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Course in International Relations

The Russian Realpolitik For a New Role As a Great Power:
The Ukrainian Case

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BASF	Badische Anilin und Soda-Fabrik
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CSCE	Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Trade Area
EEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EU	European Union
FP	Foreign Policy
GTS	Gas Transport System
IR	International Relations
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation and Europe
PR	Party of Regions
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Introduction

The latest events that saw Ukraine as a protagonist, raised the attention of the entire Western public opinion who has been focused on the pivotal role played by the Russian Federation in orchestrating its strategy to materially shape its neighbours' political orientation. More specifically, Russia has been firmly condemned for its imperialistic conduct, carried out in open violation of the main provisions of International Law, including the respect of territorial integrity, human rights and self-determination. Not even mentioning the abashment caused by the Russian complete unconcern for the authority of the most important international organisations in the world. Nonetheless, Russian behaviour was not provoked by a sudden imperialistic drift, but it was deeply rooted in a political vision firstly developed and then implemented under Vladimir Putin's presidency. Such idea involves the construction of a strong and autocratic state that carries out a power policy with the aim to rebuild a *Greater Russia* and restore the prestige lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, in the recent years, Russia cunningly used the International Relations (IR) system to collect all the necessary resources to fulfil its project, namely: the improvement of its economic structure, the enhancement of its military capacities and binding under its sphere of influence the former Soviet satellites by pushing them away from the Western influence. With its behaviour, Russia has covertly declared its hostility towards the West and Europe in particular, threatening its ruled-based international order.

Hence, given the relevance of Russia in the current global affairs, this thesis aims to analyse Russian Foreign Policy (FP) in deep and more specifically to demonstrate that Russian behaviour can be explained through the lens of the realist theory of the IR. The final objective of the elaborate is to acquire a substantial knowledge of the main variables that have determined Russian FP and of its *modus operandi* within the system of the IR.

In order to reach this goal the first chapter will establish the theoretical basis of my

thesis taking into account the main streams of literature on realism. It has the task to theoretically and historically define the realist paradigm highlighting the common background of its different sub-theories. Then, every stream of thought within realism is going to be separately analysed in order to better capture the different nuances of the realist theory and the select the most suitable one for the Russian case.

Furthermore, in the second chapter after having drawn some expectations about the states' conduct from the literary review previously mentioned, I am going to apply such model to the Russian FP. In particular, with the help of some practical examples I am attempting to demonstrate that Russian behaviour corresponds to the action of a classical realist actor. Nevertheless, other realist sub-theories can provide a useful tool in the analysis of the complex Russian FP.

Thereupon, the third chapter seeks to address the bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine, as an enlightening example of the explanatory power of the classical realist paradigm in regard of Russian behaviour in the IR. It addresses three main dimensions of Russia's clout on Ukraine: the political influence, the economic leverage and the military intervention.

Finally, the last segment gives space to conclusions retracing the overall Russian FP and highlighting the classical realist origin of Russia's conduct.

CHAPTER I

The realist theory of International Relations an Introduction

This chapter will establish the theoretical basis of my thesis taking into account the main streams of literature on realism. The first section of this literary review is dedicated to the chronological framing and definition of modern realism against the background of the International Relations' theories. The subsequent identifies the four main assumptions upon which the realist's view of the world rests on. The third one discusses the main theses of classical realism, neorealism as well as neoclassical realism and reviews the most relevant historical and contemporary scholarship related to this study. Finally, the last segment seeks to highlight the relevance of realist's contribution in the current international political debate.

1. Definition and chronological frame

Generally defined as the principal worldview in the study of International Relations, realism, has been used in every main dispute in IR over the last 80 years. Realism can be defined as a body of theories that share a set of core beliefs. Specifically, it underlines the limits established on politics by the egoistic essence of human beings and the lack of international government. Thus, the real of IR can be defined as an anarchical system dominated by states' power and particular interests. This complex approach to IR has developed progressively through the work of a series of historians and analysts who have situated themselves within a distinctive but still diverse style or tradition of analysis.¹

It is customary to bring realism back up to antiquity, surely its principles can be dated back to important works from, ancient Rome, India and China. Indeed, realist are present present in Thucydides' account of *The Peloponnesian War*, and in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, in which realism's skepticism for the constraining effects of morality is widely illustrated.² Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) can also be counted as a member

1 Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

2 Colin Elman, *International Relations for the Twenty first Century*, (Routledge, London: Martin Griffit,

of realism. Given its pessimistic perception of human nature, Machiavelli affirms that for a firm and valuable ruler power and security are the major interests. Another important exponent of realism is undoubtedly, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who has conceived the notion of state of nature, where the absence of overriding authority allows human appetites to be pursued without resistance.³

Realism's development has continued throughout the centuries in different formulations and it finally asserted itself as one of the central paradigms of the IR in the twentieth century. Contemporary classical realism was born in opposition with idealism, which at the time represented the dominant theory of International Relations, especially in the aftermath of the First World War. Realists such as Robert Carr and Hans Morgenthau, firmly opposed to idealist conception of a world ruled by international organisations in the name of universal values, common interests and morality.⁴ Conversely, from the classical realist viewpoint, since the struggle for the power is deeply rooted in the corrupted nature of human beings, states are permanently engaged in a mutual fight to increase their capabilities.

Then, during the 1950s and 1960s, classical realism came under the challenge of scholars such as Robert Gilpin, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, who attempted to establish a more scientific approach to IR. Thereafter, classical realism gradually fell and gave way to another theory of the IR, neorealism. The main difference between the two streams of thought within the realist paradigm is their contrasting view on the source of state preferences. While the first one explains conflictual behaviour by human failing, the latter proposes that structural constraints, not strategy, egoism, or motivation determines behaviour in International Relations.⁵

Finally, at the beginning of 1990s with the end of the bipolar system, since neorealism failed to give an explanation to the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, political analysts started wondering which paradigm could have been elected the new dominant theory of the IR. In such circumstances, another realistic theory came to light, neoclassical realism. This theoretical approach can be defined as a synthesis between classical realism and neorealism and it suggests that states'

2007).

3 Ibid. 2

4 Korab-Karpowicz, W. Julian, "Political Realism in International Relations", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) : <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/realism-intl-relations/>.

5 Hans J. Morgenthau *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th Edition, Revised. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) pp. 4-15.

interaction depends on both structural and domestic preferences. In particular, it stresses the fact that domestic constraints can limit state's behaviour at the international level. Even though neoclassical realism and realism in general have effectively contributed to the description of the mechanisms of the IR, the first one has recently been replaced by more methodologically sophisticated approaches such as constructivism and rationalism. Notwithstanding, its relevance in the analytical study of IR is unanimously considered undeniable.

2. Theory: the basis of realism

The above historical analysis clearly exemplifies that the realist paradigm of the IR, has not necessarily been a united approach with a number of different sub-theories that has emerged in response to the changes in the international system, highlighting different elements of the theory. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a certain set of common tenets that together form a general realist paradigm. Therefore, this segment is entirely dedicated to the investigation of the theoretical core of realism. Simplifying to an extreme degree, it is possible to reconstruct realist complex worldview by gathering together such tenets in four main assumptions.

First of all, states can be defined as the most important actors in the International Relations and they represent the main unit of analysis (also known as the state-centric approach). Accordingly, from the realist point of view, domestic jurisdiction and non-intervention are the fundamental principles which imply that states are sovereign and thus autonomous of each other and no inherent structure or society can emerge or even exist to order relations between them. They can be restrained only by forceful constraints or their own consent. Therefore, the international system is conceived as an anarchic entity whose main characteristic is represented by the lack of a central authority.⁶ Nevertheless, such anarchy does not imply a permanent state of chaos and violence, but a mechanism of relations based on state power. According to Waltz, power can be defined as the capacity to influence other agents' behaviour more than they influence ours.

Secondly, realists state that survival is the main concern of every State. External threats such as foreign invasion and occupancy are the most incumbent risk to which all states are exposed. Even though, the combination of some factors such as domestic interests,

⁶ Anne-Marie Slaughter, *International Relations, Principal Theories*, (Oxford University Press, 2011).

strategic thinking or commitment to a certain set of ideological models would probably lead to more altruistic and share objectives, given the anarchical nature of the international system, every state needs to provide for its own survival by itself.⁷ Thus, state can implement several strategies in order to survive. For instance, war is seen as a legitimate instrument of statecraft.⁸ In addition, a state can attempt to maintain the status quo by pursuing a strategy of balance of power through chain alliances. A further option is represented by bandwagoning, which consists in the attempt to push, other states under threat, in a conflict against the common aggressor. Finally, another instrument to influence others' agents behaviour without resorting to the use of force, is diplomacy. In particular, the bargaining process helps to manipulate prices and punishments in order to determine others' preferences.

Thirdly, Realists believe that states are rational actors. This means that, in order to ensure their survival, states will use all the resources in their disposal to increase as much as possible their outlook for survival. States, in the decision making process related to foreign policy issues, tend to rationally define national interest and priorities using a cost/benefits analysis. Realist believe that the rational actor paradigm constitutes the basis of foreign policy at both the strategic and the diplomatic level.

Lastly, the distribution of power is considered a pivotal principle in the definition of international system's structure. The international distribution of power can be expressed militarily, economically and diplomatically but realism ultimately tends to highlight the distribution of coercive capacity as the main variable in determining the arrangement of international politics. In this type of world, strategic assets are changeable and closely related to the concentration of power of the moment. This distribution can create different degrees of polarity which is referred to the quantity of blocs of states that operate within the system structure. A multipolar system is constituted by several blocs, generally from three up, a bipolar system is composed of two blocs, and a unipolar system is dominated by a hegemon.⁹ In this view, the Great Powers, those states that are effectively capable of exerting their influence and own significant economic and military capabilities, are crucial. Hence, from a realist perspective International Relations is essentially determined by the conduct of Great Powers.

7 Ibid. 7

8 J. Measheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York, Norton Company, 2003).

9 Mazzei, Marchetti, Petito, *Manuale di politica internazionale*, (Milano: EGEA, 2010).

3. Different streams of thought

After having restricted the scope of realist theory, it is necessary to further investigate the issues upon which realists diverge. Indeed, the evolution of the realist theory has occurred hand in hand with the alternation of the international system. This has led to the formulation of different theories within the realist approach. A more specific knowledge of realism's main streams of thought is fundamental to effectively apply its principles to the current international political situation. Therefore, the following paragraphs are going to examine realism in all its different permutations such as classical realism, neorealism and its principal branches and to conclude with neoclassical realism.

Classical realism

According to classical realism, since the strive to power is intrinsic in the imperfect essence of the human being, states continuously fight to enhance their capacities. The lack of a central authority in the IR system gives space to human hunger of power. Briefly, according to classical realism clashing conduct is due to human weaknesses. Specifically, conflict are caused, for instance, by warlike politicians or domestic political systems that give space to distinctive groups to seek the maximization of their particular interest and goals.¹⁰ Realist believe that pursuit of power is the central determinant in the political environment, as Morgenthau wrote the “will to power” is unlimited. Classical Realists grant state domestic motivations a distinct role in their foreign policy analysis. As Morgenthau highlighted, the influence of nationalism, ideologies, imperialism, diplomatic skills of the statesmen are crucial factors in states' behaviour. Furthermore, as Elman reports: “classical realism conspicuously distinguishes itself by classifying states according to their preferences, the Scylla of security-maximization and the Charybdis of power-expansion. Survival is merely one out of several possible state interests that may result in a strategy of either revisionism or the *status quo*.” Either way, what is for sure, is that states seek their own interests through the balance of power, bargaining or conflict, without subordinating their

¹⁰ Ibid. 2

priorities to the interests of other states. This logic is called self help and represents the theoretical nucleus of classical realism.

Neorealism: Waltz's theory of international politics

During the 1970s, the international scenario was partly altered by the receding of the Cold War and the increasing role of intergovernmental organisations. In this framework, a substantial revision of the classical realist worldview became extremely necessary. In particular Kenneth Waltz's 1979 *Theory of International Politics* has underlined the pivotal importance of the structure of the IR system and the distribution of power present in this context. Even though embracing the fundamental assumptions of realism, its approach tends to ignore leaders' inclinations and state's feature as determinants of international events.¹¹ Specifically, Waltz believes that system are formed by a structure within which its units relate with each other. This structure are constituted of three fundamental components: an ordering principle (anarchic or hierarchical), the character of the units (functionally alike or differentiated), and the distribution of capabilities.¹² Waltz also suggests that system that share analogous features are likely to produce similar results, even if their founding elements are characterised by divergent internal political backgrounds and environments. Waltz reaches the conclusion that there should be a specific feature in the system of International Relations that can explain to a certain extent such the uniform character of these results. In addition, Jervis observes that:

“we are dealing with a system when a set of units or elements is interconnected so that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system; because systems are generative, the international political system is characterized by complex nonlinear relationships and unintended consequences. Outcomes are influenced by something more than simply the aggregation of individual states' behaviours, with a tendency toward unintended and ironic outcomes. As a result, there is a gap between what states want and what states get.”¹³

11 Colin Elman, “Realism” ..., pp. 13-15. Compare Kenneth Waltz, “Neorealism: Confusion and Criticism (Guest Essay)”, *Journal of Politics & Society*, Vol. 15, (2004) pp. 2-5.

12 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Berkley, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1979).

13 Jervis, R, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*, (Princeton University Press, 1997).

Consequently, unlike classical realism, the neorealist approach views the IR system as the subsequent result of interconnected elements, rather than a the outcome of aggressive policies carried out by prestige-seeking statesmen.

Hegemonic rivalry realism

During the 1980s another important perspective has emerged within the neorealist approach, the hegemonic rivalry realism. This approach was illustrated in Robert Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics*. Gilpin, analysing Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*, affirms that the original essence of International Relations has remained unchanged throughout the centuries. Political affairs can be still seen an endless fight for wealth and power between rational actors that operate within an anarchical framework. States decide to fight against each other because this choice would maximize their benefits and substantially reduce their costs. More specifically, given the fact that the IR by and for the leading power in the system, any modification within this framework is responsible for causing disputes and fight over the system's control. Reinterpreting Thucydides' thought, he believes the distribution of power among states is caused by the structure of the IR; the hierarchical ordering principle determines and preserves the systemic equilibrium, state's role and their spheres of influence. The hierarchy of power and related elements thus give order and stability to the system. In short, according to Thucydides and Gilpin: "a great or hegemonic war, like a disease, follows a discernible and recurrent course." The first stage is constituted quite solid structure, whose main feature is the submission of the states to a hegemonic power. Subsequently, the power of one of the dependent states starts to increase out of proportion, as this change occurs, it inevitably fights with the hegemon. The conflict among this two actors leads to a bipolarisation of the system. Simultaneously, the system begins to reveal its instability and every pretexts can cause a major dispute. The resolution of this dispute will elect the new hegemon and determinate the new hierarchy in the IR. ¹⁴

Defensive and Offensive structural realism

Within the structural stream of realism it is possible to identify the sub-theories of

¹⁴ Robert Gilpin, *The Theory of Hegemonic War*, *the Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars (Spring, 1988), pp. 591-613.

defensive and offensive realism, both related to the bipolar order, they suggest different approaches to state's military and foreign policy. According to defensive realism state's main aim is represented by their own survival, power is not their main goal and even the dominant actors should pursue a cautious conduct. Offensive realism, insists that the anarchical nature of the IR offers several opportunities for expansionist actor who want to increase their importance.¹⁵ Defensive realism share with neorealism a common set of basic principles such as the relevance attributed to security within the anarchich system of the IR. Notwithstanding , there are three main differences between neorealism and defensive structural realism. First of all, besides neorealism take into account several determinants to clarify state's behaviour, for defensive realism the rational choice represents the only explanation. Second of all, introduces the offence–defence balance as a variable. This is a complex factor which underpins a large set of aspects that can make conquest harder or easier. Defensive realists affirm that factor such as technological resources or the geographical position can make defence prevail. Thus, in a system in which conquest is difficult it can be easily balanced by a cooperating behaviour. Lastly, defensive realism expects that states seek to maintain the status quo. While conquest is usually in contrast with the system structure, balancing represents the the best solution dangerous concentrations of power. Since the enhancement of state's power can be effortlessly counterbalanced, states would tend to equalise their resource, thus expansion could be counter-productive, seeking superior power is not a rational response to external systemic pressures.¹⁶

Offensive structural realists disagree with the defensive structural realist viewpoint as regards states' pursuit of an equal degree of power. As Labs has highlighted: “The flagship statement of Mearsheimer’s *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, argues that states face an uncertain international environment in which any state might use its power to harm another.” In these conditions, state's capacities have a pivotal role, and in order to safeguard maximize their security they should gather as much power as possible.¹⁷ Mearsheimer’s theory makes five assumptions: the international system is anarchic; all states that operate in the system are rational actors, great powers possess

15 Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy. Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security*, (Winter 2000/01), Vol. 25, No. 3 pp. 128-130.

16 Ibid. 2

17 Eric J. Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,” *Security Studies*, Vol 6. No.4 4. 199, pp. 1-49.

some offensive military capability; states can never be sure of other states' intentions and survival is the main objective of great powers. Mearsheimer further argues that the enhancement of state's capacities can subsequently increase state's security without necessarily provoking a counteraction. According to Mearsheimer, states are sophisticated relative power maximizers that try "to figure out when to raise and when to fold". Moreover, he believes that states' safety can be ensured only by covering the dominant role in the IR. Finally, a hegemon is not present in the system, states would either way try to increase their economic, political and military prestige to reach their goal. In the attempt to increase the resources in their disposal, states resort to force, blackmail, bandwagoning and engaging competitors in long and costly conflicts.¹⁸

Neoclassical realism

In part responding to what was perceived as an excess of neorealism, neoclassical realism believes that state's behaviour is largely caused by internal determinants. For instance, neoclassical realists affirm that the best way to explain state's conduct is considering and endorsing a broad range of domestic factors. One eminent vision of neoclassical realism is represented by Schweller's theory of "balance of interests," which derives different classifications based on state's main interests, inclinations, fears and greed. Hence, every state, as a rational actor autonomously implements its Foreign Policy making its decisions on the basis of a combination of power and interests. Furthermore, neoclassical realism gives capital importance to fundamental variables such as state's concrete capabilities and to the distribution of power within the system, in order to deeply understand the outcomes of state's interaction at the international level. In any case, neorealists firmly believe that state features and statesmen conception of the use of power act as mediator element among structural limits and internal preferences. In particular, Schweller argues that: "complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces, primarily changes in relative power."¹⁹ Thus, conversely to neorealism, they affirm that states tend to respond in different ways to similar systemic pressures and such outcomes are mainly induced by internal motivations rather

18 John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

19 Ibid. 2

that by structural constraints. The majority of realism's sub-theories share the expectation that states would naturally tend to balance against threatening competitors, by using the self help logic or by forming alliances. In opposition, Schweller sustains that from an historical analysis it has emerged that usually states tend to “under balance”. This means that, in facing the threat of aggression, states are incapable of a proper reaction in order to avert or defeat any eventual assailant. The higher is the degree of division within the group of interest, the less one can expect them to effectively react to external forces.

4. Why realism is still relevant to current International Relations

As highlighted above, in spite of the connotation of its denomination, realism, should not be considered as a monolithic ideology that describes in an homologous way the system of IR. Realist alleged simplification of the world's dynamics and its inability to combat new threats that go beyond its state-centred approach were cause of skepticism among its opponents. Anyhow, it is true that, likewise any other stream of thought in the field of IR, the realist theory has its own weaknesses and does not provide an answer to several relevant disputes.

Nevertheless, it provides a substantial contribution in acknowledging the current IR situation and in dealing with the modifications it is now subjected to. For instance, the concept of balance of power seems to be valid and workable to the present day.

Setting aside the dispute over the reason why states and in particular great powers are engaged in a constant struggle for power, one sees that, despite the growing relevance that new international actors such as Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) and transnational corporations have gained, states has maintained their central role within the IR.²⁰ It is important to mention that all intergovernmental organisations are formed by states and their delegates and as a result, strongly influenced by their behaviour. This statement is proved by the fact that sovereignty and territorial integrity represent the pivotal characteristics of a state and the main principles of international law. For this reason, principles such as the right to sovereignty and independence, the right to self-determination, the issue of humanitarian intervention are often cause of international disputes. Moreover, the capital importance of the state as a value itself is fully exploited

²⁰ Dougherty, Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations*, (Longman Publishing Group, 1997).

by several national leaders. In some cases, nationalism and patriotism are strongly fostered in order to achieve strategic or political goals. In this view, nationalism, which magnifies the state, represents an effective instrument in current global affairs.²¹

With no intention to denigrate liberal postulates and values, it would not be inaccurate to say that sometimes statesmen and countries who seek power politics resorting to military force, justify their behaviour in front of the public opinion recurring to liberal principles.²² To put it crudely, it appears very convenient to exploit liberalism's main tenets to freely pursue a debatable type of policy. This is not to say that there may not be people and statesmen who are sincere in their intentions. However, in several cases it has been proved that ethical principles can be used instrumentally to justify state's behaviour. For instance, the United States of America was conceived as a messianic state different from all others, which makes it unique in a sense. But the fact that America has democracy and human rights as its core values may give it a legitimate right, or so it thinks, to use these values as a pretext for advancing purely national interests. Thus, in this case realist conception of moral values suits perfectly to facts.

In light of these considerations, the realist theory can be effectively applied to current global affairs since its main aspects, such as the pivotal role of states, sovereignty, will of power, war, survival and states' strategic interests are relevant and widespread.

Even though realism can be played off against other more optimistic theories, it still preserve its dignity, at least because it can complement other perspectives and produce interesting results in combination with them. In this respect, Aron argues that realism serves as a “good starting point” for understanding the world since at least it can prove a good hindrance to “wishful thinking”.²³ Thus, any further analysis in this dissertation is going to be carried out adopting this critical point of view.

21 Ibid. 8

22 E. Carr, *The Twenty Years of Crisis 1919-1939 : An introduction to the study of International Relations*, (London, Papermac, 1995).

23 Ibid. 20

CHAPTER II

The Realist Theory and the Foreign Policy of Russian Federation

1. Realist expectations on state's behaviour

Starting from a doctrinal analysis, it is possible to derive some concrete expectations on states' behaviour in the international system. A state that behaves like a realist actor, referring to the fore mentioned common principles of realism, is a rational subject whose main goal is to safeguard its vital interests. Since it operates alone in an anarchical system, one of its priorities is concerning itself with its own survival. In this sense, a realist state uses all its political, economic and military means to preserve its territorial integrity and its economic and political establishment. In order to survive, a state must be endowed with a certain amount of power that can appear in many guises. In contemporary International Relations power can be expressed in terms of international prestige, territorial hegemony or economic and military power. Thus, a state can implement different strategies in order to accomplish this goal, for instance by declaring war, balancing or bandwagoning. Likewise, realism put itself in stark contrast with liberalism's worldview, which implies the perfectibility of the human status as well as the possibility to control and reduce the constant state of war in which human being are involved since their were born and in the international intergovernmental system. Indeed, realism suggests that states' action in the international system is driven by competitive self interests and by the urgency to safeguard themselves and their societies.

2. Realist Theory and the case of the Russian Federation

In order to fully understand the explanatory power of the realist paradigm, it is possible to apply the previously derived expectations to a concrete case. In this regard, the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy represents a perfect object of investigation. The analysis of Russia's FP certainly requires a great effort since this policy has been based

on multiple different and complex sources. In any case, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the Russian Federation has been acting as a realist actor and in particular, that its behaviour can be exhaustively explained by the tenets of classical realism. Indeed, from the analysis of Russian Foreign Policy in the background of the realist sub-theories, it emerges that even though neorealism, the theory of hegemonic rivalry and neoclassical realism may be the useful explanatory tools, Russian behaviour remains deeply anchored in the classical realistic tradition. Indeed, despite the problems on economic and political transformation, which originated by globalization and integration processes, Moscow has always centred its attention on the principle of the state's interests, on its power and especially its military capacity. Russia can definitely be considered a prestige seeking state guided by a strong government that thinks and acts in terms of interest defined as power. Furthermore, every interaction with the intergovernmental system has been instrumentally used to preserve Russia's interests and every external actor that tries to relate with Russia is seen with suspect and diffidence. This conduct is perfectly in line with the principles of classical realism, however, in order to better prove this statement a deeper investigation is required.

2.1 Russian Foreign Policy and the principles of classical realism

Russian FP guidelines and actual behaviour, at least since the beginning of the XXI century, have definitely been reflecting most of the expectations of classical realism about states' conduct. In this regard, a fundamental role is still played by the current President Vladimir Putin and his so called "Putin Doctrine" which have outlined the Russian geostrategic and domestic behaviour since his first mandate. In a large number of circumstances, the FP of the Russian Federation has exemplified the image of a strong actor which holds the task to shape the system of International Relations. Indeed, Russian demeanor has highlighted the self-help nature of the state's foreign policy and the importance of the power politic in the world affairs by being clearly oriented to: protect national interests, to safeguard territorial supremacy and to increase its power and prestige at the international level.

In this regard, it is possible to state that the Russian attitude towards International Relations is perfectly aligned with the classical realistic thesis that underlines the fundamental importance of state's sovereignty and the influence of domestic factors on

foreign policy. From the Russian perspective, the International Relations system is entirely deputed to the interaction of sovereign states whilst the role of other institutions such as international organizations, NGO's and transnational companies, remains trivial and limited. A valid indicator of this attitude, has been the problem of activity of foreign NGO's, as Moscow has usually been susceptible to uncontrolled activity on its territory and the large part of the independent foreign subjects are still identified as a potential threat for the interests of the Russian state.²⁴ Indeed, in 2006 under the Vladimir Putin presidency, Russia has introduced a series of laws imposing severe restrictions on non governmental organisations that operate within Russian borders. Hiding behind the will to protect the country from illegal activities connected to the presence of foreign entities on the territory, such laws established burdensome and difficult-to-meet reporting requirements for NGOs. These requirements, were accompanied by severe penalties for non-compliance and strict financial control over their actions. Furthermore, after a soft revision under the Medvedev presidency, this legislation has been further implemented in 2012, introducing the obligation for every NGO to register as a “foreign agent”.²⁵ The enactment of such dispositions, not only tends to delegitimise all the non governmental actors that may interfere with Russia's sovereignty, but also emphasizes the importance given to the protection of domestic interest against any international disturbance.

A further demonstration of the classical realist thesis is provided in the “Concept of Foreign Policy”, an official document endorsed by Vladimir Putin, which furnishes a systemic description of basic principles, priorities and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The document defines the top goals of Russian Foreign Policy as : “ensuring the security of the country, protecting and strengthening its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and securing its high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world”.²⁶ This statement underpins a wide range of measures that have been implemented by the Russian government domestically and internationally in order to fully achieve the fore mentioned goals.

24 Jacek Wieclawski, “Contemporary Realism and the Foreign Policy of Russian Federation”, *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1(January, 2011).

25 The International Centre For no Profit Law, *NGO Law Monitor*, (May, 2014). Available: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/russia.html>. Retrieved: May 2014.

26 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin*, (February, 2013). Available: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D. Retrieved: May 2014.

Thus, Russian Foreign Policy is perfectly compatible with the prestige-seeking approach that Hans Morgenthau classifies as one of the categories of foreign policy approaches or, in his terms, “basic manifestations of the struggle for power”. Holding a prestigious status is a way to demonstrate a certain degree of power that, which represents a instrument to achieve the goals in the short term as well as in the long run As Oliker discusses, Russia’s efforts to demonstrate its power and ensure that it receives the respect it deserves are well in line with the way Morgenthau describes a prestige-seeking state. The fore named Russia’s efforts to ensure that others do not interfere in its internal affairs also fit this paradigm.²⁷

In this perspective, the Russian position towards the action of several international organisations is perfectly in line with classical realism. Russia has demonstrated a selective adherence to international organisations by using them instrumentally and taking advantage of the work of those considered as beneficial for the Russian interests. Conversely, Russia has repeatedly ignored those organisations whose activity has been perceived an “interference” in the Russian “domestic affairs”.²⁸

A good illustrating example is represented by the relationship between the Russian Federation and the United Nations (UN). Indeed, from a Russian perspective, the membership in the most powerful intergovernmental organisation in the world, has been often seen as an important instrument for bolstering Russia's position as a great power and pursuing its main objectives. Throughout the years, Russia has fostered several reforms to improve the Security Council's efficiency (of which it is a permanent member endowed with the veto power) and has always supported the principle that member state's military actions must be sanctioned by the latter. Russia has shrewdly used its power within the organisation to hinder UN authorization to some US operations such as the Iraq war and to prevent harsh sanctions against President Mugabe's dictatorship of Zimbabwe, North Korea's nuclear blasts and Iran's nuclear programme.²⁹ Moreover, a further example of Russian selective attendance to intergovernmental organisations, is represented by its behaviour towards the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Throughout the 1990's,

27 Olga Oliker Keith, Crane Lowell, H. Schwartz, Catherine Yusupov, *Russian Foreign Policy : Sources and Implications*, (Arlington, PARAND Corporation, 2009).

28 Ibid. 24

29 Ingmar Oldberg, *Russia's Great Power and Strategy under Putin and Medvedev*, Occasional UI Paper, No. 1, (Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

the OSCE was progressively observed with diffidence by Moscow and identified as a subject which has been controlled by the West and used as an instrument to foster western interest and general goals of several nations that were not yet part of either NATO or of the EU. For this reason, its operation was strongly criticized by the Russian government as unable to deliver on its promise to either preserve the status quo in Europe, or preserve Russia's interests after the end of Cold War.³⁰ Furthermore, at the beginning of the century, Russia was very disturbed by the negative appraisal showed by OSCE for the Chechenyan war, its request to Russia to withdraw troops from Georgia and Moldova, and the increasing effort showed by the OSCE in bolstering democratic reform processes in the former satellites of the Soviet Union. Then, Russia accomplished its project to hinder OSCE operations by refusing to accept the organisation's budget. Lastly, in 2007 Russia interrupted its adherence to the treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which had the aim to limit the diffusion of conventional weapons in Europe and was one of the main accomplishments of the OSCE's precursor, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).³¹

In last instance, Russian perception of NATO as the main military threat and as dominated by the United States can be easily explained by two assumptions of classical realism. The first one, is the classical realistic assumption of state's diffidence towards all the other entities which operate in the international system. The latter, is the anarchical feature of the global system which underpins the self-help nature of the state's foreign policy, according to which every state should autonomously provide and safeguard its security and interests.

On this subject, Russia has repeatedly called for a more multipolar security system in the attempt to undermine US influence within the institution. For example, by encouraging the creation a new pan-European Security Treaty in order to boost Russian influence in Europe at the expense of NATO. Furthermore, Russia has firmly opposed to NATO enlargement to other post-Soviet states and to the US's plans to deploy the missile shield's elements on the territory of Poland and the Czech Republic.³²

30 Mark Entin, Andrei Zagorski, "Can the European Security Dialogue Return Russia the Sense of Ownership of the OSCE?" In : *Russia, the OSCE and European Security*, The EU- Russia Review, No. 12, (Brussels : EU -Russia Centre, 2009).

31 Ibid. 29 p. 5

32 Ibid. 29

Moreover, the relationship between Russia and the former Soviet states is deeply rooted in the classical realist tradition. Even though Russia does not have a strong influence over all Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) members, it has historical, ideological, strategic and economic reasons to consider the CIS's area as a zone of its exclusive interest.

Starting from this point, Russia has been using economic, political and most importantly, militarily measures to safeguard its interests. First of all, these states share a common historical background with Russia, since they were all part of the Russian Empire. Thus, many Russians perceive these populations as natural partners and allies that are essential to Russia's national interests.³³ Furthermore, since in these former Soviet countries there is a significant presence of Russian minorities, especially in Kazakhstan (29,9%), Latvia (29,9%) and Ukraine (17, 3%), Moscow has felt even more legitimate in considering them as an extension of Russia. Hence, Russia has supported its minorities militarily, as in the cases of Georgia and Crimea, and politically by easily issuing passports to its compatriots abroad.³⁴

Second of all, CIS countries are also strategically important to Russia as trade partners. To sustain growth, Russia has a clear interest in pursuing normal trade relationships with its neighbours. For instance, last May, Russia has signed a treaty with Belarus and Kazakhstan that establishes the Eurasian Economic Union, which will create a single market between these three countries. However, Russia has been using the economic partnership in the energy sector with some CIS members as a double-edged sword. On one hand, Russia has applied low energy tariffs to CIS countries that border with Europe in order to enhance its pricing power with its European customers. On the other hand, it has been using its pricing power to threaten or punish some states for their “disloyal behaviour”, as is currently happening in Ukraine in the present times.³⁵

Lastly, another fear for Russia is the insurgency of instability and disruption that can cause clashes and the spread of armed conflict within the CIS area. The risks connected in some way to forms of political renewals such as succession crisis, radicalism, or sudden defaults of governments in preserving their control are perceived by Moscow as

33 Ibid. 27 pp. 93-95

34 Ibid. 29 pp. 12- 14

35 Ibid. 24

dangerous factors. They are considered threatening since they could require the intervention of Russian forces and because they can create an high degree of instability in area that have a pivotal strategic importance to Russia. In addition, their neighbours can become belligerent and inimical towards Russia and spread this feeling to the mainland as well. Thus, Russia has intervened in several cases to prevent disturbances and to restore the order. The war in Georgia in 2008 can represent a good example of military intervention under hostile circumstances.³⁶

The last classical realistic feature of Russian Foreign Policy that should be taken in to account is its power politic in terms of military capabilities. The significant reduction of its military power after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has not prevented Moscow from a spectacular and symbolic demonstration of its military power. A demonstration of such behaviour is provided by repeated flights of the Russian strategic bombers close to the Canadian and the US territorial waters, as well as the demonstrative visit of the Russian fleet to Venezuela.³⁷ Furthermore, one of the main imperatives of the Putin Doctrine's is to preserve the country's positions as a nuclear superpower. The prominence of the Russian objective to maintain its analogy with the only other nuclear power in the world, namely the US, efficiently provides and explanation to Russia's ambition to negotiate with the Unites States about the control over this powerful armament. Simultaneously, Putin's strong will to reach this goal, represents a good explanatory tool to justify Russian attempts to contrast every factor that could have lessen this strategical parity, such as NATO's missile defence system in Europe. As Putin declared in his speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry in July 2012, the missile shield allegedly "upsets the strategic balance" that is, it weakens Russia's status as a nuclear superpower.³⁸

2.2 Russian Foreign Policy and the thesis of neorealism

Neorealism, also known as structural realism, has underlined, the anarchical nature of the international system and has attached the necessary importance of the self help

36 Ibid. 29

37 Daisy Sindelar, "Feeling Expansive, Moscow Looks To U.S. 'Backyard': *Latin America*, RFE/RL *Features*, (October 09, 2008).

38 Leon Aron, "The Putin Doctrine: Russia's Quest to Rebuild Soviet State", *Foreign Affairs*. (Mar, 2013.) Available : <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139049/leon-aron/the-putin-doctrin.e>. Retrieved: May 2014.

principle in IR, in line with the common realist tradition. Nevertheless, this theory is primarily based on the effects of the international structure and its power distribution among states. Conversely, factors such as ideology, nationalism and government's behaviour occupy a marginal role and are not considered determinant in influencing states' foreign policy. Generally speaking, Kenneth Waltz's theory conceives the structure of International Relations as the main constraint to states' decisions at the international level. This structure represents the general framework within which states operate and it is composed by the ordering principle, the character of its units and the distribution of capabilities. The distinctive feature of the structural logic is its tendency to the balance of power. In this sense, every variation in state's resources is balanced by a systemic disposition to equilibrium, regardless state's will. Thus, neorealism expects that states would naturally pursue a balancing strategy in their mutual relations, preserving the general order. Finally, according to Waltz, in the anarchical system of the IR, the tendency to the balance of power will always occur because of a simple principle : different units exposed to the same systemic stimulus will have the same reaction; the strongest is the external shock that threatens the balance of power, the strongest will be the attempt to fight against it.³⁹

During the Cold War, neorealist worldview has efficiently contributed to the explanation of the International Relations system at that time. The Soviet Union balanced the power of the United States, whereas the United States balanced the power of the Soviet Union because of a system of mutual checks. Thus, European behaviour in terms of freedom of action, security relations and overall fate was completely bound by the structural order of the international system.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding, in the presence of a bipolar order in which two rival blocs detain an almost equal amount of power, it is surely easier to highlight the pivotal role of the International Relations's structure. With the collapse of the Soviet Union along with the bipolar system, structural realism showed its weakness in predicting the end of such a system and its consequences. On this subject, Erik Jones has pointed out that: “structural realism failed to notice the internal determinants of the disintegration of the Soviet Union” and William C. Wohlforth indicates that: “ the fall of the USSR was not only a result of the decline in the Soviet relative power but also a

39 Ibid. 13

40 Jo Jakobsen, *Neorealism in International Relation: Kenneth Waltz*, (27, November, 2006). Available: <http://www.popularsocialscience.com/2013/11/06/neorealism-in-international-relations-kenneth-waltz>

perception of this decline by the Soviet elites.”⁴¹

In the attempt to adopt a neorealist approach in the analysis of the contemporary Russian FP, it is likely to find some difficulties in attributing a marginal role to domestic factors. First and foremost, it is not possible to explain Russia's behaviour without taking into account the pivotal role that the government occupies in the state's life. In particular, Putin has successfully managed to concentrate political power in the presidency by solidifying the *vertikal vlasti* (the vertical line of political authority originating with the president and extending down successively to the levels of federal, regional, and city administration).⁴² In recent years, Russia has increased its system of managed democracy as the elimination of checks and balances within the political system and the concentration of political power demonstrate. The current Russian political leadership is guided by the President and a small group of advisers who have increased their power to set the state's political agenda at the cost of the opposition.

Thus, since Russian government has gained such unquestionable relevance within Russian borders, a scrutiny of its main goals and of the ideological matters that underlie its conduct is crucial to explain Russian FP. It is important to notice that current Putin presidency included an ideological turn. Putin himself, as well as his establishment and a broad range of loyalists have switched to the language of values (Russia's "traditional values" were declared to be anti-Western and anti-liberal), militant patriotism (the state is infallible and anyone who wouldn't pledge allegiance to the leader is deemed an enemy), social conservatism (for the first time since the Soviet rule the government forcefully interferes in private spheres, such as faith, sex, school curriculum, art and culture). At the core of the newly mandated creed lies a concept of Russia, its history and nationhood, as an indivisible unit. Accordingly to this principle, the recent annexation of Crimea was partly justified by nationalistic motivations and in particular by protect "ours", "Russian-speakers", ethnic Russians or "compatriots". The patriotic euphoria with which the annexation was accompanied by, has reinforced the 2012-2013 ideological turn along with government's legitimation and has inevitably boosted the

41 William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War", *International Security*, Winter 1994/95, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 91-93, 100, 105-115. In : Jacek Wieclawski, *Contemporary Realism and the Foreign Policy of Russian Federation*, International Journal of Business and Social Science, Vol. 2, No.1 (January, 2011).

42 Ibid. 29

existing ethnic nationalism.⁴³

As previously mentioned, what has characterised this Putin presidency the most, is the attempt to foster domestic consolidation and state power enforcement as the basis to reconstruct Russia's international position and power. This was embodied in the concept of *sovereign democracy*. In his speech, addressed to the Russian Parliament in April 2005, Putin asserted that:

“It is precisely our values that determine our striving to enhance Russia’s independence as a state and to strengthen its sovereignty. We are a free nation, and our place in the modern world – I wish to stress this particularly – will be determined only by how strong and successful we are. As a sovereign country, Russia is capable of determining, and will determine independently, its own timetable and conditions from moving forward on that path.”⁴⁴

From this speech it is possible conclude that Russian FP is deeply intertwined with different internal factors and fully dependent on the government's plans.

Nevertheless, neorealism highlighting the bias between the most powerful states that operate in the global affairs to established the rules of conduct over all the other ones, swell illustrates Russia's determined attempt have a proactive role in the international making process even if Moscow has not political nor military and economic capacities to function as a leading subject in the system. Indeed, Russia holds the membership in all of the most important international organisations in the world such as the UN, the NATO, the OSCE, G-20, the Arctic Council, the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC).

In addition, structural realism provides a good explanatory instrument to illustrate the structural post Cold War restrictions for Russian foreign activity. Indeed, the fact that Russia was fully involved in the IR system after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has consistently limited its weight in global affairs. For instance, Russian conduct has been firmly criticized and then punished in the realm of some intergovernmental organisations in particular in the G-8. More specifically, in 2008 the foreign ministers of

43 Maria Lipman, Nikolay Petrov, *Russia 2025: Scenarios for the Russian Future*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

44 Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order: The US, Russia and China*, (Cambridge : Polity Press, 2012). p. 126.

the summit unanimously condemned the Russian war in Georgia and this year Russia was officially excluded from the meeting in Brussels as a sanction for the annexation of Crimea.⁴⁵ Even though these sanctions are not totally effective in preventing Russia from violating international law or from the intruding in the near boarder countries' issues, they still undermine its prestige at the international level. Therefore, in some cases the international structure has brought Russia face to face with a choice : pursuing his territorial hegemony or restoring its role in the international scene.

Anyhow, structural realism still remains a useful instrument to investigate the distribution of power within the global affairs. For what concerns Russian main interests, an enlightening example of the new distribution of power is represented by NATO's enlargement to some european countries, which has implied an increase in the American involvement in the European affairs and the extension of the US political influence across the borders of the former Soviet territory. A further example can be illustrated by Russian hostility to the American presence in the post-Soviet Central Asia as regards the American anti-terrorism operation carried out in Afghanistan. Even though President Putin gave its blessing to the to US military bases in the region, from the Kremlin viewpoint, the American presence caused a significant modification in the the previous distribution of power in the area, with the result of diminishing Russia's influence and threatening its regional interest.⁴⁶ In the case of the Russian Federation, however, a mere structural approach, based on the effect of the international system on Russia, would face several problems in reflecting the high degree of complexity that characterises Russian Foreign Policy. Indeed, this approach is not able to reflect the substancial differences that occur between the still circumscribed importance of the Russian Federation as a global power, its increasing role in determining the arrangement of the European equilibrium and its ambition to preserve its territorial hegemony within the former Soviet Union borders.

45 *Il primo G-7 senza la Russia, Internazionale*, (4 June, 2014). Available: <http://www.internazionale.it/news/g7/2014/06/04/obama-incontra-il-nuovo-presidente-ucraino-prima-del-g7>. Retrieved: May 2014.

46 Roger E. Kanet, Larisa Homarac, "The US Challenge to Russian Influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus", in: Roger E. Kanet (ed.), *Russia Re-Emerging Great Power*. pp. 182-185.

2.3 Russian Foreign Policy and the neorealist theory of hegemonic rivalry

The theories of hegemonic rivalry, including Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war, share a common set of tenets with neorealism. Indeed, both attribute a decisive importance to the systemic approach to IR, both are state centric and assume that states are egoistic actors that pursue self-help. Nevertheless, neorealism remarks the difference between pursuing state survival by choosing military preparedness over economic capacity and the opposite and enhancing economic capacity at detriment of providing the highest level of protection from potential short-term military rival. According to neorealism, states will always choose to enhance their militarily power in order to stay safe. As Brooks affirms: "Lumping such radically different strategies under amorphous headings such as "survival" and "self-help" is highly problematic because it leaves neorealism with very little explanatory content."⁴⁷ Conversely, Gilpin's theory provides a more dynamic view on states' behaviour and on subsequent changes in the international system. Sure enough, Gilpin defines power as the combination of "military, economic, and technological capabilities of states." In this viewpoint, Gilpin does not consider the necessity of a trade-off between economic capacity and military capabilities.

According to Gilpin's theory, the dynamic changes that lead to a hegemonic conflict are due to an asymmetric extension of power between the subjects in the system. In illustrating the mechanism of hegemonic war, Gilpin has been highlighting that the system's stability is maintained by a clear hierarchy among the states and minor changes in the distribution of power do not automatically unsettle such stability. Thus, the systemic stability is guaranteed as long as political, economic and technological changes, that the unequal development of power entails, do not put in danger the vital interests of the hegemon. As Wieclawski has underlined : "The most important aspect in this regard is the role of the second powerful state in the system as the growth of its power and the decline of the hegemon may undermine the status quo and lead to hegemonic war."⁴⁸

Gilpin's theory perfectly illustrated the US-USSR bipolarity during the Cold War as an

47 Stephen G. Brooks, *Dueling Realisms: Realism in International Relations*, International Organization, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer,1997).

48 Ibid. 24

example of hegemonic rivalry. Indeed, the United States represented the most powerful actor in the global affairs while the Soviet Union played the role of its main challenger. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, however, led to an expansion of the US' sphere of influence, with the result of consolidating its hegemonic role at the international level. Thus, any expectation that the Russian Federation would challenge US' predominance, would be highly unfounded. Despite its nuclear capability, Russia does not represent a valid candidate to outbrave the US for the role of global hegemon, since after the collapse of the Soviet Union it has faced several problems with its economy, its dependence on the world prices of oil and gas as well as alarming demographic trends in Moscow. At the beginning of the 2000s, any lingering aspirations to reconstitute a variant of bipolarity with the US were officially disavowed. Foreign Minister Ivanov stated in July 2002 that it would, in his view, be impossible for Russia to “reestablish a bipolar world, or lay claim once more to the role of a power that dictates its own ground rules to others”. He asserted that “we don’t even want to do that, but even if we did, we wouldn’t be able to.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the explanatory capacity of the theory of hegemonic rivalry as regards Russian behaviour in its FP, is not constrained to a more dynamic approach to the international system structure. In opposition to neorealism, it takes into account a larger set of very diverse determinants of the modification of the distribution of power within the system, including a broad spectrum of political, military, demographic, economic and technological processes.⁵⁰

Indeed, following the Soviet tradition, Russia has for a long time relied on its military capacities to enhance its influence at international level. Nevertheless, Russia's economic deficiency, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, can be seen as one of the main causes of its substantial loss of military power. Even though Russia still remains a nuclear power, its military service can not stand to the comparison with the military and technological power of the US and some leading European countries. In addition, in the new regional asset that came in to light after the end of the Cold War, the long established political and military means of pressure have become inadequate, not only

49 Martin A. Smith, *Russia and Multipolarity since the End of Cold War*, East European Politics, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp 36-51, (January, 2013).

50 Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War”, in: *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars (Spring, 1988), pp. 591-613.

in relation with Europe, but also with some CIS members. This situation does not imply a total ineffectiveness of military instruments in the Russian strategic thinking, however, it is possible to conclude that, when it come to the relationship with developed states, this measures should be implemented with other tools unrelated to the military field. Thus, the new Russian FP, initiated during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, has tried exploit Russian economic resources in order to strengthen Russia international reputation and power. More specifically, Putin has successfully increased the exportation of Russian oil and gas and the dependency of most of the European states up on Russia's provisions. Thus, as regards this subject, Russian FP and its evolution is perfectly in line with the theory of hegemonic rivalry, paying more attention to a broader set of elements besides military power to upgrade its role in the IR system.

As previously mentioned, the Russian government has realized that energy exports are one of the most useful resources at its disposal in its quest for *derzhavnost*, or great power status. Hence, especially in the last fifteen years, Moscow has effectively used its energy resources as one of its main FP instruments, becoming an energy superpower. This attitude is clearly proved by the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000, outlined with Putin's approval. This document states that : “Russia must be prepared to utilize all its available economic levers and resources for upholding its national interests”, which is a clear reference to energy resources.⁵¹

As the number one country in natural gas reserves, Russia highly considers the strategical importance of its energy sources which ensure its economic stability. For this reasons, in its quest for becoming the number one energy great power, the Russian state has acquired all the main energy companies in the country. This is also linked to the defence of a ‘strong state’, considered the central element in the Russian political tradition by the ideologues of ‘sovereign democracy’. A valid example of such strategy is represented by government's use of Gazprom, Russia's biggest oil and gas company. Indeed, the state-controlled gas corporation has consistently attempted to expand into the European market, signing deals with several of the main energy corporations: Eni, BASF, Ruhrgas or Gaz de France. Although these agreements have tried to ensure a continuing supply in the face of a slowdown in oil and gas production and increasing

51 *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, Rossiiskaya Gazeta, (January, 2000) <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>. Retrieved: May, 2014.

domestic consumption in Russia, they have also increased Europe's energy dependence. Due to this dependency, every time that Russia has used Gazprom as a political instrument against Ukraine, from the aftermath of *Orange Revolution* until now, the repercussions on European states has considerably increased.⁵²

For instance, in January 2009 Russia stopped gas deliveries to Ukraine for almost twenty days. In the first week of the month, Russia cut off its gas supplies to Ukraine, as a consequence, seventeen other European states found themselves out of gas provisions. During the following two weeks Europe had a demonstration of the effects of the greatest interruption in energy supplies in decades, which totally destabilised the European energy security system. The official cause of this interruption was the \$2.4 billions never paid debt that Ukraine accumulated toward Russia. In any case, in that period the former president Yushchenko was attempting to gain more freedom from Russian influence, shifting Ukraine's policy discourse towards a pro-western perspective. In such circumstances, the differences between Russia and Ukraine sharply mounted as Moscow have always been firm and constant in its opposition to Ukraine's reapproachment to the EU and NATO. Then, Russia has combined the gas the gas supply suspension with a discrediting campaign towards Ukraine, deprecating it as a solid political ally for the European Union, leveraging on the at the time dissent among the members of the Ukrainian establishment and emphasising their role as the main determinant of the situation.⁵³

Yet again, in spite of the decreasing relevance of military capacities, Russia's Foreign Policy has remained deeply anchored in classical realism with the focus on safeguarding state's interests and regional hegemony using all the means at its disposal, a strong linkage between the raw material export and the state's political aims. Moreover, Russia has shown its reluctance in accepting any new international obligations in the energetic sector, for instance to liberalize its energy market and to accept the European model as regards it in its exchanges with the EU member states. As a result, Gilpin's theory of the hegemonic rivalry represents a useful explanatory tool in the analysis of the role of the Russian Federation in the current system of the International Relations and it clearly

52 Antonio Marquina, *Energy Security: Visions from Asia and Europe*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

53 Agata Łoskot-Strachota, *The Complexity of Russian- Ukrainian Energy Relations*, in ISS opinion, European Institute of Security Studies. (February, 2009).

exemplifies Russian struggle to adapt its behaviour in its FP to the international environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Introducing a dynamic approach to the current IR, it has effectively illustrated the essence of Russian Foreign Policy better than the static theory of neorealism. Under any circumstances, Russia has inevitably demonstrated its tendency to look back to its classical realist background, besides of the changeable nature of the global affairs.⁵⁴

2.4 Russian Foreign Policy and the concept of neoclassical realism

The neoclassical realism approach tends to overtake structural variables not considering them as the main cause of states conduct in the international system. Conversely, it underlines the importance of domestic factors with regards to states' behaviour. Indeed, according to neoclassical realism, the analysis of the influence that the international system exerts on states in term of incentives and constrains is able to provide only a partial information. Underlining the relevance of domestic variables neoclassical realism indirectly evokes classical realism as regards the central role of state's establishment in determining state's foreign policy. Neoclassical realists, however, exceeded the classical realist approach attributing a central role to state's judgment of their competitor's resources and objectives, to the ability of the state's elites to catalyse popular consensus in order to accomplish their political goals as well as to the modifications of national preferences and interests that in some specific situations may lead to a cooperative conduct among the actors of the IR system.⁵⁵

In this regard, Schweller identifies four unit-level factors that influence state's foreign policy outcomes. First of all, he considers essential the level of elite consensus on perceptions of the external environment. Second of all, the nature of those specific influential elites who actually matter in the decision making process also affects policy outcomes. Third, Schweller argues that outcomes can be linked to the "domestic political risks associated with certain foreign policy choices". Lastly, the "risk-taking propensities of national elites" can also influence foreign policy outcomes. These factors are closely related to internal political structures that causally connect elites.⁵⁶

54 Ibid. 24

55 Ibid. 24

56 R. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Indeed, facing the complex reality of the Russian domestic dynamics, within which a pivotal role is played by a multiplicity of group of interests such as the military lobby, the oligarch involved in the energy sector and different part of the governing establishment, would be very problematic to effectively analyse the FP of the Russia n Federation without taking into account its domestic factors.

Even though, under Putin's presidency the role of Russian oligarchs has drastically decreased, those who have co-operated with Putin have maintained or increased their economic empires. According to official sources in 2005 they still controlled the 39% of the national sales and the 42% of employment.⁵⁷ The endemic form of corruption that is still plaguing Russian national apparatus or at least the its longstanding of exchanging favour, tends to facilitate oligarchs' operate. For instance, in the armed forces it was widespread, enhanced by the opportunities provided by the Chechen Wars.⁵⁸ The Russian oligarchs who survived Putin's attack definitely have enough power to exert their influence on state's decisions especially when there is a convergence between particular and national interest.

Finally, with the regard to international cooperation it is possible to assert that despite the globalization process has progressively required an high degree of integration, Russia has demonstrated an unclear behaviour. Indeed, Russia has always expressed it willingness to cooperate with other subjects in order to increase its profitability. On the contrary, Moscow has not necessarily been keen to deepen its cooperation, specifically for what involves some strategic sectors of its economic system such as energy and raw materials sectors. In conclusion it is possible to state that Russian FP has remained deeply rooted in the classical realist approach toward the IR system. In spite of the increasing attitude to cooperation with other states at the other side of the border, its FP is still strongly characterised by the protection of state's interests, self-help policy and the primacy of the state's security.

57 Sergei Guriev and Andrei Rachinsky, *The role of Oligarchs in Russian Capitalism*, Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol.19, No. 1 (Winter 2005). pp 131–150.

58 Peter J S Duncan, 'Oligarchs', *Business and Russian Foreign Policy: from El'tsin to Putin*, UCL SSEES, Economic Working Paper No. 83 (October, 2007).

CHAPTER III

The Russian Foreign Policy and Ukraine

1. *Introducing the Ukrainian case*

In the attempt to effectively demonstrate that the Russian Federation's FP is following a classical realist approach it is helpful to focus the attention on a specific case. Indeed, this chapter is seeking to address the bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine, as an enlightening example of the explanatory power of the classical realist paradigm in regard of Russian behaviour in the IR.

Firstly, the choice of analysing Russian conduct towards Ukraine stems from the recognition of the deep linkages between these two countries as well as from the economic, political and strategic relevance that Ukraine has gained in the present Russian geopolitical scheme. This fundamental importance is due to countless factors such as Ukraine's large territory, which classifies it as the second biggest nation on the European continent after Russia; its strategically important location of buffer state between the EU and the ex Soviet bloc; its role of transit country for the Russian gas; the presence of the politically, military and economically important Russian Black Fleet in the Crimean Peninsula, the large number of Russian minorities in the eastern region of the country and the several centuries of being part with Russia in one single state. As a consequence, Ukraine's inclusion in Russia's plans of pursuing a power policy, is considered vital. Secondly, Russian attitude towards the former Soviet state perfectly reflects the standard behaviour of a classical realist actor. To prove this statement this analysis has been conducted trying to explain three main dimensions of Russia's clout on Ukraine : the political influence, the economic pressure and the military intervention.

2. *Political influence*

The political aspect of bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine is mainly

determined by geopolitical interests of the actors involved. Anyway, since the two parties belong to different “weight categories” their bilateral relations are unequal in their nature and of course biased in favour of Russia.⁵⁹ As previously mentioned, Russia considers Ukraine as a zone of its exclusive interests, thus Moscow has always fought to exert its influence on Kiev to shape its political conduct and tie it close to Russian action. In this view, Ukrainian political shift towards Western institutions such as the NATO and the EU, which became quite consistent at the beginning of the 2000s, was seen with great concern by the Russian government. Indeed, despite the enormous changes that the collapse of the Soviet Union has led to, Russia's political elite has continued to view Western institutions through the prism of an adamant zero sum and geopolitical world view.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Russia's 1997 National Security concept identified “NATO expansion to the East” and “the weakening of integration process in the CIS” as “fundamental threats for national security and for Russia's political, economic and military influence in the world”.⁶¹ In order to safeguard its position, Russia vehemently opposed to Ukraine approach to NATO and EU and has implemented a series of political and economic measures to limit Kiev's space of manoeuvre. Even though there is a blurred line between the Russian use of political and economic measures, this section aims to investigate the political-oriented drivers and provisions of Russian Foreign Policy regarding the maintenance of Ukraine under its sphere of influence.

At the beginning of the first Vladimir Putin presidency, the main strategic Russian concern was the impact of the NATO enlargement to its “nearest border.” The eventual Ukrainian adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation would have brought the interest of the Western countries, in particular of the US, to the Russian Federation backyard. Russia looked on the military implications of the alliance's with particular concern. The dramatic reversal in the conventional military balance and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Central Europe in the 1990s had substantially increased Russian vulnerability. Thus, in order to preserve Russian interest as a great power, the newly elected President Putin tempted to distance Ukraine from NATO by strongly pressuring Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma to enter the Eurasian Economic Community and

59 “EU-Ukraine-Russia relations: problems and prospects”, in: Razumkov Centre, *National Security and Defence*, No 45, (2012).

60 James Greene, “Russian Response to NATO and EU: Enlargement and Outreach”, in : Chathamhouse's briefing paper, *The means and the Russian Abroad Series*, No. 2, (June, 2012).

61 Russian National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 17 December 1997, Secs I & III.

the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while also working to establish a patron client political relationship.⁶² Anyway, in May 2002 Ukrainian officials openly declared the state's will to join the NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP), counterbalancing the creation that month of the CSTO and the NATO–Russia Council. The next month, Ukraine concluded an agreement which regulated the hosting and operations procedures of NATO forces on its territory. Russia was alarmed by this arrangement, particularly in the light of the increasing US military presence in Central Asia. Putin reportedly called his Ukrainian counterpart twice to persuade him not to accept the document, which Ukraine nonetheless signed in July.⁶³ Therefore, Kuchma's turn towards NATO showed the necessity to enhance Russian political instruments to effectively influence Ukraine's political system.

The advent of the Orange Revolution, between the end of 2004 and January 2005, with its democratic wave, had further weakened Russian influence over the country. Indeed, with the election of Victor Yushchenko and the appointment of Yulia Tymoshenko as Prime Minister, Ukraine increased its involvement in the NATO membership process, which entailed a deeper Western participation in Ukraine's economy and politics, including the sensitive area of national security. As a consequence, in the attempt to accomplish his goal of political hegemony towards the nearest border, Putin prepared its strategy for the counteraction. His plan, in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, was essentially based on two elements. On one hand, Russia continued to use classical pressure instruments towards Ukraine such as elite capture, support for the pro-Russian opposition (the Party of Regions), appeals to traditional Russian identities, economic patronage and legally binding arrangements. On the other hand, Putin used Russian political weight in Western Institutions to guide their decisions and block their intervention in Ukraine.⁶⁴

As regards the Russian attempt to turn Ukraine political system against the NATO, two cases are definitely worth to be mentioned. The first one is the use of the gas trade to corrupt Kuchma and Yushchenko administrations in order to establish a privileged relationship between the two governments. The subject of the scandal was the “informal

62 Ibid. 60 p.6

63 “NATO's relations with Ukraine”, Available: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm?selectedLocale=e.

64 Ibid. 60 p.14

pension” assigned to the former President Kuchma, who was illegally controlling a stake of RosUkrEnergo (RUE), a gas mediator created by an agreement between Putin and Kuchma himself. The situation was further aggravated by the involvement of the, at the time, new President Yushchenko who entered in an agreement with Kuchma aiding and abetting its illegal conduct. Furthermore, under Yushchenko Presidency RUE received highly lucrative concessions that consistently increased its turnover, as the monopoly on Ukraine's gas imported from Turkmenistan. On top of this, in 2006, RUE reportedly made a \$53 million payment to Petrohaz, a company managed by the President's brother, as a consultancy fee during the agreement process with NaftoGaz.⁶⁵ The Russian strategy of elite capturing survived the Orange Revolution and it provided its usefulness in dulling the reformist and pro western attitude of the new Ukrainian establishment. In addition, during the parliamentary elections of 2006, Russia supported Party of Regions (PR) who launched a media campaign targeted to discredit NATO, portraying it as the bulwark of the distant, uncaring and unreliable West.⁶⁶ The PR, with the help of some political technologists close to the Kremlin, managed to create an electoral powerhouse by leveraging disruptive political matters such as the protection of the Russophone minority, the Soviet Union nostalgia and the antipathy towards the West.

Furthermore, Russia exploited its central role within the NATO with the aim to undercut the cooperation between Ukraine and the international organisation. More specifically, Russia aimed to discredit Ukrainian reliability as a partner and potential future ally. This attempt began in 2006, simultaneously with the fore mentioned intrusion in to Ukraine domestic politics. In June, the annual Sea Breeze amphibious military exercise held under the coordination of the NATO was successfully blocked by the Crimean institutions supported by the Russian Black Sea Fleet officers. Indeed, at the arrival of the US military construction, the Crimean parliament declared the region a “NATO- free zone” and concurrently the Russian Duma passed a resolution warning that “Ukraine's accession to the military bloc will lead to very negative consequences for relations between our fraternal peoples”. As a consequence, Ukraine government was forced to suspend the exercise. This episode emphasized Ukraine's the deep domestic division and

65 Serhiy Leshchenko, “Viktor Yushchenko’s Political Orbits”, *Ukrayinska Pravda*, (January, 2006). Retrieved: June, 2014.

66 Ibid. 60

the intensity of the linkages between the Crimean military and political institutions and the Russian parliament. Thus, Ukraine deficiency in maintaining a cohesive decisional conduct raised several doubts among NATO members about its reliability as a partner.⁶⁷

As the previous measures were not enough, Putin himself during a news conference at the Kremlin, declared that Russia would have targeted its offensive missile system at Ukraine in case of a possible Ukrainian NATO membership and the acceptance of the deployment of the US missile defensive shield on its territory.⁶⁸ Furthermore, at the Nato – Russia Council meeting in Bucharest in 2008, the Russian President described Ukraine: “as a chaotic and ungovernable state, struggling with complex problems of state formation and internal tensions.” In his view the NATO membership could have brought Ukraine to the verge of his existence as a sovereign state.⁶⁹ Putin's strategy was ultimately successful, since during the meeting the NATO decided not to give Ukraine the accession to the MAP. Such decision was made after have taken into account two factors. First, the drop in Ukrainian public support for the NATO membership (primarily caused by Russian supported campaigns). Second, the claim that Ukraine adherence to the organisation would have enhanced the conflict between the anti-Russian nationalists and the Russian minority in the Southeast of the country, increasing the risk of a civil conflict. Both these considerations were underlined by President Putin in the previously reported speech.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, by the late 2008, the NATO changed its mind and granted Ukraine the access to MAP. Its implementation process continued throughout 2009 with the creation of a NATO information and documentation centre in Ukraine. In coincidence with such events, in January 2009 Russia started a gas war with Ukraine that certainly underpinned political matters and that is going to be deeply analysed in the following section. The turning point, was represented by the election in 2010 of Viktor Yanukovich as the new President. Yanukovich, as exponent of the PR, privileged Ukraine- Russia bilateral relations in the optic of a deeper economic and political integration. At the beginning of February 2010, Viktor Yanukovich affirmed that Ukrainian approach to NATO was "well-defined" and the membership of the institution

67 Ibid. 60

68 “Russia in Ukraine missile threat”, *BBC News*, (February, 2008). Retrieved: June, 2014.

69 Zerkalo Nedeli, What precisely Putin said at Bucharest, No. 15, (April, 2008). Available: <http://www.mw.ua/1000/1600/62750/>. Retrieved: June, 2014.

70 Ibid. 60

was not a compelling necessity. On the 3rd of June, the Ukrainian Parliament decided not to join NATO and approved a bill that prohibited Ukraine to be part of any military bloc, but permitted the co-operation with that organisation.

In parallel with the NATO enlargement issue, Ukraine found itself at the centre of an even more complex political controversy, in between of the Russian and the European Union's sphere of interests. More specifically, Ukraine's approach to the EU in 2008, with the beginning of the negotiation process for the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), was perceived with great skepticism by the Kremlin. Russian concerns came from the perception of the EU's potential power in affecting its vital political and economic interests and in projecting Western norms and values in the post Soviet state. Moreover, Moscow was deeply worried that such proximity would have prevented Russia from putting in to practise its geopolitical aspirations and its authoritarian model of development.⁷¹ Specifically, "Putin's Eurasian Union" badly needed Ukrainian participation.

By creating the Eurasian Union, Putin aimed to build a "powerful supra-national union" of sovereign states coordinated under a common economic, legal and military system. The creation of such institution stems from Putin's vision to regain the potential lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union in order to constitute, under the aegis of the Russian Federation, a "full flagged economic Union" able to compete with the West and with China.⁷² Indeed, the actual Eurasian Union, which treaty was signed in May 2014, brings together three countries, Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, with an overall GDP of 2.7 \$ trillion, a population of 170 million people and an energy resource system that represent the 15% of global oil and gas reserves. Ukraine's presence in the Union would have further enhanced its power with its 55 million people population and its 5.4 trillion cubic meters of gas resources.⁷³ In addition, Ukraine has for several reasons a strategic importance in the Eurasian picture. It presents a strategically important location as a buffer state between the EU and the former Soviet states, is a transit country for Russian gas as well as a military outpost for Russian Black Sea Fleet.⁷⁴ Thus, since the

71 Timothy Heritage, "Ukraine holds the key to Putin's dream of a new union," *Reuters*, (23, November, 2013). Retrieved June, 2014.

72 Ibid. 71

73 Matt Schiavenza, "No Ukraine: Putin's Eurasian Union reveals limits to Russia's Strength", *International Business Times*, (29, May, 2014). Retrieved June, 2014.

74 Hannes Adomeit, "Putin's Eurasian Union : Russia's integration project and policies on post-Soviet space", in : Kadir Has University Centre of International and European Studies, *Neighbourhood*

project of the establishment of the Eurasian Union has started, back in 2010, Russia has exploited all its political and economic means to attract Ukraine in its orbit and discourage it from collaborating with the European Union.

Since, Viktor Yanukovich assumption of office, the Kremlin has always exerted itself to convince Ukraine to join the trilateral Custom Union and participate in the Single Economic Space (SES), adapting the agreement to a the three plus one formula. Nevertheless, the pro Russian President carried out the negotiations with the European Union by further defying the details of the Association Agreement in the Ukraine – Brussels meeting at the beginning of 2010. Ukraine's conduct profoundly irritated Moscow, the former President Medvedev stated : “ If Ukraine were to take the road of European integration, it would be more difficult for the country to integrate with the SES and the Custom Union. You cannot at the same time sit in two chairs.”⁷⁵ From that moment onwards, Russia implemented a strategy based on pressure and persuasion in order to capture Ukraine's favour. To fulfil its purpose, Moscow exploited its southern neighbour's economic weakness, its dependence from Russia for oil and gas deliveries in combination with political pressures and bilateral agreements.

First of all, in April 2010, Ukraine signed with Russia the Kharkiv Agreement. This, concerned the extension of the lease for the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sebastopol until 2042, in exchange for a consistent ten years price reduction on natural gas deliveries from Russia. This agreement increased Ukrainian dependence from Russia, not only because of the extended presence of the Russian military fleet in its territory but also because it allowed an estimated saving of 40\$ billion on energetic expenditures. Such agreement were prepared in an unprecedentedly secret manner and its ratification was pushed in violation of parliamentary procedures.⁷⁶ Second of all, the next year it also signed the new version of the CIS free trade agreement keeping open the option to conclude an agreement on the free exchange in the CIS , which would have probably led to a possible de facto membership in the Custom Union and in the SES.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding, since Ukraine was maintaining its dual position between the EU and the

policy paper, No.4, (July, 2012).

75 Ibid. 74

76 “Ukraine and Russia: Interim Results and problems of bilateral cooperation”, in: Razumkov Centre, *National and Security Defence*, No. 6, (2010).

77 Ibid. 74

Eurasian Union, Moscow decided to bring to an end Kiev's indecision using economic retaliatory measures. In less than two years time, Moscow drastically increased gas prices, not complying the Kharkiv agreements. When Kiev tried to politically persuade Moscow to reconsider its pricing formula, Russian government stated that any concession was strictly bound to the Ukrainian participation to the Custom Union and to the establishment a joint venture to run Ukraine's Gas Transit System, where Gazprom were going to exert strong influence leading to a gradual control over the whole Ukrainian domestic gas sector.⁷⁸ Another measure that is going to be further analysed is Russian will to exclude Ukraine from gas transit by implementing the North Stream and the South stream project.

Finally in 2013, in view of the close to come Vilnius meeting, during which Ukraine would have signed its cooperation agreement with the EU, Russia used the “carrot and stick” method. In the optic to prevent Ukraine from signing, Russia advocated the mobilisation of Ukrainian oligarchs with the purpose to both directly pressure Kiev's government and use the media resources at their disposal to shape public opinion against the agreement. Another key instrument of the strategy was weakening at the same time Ukraine's economic conditions and President Yanukovich's popularity. The total block of Ukraine's import, that occurred last August, worsen Ukraine's fragile economic situation along with the consensus for the Ukrainian President. Such sticks were also accompanied with carrots, for instance with the project of offering more business opportunities to all of those traders whom have taken heed of the Russian message and start working against the agreement with the EU or with the need to incentivise Yanukovich's family and inner circle by offering them specific money-making opportunities on the Russian market.⁷⁹

After the implementation of such strategy, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich suddenly changed its plan to adhere to the DCFTA under the pressure exerted by Moscow. President Yanukovich justified his refusal to sign, by affirming the EU was not offering sufficient economic support to upgrade Ukraine's economy.⁸⁰

78 Ibid. 74

79 Nicu Popescu, *The Russia-Ukraine trade spat*, Issue Alert, European Union Institute for Security Studies, No. 26, (August, 2013).

80 “EU summit shows no sign of reviving Ukraine deal”, BBC News, (29, November, 2013). Available: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25134682>. Retrieved: June, 2014.

Indeed, while the EU was keen to offer a \$ 838 million dollar bail out in order to restore Ukraine economic situation, instead Russia offered a \$15 billion dollar loan that included also a discount on gas tariffs. Reportedly, Yanukovych and Putin had a secret meeting before the Vilnius assembly in which the proposal was discussed. Jovita Neliupšienė, foreign policy aide to President of Lithuania, said Yanukovych had called her before announcing he was ditching the EU pact, arguing that the pressure from Moscow was irresistible. She also added that Ukraine was not be able to withstand the pressure Moscow's pressure anymore and especially the companies in the eastern side of the country, which accommodate the greater share of its industry and employs, were reaching their limit of forbearance.⁸¹

3. *Economic leverage: the energy sector*

As noted above, in analysing the bilateral relations between Russian and Ukraine, it is difficult to clearly separate the political sphere from the economic one. Indeed, these two dimensions are deeply intertwined and shape the bilateral relations as a whole. Notwithstanding, since economic measures were and still are instrumentally implemented by Russia with a political aim, a more economic approach is needed in order to clarify the nature of Russia – Ukraine connection.

The trade relations between Russia and Ukraine are mainly based on the energy sector, which includes the gas, oil and the nuclear energy markets. The two countries's markets are closely interdependent from one other as the result of their long standing development within the framework of the common business and economic system of the former Soviet Union. Once again, this mutual dependence is asymmetric in favour of Russia. As the data show, in terms of energetic dependence, Ukraine is in a considerably worse position than Russia. Indeed, Ukraine exclusively depends from Russian imports on hydrocarbon by 65-70% and on natural gas supply by almost the 53%. and on nuclear fuel by almost the 80%. It also imports the 80% of its overall demand of oil and petroleum most of which comes from Russia. Not to mention that four out of six Ukrainian oil refineries (73% of the total capacities) belong to or are

81 Ian Traynor, "Russia blackmailed Ukraine to ditch EU pact", *The Guardian*, (22, November, 2013)
Available: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/22/russia-ukraine-eu-pact-lithuania>.
Retrieved: June, 2014.

controlled by Russian companies.⁸² Since Russia ranks first in the world for oil extraction and second for gas extraction, it does not depend from Ukraine for the raw material provision but only for its distribution by the 75% as regards the gas transit and by the 10-15% for the oil transport. Anyway, the latter percentages are going to significantly decrease with the implementation of the North Stream and South Stream projects that are going to be further discussed in detail. Due to this strength position, since the election of Vladimir Putin, Russia's policy towards Ukraine became tough, target-minded and pragmatic. The Russian establishment started to promptly to take advantage of Ukraine gas dependence to control Ukraine's foreign policy, intensify the philo-Russian element in the domestic political space and keep Ukraine in the sphere of its influence.⁸³

The most used pressure tools on Ukraine include: discredit of Ukraine as a reliable partner for the EU, interruption of energy supply, attempts to reduce its capacity of extraction and trading, the price pressure and insistent encouragement of merger of strategic assets. More specifically, pushing for bilateral "gas talks" with Ukraine, Russia has tried to compel its neighbour to merge assets in the gas sector, after which, Ukraine would not be able to act as an independent and equal party to negotiations. In light of these facts, it is possible to consider the Russia-Ukraine bilateral arrangement imperfect, inefficient and unable to secure Ukraine's best interest. The current cooperation system views the dominance of Russian monopoly in all segments of Ukraine's energy sector and an effective influence exerted by the Russian lobby on the weak and hit by corruption Ukraine's institutional system. Thus, Russia has strong economic and political advantages in proposing and individuating the objectives of the Russia-Ukraine relations and in such circumstances Ukraine's strategic goals are often sacrificed to those of Russia.⁸⁴

The most evident example of Russian policy was the use of the "energy weapon" against Ukraine to force its neighbour to sign expensive gas contracts. In coincidence with the Ukrainian shift towards the EU and NATO, Gazprom supported by the Kremlin, convinced Ukraine to stipulate a ten-years contract (2009-2019) which imposed unfair conditions, and which negotiation started at the end of 2008, together

82 Ibid. 76

83 Ibid. 59

84 Ibid. 76

with the contract on Russian gas transit for the same period. Hence, when Russia started its gas war against Ukraine it had an additional lever to affect Kiev's decisions. While the terms for the MAP and the DCFTA were under discussion, Moscow cut off its energy supply to Kiev paralysing the entire European gas transit for almost 20 days and causing an economic loss of \$100 million a day for Gazprom and even more significant amount for Naftogaz. Manifestly, for the Russian establishment, punishing Ukraine for not having paid its 2.4 \$ billion debts and making it appear as an unreliable economic partner to the EU, was worthing the price.⁸⁵ As result of the crisis, Ukraine conclusively signed the previous mentioned agreement. The unfair deal led to an increase of the Ukrainian Naftogaz deficit and to an aggravation of the state's dependence on Russian energy reserves.

A direct consequence of the controversy, was an acceleration of the fulfilment of the North Stream and South Stream pipeline projects. In March 2010, Putin affirmed that: “ We are working on both, North Stream and South Stream and these project has lowered our interest in joint work on gas transportation network”.⁸⁶ This statement came few days after the Ukraine – Brussels meeting, and just few month before the sign of the Eurasian Custom Union. The Russian project to deliver its gas supplies to Europe bypassing Ukraine put extra pressure on Kiev's government, taking in to account that the energy intensity of Ukraine’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeded by almost two and a half times the relevant indicators of the developed countries.⁸⁷ Thus, considering the Ukrainian transit volume of 95.4 bcm in 2010 and of 104bcm in 2011, the overall loss caused by the construction of these additional pipelines, could amount to 108 bcm which correspond to almost 1.5\$ billion of net gas profit.

Indeed the construction of the North Stream, a pipeline that runs under the Baltic Sea, Gazprom provided 22 billion cubic meters of energy to Germany, Denmark, France and Great Britain, leaving to Naftogaz only 5.5 bcm to trade. Furthermore, with the intent to convince Kiev's government to get the Custom Union membership, Russia has threaten Ukraine several times to stop the use of its GTS after that the South Stream pipeline had been completed, unless Ukraine agrees to Russian terms.

85 Simon Pirani, “The Russo-Ukraine gas dispute 2009”, in: *Russian analytical digest*, No.53, (January, 2009).

86 Ibid.74

87 Ibid.74

Indeed, the planned development of which has a capacity of 63 bcm and would carry the gas through Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Greece, Austria and Italy, would additionally reduce Ukrainian competitiveness and trade capacities. Hence, in spite of the effective success of the Russian government in dissuading Ukraine to continue its pro western policy, Russia has successfully accomplished its aim to strengthen its influence over the EU countries and cause a substantial damage to Ukraine's economy.



Picture 1: The map illustrates how Ukraine can be excluded from the gas transit by the construction of the North and the South Streams (dark blue)

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Moreover, in the attempt to impenetrably connect the Ukraine GTS to Gazprom and reduce any interference from the outside, President Putin has offered several times the possibility to merge Naftogaz and Gazprom. The Russian party showed its willingness to let Ukraine extract gas on the Russian territory on the proviso that Naftogaz would establish a joint venture with the Russian company. In addition, Gazprom expressed its readiness to provide for a modernisation of the Ukraine's gas implant. In this regard in September 2010, the Russian-Ukrainian Joint Venture, International Consortium for Management and Development of Ukraine's Gas Transportation System (GST) (established in 2004, suspended in 2007) resumed its work. At a later stage, the holding

88 Sources: Ibid.76 p.14

company members succeeded in amending Article 7 of the Law of Ukraine to allow foreign states to take part in the gas transportation system management. The Ukrainian Government approved relevant amendments to the legislation, pending submission to Ukrainian Parliament. At the end of the same year, the Ukrainian government and Gazprom signed an agreement for two joint ventures : for the extraction of coal within the Ukraine territory and for the development of the Palas structure on the Black Sea shelf. Nonetheless, both project have never been fully completed, since Gazprom was mainly focused in extending its influence of the Ukrainian market rather than in investments that would have led to a contraction of its exports. Thus, the flexibility of the legal aspect in the gas sector and the increasing role of business interest in the cooperation between the two countries are all relevant causes of the 2012- 2014 weakening of Ukraine's control over its GTS and the increase of Russian access to the principal liquid assets of Ukrainian industry at a low price.⁸⁹

Anyway, the most important pressure instrument in Russia's disposal towards Ukraine is undoubtedly its power to impose gas prices and transit tariffs.



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In 1997-2005, the value of Russian gas for Ukraine was tied with the rate of its transit across Ukraine. From 2006, the Agreement on Regulation of Relations in the Gas Sector among *Gazprom* , *Naftohaz* broke the linkage between the gas price and the transit rate determining it by a “formula” in dependence to the oil and gas oil prices. The contract also provided unreasonably strict sanctions for undertaking contracted volumes and/or

⁸⁹ Ibid. 59

⁹⁰ Sources: Ibid. 59, Ibid. 76, Svetlana Burinistrova, Natalia Zines, “Russia raises gas prices for Ukraine by 80 per cent”, *Reuters Uk*, (4, April, 2014). Retrieved June, 2014.

breach of payment terms. On April 2010, following the Kharkiv Agreement, the basic price in the “formula” specified by the 2009 Contract remained the same \$450, while a discount was provided through cancellation of the gas export duty. This reduction was presented in mass media by the Russian and Ukrainian leadership as Russian investment of \$40 billion in the Ukrainian economy over the next 10 years. However, such statement was intended only to calm down the public opinion in Ukraine. In reality, Ukraine got no preferences and benefits. Indeed, the discount prices for Ukraine entirely met the level of Russian gas prices for other European countries, for which, no discount is provided. Furthermore, Russian Government, in case of problems with Ukraine’s fulfilment of the 2010 Kharkiv Agreement, kept open the possibility to return to the prices established before the 2009 contract. Therefore, agreement envisaged the risk for Ukraine not only to return to discriminatory conditions of Russian gas purchase, but also to repay the amounts of discounts obtained for consumed gas.⁹¹

Exploiting such conditions, Russia has used gas prices to punish or reward Ukraine for its political behaviour. As the graph highlights, there is a connection between the gas prices applied by Russia and Ukraine shift towards or backwards the West. In 2009, in coincidence with the negotiations of the DCFTA and the MAP gas prices started to drastically increase, conversely after the Kharkiv Agreement, which extended the lease for the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sebastopol until 2042, such prices, at least apparently, decreased. From 2011 onwards, in concomitance with the progression of the dialogue between Ukraine and the EU prices started to rise again and as previously stated, Russia was willing to grant Ukraine concession only at the price of Naftogaz's sale and of Ukraine's joint in the SES. Finally, just before and during the current Ukraine's crisis Russia used a mix of trade sanctions and promises. While the gas prices were skyrocketing, Russia offered Kiev the foresaid \$15 billion bail out. In the past few days gas prices reached \$485,5 for bcm with an increase of the 80% compared to the pre-crisis levels.⁹² Now that the relations between Kiev and Moscow could not be any tenuous, now that Ukraine has already signed the Association Agreement with the EU back in March and is about to sign the DCFTA on June 27th,⁹³ Gazprom is once again

91 Ibid. 76

92 Ibid. 89

93 Isaac Web, *Economic side of Ukraine : Association Agreement set to be signed on June 27*, Kyiv Post, (16, June, 2014). Retrieved June, 2014.

threatening Ukraine to cut of gas supplies closing in on Naftogaz.⁹⁴

4. Military intervention

In last instance, the third and last dimension of Russia – Ukraine relations, connected to the use of military force, perfectly illustrates the balance of power between the two countries. Russia has played a key role in the recent Ukraine's Revolution and its intervention is still crucial in shaping the future arrangement of such crisis. The nature of Russian military intervention in Ukraine stemmed from Moscow perception of a large scale power struggle with the West as well as its classical realist approach to traditional components of power, including security, balance of power and geopolitical advantage. In this regard, from its point of view, Russia is playing with the West as well as with Western Ukraine a zero sum geopolitical game. What is at the stake for Moscow is continuing its longstanding domination of a strategic area and to preserve its regional and international prestige, because losing control over the entire Ukraine would mean sending a message of vulnerability to both friends and enemies of Russia. Thus, the rapid transition to the military phase in facing Ukraine's situation has led Moscow to the violation of international law and of sovereign rights of countries, to the underestimation of role of the UN in settling international disputes and to the recourse to force in international relations. Such hard approach has demonstrated that Russian leaders believe that their country's security, superior position and geopolitical advantages especially in the nearest abroad, are not open to any deal. As a result, they have shown their preparedness to resort to force without hesitation in the face of any threat to these factors.⁹⁵

Henceforth, in order to fully grasp the logic that stands behind Russian military intervention in Ukraine it is fundamental to retrace the main events that have brought the Ukraine Crisis and to the annexation of Crimea. Back in November, Yanukovich's decision not to sign the Association Agreement caused large protests all over the country and especially in Kiev. The President not only gave in to Moscow 's pressures

94 "Ukraine Crisis: Russia halts gas supplies to Kiev", *BBC News Europe*, (16, June, 2014). Retrieved June, 2014

95 Noori Alireza, *Geopolitical Conflict a zero-sum game of Russia and Ukraine*, Iran Analysis, (March, 2014). Available: <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Geopolitical-Conflict-and-Zero-Sum-Game-of-Russia-and-West-in-Ukraine.htm>.

but also chose to tie the nation closer to Russia by accepting its foresaid \$15 billion bailout package. By the end of January the Euromaidan dissent turned from a peaceful political turmoil to a violent riot. The Ukraine Parliament, allegedly pushed by the Russian establishment, passed a restrictive anti protest law aimed to crush the rallies. It has emerged that the police intervention on Euromaidan protesters took place just after that \$2 billion from Russia was transferred into the Ukrainian government bank account.⁹⁶ By mid February clashes erupted and Kiev saw one of its most terrible days in terms of violence: more than 25,000 protesters were circled in Independence Square and at least 88 people died in 48 hours time. Subsequently, Yanukovich government was completely torn apart, the parliament votes removed the President from power, protesters took control of the state's administration buildings and set new elections for May 25th. This protest endemically spread to almost the whole country, capturing the attention of the global public opinion.

In light of these events, Russia could not remain neutral. The risk that the revolutionary wave could have shifted the whole Ukraine towards the West led the Kremlin to safeguard its major interest which are placed in the Crimean peninsula. Indeed, Crimea is the site of the largest Russian naval base which hosts over 15,000 members of the Russian military force, stationed in the Port of Sevastopol, several natural gas deposits and a large population composed by ethnic Russians. Invoking the responsibility to protect the Russian minority pending the normalization of the socio-political situation in that country, between the 26th and the 28th of February, Putin displaced in Crimea over 6000 troops with their armaments arrived either by air via the Russian military airport near Simferopol, or by sea through the port of Sevastopol and the ferry across the Strait of Kerch, on top of this of military helicopters were arrayed throughout the Crimean airspace. Then, the situation escalated, Russian military corps took control over the Crimean most strategic facilities, such as the airport of Simferopol, road junctions and fords, and also the telecommunications, highways and the airspace up above the region were completely blocked. Russian took also possession of part of the infrastructure and equipment of the Ukrainian army and security structures such as the military field in

⁹⁶ Mark Mackinnon, "How Putin's Sochi dream was shattered by Ukraine's nightmare", *The Globe Mail*, (22, February, 2014). Available: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/how-putins-dream-of-sochi-was-shattered-by-the-nightmare-of-ukraine/article17042500/> Retrieved: June, 2014.

Kirovskoye and the reserve field in Jankoy.⁹⁷ This entire operation met the criteria of a military invasion, opposing a contingent of over 25,000 soldiers to the 14,600 Ukrainian forces present in Crimea. The military action coincided with the build-up of Russian army units in districts bordering on Ukraine's territory, and the retention on standby of the Land Forces units assembled after 26th February for exercises in the Russian Western Military District. Simultaneously, on March 1st Putin obtained from the Federation Council the authorisation to use armed force in Crimea, which can be seen a legal justification ex post justification to its invasion of Ukraine. While Kiev was preparing the mobilisation of the Armed Forces, and the former prime minister Yatseniuk was declaring: "Ukraine will never give up Crimea to anyone,"⁹⁸ Russia smoothly managed to take apart the residual Ukrainian pockets of resistance.

Meanwhile, Russia started a media campaign affirming that it would have supported Crimea if the region had been voted to leave Ukraine. In this direction, on March 6th the Crimean Parliament voted to hold a referendum to join Russia, which was held ten days after. Even if the referendum was held with the opposition of Kiev and strictly criticized by most of Western public opinion, since the 96.8% of the voters decided for the secession, few days later Vladimir Putin signed a bill to officially absorb Crimea within the Russian Federation. Albeit the clashes continued for a longer period of time, at the end of the same month, Ukrainian troops began to withdraw from the peninsula, that was formally left under the Russian jurisdiction.⁹⁹

97 Maren Menkiszak, "Russia's strategy in the Ukrainian crisis", (5, March, 2014). Available: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-05/russias-strategy-ukrainian-crisis> Retrieved: June, 2014.

98 "PM Yatseniuk says Ukraine will never give up on Crimea", *Reuters*, (3, March, 2014). Available: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/idusl6n0m01o420140303>. Retrieved: June, 2014.

99 Luke Harding, "Crimea applies to be part of the Russian Federation after vote to leave Ukraine", *The Guardian*, (17, March, 2014). Retrieved: June, 2014.



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On May 7th, Vladimir Putin declared that the Russian troops were about to withdraw to their previous location. Nevertheless, NATO officials expressed their skepticism about the effective withdrawal of the military forces. Finally, last week Ukrainian officials individuated the presence of three non identified tanks within the Ukrainian territory and accused the Russian establishment to have illegally provided them to the pro-Russian minority. NATO has published satellite pictures which portray ten tanks not so far from Rostov base,.Unmarked tanks were also spotted at the other side of the border.¹⁰⁴

5. A brief summary of the previous analysis

After having examined the pivotal axes through which Russia exerts its influence over Ukraine, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Whether or not Russia successfully achieved its goal to prevent Ukraine from tiding close to the Western institutions, it has effectively succeeded in making at least this approach very difficult and in safeguarding its strategic interests. From the political scrutiny, it has emerged that: Russia views as a priority the protection of national interest (in this case its influence over Ukraine), it has shown an high degree of diffidence towards the other actors in the IR, adopting the logic

103 Ibid. 99

104 “NATO releases imagery: Raises questions on Russia's role in provoking tanks to Ukraine”, SHAPE, Belgium: NATO Allied Command Operations. (14,June,2014). Retrieved: June, 2014.

of self help and it has constantly resorted to media and ideological levers to affect Ukraine's decisions. The economic inquiry has shown the preeminence of the use of the raw material sector to politically threaten Ukraine and to affirm its regional and international supremacy. Finally, the last segment has underlined the importance that Moscow attributes to its extended security issues and its high disposition to restore to armed force as a demonstration of its power. Despite some few complementary aspects that can be better explained with other sub-theories of realism, such as the importance of the economic sector as a domestic factor and the limiting role of structural variables, it is possible to conclude that the overall Russian strategy towards Ukraine mostly reflects the principles of classical realism.

Conclusion

Throughout the preceding chapters I have argued that the best method to fully understand Russian Federation's FP is analysing it through the lens of the realist theory of the IR. Specifically, the classical realist sub-theory represents a good explanatory framework for Russian FP and it can be successfully applied to the empirical case of the bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine. I reached this conclusion after having systematically evaluated different factors.

First of all, I reviewed the most important historical and contemporary scholarship related to realism to grasp the core of the paradigm and define its main principles. Consequently, I deeply investigated the main streams of thought within the paradigm in order to capture the different nuances of its sub-theories and increase the analysis instruments in my disposal.

Second of all, I use the theoretical basis built up in the prior chapter, to draw some expectations on state's behaviour (following the classical realist approach) and I applied this model to some concrete cases of the Russian Federation's conduct in the IR. Throughout the chapter I highlighted that Russia has often looked back to classical realistic fundamentals of the state's interests, self-help policy and the primacy of the state's security. Notwithstanding, some few complementary aspects can be better explained with other sub-theories of realism, such as the importance of the economic sector as a domestic factor and the limiting role of structural variables.

Lastly, in pursuance of a corroboration I examined the bilateral relations between Moscow and Kiev in approximately the last fifteen years. The scrutiny has emphasized three main dimensions of the Russian interference in Ukraine's life, namely: the political influence, the economic leverage and the military intervention.

From this analysis it is possible to individuate the guidelines of the Russian Federation's FP. Indeed, the Russian leaders's design is to restore Russia's power at the international level, pursuing a power policy. This policy involves the enhancement of Russia's economic power, the preservation of its regional hegemony and the improvement of its

militarily capacities. In this regard, Russia has been craftily exploiting its role in the IR to reach its goal. It has selectively used its relevance within some international organisations to benefit from several decisions. At the same time it has shown its diffidence towards all the external entities that have somehow interfered in its operate, it has exploited its political and economic leading position to threaten even its alleged allies and it resorted to force to preserve its strategic interests. In other terms, it is possible to portrait Russia as a classical realist actor in the field of the IR.

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