

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences

Giorgi Shaishmelashvili

Analyzing Russia's Foreign Policy Objectives: August War of 2008

and Annexation of Crimea

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Pikria Asanishvili, Associate Professor.

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## ანოტაცია

ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს რუსეთის ფედერაციის საგარეო პოლიტიკური მიზნების ანალიზს და იმ ფაქტორების დადგენას, რომლებმაც განაპირობეს 2008 წლის რუსეთ-საქართველოს ომი და ყირიმის ანექსია 2014 წელს. კვლევაში გაანალიზებულია რუსეთის ისტორიულად ჩამოყალიბებული საგარეო პოლიტიკის მიზანი. სწორედ ამ კონტექსტშია ახსნილი რუსეთის საგარეო პოლიტიკური ქცევა 90-იანი წლებიდან მოყოლებული ყირიმის ანექსიამდე.

ვლადიმერ პუტინის რევიზიონიზმი, რუსეთის, როგორც დიდი სახლმწიფოს შესახებ ელიტასა და საზოგადოებაში არსებულ მეინსტრიმულ იდეებს ეფუძნება. ამ იდეების მიხედვით, მოსკოვისთვის, როგორც ძალაუფლების ერთ-ერთი ცენტრისთვის სასიცოცხლოდ მნიშვნელოვანია დომინაცია ახლო სამეზობლოზე.

2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომისა და 2014 წელს ყირიმის ანექსიის შემდეგ, რუსეთის რევიზიონისტულმა საგარეო პოლიტიკამ მნიშვნელოვანი გამოწვევის წინაშე დააყენა მსოფლიოს და კონკრეტულად კი ევროპის უსაფრთხოების არქიტექტურა. რადგან აგვისტოს ომისა და ყირიმის ანექსიის შემდეგ რუსეთი განაგრძობს აგრესიულ პოლიტიკას, მნიშვნელოვანია საფუძვლიანად გაანალიზდეს ის მოტივები, რომლებიც რუსეთის საგარეო პოლიტიკურ კურსს განაპირობებს.

რუსეთი დიდ ხანს ემზადებოდა საბჭოთა კავშირის დაშლის შედეგად მიღებული, მისთვის არა სასურველი საერთაშორისო სტატუსის რევიზიისთვის. ვლადიმერ პუტინმა ეფექტურად გამოიყენა აშშ-ის გადართვა ახლო აღმოსავლეთის პრობლემატიკაზე და

ქვეყნის შიგნით ძალაუფლების ვერტიკალის გამტკიცებასთან ერთად, რუსეთის სამხედრო და ეკონომიკური მოდერნიზაცია დაიწყო. რაშიც გადამწყვეტი ნაფთობზე და გაზზე გაზრდილი ფასები აღმოჩნდა.

ამდენად, ნაშრომში ნაჩვენებია, რომ 2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომის და ყირიმის ანექსიის განმაპირობებელი ძირითადი ფაქტორი, რეგიონში რუსეთის ჰეგემონური ინტერესების დაცვაა. სხვა ყველა ფაქტორი, იქნება ეს ნატოს ბუქარესტის სამიტი თუ ევროკავშირის აღმოსავლეთ პარტნიორობის პროგრამა, მეორადი მნიშვნელობისაა.

## Abstract

The research aims at analyzing Russian Federation's foreign political objectives and identifying factors leading to 2008 August War between Georgia and Russia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The research explores Russia's historically established foreign policy objective and examines Russia's foreign political conduct from early 90's until the annexation of Crimea through this prism.

After the August War of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's revisionist foreign policy challenged the world's and in particular, Europe's security architecture. Since Russia continues its aggressive foreign policy after 2008 and 2014 military interventions, it is crucial to thoroughly analyze the motives driving Russia's foreign policy course.

Vladimir Putin's revisionism is based on the mainstream ideas on Russia's greatness shared by elites and the general public. According to these ideas, Moscow, as one of the power centers of the international system, necessitates domination over its near neighborhood.

Russia has long been preparing to revise its undesirable status after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Vladimir Putin effectively utilized US shift towards the Middle East, and by strengthening the power vertical at home, started military and economic modernization of Russia. The major enabler of Putin's political course was increased prices on oil and gas on the international markets.

Consequently, the research argues that the major factor determining 2008 war against Georgia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was Russia's quest to protect its national

interests. All other factors, be it NATO Bucharest Summit or Eastern Partnership Program of the EU, are of secondary importance.

## **1. Introduction**

Russia's revisionist foreign policy is one of the major challenges to the global security. With direct military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine Moscow challenged the international order and tested the West's readiness to respond to the ambitious and revisionist Russia.

In the beginning of 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the liberal enthusiasm that followed the dissolution of the Communist bloc, political and academic circles in the West nourished the idea that Russia was a weakening, declining power (Oliker, Charlik-Parley 2002). Moreover, in the post-Cold War world order characterized by unilateralism, the interest towards Moscow started to reduce. Therefore, Russia's aggressiveness at first in Georgia and later in Ukraine surprised the Western political class, but the inertia was proved to be strong even after 2008 August war. However, after the Crimea's annexation, Western political thought on Russia's revisionist foreign policy started to consolidate gradually.

Since gaining independence, relationship with Russia has been one of the major determinants of Georgia's domestic and foreign policy. According to the Strategic Defence Review 2017-2020 document, the occupation of Georgian territories, Russia's further steps to annex the occupied territories, and its willingness to disregard international law, violate the sovereignty of its neighbouring countries through open military aggression and the use of hybrid warfare, remain key challenge to Georgia's security. Moreover, the document

discusses the region's energy resources and states that gaining and maintaining control over regional energy sources and the distribution networks remain to be Russia's key strategic objective that challenges Georgia's energy security and puts its role as an energy transit route under significant risk (Ministry of Defense of Georgia, 2017).

In this context, Russia's foreign policy especially towards the post-soviet space has a critical importance. This work in fact aims at analyzing Moscow's foreign policy objectives and its action using August 2008 War and the annexation of Crimea as case studies. The author hopes that in retrospect, the pattern of Russians conduct identified by the analysis of past historical experience, will serve as an orientational framework both for academics and politicians to determine Russia's future course of action.

The work aims at answering the following research question: *what factors determined Russia's conduct during August War in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014?*

The author argues that the August War against Georgia and the annexation of Crimea was a result of a revisionist Russia's attempt to achieve its foreign policy objective to become a great power. Consequently, the following hypothesis will be tested: Russia's conduct during the August War and the annexation of Crimea was determined by Russia's great power objectives, with hegemony over the post-Soviet space being one of the major pillars of this quest for great power status. Realising this objective was also made possible by the domestic and international factors - more specifically, by US's shift to problems in the Middle East, Kremlin's strengthening power vertical at home, fast economic growth and developing military capabilities.

The work will be organized around the following chapters:

**Chapter Three – theoretical framework** is devoted to the description and the substantiation of the relevance of the selected theoretical schools of thought with the objectives of the research. To analyze Russia's foreign policy conduct, the work uses the theoretical frameworks of offensive realism and constructivism. Moscow's foreign policy ambitions are equally based on its material capabilities and rational calculation, as well as on its political identity, which on its part is the projection of the idea of Russia's special role living among the elites. Therefore, according to the author, integrating realist and constructivist approaches, best explains the foreign policy conduct of Russia.

**Chapter Four – Russia's Foreign Policy objectives** analyzes Russia's foreign policy objectives after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is essential to explain modern Russian revisionism. The analysis of historical facts, discourses coming from the state officials and official state documents illustrates that Russia's main foreign policy objective is to protect its interest as a great power. The great power interest inherently implies hegemony with its own power center. In this case, former soviet allied republics present a natural sphere of hegemony to Russia. Therefore, Russia's main foreign policy objective is ensuring domination over the former post-Soviet territories by denying other powers an access in this space. *Russia's unchanging political objective towards the post-Soviet space is used as a first independent variable in this research.*

**Chapter Five and Chapter Six** deal with Georgian-Russian and Ukrainian-Russian relationships. Since gaining independence, relationships with Russia have had a significant impact on these countries domestic and foreign policies. As the analysis illustrate, both Tbilisi and Kiev have been attempting to conduct their domestic and foreign policies independent from Russia, which was never accepted by Moscow. *Georgia and Ukraine's*



*quest to conduct independent (sovereign) foreign policy is used as a second independent variable.*

**Conclusion** – the concluding chapter analyzes those factors and the interdependencies of the independent variables that determined Russia's conduct towards Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014 respectively. These factors and their interactions are thus used as dependent variables.

## **2. Research Methods**

An empirical case study of Russian-Georgian War of 2008 and Russia's annexation of Crimea provide an opportunity to explain the roots of Russian conduct. The proposed research required the use of primary qualitative research methods in order to analyze a large amount of information. The research relies on a number of sources of evidence. Secondary sources of social science works will be used in this paper, including books, articles, scholarly papers and official documents. The theoretical framework of offensive realism and constructivism is applied to empirically grounded Russian foreign policy analysis towards Georgia and Ukraine. The discourse analysis is used to understand political discourse evolving on the Russian foreign policy, while, the content analysis is employed to make inferences from the documents.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Offensive Realism and Social Constructivism**

For the purposes of the research, the analysis of Russia's foreign policy objectives will be based on two theoretical frameworks of international relations: offensive realism and social constructivism.

The realist school of thought looks at international relations through the prism of competition and conflict between states, with survival as a primary motivation and power as an ultimate tool to further national interests. Hence, realism is mostly interpreted as a zero sum game between the states, stressing the significance of states as principal actors in international relations. The main tenets of realism as a theory of political philosophy derive from four principal assumptions (Viotti & Kauppi, 2010 p. 42). First, the states are viewed as unitary actors in international arena acting in the pursuit of national interests. Second, international system is regarded as anarchical structure lacking legitimate central government. Third, states are considered to be rational actors using cost-benefit analysis to maximize the benefit by minimizing the costs. Fourth, national security is understood to be the focus of national interests, with power as the primary means to achieve states' security objectives.

Among numerous theories under the realist school of thought, two particular theories – offensive realism and defensive realism – stand out that help to explain Russia’s behaviour against Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014. Both, offensive and defensive realism focus on power relations and emphasise the importance of relative gains. More specifically, as argued defensive realists, international structure deprives states of incentives to pursue more power. Instead, states merely respond to security dilemmas and try to guarantee security and preserve existing power by maintaining the status quo of the international system (သုဒ္ဓကဝိဝ, 2006 p.30). Conversely, according to offensive realists, states constantly seek to gain more power at the expense of others, challenging the existing status quo and maximizing their share.

Offensive realism explains states’ unvarying desire to maximize their power, since it is the only way to guarantee security and survive. In this sense, striving for hegemony is the extreme form of power maximization (Mearsheimer, 2001 p. 5). John Mearsheimer – an American author of the theoretical concept of offensive realism points out that states can only ensure safety if they secure for themselves the status of the most powerful actor in the international system. However, since this process requires enormous economic and military resources, a number of states seek regional hegemony considering their limited capabilities. Achieving this objective might provide incentives for states to increase their relative power in the international system and strive for world hegemony. Yet, it is worth noting that a number of regional hegemons respect status quo due to pragmatic calculations and while not openly disclosing ambitions, still seek global hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001 pp. 32-36).

While the realist school of thought provides credible rationale behind great powers’ strive to maximize power, it disregards social and emotional contexts influencing state behaviour. Yet, as Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist argue, excluding emotional and social context from the

equation risks misunderstanding the meaning of the conflict, its dynamic and adversaries future course of action (Tsygankov & Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009). Therefore, contextualizing security interests and power politics in terms of emotional, social and historical backgrounds is essential to thoroughly analyze the motives driving Russia into direct military confrontation against Georgia and Ukraine.

To do so, the research uses social constructivist approach to interpret and analyze Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014. Constructivism, as one of the approaches for theorizing IR, looks at state actions in the light of national identities and interests and argues that state politics is guided by "intersubjectively shared and institutionalised norms, rules, ideas, beliefs and values" (Viotti & Kauppi, 2010 p. 280). Central to the constructivist understanding is that the international politics is an ideational creation, a structure of norms that may change with the changes in the ideas making up the system (Akobia, 2006 p. 48). Unlike realist understanding of international system, where the system is determined through the distribution of material capabilities, constructivists view the world in terms of social structures defined by shared knowledge and understanding of the world, material capabilities that acquire the meaning only through shared knowledge established in the society and practices (Wendt, 2010 p. 300).

The inclusion of shared understanding of the outside world is a significant determinant of the types of relationships between the states, and in particular conflict and cooperation. Primary source of shared understanding and shared knowledge is the history and the past experience of states within the international system. The experience of a state determines the way the state identifies itself in the international system and thus directs its relationship towards the outside world. Consequently, how states behave with each other determines

the structure in which they are acting by the logic of reciprocity (Wendt, 2010 p. 302), which on its part, directs the interaction between the states in international system.

Understanding Russia's behaviour in terms of great power ambition and examining Georgian-Russian and Ukrainian-Russian relationship by combining offensive realist and constructivist theoretical frameworks, enable the analysis of Russian foreign policy both in terms of material and emotional/symbolic aspects of power. In fact, as Tsygankov and Neumann argue, Russia's international ambitions are fed by domestic perceptions and the vision of national honour, which, supported by strong material base, has eventually determined Russia's policy towards Georgia in 2008. Therefore, the inclusion of domestic perceptions and socio-historical context in the analysis of Russia's quest for hegemony and great power statues, provides a holistic view of the motives behind 2008 war in Georgia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

## **4. Russia's Foreign Policy Objectives: From tactical pause to Revisionism**

*Russia is reconcentrating*  
Gorchakov

*Russia is catching a breath*  
Stolypin

### **4.1. Liberal Westernism**

The debate on Russia's civilizational and political identity and its interaction with the outside world has a long history in the intellectual life of Russia. In addition to external factors and material capabilities, the way the elites and the people see their place and role in the history has a major impact on the political system of the country, including its foreign policy.

In the light of crises following the collapse of the Soviet Union, discussions intensified on Russia's foreign political objectives and interests that were based on previously existing traditional concepts. The central theme of the abovementioned debates was the issue of civilizational identity of Russia. The (foreign) political implication of Russia's quest to define its civilizational identity translated into an attempt to shape Russia's interests during its integration into the international system. Two main aspects were particularly important in shaping Russia's interests: 1) What kind of relationship would Russia have with its former Cold War rival – the West; 2) How would it interact with its former protectorate allied republics.

In the context of liberal euphoria since the end of the Cold War and discredited Gorbachov's project as a result of an unsuccessful coup, Russia's President Boris Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister – Andrey Kozyrev viewed Russian interests in the integration with the Western structures. For Yeltsin and Kozirev, Russia was an integral part of Western civilization and thus sought Russian modernization through the economic and political integration with the West.

Focusing foreign policy on Western political and economic institutes, Russia's interest towards the post-Soviet space was relatively low immediately in the aftermath of the Cold War. The reason behind was the view in Russia's political thinking that former allied republics were economic burden for the Russian Federation. Yet, according to Russia's main Westerner – Foreign Minister Kozirev, Western partners were to consider Russia's special role and responsibility in the post-Soviet space and accept its voluntary integration with the West as naturally as German and French integration into the European Union (Козырев, 2002 pp 5-15). Interestingly, the Foreign Minister's focus on Western institutions had the

roots in 16 years (1974-1990) of experience in the Directorate of International Organizations at the Soviet Foreign Ministry (Tsygankov, 2010 p.60).

Similar foreign policy reflexes served as the basis for 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of Russia. The concept was heavily influenced by the OSCE charter and presented Russia's participation in different international organization as a way to advance state's interests.

Despite realist assumptions that Russia's pursuit of Western integration was a pragmatic move of a weakened superpower with limited material capabilities, reformers in the post-Cold War Russia viewed the end of the Soviet Union as the beginning of Russia's opportunity to define its new identity (Tsygankov, 2010).

From the very beginning, Kozrev's liberal foreign policy was met with resistance from the opposition, as well as from the inner circles of the government, and most importantly - from the wider society. Among the opponents of Kozrev's western political course were Gorbachev's supporters, nationalists, Eurasianists and others. However, the most influential was the group of Derzhavniks, who viewed Russia as a global player relying on individual strength to maintain its position and status and hence possessed the capability to maintain the "equilibrium of power" in the world (Tsygankov, 2010 p.95).

The leader of the Derzhavnist group was the head of the foreign intelligence - Yevgeni Primakov. The most influential officials supporting the idea of Russia's special role in international system, who also focused on power as the most important foreign policy tool, were among the government entities, military-industrial complex and the so-called Siloviki, who were represented in defense, security and secret services. The relative advantage of this group compared to others was the institutional levers influencing the foreign policy directions and decision-making process within the government (Tsygankov, 2010).

In light of failed economic reforms, conflicts in the Russian neighborhood, subsiding western interest towards Russia and disintegration from within the state, Etatists managed to consolidate the power. The symbolic expression of the rise of Derzhavnists was the replacement of liberal Foreign Policy Minister – Kozyrev with Derzhavnik Yevgeni Primakov in 1995. However, it is important to note that the Derzhavnik ideas appeared in the foreign policy course, including in official documents of Russia during Kozirev's term. For Mankoff, in constructivist terms, this dynamic illustrated the emergence of consensus about Russia's new identity and role in international system dominated by the West (Mankoff, 2009 p. 62).

The analysis of the developments in Russian foreign policy and practice illustrates that short-lived, fragmented and uninstitutionalized liberal foreign policy course was only a slight deviation from Russia's power-centered foreign policy. This deviation was an exception dictated by historical, individual and tactical context of a given period.

#### **4.2. Unforgotten past: Return to the Great Power Politics**

Interpreting Russia as a great power in the anarchic world started to dominate the Russian foreign policy thinking immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This traditional discourse had strong roots in the Russian empire dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. While researchers identify a number of schools of thought on Russia's foreign policy thinking, according to Mankoff, the differences among them merely rested on specific policy choices, instead of differentiating Russia's overall strategy (Mankoff, 2009 p.62). All of the various schools of thoughts share a number of essential postulates:



- Foundational principle of Russia's foreign policy is about maintaining great power status;
- Military power determines the international order, instead of norms and international law;
- Opposing the domination of West in general and of the US in particular;
- Russia has a special role in the post-Soviet space.

It is worth mentioning that Russian elites, as well as the majority of the general public started to gradually blame the West for the failure of the post-Cold War Russia. As an illustration, in 1995 44% of the general public viewed the US as a threat – an increase from 26% in 1993. Similar dynamic was identified among elites that showed the increase from 27% in 1993 to 53% in 1995 (Tsygankov 2010, p.25). Anti-Western sentiments accumulated in the elite and general public was effectively capitalized by Yevgeni Primakov.

Primakov's foreign policy course was built on two major policy objectives: Containing US ambitions of a unipolar power and reintegrating post-Soviet space under Moscow's umbrella. Primakov and his team viewed the international system as a great power arena, which was anarchic and required the balance of power multipolarity. In this multipolar world, Russia was seen as an independent power. For pragmatic purposes and only by considering Russian interests, similar conception of the state identity did not exclude cooperation with the West, including in the field of security. According to Primakov, Russia had to conduct a multi-vector foreign policy and free itself from Eurocentrism. It was obvious from the onset that the objective of this multi-vector diplomacy was to contain the US and consolidate its competitors. Primakov viewed these geopolitical values as constant that were not influenced by the historical contexts (quoted in Tsygankov, 2010 p.93).

In parallel to containing the West, Primakov's primary foreign policy objective was centered on reintegrating post-Soviet republics and gaining informal influence over their domestic and foreign policy course, which Primakov himself referred to as "multi-faceted integration". To consolidate his power, which had the ideological basis in anti-Americanism and rested on the premise of integrating post-Soviet space, Primakov used a number of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Tsygankov explains Primakov's attempt to involve both governmental and non-governmental actors in promoting his idea of Russian identity.

To reiterate the Silovik's ideas of Russian identity and move away from Kozyrev's liberal foreign policy course, the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee – Yevgeni Ambasturmov introduced the idea of enlightened imperialism of the post-Soviet space led by Russia. The cornerstone of the concept was the establishment of Russia's sphere of vital interest over the former Soviet Republics, redrawing the image of the American Monroe Doctrine of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century asserting the US rights over the West (Tsygankov, 2010 pp. 65-67).

The critics of Kozyrev's foreign policy appeared in the President's administration and Security Council as well. President's adviser Sergei Stankevich formulated the vision of Russian identity as a new state in terms of culturally connecting Europe and Asia in addition to Russia's responsibility of protecting ethnically Russian population in across the former-Soviet territories (Tsygankov, 2010 pp. 65-67).

Stankevich's idea of the new Russia, which was first formally introduced at the 1992 Foreign Ministry conference - "The transformed Russia in the New World" was shared by the Russian Security Council primarily made up from anti-Western Derzhavnists. Members of the Council, which included Defense, Security and Foreign Ministers, elaborated the "Guidelines for the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" that outlined Russia's role as a great power at the world stage with particular interests in the post-Soviet space referred to as

“Near Abroad” and identified the country’s role as a bridge between the East and the West (Tsygankov, 2010 pp. 65-67).

In addition to governmental entities, Derzhavnists engaged other non-governmental organizations to promote their vision of new Russian identity. For instance, the think-tank Council for Foreign and Defense Policy - uniting business people, industrialists and opinion leaders - promoted the idea of “Near Abroad” to refer to the territories of Russia’s special interest. At the same time, the organization was sought to draw Russia’s image as an equal player to its former Cold War rivals and advocated for Russia’s role as a great power in the Western dominated international system, which ought to be achieved through pragmatic relations with the West (Tsygankov, 2010 pp. 65-67).

Derzhavnists also relied on political platforms to consolidate already strong public opinion around their understanding of Russian identity and hence, its interaction with the West. One of these platforms was the political alliance/movement – Civic Union. The opinion of the Civic Union did carry an important weight since numerous high profile politicians – including Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi and the head of the Security Council Yuri Skokov - were affiliated with its philosophy. Not surprisingly, the Union’s philosophy coincided with the ideas advocated by the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy and promoted Russia’s image as a great power in Eurasia. More importantly, Civic Union, was also actively engaging in advocating Russia’s role as a great power in Eurasia and worked on establishing close economic ties with post-Soviet republics considered to be under Russia’s sphere of vital interest (Tsygankov, 2010 pp. 65-67).

By strengthening governmental and non-governmental institutions that advocated Silovik’s policy objectives of the new Russia, Kozyrev and his Westernism slowly faded away by 1992. Appeals to domestic audience by rallying the public around anti-Western sentiments and

emphasizing Russia's historic special role in the post-Soviet space allowed Derzhavnists took strong hold on setting the Russia's foreign policy agenda in early 1990s. Soon Yeltsin himself started to voice the Derzhavnist discourse emphasizing the need for balancing the West and reiterating Russia's role in the post-Soviet space (Tsygankov 2010, p.67).

On the one hand, containing the West and on the other hand strengthening Russia's position in a zone of privileged interest of former Soviet republics, were soon formulated in major official documents as well. As early as in 1992, the Russian military doctrine was openly suggesting the expansion of Russia's sphere of influence beyond the state borders. 1992 Doctrine included the entry on the armed forces task to protect not only Russian citizens, but also "people linked with it ethnically and culturally abroad", while the 1993 modification of the same doctrine tasked the military to respond to "the suppression of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens of the Russian Federation in foreign states" (quoted in Allison, 2008 p.1167). Open disclosure of the abovementioned objectives in the major strategic documents signaled Russia's desire to regain its status as global power and exert influence beyond its borders immediately after the collapse of Soviet Union.

The ambition to become a significant player at the international stage was also expressed in the 1997 National Security Concept. The Concept outlined western-led international system and the existing geopolitical situation as one of the major threats to Russian national interests and identified Russia as an "influential European and Asian Power" seeking equal partnership with other great powers of the international system (quoted in Tsygankov 2010, p.98). The Concept also included the intentions to integrate former satellite states under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) led by Russia, which had its root in the reports of the Foreign Intelligence Service, led by Primakov at that time (Tsygankov 2010, p.113). 1997 National Security Concept was important not only because of its open articulation of

Russia's pursuit of a great power status, but also because it was the first time that Russia had expressed the readiness to lead the union of former Communist states under its umbrella.

In the context of international developments of early 1990s, after NATO's 1994 decision of Eastern enlargement, the containment of the West was essentially translated into preventing NATO's enlargement in foreign and security policy of Russia. This latter objective and the reintegration of the post-Soviet space under the Russia's umbrella requires holistic discussion and represents two fundamental ideas of Russia's comprehensive foreign policy.

Russia's foreign policy objectives towards post-Soviet republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, may be summed up as follows:

- Post-Soviet states' security and foreign policy (in some cases, even domestic policy) harmonized with Russian interests and even dictated by Russia;
- Russia's monopoly over security and defense field in post-Soviet republics. Refusal of NATO's military infrastructure and more importantly rejection NATO membership of these states
- Economic consolidation and the establishment of economic community led by Russia via its integration projects to ensure that Russia remains to be the transit road for rich Eurasian resources to the world markets (particularly to the West).

### **4.3. Vladimir Putin's Revisionism**

*Так выпьем же за то, чтобы наши желания совпадали с нашими возможностями*

Quote from the Soviet-era movie

Vladimir Putin's foreign policy objectives are essentially the continuation of "Primakov's Doctrine" and needs to be discussed through this prism. Russia's self-perception as a great power always dominated the country's foreign policy thinking. However, materializing this idea was only possible in Putin's Russia through the combination of several factors: 1. High price on hydrocarbons contributing to the fast economic growth of Russia; 2. Internal political consolidation through authoritarianism; 3. Moving the US pivot to the Middle East; 4. Georgia and Ukraine's intensification of relationships with NATO and the European Union respectively.

According to a number of researchers, "strategist-situationalist" Putin, did not limit himself with the clichés of foreign policy ideologies, which was especially true during his first term. To secure Russia's great power interests, Putin needed to cooperate with the West, and especially with the US. Stabilizing relationship with the West was merely an instrument to achieve Russia's economic and political objectives.

Russia's decisions to show support to the US after 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 on the one hand, and to successfully negotiate the membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), on the other hand has to be discussed in this context. In return to the former, Putin received a full discretionary power to deal with the centrifugal forces in the North Caucasus. Additionally, it is highly probable that Putin assumed he would be free to conduct more effective policy in South Caucasus, and in particular, in Georgia (O'Loughlin et.al 2004, pp. 3-34). In return to Putin's latter move, joining the WTO had economic and symbolic importance to signal Russia's return as a great power.

For Vladimir Putin, economy is the basis of a state power. Therefore, one of Russia's foreign policy objectives is to protect its economic interests. The significance attached to national economy was signaled during one of the Security Council meetings in 2006, where Putin

reiterated that “the level of military security depends directly on the pace of economic growth and technological development” (quoted in Mankoff 2009, p.33). Parallel to the economic growth, Russia’s military spending more than doubled during 2005 and 2015 (Persson, 2016 p.135):

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
1. GDP, billion RUB, current prices	21 610	26 917	33 248	41 277	38 807	46 309	59 698	66 928	71 017	77 945	80 804
2. GDP growth %		8.2	8.5	5.2	-7.8	4.5	4.3	3.5	1.3	0.7	-3.8
3. Productivity growth %	5.5	7.5	7.5	4.8	-4.1	3.2	3.8	3.2	1.8	0.9	NA
4. Investment as % of GDP	17.4	18.1	20.8	21.4	20.9	20.6	19.2	19.5	19.5	20.6	20.7
5. Average monthly wage, nominal, RUB	8 555	10 634	13 593	17 290	18 638	20 952	23 369	26 629	29 792	32 495	33 981
6. Average oil price Brent USD /bbl	54.5	65.1	72.4	97.3	61.7	79.5	111.3	112	108.7	99	52.4
7. Poverty rate, % of population					13	12.5	12.7	10.7	10.8	11.2	13.4
8. Exchange rate USD/ RUB. CBR e-o-p	28.8	26.3	24.5	29.4	30.2	30.5	32.2	30.4	32.7	56.3	72.9

**Sources:** Rows 1–5: Rosstat; Row 6: BP (2015: 15); Row 7: World Bank (2016: 31); Row 8 Central Bank of Russia (2016).

**Note:** NA = not available; e-o-p = end of period.

As for the second major direction of Russia’s foreign policy to reintegrate post-Soviet space, Putin follows Primakov’s path with slight modifications and pursues more aggressive foreign policy with the increase in its material capabilities. Initially, due to the lack of sufficient resources and considering the objectives behind reconciliatory relationship with the West, Putin allowed the deployment of Russian troops in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in early 2000s.

Russia’s deteriorating relationship with the west was directly reflected on its more stringent policy towards post-Soviet space. The shift in the relationship coincided with the second

term of Putin's presidency, which was also marked by increased oil and gas prices, war in Iraq and colorful revolutions in the former Soviet Union republics.

The first symptoms of changes by signaling more aggressiveness in Russia's foreign policy approach became evident in 2006, when Moscow cut the gas supply to Ukraine, nationalized Yukos, dropped out from Iran's Nuclear Program and Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, tried to block the recognition of Kosovo's independence. The process continued with the 2008 August war with Georgia and culminated with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

To rationalize and re-conceptualize increased authoritarianism at home and revisionist foreign policy, Vladimir Putin necessitated ideological basis and brought more clarity to his ideological stance. Resulting Sovereign Democracy concept, coined by Vladislav Surkov - the head of the Presidential Administration, was a moderate mixture of Eurasianism and Westernism.

Unlike Eurasianists, Surkov sees Russia as a part of the Western civilization. However, according to Surkov, Russia has the right to have its own special political and economic model. In this model foreign policy was an important tool to meet Russia's economic objectives. The main tenets of Sovereign Democracy was later voiced by Putin during the 2007 Munich Conference speech stating that Russia would follow independent foreign policy from the West and would be guided only by its national interests.

2008 War between Georgia and Russia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that led to the destruction of European security architecture, required ideological basis (justification domestically and internationally). As a result, Vladimir Putin's rhetoric became even more "conservative". In September of 2013, during Valdai Club meeting, Putin introduced the framework of his ideology. Well-known Russian political scientist – Lilia Shevcova



compared Putin's ideology presented during Valdai discussion to "Sbornaya Salianka' in which the chef mixed incompatible ingredients: sovietism, nationalism, imperialism, orthodox fundamentalism" (Шевцова, 2013).

On December 12, 2013 during his address to the Federal Assembly, Putin declared conservatism as a Russian state ideology. Putin's new Russian conservatism is based on a particular set of value approaches, with obvious antiliberal and antidemocratic character expressed through internal developments in Russia, as well as through its foreign policy.

Russia's practical revisionism and ideological anti-liberalism contributed to obvious antagonism between Russia's new ideology and Western liberal democracy and turned itself into official philosophical-political doctrine of Eurasianism. The essence of the doctrine is Russia's perception to be an independent civilization, which is determined by the combination of geographical, ethnical, religious, demographic, historical, mental and other factors. On the one hand, Russia "does not fit" into the boundaries of Europe and on the other hand, is neither an Asian state. It has its distinct and individual way and mission to accomplish, which is primarily expressed with life and death struggle with the West.

Reflecting on international politics with schematic geopolitical clichés has a powerful tradition in Russia. Intellectual and institutional basis of this "school" is the mixture of former Soviet officers and political scientists with messianic ideas. However, as already mentioned above, Vladimir Putin - a situationist-strategist, not a revolutionary leader - was cautious with the ideological frameworks. The annexation of Crimea was a point at which the boundaries between radical conservators (Dugin) and pragmatists (Lukianov) disappeared. What is more, the annexation of Crimea turned marginal ideas into mainstream, official discourse and contributed to the establishment of social contract between the elites and general public.

In addition to the content analysis of public statements, analyzing Putin's revisionist foreign policy objectives requires the analysis of official state documents. Main conceptual documents on Russia's defense, security and foreign policy are as follows: National Security Strategy, Military Doctrine, Foreign Policy Concept.

**National Security Strategy** is the highest strategic level document, which originates from the federal laws of Russia. The Concept is the foundational document providing the basis for all other doctrines and considering its significance, determines national values and sets the tone of the perceived threats to the country. In this sense, analyzing the discourse coming from major strategic documents is of particular importance. The existing National Security Strategy signed in September 2015 is considered to be the most anti-western strategic document, which, for the first time identified EU as hostile to Russia and traditionally described NATO and the US in a confrontational tone. In addition to drawing the image of an enemy, the document focuses on the essence of being Russian emphasizing historical and cultural traits that are specific to Russian people. The document also revives the concept of Fatherland in the historical context and calls for the historical unity of Russian people. The existing National Security Strategy, therefore, goes in line with the official Russian political discourse stressing role of Russia as a great power with special characteristics and interests.

Following the National Security Concept, **Russian Military Doctrine** is next in the hierarchy of documents, being mentioned in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In addition to defining the tasks of the Armed Forces, Doctrine reiterates the threats to national security already identified in the National Security Strategy. Similar to the National Security Strategy of 2014, current 2014 Military Doctrine provides interesting insights into Russia's foreign policy discourse. The most significant aspect of the current Doctrine is the entry on the variety of threats facing the country. Considering the timing of the annexation of Crimea,

the Doctrine identifies political and civic movements and protesting population controlled from abroad as one of the major aspects to the contemporary conflict with little doubt referencing the colored revolutions in the post-Soviet Space. While discussing the characteristics of a modern conflict, the Doctrine focuses on the aspects of hybrid war that integrates military, political, economic, informational and other means of the power, including special operation troops, irregular and private military forces in direct and indirect methods of warfare. It is worth noting that the inclusion of the abovementioned methods of warfare is not there to merely warn Russians about the possibility new types of warfare. Quite contrary, the existing Military Doctrine elaborated around the time of Crimean annexation, in a way legitimizes for Russia the utilization of new tools of war.

Last, but not least, **Concept of Foreign Policy** is the document that lays out Russia's view of an outside world, determining the threats and Russia's role in the international system. Concept of Foreign Policy 2013 was particularly discrete in its assessment of the weakening West and emerging East in terms of control over the economy and politics. The concept focused on power politics and places Russia among the major powers of international system. In this system, major great powers are the only actors capable of conducting independent policy, while smaller states merely act as a tool for great power policy objectives.

It is worth noting that the 2013 Concept of Foreign Policy preceded the conflict in Ukraine, therefore the revision of the document was announced in 2015 to take into consideration the new constraints of the international system. The new Concept maintained the main principles of Russia's foreign policy, which was expressed in the ambition to "to consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a centre of influence in today's world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, 2016). To do so, the concept has a heavy focus on

regional cooperation mechanisms in the framework of Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization.

## **5. Georgia-Russia Relations after the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

### **5.1. From 1990s to Rose Revolution**

The complexity of Georgian-Russian relationship is determined by numerous factors. Social, cultural, economic, domestic or foreign policy factors affect the dynamics of the relationship between these two countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, both states faced the need to find their new place and role in the international system.

In light of declining economy and fragmented-deinstitutionalized political system in the country, Russia tried to compensate its great power ambitions by maintaining influence over the post-Soviet space. At the same time, Georgia's national project was based on anti-Russian sentiments attempting to emancipate from the empire. Therefore, analyzing conflicting relationship between Russia and Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union is impossible

without understanding Russia's foreign policy objectives and Georgia's quest to conduct its own independent foreign policy (two independent variables of the research).

It is hard to discuss foreign policy priorities of the first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, since he barely stayed in office for one year having been ousted by the coup. The return of the foreign minister of the Soviet Union – Eduard Shevardnadze as a replacement for Gamsakhurdia, created the expectation of de-isolation at least in part of the society. Soon after Shevardnadze's return, Georgia was recognized as a sovereign state by a significant part of the international system.

Eduard Shevardnadze opposed Georgia's membership in CIS for a long time and considered that joining the organization would be against Georgia's national interests (Frazer 1997, p. 16). By that time the conflicts had already begun in Abkhazia and Autonomous Region of South Ossetia, where Russia was providing assistance to separatists and in the meantime was putting economic pressure on Georgia.

Bloody confrontations in Abkhazia and Autonomous Region of South Ossetia had a major impact on Georgian-Russian relations. The consequences of the Conflict in Abkhazia were particularly grave. It lasted for 13 months with thousands killed. Weakened by the war, internal disputes and sharp economic decline, Georgia had to agree to join the CIS. As a result, Russia maintained four military bases on Georgian territories and Russian border-guards stayed on Turkish-Georgian border. Additionally, through the CIS mandate, Russian peacekeepers were deployed on the administrative border of Abkhazia.

After adopting the constitution in 1995, the main task of Georgian foreign policy was to neutralize the threat coming from Russia. To do so, Shevardnadze was trying to receive security guarantees from the West, which coincided with the West's and particularly the US

increased interest towards the Caspian Sea oil (დევდარიანი 2006, p.223). In Georgian-Russian relations, special attention was paid to the possibility of transporting Azerbaijani oil through Georgian territories, which was perceived by Russia to be against its national interest (დევდარიანი 2006, p. 223). Despite this, the construction of two oil pipelines - Bako Supsa and Bako-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines were commenced with the support of the US.

Meanwhile, Georgia started to intensify relations with NATO. NATO-Georgia relations started in 1992 with Georgia becoming a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which transformed into Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. The relations between NATO and Georgia were further enhanced, when Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994 and engaged in the PfP Planning and Review process in 1999. In 1997, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana visited Tbilisi for the PfP program and met with the President and Foreign and Defense Ministers. Already in 2002 Prague Summit in November, Shevardnadze officially declared Georgia's desire to join the Alliance (Miller, 2004 p. 12).

While trying to distance itself from Russia's influence, Georgia was seeking to conduct an independent foreign policy in part by aligning itself with the West. As an illustration, on October 10, 1997, during the European Council summit in Strasbourg, four countries – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM) – established regional organisation. The organization aimed at deepening cooperation between the member states on the matters of economy, security and democratic development.

In parallel to independent regional policy initiatives, Georgia tried to intensify relations with western institutions while refusing to prolong its membership into collective security agreement in April 1999, along with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan (Giorgadze 2002, 68). As a result of intensive negotiations, Russia took the responsibility to withdraw military bases and

border guards from Georgia and Moldova after OSCE summit in 1999. This agreement sought to be the cornerstone for demilitarizing region and resolving the existing conflicts.

Despite Georgia's numerous attempts to distance itself from Russian influence on the one hand and intensify relations with the West on the other hand, the tensions between Russia and Georgia reached its peak during the second military campaign in Chechnya. According to Oksana Antonenko, unlike first Chechen war that brought Russian and Georgian positions closer, the second Chechen war on the contrary – deepened the existing crises, culminated in events unfolding in Pankisi Gorge in 2002 (ანტონენკო 2006, p.301).

In the context of Pankisi events, Shevardnadze was motivated with pragmatic interests and used the cooperative relationship between the US and Russia established after 9/11 terrorist attacks, to further Georgia's foreign political interests and intensified cooperation with the US. Therefore, invited Americans to start the US sponsored "Georgia Train and Equip Program", later acting as a cornerstone of the defense transformation process. The program was a turning point that led to an irreversible process of active cooperation between Georgia and the US in defense field and cemented Georgia's pro-western foreign policy course.

## **5.2. Rose Revolution: Conflict Management and Euroatlantic Integration**

The Kremlin's aggressive stance towards colored revolutions was determined by three major factors: 1. Moscow viewed the colored revolutions in the context of great power politics and did not want to allow outside powers within its privileged zone of interest; 2. Undesirable regimes within its neighborhood could threaten Russia's economic interests in post-Comunist space; 3. Gradual establishment of democratic regimes could have a spill-over effect threatening Kremlin's authoritarian leadership.

Despite initial mutual attempts to regulate relations between Georgia's new leadership and Moscow, the cooperation turned out to be unsuccessful and relations soon started to deteriorate. In fact, as Dimitry Trenin - Moscow Carnegie Center analyst described, bilateral relations between Moscow and Tbilisi resembled to the "calm before the storm" (civil.ge, 2003) .

Each one the Georgian governments attempts to normalize relations with Russia, in itself considered two legitimate interests – retaining the right to decide foreign policy course and restore territorial integrity of Georgia. However, since the beginning of 1990s, Russia viewed these two interests as alternatives and mutually exclusive ideas.

Saakashvili's reformist projet aimed at achieving rapid development, seeking to resolve the existing conflicts within a short period of time. This perception was well expressed in public statements of President Saakashvili and his ministers.

Russia's uncompromised stance towards conflict regions in Georgia pushed Shevardnadze to balance Russian interests with his first opportunity, but encouraged Saakashvili to intensify relations with the West. National Movement leadership was skeptical towards established conflict resolution mechanisms and negotiation formats due to Russia's potential role as a veto player. Similar skepticism led Georgian leadership, and especially Saakashvili, to internationalize the conflict<sup>1</sup>.

The following events bewteen 2006 and 2007, were turning points in the relationship between Georgia and Russia:

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<sup>1</sup> On September 21, 2004 Mikheil Saakashvili presented a "Gradual Regulation Plan" for conlicts in Georgia to UN General Assembly. Several peace initiatives were voiced during European Council Parliamentary Assembly in the beginning of 2005.



- In 2006 Georgia conducted the operation to put down rebellion in Kodori Gorge. The move was perceived by Russia as a preparation of military campaign against Abkhazia. It was also considered that the operation broke the September 3, 1992 ceasefire agreement prohibited the deployment of both Georgian and Abkhazian armed forces.
- Russia intensified its support to Kokoiti government after the establishment of the Provisional Administration of South Ossetia in 2007;
- In 2006, Georgian authorities arrested four Russian officers who allegedly were collecting information on the issues of Georgia's NATO membership process (civil.ge, 2007).
- Massive anti-Georgian hysteria was followed the "spy scandal" that led to deportation of up to 200 Georgians from Russia via cargo planes;
- In 2006 Russia embargoed Georgian fruits, vegetables, mineral water and wine claiming the inadequate quality of the products.
- In February 2008, Kosovo's independence was recognized. Despite opposition, Russia signaled to the West, that Kosovo's case could act as a precedent for resolving the separatist conflicts in Russia's sphere of interest, and particularly in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the end, Saakashvili's attempts to resolve the territorial problems by engaging the West, was perceived by Russia as a risky attempt to change the existing and desirable status quo in the region.

### **5.3. August War of 2008**

As illustrated above, the seeds of the conflict between Georgia and Russia have been sewn gradually since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the August War of 2008 had a significant pretext in the history of complicated relationship between Russia and Georgia.

Despite assertions from Russia that it merely acted as mediator deploying peacekeepers in the conflict region, it was obvious from the onset that Russia was a side, not an arbitrator between the two conflicting parties.

The dynamic of the deteriorating relationship caused by Putin's irreversible revisionism and Saakashvili's uncompromised stance on Georgia's national interests, coupled with the events described above, suggested inevitable confrontation between the two countries. In fact, already in 2007 Russian newspapers and independent analysts were predicting the recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence, and more importantly, nearly inevitable war between Russia and Georgia (Illarionov, 2009 p.65). However, the exact time and the location for Russia's direct military intervention in Georgia was to be determined by the international and domestic context allowing Kremlin to employ all of the existing tools to further its policy objectives.

The five-day war that culminated with near total invasion of Georgia by Russian military forces did not start when Georgian troops entered the South Ossetian capital - Tskinali at the night of August 7<sup>th</sup>. Instead, diplomatic rifts, provocations and small skirmishes preceded the major military operation of the August War in 2008 that eventually led to a full scale military confrontation between Russia and Georgia.

With heightened relationships, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were becoming playgrounds for the tit-for-tat politics between Russia and Georgia in the conflict zones. For instance, Tbilisi's decision to withdraw from the Joint Control Commission (JCC) on March 4, was met by Moscow's response on March 6 to lift trade sanctions on Abkhazia imposed by the 1996 treaty and with the resolution urging Duma the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on March 21.

Trying to keep the conflict within the diplomatic boundaries, Saakashvili offered a new peace plan to Abkhazia on March 28, suggesting greater representation in the central government. The plan, however, was rejected by the then-de facto President of Abkhazia – Sergey Bagapsh claiming that Saakashvili’s attempt was merely a propaganda aimed for the West right before the NATO Bucharest summit in April (Popjanevski, 2009 p.144). Saakashvili’s failure to achieve diplomatic solution with the breakaway region of Abkhazia was hence a proof that a peaceful means for conflict resolution was slowly slipping away.

In this context of a major diplomatic rift, 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit was a turning point in the relationship between Georgia and Russia on the one hand and between the West and Russia on the other. Despite hopes for securing effective mechanisms for NATO membership, Georgia and Ukraine were denied the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as a precondition for the integration into the Alliance. However, the Summit Declaration still included the entry on the future NATO membership of these two countries and voiced the Alliance’s support to grant MAP to Georgia and Ukraine after high level political negotiations (NATO, 2008 Article 23).

NATO’s declared willingness of eastern enlargement into Russia’s perceived sphere of influence was a watershed moment triggering Kremlin to employ more effective tools to further its policy objectives. Immediately after the Summit, Kremlin warned that the emergence of a powerful military bloc by Russia’s borders was seen as a direct security threat to the country (Blomfield & Kirkup, 2008), while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov voiced Russia’s readiness to do “everything possible to prevent the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO” (Croft, 2014). The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit was therefore a game changer implying Russia’s willingness to use military power as an instrument of its policy. Harsh and confrontational discourse coming from Kremlin after the Bucharest Summit was

an illustration that Putin's Russia was ready to protect its interests by any means possible. This was the moment when Putin could put his words from 2007 Munich Security Conference into action and assert its status as a great power in the international system still dominated by the West.

From Bucharest Summit onwards, Russia started to mobilize its diplomatic and military tools to take advantage of the existing situation. On April 16, the Kremlin established direct official relations with de-facto governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and prohibited the movement of Georgian planes over the conflict zones after shooting down a number of Georgian unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles over Abkhazia (Illarionov, 2009 p.69). At the same time Russia started to build up its military capabilities in and around conflict regions. By the end of July through August, Russian troops were conducting military exercises in the Black Sea and around Roki district. The purpose of the exercises was to train military personnel to provide assistance to Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and remained in place in high combat readiness even after the exercises were over in early August (Illarionov, 2009 p.69; Allison, 2008 p.1150). The aim of the show of force, Kremlin argued, was to "force Georgia to peace".

By the beginning of August, the outbreak of the war was just a matter of an accident triggering direct military confrontation, with separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia providing a pretext for engaging Russian and Georgian sides (Allison, 2008 p.1147). Considering the strategic importance of Abkhazia, the expectations were that Abkhazia would become the initial stage of an armed conflict. However, rapidly deteriorated situation in South Ossetia by the beginning of August and the shelling of Georgian settlements by local militias, provoked Georgian side to move into Tskhinvali. However, what it seemed to

be a rapid success of Georgian Armed Forces in the first days of war, soon ended with Georgia's withdrawal from Tskhinvali region.

Despite Georgia's announcement of ceasefire on August 10, Russian military forces continued taking over the cities remote from the conflict regions and destroyed military infrastructure on the way. Hostilities ended with ceasefire agreement on August 12, when Russian troops were still stationed couple of kilometers away from the capital. Six point ceasefire agreement included provisions requiring Georgian Military Forces' withdrawal to the bases, Russian Armed Forces return to the line preceding the start of hostilities and maintaining Russian peacekeeping forces for additional security measures awaiting an international mechanism.

As a result of a five day war between Russia and Georgia, Russia achieved the following:

- Georgias's strategic vulnerability increased in the eyes of Georgia's Western partners and hence the prospect of NATO membership was postponed indefinitely;
- By stationing military basis in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia gained a significant advantage in comparision to its rival;
- Strengthened its positions in strategically important south Caucasus;
- By destroying Georgia's military infrastructure, ensured the safety of its buffer zones.

## 6. Russo-Ukrainian Relations Since the End of the Soviet Union (1991-2004)

Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula has shocked the world and transformed the regional security landscape, leading to arguably the most significant crisis in the Russian-Western relations since the end of the Cold War. Yet, Russia's aggressive behaviour is anything but a surprise, since the roots of the Russian conduct lead us to a complex historical background and Russia's ambitions to maintain its sphere of influence over the post-Soviet countries.

Nevertheless, for Russia, Ukraine represented the most strategically and emotionally important state in the post-Soviet space. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, independent Ukraine disposed almost 5,000 nuclear weapons, which made the country the third largest nuclear power in the world, as well as rich agriculture and more or less developed industrial infrastructure (Petro and Rubinstein, 1997, p. 265). During the final years of the Soviet Union's existence, Russian and Ukrainian authorities were fostering the end of the Union. A Friendship Treaty of 1990, signed by Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk was a good example of this. According to the treaty the two countries were recognising each other as sovereign states. Very shortly, on December 1, 1991 a referendum in Ukraine decided the fate of the Soviet Union, when an overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian population voted for independence of their country (Donaldson and Noguee, 2014, pp. 159-161).

USSR's collapse gave birth to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), gathering all post-Soviet states, except from the Baltic States and Georgia, under the common framework. The CIS was far from being a "means for civilized divorce" (Moroney and Closson, 2003, p. 224), rather, the Kremlin was aiming at making the CIS an instrument of the Russian foreign

policy to dictate policy and assert hegemony in eleven member-states. The Article One of the CIS Charter clearly demonstrate the Russia's fears and ambitions in regards to its neighbouring states - 'participating states will not enter into military alliances or participate in any groupings of states, nor in actions directed against another participating state' (quoted in Rivera, 2003, p. 92).

Nonetheless, Ukraine played a major role in keeping the CIS a weak alliance. Russia was willing to create a common CIS military command, which would have given the Kremlin more leverage on member-states (Mankoff, 2009, p. 175). Ukraine's first president Kravchuk was on the other hand demanding creation of national army under the Ukrainian command and control of Ukraine's military units such as the Black Sea Fleet, which is based in Sevastopol (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 683). From the very beginning, Ukraine was hesitant in becoming a full-fledged member of the Russian-led alliance.

Nationalist sentiments towards the Black Sea Fleet were strong from both sides, resulting in four different agreements between 1992 and 1994. In 1993, Yeltsin and Kravchuk agreed on dividing the fleet on equal terms. Kremlin aimed at using its power by offering Ukraine to cancel its debt to Russia in exchange for nuclear weapons owned by Kiev and the Black Sea Fleet (Donaldson and Noguee, 2014, p. 161). The nationalist pressure in Ukraine forced Kravchuk to dismiss the deal and agree on dividing the fleet equally and selling the part of it to Russia. On the other hand in February 1994, Kravchuk signed NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP), which caused a great discontent in Moscow (Petro and Rubinstein, 1997, p. 267).

The future of the Black Sea Fleet and the Crimean peninsula represented really well the existing political disagreement between the two parties. Looking back at the historical background makes it clear that Russian ambitions to capture the Ukrainian territory were

not a product of Putin's reactionary politics solely aiming at preventing Ukraine's rapprochement with the West. Russians strongly believed that the Crimean peninsula and the city of Sevastopol belonged to the Russian Federation, blaming Nikita Khrushchev for transferring Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 as a gift to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unification of Ukraine with Russia. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this move had no implications; "the loss" became apparent for the Russian side when Ukraine gained its independence, marking the beginning of tough negotiations in regards to the future of the Crimean peninsula (Mankoff, 2009, p. 173). For Russia, the Black Sea Fleet was of a strategic importance, since it grants easy access to the seaports and shipping routs and the possibility to conduct naval operations.

However, unlike the president Putin, Yeltsin was not ready to push for Russian territorial claims against Ukraine. Rather, he feared of loosing friendly relations with Ukraine. This prompted both sides to achieve a compromise during the Russo-Ukrainian summit in Dagomys (Mankoff, 2009, p. 174). Kravchuk had to confirm that Ukraine was not going to leave the CIS, while Yeltsin affirmed that Russia did not have any territorial claims against Ukraine. Nevertheless, the nationalist rhetoric in Russia made it difficult to resolve the case of Crimes.

The 1994 Presidential elections and the victory of Leonid Kuchma sparked optimism in the Kremlin. Kuchma promised closer relation with Russia, though once in the office, his foreign policy towards Russia was less friendly than expected (Gotz, 2016, pp. 307-308).

By 1997, Russia was controlling 80% of submarines and ships in the Black Sea Fleet and was granted a 20-year long lease of naval facilities in Crimean peninsula in expense of writing off Ukraine's oil debt to Russia (Gotz, 2016, pp. 307-308). Kuchma and Yeltsin also signed a treaty of friendship and the latter has formally declared that Russia respects Ukraine's



territorial integrity. Yet, the friendly ties between the two states were not as straightforward as it may seem at the first sight, Ukrainian Rada took more than a year to ratify the agreement. Kuchma was resistant to join the CIS Collective Treaty and was pushing for more cooperation with NATO by signing a partnership agreement with the Alliance (Donaldson and Noguee, 2014, p. 164).

The election of Vladimir Putin as president marked the beginning of more assertive Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine. Moreover, Putin emerged as a strong leader, bringing stability to the country in the aftermath of Yeltsin's chaotic presidency. Putin was determined to push for more integration with Ukraine, which automatically meant preventing Ukraine to flirt with the West. Despite the fact that there was no serious precondition to be worried regarding Ukraine's closer engagement with NATO, given the terrible human rights record and corruption reigning in the country, Ukraine's disloyalty was concerning for Russia. Therefore Kremlin started to use its soft power as a counteroffensive. As Kuchma's term was coming to an end, the Kremlin openly supported its pro-Russian successor Viktor Yanukovich over the pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko. Erasing any source of sound opposition, would have allowed Putin to assert its agenda in Ukraine and prevent Ukraine from aspiring to the West.

### **6.1. Orange Revolution: Pro-Western Agenda in Ukraine**

Moscow's campaign to support the loyal Yanukovich included openly providing a media support and financial aid from state-owned companies by investing millions of dollars in his electoral campaign (McFaul, 2007, p. 70). By helping Yanukovich, Putin was determined to have a full leverage on Ukraine, however his plan did not work smoothly. More than half a million Ukrainians protested the victory of Yanukovich in streets demanding a revote. The protests, better known as "orange revolution", were an outbreak of popular sentiments for

freedom and democracy, as well as Russia-fatigue. The popular demand resulted in a revote, which was confidently won by the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko, who was determined to bring the wind of change in Ukraine.

Fearing the snowball effect of the colorful revolutions, as well as the rise of pro-Western leaders in the neighborhood, threatened to undermine the Kremlin's strategic goals in the region. Additionally, Yushchenko was determined to have close engagement with the EU and NATO, while also announcing that that Ukraine would not renew the Russian lease in Crimea, which was meant to expire in 2017(Karatnycky, 2005). This was a ringing bell for the Kremlin and in 2005 led to a serious crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations over Russia's supply of natural gas to Ukraine (Gotz, 2016, p. 309). Having failed to appoint a pro-Kremlin president in Ukraine, Russia was eager to manipulate with its natural recourses by increasing the price of fuel and petroleum products in Ukraine as well as the nuclear fuel. While the Kremlin claimed that the reasons behind this, were only commercial, in reality it was aimed at economically weakening the country just before the parliamentary elections, which would work in favor of Yanukovych. Kiev's refusal to pay the new prices led to Gazprom shutting the gas transmission taps. This move had serious consequences not only on Ukraine, but also on Russia's global reputation as a reliable supplier, since Ukraine's pipelines were also transporting gas to Europe. However, Putin achieved its aims by the victory of the party of Yanukovych in 2006 parliamentary elections.

At the same time, Russia remained active in triggering nationalist sentiments on the Crimean Peninsula, by closely engaging with Crimean movement that was calling for either Crimean independence or its return to Russia. A number of state-funded organizations such as Cossack groups, the Russian Orthodox Church and Nashi – were particularly engaging in Crimea (Kuzio, 2009, pp. 358–360; Roslycky, 2011).

Depending on external pressure, Moscow was using a set of softer and harder means to achieve its aims. The Kremlin was particularly alarmed by the active pro-NATO rhetoric in Georgia and Ukraine and the prospects of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for these countries at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. Russia was seeing this as a direct threat to its national interest and prospect of losing its sphere of interest in the post-Soviet states. Thus, Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and the demonstration of the Western inability to defend its ally sent a clear message to the post-Soviet countries and particularly to Ukraine.

## **6.2. Russia's Attempts to Block Ukraine's Rapprochement with the EU**

Election of Viktor Yanukovich as the president of Ukraine marked the beginning of a shift in Ukrainian foreign policy towards Russia. Russian lease on the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol was extended for 25 years. In return, Russia offered to write off a considerable share of Ukraine's energy debt and offered more affordable gas prices (Mankoff, 2009, p. 251). However, Russian-Ukrainian relations were not as smooth as it seems. During the ongoing EU-Ukraine Association Agreement negotiations, Russia sought to take countermeasures and started to put pressure on Ukraine to join the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The Customs Union was a part of Russian agenda, creating a common regulatory space and aiming at advancing into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015. However, Ukraine abstained from joining the Union with a pretext that: 'Ukraine has made its choice. It has entered the WTO and develops in line with the principles of this organisation.

For this reason, joining the Customs Union is now impossible' (Solov'ev and Sidorenko 2010). Yanukovich was rather determined to partake "strategic economic partnership" with Russia that would have allowed the country to enjoy the benefits of trade without actually joining

the Union (Goltz, 2016, p. 312). Yet, by 2013 it was clear that Ukraine would not achieve its goals of having a free trade and lower energy prices while remaining out of the Eurasian integration bloc. As a result of this, Russia put an extreme economic pressure on Ukraine by stopping the Ukrainian goods on the border and demonstrating how dependent and vulnerable Ukrainian export is on the Russian good will.

At the same time, during the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, Yanukovich expressed his readiness to sign the Association Agreement with the EU; this would directly exclude the possibility of Ukraine joining the planned EEU (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 689). Deeply frustrated by the danger of Europeanization in its neighbourhood, Russia was determined to stop EU integration process, which was seen as a move aiming at undermining the Russian influence in the region. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, went as far as indicting that the EU is building its own sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, 'We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence' (Pop, 2009).

Falling to the trap of persistent Russian pressure, Yanukovich was soon forced to 'postpone'; the signing of the Association Agreement in exchange of receiving a loan from Russia, reduction of gas prices and regularization of trade relations between the two countries (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 683). However, the popular response to turning away from the EU was of an unprecedented scale. A wave of protests started on the night of 21 November 2013 on Maidan Square in Kiev. The Kremlin did not predict the level of popular frustration towards the existing government and support of Ukraine's pro-Western agenda. The Maidan protests led to overthrow the President Yanukovich by the Ukrainian populist leaders. These developments forced the Kremlin to deliberately change its rules of the game and rely on hard power.

### **6.3. Annexation of Crimea: Shift in Russian Foreign Policy from Soft Power to Hard Power**

On February 23, 2014 Russian aggression on a Crimean peninsula came as a surprise. However, for about two years Russia has carefully prepared for this possible scenario by creating new divisions and shifting brigades from other regions (Koffman, 2016). The 'perfect' timing to advance Russia's interests was granted to Moscow in the aftermath of the downfall of Yanukovich, when it became clear that majority of Ukrainians advocated for signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. The Kremlin has seen these developments as a pretext to send its troops to Crimea in order to defend its interests in the region.

Russian propaganda was very efficient at that time, operating in conjunction with the use of hard power. The state-controlled media advocated that "the return" of Crimea to Russia was the greatest moment in Russian history since the victory in the WW2 (Pinkham, 2017). The media campaign achieved success, given the overwhelming domestic support towards Putin's decision to annex Crimea and continue its aggressive actions in eastern Ukraine. Russian officials never admitted the annexation of Crimea; they rather justified the military operations in the peninsula by safety concerns of the Russian community, which has always been quite largely represented in Crimea. The large majority of the Russian local population in Crimea, played a considerable role in the Russian decision to go ahead with annexation of the peninsula instead of encouraging separatist regimes that would remain loyal to the Kremlin, the latter was the case with Abkhazia, the so-called South Ossetia and Transnistria (Mankoff, 2014 p. 270).

Throughout many years, the Kremlin was using different tactics to have leverage over the population of Crimea, preparing the ground for aggressive intervention if needed. The

strategy of annexation through passportization was not a novelty. From 2000 onwards, Russia was encouraging Crimean citizens to apply for Russian passports, offering in return visa-free travel to Russia. Russia's passportization policy turned out to be successful not only in Crimea but also in Abkhazia. The success of the aforementioned policy meant that Russia's soft power had a considerable impact on vulnerable regions (Grigas, 2016).

Russian aggression began on February 23 in Sevastopol by a rally of a pro-Russian radical organization that successfully achieved the dismissal of the acting mayor of the city and the appointment of a pro-Kremlin mayor (Kononczuk, 2014). The key demand was to attain Crimea's secession from Ukraine in order to become part of Russia. Shortly, under pressure from armed men the deputies voted in favour of an all-Crimean referendum. On subsequent days, the key strategic sites in Crimea were captured by armed men. Despite the fact that the Kremlin denied the deployment of the Russian troops, it was clear that the seizure of Crimea was executed by Russian troops. Russia has therefore aimed at using the Crimea as a bargaining chip against Ukraine (Kononczuk, 2014).

Russian authorities claimed that military operations in Crimea were executed by the forces of the Black Sea Fleet that were defending the rights of the Crimean civilians from extremists. The Kremlin was attempting to legalize the annexation of Crimea through the pretext that the citizens of the peninsula were free to choose their future by voting in a referendum. On March 16, 2014 the Crimean status referendum was held, which was recognized as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine (Kononczuk, 2014). Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of the voters reportedly supported the Russian annexation.

Despite the significant deterioration of relations with the West, Russia achieved its key aims with the annexation of Crimea and ongoing tensions in the eastern Ukraine. Namely, preventing future NATO expansion closer to the Russian border; disrupting Ukraine's closer

ties with the EU and excluding the possibility that the new Ukrainian government would review the Russian lease and possibly remove the Black Sea Fleet from its base in Sevastopol. In the long-term perspective, the annexation served the purpose of maintaining Russian hegemony in the region and from the Russian perspective - restoring historical justice. Additionally, The Kremlin destroyed a significant part of Ukraine's military and economic capabilities aiming to make the country vulnerable to accepting the Russian proposals and inciting the feeling of betrayal towards the West among the population. Additionally, Russia was counting on having a long-lasting impact on the decision-making processes in Ukraine especially with regards to the European integration. Given the history of revolutions that led to the victory of pro-Western leaders and massive protests against Putin's regime on Bolotnaya square in 2011, the Kremlin has always feared the spillover of the revolutionary sentiments in Russia. With the Crimean annexation, it is highly unlikely that Russia will face the challenge of the colored revolutions at home.

## 7. Conclusion

The belief that Russia is a great power has a long record in Russia's intellectual and political history. Since the end of the Cold War, Russian society and elites were dissatisfied regarding Russia's role and place in international system.

The liberal Westerism of Kozyrev, largely driven by personal and tactical considerations, was an exception of Russia's mainstream power-centered politics that proved the rule.

The revision of Kozyrev's policy was quickly implemented in the society as a result of existing attitudes in state apparatus and opposition circles, the symbolic expression of which was the replacement of Kozyrev by Primakov. Since then, with insignificant modifications, the Russian foreign policy is still functioning on the basis of the Primakov's doctrine, which consists of ideological foundations from Gorchakov and Stolypin's ideas.

The key determinant of this policy is to serve the interests of Russia as a great power in an anarchical world. Within this context, domination over the post-Soviet states is of a vital importance for Moscow given its prestige, security policy, economic and energy goals.



President Vladimir Putin, who perceives the breakup of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century, was preparing for a long time to revise Russia's status as a weak state. Putin has effectively used the US engagement in Iraqi and Afghan campaigns and along with consolidation of his power vertical, he has also started strengthening Russia's economic and military might. Moreover, growing oil prices played a positive role in Putin's aforementioned endeavour.

Not only the "incursion" of military-political organization such as NATO in the post-Soviet space is unacceptable for Moscow, but also any alternative political project such as the EU is intolerable for the Kremlin's hegemonic interests. Therefore, Moscow is highly opposed to independent foreign policy agenda pursued by the post-Soviet republics.

Moscow's effective military campaign against Georgia and Ukraine in conjunction with appropriate information and ideological campaigns makes it clear that Moscow has been working hard to carry out the aforementioned operations.

Consequently, the primary factor that drove Russia to go to war with Georgia in August 2008 and annex Crimea in 2014, is Russia's geopolitical aim to return its great power status. Thus, Vladimir Putin has deliberately decided that Russia's military-political modernization, economic growth and foreign policy would serve the primary aim of portraying the country as a great power and has awaited for relevant circumstances.

External factors, whether it is recognition of Kosovo's independence, NATO Bucharest Summit or EU Vilnius Summit, have all served as pretexts for Putin to achieve his foreign policy goals.

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