numerous governmental statements and speeches. It is important to analyse if Russian understanding of these principles have changed as after the interference in Ukraine, countries in the near abroad and countries with a large Russian speaking minority feel threatened. I will also analyse discourses on values and their importance for Russian national interests formation through the concept of the Russian world. Furthermore, I find important to include discourses on how Russia perceives its place in the international system, and finally I will discuss how Russian interests have changed in terms of identity through the notions "Distancing from Europe" and "Turn to Asia".

The thesis is structured as follows. I firstly discuss existing literature on the topic with a focus on realist and constructivist approaches towards Russian national interests. Then I continue with a theoretical framework and will discuss concepts of identity and national interest from a constructivist position. After, I will discuss methodological framework built on post-structuralist discourse analysis. The decision to discuss theory and methodology in the same chapter is based on epistemological and ontological closeness of constructivism as a theory and post-structuralism as a method. The final component is the analytical chapter focused on two sections: interests and identities that stem from domestic circumstances and interests and identities that stem from international circumstances. Based on empirical research I identified major themes within which discourses on national interests are discussed and analysed them comparatively before and after the events in 2014, but all in the timeline of Putin's third term (2012-2017). In the end I will discuss my conclusions.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Reviewing research on Russian national interests***

The literature review component of my dissertation aims to show how Russian national interest has been interpreted in different ways depending on different perspectives. An extensive amount of scholarly work on Russian national interests and foreign policy has been delivered (Clunan 2009; Hopf 2016; Tsygankov 2010; Sakwa 2016; Mankoff 2009; Laenen 2012). However, the two most common approaches to national interests are from the realist and constructivist perspectives. Therefore I will provide a brief overview from realism and constructivism in Russian foreign policy in order to be able to explain what is missing from these accounts and why we need more discursive constructivist approach to unpack and study the discourses behind national interest formation in Russian foreign policy.

### **Views on Russian national interests from a realist perspective**

Some scholars note that in the field of post-Soviet studies and Russian foreign policy, national interests are most commonly studied in their justification function. That means that national interests are used instrumentally to provide legitimisation and explanation of policy decisions. This usage of national interests follows realist logic according to which the main purpose of national interests is seen primarily rhetorically, used by governing structures in order to provide justification for certain decisions and to mobilise support for them (Laenen 2012). Or

like one of the most influential scholars of realism in international relations Hans Morgenthau wrote “There can be no successful foreign policy which cannot be justified by the national interest” (Morgenthau 1949, p.210).

The realist school of thought sees the national interest in terms of some basic assumptions about human nature, the nature of international relations and the motivations of states. For example, the main goal for each statesman is to achieve national interests which are usually defined in terms of power, as well as strategic and economic capability. For realists, national interest is given, unchangeable and represents a driving force of foreign policy. They use famous analogy with states as billiard balls, meaning that it is not important what is happening in domestic affairs and therefore neglect many important questions. The main idea is that anarchy makes security the leading foreign policy concern of states. Security, in turn, requires the acquisition and rational management of power and only policies conducted in this spirit can serve the national interest (Griffiths & O’Callaghan 2002). Anarchy does not allow states to develop honourable and friendly relations and therefore in international politics we are never certain about other's intentions.

Morgenthau claimed that power is the immediate aim of international politics. Whenever ruling elite tries to realise their interests by the means of international politics they do so by striving for power (Morgenthau 1948). To sum up, for realists international politics, is the struggle for power which follows Clausewitz's famous aphorism that war is nothing but the continuation of political relations by other means. Spheres of influence and great power management are the most important notions in realist interpretation of foreign policy. As Makarychev argues these are reflected in the Kremlin’s eagerness to be recognized in the West as a legitimate hegemon in the region (Makarychev 2014).

That great powers fear each other is an important characteristic of the international system and according to realists fear still shapes relations between Russia and the West. That is why some scholars argue that the international system’s incentives have the biggest influence on national interest formation during Putin’s third term. For example, in his article Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault, Mearshimer claimed that the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. Crimean operation is just a response to the threats that came from international structure. By this logic, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s

(NATO) enlargement and European Union's (EU) eastwards expansion could not be tolerated by Russia. Furthermore Mearsheimer claims that events in 2014 should not have come as a surprise:

“After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of international politics. They tend to believe that the logic of realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and free on the basis of such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependence, and democracy” (Mearsheimer 2014, p.77).

However, this explanation has few shortcomings. First, there is the question of why Russia did not interfere in Ukraine militarily for more than a decade, as NATO enlargement started in 1999. The argument that Russia was too weak until 2014 is disputable because Russia launched two wars in Chechnya and employed larger military might than during the annexation of Crimea. Another problem with the realist approach is that it fails to explain cooperation between Russia and the West, especially the period of so called reset of relations between Russia and United States during Medvedev's term as a president. Back then Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev agreed cooperation based on what they considered is in the national interest of their respective countries (McFaul & Sestanovich 2014).

According to Mankoff even though Russia had problems to define itself in terms of identity after the dissolution of Soviet Union, it was easier for the Russian elite to consolidate about Russia's international role as they were still led by Soviet perceptions. They inherited the view that Russia is a great power country with national interests that stretch around the world and with a right to be consulted on a wide variety of international issues (Mankoff 2009). According to Makarychev, Russian foreign policy has a realist background and sympathy for this approach was proven by the latest assertive policies first annexation of Crimea, and interference in eastern Ukraine (Makarychev 2014).

It is important to note that realist approaches will differently answer to the question how much power for a state is enough. Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz maintain that the goal of each state is simply to survive and maintain status-quo, and furthermore, that it is unwise to seek to maximize the share of world power (Waltz 1979). On the other hand, offensive realists like

John Mearsheimer take the opposite view. Following the offensive realist's logic states like Russia will act rationally to achieve military hegemony if conditions are right. Their goal is to dominate other states because domination can ensure survival and will lead to maximization of the share of world power. For Mearshimer power is the currency of great-power politics, and states compete for it among themselves. The ultimate aim of Russia would then be to become a hegemon. Hegemony means domination of the system, but not necessarily entire world, it is possible to apply the concept more narrowly on particular regions, such as Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Western Hemisphere or Eastern Europe (Mearsheimer 2001). In the great power thinking, once a country achieves an exalted position, it will become a status quo power (Mearsheimer 2001). The concept of status quo is important and implies a defensive concern with state stability. For example Sakwa concludes that Russian interests during Putin's third term are formulated to preserve the status quo: Russia under Putin is a profoundly conservative power and its actions are designed to maintain the status quo (Sakwa 2016, p.182).

Since Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its involvement in Eastern Ukraine, Putin's policies are increasingly described as imperial with the main interest to maximise power and to continue a Russian project to gradually recapture the former territories of the Soviet Union. For example, former US president, Barack Obama, said that Putin's policies express a deep grievance about what he concerns to be a loss of Soviet Union, without realising that he is going back to practices from the Cold War times (Obama 2014). German Chancellor Angela Merkel compared Russian aggression to nineteenth and twentieth century imperialism and warned against the return of Soviet style dominance over Eastern Europe (Teper 2016). It is widely argued that the Russian president has never accepted the loss of superpower image that the Soviet Union once had, which ended with the end of Cold War. It is hard to disagree with this because in one of his speeches Putin referred to the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an unfortunate event which left many "people overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders" (Putin 2014a). Furthermore once he described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century (Putin 2005). That is why Putin is determined to regain once lost prestige, in part by expanding the country's borders (Treisman 2016).

I find realism as a very useful theory which can explain the behaviour of a major power if we see the international system as anarchic based on self-help where power is the *ultima ratio*, rather than international norms or institutions. This theory works if international politics is a *zero sum* game meaning that each actor's gains or losses in international relations are equally balanced to the losses or gains of other actors. However it is difficult to argue *zero sum* game in the age of globalization because there are more opportunities for states to cooperate on different levels and different occasions. Therefore realism fails to provide explanation behind policy changes especially if it's not followed by improvement in material capabilities<sup>1</sup>.

To sum up, realist theories in international politics assume that Russian national interests are exogenously predetermined, are not changeable through social interaction and will be pursued strategically but they are silent on the substance of those interests (Clunan 2014). Therefore in order to unpack the substance of the interests, not only power should be taken into consideration. I argue that previous knowledge, cultural belief and different ideas play an important role and they can give more fertile ground to explain policy changes and complex forces behind national interests formation. Furthermore as Makarychev noted during his third term, Putin's administration preferred to emphasize identity rather than material interests. Discourses on protecting Russian speakers and the return of historical territories are the proof that Russia's discourses are more identity-driven than grounded in rationality and economic calculus (Makarychev 2014). That is why I find necessary to include more constructivist explanations into analysis.

### **Views on Russian national interests from constructivist perspective**

Scholars under the constructivist approach provide a different understanding of national interests depending on the different visions of Russian identity and the role of Russia in the world. They also propose divergent Russian foreign policy lines, based on different diagnoses of Russian interests and identity. Clunan for example argues that after the dissolution of Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Like at the times of the transition of power from Kozyrev to Yevgeny Primakov. The country's economic decline continued, and there was hardly a material basis for developing a more assertive foreign policy, but still Russia became more assertive (Tsygankov 2016).

Union, political elites could not agree on Russian purpose in the world, therefore they largely relied on history and defined national interest as maintaining international status. She claims that Russia is the case where aspirations derived from the past have become the driving force of national identity. Despite political stabilisation in Putin's era the pursuit of great power status remained the common denominator in political elite for definitions of Russia's national interests and identity. She further argued after the dissolution of Soviet Union Russia's identity and interests have been framed in relation to three groups: the great powers, the West, and the former Soviet republics (Clunan 2009)

Sakwa on the other hand argued that Russia with recent changes in foreign policy had to stop the United States in "defining red lines". Russian interests are not to establish a Greater Russia or revive the Soviet empire. According to Sakwa Russian motivation to interfere in Ukraine is to defend the idea of Greater Europe<sup>2</sup> and Russia's national interests (Sakwa 2016). However, as Makarychev argues, by interference in Ukraine Russia voluntarily gave up of the concept Wider Europe which could have been used to establish non-confrontational relationship with its neighbours (Makarychev 2014). I argue that interference in Ukraine largely discredited faith in Russian good intentions in near abroad. States in the region still perceive some Russian interests as selfish and hegemonic. For example, in order to balance against Russia's power, central Asian states increasingly seek to strengthen their ties with China. Even before the annexation of Crimea, Uzbekistan withdraw its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a signal of its dissatisfaction with Russia (Tsygankov 2016). Therefore, the Ukraine crisis was proof that Russia failed to translate its influence into stability in the Post-Soviet space, and I find it necessary to add discursive analysis on how Russia sees the near abroad through the notion of Russian world which will be discussed later.

Following Shin's argument scholars under the constructivist approach adopt different criteria for categorizing Russian foreign policy orientations:

"This categorization ranges from two orientations (Westernism / Eurasianism), three (Liberalist or Atlanticist or Liberal internationalist / Pragmatic Nationalist or Eurasianist /

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sakwa "Greater Europe is a way of bringing together all corners of the continent to create what Mikhail Gorbachev in the final period of the Soviet Union had called the Common European Home. This is a multipolar and pluralistic concept of Europe, allied with but not the same as the Atlantic community. In Greater Europe there would be no need to choose between Brussels, Washington or Moscow" (Sakwa 2016).

Patriotic Nationalist or *Derzhavniki*), four (Pro-Westernist or Moderate Liberalist / Centrist or Moderate Conservatives / Neo Communist / the Extreme right Nationalist), to even five (Expansionists / Civilizationists / Stabilizers / Geo economists / Westernizers according to geopolitical thinking in this case (Shin 2007, p.1))”.

However three traditions of thought on Russia’s worldview and its interests offer the starting point for further study on Russian national interest formation from constructivist point of view and I will discuss them further. According to Tsygankov these three traditions are Statism, Westernism and Civilisationism (Tsygankov 2016), for Shin they are West-oriented Liberalism, Pragmatic Statism, and Tradition-oriented Nationalism, and Hopf refers to them as Liberal, Centrist and Conservative tradition (Hopf 2016). Each of these forms of thought outlines different diagnosis of Russian national interests and Russian identity but debates among them present good foundation for further analysis of the most recent events in Russian foreign policy. All three approaches have been present in post-soviet foreign policy thinking and have the influence on the policy formulation, but which one will have the biggest impact on the national interest formation depends on the leadership and international context. For example in the current context, during Putin’s third term national interests are influenced primarily by statist but also by civilisationist understanding of Russian foreign policy.

Westernism/ West-oriented Liberalism/ Liberal tradition understands Russia as a part of liberal world based on market economy, democracy and respect for human rights. It is close to classical liberal paradigm in traditional international relation theories. This approach had a major influence in defining Russian foreign policy under the Andrei Kozyrev<sup>3</sup>, according to this view Russia is one of the agents in the West centred system (Shin 2007). The emphasis is on Russia’s similarity with the Western civilisation and therefore Russia should seek national interests in terms of integration with Western economic and security institutions. Priority over great power status and distinctive Russian identity is given to the economic development. This view argues that Russia’s interests in the near abroad should be negligible as Russia does not have major economic gains there. Accordingly, Russia is understood in civic national, not ethno national

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<sup>3</sup> Kozyrev was ready to develop relations with United States similarly as Germany and France did after the World War II. According to Kozyrev: “It also must be understood that a firm and sometimes aggressive policy of defending one’s national interests is not incompatible with partnership. Germany and France have shown that national interests can be pursued by cooperation instead of war. It would be naive to expect anything else when talking about great nations, especially unique ones, like Russia and the United States” (Kozyrev 1994).

terms (Hopf 2016). For example, during Kozyrev time when Westernist tradition dominated foreign policy thinking, the key components of national interests were economic reform, rapid membership in the Western international institutions, and isolationism from the former Soviet states. Leadership even introduced the concept “little Russia” to justify little, if any, responsibility for the former Soviet region (Tsygankov 2016).

However, the Westernist view on national interests formation was difficult to justify and was quickly discredited by Russian realities during the 90s such as economic collapse and corruption during privatization. There is an opinion that engaging with the West under Westernist discourse was an indication that Russia lacked a strategy on how to pursue its national interests and to understand what these interests are after the dissolution of Soviet Union. For example Mankoff wrote that Kozyrev even asked Nixon, “if you can advise us on how to define our national interests, I will be very grateful to you” (Mankoff 2009, p.29). Westernist discourses had a short come back during Medvedev’s presidency, but the support for Westernist understanding of what Russia should become seems lost.

The Statism/ Pragmatic Statism/ Centrist approach understands Russia as one of the most influential countries in the world with a power to manage world affairs. Main national priorities are both economic development and military modernization as they are crucial for restoration of great power status (Hopf 2016). This tradition has started during Primakov’s time and inspired him to set two main national interests. First one to balance the United States’ hegemonic unipolar aspirations in a coalition with other states and second to integrate the former Soviet region under tighter control from Moscow (Tsygankov 2016). Westernism is declared to be a period of naïve romanticism, priority is given to the concepts like major power status and an equal, mutually beneficial partnership with the United States and Europe (Mankoff 2009). Statist approach has the main aim to recapture the greatness of Russia. This perspective holds that the West should recognise Russia’s inherited privileged position in international system (Shin 2007).

The main threat for Russian national interests according to this view is the unipolar world where Russia would not have an independent voice. That is why cooperation with Europe and the United States based on the principle of absolute power equality is possible and desirable. Russian national interest should include combination of both cooperation and balancing policies for the purpose of undermining the unipolarity (Tsygankov 2016). Even though statist approach



provided outlines for regaining Russia’s lost identity and prestige, it failed to produce a long wanted outcome. Domestically, statist gained support for the identity of great power and strong Russia, however they were completely disregarded internationally by the Others namely the West. According to Shin “the main reason behind this is the wide disparity between wishful thinking and the actual capability of Russia. That is, working on an idea was one thing, and its application to real policy was another” (Shin 2007, p.8). This limitation forced Russia’s foreign policy to consider another readjustment.

Civilisationist/ Tradition-oriented Nationalism/ Conservative approach understands Russia in ethno-national terms. According to Mankoff, Russia after 1991 was not a tabula rasa, and ideological leftovers from soviet times remained present (Mankoff 2009). A civilisationist foreign policy implies an alliance with any country that would balance against the imperialist United States (Hopf 2016). This view sees Russia’s national interest is almost by definition, anti-Western (Tsygankov 2016). For them military power is more important than economic power as it is more important for the great power status in terms of hard power. Given its ethno-national Russian identity, it understood the Near Abroad (millions of ethnic Russians live there), as a critical national interest, important for reunification of ethnic Russians with their Homeland (Hopf 2016). Furthermore they see a moral obligation to support and defend brethren *Russkie*, even beyond Russia’s borders (Teper 2016). Russian values such as history, language, and the Orthodox faith are fundamentally different from those of the West, therefore one of civilisationist visions is that Russia should be a geopolitically and culturally distinct entity with a mission to stabilize relations between East and West (Laruelle 2015).

<b>Russia’s visions of national interests argued by Shin, Hopf and Tsygankov</b>	
Westernism/West-oriented Liberalism/ Liberal tradition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Integration with Western economic and security institutions;</li> <li>2. Economic development and modernisation prevail over great power status seeking;</li> <li>3. Interests in near abroad negligible;</li> </ol>
Statism/ Pragmatic Statism/	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Restoration of great power status through both economic development and military modernization;</li> </ol>

Centrist approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Reintegration with post Soviet space;</li> <li>3. Cooperation with West based on mutual respect of great power status</li> </ol>
Civilisationist/Tradition-oriented/Conservative approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on military modernisation in order to achieve great power status</li> <li>2. Promotion of Russian values which are fundamentally different from those of the West</li> <li>3. Restoring Russian empire</li> </ol>
Hard-line approach	
Civilisationist soft-line approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Great power status</li> <li>2. Russia as geopolitically and culturally distinct entity with a mission to stabilize relations between East and West</li> </ol>

Table 1: Russia’s visions of national interests argued by Shin, Hopf and Tsygankov

***Theory on identity and national interests***

Following Teper’s argument, the way in which the annexation of Crimea influenced Russian national interests is a particularly interesting case for analysis because the change of borders requires explanation and legitimization for this particular move. In this process interests and identities are either reasserted or reformulated and reconfigured (Teper 2016). As mentioned before, realism cannot explain assertiveness in foreign policy which is not supported by economic improvement. Additionally it does not pay much attention to the change of explanations and does not provide accounts for cooperation between countries when they have competing interests. For example even though Russian ties with the West declined due to an unprecedented low level, Russia still produces discourses on cooperation based on equal respect, especially in the area of economy and in solving major political issues such as Iranian nuclear deal.

Rejecting the rationalist assumptions of realism and liberalism and their neo variants, constructivists have introduced a sociological perspective on world politics, emphasizing the

importance of normative, as well as material structures, role of ideas and identity in the constitution of interests and the mutual constitution of agents and structures (Wendt 1994a; Price & Reus Smit 1998; Guzzini 2007; Hopf 2002; Zehfuss 2004; Adler 1997). Assuming that national interests are exogenously given and exist objectively such as realism and liberalism claim, can lead to many shortcomings in the analysis. Specifically, they neglect important questions like who, why and how produces national interests (Weldes 2011).

Constructivist approaches are useful especially to understand Russian self and the concept of identity however conventional constructivism has a constraint because it follows the causal logic behind identity and interests. Additionally, as conventional constructivism follows the line of division between material and ideational realities, their argument would probably go into direction that material factors such as geopolitical balancing prompt changes into Russia's interests and identity surrounding the Ukraine crisis. According to Wæver, conventional constructivism offers little advice on how to examine how unit or nation creates its own rationales behind identity and foreign policy (Wæver 2002). Therefore beside conventional constructivism I find important to include in the analysis poststructuralist understanding of interests and identity. Following Hansen's argument there are no objective identities located in some extra-discursive realm. Representations of identity are the precondition for interests and policy and furthermore they are produced or reproduced through articulations of policies and interests (Hansen 2006b).

Therefore the usefulness of the poststructuralist approach in Russian national interest (RNI) formation analysis lies in the understanding that meanings and knowledge are discursively constructed. Language is a very important element in this process and it can help us discover the forces behind RNI formation. I argue that national interests are discursively framed and constructed in the language used by government officials in charge for foreign policy. Using language is the process of making sense of certain choices and "speaking is doing is knowing" (Kowert 1998, p.104).

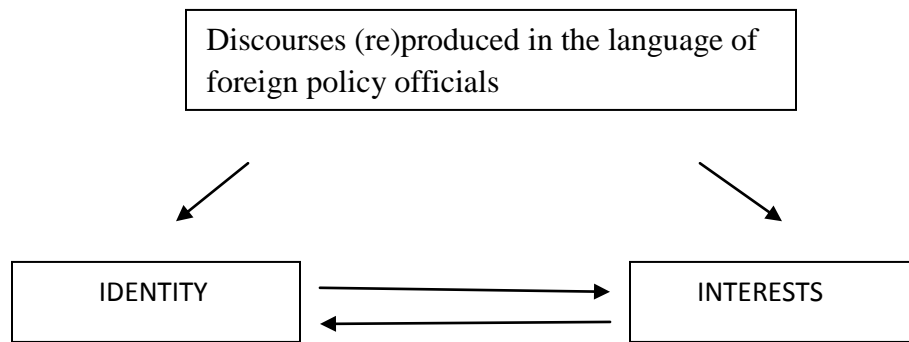


Figure 1: Discourses, interests and identity

Concepts of identity and national interest within constructivist and poststructuralist framework will be discussed further.

### **Constructing identity**

The central concept of constructivism is the concept of identity. Simply because before nations figure out how to defend their interests in the most appropriate manner, they first seek to understand themselves and their role in international society (Tsygankov 2010). Since Kant and Hegel, identity formation has been understood as a separation and distinction from others (Lebow 2016b). The identities of Self and the Other are mutually necessary for an actor to understand the interests and environment. Additionally, as Clunan argues national identity is an interactive product of the self and its context and as such it can be changed and reproduced (Clunan 2009). Furthermore Hopf claims that identity is a cognitive device which can help human brains process large amount of information (Hopf 2002).

There are a number of established definitions of identity but there is no singularly-accepted definition. However, it is easy to recognize main functions of this concept which are helpful for social analysis. The first very important function of the identity is that it is able to tell you and others who you are and who others are. Second, identities can imply a particular set of interests or preferences in foreign policy. Finally, for Ted Hopf a world without identities would

be one of "chaos, a world of pervasive and irremediable uncertainty, a world much more dangerous than anarchy" (Hopf 1998, p.175).

On the other hand some scholars criticize the very nature of the concept of identity and see it as problematic. Identity research still lacks agreed definition on what scholars mean and do not mean when using this concept. Identity has been criticized as a catch-all term, used to explain different conducts in foreign policy, but it still does not provide suggestions that states with particular types of identities will act in particular ways (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001). Especially problematic for some scholars is not that a identity as a concept is used, but how it is used as the identity is too ambiguous to serve well the demands of social analysis (Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Therefore I find important to discuss this concept and its relations with foreign policy and interests.

There is a complex relationship between identity and foreign policy. This complexity is often reflected in tensions in the formulation of collective identities because a state identity construction takes place at multiple levels. Lebow argues that there is international level where other states take part in this process. Then there is a state level where officials are in charge, but there is also a sub-state level with diverse actors (Lebow 2016a). For example bodies of the Russian government such as the President and its administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, other executive agencies, and the Parliament all compete for influence over various aspects of policy toward certain Others like European Union, China and the United States. Simultaneously, local and regional governments lead policies according to their interests hoping to create relationships with Europe or Asia independently from Moscow. Business lobbies, companies, interest groups, and different nongovernmental organizations also try to weigh in as they can. Everyday there are thousands of choices through Russian society which contribute to the collective identity choice (Hopf 2008). For the purpose of this research, only choices made by foreign policy officials such as the President and his administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister in shaping and reshaping Russian identity will be analyzed.

When analysing identity another distinction should be noted. For individuals, the process of identity and interest construction is a social and personal process; however it is not the same for states. In the latter case the process is political. Mainly because states do not have reflexive

self, and therefore they cannot accept or reject attributions made by others. Only their leaders and citizens can (Lebow 2016b). States are not passive actors as officials everywhere produce or encourage the narratives that support interests according to their political goals (Lebow 2016a). National leaders exercise some choice regarding state identifications, but this does not make states persons, and it is important to acknowledge this difference and its consequences. However, what is the same when it comes to individual and state identity is that they can only be understood relationally. We cannot know what an identity is without relating it to another. For example, being a great power is meaningless unless we can create a non-great power identity (Hopf 2002).

Early constructivist, Alexander Wendt claims that there are two types of identity. First one is corporate identity which has a singular quality and constitutes actor individuality. The second type is social identity which represents the sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of other (Wendt 1994b). Wendt argued that the corporate identity can exist without the need to relate it to other and it generates four basic interests of a state<sup>4</sup> (Wendt 1994b, p.385). Constructivism argued by Wendt is often referred to as systematic as it focuses on interaction between states in the international system and ignores non-systemic sources of state identity such as domestic political culture (Karacasulu & Uzgören 2007).

Wendt has convincingly argued that the anarchy is what states make out of it, and therefore interests are not produced exogenously in the anarchic system. He made important steps in constructivist identity analysis by introducing re-conceptualization through the important process of meaning creation and inter-subjectivity (Wendt 1999). Wendt developed assumptions on the dual nature of identity, identity formation from the perspective of the system, prevalence of ideational factors over material, and linear causality of identity, interests and foreign policy, which served as a foundation of research for many constructivists after him.

For example authors like Martha Finnemore focus on international society and how it shapes state's identities and interests. Finnemore attempts to show that socialization at the international level through organizations such as World Bank and the Red Cross can change state preferences from traditionally defined interests (Finnemore 1996). As these accounts focus on

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<sup>4</sup> Physical security, ontological security, development and recognition

international influences, Hopf has tried to fill in the research gap and he addressed the influence of internal societal dimension on identity. For example he established “common sense constructivism” by combining social theory of constructivism with theories of hegemony. He came to the conclusion that common sense of the masses in various ways affects the political calculations of elites and therefore affects state’s policy outcomes (Hopf 2013). Clunan criticized Wend’s and Hopf’s approaches arguing that they overly focus on international or structural accounts of how identity shapes behaviour without addressing how particular identities come to dominate at different points in time and how they change (Clunan 2009, pp.6–7). That is why she proposed to incorporate historical memory, psychological, and cultural aspects to identity analysis. She claims identity and interest formation is a process which should be analyzed, it is not an outcome that can be explained by the structures an actor faces (Clunan 2009). However Clunan also follows the causality logic as she argues that political elites will rationally create collective identity which will shape national interests, based on psychological need for collective self-esteem.

Each of the scholars that I mentioned above has tried to improve constructivist accounts in foreign policy and to enhance explanations on complex relations between interests and identity. But by arguing causal logic behind identity and interests these scholars put greater emphasis on the former and therefore seem to neglect the possibility that interests can also influence identities. As I seek to improve understanding of national interests formation, I find useful to incorporate poststructuralist accounts of interests and identity. In that manner, I find Hansen’s approach particularly useful. She claims that various foreign policies are legitimized in the national interest framework through reference to identities. Additionally, identities are produced and reproduced through foreign policy formulations. Identities are not objective accounts as they are fluid, relational, negotiated and reshaped constantly. Therefore identity and policy are constituted through a process of narrative adjustment and they have constitutive, rather than causal, relationship (Hansen 2006). The conceptualization of identity as discursive, relational, and social suggests that foreign policy discourse always articulates a Self and a series of Others which can take different degrees of Otherness, ranging from crucial difference to less than fundamental difference between Self and Other (Hansen 2006, p.6).

The ongoing debate on Russian identity tries to frame Russia as European or Eurasian, but there are also those who claim that Russia instead has its own unique combination of characteristics (Hopf 2008). Russian interference in Ukraine has changed policies in various directions, and Lo, for example, suggests that developments around the Ukraine crisis have confirmed Russian interests in Asian strategy. Through Asian strategy Russia can counterbalance the United States and can establish itself as a reliable alternative to the Western led governance. It can also reinforce Russia as an independent center of power (Lo 2015). Therefore in order to analyse the change of interests, policies and possibly identity around Ukraine crisis, I find useful to include Weaver's theory on discursive structure. In his theory he explained that the relationship between identities and discourse. Like Hansen, he follows a poststructuralist approach and claims that interests cannot be presented by political actors outside of the discursive structure, and an interest-based argument is always made on the basis of a particular distribution of layered identities (Wæver 2002, p.30). For Wæver, discussing identity changes is not yes or no question, it is only a question of how much pressure is necessary, what degree of political cost can be tolerated in breaking a certain identity code (Wæver 2002).

I argue that in Russian foreign policy, the Ukraine crisis presented the pressure which caused a rupture in the Russian European identity code. The main reasons behind this are the unsettled identity structures towards West. In the post-Soviet Era Russia and had uneasy relationship with Europe and therefore difficulties with incorporating European identity. For example, being naturally European implies a Russia that is already confident that it is as European as France or Germany, and that Russia need not be tutored as to what constitutes European identity which currently is not a case (Hopf 2008).

Finally, in order to theoretically frame certain Russia's preferences, I will also incorporate Urrestarazu's<sup>5</sup> three dimensional model of identity - narrative, performative and emotional. Narrative dimension is constructed socially through particular country's (Russia in this case) historical development and represents the construction of self through relations with others. The second is performative dimension which represents a synthesization of several (potentially different) narratives into one meaningful Self, constituted in a specific situation in

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<sup>5</sup> According to Urrestarazu the concept of identity is "extremely complex, because it comprises individual and collective, historical and cultural dimensions at the same time, all directed towards the formulation of policies vis-à-vis the external realm of an actor" (Urrestarazu 2015, p.136).



which foreign policy is put into practice (Urrestarazu 2015, p.137). This dimension will help us understand Russian contested identities and contested interests that simultaneously exist in Russian foreign policy. Finally, emotional dimension implies close connection between identity and self-esteem because much of international relations can be characterized as a struggle not only for power, but for high-status roles and privileges (Lebow 2016b). This dimension is useful for understanding the relevance of concepts such as glory, trust, hate and other emotion led concepts in foreign policy (Urrestarazu 2015, p.138). Additionally, citizens feel good about themselves when they belong to a nationality or a state they consider superior. They take vicarious pride in the accomplishments of their state. The glorious past and equally glorious future are often referenced in Russian official discourse. As Leboow argues, in order to legitimize the importance in international system and to gain recognition from other actors, leaders often claim distinctiveness and superiority and Russia is no exception (Lebow 2016b). Additionally, emotional dimension is very present in Russian foreign policy towards near abroad.

### **Constructing national interests**

The concept of the national interest has long been central to theories of international politics due to its role in the explanation of state action. However, many scholars doubt its analytical usefulness. For some scholars the concept of national interest remains a very problematic and contested idea with wide a range of meanings. For example, according to Joseph Nye “national interest is a slippery concept, used to describe as well as prescribe foreign policy“(Nye 1999). Therefore there is a significant debate about it within the IR discipline and some scholars have even regretted the importance of the idea of a national interest today. On the other side of this dispute are those who insist that the notion of the national interest should remain central to explanations of state action and thus of international politics. Among the loudest proponents of national interest are certainly realists like Morgenthau who argued that national interest defined in terms of power is the main guide for foreign policies that helps them find the way through the landscape of international politics (Morgenthau 1948). I understand the criticism of the concept and therefore share the opinion that its analytical usefulness is rather limited if it is not understood as a social construction.

Alexander Wendt defines the national interest as the objective interests of state society complexes, consisting of four needs: physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem<sup>6</sup> (Wendt 1999, p.198). He built his definition on George and Keohane's formulation that national interests are "life, liberty, and property". According to Wendt, if a state wants to achieve security it has to meet all four objectives.

On the other hand, Clunan argues that national interests are built on two pillars, political purpose and international status. Political purpose is based on the ideas about which principles and values symbols characterize the country but also what values and principles should govern relations between countries. For example the Russian Federation may have a political purpose of "becoming a Western country" or "protecting all Slavs" or "restoring the Soviet empire" (Clunan 2009, p.31). The second pillar related to international status which includes ranking and position of a country into imagined international hierarchy of political, economic and military power. Countries can rank differently like developed countries, third world countries, industrialized countries etc. Additionally ranking refers to super, great, medium, or small power along global or regional lines. The second pillar is important for my analysis as its purpose is to indicate if a country is a status-seeker or a status-maintainer (Clunan 2009). For example it seems that the annexation of Crimea represented an important milestone in Russian foreign policy as after the events in 2014 Russian officials perceive that Russia went from a position of a great power status seeker to great power status maintainer.

As I maintain that national interests cannot be assumed a priori and have to be discovered empirically, I find useful to incorporate a view argued by Jutta Weldes into my analysis. Weldes re-examined national interests in a case study of the Cuban Missile crisis. She argues that national interests are important in international politics firstly because they help policy makers understand goals which the state pursues, and secondly they are a tool through which legitimization and support for foreign policy actions is generated (Weldes 2011). Weldes does not see interests as previously established objectives like Wendt. Rather she explains that

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<sup>6</sup> What counts as survival varies historically and it is not just the preservation of existing territory. For example according to Wendt decision to agree on dissolution of Soviet Union counts as a survival for Russia, as Russia was the core of the state and later successor. What counts as autonomy is also case dependent but in short autonomy is the liberty of a state or organization to meet internal demands or respond to contingencies in the environment. Economic well being is usually connected with economic growth and finally, collective self-esteem refers to a group's need to feel good about itself, for respect or status (Wendt 1999, p.236).

constructing national interests is done through the process of interpretation and communication by the state officials. She also provides a useful framework which will help us to answer the following questions: who, why and how produces national interests in the Russian Federation. There is variation of state institutions involved in national interest formation across different states, but according to Weldes it is safe to say that national interest is produced primarily, although not exclusively, by foreign policy decision-makers (Weldes 2011).

The answer to the question why states produce national interests is related to the fact that in order for a state to act it has to comprehend its environment and should have some specification of its goals. National interests will enable the state to make a decision on how to act in a particular situation. Leaders construct the national interests and conduct foreign policy based upon their assessment of other states' intentions in the environment (Weldes 2011). Representations make clear to state officials who and what they are, who and what their enemies are, and how they are threatened by them.

Finally, when it comes to how national interests are produced, Weldes claims that they are constructed through the process of articulation and interpellation. The term articulation refers to the process of giving meaning out of cultural materials. Meaning is created by establishing chains of connotations among different linguistic elements which make sense within a particular society (Weldes 2011, p.190). For example in representations of post Cold War Russian foreign policy, for instance, the object "Western institutions" was often articulated to, and hence came to connote, "expansion" and "potential aggression". As a result, when the term Western institution like NATO or the European Union has been used, it simultaneously carries with it (among other characteristics) the meanings of expansion and potential aggression. This is one part of a complex process of constructing national interests.

The other part of this constructive process involves the interpellation. This concept was introduced by French philosopher Louis Althusser. In short it represents a process which can explain the way in which cultural ideas have an effect on individuals' lives so much that they start to believe that they are their own (Althusser 1971). For Weldes interpellation means that specific identities are created through the process of internationalization of culture's values. In the language of the national interest, the Russian Federation for example, not only as a subject, but as a subject which represents an imagined national community (Weldes 2011). For instance,

claims about the Russian national interest during Putin's third term made sense to most Russians as they are for interpellated into different but familiar subject-positions. Following Weldes' example, Russians are hailed into the position of the Russia, into the imagined national community of Russianness. In addition, they are simultaneously hailed into other familiar positions, including such comfortable identities as the "justice loving country" which opposes "Western aggressions", or the "concerned Russian patriot" who believes that "we" should protect "Russian speakers abroad." Within Russian foreign policy, process of interpellation is largely used to construct the notion of the Russian world.

### ***Poststructuralist Methodological Approach***

The goal of the methodology component is to establish a proper research design to achieve the aim of the research which is to unpack the meanings behind discourses on Russian national interests during Putin's third term. And also to answer the research question *How has the Crimean crisis changed Russian national interests formation* and a sub question *How coherent are discourses on national interests represented by the Russian officials.*

As a research strategy this thesis is built around an interpretative single case study of Russian national interest formation. Case studies' purpose is to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of a single object of study in a specific context (Odell 2001). Many criticize single case studies under the assumption that they do not provide adequate comparison and accordingly cannot be used in generalizations (Landman 2008). However, the case chosen for study will provide comparison in contextual description and even though the thesis is built on single case study research, it is chosen to contribute larger sets of questions in international relations discipline, especially related to national interest formation.

Unlike positivist ontological and epistemological approaches which claim that reality is objective, independent from observer and predictable (Gerring & Thomas 2005), for the purpose of my research, I decided to employ interpretative ontology and epistemology. A research starting from an interpretative position is based on the principle that there are many, equally valid, time and context dependent interpretations of reality (Biggam 2011). Following Fierke's argument most objects of international relations, unlike rocks or trees, exist only as a human

creation in a cultural, historical, and political context of meaning. That is why for example human rights, threats or national interests are rather social facts, than material ones, that exist only because of the meaning and value attributed to them (Fierke 2013). Additionally, research based on interpretative ontology and epistemology sees a language as a very significant tool in explaining reality. Language is not a transparent and objective means able to provide true meaning like positivists see it. On the contrary, language is as social practice as it is not an external part of society and it is socially conditioned by other (non-linguistic) parts of society (Fairclough 1989).

## **Research Design**

The main method of research is discourse analysis together with text analysis (as an essential part of discourse analysis). According to Fairclough, discourse analysis is not only the linguistic analysis of texts: The term discourse signals the particular view of language in use as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life, and its approach to the linguistic analysis of texts is always oriented to the social character of texts (Fairclough 2003, p.3). Fairclough's discourse analysis takes a more critical approach because it includes representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries and representations of how things might, could or should be (Fairclough 2003). However, even though this research emphasizes the linguistic construction of reality, it takes the view that the productive nature of language does not depend on hidden intentions or motivations of social actors (Doty 2011). Discourse analysis works on public texts and does not try to get to the thoughts or motives of the actors or to their secret plans. According to Wæver for the sake of argument clarity public and open sources should be used for what they are, not as indicator of potentially something else (Wæver 2002).

## **Data collection and data analysis**

The first criteria in data collection are the time frame under the study. However due to a large amount of materials I also used codes to identify relevant texts for analysis. These codes were national interests, Russian world, polycentric, Crimea, values, identity, world order, West, goals/aims, foreign policy.

For discourses produced by Putin I used the official kremlin.ru website. I was guided by codes, but also looked into annual addresses of the president to the Federal Assembly because in these addresses the president outlines priority targets for national political and economic development. I also looked into website section statements on the major issues, transcripts of media conferences and press releases. I also use the president's speeches at the Valdai Discussion Club for example, as this forum is seen as an important platform where Russian officials have the opportunity to engage with domestic and international academics in debates about the most important trends and events in the world. Majority of material is taken from the time under study - during Vladimir Putin's third term. However research will also rely on few older sources that traces the genealogy of the dominant representations such as articles written in 2012 by Vladimir Putin while he was prime minister as they still represent his views on important issues. These are Russia and the changing world, Being strong: National security guarantees for Russia, Democracy and the quality of government, Russia: The Ethnicity Issue, Russia muscles up – the challenges we must rise to face.

The second important source is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, especially Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions and interviews of Minister Lavrov to Bloomberg, Russia Today, Washington Post etc. There are also ten articles written by Sergey Lavrov and published on Russia in the Global Affairs website which will be used as primary data. Selection of text is as well guided by codes with the primary focus on interviews, statements and articles.

The third important source of data is the Russian government website. I use Government reports on its performance, then transcripts from interviews like conversations of Dmitry Medvedev with five television channel and also transcripts of meetings of the CIS Council of

Heads of Government, meetings of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council and meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government. Analysis will also refer to Dmitry Medvedev's articles such as *Russia and Ukraine: Living by new rules*, *Go Russia!*, *New dynamics in Russia's socioeconomic development*, *The new reality: Russia and global challenges*, *The time of simple solutions is past*. For Medvedev's discourses I was also primarily guided by codes found in his interviews and statements.

The fourth source of data are official foreign policy documents such as *Foreign Policy Strategies from 2013 and 2016*; *National Security Strategies from 2008 and 2015*; *Russian Military doctrines from 2010 and 2014*.

Hansen (2006) explained four main steps for research design based on discourse analysis. The first step is *choice of Selves*—or how many states, nations, or other foreign policy subjects one wishes to examine. In my case, that is the single Russian self. Hansen suggests that the Self is constituted through the delineation of Others, and the Other can be articulated as superior, inferior, or equal (Hansen 2006b, p.68). In the literature on Russian identity, the West is perceived as the most significant Other. However, after the annexation of Crimea, the Russian self is situated within a more complicated set of identities, especially a growing presence of Eurasian orientation.

The second important step is a decision on inter-textual model. Hansen makes difference between official discourse, wider political debate and academic discourse. For the purpose of this research and due to its scope only official discourse will be examined. That means that research will be directly based on official foreign policy discourse and the focus will be on political leaders who have the authority to pursue and sanction different foreign policies (Hansen 2006b). For my analysis I identified speeches, interviews and articles of the main decision makers on foreign policy in Russia. These are president Vladimir Putin, prime minister Dmitri Medvedev and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov.

Regarding the timeline I use a shorter timeframe from 2012-2017, that is from the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third presidential term. I find that a shorter time frame will give me the possibility to discuss discourses on Russian national interest formation and provide more in-depth analysis. The crucial moment around which will be used as a parameter if and what kind

of change has happened in national interest formation will be Crimean crisis. This event is significant as it has challenged Russian relations with near abroad, especially Ukraine, relations with West declined to the lowest level after the end of Cold War and Russia started seeking comfort Eastwards.

Finally, I will also use Waever's discursive layered framework (Wæver 2002). His framework is useful to examine discourses on Russian identity and Russia's relational position towards West. Additionally, this framework helps to understand if policies (third layer) undertaken by Russian government since 2012 have affected Russia's interests and identity. The first layer he calls the basic conceptual constellation of state and nation and as he suggested I will trace Russia's discursive construction of self. The first layer is the core layer focused on country's identity and it is the most difficult to change. The second layer is the relational position of the state/nation and I will look into Russian relational position towards West (as the most Significant Others in Russian case). Finally the third layer are concrete Russian policies undertaken under the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin. Third layer therefore represents operationalisation of interests and it is a surface level where small changes can be made without affecting second layer. A radical policy change would be able to influence changes in the second layer. And only the most radical policy changes will be able to affect the core layer but radically different core layer would be in most cases very hazardous (Wæver 2002).

As Waever addressed only the change towards one Other, I find that it is important to address the possibility of change in various directions, or to be more precise, if the interests and identity change towards one Other can constitute interest/identity change toward another Other. With this argument I will examine if the changes in relations with the West have prompted the changes in Russia's relations with other actors in international community.

### **Limitations and potential problems**

This is a language dependent study but my Russian language skills are rather limited. Therefore I try to overcome this limitation by using official translations of speeches and interviews published on official websites. A further limitation is also the fact that I will be analysing only official discourses, setting aside wider political debate and academic discourses



on national interests. But I find my choice appropriate due to the scope of this research and the fact that production of national interests is done, not exclusively but primarily by officials in charge of foreign policy. The research is inevitably selective because, as in any analysis, the author chooses to ask certain questions about social events and texts, and not other possible questions. Secondly, generalisation from a single case study will always be limited since a particular country is bounded by its special characteristics (Landman 2008). However, I find that understanding a particular country's set of choices can still enrich the existing debates on national interests in international relations. Finally, as most of the empirical material comes from the websites I was not able to provide page number for direct quotations.

## **RUSSIA HAS REDEFINED NATIONAL INTERESTS**

This analytical chapter is structured around Wendt's argument that to certain extent some state identities and interests stem primarily from relations to domestic society while others come from international society (Wendt 1994b). Contents of state's interests and identities get redefined by the changing international and domestic circumstances. In turn these changes reflect into identity self-conceptions and they can modify national interests and their hierarchy. For example, like Omelicheva argues in recent years, beside geopolitical elements of Russian foreign policy, very important place take cultural and civilizational elements. They became crucial for Russia's conception of the Self and its perception of the world (Omelicheva 2016).

The first part of this analytical chapter will analyse the change of interests caused by domestic circumstances especially in terms of ideas about national sovereignty as well as in defining values, and the second part will be devoted to the analysis of changing international circumstances in terms of Russia's position in the international system and international political orientation in terms of identity.

Discussion on identity will follow Urrestarazu's argument on multidimensional aspects of identity. Narrative dimension is incorporated through discursive construction referring to culture and history. This dimension is important for framing Russia's position in the world. Performative dimension regards the situational character of identity and helps mapping competing identity discourses like belonging to Europe, or building own civilizational alternative, or even the turn to East. Finally, emotional dimension is incorporated through the discourses on the need for respect, trust, and family related metaphors regarding near abroad courtiers.

Discussion on interests will follow Weldes' steps on representation, articulation and interpellation. I will discuss how Russia represents new meanings on concepts such as national sovereignty and territorial integrity, how it attributed new meanings to certain values, and how it sees the international system and its place in it. Articulation on the other hand will help me elaborate changes in the way how Russia perceives its national interests. Finally interpellation is particularly important for understanding the Russian World as Russia is promoting certain values which tries to incorporate into familiar position of Russianness. After all Russia is a subject which represents an imagined national community and during Putin's third term Russia has added additional efforts to promote distinctive values and gain support from people (primarily but not exclusively Russians) that live in (near) abroad.

### *Changing domestic circumstances*

When examining the national interests of a country, I find that initial contextual understanding can be gained from official documents like Foreign policy concepts, National security strategies and Military doctrines. Usually these documents provide very abstract definitions of national interests. For example according to the National security strategy the Russian Federation's national interests are "objectively significant requirements of the individual, society, and the state" (National Security Strategy 2015). However, by adding insights from other documents and speeches done by high level officials, we can identify the main discourses around which national interests are built.

Traditional foreign policy interests mentioned across all strategic documents are ensuring national security and creating favourable external conditions for economic growth. However, what stands out most loudly in the Foreign policy concept from 2016 is the status projection: "With a view to upholding the national interests of the Russian Federation, foreign policy activities shall be aimed to consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a centre of influence in today's world" (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016). Therefore I argue that behind Russian international conducts, whether that is continuous support for the Syrian government, joint military exercises with Belarus, or joint naval exercises with China, there is an

ultimate aim of ensuring a place in hierarchy of power where important international decisions are made.

Additionally, I would argue that one of the first proofs that changes occurred in the way how Russia conceptualise its national interests and foreign policy is the fact that not long after the interference in Ukraine and the beginning of the crisis in relations with the West, Russia adopted new Military doctrine in 2014. The following year a new National security strategy was signed, and finally, in 2016 new Foreign policy concept was adopted. Previous versions of Military doctrines came into force in 2010 and 2000. Security strategies were previously adopted in 2009 and 2000, and finally, foreign policy concepts were adopted in 2013 and 2008. Even though these kind of documents contain generic strategic and administrative language (Monaghan 2013), they also provide to certain extent the understanding of how Russia sees its position in international system, how it sees international environment and how it will seek to act.

### **Changed understanding of national sovereignty**

Clunan argued that while many in the West have come to see the post–Cold War world as a postmodern future of softened sovereignty due to the process of globalisation, Russian elites have not changed their views on political space. She wrote that most of the Russian elites perceive international relations through a nineteenth-century lens of sovereign states (Clunan 2009). However, I would argue that Russia has changed its perceptions on the concept of national sovereignty.

Discourses on national sovereignty can be traced in the official documents. I argue that it is not a coincidence that the first document that was replaced after the events in 2014 was a Military doctrine. Even though the document contains only few individual changes compared to its predecessor (The Military Doctrine 2010), they are still significant as they are included to send a message to Russia's opponents, allies and others. Russia sees the world as a more dangerous place than in 2010 however the point that the Russian Federation has the legitimate right to use force to repel aggression against itself or against its allies (therefore in defensive

purposes) is not new. The section *Employment of the Armed Forces, other troops and bodies, and their main tasks in peacetime under the conditions of an imminent threat of aggression and in wartime* clearly states that the Russian Federation has the legitimate right to employ the Armed Forces and other troops to fight the aggression but also to use these entities for protection of the Russian citizens abroad with respect for international law and international treaties of the Russian Federation (The Military Doctrine 2014). This narrative is followed in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept and in 2015 Security Strategy. For example, according to the National Security Strategy utilization of military force to protect national interests is possible in the cases where non violent measures are ineffective (National Security Strategy 2015). Therefore this trend reflects the growing intention to use forceful means to ensure what is perceived to be Russian national interests.

However the rhetoric before the Ukraine crisis was significantly different and Russia was interested to reduce the role of force in the international system while improving strategic and regional stability (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013) For example, Putin in 2012 claimed that the basic foundational principles for any civilization are “unacceptability of excessive use of force, and the unconditional observance of the basic standards of international law” (Putin 2012e). Additionally, in his interview for TV channel Russia today in late 2013 Lavrov argued that Russian foreign policy is primarily guided by the Concept of Foreign Policy. The main principles for Russian conduct internationally were pragmatism, aspiration to equal partnerships, and, most importantly, the principle to “defend national interests consistently and firmly, without being involved into any confrontation”. Furthermore, Russia does not seek domination and does not pretend to any “superposition”. On the contrary, Russia aims to be a leader in the field of international law and a defender of the principles listed in the United Nations Charter (Lavrov 2013f).

Based on strategic documents, I would argue that Russia has become a state which perceives that it has a lot to defend against and therefore more assertive rhetoric is being employed. The official narrative of increasingly dangerous international society is present in Military doctrine, Security strategy and Foreign policy concept and in all three documents significant part is devoted to threats. Perceived threats are global competition, tension, rivalry for resources and values and stage-by-stage redistribution of influence in favour of new centres of

economic growth. I argue that because Russia has changed the way in which it perceives its place in international system alongside with changes on the discourses of the concept on national sovereignty, goals mentioned in strategic documents before 2014 became practically unattainable.

For example, when it comes to goals mentioned in the Foreign Policy Concept from 2013, I would argue that Russia's position abroad (or at least in the West) can hardly be referred to as "high standing" (Pew Research Center 2014; BBC World Service Poll 2014). Additionally, sanctions affected negatively "steady and dynamic growth of the Russian economy" and therefore the quality of life continues to decrease. Until 2014 Russia followed one policy line and was widely promoting principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. But after the annexation of Crimea I find very difficult for Russia to play the role of defender of UN Charter's basic principles. With support for militant groups in Eastern Ukraine Russia has challenged the principle of non interference and with the annexation of Crimea Russia gave priority to the principle of self-determination over sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the concept it is clearly stated:

"Arbitrary and politically motivated interpretation of fundamental international legal norms and principles such as non-use of force or threat of force, peaceful settlement of international disputes, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, right of peoples to self-determination, in favour of certain countries pose particular danger to international peace, law and order" (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013).

However it must be noted that this is the only paragraph in the concept which mentions self-determination while sovereignty was mentioned ten times and territorial integrity three times. Therefore it can be argued that the key principles according to Foreign policy concept from 2013 are sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Furthermore, here we can trace an instance where Russian authorities are trying to tie their discourses and practices to discourses of international law. In this respect, there is an attempt to fit their meaning in with the understandings of principles of international law. For example, when Lavrov was asked on situation in Ukraine during Munich security conference in

February 2015, he claimed that according to the UN charter there are several principles but nation's right to self-determination is a key one. Lavrov claimed that territorial integrity and self-determination are inviolable (Lavrov 2015). Therefore I argue that these statements showed the inconsistency between Russian key strategic document and the ongoing understanding of national interests. Furthermore the concept stated that carrying out military and other forms of interference under the mask of the principle of responsibility to protect is unacceptable and against international law (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013). However this exact principle was used in Ukraine which proves that Russia has changed its stance on this concept and decided to pursue active policy of protecting Russian compatriots and the Russian world. Putin seems to have forgotten that once he argued that state sovereignty is too easily violated in the name of the principle of human rights, especially when human rights are protected from the outside and on a selective basis (Putin 2012e). Finally, needless to say promoting good-neighbourly relations with adjoining states failed as a basic goal of foreign policy concept at least in regard to Ukraine and Baltic states.

It is worth of mentioning that Ukraine was seen as a priority partner according to Russia's 2013 Foreign Policy Concept. The narrative around negotiations between the European Union and Ukraine was that Ukraine needs to make an independent choice which Russia will accept. In case that Ukraine decides to pursue the EU path, then it will lose privileges from the CIS free trade area and the most-favoured-nation principle will be introduced in respect of Ukrainian goods, "and nothing more" (Lavrov 2013e). Russia anticipated that Ukraine will decide in favour of Russian suggestions for economic cooperation and that is why the leadership repeated numerous times that they will respect Ukrainian sovereign choice.

However, in 2014 Russia decided to pursue a revisionist path and that is why the leadership felt the urge to replace the foreign policy concept only after three years. According to Lavrov, the concept was adopted in order to reflect a new stage in the history of international relations (Lavrov 2017d). The time of the Concept publication coincided with an annual presidential address to the Federal Assembly in order to ensure a higher level of importance. In his address Putin stated the need to continuously take care of human capital as it is the most important Russian resource and the achievement of major strategic goals is not possible in a fragmented society. Additionally, Putin repeated that Russia's foreign policy does not seek

confrontation or enemies of any kind, but he also seized the opportunity to stress that “Russia will not allow their interests to be infringed upon or ignored” (Putin 2016e).

Changes in discourses on sovereignty were followed by the changes of discourses on certain values. For example, current Russian national security strategy is intended to consolidate all levels of government and civil society to create favourable conditions for achieving Russian national interests and national priorities abroad. From a careful reading seems that a large focus of this strategy is on Russia’s own development and on the role of values which are incorporated in the discourses on national interests. Ten times throughout the document, Russia refers to a vague concept “spiritual and moral values” which are being reborn and present foundation of Russian society. Meanings included in this concept are various such as respect for family, faith traditions, collectivism, patriotism, fairness, and “the continuity of our motherland’s history” (National Security Strategy 2015). These values are described as necessary for Russian development. They are understood as very distinctive from the Western values where priority is given to material over spiritual values. Through their promotion Russia seeks to enhance national unity and establish the Russian world which will be discussed further. The Russian world is another signifier on Russia softened understanding of national sovereignty.

### **The role of Russian world in national interests formation**

From the constructivist perspective, the Russian world is an important issue as it refers to national self-conceptions. As collective identity refers to an individual’s belonging to a group Putin often repeats that Russia should develop with confidence and with an aim not to lose a sense of national unity. Russia must be a sovereign and influential country with a national identity based on spiritual values in order to be able to balance economic, civilisational and military threats. Referring to national unity Putin once said “We must be and remain Russia” (Putin 2012a). For Putin this statement might be clear, however I argue that statements like this need to be unpacked in order to better understand how Russia perceives its nationhood and therefore national interests.



I argue that Russian world doctrine in its expansionist form has influenced significantly Russian foreign policy and therefore national interests during Putin's third term. The Russian world can be defined as a geopolitical imagination of different regions with a fluid connection to Russia (Laurelle 2015). However the term Russian world has developed to have several meanings in the official discourse. Usually it includes the language as "Russian language has always played an important unifying role over Russia's centuries of history. The Russian language was the main form of expression and bearer of national unity, cementing together the vast Russian world" (Putin 2013d). The Russian world provides the kind of civilisational identity which is based on Russian culture "although this culture is represented not only by ethnic Russians, but by all the holders of this identity, regardless of their ethnicity" (Putin 2012d). The Russian world stretches far beyond Russia's borders and is open to anyone who considers themselves a part of Russia and considers Russia their home (Putin 2013d). Russian world also plays an important role in enhancing Russia's position in the international system and it can improve Russia's prestige globally by spreading Russian language and Russian culture (Lavrov 2012).

Feklyunina argues that the idea of the Russian world was particularly salient in Russia's official discourse before the events around Ukraine in 2014. In the period right after the dissolution of Soviet Union, the Russian government neglected any coordinated image-projection efforts towards post-Soviet space. That was the period when Russia articulated a rather incoherent narrative of common space in near abroad without common interests, as Russia was primarily focused to establish good relations with the West (Feklyunina 2015). Therefore, I argue that maybe one of the most important causes behind triggering the redefinition of national interests is the lack of national idea in Russia. Soviet ideology ceased to exist, but it seems that Russia still has not found a common denominator for Russianness. Tsygankov for example argued that at a given time several ideological traditions exist, overlap, and compete for national influence over dominant national idea of foreign policy. For Tsygankov, Russian idea in the post-Soviet context has been influenced by ideologies of Westernism, Statism, and Civilizationism (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2010). Westernist idea assumes a reorientation of Russia's foreign policy toward Europe and the United States, so called pro-Western integration, but mostly by means of free trade and enterprise. Statist idea assumes Russia as an independent state that pursues great power status in order to resist the tendency of some international actors to

become predominant in the system. Finally, civilisationist idea is based on the assumption of Russia's cultural and civilizational distinctiveness (Tsygankov & Tsygankov 2010).

However, in his speech at the Valdai International Discussion club Putin outlined Russia's urgent need for a united national idea as there has been no progress on questions "about who we are and who we want to be" (Putin 2013a). According to Putin, the question of finding and strengthening national identity really is fundamental for Russia as it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination (Putin 2013a).

Keeping in mind that Russia did not have efficient cultural mechanisms to maintain influence in the neighbourhood, the Foreign policy concept from 2013 called for more efficient use of information, cultural and other methods for achieving Russian foreign policy goals. This was seen as particularly important because there is a "risk of destructive and unlawful use of soft power and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states" (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013). As Feklyunina noted this discursive change was followed by the rise of new public diplomacy actors and by a substantial increase in the funding of already existing actors such as the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation or and Voice of Russia (Feklyunina 2015).

When discussing the Russian world I would argue that in the first half of Putin's third term, the agenda of reunification with historic homelands was not pursued. Instead, the Kremlin has tried to enhance economic and political influence over the governments in near abroad. In his inauguration speech Putin set as one of the main goals for Russia to become a "leader and centre of gravity for whole Eurasia" (Putin 2012g). One of the means to achieve this position would be through Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). For Russian leaders the EEU has not only political and economic dimensions, but also has civilisationist undertaking and therefore overlaps with Russian world: "The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world" (Putin 2013a).

Russia was criticized that the real goal behind Eurasian integration lie in restoring dominance over former post soviet space (Ivanchenko 2016), but accusations are denied by Kremlin. For Medvedev, Eurasian integration is the long supported position from the Russian

side not used for promotion of Russian dominating influence, but rather as a means for a civilised and modern way of cohabiting with the neighbours (Medvedev 2013c). Development of the EEU has led Russian leadership to believe that it represents a step before harmonisation with European Union into common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific (Lavrov 2013b). In the official discourse the process of European integrations and process of Eurasian integrations are presented as complementary, and EEU will ensure that once when they are ready, EEU member states will get more equal position to negotiate integration with EU.

As the Russian world has developed to have various meanings and it simultaneously overlaps with Russian led institutionalist processes, we cannot argue with certainty where the borders of the Russian world are. Even though in the official discourse it is not linked exclusively to certain ethnicity or territory it seems that Russian world mostly refers to the spaces made of Kievan Rus where Russian world has “a common Dnieper baptistery” therefore follows softened sovereignty logic. In the official discourse the Kievan Rus and Holy Rus are often used as synonyms and represent the ancestor of Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian people. For Putin a common Dnieper baptistery set foundations of common spiritual values that make these three nations a single people (Putin 2013b). Without a doubt, Ukraine plays an important role in the Russian world and once when he was asked about Ukraine, Putin said:

“The Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian language have wonderful features that make up the identity of the Ukrainian nation. And, I, for one, really love it, I like all of it. It is part of our greater “Russian, or Russian-Ukrainian, world”(Putin 2013a).

Much of the discourse on the Russian world is interlinked with emotional dimension of Russian identity as argued by Urrestarazu (2015). Emotional and family related terminology is particularly present in relations with Ukraine. For instance, numerous times Russian officials repeated that Ukraine is a “brotherly country” and Ukrainians are “brotherly people”. Kiev is perceived to be a “mother of Russian cities”. Even after the annexation of Crimea, Putin has kept maintaining that he “does not make any distinction between Russians and Ukrainians” (Putin 2015b) and as “he has said many times already, Russians and Ukrainians are “one people” (Putin 2014a). Putin even had existential claims towards Ukraine “Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other” (Putin 2014a). Therefore keeping in mind how Ukraine is

perceived in Russian official discourse it is not a surprise that the crisis in their relations managed to influence significantly Russian interests and identity.

### **Divided nation?**

In the process of unpacking the discourses behind Russian national interests formation, it is important to discuss what Russia perceives as threats. According to the logic of softened sovereignty, it is viewed that now threats to what is perceived to be a Russian world are simultaneously threats to Russia (Omelicheva 2016). Traditional threats such as military aggression against Russia have been extended, and imposing Western norms or values in Russian world have become perceived as a threat to Russian national interests. Or in Lavrov's words "Confrontation has been growing in the world not just as part of the natural political and economic competition, but also rivalry that is affecting the system of values due to our Western partners' attempts to force their views on everyone" (Lavrov 2017b).

Following Omelicheva's (2016) argument the goal of cultural preservation from Western dominance has become the highest foreign policy priority of Kremlin (Omelicheva 2016). Additionally, Feklyunina's argued that for the Russian world to stay alive and continue to uphold its values, it is essentially important that all of its constituent parts resist any attempts to leave the common space. Seeking foreign policy options like becoming a member of European Union or NATO would symbolise a betrayal of this imagined community (Feklyunina 2015). Therefore the urge to establish a stable collective identity that government officials talked about before the annexation of Crimea is now more present in the discourses on national interests.

The way in which Russia justified the annexation of Crimea follows Neumann's argument that conceptions of self and interests tend to mirror the practices of significant other over time (Neumann 1999). Exercising military might over smaller and weaker nations is something that Russia's Significant Other (West) has done in the past. That is why he compared the right of self-determination of Crimea with self-determination in the case of Kosovo. Rhetoric used variety of narratives on double standards, NATO and EU eastward expansion.

However, one of the loudest discourses was there was also an argument of Russia as divided nation (Laruelle 2015). The statement that the “Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders” (Putin 2014a) caused discussions on the role of nationalism behind Russian national interest formation and foreign policy decision making. With the statement on divided nation, Russian officials recognized that there is a gap between what is perceived to be cultural body (self-representation as a nation) and territorial body, with cultural body being larger than its territory (Laruelle 2015). This further reflects in the way how Russian leadership understands political systems in near abroad countries. For example Putin still maintains that Russia has to help neighbouring countries to establish stable political systems as they do not have long traditions of statehood (Putin 2015b).

Following Makarychev’s argument Russia’s policy is built on the presumption that its neighbours are not allowed to conduct independent foreign policy choices (Makarychev 2014). By this logic, Russian officials often claim that it is of a “vital national interest” for Russia to maintain stability in the post-Soviet space keeping in mind all variety of trans-national threats that exist (Putin 2017a). The discourse that it is in Russia’s interest is to protect Russians living abroad is equally argued by Lavrov. According to Lavrov, Russia continues to seriously monitor the status of Russians living abroad so they can maintain ties with their “historical homeland” and educate their children with “due respect for their Fatherland” (Lavrov 2017a). Russia highly maintains the interests in territories which are perceived to be homes to Russian culture and Russian speaking populations and protectionist discourse is also espoused by Medvedev in his speech on Global Solidarity forum:

“Russia is a strong and influential nation and we must protect our people, our citizenship, and our history and culture. Russian Federation will always stand by you, that it is a country that has never left, nor will ever leave its people in the lurch, the way it was in South Ossetia and Crimea” (Medvedev 2016a).

The discourse to maintain regional influence in the post-Soviet space and is not new and can be traced before Crimea in various ways. I would argue that being the most influential power in the near abroad has always been of a central national interest for Russia. However, the manner in which Russia plans to maintain that influence has changed.

Values play a crucial role in Russian world and it was not a coincidence that 2014 was declared as the Year of Culture in Russia, intended to be devoted to enlightenment, respect for cultural roots, patriotism and ethics. According to Putin, foundational values for every civilization are “the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity” (Putin 2013c). As the international system is perceived to be unfair, justice became one of the most important values in the Russian world:

“You know, the Russian people feel in their hearts and understand in their minds very well what is happening. Napoleon once said that justice is the embodiment of God on earth. In this sense, the reunification of Crimea with Russia was a just decision” (Putin 2016c).

What is problematic with this vision of collective identity is that it is presented as a very blurry and uncertain concept in the official discourse. However, as Laurelle argued, the Russian World is not meant to be a rigid doctrine. It is rather a floating signifier open to all kinds of re-articulations (Laurelle 2015). Very often political leaders refer to the size of the Russian country to stress that Russia has no needs for expansion and others’ recourses: “If you look Russia’s place in the world, it is obvious that we have no need for others’ territory or natural resources” (Putin 2015a). In the post-annexation period official discourse maintains that Russia has a peaceful foreign policy with no desire to restore or rebuild the Soviet Union, rather the Russian world is about language, religion, values and preservation of cultural heritage. However, what is inconsistent with these representations is the way in which Russia treats the Russian world. For example, while he was justifying the decision to annex Crimea, Putin referred to the Russian world. He particularly addressed Germans and reminded them that Russia sincerely welcomed the idea of German unification even though some nations were opposed. “I am confident that you have not forgotten this, and I expect that the citizens of Germany will also support the aspiration of the Russians, of historical Russia, to restore national unity” (Putin 2014a). This quotation shows that Putin’s understanding of Russian world contains expansionism and refers to unification with Russians outside Russia, and in this particular case it is with citizens of Crimea.

### *Changing international circumstances*

The second part of the analysis will be devoted to changing international circumstances that have influenced changes in Russian national interest formation. From a constructivist point of view, a country's image, prestige and status in international hierarchy play an important role in national interests articulation. For Clunan, the way in which Russia perceives the international system is largely led by historical memory and status recognition (Clunan 2009).

For Realists a state's international status depends on military might that can be demonstrated in a war. On the other hand some schools argue that the recognition of a great power status regarding some "special rights and duties" always requires approval from other great powers and other states in international system (Larson & Shevchenko 2010). Lebow argues that international society legitimised the role of great power. Therefore many activities in international relations can be regarded as a competition for high status roles and privileges that come with the status. States are also interested to transform from a low-status roles into high-status ones. Therefore success or failure in the struggle for either regional or international status can affect interests and identity of a state (Lebow 2016b). The issue of great power status is of a great importance in Russian official discourses and will be discussed in more detail.

A second important issue that will be discussed is the issue of identity. I argue that a chain of events in the international community around annexation of Crimea have influenced the way in which Russia perceives itself towards West. Following Makarychev's argument the crisis triggered the feeling that the structure of East-West relations has permanently changed (Makarychev 2014), I see Ukrainian crisis and annexation of Crimea as a result of unsettled identity issues that Russia had with the West. Therefore I argue that the events in 2014 represented a shock into Russian discursive structures which influenced certain changes in Russia's interests, identity and concrete policies. I will apply Waeber's discursive structure framework to analyse these issues. However, to the fact that Russia has had difficulties to with West has also contributed the possibility that annexation of Crimea was simply a case of opportunistically seizing a territory and then formulating an updated set of national interests that could be used to justify their actions.

## **Russian place in international system**

For Russia, the international system is currently going through the process of global and regional instability which leads to increased competitiveness among states (National Security Strategy 2015). Global competitiveness particularly regards relations with West. For example the National security strategy openly condemns “the support of the United States and the European Union for the anti-constitutional coup d'etat in Ukraine” which led to an armed conflict near the Russia’s borders. Discourses towards the West have significantly changed after 2014 because for the first time in the official document, the National security strategy explicitly states that the West negatively influences the realization of Russian national interests and has aims to create different tensions in the Eurasian region (National Security Strategy 2015).

Russia sees the international situation as uneasy because the post-Soviet phase of Russian and global history has now come to an end (Putin 2012f). For Russian officials the struggle for global leadership has become more acute than ever before. A Multi-polar world order has emerged and actors like Brazil, China, India, or in Putin’s words “countries that were looked down on only yesterday” are making international relations more complex (Putin 2012c). Russian leaders are deeply convinced that this complexity makes Russia’s responsibility for maintaining international stability grow. In a polycentric world Russia is one of the key centres of world power and this kind of international order provides conditions for Russia’s gradual yet confrontation-free advancement of national interests (Lavrov 2013f).

Discursive understanding of the Russian position in international society is largely influenced by its history and geography. Foreign policy officials constantly refer to their great past and size of the country. For example in his inauguration speech Putin said that Russia has a “great past and just as great a future” (Putin 2012g). Portrayal of Russia as the largest country in the world also plays significant role in Russian understanding of international politics. Putin wrote in one of his articles that even though Russia does not occupy one-sixth of the Earth's surface anymore, it is still world's largest nation which has intention to protect its national interest by actively and constructively engaging in global politics (Putin 2012e). Furthermore this rhetoric is followed by a narrative of how Russian people are brilliant and heroic, and how they enjoy the world’s respect and admiration (Medvedev 2009).



For Russian leaders great power status goes naturally with Russia, because their nation inherited huge territory, glorious past, outstanding achievements in different spheres from science to military and technology. Additionally, Russian leaders perceive their country as a crucial member of the international community devoted to achieve more equitable world order where justice is respected. However, Russia has been struggling to gain recognition of its greatness as Other has the power to deny or attribute certain characteristics to Self. For example Putin stated that 2014 was a year of disappointment in Western partners. The connection with the events in Ukraine is perceived to be a demonstration of Western rejection of what Russian self has become, or in Putin's words "a full international player that has consolidated politically" (Putin 2016g). That Russia has become a full international player refers to the long wanted great power status recognition. Furthermore when he was asked to comment Obama's statement that Russia is regional power, Putin answered that the statement is a disrespectful speculation and an attempt to prove United States' exceptionalism by contrast (Putin 2016c). Even though the official governmental position is that Russia does not aspire to be called a superpower (Putin 2013c) it is expected that actors in the international system understand that Russia is more than just a regional power. Because if someone claims that Russia is a regional power, Putin's suggestion is first to look at the map and determine to which region to refer to as Russia is part of Europe, part of Asia, bordering with China, Japan, United States, even Canada across the Arctic Ocean (Putin 2016c) again referring back to the discourse of greatness.

Status recognition is important for Russia as it fears of the possibility to become marginalized as it has powerful neighbours, European Union from the Western side and China from the Eastern side. Keeping in mind its economic shortages, Russia constantly argues that regardless of economic power, one actor cannot aspire to lead the world or the global economy. This standing is followed in the discursive narrative that Russia is considered and respected internationally only when it is perceived strong. During 2012 Putin has numerous times repeated that Russia should not tempt anyone by allowing itself to be weak (Putin 2012b). Official speeches in the beginning of Putin's third term are full with rhetoric about the attempts to push Russia in the background and to weaken its geopolitical position.

That Russia officially aspires equal position internationally with major world powers is reflected in repetitious rhetoric about multi-polar or polycentric world order (these two concepts

are often used as synonyms in the official discourse). Leadership also repeats that no one should question Russia's position in it due to its military, geographical and economic capabilities, its culture and human potential. According to Lavrov, Russia seeks to maintain polycentric world order by standing firmly on the position of law and justice (Lavrov 2012). Russian officials often emphasise the need to respect the rule of law as they perceive it as a tool which can ensure Russia's international position.

Russia seeks that actions of major world powers reflect respect for Russian national interests and numerous times Russian leaders repeated that Russian national interests are not being taken into consideration. In the official discourse, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Union are and have always been a priority for Russian foreign policy (Putin 2016e). Additionally as the Russian government sees the CIS as "a driving force of development and as a guarantee of region's stability"(Medvedev 2012c), it is not a surprise that they requested to be involved into Ukrainian trade negotiation with European Union. The fact that these bilateral negotiations had not transformed into trilateral negotiations Russia perceived as disrespect towards Russian interests. Lavrov stated that around crisis in Ukraine it became evident that for centuries European countries have felt uncomfortable about "nascent giant in the East" and have devoted significant efforts to isolate it from taking part in Europe's most important affairs (Lavrov 2016).

One of the main consequences of the manner how Russia perceives respect for its national interests resulted in even deeper lack of trust towards West. Trust issue was a problem before annexation of Crimea. For example, Lavrov's argued that the level of economic, education and scientific ties with Europe is tremendous and is consistently growing, however if there is a low level of trust in the military and political areas (Lavrov 2013d). For Medvedev, Russia and the United States reset everything they could during his presidency (Medvedev 2012c), but Russia still felt that the United States does not respect Russian interests. For example Medvedev argued that the United States employs a "shoddy doctrine" of extended sovereignty and that tries to impose its verdicts across the world, and that this kind of acts can provoke both symmetric and asymmetric reactions from Russia (Medvedev 2012a).

The discourse on the lack of trust towards the West became even louder with the Ukraine crisis. Lavrov for example argued that main goal behind the entire Eastern Partnership project

was to “tear the neighbours from Russia, even if it is done artificially and using blackmailing” (Lavrov 2013c). This kind of rhetoric culminated in 2014 in Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly to incorporate Crimea into Russian Federation:

“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. They kept telling us the same thing: Well, this does not concern you” (Putin 2014a).

Official discursive narrative suggests that Russia acted defensively in 2014 and therefore did not provoke any disturbances in the world. For Putin Russia’s contribution goes only to the extent of firm protection of national interests “We are not attacking in the political sense of the word. We are only protecting our interests” which simultaneously causes dissatisfaction with Western partners (Putin 2014b). It is West who undertook the actions against Russia, against Ukraine and against Eurasian integration (Putin 2014a).

### **Identity in the official discourse**

This section is built on Hansen’s argument of the narrative and constitutive adjustment between identity, interests and policy<sup>7</sup>. As many constructivist argued in order to understand what states want, scholars should start from investigating a country’s identity and its relation to interests. In order to achieve this goal I will apply Waever’s discursive structure. I argue that annexation of Crimea accelerated or even caused changes in concrete policies especially Russian turn to Eastern dimension of foreign policy. One part of the international community imposed sanctions and excluded Russia from international platforms such Group 8 therefore Russia had to accommodate to new international circumstances. These policy changes raised the debates on Russian identity and questioned Russian Europeanises. To remind, being naturally European would mean that Russia does not need to be tutored as to what constitutes European identity, and Russia would feel comfortable with its European identity as France or Germany.

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<sup>7</sup> “Foreign policies are legitimized as necessary, as in the national interest, through reference to identities, yet identities are simultaneously constituted and reproduced through formulations of foreign policy” (Hansen 2006a, p.Preface).

There are scholars who claim that Russia is predominantly European. For example Morozov's identity analysis has led him to claim that there is only one Russia, which is European and in its own way civilized (Morozov 2015, p.167). He argues that Russian identity is always rooted in European identities because it either accepts them, or uses them as a means to create a distinct Russian identity. In this sense, Russia's is thoroughly "Eurocentric" as references are always to Europe. That Russia is predominantly European seems to be a dominant view, but it is important to acknowledge that there are some competing discourses like portrayal of Russia as Eurasian country, or arguing that Russia already has its own distinctive civilisations characteristics.

The discourses on identity at the very beginning of Putin's third term were very Eurocentric. Putin claimed that Russian citizens feel and think of themselves as Europeans (Putin 2012e). Furthermore, that was the time when he proposed the creation of a common human and economic space which would connect the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean, a so called Union of Europe. The idea of Union of Europe according to Lavrov, it is not solely supported from the Russian side, it is also much discussed topic in Germany and France (Lavrov 2012). In this context he quoted French President Charles de Gaulle in a sense that he was one of the European leaders who then spoke about common European space from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals (Lavrov 2013d).

Putin seemed to be convinced that the European identity of Russia should not be questioned as "Russia is an inalienable and organic part of Greater Europe and European civilization (Putin 2012e). Or, as Medvedev argued, the European Union and Russia are partners who live in a common European home and have one common European identity (Medvedev 2013b). This narrative was supported by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who added that Russia belongs to greater European civilization which naturally includes North America (Lavrov 2012). European discourse was also supported in Putin's article Russia muscles up when he argued that the United States is no longer the single centre of power, but on the other hand emerging centres of influence are not yet ready to take over. Therefore Russia must play its civilisationist role based on a great history but also on distinctive cultural model which "organically combines the fundamental principles of European civilisation and many centuries of cooperation with East" (Putin 2012f). Putin wanted to make the point that Russia and Europe share same the

civilisational values, whereas connection to the East is more technical due to the emergence of new economic powers.

Before the Ukraine crisis, relations with the European Union and Russia were described as “friendly and mutually beneficial.” Medvedev stressed many times that the EU is Russia’s largest trade partner with around 400 billion dollars trade turnover, and that probably only the United States and China have bigger trade. That is why he also argued that Russia is an “exclusive partner” to the EU (Medvedev 2013a; Medvedev 2013e). This discourse compliments Lavrov’s vision that Russia consistently works on the reinforcement of strategic partnership relations with the European Union, which is Russia’s largest economic partner (Lavrov 2013a). Medvedev also used the EU to make a positive linkage<sup>8</sup> in order to explain the advantages of the Eurasian Union. Medvedev argued that extensive economic integration can be achieved when two nations live side by side and that the EU represents a good example of well integrated and fairly safe economies in the long term. Common market, common currency and common values create a beneficial environment and show a good example which should be followed (Medvedev 2013c).

That Russia is a European country on one hand, and an Asian country on the other hand was widely referred to in the official discourse. It is also argued that Russian interests lie on both continents. However, the narrative around the Asian part of Russia is usually followed by the Far East question. Medvedev once said this is a “distant land with a number of difficulties” (Medvedev 2012b) which could be a sign for internal othering. Even though the Far East is declared to be a development priority of Russia overall, it can be argued that officials realised that a lot of work has to be done in order to fit these ‘distant’ territories into official identity discourse.

One year before the crisis in Ukraine, Medvedev still hold the position that European discourse has a central place in Russian identity. His rhetoric was that democracy is a universal concept and that Russia does not seek political developments towards human rights and basic

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<sup>8</sup> Positive linkage was referred to United States as well. Putin argued that Russia could learn from American experience in shaping the consciousness of several generations of Americans through Hollywood because it managed to positively link American values and priorities with national interests and public morals (Putin 2012d).

freedoms different from the west. Russia is no different from other European countries and does not pursue a “special democratic path based on certain Russian specifics” (Medvedev 2013d).

However, the same year president Putin started the differentiation from Europe during the discussion at the Valdai club. For example unlike Russia who is consistently deepening integration ties with its neighbours, Europe works on the “principle of eating from one’s neighbours’ plate before eating from one’s own”. Furthermore he argued that Europe is rejecting its roots including the Christian values that represents a foundation of Western civilization (Putin 2013a). The differentiation from Europe hides also in the narrative that Russia has always tried to pursue foreign policy based on equality, mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests unlike Russia’s Western partners who constantly promote principle “with us or against us” (Lavrov 2013f). Therefore he started including discourses distancing from Europe such as “Russia is returning to itself, to its own history”, but remaining open and receptive to the best ideas and practices of the East and the West (Putin 2013a).

When the situation around Ukraine started to get complicated in a sense that it was more likely that Ukraine will decide to sign the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, discourse toward Europe started changing. For example, Lavrov said that the turn of Russia to the Pacific Ocean, the rise of Siberia and the Far East are national priorities for the entire twenty first century because these regions have potential which can ensure dynamic development of Russia (Lavrov 2013a). Culmination of a change came with adoption of new cultural policy. As Moscow times reported, the Ministry of culture announced new cultural policy and its content could be summarized as “Russia is not Europe”. This policy argues that Russia should be examined as a unique and distinctive civilization due to traditional Russian values. It belongs neither to the West nor the East (Golubock 2014). Russia has always sought to be a part of European culture. However, according to this policy one has to be blind not to see how the modern West withdrew from the culture of “classical” Europe (Министерство культуры Российской Федерации 2015).

## **Distancing from Europe (relational position)**

National interests depend on the interpretation of identity but identity itself is a fluid construct. Therefore I find important to discuss what implications for national interests formation has the process of discursive changes of identity. There is an opinion that the annexation of Crimea accelerated Russia's turn to East. This claim is stipulated by the fact that 2014 was the year when Russia's relations with the West reached an unprecedented low level since the end of Cold War, while relations with China reached unprecedented high level (Lavrov 2014). According to some analysts Russia's true turn to the East is just beginning and it consists of accelerated development of Siberia and the Russian Far East, and of increased presence in the Asia Pacific region (Bordachev 2016). However, I argue that discourses on Russian interests in the so called "Turn to East" should be carefully examined.

Official discourse claims that intensifying cooperation with Asian countries does not come from a need to find an alternative to the West, it is rather the sign of taking advantages of cooperating with countries which have faster economic progress than the rest of the world. For example, Putin claims that diversifying energy exports to new markets such as China, Japan, India and South Korea was planned long before the Russian economy faced serious troubles (Putin 2014b). Not surprisingly, this narrative is supported by the Prime Minister as well in claims that Russia must develop an Eastern dimension of foreign policy with countries like China, Vietnam, Japan, the Republic of Korea and all other Asian-Pacific nations. For Medvedev neglecting this foreign policy vector would have "strategic consequences" as this region currently shows remarkable trade and financial potential (Medvedev 2015). Finally Lavrov acknowledged that there are many analysis regarding Russia's decision to turn towards the East considering its relations with the West. However, he claims that Russia's policy is exclusively based on its national interests, therefore turning away from either Europe or Asia is out of question as it would hurt Russia's interests and will worsen Russia's international standing (Lavrov 2016).

Keeping in mind that Russia is not a country primarily led by economic incentives in the international arena, I would argue that a closer look into Russian strategic documents before and after the annexation of Crimea shows some silent changes. For example, Foreign Policy Concept

from 2013 mentions cooperation with certain Asian countries only within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) framework. On the other hand, the latter version of Foreign Policy Concept besides a part devoted to cooperation with ASEAN, seems to imply that Russia is interested to maintain strategic ties with countries like Vietnam, Japan, North Korea, but also Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. A special part is also devoted to China, India and Iran (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016).

On the other hand only four European states are mentioned: Germany, Italy, France and novelty Spain. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are no longer mentioned. However, concept carefully added that cooperation with other European countries has substantial potential in terms of promoting Russia's national interests in European and world affairs (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016). But besides the change in the list of preferred partners in European affairs, I find that more significant change is the fact that Russia deleted an important indicator of its relations with Europe. In the Foreign Policy Concept from 2013 it was clearly written that Russia is "an integral and inseparable part of European civilization" whose main task is to create and promote a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013). New concept does not refer to Russia as an inseparable part of European civilization. Now establishing a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific with EU is a strategic priority for Russia as it can prevent the emergence of dividing lines on the European continent. The main interest of Russia now lies in harmonizing and aligning processes of European and Eurasian integration.

In an interview, when he was asked where Russia's foreign policy should be oriented: to the East or the West, Lavrov had an interesting answer. He said that Russia has no choice as it is an enormous country that occupies a huge portion of Eurasia which naturally reflects the European and Asian roots of its foreign policy. However, to East and West, he added that Russian interests lay in cooperation North (Arctic) and South as well, especially with Chinese initiative Silk Road Economic Belt. Lavrov's point was that Russia has interests to be cooperative and active everywhere as long as it is on the basis of equality, mutual respect and reciprocal interests (Lavrov 2017c). I would argue that Lavrov used this kind of diplomatic rhetoric to make a skilful differentiation from the West as he did a year before in an article



Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective. He argued that "many prominent Western thinkers recognized that historically Rus was part of the European context but Russian people always had their own cultural matrix and spirituality and never blended entirely with the West" (Lavrov 2016). Lavrov seem to lean on Russia's "unique path" as often in his speeches he refers to a philosopher Nikolai Berdyayev, who argued that Russia has the mission of being a bridge between the East and the West. It seems that only Medvedev still maintains the clear idea of Russia belonging to European family of nations. He claims that Russia "will not withdraw from Europe economically, politically or in terms of mentality". For Medvedev Russia is a European power and "it would be futile to try to break Russia away from the European civilisation and its cultural diversity" (Medvedev 2015).

### **Turn to East: Change of policies?**

As national interests are operationalised through concrete policies I find very important to discuss how does the policies influence national interests formation. The policy changes during Putin's third term (the third discursive layer) are usually analysed within the framework of Sino-Russian relations. Following Lo's argumentation China became the main signifier of Russia's turn to the East, as most of the activities in Russian foreign policy are directed towards China (Lo 2015). Following Lo's arguments, different narratives developed on Chinese importance during the Ukraine crisis. One of them is that Russia was "forced to turn to East due to Western hostility". Lo sees partnership with China as the main hope for Russian government to leverage Western governments (Lo 2015, p.142). Therefore I find it necessary to discuss Russian interests in this relationship.

Officially in Russia Sino-Russian relations are labelled as "a comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation" which increased unprecedentedly in terms of level and substance (Putin 2016b). That Russia has the interest to cooperate with China is proven by different levels of cooperation. This includes major energy trade deal, building "Power of Siberia" pipeline, Russia became China's number one oil supplier, trade has increased due to currency swap arrangements that these two countries signed, and Russia has become one of the five largest

recipients of Chinese outbound direct investment in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative which connects Asia and Europe (Savic 2016).

This increased cooperation has influenced either the opinion that Russian relations with China are very fragile and uncertain, or that relations between these two countries will soon transform into to an anti-Western alliance. However, I would argue that the real essence of Russia's turn to the East is more complex. Overestimating the extent of a Russian turn to the East should be avoided because this turn resulted in asymmetrical rather the equal rapprochement. Russia found itself again in an uncertain international terrain and is trying to exploit relations as much as possible. I would also add that the uncertainty of Russia's turn to the East comes from the complex situation on Asian continent.

In the after Crimean discourse, Asia is seen a vital partner (Medvedev 2014) and Russia claims powerful friend in China. Putin is grateful that China understands Russian moves in Ukraine (Putin 2014a), and therefore argues that "it is common knowledge that Russia and China have very close relations" (Putin 2016f). Official discourse claims that the bounds that Russia and China have developed over recent years are more than a simple strategic partnership (Putin 2016f). This discourse is supported by Medvedev's rhetoric who claims that China and Russia are "truly friends" who share a common approach to many international issues and implement large projects through organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, including the alignment of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt (Medvedev 2016b). Therefore the core principle in this partnership is discursively portrayed as friendly.

As the principle of reciprocity is of a great importance in Russian discourse, I assume that it is very important that Chinese discourse goes in similar direction. For example Russia is the country that Chinese president has visited the most, and Xi Jinping said that he maintains the closest ties with Putin among all foreign leaders (Jinping 2017). Jinping also described relations with Russia as friendly "we are reliable friends always eager to help and support one another" (Jinping 2017). More importantly Junping addresses openly Russia as a great power country: "Our cooperation is underpinned by the core principles of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. This is an essential feature of the relations between our two countries as great powers" (Jinping 2017). That is why Putin started characterising Russian-Chinese relations as a "special

strategic partnership” (Putin 2016a). According to Putin, the level of trust that Russia currently has with China is on the higher level than ever before (Putin 2016a). Therefore it can be argued that the lack of trust with West has accelerated Russian discourses of high levels of trust with China.

Referring to China as a friend and lack of discourses on China as a threat in post Crimean period is significant, especially if we keep in mind that Putin once said “I do not want to dramatize the situation, but if we do not make every real effort, the Russian population will soon speak mostly Japanese, Chinese, and Korean” (quoted in Tsygankov, 2016, p 152). Keeping in mind Far East anxiety, and potential rivalry in Central Asia it can be argued that Russia carefully works on establishing good relations with China’s opponents. For example, before the Crimean crisis, Russia devoted significant efforts to enhance relations with Japan. As a consequence of annexation, Japan joined sanctions against Russia which influenced on deterioration of relations. However Putin openly said that the interests of the Russian Federation include the normalisation of relations with Japan, which is not at the bottom of the agenda as Russia is interested to create an atmosphere of trust (Putin 2016a).

Following Teper’s argument Putin spoke of Russia’s “European calling” and Russia’s place in “the common European home” but there was no “Asian calling”, common home, common culture, or common civilization (Teper 2016). The lack of civilisationist connection in the official discourses towards Asia is replaced by economic cooperation with China and other Asia-Pacific countries. In that sense Initiative on Greater Eurasian Partnership that would include member states of SCO, ASEAN, CIS and Belt and Road Initiative was proposed (Lavrov 2017b). Russia has been trying to intensify its presence in various economic initiatives in Asia however Russia is still very careful when producing civilisationist discourses. Therefore Russia’s interests in cooperation with Asian countries are still very pragmatic.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to unpack the meanings behind Russian national interests during Putin's third term. In order to achieve this goal, I proposed a research question *How has the annexation of Crimea changed discourses on Russian national interests formation*, with a sub question *How coherent are discourses on national interests represented by Russian official*. As the time frame I set period of Putin's third term with a middle point of 2014 when the annexation of Crimea occurred. Combining constructivist theoretical approach and poststructuralist methodology I tried to answer these questions.

### *How has the annexation of Crimea changed discourses on Russian national interests formation?*

Various factors can influence changes in the way in which national interests are formulated. I identified that among others, ideas on national sovereignty, the Russian world, Russia's place in the international system, and ideas on identity orientation influenced national interest formation between 2012 and 2017 in Russia.

I identified that Russia has changed discourses on national sovereignty. Before the annexation of Crimea, one of the most important foreign policy goals for Russia was to be a leader in the field of international law. Many times Russia has criticized Western interventionism for not respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore officials produced discourses such as Russia defends its national interests without being involved into any confrontation, unacceptability of excessive use of force, Russia does not seek domination neither in region nor in the world. However, by supporting separatists in Eastern Ukraine, and with the annexation of

Crimea, Russia has challenged the principle of non-interference and has given priority to the principle of self-determination. Empirical analysis showed inconsistency between Russian key strategic documents and the ongoing understanding of national interests as Russia has tried to justify the annexation of Crimea by the “inviolability of self-determination” even though main principles in Foreign policy concept from 2013 were sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The second conclusion is that the influence of the Russian world doctrine in its expansionist form triggered the redefinition of national interests during Putin’s third term. Changes in discourses on sovereignty were followed by the changes of discourses on values that refer to spirituality and morality. Russia has been trying to establish the Russian world as a cultural unit in the polycentric world order in order to deal with civilisational struggle with the West. But the concept has developed to have several meanings in the official discourse, therefore boundaries of the Russian world are not known. During the timeframe under study the lack of the national idea is presented to be one of the most important issues that Russia has to solve “there has been no progress on questions about who we are and who we want to be” (Putin 2013a). Even though in the official discourse it is not clear who Russia wants to be, for Putin it is clear that Russia is one of the biggest nations divided by borders. Therefore another inconsistency is noted: the Russian world is presented as a concept about language, religion, values and preservation of cultural heritage. However, comparison of German unification with the Crimean case showed that the parts of Ukraine have become included in dominant thinking about Russian nation. This added expansionist element into Russian world concept.

The international situation also plays an important role in national interests formation. Russia sees the international situation as uneasy as it is perceived that the post-Soviet phase of Russian and global history has now come to an end. Without a doubt discourse on Russia as a great power has been incorporated into Russian national interests and the annexation of Crimea has not changed the fact that Russia perceives itself in the great power terms. However discursive portrayal of Russia as a great power seems a bit different after the annexation of Crimea. It seems that for the governmental elite, Russia is perceived as a status maintainer or, in Putin’s words Russia has become “a full international player that has consolidated politically” (Putin 2016g). Therefore large criticism is directed towards the West for constantly trying to prevent Russia from achieving and protecting its national interests.

Finally, identity has played an important role in Russian national interest formation. Based on empirical evidence, without a doubt the consequences of the annexation of Crimea have accelerated Russian devotion to Eastern dimension of foreign policy. Even though Russian officials claim that the development of cooperation in Asia is part of a long term strategy planned before the events in Ukraine, I argued that the response that Russia got from the West after the annexation has had the predominant influence. Using Waever's discursive structure model, in this case I argued that the change happened first in the second layer. Relational position between Russia and West has changed which prompted the changes in policies (third layer). Russia has intensified cooperation in various directions such as trade, infrastructure projects and energy deals. The dependence on Chinese purchasing power is growing and Russia has the interest to maintain good relations with its eastern neighbour, but also with other Asian countries in order to diversify its policies and to counterbalance Chinese influence. Referring back to Waever's argument that it is the most difficult to change or politicise the core layer, I also found out that only silent changes occurred in the core layer of Russian identity. For example the discourses on identity at the very beginning of Putin's third term European discourse had a central place in Russian identity. When the crisis in Ukraine started the discourses like "Russia is returning to itself" became more feasible. Then in 2014 Ministry of Culture announced new cultural policy which argues that Russia is a distinctive civilization due to traditional Russian values. It belongs neither to the West nor the East. Discourses on civilisation distinctiveness are noticeable, but for example even in the post-Crimean period for Medvedev "Russia is a European power and it would be futile to try to break Russia away from the European civilisation diversity" (Medvedev 2015). Finally, Russia has reoriented a significant part of trade and energy policies towards East but has been very careful on producing discourses on civilisational similarity with countries Asian countries like China. However changes in relational position towards West influenced changes of Russian relational position toward China and Russia now claims a powerful friend in China. It seems that Russia has entered in uncertain terrain with no clear international orientation.

To conclude, territory is one of the most important elements of each state. Therefore when a state decides to change its borders it goes through the process of explanation and legitimization for the particular move. Such policies are usually legitimized through the notion of national interests. National interests depend on the interpretation of identity but identity itself is a

fluid construct. Due to the changes that stem from domestic circumstances as well as from the changes that stem from international environment, Russia has changed the way in which it understands self and its nation. What can stem from here is that Russia still has not built a clear idea of its nation, therefore the very idea of the nation remains blurred and uncertain and this uncertainty will leave national interests as a vague concept.

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