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**INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS POLÍTICOS**

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**The Annexation of Crimea:  
Foreign Policy and Identity Politics of Russia**

Dissertation submitted to the Portuguese Catholic University  
for the degree of Master of Art (M.A.) in Governance, Leadership and Democracy  
Studies

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The Institute of Political Studies  
2015

## **Abstract**

The main focus of this research work is on examining and revealing the relation and interaction of Russia's foreign policy and its identity politics.

Most of time, Russia's foreign policy messages in connection with the annexation of Crimean Peninsula have been revealing its oppositional stands towards the West. Since Russia's leadership promulgated foreign policy elements have been embedded in its peculiar political culture, historical path as well as certain political context, the analysis of the annexation case of Crimea reveals how Russia's historical experience and geopolitical inclination towards invasion and expansionism have nowadays also become indispensable elements of Russia's foreign policy, within its desire to dominate at a regional level, as well as its Great Power's aspirations in the international scene.

The case study of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine, within its justification arguments, helps not only to better understand the scope of Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine conflict but also reveals the existing controversies between the postulated political goals of Russia's leadership and its implemented politics.

Since Russia's foreign policy has become a manifesting voice of its identity politics, this research work examines also the formative aspects of Russian identity politics, such as the desire and struggle for recognition, "Social contract" and propaganda instruments.

The afore-mentioned formative elements have helped Russia's leadership to consolidate its power and succeed with its foreign policy's objectives in the case of Ukraine conflict. Thus, the examination of the afore-mentioned instrumental capacities gives a deeper insight in Russian political identity, which within its various dimensions, becomes the driving force of its foreign policy as well the source of Russia's cultivated perception that it has a special mission in world affairs.

The analysis of this research devoted to Russia's foreign policy messages in connection with the afore-mentioned formative aspects of its identity politics is aimed at: (1) answering the question of whether the Ukraine conflict is a part of Russia's "political identity building" strategy, as well as (2) deepening prospects in the Kremlin's enforced identity building strategy, within which international society can view and rethink the potential and perspectives of the relations with Russia.

**Number of words: 21.578**

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Mónica Dias who has provided me with her valuable advices and guidance which greatly assisted me in completing my research work

I would like to say a very special thanks to the professors of the Institute of Political Studies of the Catholic University who have introduced me with various disciplines and provided me with a valuable learning experience during my master studies at the MA program of Governance, Leadership and Democracy Studies.

The support of Professor João Carlos Espada as well as other professors of the Institute of Political Studies encouraged me to overcome difficulties in order to accomplish this research work and succeed with my academic goals.

I am thankful to my family and, especially, my son Harijs and daughter Marta who have been next to me through these studies assisting me and providing me with the opportunity to devote my time and attention to my academic interests and research.

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## **Introduction**

The studies of Governance, Leadership and Democracy, having been devoted to the most essential constituents of a modern democratic statehood and its moral-political values, have also opened the doors to various captivating academic disciplines and topics related to leadership strategies, international relations, political governance systems, global political economy and political philosophy. Throughout history, these concepts have also proved themselves as crucially important and decisive issues in the formation of domestic policies and the international order. Therefore, in these studies and discussions, devoted to governance, leadership and democracy issues, the main reference point has been the historical relevance and imputability of the theoretical concepts, as well as their integral aspects, to the implemented politics and applied leadership strategies of nation states and international society in the current political context.

Despite an almost conventional understanding of governance, leadership and liberal democracy, as well as integrated approaches on their applicability in the West, the current international political arena presents a wide-range of challenging difficulties and uncertainty related to the meaning and utilization of these concepts, particularly, in connection with attempts to resolve the ongoing international conflicts in various parts of the world.

As the experts in the field of international politics of identity - Brown and Anley (2009) have admitted, there is no longer one single model of politics that can reasonably be seen as universal, at least, which most countries will gravitate towards over time. Instead we can observe an emergence of new tendencies of international politics. Due to the spread of globalization, the new tendencies imply the appearance of identity politics, which caused and comprised by

different political cultures, sometimes present the insurmountable barriers, emphasizing the salience of nationhood, ethnicity or religion.<sup>1</sup>

The distant and, even sometimes, incompatible policies of international players also imply the necessity to re-evaluate the existing expectations and perspectives of international relations and collaboration forms.

Following my interest to deepen my master program studies in the field of international contemporary relations and, particularly, in regard to certain political challenges taking place today in the international arena, my dissertation work is focused on the analyses of Russia's foreign policy and its identity politics in the context of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

Coming from Latvia and being born there during Soviet occupation times, where Russian people were purposefully sent to in order to form "a new working class society" (the Russian minority nowadays remains close to thirty percent) and the Russian language was the main spoken language at an institutional level, I feel close to Russian and Ukrainian people not only geographically, but, mostly, due to the common historical experience that we share.

A short time before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, staring from the window of the well known Soviet pioneer camp *Artek* at the snowy mountains of the Crimean Peninsula (a part of the Soviet Ukraine), with a twelve year old child's eyes, I was lucky to understand that they were spectacularly beautiful as the postulated great ideas and nature of the Soviet ideology but not enough to force myself to like and enjoy them due to the fact that I felt manipulated and contained by the strong and repressive hand of the state which was ready to brainwash people in

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<sup>1</sup> Brown and Ainley (2009), "International Politics of Identity," Chapter 10 in *Understanding International Relations, The International Politics of Identity*, pp.200-207.

order to succeed with unquestioning obedience and praising of its greatness giving back just lies, imitations and splinters of liberty.

Due to these circumstances during my childhood I had gained a very unique life experience in the society that was disposed to collapse, but still contained by the jaws of the Soviet totalitarian regime. This experience was shortly followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and my country's independence fights during the late 80s and early 90s. After almost fifty years of Soviet occupation time, Latvia, similarly like Ukraine, looking at the Western democracies, was ready to gradually and steadily improve its governance and institutional system in order to be able to join the European Union as well as the Transatlantic Alliance.

Within these circumstances and experience it has been impossible to stay neutral or respectful towards the states whose regimes constrain and oppress people in their aspirations for freedom, free expression of their thoughts, as well as their self-determination capacities that still is a reality for millions of people all over the world, including the close neighbourhood of Europe.

At the same time a short time period of my life spent in the Soviet era within its cultivated patriotic spirit and close friendship ties among the Soviet Republics allowed me to understand the composite nature and the Great Powers capacity to take lead for its people, promulgating the representation of their common interests, their protection against Western enemies and convincing of the State's leadership ability to better know what the people actually need for their lives.

Since Latvia is geographically close to Ukraine conflict zone and has shared a similar historical experience during the Soviet time, as well as during the independence movements and struggles for freedom, the target of this research work is to apply this experience in order to better understand and disclose the nature of Russia's foreign policy and its political identity within the context of Ukraine conflict, finding out whether there are new ways of resettling mutual expectations and relations between Russia and the West.

Russia's run annexation of Crimea has been recognized not only as a certain turning point of its foreign policy towards Ukraine but as a culmination moment of its oppositional politics in relation to the Western states and their created international alliances and organizations. The well-known American expert on Russia's foreign policy Mankoff (2014) has stressed the serious and irreversible consequences of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine on international society, admitting that "Russia's occupation and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February of 2014 have plunged Europe into one of its gravest crises since the end of the Cold War."<sup>2</sup>

The source of the Ukraine conflict can be found in the nature of Russia's implemented foreign policy towards the West already a long time before Russia's led intervention in Ukraine. In spite of the fact that Russia's elite has been generally always in agreement that Russia is, and should remain, a power with global interests and a global reach, as Mankoff (2012) has depicted, the ambitions of Russia do not automatically imply its interaction in a form of constructive cooperation with the West. On the contrary, its foreign policy's messages and actions have been revealing its oppositional stands and dissatisfaction with the West, which have usually taken the form of a rival and a spoiler, set and remaining outside the institutional and normative bounds of the West.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of the afore-mentioned analysis the relevant issue is the role of Russian leadership and its presented way of governance and examination of power. Russia's political system has been often called a "power vertical" due to the fact that its authority is concentrated with the President at the top. Russian leadership, within its obvious attempts to isolate and distance

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<sup>2</sup> Mankoff (2014), "Russia's Latest Land Grab, How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," Essay in *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-04-17/russias-latest-land-grab>.

<sup>3</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p.29.

Russia from the West and its influence, has caused concerns and continue to challenge Western policy makers and experts as well as international society. As an illustrative example of Russian political elite's inclination to preserve its isolation and non-participation in the Western international order serves the world view expressed by Surkov in the article „The Hidden Author of Putinism, How Vladislav Surkov invented the new Russia“ of Pomerantsev (2014), the author of many publications on Russian leadership. The former deputy head of the presidential administration, later deputy prime minister and, at the later stage - assistant to the President on foreign affairs, has indicated that the processes taking place in the international arena have become a darkling vision of globalization, in which instead of everyone rising together, interconnection rather than cooperation means contests between movements, corporations and states. As Surkov has underlined, in the context of globalization provoked consequences the European Unions and NATO's and “the West,” have all worn out, and the new players can fluctuate and split the old alliances and partnerships.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore it could be concluded that the controversies created by Russia's foreign policy within the Crimea's annexation have provided even a more explicit evidence of Russian leadership's criticism and denial of the international order and Western leadership's envisaged foreign policy objectives, which according to Mead (2014), since the end of the Cold War has put all the efforts to shift “international relations away from zero-sum issues toward win-win issues.”<sup>5</sup>

Also the current outcome of “the frozen conflict” between Russia and Western states has signalized of a new strong clash of the diverse political perspectives and approaches, by which,

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<sup>4</sup> Pomerantsev (2014), „The Hidden Author of Putinism, How Vladislav Surkov invented the new Russia“ in *Global, The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/hidden-author-putinism-russia-vladislav-surkov/382489/>, p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Mead (May/ June 2014), „The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers“, *Foreign Affairs*, p. 69.

as Mead (2014) has depicted, “the task of promoting and maintaining world order grows more daunting.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite the afore-mentioned Russia’s oppositional foreign policy towards the West, by the end of the year 2015, *The Economist* (8 December 2015) in its article on Russia and its President Vladimir Putin has pointed out the following:

*“Russians adore their president in part for making their country a “great power” again, and when asked what makes a country great, they name two qualities: wealth and military strength. The less Mr Putin can provide of the former at home, the more he must demonstrate of the latter abroad.”*<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, as *The Economist* (8 December 2015) notes, Putin’s yearly presidential address carries a special weight aimed at the Russian elite. Remarkably, that almost two years after the intervention in Ukraine, Putin in his speech has softened his tone towards the West that, in its turn, has been perceived as “a departure from the confrontational course Mr. Putin has charted since returning to Russia’s presidency in 2012” and resumption of its aggressive foreign policy tactics towards the West.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, taking into account that almost two years after Crimea's annexation the Russian President Putin in his yearly speech did not even mention Ukraine, it has been translated by international society as a change of Russia’s leadership applied tactics which, in its turn, have drawn attention to the Great Power’s potentially new plans and political considerations. The change of tactics and replacement of old appearances by new ones have been considered as provoked by several

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<sup>6</sup> Mead (May/ June 2014), „The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers“, *Foreign Affairs*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *The Economist* (2015), „As Russia’s economy shrinks, Vladimir Putin softens his tone. A popular President muffles his anti-Western rhetoric“, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21679701-popular-president-muffles-his-anti-western-rhetoric-russias-economy-shrinks-vladimir-putin>.

<sup>8</sup> *The Economist* (2015), „As Russia’s economy shrinks, Vladimir Putin softens his tone. A popular President muffles his anti-Western rhetoric“, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21679701-popular-president-muffles-his-anti-western-rhetoric-russias-economy-shrinks-vladimir-putin>.

reasons and circumstances - Russia's recent military intervention in Syria as well as the current precarious state of Russia's economy (due to the and implied economic response sanctions by the European Union and the United States to Russia) and the Kremlin's preoccupation with calming calm down and coping with those who can foster an oppositional movement and threaten with liberalization ideas that, according to *The Economist* (8 December 2015), could eventually lead to the "dismantling the entire system of "vertical" power".<sup>9</sup>

According to the Lithuanian political scientist Jakniūnaite (2009):

*"Thus, foreign policy is a manifestation of state identity, and its analysis can be used to understand how the state is transforming, what message about itself is transmitting to the world, how it understands the world and how it sees the others."*<sup>10</sup>

**Therefore, the goal of this research work is to clarify whether the Ukraine conflict is a part of Russia's "political identity building" strategy and, especially, in which way the annexation of Crimea within its scope of Russia's foreign policy has contributed to the formation of Russian identity politics.**

The afore-mentioned question of my dissertation work leads us to closely examine and reveal the relation and interaction of Russia's foreign policy with its identity politics. The analysis of Russia's foreign policy, within its messages, political culture, failures towards the West and historical background as well as the formative trends of its political identity, analysed in the

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<sup>9</sup> The Economist (2015), „As Russia's economy shrinks, Vladimir Putin softens his tone. A popular President muffles his anti-Western rhetoric," <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21679701-popular-president-muffles-his-anti-western-rhetoric-russias-economy-shrinks-vladimir-putin> .

<sup>10</sup> Jakniūnaite (2009), „*Neighborhood Politics of Baltic States: Between the EU and Russia*," Chapter 8 in Berg, Ehin (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy, Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration*, p.119.

below-mentioned sequence, are aimed at the addressing one of the main concerns of international society: what Russian political identity is; and what Russia's leadership wants to achieve and transmit to the world, by steadily presenting its oppositional and denying political stands towards the Western international actors, as in the case of its foreign policy towards Crimea?

Thus, the first chapter of this research starts with the examination of the main messages of Russia's foreign policy towards the West and the analysis of their imputability to its political culture and context. The afore-mentioned analysis is followed by the second chapter devoted to the case study of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine and its justification attempts by the Great Power's aspirations and its special political mission in the world. Since the political context, related to the annexation fact of Crimea, presents more dilemmas and unanswered questions than constructive suggestions and solutions, a challenging question arises of whether is it possible to formulate what Russian political identity is? Due to the fact that the messages of Russia's foreign policy have been dictated and imposed by Russian leadership rather than embedded in its peculiar political culture and context, the third chapter of this work examines and discloses the indispensable elements or formative aspects of Russian politics of identity, which make feasible and sustain the oppositional nature and autonomous character of Russia's foreign policy.

The afore-mentioned structure of this research work, which starts with the examination of Russia's leadership implemented foreign policy elements and goes through the case study of the Ukraine conflict to the analysis of Russian political identity, has been intentionally chosen as a way of clarifying and disclosing how the Ukraine conflict has become a part of Russia's "identity building strategy," as well as how Russia's implemented foreign policy in the case of Crimea has contributed to fostering Russian autonomous and isolated political identity.

Since after Crimea's annexation some commentators of international relation have even raised the question of whether Cold War tensions have ever been disrupted or replaced by a new viable phase of relations between Russia and the Western states, this research work reveals also

different stands and considerations on whether the intervention in Ukraine as the expression form of Russia's foreign policy has changed the character of international politics and marked a new page in international relations between Russia and the West.

Taking into consideration the concentration of power in one leader's hands in Russia, the main source of my dissertation project is the analysis of President Putin's speeches from the annexation of Crimea to the commemoration of the first anniversary of Crimea's and Sevastopol's reunification with Russia:

- Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives on 18 March 2014 in the Kremlin, Moscow;
- Conference of Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives on 1 July 2014, Moscow;
- Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly on 4 December 2014, the Kremlin, Moscow;
- News Conference of Vladimir Putin on 18 December 2014, Moscow;
- Concert celebrating Crimea and Sevastopol's reunification with Russia on 18 March 2015, Moscow.

Neither Putin's speeches nor their interpretations by Russia's propaganda authors can provide a comprehensive and structured foreign policy's outlook. Nevertheless, containing the consequent and certain messages addressed to the West and its created international order, the Russian president's speeches disclose the political context of Russia's foreign policy within the Ukraine conflict. Since the propaganda used by Russian leadership basically proves that the same bodies of evidence could be interpreted and endowed with a completely different meaning depending on

the designed political objectives, the speeches by Putin also serve as an authentic source of evidence for disclosing a consequent and purposeful building of the Great Power's identity along with its foreign policy course.

Therefore, within this research work Putin's speeches and their messages are examined in relation to its various supportive as well as oppositional interpretations expressed in regard to the annexation of Crimea by Allison, Mead, Mankoff, Surkov, Pomerantsev, Brown, Anley, Marshall, Vanik and Birg, Jakuniūnaite, Kissinger as well as other experts on Russia's foreign policy issues. The diverse stands serve as a source for reflection over the oppositional character of Russian foreign policy, which once again with the Ukraine conflict enters into open confrontation with the principles of Western international order, and presents evidence of provoked dilemmas by Russia's foreign policy and identity politics in Western society.

Russia's posed problems within the annexation of Crime and their impact within the international arena, as well as its leadership's recently changed foreign policy tactics, lead the West to reconsider the point of view, which was quite sarcastically depicted by Gaidar (2005), Russian political analyst and director of the Institute for Economic Policy. As Gaidar (2005) has admitted, the core problem that Europeans should understand, is that Russia will never disappear and it is one of the most important European neighbours, therefore, "Europe needs to have a clear, well elaborated policy towards Russia, which should not be based on the traditional concept of EU enlargement..." and traditional collaboration forms of Western states.<sup>11</sup>

Departing from the foreign policy concept offered by Lithuanian political scientist Jakniūnaite (2009) and taking into consideration the afore-mentioned remarks of Russian political analyst Gaidar (2005) concerning the practical necessity to resettle the West's expectations and come to adequate policies towards Russia, the objective of my dissertation is to deepen the perspectives

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<sup>11</sup> Gaidar (2005), "Russia as Europe's Neighbor: Strategic Challenges of Economic and Political Development," Chapter 16 in Hamilton (ed.), *The New Frontiers of Europe. The Enlargement of the European Union: Implications and Consequences*, pp. 225-226.

for discussing Russia's foreign policy messages and their practical implications within the annexation of Crimea.

Since the far-reaching impact of the Ukraine conflict and its current "frozen" status have already served as awakening signals to international society, the recent change of Putin's applied political tactics leads it to take an even closer look not only at the expression forms of Russia's foreign policy, but also at the substantive and formative elements of its identity politics, which could provide explanation for two interconnected questions: how the foreign policy carried out by Russia's leadership within the annexation of Crimea has become feasible and applicable in the international scene despite its contradictoriness and created grave consequences, and what is its contribution to Russian political identity.

Furthermore, the overarching objective of this research work on Russian identity politics and its foreign policy within the intervention in Ukraine is to deepen understanding towards the question of whether there is a way in which Russia and the West despite the incompatibility of different interests and foreign policy could move beyond its cooperation dichotomy (in Sakwa's terminology) and reach the balance, within which it is feasible to restructure and rebuild their relations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Sakwa (2012), „The problem of “the international” in Russian identity formation,“ *International Politics*, 49, pp. 449-465.

## **1. Foreign Policy of Russia within the annexation of Crimea**

Despite the fact that the Crimean Peninsula has already been annexed by Russia in the year 1783, since the year 1954 Crimea has been transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic and later - in the year 1991, became the autonomous Republic of Crimea within independent Ukraine. Therefore, from a legal point of view, Russia within the annexation of Crimea on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 and intervention in the independent state's territory has violated territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

In addition, Russia has been violating the international law as well as agreements, which were signed by Russia in partnership and trust with other European states. As Estonian President Ilves has indicated in his address at the European Parliament:

“I must state that in doing what it did two years ago this month, Russia violated every major, foundational European security treaty, beginning with the U.N. Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and the 1990 Charter of Paris. It violated as well the 1994 Budapest Memorandum that guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity in return for eliminating what was then the world's third largest nuclear weapons arsenal.”<sup>13</sup>

Since the annexation of Crimea has been perceived by Western countries as an unambiguous political signal pointed against Ukraine and its aspirations as well as collaboration ties with the West, this chapter is devoted to the analysis of Russia's leadership implemented foreign policy in the context of the Crimea conflict.

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<sup>13</sup> Ilvess, „The address of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the European Parliament,“ <https://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/11972-address-of-president-toomas-hendrik-ilves-at-the-european-parliament-february-2-2016/index.html>.

Contrary to afore-mentioned Western concerns, over the last two decades Russia and its independent foreign policy has been revealed in Putin's speeches as seriously contained and suppressed by the Western spread of power and its practised double standards in international relations. Putin (1 July 2014) in his conference with Russian ambassadors and diplomatic representatives has admitted the following:

*“The potential for conflict is growing in the world, old contradictions are growing ever more acute and new ones are being provoked. We come across developments, often unexpectedly, and we observe with regret that international law is not working, the most basic norms of decency are not complied with and the principle of all-permissiveness in gaining the upper hand...Those who continue insisting on their exclusivity strongly dislike Russia's independent policy. The events in Ukraine prove it. They also prove that a model of relations full of double standards does not work with Russia.”<sup>14</sup>*

The various speeches and comments of the Russian president in relation to the Ukraine conflict have been revealing a strong criticism and denial of the Western international order and practiced politics. Due to the different and even incompatible political approaches, Russia's aggressive foreign policy towards Crimea has provoked serious dilemmas and vigorous debates among the Western states concerning the ultimate goals of Russian identity politics and its foreign policy within this conflict. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is devoted to the studies and analysis of three issues – (1) the substantial goal of Russia's foreign policy; (2) the main messages and nature of Russia's foreign policy and their imputability to its political culture and traditional perception of power, as well as (2) the failures of Russia's foreign policy towards the West and its regional partners due to the lack of cooperation, its arbitrary approach and overbearing attitude.

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<sup>14</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, p.1; pp. 3-4.

## 1.1. Russia's aspirations for the Great Power status

In the particular context of the Ukraine crisis and on-going disputes about it, Dejevsky (2014), the chief editorial writer and a columnist at *the Independent*, has drawn attention to Putin's described "independent nature" of Russia's foreign policy in relation to the West. The Russian President in his press conference has characterized Russia's privileging position over Crimea and its implemented intervention policy, by the allegory of the Russian bear. In other words, Putin has openly admitted that the Russian bear decides on its own, independently from everyone else, what to do and when to do things. As Putin has noted, "perhaps the Russian bear should eat berries quietly and not chase piglets in the forest," but it "won't be chained" by the West.<sup>15</sup>

It has to also be admitted that after the dissolution of the Soviet regime, Russian leadership has consistently reminded the West, particularly, the European Union and the United States of America, of its special mission and role in ensuring a right balance of power in the world order. According to Mankoff (2012), within this mission, Russia's objective has been to re-establish itself as "a major global player" in the international arena.<sup>16</sup>

As Blank (2014), the internationally well known expert on Russia's foreign policy and the former Soviet Union, has admitted, Russia's Great Power aspirations have been already embedded and coinciding with the visionary perspectives of the Russian President Yeltsin, especially, towards autocracy and "a right to an exclusive sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dejevsky (2014), „Putin speech: President says Russian bear won't be chained by the West as he warns of tough two years ahead,” *Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-speech-president-says-russian-bear-wont-be-chained-by-the-west-as-he-warns-of-tough-two-years-9934532.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,” Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, p 17.

In order to reveal the main principles of Russian leadership's postulated and implemented foreign policy, it is relevant to look at its Foreign Policy Concepts, priorities and goals, which have been set as a systematic description by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by the Russian President.

The Foreign Policy Concept (2000), adopted at the beginning of Putin's Presidency time, has explicitly conveyed and specially underlined that the top priority of Russian foreign policy is the promotion of its Great Power:

*“Promoting the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power and one of the most influential centers in the modern world (by) ensuring the country's security, preserving and strengthening its sovereignty and territorial integrity and its strong and authoritative position in the world community (in order to promote) the growth of its political, economic, intellectual, and spiritual potential.”<sup>18</sup>*

As the Western expert of Russia's foreign policy Mankoff (2012) has depicted, this statement, along with the Concept subsequent priorities has been notable for the attention it gives to notions such as Great Power, sovereignty, and partnership among states. Also the language of the Foreign Policy Concept (2000) underlines Russia's strong geopolitical aspirations within its foreign policy visions and goals - “a world of states seeking power and pursuing their national interests while balancing against other large states.” As Mankoff (2012) has noted, “such language, and such a worldview, would be unthinkable in official statements from the United States, much less in the European Union.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Mankoff (2012), it is remarkable that Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (2008) has also remained a very strong notion and subtext of Russia's striving attempts to succeed with its

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<sup>18</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2000), „Kontsepsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” in Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power politics*, p.16.

<sup>19</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power politics*, p.16.

Great Power status, while maintaining a great emphasis on Russia as a rising power and the creation of favourable external conditions for the modernization of Russia and consolidation of its society.<sup>20 21</sup>

Despite the fact that Russian Foreign ministry has been in charge of drafting Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts and similar documents, the decisive role and leadership issues related to Russia's foreign policy has been overwhelmed by the strong hands of the President Putin (also during his Prime minister's post). Describing the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in shaping Russia's foreign policy, Mankoff (2012) has admitted the following:

*“Official strategy documents provide some basic insights into this world view. Although the importance of these documents should not be overemphasized – they are work of bureaucratic horse trading and are often left deliberately vague.”*<sup>22</sup>

Focus on the Great Power status has been explicitly expressed also in Putin's attempts to create and preserve his “increasingly undemocratic, even autocratic policy” and leadership at a regional level, by privileging of Russian sovereignty over its chosen partners. According to Blank (2014) the Great Power aspirations of Russia have been accompanied by its strong expectations towards the partnership model with the EU that, as Russian leadership has stated, “should contribute to consolidating Russia's role as the leading power in shaping a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area.” (CIS – the Commonwealth of Independent states)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>.

<sup>21</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power' politics*, p.17.

<sup>22</sup> Mankoff (2012) , *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p.16.

<sup>23</sup> Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,“ Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, pp.14-16.

At the same time the Great Power status have been imagined and portrayed by the Russian leaders in a very different way from the European Union model due to Russia's preferences and interests to maintain its dominant role as well as gradual inclination to the centralized power towards its partners. As a Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov has acknowledged in 1999:

*“Our country is not in need of affiliation with the EU. This would entail loss of its unique Euro-Asian specifics, the role of the center of attraction of the reintegration of the CIS, independence in foreign economic and defense policies, and complete restructuring (once more) of all Russia statehood based on the requirement of the European Union. Finally great powers (and it is too soon to abandon calling ourselves such) do not dissolve in international unions – they create them around themselves.”(Blank, 2014)<sup>24</sup>*

Therefore, it could be admitted that within the annexation of Crimea and its implemented foreign policy towards Ukraine and the West, Putin's leadership has once again actualized Russia's role and its ambitions for a Great Power status, this time remarkably intensifying its anti-Western rhetoric. Thus, the intervention in Ukraine accompanied by Putin's criticism towards the Western international order, have been transferring to the world unambiguous messages, within which the West's dream that by the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical questions of territory and military power, as well as competition among the powers will be replaced by the purposeful construction of liberal world order, did not come true.

As Mead (2014) has depicted, the post Cold War era did not let “the old-fashioned geopolitics” of the Soviet times go away, and the West has “fundamentally misread what the collapse of the

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<sup>24</sup> Quated in Emerson (2005), „From an Awkward Partnership to a Great Europe: A Eropean Perspective,“ Allin and Emerson (eds.) *Reading in European Security*, III, P.19., quated in Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,“ Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, p.16.

Soviet Union meant: the ideological triumph of liberal capitalist democracy over communism, not the obsolescence of hard power.”<sup>25</sup>

## **1.2. The main messages and political context of Russia’s foreign policy**

Since the intervention in Ukraine has been presented and justified by the Russian President as aimed at protecting Russian people, defending Russia's national interests as well as proclaiming and securing its statehood and pursued pure sense of “sovereign democracy,” the author’s intention is to deepen insights in the nature and goals of Russia's foreign policy, by analysing the afore-mentioned foreign policy's messages and their imputability to Russian political culture and political context.

Already at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis Putin has firmly transferred to Russian and international society the message of Russia’s readiness to protect its “compatriots” in Crimea and Ukraine. As Putin (18 March 2014) stated in his speech to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society members:

*“Our country will continue to actively defend the rights of Russians, our compatriots abroad, using the entire range of available means - from political and economic to operations under international humanitarian law and the right of self-defence.”*<sup>26</sup>

Beside the strong argument of the humanitarian protection of Russian people abroad, the Russian President has also underlined the duty to defend Russia against the growing threat from the West. In the context of the defence necessity against the growing influence of the West, Putin (18

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<sup>25</sup> Mead (May/ June 2014), „The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,“ *Foreign Affairs*, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Putin (2014), „Address by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014,“ p.11.

March 2014) has stressed in his meeting with Russian ambassadors and diplomatic representatives the following:

*“Today, it is imperative to end this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.”*<sup>27</sup>

As the third message of Russia’s foreign policy has been manifested its leadership’s necessity to defend Russia’s national or state interests. The latter has been strongly related to a historical aspect and Russia’s special relation with Ukraine and Crimea. As Putin (18 March 2014) has underlined, the Ukraine conflict has proved that “the issue at stake here was the sources of our history, our spirituality and our statehood, the things that make us a single people and single united nation.”<sup>28</sup>

Since the Kremlin domestically and also internationally has been favouring and applying an authoritarian model of governance, Russian leadership's historically sustained aggressive expression forms of power and oppressive control at home have shaped Russian society's perception and left a significant impact on its political culture and perception of power. Due to this, nowadays Russian society seems to still be imbued with its aspirations to reaffirm Russia’s greatness by extending its territory, along with the continuous acceptance and subjugation to its leadership authoritative and non-disputable governance style in domestic as well as in international affairs.

As Kissinger (2014) has depicted, the opinion that the Czar is “the embodiment of the defense of Russia against enemies surrounding it on all sides” is based in Russia's unique historical

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<sup>27</sup> Putin (2014), „Address by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

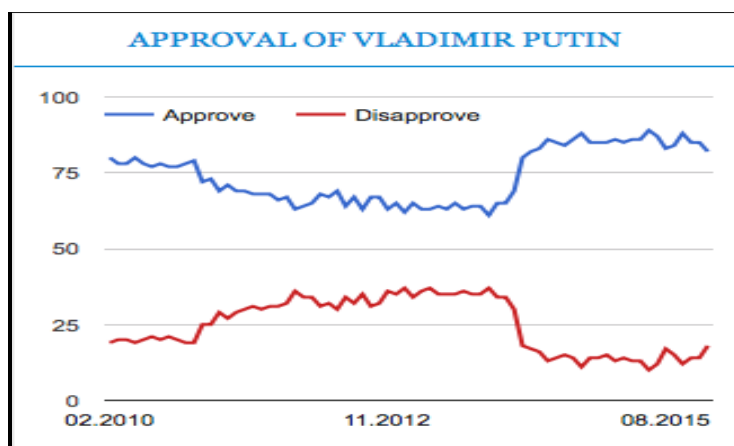
<sup>28</sup> Putin (2015), „Speech of the President of the Russian Federation at the Concert celebrating Crimea’s and Sevastopol’s reunification with Russia,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/4787>.

experience that has proved and justified in its own eyes that “Russia’s extreme autocracy is the only system government that could hold together such a gigantic territory” and defend it against its enemies.<sup>29</sup>

Also recently, despite the precarious economic situation and the badly affecting consequences of the Ukraine conflict, *The Moscow Times* (2014) published a strong loyalty manifestation to Putin’s leadership and his authoritarian political regime. Putin’ Chief of the Staff Volodin (2014) has publically stated that ”there is no Russia today if there is no Putin”, as well as “any attack on Putin is an attack on Russia.”<sup>30</sup>

The below - enclosed *Levada Center*, a Russian research organization, prepared statistic chart on Vladimir Putin’s approval rates in Russian society - one and a half year after the Crimea’s annexation, serves as an explicit example of the afore-mentioned observation.

**Chart 1. Approval of Vladimir Putin (October 2015)** <sup>31</sup>



According to the statistics of *Levada Center*, published at the Foreign Affairs (January/ February 2016), Putin's approval rating increased from 63 percent during the invasion of Crimea to 88

<sup>29</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> The Moscow Times (2014), “No Putin, no Russia, says Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff”, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/no-putin-no-russia-says-kremlin-deputy-chief-of-staff/509981.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Chart: *Approval of Vladimir Putin* (2015), Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/>.

percent by October of year 2015, which provides evidence that Russian people have still been supporting to a great extent their President and his introduced and implemented politics despite Western sanctions, which were perceived by Russian society as only humiliating and weakening Russia economically.<sup>32</sup>

According to the survey of *Levada Center*, in November 2015, 46% of the respondents answered that Russia could just partially be considered as democracy. At the same these respondents have indicated that Russia is and has to be “a completely special kind of democracy according to what is appropriate to Russia's national traditions and unique characteristics”. The 19 % respondents were in favor of necessity to return the model of governance, which existed in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, only 16% respondents have considered that Russia has to become a democracy similar to those of developed European countries and the United States.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 1. Democracy in Today’s Russia**

**IS THERE DEMOCRACY IN TODAY'S RUSSIA?**

	Feb.06	Mar.10	Feb.12	Mar.13	Mar.14	<b>Nov.15</b>
Without a doubt, yes	4	4	8	6	8	<b>16</b>
Partially, yes	33	32	40	31	38	<b>46</b>
It hasn't yet found its feet	33	36	31	32	32	<b>19</b>
Recently there is less and less of it	20	20	14	22	13	<b>11</b>
It is difficult to say	11	8	8	8	8	<b>9</b>

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<sup>32</sup> Ashford (2016 ), “Not-So-Smart Sanctions, The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia,” *Foreign Affairs*,p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Table: *Democracy in Today’s Russia* (2015), Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/democracy-todays-russia>.

## WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY DOES RUSSIA NEED?

	Oct.11	Aug.13	Sept.14	Nov.15
That of developed European countries, the United States	19	26	13	<b>16</b>
That which existed in the Soviet Union	14	17	16	<b>19</b>
A completely special kind that is appropriate to Russia's national traditions and unique characteristics	49	34	55	<b>46</b>
Russia does not need democracy	7	8	5	<b>5</b>
It is difficult to say	11	16	11	

*Levada Center:* This survey took place between 20 and 23 November 2015 and was conducted throughout all of Russia in both urban and rural settings. The survey was carried out among 1600 people over the age of 18 in 137 localities of 48 of the country's regions. The survey was conducted as a personal interview in respondents' homes. The answer distribution is presented as percentages of the number of participants along with data from previous surveys. The statistical error of these studies does not exceed 3.4%.<sup>34</sup>

The above-mentioned support of the Russian people for Putin's leadership and governance model serves as an explicit example of how thus, what in the West is disregarded as arbitrary authoritarianism can be presented in Russia as an elemental necessity and precondition for a functioning governance. The afore-mentioned research statistics offered by *Levada Center* present evidence and also illustrate, how the aggressive intervention into the sovereign territory of another country that, as Kissinger (2014) has admitted, in the West would be critically viewed and even condemned, can be justified and glorified as a common victory in, the so-called, “a completely special kind of democracy” of Russia.<sup>35</sup>

The consequences of the authoritarian style of ruling have left a long lasting impact particularly on the capability of Russian society to react to political decisions. Not only in the Soviet times,

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<sup>34</sup> Table: *Democracy in Today's Russia* (2015), Levada Center survey, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/democracy-todays-russia>

<sup>35</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p. 56.

but during the last decades of the current Kremlin's leadership, Russian people have continued to be seriously contained and oppressed in their human need to express themselves as free individuals, who have a rational interest and desire to take part in their country's political and social processes.

The afore-mentioned has been confirmed by Tilburg University students Birg's and Vanik's (2015) stands in their paper on 21<sup>st</sup> century Russian and Ukrainian identity issues. Both authors have underlined that Russian political culture has remained largely unchanged in the last twenty-four years due to the fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia returned to a strong central government in Moscow and Russian people have been used for the centralization of power as a historical tradition within society.<sup>36</sup>

A similar observation on the historically conditioned and restricted capability of Russia people to decisively react to political decisions has been shared by Fukuyama (1995). One of the most quoted political scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century, describing Russian society after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, has noted that “the “democrats” in Russia all believe in democracy and markets on an intellectual level, but lack of the social habits necessary to create a unified political organization.”<sup>37</sup>

The observation of Fukuyama corresponds with another view - shared by Pomerantsev on Russian society's understanding of its political life value nowadays. Pomerantsev (2014) has expressed the currently prevailing sceptical attitude in Russian society towards a possible involvement in the political processes is due to the fact that a great part of Russian society

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<sup>36</sup> Birg, Vanik (2015), „National Identities in Russia and Ukraine in the 21st Century : Conflict and In(ter)dependence”, [https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/upload/0b21b707-1fda-47dc-ab35-ddb3df61e994\\_Birg%20and%20Vanik%20Honors%20essay.pdf](https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/upload/0b21b707-1fda-47dc-ab35-ddb3df61e994_Birg%20and%20Vanik%20Honors%20essay.pdf), p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Fukuyama (1995), *Trust, Enriching Trust*, p.357.

considers that “everything is PR” (public relations) in relation to the politics, and nothing can be constructively changed by taking part in it.<sup>38</sup>

As *The Guardian's* commentator Wood (2015) has admitted, these are not just the Kremlin's public relations that feed on confusion. As Pomerantsev (2015) has pointed out, one key to the success of this new Kremlin's authoritarianism is that “instead of simply oppressing opposition, as had been the case with 20th-century strains, it climbs inside all ideologies and movements, exploiting them and rendering them absurd”.<sup>39</sup>

As Wood (2015) has noted, the clearest example of this is the manipulation by a political system that has the appearance of democracy – regular elections, multiple parties, a postulated free media – without any of the substance: the elections are rigged; the parties are all under the president's control; the media do what their owners tell them, and the owners obey the Kremlin. According to Wood (2015), it has been the mismatch between form and content that has earned in Putin's regime, as well as in its foreign policy the name “democracy” and that has subsequently suppressed the society's capacity to oppose it. 40

Thus, it could be concluded that the messages of Russia's foreign policy - as self-defence against the Western “rule of gun”, fight for Russia's national interests and statehood ideas, as well as the protection of the Russian people, have been sustained by its long lasting authoritarian style of ruling that has shaped Russian political culture and its policies. Due to this, Russian society has been endowed with its peculiar sense of acceptance of its leadership as a provider of order and

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<sup>38</sup> Pomerantsev (2014), “The Hidden Author of Putinism. How Vladislav Surkov invented the new Russia,” *The Atlantic, Global*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/hidden-author-putinism-russia-vladislav-surkov/382489/>.

<sup>39</sup> Wood (2015), “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible by Peter Pomerantsev review – Putinism and the oil-boom years, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/04/nothing-is-true-and-everything-is-permitted-peter-pomerantsev-review-russia-oil-boom>.

<sup>40</sup> Wood (2015), “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible by Peter Pomerantsev review – Putinism and the oil-boom years, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/04/nothing-is-true-and-everything-is-permitted-peter-pomerantsev-review-russia-oil-boom>.

wealth for the state and its people, despite its economically weak performance and lack of respect towards individual freedoms and civil rights.

At the same time the afore-mentioned examples lead us to admit that, instead of ensuring his people their basic freedoms and rights as well as encouraging their civic activities, Putin during his presidential mandates has tried to endow its own promulgated policies to Russian society as a common goal, appealing to the collective self-esteem and fostering people's belief in Russia's Great Power status. Therefore, the political context of Russian society has been remarkably influenced by its leadership created and broadly disseminated political concepts - as Russia's true sense of sovereignty, the threat from the Western world, as well as historical legacy over its previously own lands.

Furthermore, by taking an oppositional stand towards the West within the intervention in Ukraine and proclaiming its self-defence against its spread of power and order, Putin has emphasized that through "Crimea's reunification with Russia," his leadership has actualized and convinced, once more, of its genuine and true sense of "sovereign democracy".

As Putin (4 December 2014) has provocatively underlined in his speech to the Federal Assembly, "true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival," even if "for some European countries national pride is a long – forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury." <sup>41</sup>

Therefore, an additional question arises on what the endowed meaning of true sovereignty is, which is systematically underlined by Russian leadership as a basic reference point of its independent foreign policy?

According to Mankoff (2012), the Kremlin ideologist Surkov has formulated the core principle and concept of Russia's foreign policy, postulating that "sovereign democracy" means and envisages that Russia's "goals and methods - both at home and abroad, are made solely on the

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<sup>41</sup> Putin (2014), „Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly delivered by Vladimir Putin on 4 December 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173> , p.3.

calculations of national interest, rather than because of external pressure to confirm to behavioural norms.”<sup>42</sup>

As Mankoff (2012) has pointed out, Russian “sovereign democracy” emphasizes an official states' policy with a special emphasis on its new autonomy in the international context. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2006) has already indicated ten years ago in his speech in the United States, Los Angeles, the possible complications related to the application of Russia's “new autonomy” concept in foreign affairs: “.. the rapid revival of Russia's foreign policy autonomy is one of the issues which is complicating relations between us...”<sup>43</sup>

However, in-spite of the seemingly positive features of Russia's leadership created and promulgated concept of “sovereign democracy”, the political analyst of international relations and intervention policy of Russia - Allison (2013) has drawn attention to the following crucially important moment, related to the understanding and applicability of this concept. In his opinion the concept of “sovereign democracy”, besides pursuing Russia's national interests and underlying their importance, also indicates and signals a dangerous rejection of the transference of “external” or international norms to Russian governance and order.<sup>44</sup>

Allison (2013) has explained the afore-mentioned opinion, pointing out that within this approach the Russian leadership has already loathed accepting that “traditional international law (or the law of nations) is being displaced by some “new international law”, which asserts that the domestic practices of states must confirm with emergent global norms of conduct.”<sup>45</sup>

Thus it could be presumed that Surkov's created concept of “sovereign democracy” has fostered the formation and escalation of Russia's foreign policy into a more radical anti-Western policy, which has simultaneously provided the basis for Putin to manifest and justify his led intervention

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<sup>42</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, pp. 20-21.

in Ukraine as a necessary step for protecting Russian compatriots and defending Russian national interests and statehood. As the Russian President (18 December 2014) has notified in a press conference, his led intervention into the territory of Ukraine, was “not about Crimea but about us protecting our independence, our sovereignty and our rights to exist.”<sup>46</sup>

Taking into consideration the afore-mentioned, it could be admitted that the considerations laying behind Putin’s organized annexation of Crimea have been based on Russian leadership’s promulgated united concept of threat coming from the West, which, as Kissinger (2014) depicts, has been historically “instinctive Russian sense of insecurity” that, according to Legvold (2001), has usually skipped the question of what the outside world, and particularly, the West, could really do to and for Russia.<sup>47 48</sup>

The afore-mentioned Russia's, the so-called by Kissinger, “instinctive sense of insecurity” as underlying cause of its invented and cultivated necessity for self-defence and protection of its people living abroad has also been regularly applied during the last two decades towards other neighbouring countries. Russian leadership has been systematically attempting to victimize Russian people living in its former-lands of influence, manipulating them with various embarrassing grounds for justification of its military and propaganda’s intervention.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and consequent separation of the Soviet Republics from Russia and their transition into independent republics, Russia has continued to apply the same manipulative tactics, by accusing such countries as Estonia and Latvia in the oppression of Russian people’s rights, and spreading unverified and defamatory accusations at a domestic and international level. The same tactics have been applied within its military expansion plans and strategy in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014).

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<sup>46</sup> Putin (2014), „News Conference of Vladimir Putin on 18 December, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>, p.7.

<sup>47</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.285.

<sup>48</sup> Legvold (September/ October 2001), “Russia’s Unformed Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, p.64.

In addition to the afore-mentioned justification messages, Russia has complemented its foreign policy by presenting its led intervention in Ukraine through a sense of historical legacy over the territory of Crimea. Brzezinski (2014) has also depicted that a relevant addition and element to Putin's (2014) promulgated version of "Crimea's unification with Russia" has been Russia's "historical legacy" and nostalgia for a formerly owned and still strategically important land. Thus, Brzezinski (2014) has defined Russia's foreign policy doctrine towards Crimea's intervention as based on the Great Power status and "the historic legacy" of its common national identity with Ukraine that has been additionally fostered by its sophisticated propaganda.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, it could be presumed that, within the annexation of Crimea, Russia's foreign policy has manifested and consolidated three messages, which have also been applied as the justification motives of its led intervention in Ukraine. The responsibility to mobilize political and military power in order to protect Russian people abroad, the necessity for self-defence against the oppressive Western order or "rule of gun", as well as the readiness to fight for its national interests have been sustained and cultivated in a concrete political culture by historically developed methods of the authoritarian governance, Russia's leadership promulgated threat and insecurities presented by the West, as well Russia's manifested true sense of sovereignty and historical legacy towards Crimea .

In addition to the afore-mentioned, it is equally relevant to mention that, according to Kissinger (2014), the Russian experience of forming its political regime has historically been grounded in its weaknesses and stoic endurance of its rightness and sense of order.<sup>50</sup>

As an explicit example of the afore-mentioned acknowledgment serves the message of Putin's speech delivered at the first anniversary of Crimea's reunification with Russia. In order to hide

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<sup>49</sup> Brzezinski (2014), "Confronting Russian Chauvinism, The Ukraine Problem," *The American Interest*, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/06/27/confronting-russian-chauvinism/>.

<sup>50</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p. 57.

its “instinctive sense of insecurity” (Kissinger, 2014) and weaknesses, as well as persuade of the rightness and the legitimacy of his chosen aggressive foreign policy, the Russian President (18 March 2014) has justified his led intervention in Ukraine by presenting it as a common goal of Russian people, their power of unity and historical justice as the key principles of its foreign policy’s rightness:

*“In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.”*<sup>51</sup>

Thus, emphasizing Russia’s common history with Ukraine as well as its historical legacy towards Crimea as a relevant argument for justification of its led intervention, Putin (18 March 2014) in his speech has drawn attention once more to the fact that Russia’s implemented foreign policy is aimed at achieving the Great Power status and extending its sphere of influence to its former lands, proving, particularly, towards Ukraine that Russian and Ukrainian people “are not simply close neighbours but ... one people.”<sup>52</sup>

Stressing the success of a collective power, togetherness and a humanistic approach of the Russian people, who by the annexation of Crimea have saved millions in Ukraine, who needed the help and support of Russia, Putin (18 March 2015) has addressed the population of Crimea on the occasion of its one year reunification with Russia, urging people to show their gratitude for Russia’s faithful action, as well as “an objective and worthy appraisal of those who brought

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<sup>51</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

<sup>52</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

their country to the state in which it is today”.<sup>53</sup>

### **1.3. The failures of Russia’s foreign policy**

In the context of the afore-mentioned it has to be admitted that Russia has always been viewed and analysed from the reference point of the West and its created international order. Therefore, taking into consideration that the messages of Russia’s foreign policy towards the West in the context of the Ukraine conflict are rooted in Russian society’s peculiar political culture and certain political context, the author’s task is to disclose the impact of Russia’s foreign policy actions on the international order and Western society. As Sperling (2015) has indicated, looking back at the recent history of the Cold War, Russia’s intervention in Ukraine and its foreign policy’s messages and justification rhetoric have reminded of the past, also raising the question of whether something has changed in Russia's foreign policy towards the West or whether it has been the same old game of the Cold War? <sup>54</sup>

Already back in 2001, Legvold pointed out that Russians were struggling with the “who are we” question in relation to the rest of the World and, particularly, the West. For Russians there was a dilemma of where the country belongs - with the West, with China, or somewhere on its own.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 90s, Russia’s leadership has moved forward absorbing and adapting the Western democracies’ promulgated ideas and values, as well as the elements of their political systems. However, despite its initial commitment and even decisively taken steps towards its implementation, the success of Russia’s leadership in establishing functioning democracy has been contained by its own historically conditioned self-awareness, which according to Legvold (2001), reminds that despite Russia’s “weaknesses”, “Russia matters

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<sup>53</sup> Putin (2015), „Speech of the President of the Russian Federation at the Concert celebrating Crimea’s and Sevastopol’s reunification with Russia,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/4787>.

<sup>54</sup> Sperling (2015), „A case of Putin’s Envy, Behind the Obsession With Russia’s Leader,” Snapshot, *Foreign Affairs*, 5 November, p.167.

to others for three reasons: the atom, the veto, and the location.”<sup>55</sup>

These aspects have not changed and still matter as the relevant factors of “real politics” which frame Russia’s foreign policy and generate the attitudes and policies of the rest of the world towards Russia. At the same time, from those considerations the question arises: what comprises, the now so-called, “weaknesses” of Russia. And is it referable only to the decline of Russia’s economy or is rather related to the elements of its foreign policy towards the West?

Within the collapse of the Soviet Union, the same afore mentioned “real politics” aspects of Russia’s power in composition with its “weaknesses” have been the crucial modalities for shaping Russia’s political identity and its desire for a greater influence in international affairs. Meanwhile, the same combination of strengths and “weaknesses” of Russia has provoked its current isolated and controversial role in the international arena. As the Russian President (18 December 2014) in conversation with journalists has admitted, “we always run into challenges, objections and opposition.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus either Putin’s leadership, by the intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, had “made impulsive decisions that subordinated Russia's national interests to his own personal political motives” or, by contrary, had performed as “the first class strategist”, leading Russia to reach its top point in the manifestation of its peculiar and controversial identity, Russia has explicitly proclaimed and affirmed its oppositional attitude towards the West, once more paying attention to the following aspects of its implemented foreign policy and their left impact on international society.

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<sup>55</sup> Legvold (September/ October 2001), „Russia’s Unformed Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.63.

<sup>56</sup> Putin (2014), „News Conference of Vladimir Putin on 18 December, 2014,”

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250> , p.7.

### **1.3.1. Russia's lack of cooperation towards the West**

Until just recently Russia was considered as the Transatlantic Alliance's possible strategic partner and was one of the members of the Euro Atlantic Partnership Council's Partnership for Peace program. During the last two decades NATO has worked hard to transform Euro-Atlantic security by erasing dividing lines, inspiring reforms and building peace and security through consultations and cooperation with Russia.

Despite the fact that the West has tried to cooperate with Russia in several political formats, the cooperation efforts of Western countries have never been adequately admitted and met by Russia mostly due to the lack of the latter's real interest to seriously contribute in the engagements and set cooperation forms with the West. As Russia's foreign policy expert Mankoff (2014) has noted concerning Russia's foreign policy strategy, "Russia have more to gain from open confrontation with the United States and Europe - consolidating his political position at home and boosting Moscow's international stature - than from cooperation."<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, it could be presumed that Russia, instead of cooperation with the West, has always preferred to act in accordance with its own understanding of what the Great Power means. Taking into consideration that Russia's leadership has been demonstrating by its political behaviour that the strongest is the one who manages to succeed with its goals and impose its power and rules on others, Russia has been perceived and considered by some political commentators as the state that has never really recognized the value of dialog and compromise solutions in its communication forms and actions with the West. Consequently, contrary to Putin's statement in his speech on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 that ".. Russia strived to engage in

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<sup>57</sup> Mankoff (May/ June 2014), "Russia's Latest Land grab, How Putin won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-04-17/russias-latest-land-grab> .

dialogue with our colleagues in the West ... constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues,” Mankoff (2014) has pointed out that “there was never a really belief in Russia's giving up its identity as an autonomous actor in world affairs.”<sup>58 59</sup>

Despite the afore-mentioned lack of successful collaboration between Russia and Western countries, it has to be recognized that also the acknowledgment, mentioned by Mead (2015) in his article “The Return of Geopolitics”, that states in the future have to adopt the principles of liberal capitalism to keep up, has not always proved itself as true.<sup>60</sup>

The illustrative example, which proves the existence of different approach possibilities and cooperation forms within international relations, is Russia's partnership and collaboration model with China. Both countries - China and Russia are close, but not really allies. Speaking about Beijing and Moscow, Ying (2016) in his article reflects on the possible partnership model, within which both countries expect from each other a contribution level corresponding to the scope of their common interests. In the afore-mentioned context, Ying (2016) has pointed out:

*“Beijing hopes that China and Russia can maintain their relationship in a way that will provide a safe environment for the two big neighbours to achieve their development goals and to support each other through mutually beneficial cooperation, offering a model for how major countries can manage their differences and cooperate in ways that strengthen the international system.”<sup>61</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin, delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

<sup>59</sup> Mankoff (May/ June 2014), “Russia's Latest Land grab, How Putin won Crimea and Lost Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-04-17/russias-latest-land-grab>.

<sup>60</sup> Mead (May/ June 2014), „The Return of Geopolitics,. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,“ *Foreign Affairs*, p. 71.

<sup>61</sup> Ying (January/ February 2016), “How China Sees Russia, Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.97.

Taking into consideration the clash of different identity politics and cold growing relations between Russia and Western countries, the afore-mentioned not only attracts attention, but also implies the necessity of balancing Western criticism towards Russia with more constructive prospects. The question arises: is there a way in which Western countries can also re-evaluate their strategies, tactics and perspectives towards Russia in order to shift their relations with Russia from the current almost “zero-sum” issues toward minimum “win-win” issues. Meanwhile, due to the aggressive nature of Russia’s foreign policy, the question remains on how to come up with a new approach in the situation when the intervention has become not only an indispensable part of the competence scope of Russia’s foreign policy but almost its main expression form.

### **1.3.2. Russia’s arbitrariness towards the West**

The Ukraine conflict has also revealed that Russia under its leadership’s postulated concepts of “true sense of sovereignty,” “historical legacy” and state or “national interests” prefers to proclaim and remind of its Great Power’s political identity and global role, by imposing its power on other state rather than looking for cooperation possibilities and compromises. Moreover, within the afore-mentioned circumstance, Russia has also been expecting the invaded, deceived or oppressed state to accept its “iron hand” as the best possible solution in the given circumstances.

Putin, describing his leadership approach in the international arena has acknowledged that “a bear doesn’t ask permission from anybody”. The afore-mentioned, as Sperling (2015) depicts, proves that the Russian President over the past years has really shown that he is a political bear –

“from land grabbing and perpetuating conflict in Ukraine to the recent military intervention in Syria”.<sup>62</sup>

Due to Russia’s arbitrary authoritarianism at a domestic level and projection of it in international affairs, Heisbourg (2014) has pointed out that the West - has to count that within the intervention in Ukraine it has “entered in the long lasting, deeply antagonistic relationship with Russia” because “he (Putin) says what he does and he does what he says.”<sup>63</sup>

Despite the afore-mentioned view, represented by Heisbourg (2014), the most confusing and difficult part for the Western society has been to understand that in reality Putin does not say what he does or will do. The Russian president has already changed his tactics and sculptured his policies unpredictably - by manipulative instruments and propaganda means, saying and naming things completely different from what he has done and what he intends to do.

The afore-mentioned concern of international society could be illustrated by the following situation. Despite the long lasting (sixteen hours) talks through the night among the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko, French president Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which have been held due to Russia’s led annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine, and that had concluded with the so-called Minsk Agreements, within which Putin has confirmed his readiness to fulfil the agreed, Russian leader has constantly disregarded and replaced the affirmative covenants by his own arbitrary political and military moves. Furthermore, Putin’s presented excuses or justifications of Russia’s position have contained treachery and manipulation towards Western leaders, who initially have believed in the reliability of the Russian President and durability of his made agreements.

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<sup>62</sup> Sperling (2015), „A case of Putin’s Envy, Behind the Obsession With Russia’s Leader,” *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-11-05/case-putin-envy> .

<sup>63</sup> The Economist (2014), „First Principles.The future of NATO“, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21599797-russias-annexation-crimea-has-brought-nato-renewed-purpose-first-principles>; p. 55.

Moreover, in addition to the afore mentioned negligence towards the reached international agreement and violation of the promises on mutually agreed ceasefire and pulling back the Russian military units from Ukraine, as well as other requests, the Russian President has found the way and courage in these circumstances to blame the Ukrainian President for disregarding international efforts and not obeying the agreement on ceasefire in the war zones of Ukraine. The Ukrainian President's decision to interrupt the extension of the ten day cease-fire, after Russia has been continuing its aggressive military actions, Putin (1 July 2014) has presented as the unfortunate case of failing to agree to implement "the common statement approved by the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine on the need to maintain peace and search for mutually acceptable solutions."<sup>64</sup>

Thus, it could be admitted that, within Russia's intervention in Ukraine, the Western leaders had to learn a new lesson and realize that Russia's arbitrary approach to everything can be related and branded by its propaganda as defence of its national interests or statehood.

Due to the afore-mentioned disregarding attitude and manipulative approach, Putin has already provoked a loss of reliability towards Russia and cultivated serious concerns of its Western partners concerning Russia's lack of capacity to cooperate and be a reliable partner in the common interests of the international community.

Therefore, it could be assumed that the uncertainties provoked by the gradual alienation of Russian foreign policy, which have already been observed decades ago, have not gone or disappeared today. By contrary Russia's unpredictability in international affairs over time and especially within the its intervention in Ukraine has only provoked and stimulated its deeper

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<sup>64</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>, p.2.

isolation and unconventionality, misbalancing its relations with many Western partners, as well as lowering its reliability in the international arena.

Nowadays, after almost ten years Trenin's expressed opinion in 2006 on Russia's international role provides a very similar reflection of Russia today. As Trenin (2006) has acknowledged:

*“Until recently, Russia saw itself as Pluto in the Western solar system, very far from the center but still fundamentally a part of it. Now it has left that orbit entirely: Russia's leaders have given up on becoming part of the West and have started creating their own Moscow-centered system.”*<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, the afore-mentioned messages of Russia's foreign policy in connection with the recently discussed failures towards Russia's cooperation capacity with the West, such as the arbitrary approach and unpredictability in the international arena, which have provoked the serious concerns of the Western states, also reminds us that Russia's foreign policy has been based on very different political considerations and goals, which have originated from very different historical grounds and objectives than the ones familiar to the West.

Concluding the chapter on Russia's foreign policy's nature, its main messages and failures towards the West within the Ukraine conflict, the author's intention is not only to emphasize the differences and incompatibilities between Western and Russian political discourses and approaches, which obviously exist, but propose to take a closer look at the formative elements of the afore-mentioned Russian political identity as a valuable source for getting a deeper insight into Russian oppositional and rivalry political behavior towards the West. As Mead (2014) has stated in the context of the annexation of Crimea and concerning Russia's ability be “remarkably successful at frustrating Western projects”:

*“The realities of personal and political life in post-historical societies are very different from those in such countries as China, Iran, and Russia, where the sun of*

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<sup>65</sup> Trenin (July/ August 2006), “Russia Leaves the West, The End of the Affair,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.1.

*history still shines. It is just those different societies bring different personalities and values to the fore; it is also that their institutions work differently and their publics are shaped by different ideas.”*<sup>66</sup>

### **1.3.3. Leadership at a regional level**

In order to obtain a deeper insight in Russia's foreign policy in relation to its led intervention in Ukraine, it has to be taken into consideration that Russia has tried to actualize its relevant role and capacity in the international scene, especially, by playing a significant leading role at a regional level. According to Blank's point of view concerning tactics and instruments in "Putin's Grand Strategy":

“Given the importance to Moscow's dreams of being a pole in the multipolar world order that ceaselessly proclaims, the formation of such a continental bloc is essential to the survival of Putin system and the sharpest conflicts with the EU occur in those borderlands closes to Russia or most strategically important to it, particularly Ukraine.”<sup>67</sup>

Russia's interest to keep control over its neighbouring countries has been manifested by its foreign policy actions aimed at attempting to consolidate and lead a coalition of the "like-minded" Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS), such as Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Moldova and Ukraine, which have once been the former Soviet Republics. Putin (1 July 2014) in his annual address to Russian Ambassadors has emphasized the importance of integration within the CIS region level, indicating that

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<sup>66</sup> Mead (May/ June 2014), „The Return of Geopolitics,. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,“ *Foreign Affairs*, p.79.

<sup>67</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk (2012) „Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation and Rivalry,“ *Chatam House Briefing Paper*, pp.1-13, in Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,“ Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, p 17.

“strengthening close friendly ties and developing mutually advantageous economic cooperation with our neighbours is the key strategic priority of Russia's long-term foreign policy.” 68

As Russian leadership has noted it, during the first and second Putin presidencies, the policies and activities of the institutions and organizations established and led by Western states served as an important obstacle for consolidating and confirming Russia’s power. Due to this, Russia’s persistent claim has been to undertake leadership at a regional basis, within which Russia could extend its political influence and express its weight holding foreign policy negotiations with other powers and international actors.

Thus, it could be presumed that, experiencing failures and a relatively weak position in the distribution of a global power, Russia has enforced its Great Power aspirations by focusing on its dominance at a regional level towards neighbouring countries.

In the afore-mentioned context, Allison (2013) has critically remarked that, due to the fact that Russia’s leadership was not able to succeed with its envisaged regional consolidation plans, Russia’s attempts to be an indisputable regional leader could be compared to other “second-tier” powers seeking to enhance their global standing through a shadow they cast in a particular region.<sup>69</sup>

Besides the afore-mentioned failures of Russia's leadership, in practice, Russia’s foreign policy and its distributed order as well as authoritarian ruling in the region have left a significant binding and restrictive impact on its weaker CIS partner states, even compromising their regional partners’ sovereignty. Thus, it could be concluded that failing to demonstrate its political weight toward the Western states and their international organizations and alliances, Russia’s aspirations for a Great Power status have been resumed by imperiling the sovereignty of its self-chosen

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<sup>68</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131> , p.4.

<sup>69</sup>Alisson (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, pp. 138 -139.

regional “partner states”, which in the case of Ukraine once more provides evidence of Russia’s prevailing interventionist ambitions over peaceful co-existence and collaboration intentions toward its partners.

Russian leadership’s inclination to play a dominant role at a regional level, as well as revise its borders towards its neighbours has been well depicted by Kissinger (2014) in his recent book *World Order*. As Kissinger has noted, characterizing the outlook of the Russian Ambassador in Washington in 1903, Henry Adams, the American man of letters, admitted:

*“Political philosophy, like that of all Russian, seemed fixed on the single idea that Russia must roll – must, by her irresistible inertia, crush whatever stood in her way... When Russia rolled over a neighbourhood people, she absorbed their energies in her own movement of custom and race which neither Czar nor peasant could convert, or wished to convert, into any Western equivalent.”*<sup>70</sup>

Within the aspects discussed in this chapter, it becomes evident that the historically cultivated memory of the outside threat, represented by the West, and intervention as a form of self-defence against the Western hegemony have been historically absorbed into a national outlook of Russia and have even nowadays remained a relevant driving force of its foreign policy.

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<sup>70</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.53.

## 2. Russia's politics of intervention

Describing the origins of Russia's foreign policy in the case of the Ukraine crisis, Blank has stated that the ideas which have been accompanying and predating the current foreign policy of Russia "show that its roots are not in economics but in geopolitics and that Putin's program is fundamentally geopolitical in its thrust."<sup>71</sup>

### Map.1. The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula



On the **27-28 February 2014**, pro-Russian gunmen seized key buildings in the Crimean capital, Simferopol. The majority of Crimea's 2.3 million population identify themselves as ethnic Russians and speak Russian - a legacy of Russia's 200-year involvement in the region. Sevastopol in Crimea is also the historic base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Within days, the Crimean parliament has voted to join Russia and called a referendum. Russia later has recognized that its military helped the Crimea insurgents.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,“ Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, p 20.

<sup>72</sup> Map: „Ukraine Crises in Maps“ (2015), BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27308526> .

Allison (2013), the expert and author of various publication on international relations of Russia, commenting on Russia's political discourses and practical actions in relation to interventions, in his book "Russia, the West & Military Intervention," has admitted that intervention has become a part of the competence scope of states' foreign policy, since it is proved by the fact that "the process of justification over intervention, even if cast in legal terminology, or the language of emerging norms, is fundamentally political, that norms and customary law develop in a political context." <sup>73</sup>

The afore-mentioned point of view attracts attention as a crucially relevant aspect of states' foreign policies and contemporary international relations, which in the case of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine, also proves to be a part of Russia's foreign policy and subsequent continuation of its postulated necessity to interrupt the threatening influence of the West in Ukraine.

As it was discussed above, due to the lack of a successful story at a domestic level, as well as, most probably, the noticeable consequences of its recent economic and political failures in relations with Western countries, Russia has attempted to cover its, the so-called, "weaknesses" and "insecurities," reminding of its geopolitical strength to its neighbors, as well as demonstrating its Great Power status to other international players, by extending its borders and annexing its "historical land" of the Crimean Peninsula.

Thus, the afore-mentioned assumptions in relation to the underlying cause and context of Russia's foreign policy and its expression forms can be further examined and verified within the case study of Putin's led intervention in Ukraine. The case study of the annexation of Crimea will be commenced by looking closer at Russia's historically and geographically formed and conditioned perception and attitude towards interventions.

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<sup>73</sup> Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p. 8.

## 2.1. Russia's historical and geopolitical inclination towards interventions

Russia's foreign policy historically has been engaged in the extension of its borders by interventions in its neighboring states. Therefore, the question arises: which were the promulgated reasons and circumstances, by which Russia's led interventions were justified and legitimized?

As Kissinger (2014) has acknowledged, Russia has endowed itself by the entitlement of its special privileges and mission, which allows its leadership to pursue the "authoritarian trajectory" of power and conquest the territories of other states. As Kissinger (2014) has noted, history provides evidence that Russia has replaced its geopolitical fears by self-postulated moral reasoning as a justification of its motives and illegal actions for various military invasions:

*"Russia had imbued its conquests with the moral justification that it was spreading order and enlightenment into heathen lands... Russia saw itself as endowed with a special mission to bridge them but exposed on all sides to threatening forces that failed to comprehend its calling..."*<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, as a result of the afore-mentioned expansionism Kissinger (2014) has depicted the following arbitrary tendency of Russia's international role towards its surrounding states:

*"The exaltation over Russia's world spanning synthesis of civilizations evoked of a corresponding despair over Russia's status as (in the words of an influential 19<sup>th</sup> century critique) an "orphan cut off from the human family.... For people to notice us, we have had to stretch from the Bering Straits to the Oder..."*<sup>75</sup>

The afore-mentioned acknowledgment of Kissinger (2014) leads us to admit that Russia's expansionism desire and tactics within its foreign policy, which have been promulgated as Russia's confidence of its special role at a regional and global scale, have been embedded in its

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<sup>74</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.57.

<sup>75</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.57.

geopolitical necessity for self-defence against “enemies” surrounding Russia on all sides that, in its turn, has been related to its long lasting historical memory that dates back to the time of the Mongol-Tatar invasion in Russia (1237-1480). In this context Kissinger (2014) precisely formulates the expansionism and intervention tendencies of Russia’s leadership, which are accompanied by its felt “insecurities” and fears relating to Russia’s historical experience during the Mongol-Tatar time:

*“In Russia’s experience of history restraints of power spelled catastrophe: Russia’s failure to dominate its surroundings, in this view, has exposed it to the Mongol invasions and plunged it into its nightmarish “Time of Troubles.”*<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, Russia's self-justification and its self-created source of Great Power's aspirations allow us to admit that its foreign policy, and particularly, its constant inclination to interventions, has been based on its geopolitical fears and desire to hide its weaknesses behind the empowered military capacity, which happened to be expressed in the extension of its borders, and conquest of new neighbouring states. The mid 17<sup>th</sup> century Czar Alexei’s minister *Nashchokin* offered a straightforward description of the business of Russia’s Department of Foreign Affairs or the goal of Russian foreign policy, which overall envisaged: “expanding the state in every direction.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite the fact that Western leaders and society have been having difficulties to understand Putin’s moves within the intervention in Ukraine, the political expert and journalist Marshall (2015) has depicted a similar perspective towards Russia’s geopolitical considerations.

According to Marshall (2015), the Russian President’s intervention motives have not been so mysterious after all. Besides that they have been readable on the map. Russia, being the world’s largest country my landmass, faces problems that come by land as well as by sea. Since the past 500 years Russia has been invaded several times from the West, it has been equally important for

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<sup>76</sup>Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.52-53.

<sup>77</sup> Kissinger (2014), *World Order, Reflections on the Charter of Nations and the Course of History*, p.52.

Russia to ensure its access to the sea-lanes and, particularly, its historical warm-water port at Sevastopol in the Crimean Peninsula. As Marshall (2015) has indicated, the strategic location of Crimea comprises its capacity to be “a buffer zone” military and operate as “a global power” economically; consequently, “Russia’s chief pre-occupations”, which came together in the Ukraine conflict, were based on “its vulnerability on land” and “its lack of access to warm-water ports.”<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the afore-mentioned factors, Marshall (2015) has indicated the following. Since within the protests, taking place in Ukraine capital Kiev, Russia’s leadership could not be confident anymore that its “buffer zone” will remain intact and the neutrality of Ukraine would not be seriously undermined by the influence of the West, according to Marshall (2015), Putin as some other former Russian leaders in the past, did not have much choice in deciding what to do:

*“He could have respected the territorial integrity of Ukraine, or he could have done what Russian leaders have done for centuries with the bad geographic cards they were dealt. He chose his own kind of attack as defence, annexing Crimea to ensure Russia’s access to its only proper warm-water port, and moving to prevent NATO from creeping even closer to Russia’s border.”<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>78</sup> Marshall (2015), „Russia and the Curse of Geography,“ *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>, pp.2-7.

<sup>79</sup> Marshall (2015), „Russia and the Curse of Geography,“ *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>, p.7.

**Map.2. Russia's Changing Borders** (Reuters, 2015) <sup>80</sup>



The afore-mentioned opinion of Marshall (2014) has been proved by the Russian President's message addressed to his Foreign Service representatives in July of 2014. Putin has stated in his speech:

*"We clearly had no right to abandon the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol to the mercy of nationalist and radical militants we could not allow our access to the Black Sea to be significantly limited; we could not allow NATO forces to*

<sup>80</sup> Maps: *Russia's Changing Borders* (2015), Reuters, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>.

*eventually come to the land of Crimea and Sevastopol, the land of Russian military glory, and cardinally change the balance of forces in the Black Sea.”*<sup>81</sup>

Thus it could be concluded that military interventions in the form of its promulgated self-defence missions against potential enemies (recently taking place in Georgia and Ukraine) have been historically and geographically proven to serve Russia for securing itself and sustaining its Great Power status and foreign policy's goals.

## **2.2. Russia's contradicting policies regarding interventions**

Paradoxically that despite the afore-mentioned geopolitical and historical considerations, over more than two decades Russia has been positioning and distinguishing itself in the international arena as “a frequent and vocal, if not consistent, critic of Western-led interventions.” As Allison (2013) has recognized:

*“Russia’s engagement and influence in international debates over military intervention and the use of force has been understudied” and “Moscow’s role has puzzling inconsistencies but also intriguing continuities” that can reveal a complex interaction between domestic state, regional and global political and normative processes.”*<sup>82</sup>

Even more controversial is that, within the annexation of Crimea, Russian leadership’s presented justification over its led intervention was primarily based on humanitarian grounds: to protect Russian people in Crimea and defend states interests against the Western hegemony. Within Russia's leadership postulated humanitarian considerations and national interests as the basis for its intervention justification in Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated an explicit solidarist approach

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<sup>81</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>, p.3.

<sup>82</sup>Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, pp. 1-2.

in international relations (from the perspective of the English school of international relations) that coincides in almost one line with the way in which Western states and alliances have in the past justified their interventions in the third countries (the intervention after the Gulf War to protect the Kurds in northern Iraq, NATO's intervention in Kosova).

As Allison (2013) has indicated, the alternative trajectories of solidarism and pluralism are reflected in the core controversies of intervention policies, particularly, in regard to the issue of what is meant by the responsibility to protect. Solidarists, who have been justifying the intervention by protecting civilian populations in international conflicts and wars, have been criticized by the pluralists due to the lack of normative content as a necessary ground for intervention in the name of solidarity. Therefore, it could be assumed that, despite the fact that, since the late Soviet period, the USSR and Russia have vacillated along “a pluralist-solidarist continuum”, according to the experts of international relations there are sufficient grounds to consider Russia as belonging to and affirming itself as a representative of the “pluralist camp”, which has advocated the view that states and not individuals occupy the center ground of international society.<sup>83</sup>

Contrary wise to its postulated motive of protecting Russian people in the case of Crimea, most of the time in the past, Russia by the same pluralists' arguments has explicitly demonstrated its criticism toward the humanitarian character interventions implemented by the Western states into the territories of the third countries. Since the late 2000s Russia even in its Foreign Policy's concepts has scorned attempts of the Western states to justify humanitarian interventions and violations of international law. Moreover, as Allison (2013) has marked, Russia has been strongly internationally advocating and emphasizing the importance of state sovereignty, non-intervention and territoriality.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>84</sup> Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p p. 173-174.

The afore-mentioned position has also been an indispensable part of Russia's official Foreign Policy concept of the year 2008, in which the Russian President (12 July 2008) has underlined that the United Nations Charter Article 51 remains the only adequate legal basis for the use of force in self-defence, including in response to international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>85</sup>

In spite of the afore-mentioned conviction and numerous declarations on Russia's oppositional stands concerning humanitarian interventions, taking place in the international scene, the case study of the annexation of Crimea proves that the intervention in Ukraine has been justified by Russian leadership exactly by the humanitarian considerations and obligation of protecting "Russian compatriots" in Ukraine, which usually have been associated with the human - orientated "universal values" built into the foreign policy agendas of Western states.

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of Russia's led intervention in Ukraine and the context of Russia's foreign policy formation reveals that the real grounds for the annexation of Crimea have been very different from the ones considered by the Western states and their alliances in the cases of their implemented humanitarian interventions.

Since, as Allison has depicted, Russia has perceived Western leadership and its governance as "a hegemony under unipolarity", starting from the year 2003 Russia has been strengthening its defensive position against the West and reinforcing it at a global level against challenges to the legitimacy.<sup>86</sup>

Within this role Russia has been interested to take an active part and affirm its special mission among major international actors, governing at a global level and deciding who should define international norms and rules on a multipolar basis. Taking into consideration the afore-

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<sup>85</sup> President of Russia (2008), „The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation ”, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

<sup>86</sup>Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p. 175.

mentioned, it is equally relevant to mention that the concept of multipolarity has been examined by Mankoff (2012), as well as by Blank (2014), as Russian leadership's praised and postulated key element to international stability.<sup>87 88</sup>

At the same time, the case study of Ukraine conflict presents evidence that the crucial difference between Russia and the Western states lays in the fact that "this kind of concert" with other international actors, which according to Russian leadership' opinion has to be more multipolar, would be crucially differently multipolar from Russia's and Europe's point of view. As Allison (2013) admits, in the case of Russia, it would be "interest' driven and not require bonding around any set of core values," as it has been for the Western states.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, it could be concluded that Russia within its solidarity affirming claim towards the necessity for the reunification with Crimea, which contends the protection of Russian people in Crimea as members of international society and subjects of international law, has invented in its foreign policy rhetoric "a new type of solidarism". Moreover, within this change of position concerning interventions, Russia obtained a new foreign policy's dimension and placed itself in the new self-made category of the "hybrid" state, which is allowed to refer to the values and principles shared by the Western society in order to apply them arbitrarily according to its own interests and depending on its own necessity to justify its aggressive foreign policy and military actions.

In the afore-mentioned context, Illarionov's comment (2014) seems to be accurate and revealing that this is not a Ukrainian issue but "a war of Russia with Ukraine or, more precisely, Putin's

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<sup>87</sup>Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power politics*, p.19.

<sup>88</sup> Blank (2014), „The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,“ Starr, Cornell (eds.), *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, p 20.

<sup>89</sup> Zagorski (2009), „Multilateralism in Rural Foreign Policy Approaches in Elana Wilson Rowe and Torjesen,“ in Stina (eds.), *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 47-48., quoted in Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p. 175.

war against Ukraine.” In the Russian analyst’s opinion “this war is “an unconventional war” or intervention, and those who want to win it must recognize that reality.”<sup>90</sup>

The examined elements of Russia’s practiced policy in the case of Crimea’s annexation, as well as the process of justification over it, prove that intervention has become an indispensable element of Russia’s foreign policy and present once more (after a military clashes and intervention in Georgia in 2008 and Syria 2015) explicit evidence of Russia’s implemented foreign policy’s inclination to its continuous intervention plans instead of peaceful co-existence or cooperation possibilities with its neighboring countries and Western states.

Moreover, it could be concluded that Russian decision making, strengthening its defensive position against Western leadership, and, according to Allison (2013), “reinforcing defence at the global level against challenges of its legitimacy” has been involved in formulating not only legal and normative positions but also developing its broader policy around interventions as its foreign policy's conditioned principle.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, the paradox towards the incompatibility of Russia’s foreign policy actions with its postulated principles lies in the fact that they have been constructed and adjusted by Russian leadership in order to justify and legitimize its aggressive approach and intervention in Ukraine as a sovereign and humanitarian act. Consequently, under the same concept of “sovereign democracy” Russia’s military actions in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have been wrapped and legitimized as a manifestation of its pure sovereignty, meanwhile, abolishing Russia’s so far postulated criticism in the international arena towards any claim that could give

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<sup>90</sup> Globe (2014), „Window on Eurasia: Illarionov’s Ten Theses on Putin’s Aggression in Ukraine,“ <http://www.interpretermag.com/illarionovs-ten-theses-on-putins-aggression-in-ukraine/>

<sup>91</sup>Alisson (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p.175.

external actors and international law a right to shape or judge the domestic order of another state (Allison, 2013).<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, Russia's foreign policy's compromised controversies and inconsistencies lead us to admit the crucial role of its self-made and promulgated confidence in relation to its special mission and its sense of entitlement to Crimea. The afore-mentioned, in its turn, leads us to further examine the formative aspects, which have made foreign policy messages and goals viable as a part of its postulated political identity.

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<sup>92</sup>Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p.21.

### 3. Russian politics of identity

The main messages of Russia's foreign policy towards Crimea, constituted by the salience of three elements - the opposition and self-defence against the West and its presented threat against Russia's sovereignty and statehood, as well as Russian leadership commitment to protect its "compatriots" beyond its borders, simultaneously, have been designed to shape Russia's foreign policy's consolidation with its domestic politics and the cultivated conviction of its providential mission in world affairs. Allison (2013) has depicted the complexity of Russia's foreign policy and identity politics correlation, admitting that:

*"There exists a decisive relationship between Russian strategic priorities and normative preferences with respect to international order (regional and global) and Russian perception of order and the concentration of power at the domestic level."*<sup>93</sup>

As Allison (2013) has admitted, an important aspect for preserving Russian foreign policy's connection with its domestic interests has been Russian leadership's underlined and manifested importance of order and power, which implies "the priority of preserving its own domestic structure of power" before accepting any outside influence. The afore-mentioned interconnection between Russia's domestic order and interests and projection of its foreign policy's goals has influenced "Russia's conception of international society" as well as its identity politics towards other international players. Since Russia has insisted on the primacy of order over justice and human rights domestically, its privileging over justice on an international level has been in many respects "an external projection of this internal preoccupation."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p .207.

<sup>94</sup> MacFarlane, „Russian Perspectives on Order and Justice”, Gaddis, and Hurrell (eds.) *Order and Justice in International Relations*, pp.184-5, 206., quoted in Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*, p. 20.

Russia's domestic order has been based on its strong control and enforcement of restraints on the political rights and civil liberties of Russian people. The afore-mentioned has been proved by several research statistics, among which *Freedom House* presented scores of the year 2015 discloses clear evidence of the lack of justice and constitutional rights of Russian people in relation to the implementation of their basic social and political rights and activities.

**Table 2. Statistics on Russia's 2015 Scores**



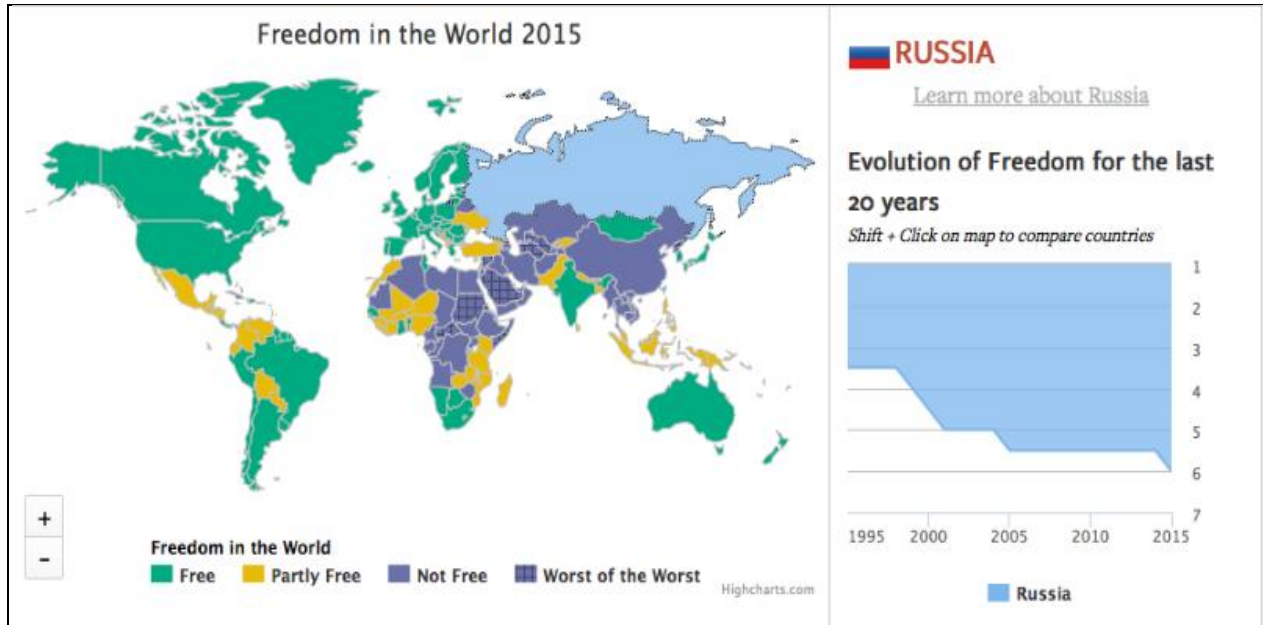
Research statistics provided by *Freedom House*: Russia's score is based on two numerical ratings - from 1 to 7 - for political rights and civil liberties, with **1** representing the **most free** and **7** the **least free**.

Russia's civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6 due to expanded media controls, a dramatically increased level of propaganda on state-controlled television, and new restrictions on the ability of some citizens to travel abroad.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Statistics on Russia's Scores: Freedom in the World (2015), Russia, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/russia>.

## Chart. 2. Evaluation of Freedom in the last 20 years of Russia



Evaluation provided by *Freedom House*<sup>96</sup>

According to Kotkin, the restraints placed on the freedom of expression, civil liberties and political rights as well as other expression forms of Russia's leadership authoritarianism have been justified and covered by the belief that history has almost recruited Russia to carry out a special operation for the resurrection of its great power, "because there has to be balance in the world, and without a strong Russia the geopolitical turbulence will begin."<sup>97</sup>

Referring to the afore-mentioned tendencies, Mankoff (2012) has emphasized that Russian foreign policy's role to a large extent is the continuation of its domestic politics and identity politics and that there are no particular foreign policy aspects within it.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Evaluation of Freedom for the last 20 years in Russia (2015), Freedom House, Evaluation of Freedom for the last 20 years in Russia, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#.VqkWBrRfRdg>.

<sup>97</sup> Kotkin (March/ April 2015), "The Resistable Rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia's Nightmare Dressed like a Daydream," *Foreign Affairs*, p. 146.

<sup>98</sup> Mankoff (2012), *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, p.24.

Similarly, Von Eggert (2015) has agreed with this point of view, saying that Russia's foreign policy and its relations with the outside world have been based on strong domestic policy's interests of its leadership. Von Eggert (2015) has depicted the following:

*“If you look at it from a geo-strategic point of view, a lot of what Putin did was completely senseless. But if you look at it keeping in mind the domestic prestige of the regime, the legitimacy of the Kremlin, it makes complete sense. You start realizing that most of Russia's foreign policy – and here Ukraine is really the best example – is, to a large extent, domestic.”<sup>99</sup>*

Taking into account “the power vertical” of Russian leadership, an equally relevant question is what are the domestic interests of President Putin, which dictate and shape Russia's foreign policy?

As Kotkin (2015) has depicted, the Russian President's imperative has been to realize its quest for a great-power status and his vision of Russia as “a providential power with a special mission and distinct identity.”<sup>100</sup>

Taking into consideration the afore-mentioned assumption concerning Russia's ambition to have a distinct political identity, difficulties arise from Russian leadership's postulated objective and its compatibility with the fact that Putin through his speeches has made, as it was noted by Kotkin (2015), an explicit “demonization of the West a foundation of Russia's core identity and its government's claim to legitimacy.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Prelec (2015), “LSEE's Tena Prelec speaks to Konstantin Von Eggert and Nikolay Petrov, Russian Foreign Policy: “What are we missing?”,” *The London School of Economics and Political Science, Research on South Eastern Europe*, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2015/03/21/russian-foreign-policy-what-are-we-missing/>, p.1.

<sup>100</sup> Kotkin (March/ April 2015), “The Resistable Rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia's Nightmare Dressed like a Daydream,” *Foreign Affairs*, p. 149.

<sup>101</sup> Kotkin (March/ April 2015), “The Resistable Rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia's Nightmare Dressed like a Daydream,” *Foreign Affairs*, p. 149.

Russia's external projection of its internal preoccupation has been partially explained by the latter's inevitable inclination to the camp of different political approaches and collaboration forms, which alienates and threatens Russia with the possible diminution of its role in the international arena. Even despite the fact that the values formally postulated by Russian leadership, correspond to the principles promoted by the Western states, Russian identity politics has been constructed to steadily oppose the policies of Western states and their created international order, which Putin (18 March 2014) depicts as an aggressive politics of the “rule of gun”.<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, the question remains of which are the aspects that form and foster a distinct political identity of Russia and play a decisive role in Russian identity politics' interaction with its foreign policy?

Presuming that a distinct political identity could have been endowed and fostered by the consolidation of Russia's foreign policy with its domestic politics, this chapter is devoted to the examination of the core formative elements of Russian political identity that ensure a successful implementation of its promulgated policies at a domestic and international level.

Therefore, taking into consideration the afore-mentioned, the author will examine three elements or formative aspects of Russian political identity - the desire and struggle for recognition, the “Social Contract” and propaganda.

### **3.1. The desire and struggle for recognition**

Since a desire for recognition is an extraordinary powerful part of the human psyche, Russia's leadership has introduced a strategy to consolidate society and foster its political identity by

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<sup>102</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

building it on “the motor of history”, the so-called Hegelian “struggle for recognition,” described by Fukuyama in his work “The End of History and the Last Man”(1992).<sup>103</sup>

Putin, pursuing with the “struggle for recognition” in a collective form, has empowered its manifestation by applying the idea of unity and sophisticated propaganda means. The following fragment from Putin’s speech on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2014 confirms that the desire for recognition has been used as the main motive for uniting Russian people and persuading them of the rightness and legitimacy of Russia’s foreign policy towards Crimea. Putin (18 December 2014) has also underlined the relevance of Russia’s foreign policy in implementation of the state’s and its society’s common interests as well as the price that has to be paid for the recognition of this unity: “This is not the price we have to pay for Crimea... This is actually the price we have to pay for our natural aspirations to preserve ourselves as a nation, as a society, as a state.”<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, Putin (18 March 2014) has also described Russia’s special entitlement to reunification with Crimea, underlining Russia’s and Crimea’s historical unity and its common memories:

*“Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun*

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<sup>103</sup> Fukuyama (1992), „By Way of an Introduction“, *The End of History and the Last Man*, <http://www.social-sciences-and-humanities.com/PDF/The-End-of-History-and-the-Last-Man-.pdf>, pp.xi-xxiii.

<sup>104</sup> Putin (2014), „News Conference of Vladimir Putin on 18 December 2014,“ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>.

*Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.”<sup>105</sup>*

Taking into consideration, the support of Russian people to Putin diffused ideas of historical justice in the case of Crimea’s unification with Russia, the question stands of what makes a great part of Russian society identify itself with the promulgated aspects or positive side of the annexation of Crimea rather than question or doubt its legitimacy?

As a matter of fact Russia’s leadership has not even considered it necessary to present sufficient evidence concerning the violation of compatriots’ rights in Ukraine as a relevant argument to start with, in the case of intervention. On the contrary, the enchantment to defend Russian people in Ukraine has rather been based on the collective sense or true understanding of the Great Power’s objectives towards the reunification with Crimea.

As it was discussed before, Putin (18 March 2014) has also stressed Russia’s as state’s and society’s humanitarian concerns towards Russian compatriots in Ukraine. The President in his speech to the State Duma deputies and Federation Council members has emphasized this aspect, saying that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he as many others had different expectations towards future developments, hoping “that Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, especially its southeast and Crimea, would live in a friendly, democratic and civilised state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law,” and sharing his observations that: “However, this is not how the situation developed. Time and time again

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<sup>105</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/2060>.

attempts were made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject to forced assimilation.”<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, the question arises of what is it that makes Russian people not react to the disruptive character of Kremlin’s politics, which implies their isolation from the Western world?

Partially the afore-mentioned phenomenon can be explainable by Russia’s leadership clearly promoted sense of nostalgia for “Russia’s lost land” and in reality close connections with Crimea. Putin (18 March 2014) has revealed on several occasion that “Crimea is historically Russian land and Sevastopol is a Russian city.” Therefore, according to the Russian President, “to understand the reason behind such choice it is enough to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other.”<sup>107</sup>

Portraying the common history and culture of both countries, Putin (18 March 2014) in his speech has once more underlined the inseparable proximity of Russian and Ukraine people’s identities:

*“In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generations to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.”*<sup>108</sup>

The afore mentioned fragments of the Russian President’s speeches allows us to admit that the need to intervene in the territory of Ukraine and Crimea has been presented even more as an inevitable part of the Great Power’s nature in the name of a common history and desire for

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<sup>106</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

<sup>107</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> .

<sup>108</sup> Putin (2014), “Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin delivered on 18 March, 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

recognition of its identity than a humanitarian consideration to protect those, who feel insecure or oppressed due to the violation of their rights and other circumstances.

Consequently, it could be concluded that the duty to protect Russian compatriots in Crimea as “one people” (Putin’s used terminology) of Russia as well as fight and defend Russia’s “true sense of sovereignty” have been presented as fundamental elements of Russian politics of identity and foreign policy, which in all its expressions have mainly been attributed to the sense of a common historical legacy and desire and struggle for recognition. Furthermore, by disclosing this phenomenon, there have been sufficient grounds to acknowledge that a source of desire for self-recognition has been deeply integrated in Russian political culture by the means and strategies of “Social Contract”. The latter, in its turn, envisages that Russian leadership’s political decisions are postulated as the expression forms of its peoples’ common will.

### **3.2. The “Social Contract”**

The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, introducing the concept of “Social Contract” into society, most probably, inclined on the idea that it was the only way, in which people can preserve themselves, uniting their separate powers under the supreme direction of general will. In the context of Russia's foreign policy within the Ukraine conflict, the afore-mentioned idea of the “Social Contract” has been adapted by Russia’s leadership as a framing mechanism for usurping and maintaining its power and control over people.

As Makarkin (2011) has admitted, the “Social Contract” in Russia was re-established under the leadership of Putin when after the shock and economic transition in the 1990s, the Russian people saw that the state is capable of restoring the “order” of things. In this situation, when society trusted the authorities to fulfil their part of the bargain, they were also disposed to let central authorities decide on political leadership without their involvement. Consequently,

according to Auzan (2009), Russian citizens agreed with their authorities to a “deal”, in which they exchange “stability” and “order” for political freedoms.<sup>109 110</sup>

The afore-mentioned “deal” and exchange of “political and social freedom” for “order” could be explainable only by fact that Russian society has been persuaded to privilege the order as the most supreme value and precondition for the state’s stability.

As long as Putin's regime could secure a sense of economic stability and wealth, Russian people were persuadable to give up their political rights (a great part of them), which due to the decades of the Soviet oppressive regime for Russian society was a familiar reality rather than a huge sacrifice and constraint.

According to Auzan (2009), Lotman has also indicated that “the Russian Social Contract” has been rooted in a certain Soviet political culture. As Auzan (2009) has indicated, due to this Lotman has viewed the “Social Contract” as an increasingly important and indispensable framing element of Russian society’s identity, within which Russia's leadership managed to maintain its focus on a personal commitment to the state over the contract itself as a two parts “deal.”<sup>111</sup>

With the fall of economic growth the leadership of Russia had to reinvent some success story in order to keep its Great Power status alive. Therefore, the Kremlin’s led annexation of Crimea has become an expression form of Russian leadership’s necessity to ascertain its power and ambitions, by bringing home to its people success stories that could balance its failures and cover its ”weaknesses.”

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<sup>109</sup> Makarkin (2011), Oppenheimer, „The Russian social contract and regime legitimacy,” *Internation Affairs*, 87 (6), 6 November, pp.1459-1474.

<sup>110</sup> Auzan (2009), „Dynamics of Social Contract,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_13026](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_13026).

<sup>111</sup>Auzan (2008) , „Dynamics of Social Contract,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_13026](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_13026).

Putin's speeches devoted to Crimea's reunification with Russia imply that Russian leadership, similarly to Rousseau (1968), considers that there is a "general will", which "alone can direct the forces of the state in accordance with that end, which the state has been established to achieve – the common good ...". Putin's chosen rhetoric and approach towards the expected commitment of its citizens also coincide with Rousseau's vision on the necessary imperative or authoritarian power for the constitution of the common good. As Rousseau has noted, "... it is precisely in this common interest that society must be governed."<sup>112</sup>

The examined Putin's speeches allow also us to presume that "a desire of recognition" has been transitioned to the people as a part of "the Russian Social Contract" that envisages commitments and total compliance with the state's objectives and policies.

As Rousseau (1968) has admitted:

*"In order that the social pact shall not be an empty formula, it is tacitly implied in that commitment – which alone can give force to all others – that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body, which means nothing other than he shall be forced to be free."*<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, by disclosing the formative elements of Russian political identity in this particular context, it can be presumed that the expression forms or messages of Russia's foreign policy like the self defence as an explicit opposition to the Western order as well as the desire to protect its compatriots, by the combination of the "Social Contract" and desire for recognition have become imperatives of Putin's imposed state order and its set objective - the expansion of the Great Power's borders and influence.

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<sup>112</sup> Rousseau (1968), *Book I, The Social Contract*, in Espada (ed.), *Tradition of Liberty*, Limited government and civil society pluralism, Liberty as dispersion of power, Rousseau vs. Tocqueville, Stuart Mill and Berlin, 2013/2014, pp. 59-69

<sup>113</sup> Rousseau (1968), *Book I, The Social Contract*, in Espada (ed.), *Tradition of Liberty*, Limited government and civil society pluralism, Liberty as dispersion of power, Rousseau vs. Tocqueville, Stuart Mill and Berlin, 2013/2014, p. 64.

The afore-mentioned assumption has been proved by Putin (18 March 2014) in his authoritative address to Russian people after the intervention in Ukraine and attempts of Western states to resolve the military conflict:

*“Russia’s foreign policy position on this matter drew its firmness from the will of millions of our people, our national unity and the support of our country’s main political and public forces. I want to thank everyone for this patriotic spirit, everyone without exception. Now, we need to continue and maintain this kind of consolidation so as to resolve the tasks our country faces on its road ahead.”*<sup>114</sup>

### **3.3. Propaganda**

An inevitable and significant part of Putin’s arsenal in building Russian identity politics is propaganda. Putin’s speeches explicitly demonstrate propaganda’s integration into Russian leadership strategies and its identity politics. Propaganda in the hands of Russian leadership not only converts such principles as sovereignty, unity, liberty and solidarity into empty slogans, but also presents them in the context of a deformed and unrecognisable reality.

The Ukraine conflict has also revealed that Russia’s leadership used propaganda has been an effective accompanying element of its foreign policy due to the fact that the West has been less familiar with propaganda phenomenon and, therefore, not ready to deal with it.

The afore-mentioned and discussed Surkov’s concept of “sovereign democracy” (that has been created by Russian political mastermind Surkov), can be recognized as one of the most remarkable propaganda masterpieces. As *the Economist* reveals, this concept, which through its vagueness also empowers its flexibility, has been developed and broadly applied by the Great

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<sup>114</sup> Putin (2014), „Address by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

power's leadership as a reference point for the justification of Russia's arbitrary foreign policy actions.<sup>115</sup>

By propaganda the concept of “sovereign democracy” could be described as a basic principle of Russia's independent foreign policy and identity politics, and at the same time can be attributed to the justification of Russia's intervention in Ukraine. In the context of the Crimea crisis, Putin (4 December 2014) in his speech to the Federal Assembly has disclosed emptiness of Russia's leadership used phrases and postulates:

*“I would like to emphasize this: either we remain a sovereign nation, or we dissolve without a trace and lose our identity. Of course, other countries need to understand it, too... It is imperative to respect the legitimate interests of all participants in international dialogue.”*<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, propaganda could be easily related to the afore-mentioned Russian society's observation that everything in regard to Russia's political life is constituted as “PR” (public relations). This notion can be referred to the promulgated empty slogans of the Russian president (1 July 2014), such as the Russian leader's officially recognized “supremacy of international law” as well as his “notion that solutions to global and regional conflicts should be sought not through confrontation, but through cooperation and compromise” as well as others, which have been related to the completely opposite Russia's foreign policy actions.<sup>117</sup>

Russian leadership uses propaganda almost as “a magic wand” in order to pursue people of the rightness and legitimacy of its implemented politics. Despite the fact that the annexation of

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<sup>115</sup> The Economist (2013), “An Ideologue's exit, What the departure of Vladislav Surkov means for the government,” <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21577421-what-departure-vladislav-surkov-means-government-ideologues-exit>.

<sup>116</sup> Putin (2014), „Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly delivered by Vladimir Putin on 4 December 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173..>

<sup>117</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>.

Crimea has been internationally recognized as an aggressive violation of international law and intervention in Ukraine's sovereignty, Putin by propaganda means has succeeded in reinforcing to a great part of Russian society the reality of a completely different perspective towards Ukraine. Already from the beginning of this conflict, the reunification with Crimea and the protection of Russian people has been postulated as a moral and beneficial action on behalf of all the Russian people. Despite a brutal violation of human rights and applied constraints on the political and social freedoms in Russia, Putin (18 March 2014) has affirmably stated that "...any decision here can be based only on the peoples will, because the people is the ultimate source of all authority".

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Consequently, through propaganda the Russian President's led intervention in Ukraine has also been promulgated as the expression form of the common will, and Putin's imposed aggressive power has acquired an image of humanitarian nature. Quoting Putin (18 March 2014), it has been described as the "common historical legacy" encompassing a victory of historic justice and proving that Russia and Ukraine are "one people".<sup>119</sup>

Through the strength of propaganda Putin has also combined incompatible things and experiences. In order to strengthen his political message and justify Russia's military intervention in Ukraine by common humanitarian goals, Putin has used propaganda in order to manipulate and present hardly imaginable realities of the political scene. For instance, the President has been describing the annexation of Crimea and military clashes in Ukraine as a collective act of responsibility with its Western partners. Despite Russia's violation of the Minsk agreements, Putin (1 July 2014), using the expression "we failed", has indicated the failure of the

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<sup>118</sup> Putin (2014), „Address by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

<sup>119</sup> Putin (2014), „Address by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, Heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014,” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

joint efforts of Russia and the European states to convince the Ukraine President that “the road to a secure, stable and inviolable peace cannot lay through war”, and that the Ukrainian side has finally obeyed the ceasefire agreement.<sup>120</sup>

By propaganda, Russia’s leadership imposed struggle for recognition and “Social Contract”, have been envisaged to be a coercive stimulus for persuasion and the implementation of the afore-mentioned messages. Therefore, it could be presumed that the ultimate goal of propaganda has been set to achieve that Russian people identify themselves with the Great Power of Russia and admit the Kremlin’s policies as a non disputable ”general will” rather than discuss them or request its leadership to take the responsibility for their actions and created consequences.

On the other hand, despite the sophisticatedly applied propaganda means and strong authoritarian regime, general discontent has been spilling over into politics. As Sattler (2015) has stressed, in September of the year 2014, 20 000 people marched against Russia's aggressive politics in Ukraine. This dissatisfaction has held strong through March of the year 2015, with 20 000 marching in memorial for Boris Nemtsov and tens of thousands protesting the war in Ukraine. Protests were continuing throughout the year 2015, with thousands rallying in Novosibirsk and Petrozavodsk against government and its oppressing power. In Sattler’s (2015) opinion despite the lack of a strong and coherent opposition, these movements have been signaling a pervasive discontent, which, as Sattler has noticed, Putin’s government has been increasingly unable to control.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, there is a reason to disagree with Fukuyama’s afore-mentioned point of view about Russian society’s political inertia, mainly due to the fact that despite the constant use of

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<sup>120</sup> Putin (2014), „Speech delivered by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 1 July, 2014 at the Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives“, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>.

<sup>121</sup> Sattler (2015), „Putin Defaulting on the Social Contract,” *Atlantic Council*, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/putin-defaulting-on-the-social-contract>.

propaganda as well as an oppressive state's control during the last years, the opposition movements have managed to maintain their capacity and demonstrate their dissatisfaction and protests with Putin's authoritarian and aggressive political regime. It still remains a question whether in the future these tendencies may lead to a greater push against Putin's regime and force for changes in the Russian political scene, including its politics of identity.

Meanwhile, it is evident that, despite the afore-mentioned opposition movements and changes in Russian society, Russian political identity within its persuasive elements, such as struggle for recognition, "Social Contract" as well as propaganda in combination with other attributes of its political culture and context, have been strong enough to form and seriously impede any substantial rise or upheaval that could seriously endanger the positions of the Kremlin's leadership.

## Conclusions

Taking into consideration the previously discussed aspects or messages of Russian foreign policy and coming back to the question of my thesis about the role and contribution of a Russia's foreign policy towards Crimea to building of a Russian identity, my hypothesis implies the following.

Since it could be presumed that Russia's foreign policy is sustained by the afore-mentioned formative aspects of identity politics, at first sight, it could be presumed that the role of Russia's foreign policy towards its political identity is rather instrumental than substantial. At the same time, the analysis of the Ukraine conflict has proved that every expression and manifestation of a distinct Russian political identity, through the scope of activities of its foreign policy, can provide the necessary continuation and sustainability of Russia's leadership's envisaged policies as well as strengthen its positions at a domestic and international level. For instance, according to the afore-mentioned *Levada Center* surveys, Russia's led annexation of Crimea has lifted Putin's approval ratings to 80% from 65% in January of the year 2014.<sup>122</sup>

Russia's led intervention in Ukraine has demonstrated that even in the case of a brutal violation of international norms, nation state's sovereignty and territorial integrity can be justified as a humanitarian act and a necessity for self-defence. Therefore, within the annexation of Crimea, Russia's leadership, encouraging and uniting its people within common goals and perspectives, has proved that the intervention as a precisely targeted and justified foreign policy can serve as a beneficial contribution to the state's political identity, especially, when the rest of the circumstances are not enough favourable to guarantee the success of the state's governance and people's support towards its carried policies. In order to distract attention from the aggressive

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<sup>122</sup> Chart: *Approval of Vladimir Putin* (2015), Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/>.

nature of its intervention, Russia's leadership has justified its led annexation of Crimea by its oppositional and self-victimizing messages addressed to the West and its international order.

The chosen strategy of Russia's leadership within the Ukraine conflict has also reminded of the similar rhetoric transmitted by the Communist Party's leaders and Soviet political commentators in the relevantly recent history of the Cold War. Therefore, within this research work the question has been raised of whether something has changed in foreign policy towards the West or if it has been the same old game of the Cold War.

The afore-mentioned question concerning the possible repetition of Cold War consequences in the case of the Ukraine conflict, in its turn, leads us back to the initial question of this work of what Russia intends to achieve by presenting its oppositional and autonomous identity towards other international actors of the West and, particularly, by its foreign policy towards Crimea.

As it has been admitted by various political commentators, the Cold War tensions between both sides were much lower than the currently existing ones, due to the fact that, despite oppositional ideological grounds, the Soviet propaganda did not comprise aggressive messages and threats related to the expansionism and aggravation of relations that have been transferred to the world in the case of the Ukraine conflict..

On the other hand, there is a sufficient basis to agree that through its history Russia has been performing as an autonomous player in the international arena, due to its own chosen path and historical traditions as well as envisaged leadership and governance targets. In relation to the West's concerns about Putin's led regime or, the so-called, "imperfect democracy", the Russian political expert Gaidar (2005) has noted that Europe should be realistic and Europeans should understand that there is not much they can do about it. <sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Gaidar (2005), "Russia as Europe's Neighbor: Strategic Challenges of Economic and Political Development," Hamilton (eds.), *The New Frontiers of Europe. The Enlargement of the European Union: Implications and Consequences*, p. 225.

The afore-mentioned acknowledgment concerning Russia's historically conditioned peculiar political governance and culture has also been admitted by Trenin (2014). The political analyst has depicted it well by saying that through the annexation of Crimea the Kremlin has again convinced of the truth of the famous maxim of Alexander III that Russia has only two friends in the world, its army and its navy, and both of them defend its interests in Crimea.<sup>124</sup>

Therefore, taking into account the afore-mentioned considerations, it could be concluded that beside its apparent coincidence and resemblance, the assumption that the crisis in Ukraine has led to the repetition of the history or the Cold War has been recognized by various foreign policy experts as unhelpful, due to the fact that the deeper insights into the situation reveal that this analogy fails to present the evidence and explanation of the new context of Russia's foreign policy and identity politics. In Trenin's (2015) opinion the international relations between Russia and Western countries within the conflict in Ukraine present evidence of an open and deep confrontation between both sides in a form that was not characteristic to the Cold War time.<sup>125</sup>

Consequently, it can be presumed that Russian politics of identity, even having similarities of the Cold War past within its disposition to an authoritarian governance, no longer represents the Cold war reality in the current political context and existing circumstances of the Ukraine conflict.

According to the Tiburg University students Birg and Vanik (2015), the annexation of Crimea discloses not only "the conditioned principle" of historically "settled imperial identity" of

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<sup>124</sup> Trenin (2014), „The crisis in Crimea could lead the world into a second world war,” *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/02/crimea-crisis-russia-ukraine-cold-war>.

<sup>125</sup> Zabrovskaya (2015), „Levgold and Trenin: How to fix the US and Russia's relationship,” *Russia Direct*, <http://www.russia-direct.org/qa/legvold-and-trenin-how-fix-us-russian-relationship>.

Russia, but also the identity, with a new reinforced path, which Russia has committed and positioned itself in relation to its foreign policy.<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, it could be presumed that instead of the ideological conflict of the Cold War, the war in Ukraine has expressed itself as a new clash of two diverse and incompatible identities – Russian and Western. As a result of this conflict, the West has been confronted with the still hardly understandable Russian political identity, which within its aggressive messages and accusations, and, as Ramani (2015) admits, the consequences of its foreign policy in the form of “the frozen conflict,” presents for the West challenges as well as acute and irresolvable issues.<sup>127</sup>

The afore-mentioned Russian leadership's tactics have been precisely described by Shevtsova (2015). The political analyst has noted that the Kremlin has endorsed contra-dictionary propositions, “disorientating both Russia and the world, and making chaos its playground.”<sup>128</sup>

Thus, it could be concluded that Putin by salience of such aspects as Russia's led struggle for recognition, the “Social Contract” and propaganda, has managed not only to shape and sustain the main messages of Russia's foreign policy, but reinforced its path of political autonomy and expansionism. The afore-mentioned conditioned principles and formative elements of Russian identity politics have convincingly proved that Russia has steadily and purposefully constructed its identity as an autonomous and self-concerned actor in world affairs as well as has fostered its explicit isolation from the Western partners by the authoritarian means of ruling and a highly prioritized appreciation of order and power over justice and collaboration.

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<sup>126</sup> Birg, Vanik (2015), „National Identities in Russia and Ukraine in the 21st Century : Conflict and Interdependence, National and Regional Identities in a Age of Globalization 2014/2015,” p.9.

<sup>127</sup> Ramani (2015), „Three and a half reasons why Russia might be planning to withdraw from Ukraine (or some of it, anyway),” *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/31/three-and-a-half-reasons-why-russia-might-be-planning-to-withdraw-from-ukraine-or-some-of-it-anyway/>.

<sup>128</sup> Shevtsova (2015), Forward to the Past in Russia,” *Journal of Democracy*, 2 April, p.25.

Consequently, it leads us to admit that Russian identity politics have not been constituted by Russia's foreign policy trends. Rather than that, its foreign policy has been shaped and undermined Russian identity politics, which have been built by Russian leadership in order to cover its, the so-called, "weaknesses". The afore-mentioned leads us to admit that, despite the materialized and substantive aspects of power, nowadays the genuine driving force of Russia's foreign policy has become its identity politics.

Therefore, Putin within the Ukraine conflict has fostered and reinforced Russian society's sense of opposition towards the West and its order, persuading of the national interests, significance of resistance and self-defence as well as protection of Russian people in Crimea, as the main motives for Russia's chosen aggressive foreign policy and the expansion of its influence in the international scene. The afore-mentioned leads us to admit that the annexation of Crimea has been a consequent element of Russia's leadership identity building strategy, particularly, contributing to reinforce and foster its oppositional and autonomous character as global player in the international arena.

In the case of the Ukraine conflict, the problem arises from the lack of compatibility of Russia's declared goal - to achieve a more equal and balanced international order in a form of multipolarity, and the practical implications of its foreign policy actions, which have been directed explicitly towards the aggressive maximization of its geopolitical influence.

Describing Crimea's annexation, Mankoff (2014) also stresses, that the dilemma has been presented by the fact that the initially attended goals by Russia's foreign policy actions could prove to have completely different outcomes in the future. Due to this, the political expert has pointed out that Russian oppositional identity politics and aggressive foreign policy could have far-reaching international implications not only for the West, but for Russia itself: "Russia may

have won Crimea, but in the long run, it risks losing much more: its once-close relationship with Ukraine, its international reputation.”<sup>129</sup>

Taking into account the-afore mentioned observations and acknowledgments, the uncertainty lies within the current status quo of Russian political identity and foreign policy as well as the future of relations between Russia and Western states.

Therefore, within the annexation of Crimea and Russia's ambitions to succeed with its Great Power status and reaffirm its crucial role in international affairs, Russia has also actualized the question for the West of whether Russia's role at a global level has to be re-evaluated and reconsidered.

Going back to the observation mentioned at the beginning of this research work concerning Russia's recently softened and lowered rhetoric towards the West, it should be admitted that Russia's applied tactics with its new intervention in Syria, has proved that despite the impact of the Western economic sanctions, imposed just right after the annexation of Crimea (and its disputable results), Russia has managed to resume its positions, once more becoming a visible and accepted player in the international arena. Russia has succeeded it by reducing its oppositional tone towards the West and NATO alliance and, according to Stent (2016), “diverting attention away from Russia's destabilization of Ukraine.”<sup>130</sup>

As a result the afore-mentioned tactics of Russia's foreign policy have made it almost impossible for the West to continue to isolate the Kremlin. As Stent (2016) has pointed out, Western leadership may refer to Russia as a regional power, but Russia's aggressive foreign policy and,

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<sup>129</sup> Mankoff (May/ June 2014), “Russia’s Latest Land grab, How Putin won Crimea and Lost Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.12.

<sup>130</sup> Stent (January/ February 2016), “Putin's Power Play in Syria, How to Respond to Russia's Intervention,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.106.

more precisely, its military interventions demonstrates that “it once again intends to be accepted as a global actor and play a part in every major international decision.”<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, it has to be admitted that the formative aspects of Russian identity politics as “Social Contract”, a desire for recognition and propaganda, which have formed and shaped its aggressive foreign policy, which, in its turn, within the Ukraine conflict has enforced the oppositional and autonomous political identity of Russia, has created also a difficult task for the West to find an effective way to deal with it.

Thus, agreeing with Bismark’s notion that Russia is never as strong as it appears or as weak as it appears, the analysis of Russia’s foreign policy and its identity politics within the annexation of Crimea, leads us to admit that in spite of various contradictions and divisions of opinions towards the basic questions of what is a Russian political identity, and what Russia’s leadership wants to convey within its aggressive and oppositional foreign policy in the case of Ukraine, as Kotkin (2015) has acknowledged, “it is ultimately up to Russia’s leaders to take meaningful steps to integrate their country into the existing world order, one that they can vex but not fully overturn.”<sup>132 133</sup>

Taking into consideration that the cooperation forms practised by the Western states not always are compatible with the preferences of Russia’s leadership and its political culture, it is also time for the West to reconsider the different forms of peaceful coexistence and partnership with Russia, instead of quite inefficient integration attempts into the Western collaboration forms and alliances. Maybe, similarly, as in the case of Beijing’s and Moscow’s relations and their

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<sup>131</sup>Stent (January/ February 2016), “Putin's Power Play in Syria, How to Respond to Russia's Intervention,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.106.

<sup>132</sup> Bismark quoted in Gaidar (2005), “Russia as Europe’s Neighbor: Strategic Challenges of Economic and Political Development,” Chapter 16, in Hamilton (eds.), *The New Frontiers of Europe. The Enlargement of the European Union: Implications and Consequences*, p. 219.

<sup>133</sup> Kotkin (March/ April, 2015 ), “The Resistable Rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia’s Nightmare Dressed like a Daydream,” *Foreign Affairs*, p. 153.

established partnership described by Ying (2016) in *the Economist*, a new step must be taken that would allow Russia and Western countries to overcome mistrust and rivalry competition, as well as remodel their partnership and cooperation on existing common interests and cooperation capacities.<sup>134</sup>

The afore-mentioned model of foreign relations and partnership perspectives offered by Ying (2016) coincides with the visions towards international relations portrayed by Kaplan (2009). In his opinion success in international relations to the large extent could depend on the states' ability to "amid the revenge of geography," find ways of peaceful coexistence, partnership or collaboration - "near the edge of what is possible, without slipping into the precipice."<sup>135</sup>

Russia's leadership, within its foreign policy towards Crimea, aimed at transferring to the world its persistent claim to be taken into consideration as a global player, has been also reinforcing its oppositional and autonomous political identity towards the West. In this situation when, as the philosopher Berlin (2013) has described it in the context of the clash of diverse and even not reconcilable points of view, which can be pursued by the different identities, "the notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems ... to be not merely unattainable" and not imputable to the scope of relations between Russia and the West after the Crimea's annexation.<sup>136</sup>

However, both sides – Russia and Western states, should not exclude a possibility of revising their expectations and perspectives towards each other, and resettling their relations into a more moderate partnership or co-existence model, within which there could be a possibility to find a balance and move beyond the current cooperation dichotomy of "the frozen conflict."

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<sup>134</sup> Ying (January/ February, 2016), "How China Sees Russia, Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies," *Foreign Affairs*, p.105.

<sup>135</sup> Kaplan (2009), "The Revenge of Geography, Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/05/revenge-of-the-geographers/>

<sup>136</sup> Berlin (2013), *The Proper Study of Mankind*, An Anthology of Essays, pp.10-11.

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