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RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND EUROPEAN SECURITY
FROM GORBACHEV TO PUTIN (1985-2001)

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Introduction

I chose to devote my Master's thesis to the analysis of Russian foreign policy from Gorbachev's perestroika to the election of Putin after I followed a course on Russian foreign policy strategy during an exchange in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Throughout this course, I was able in fact to appreciate the radical shift in Moscow's foreign policy stance throughout the 1990s, that is from the liberal and pro-Western conception of national interests proposed by Yeltsin and Kozyrev to the more assertive and traditional approach to foreign policy advocated at first by Primakov and subsequently by Putin. In particular, what impressed me was that such a major turn in Russia's foreign policy and in its relations with Western countries, which arguably influences the country's conduct in international affairs up to the present days, was justified by the Russian foreign establishment largely as an answer to the Western decision to enlarge NATO in Central Europe irrespective of Moscow's opinion, a move that was presented in the Russian mainstream political environment as betrayal of previous commitments for partnership and an outright denial of the country's status and legitimate concerns in European security issues¹.

However, understanding the evolution of Russian foreign policy only as a reaction to Western international activity is quite problematic from an historiographical perspective. First of all, this approach overlooks the impact on foreign policy change of domestic dynamics, such as the failed liberal reforms of the early 1990s which dramatically weakened the appeal of the Western model both among the Russian elite and the population. Secondly, an analysis of foreign policy change centered on the role of external influences, while partially explaining the failure of Russia's pro-Western approach after the collapse of the Soviet Union, may not provide with a framework for the explanation of other periods in Russian foreign policy. For example, such an approach hampers the comprehension of the Putin's decision to engage the United States after 9/11, which was taken a few years after the Kosovo War - the most serious crisis in the relations between Washington and Moscow since the fall of the Iron Curtain – but proved largely successful both for Russia and the West. Therefore, this thesis will try to give a comprehensive account on the main factors that influenced the evolution of Russia's foreign policy from 1985 to 2001, considering both the influence of Moscow's interaction in the international arena and the weight of domestic dynamics and politics.

I chose this particular timeframe (1985-2001) because it was marked by dramatic political, economic and social transformations that had an impact on the very essence of Russian self-consciousness and self-identity, and upon common beliefs in the country's role and place in the world. As the works of

1 Notably, this was argued by Yevgeny Primakov after his appointment as Foreign Minister in 1996. See: Yevgeny M. Primakov, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya nakanune 21 veka: problemy i perspektivy* (International Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century: Problems and Prospects), *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* (International Affairs), 1996, n. 10.

many scholars point out, the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI is a particular fitting period to explore the issue of change and continuity in Russia's foreign policy. I decided to devote the first chapter of the thesis to Gorbachev's foreign policy because of two reasons. Firstly, this gave me the opportunity to draw some comparisons between the process of foreign policymaking in the USSR and the one in the Russian Federation, and therefore to highlight patterns of change and continuity in the institutional arrangement concerning Moscow's international conduct. Secondly, the analysis of the conduction of Soviet foreign policy in its last years encouraged me to draw a link between Gorbachev's new thinking and the following liberal internationalist course: indeed, I argue that the conception of relations with the West proposed and put in place by Gorbachev in his international activity was one of the critical elements that favored the affirmation of a pro-Western foreign policy course in Moscow after 1991. A similar connection will be drawn also between the following steps in the evolution of Russian foreign policy in order to verify the presence of a learning curve in the process of determination of national interests and the country's international conduct. Nonetheless, the thesis will also try to focus on some elements of continuity in Russian foreign policy and security thinking which relate to the country's historical experience and to its traditional aspiration of great power status in the international arena. The sphere of European security, which in the analyzed period entailed relations with NATO, policy toward Central and Eastern European countries and the approach to peacekeeping in the Balkans, will therefore be given significant attention in light of its overall significance for the formulation of Russian international conduct and national security conception. The thesis will not deal with other areas affected by Moscow's foreign policy activity (the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Far East), but will sporadically mention other elements not directly tied with European security but useful to give a full account of single foreign policy courses.

In the literature, it is possible to notice two different approaches to the study of Russian foreign policy. The first is the chronological one, as exposed by Andrey Tsygankov's *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, which divides Russian foreign policy in four recognizable courses and for every course analyzes the interplay of domestic and international factors which led to their affirmation, the conception of national interest, the implementation of concrete policies, the domestic reception and the overall impact of every course on a variety of areas (security, welfare, independence, national identity). The second approach is a more thematic one, presented in Bobo Lo's *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking* or Dmitri Trenin's *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*. These studies prefer to focus on single issues (the role of borders, the sectionalization of foreign policy in the 1990s) and check their impact over a whole historical period. This thesis will try to balance these two approaches by following the usual chronological sequence with a few diversions in every chapter devoted to single aspects who play a critical role in the definition of Russia's foreign policy. My

approach to the issues dealt with in this thesis will take into consideration the major scholarly studies devoted to the analysis of the sources of Russian foreign policy. Aside from these, the historical analysis will also profit from the access to memoirs, studies, articles and unpublished archival sources that I retrieved during the research period conducted in Moscow in Spring 2015.

Note on Transliteration of Russian

Throughout this thesis I have generally adhered to the Library of Congress standard for the transliteration of Russian. I have used ‘j’ to denote ‘й’, ‘yu’ to denote ‘ю’, ‘ya’ to denote ‘я’, ‘ye’ to denote the pronunciation of the letter ‘е’ when at the beginning of a word. I did not distinguish between ‘e’ and ‘ë’. In the case of some well-known politicians, I have used the spelling commonly found in Western media (Yeltsin, Gaidar, Lebed) while retaining the correct transliteration (El’tsin) for publications in Russian. I followed the same rule for Russian personal names (Andrey, Yury, Nikolay). Russian words are generally written in italic (ex.: *demokratizatsiya*) but not when they are commonly used in English (ex.: perestroika, intelligentsia).

List of Abbreviations

ABM = Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
CDU = Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich Demokratische Union*)
CFE = Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CIS = Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU = Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE = Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DPR = Democratic Party of Russia (*Democraticheskaya Partiya Rossii*)
FRG = Federal Republic of Germany
FRY = Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
FSB = Federal Security Service (*Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti*)
GDP = Gross Domestic Product
GDR = German Democratic Republic
GNP = Gross National Product
IMF = International Monetary Fund
INF = Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
KGB = Committee on State Security (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoj Bezopasnosti*)
KPRF = Communist Party of the Russian Federation (*Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossijskoj Federatsii*)
LDPR = Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (*Liberal'no Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii*)
MFA = Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NACC = North Atlantic Cooperation Council
PfP = Partnership for Peace
PJC = Permanent Joint Council
SACEUR = Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SED = Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*)
SEV = Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (*Sovet Ekonomicheskoy Vzaimopomoshchi*)
SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)
START = Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
SVR = Foreign Intelligence Service (*Sluzhba Vneshnej Razvedki*)
WTO = World Trade Organization

1st Chapter

A new thinking for the Soviet Union and the world

If liberalization is carried too far or conducted carelessly, then disorder will occur, but the opposite point is just as important to make. The rising level of the education of the population, the need to integrate the Soviet economy into the world economy, and the impending communications revolution mean that a failure to liberalize may also lead to disorder. The ability of Soviet leaders to follow a correct line between these opposing imperatives will determine the degree of success for the Soviet system in the future.

(Jerry Hough²)

Gorbachev and the domestic stagnation

After the death of Konstantin Chernenko, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was to select its next General Secretary. Inside the Party there was a widespread consensus that the immobility that had characterized the Brezhnev era (1966-1982) could not go on. Previous attempts by Andropov and Chernenko to introduce some minor and partial reforms between 1982 and 1984 had failed and had sparked a further loss of confidence in the Soviet nomenklatura. Indeed, the presence of a negative consensus inside the Politburo³ on the country's status was one of the factors leading to the hasty decision to elect by secret vote Mikhail Gorbachev as the next leader of the Soviet Union. Another factor leading to his election was the marginalization inside the Politburo of the status-quo oriented faction, at first weakened by the death in December 1984 of its leader, the Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, and ultimately disoriented by the decision of Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko to support a young reformer like Gorbachev⁴. In the end, his young age, his energy and the lack of more preferable alternatives played a major role in his nomination. Desperately looking for “a messiah, a leader, a redeemer, an innovator that would save the system from imminent collapse”⁵, the Party apparently did not give too much attention to the kind of innovations that Gorbachev would propose. The ambiguity that surrounded him was not uncommon for a figure emerged during the Brezhnev era, when conformism and ‘nicodemism’ were widely spread among Soviet nomenklatura⁶.

2 Jerry Hough, “Evolution in the Soviet Political System”, p.6, in *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, vol.2, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center (Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers, 1984), p.147.

3 The Political Office, or Politburo, was the supreme policy-making body inside the CPSU Central Committee and was headed by the General Secretary.

4 Anatoly F. Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no: Posol v Vashingtone pri shesti presidentakh SSSR, 1962-1986* (Strictly Confidential: The Ambassador in Washington through six US Presidents, 1962-1986), Moscow: Avtor, 1996, p.471.

5 Andrea Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado: Storia dell'Unione Sovietica 1945-1991* (The USSR from triumph to decay 1945-1991), Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2008, p.508.

6 A content analysis of speeches and articles made by Gorbachev between 1976 and 1981 showed that the future General Secretary did not stand out either as a reformer nor as a status-quo oriented *apparatchik*. George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 47.

His ties with radical reformist academics and journalists were well known⁷, but Gorbachev was nonetheless a politician that had followed the full *cursus honorum* inside the Party: in particular, the fact that his rise from Stavropol' had been sponsored by former KGB head Yury Andropov and by chief Party ideologue Mikhail Suslov discouraged any speculation on future radical reforms.

In the first phase of his activity as General Secretary, Gorbachev used this ambiguity at its advantage. Exploiting his remarkable rhetorical skills and political talent, he introduced in his speeches and articles “an umbrella of concepts and ideas [perestroika, *glasnost*, *demokratizatsiya*, the ‘human factor’] under which representatives of all three alternatives to Brezhnevism could huddle: puritans (anti-corruption fighters), technocrats (rationalizers of the planned economy), and political reformists”⁸. This eclecticism, reflected also by the choice of close collaborators coming from various Party factions (Ryzhkov, Yakovlev and Ligachev⁹), was a signal at once of his authority building efforts inside the Party and of the unclear inspiration of the reformist thrust of Gorbachev, who would remain a controversial figure driven by often conflicting ideas and goals until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Growth rates of the Soviet economy, 1985-1991¹⁰

| | <i>Western Estimates (GNP)</i> | <i>Official Soviet Data (NMP)</i> |
|------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1985 | 1.8 | 3.2 |
| 1986 | 4.1 | 2.3 |
| 1987 | 1.3 | 1.6 |
| 1988 | 2.1 | 4.4 |
| 1989 | 1.5 | 2.5 |
| 1990 | -2.4 | -3.9 |
| 1991 | -12.8* | -15* |

(*Estimate excludes Georgia and the Baltic Republics)

7 Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 183.

8 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 49.

9 Nikolay Ivanovich Ryzhkov (1929), Chairman of the Council of Minister between 1985 and January 1991, was a reformist official emerged involved in state economic administration and focused on scientific and technological development. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Yakovlev (1923-2005), head of the Central Committee Propaganda Department, was an intellectual promoting political liberalization and disillusioned with Marxism. Yegor Kuzmich Ligachev (1920) was one of Gorbachev's main allies inside the Party but held conservative and Russian nationalist views, favoring the restoration of the Soviet power without comprehensive reforms.

10 David Kotz, Fred Weir, *Revolution from the Above: The Demise of the Soviet System*, London: Routledge, 1997, p.75.

The sense of decline which spread throughout the country was not unjustified. What haunted the Soviet elite was the bleak macroeconomic situation of the country, marked by declining productivity, systemic burdens and increasing backwardness in several sectors: in fact, the Soviet Union had been mostly untouched by the communication revolution, and in 1984 had to import 55 million tons of wheat, just one million less than the national production for the same year¹¹. Still, the crisis was not as dire as many commentators would later describe it. Despite the unsolved systemic problems that had piled up throughout the decades the USSR did not face real economic crises until 1988-1989. Therefore, while it was clear that something had to be done in order to reverse the lagging competitiveness, there was no widespread consensus nor social demand for radical economic reform in the first years of Gorbachev's rule.

Moreover, any reformist attempt had to face an issue that Andropov had already identified in 1982: the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the Soviet economic system and of coherent policy proposals for its reform¹². This feature had been inherited by the Brezhnev era, when the debate on reforms opened by Kosygin had been halted and circulation of critical data - even among top policy-makers - had been restricted by the KGB. The impact of these practices became clear during the Andropov and Gorbachev era, when reformers revealed their absolute lack of understanding and asked for the support of an academic community that itself had become stuck in an outdated debate¹³. The absence of a comprehensive analysis on the structural problems of the Soviet system decisively influenced the first economic policy adopted by Gorbachev, named *uskorenie* (acceleration). The General Secretary decided to undertake an old-fashioned extensive growth strategy, whose aim was to modernize the Soviet economy and completely bridge the technological gap with Western production¹⁴. However, in order to achieve such an ambitious goal by the end of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (1986-1990), a massive increase in state investment in science and heavy industry (+20%) was needed. In the context of the 1980 Soviet economy - marked by excess in liquidity and shortages in consumer goods – such measures made little sense. In the end, not only did *uskorenie* fail to achieve its goals, but it also triggered dangerous drivers of instability. In other words, the priority given to technology import further reduced the purchase of food and consumer goods, whereas the currency emission and the foreign debt skyrocketed, also as a consequence of a decline in world oil prices¹⁵.

11 Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p. 499.

12 The former head of the KGB admitted in the early 1980s that “there are many urgent problems in the economy. I, of course, have no ready recipes for their solution. But all of us in the party Central Committee are going to find these answers”. Hough, “Evolution in the Soviet Political System”, p. 130.

13 As the reformer Aleksandr Yakovlev would later admit: “We all lacked the courage and the competences to honestly assess the social processes under way... We tricked ourselves in believing that freedom would save Soviet socialism”. Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.544.

14 John L. H. Keep, *Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union 1945-1991*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 339.

15 The strain on finances was not officially revealed at the time, but the growth of Soviet deficit was identified by the CIA, who estimated in 1988 a growth in gross sovereign external debt from \$22.8 to \$38.2 billion just over three

By destabilizing the monetary system, raising hidden inflation and hitting the commodity market, *uskorenje* paved the way for the following economic crises that destabilized the legitimacy of Gorbachev as well as his reforms.

The issue of economic reform had important foreign policy implications because of the oversized defense budget, which during Brezhnev era grew disproportionately and amounted at 40% of state budget and 20% of Soviet GNP in 1985¹⁶. These data, shown to Gorbachev just after his appointment and not available to the majority of the nomenklatura, exceeded by far the common perception inside the party and called for a revision of Moscow's foreign policy strategy. Gorbachev chose to undertake a non-confrontational course in his foreign policy, which would become famous under the label of new thinking (*novoe myshlenie*).

Contents and origins of new thinking

New thinking was a foreign policy course that revolutionized the stance of the Soviet Union in the international arena and had a huge impact on global politics as a whole. It was deeply influenced by the intellectual and political evolution of Gorbachev, and in particular by his attempt to reshape communism with democratic principles. The political rationale for this radical turn was, as we mentioned earlier, the priority given by Gorbachev to the decrease in defense budget as a means to free resources for the domestic economy, which implied stopping the arms race and cutting in Soviet military presence abroad. In his own words:

In my discussions with Americans and people from other Western countries, I always ask bluntly if they want the Soviet Union to have a chance to direct more resources to its economic and social development through cuts in its military spending.¹⁷

The importance given by Gorbachev to the new foreign policy course was signaled by his initial effort to marginalize possible obstacles inside the foreign policymaking structure. The first sign of change came with the substitution of Gromyko, who had been Foreign Minister since 1957. The decision was expected and consensual, since the Minister was 76 and was to be moved to the less stressful position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet without losing its seat in the Politburo. However, when Gromyko met the General Secretary to discuss about his successor, Gorbachev surprised him by refusing to consider his suggestions (diplomats and experts like Kornienko, Dobrynin and

years. Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945*, London: Longman, 2003, p. 192.

16 Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.521.

17 Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987, p.129.

Chervonenko) and by proposing Eduard Shevardnadze¹⁸, who was very close to him but had no experience in diplomacy and in Moscow politics¹⁹. Gorbachev's aim to personally manage the country's foreign policy course without major opposition was stressed even more by the following appointments: Aleksandr Yakovlev to the Politburo, Vadim Medvedev as head of the Socialist Countries Department in the Central Committee with Georgy Shakhnazarov as first deputy, and thirdly Anatoly Chernyaev as foreign policy advisor²⁰.

Still, the easiness of this radical foreign policy change tells a lot about the foreign policymaking process inside the Soviet Union, which was concentrated into just two bodies: the CPSU Central Committee and the MFA. This structure reflected the duality of the Soviet system inspired by Leninism, which indicated that the activity of governmental bodies always had to be checked by Party officials. The "elitist and secretive"²¹ character of Soviet policymaking process was especially present in matters of foreign policy and security, and this feature was only exacerbated by Gorbachev, who in his years of activity would often take decisions without consulting the Politburo and sometimes even Shevardnadze. Therefore, it is not difficult to see how such a radically innovative foreign policy strategy managed to become the official foreign policy course of the Soviet Union. Apart from new appointments, Gorbachev was also helped in this task by the complete disappearance of the 'Old Guard' from the Politburo between 1982 and 1987²².

The new thinking was presented for the first time during the XXVII CPSU Congress (February-March 1986), when Gorbachev also introduced the idea of indivisible security (*nedelimaya bezopasnost'*). The latter was partially inspired by the ideas of the XXIV Congress (1971) that officially sanctioned the détente period and implied the rejection of the inevitable clash between capitalist and socialist countries. The General Secretary was very critical of the classical Soviet view on imperialism and

¹⁸ Eduard Amvrosievich Shevardnadze (1928-2014) was the *de facto* leader of Soviet Georgia between 1972 and 1985. Serving as the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, he developed a strong relationship with Gorbachev when the future General Secretary was the head of the CPSU Stavropol Regional Committee. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Shevardnadze became President of Georgia between 1992 and 2003.

¹⁹ Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), p. 479.

²⁰ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 213.

²¹ The definition was used by Adam Ulam, who justified it on the basis that the Central Committee Plenum had become after Khrushchev "a forum where decisions of the top leadership are announced and perhaps explained in greater detail than they are to the public at large, but not debated" and the Central Committee International Office was only involved in relations with foreign communist and socialist parties. The Politburo, that is the Central Committee Political Office, was the real center of "a system where policy options and moves are freely discussed by and fully known only to some 25 people, and the ultimate decisions are made by an even smaller group – the 13 or 15 full members of Politburo". Adam B. Ulam, "Anatomy of Policymaking", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol.6, n.2 (1983), p.71-73.

²² In these years, all major Politburo members either died (Brezhnev, Andropov, Ustinov, Tikhonov, Suslov, etc.) or were marginalized (Gromyko), allowing for a generational change that brought to power much younger policymakers who, as was the case for Gorbachev, had been born 20 years after them and had their defining formation in the post-Stalinist period. For more on the issue of generational differences in the Soviet Union: Hough, *Evolution in the Soviet Political System*, pp. 127-147; Vladislav M. Zubok, "Unwrapping an enigma: Soviet elites, Gorbachev and the end of the Cold War", chap.9, in *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations*, edited by Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, New York: Frank Cass, 2005, pp. 137-164.

argued that “capitalism had developed domestic democratic mechanisms for resisting expansion and war and was therefore self-containing”²³. Such an approach allowed him to put forward a different notion of military sufficiency and to call for a reevaluation of the defense budget. The main focus would therefore be placed on avoiding a possible nuclear confrontation and stopping the military competition with the West. Emphasis was also given to the process of rebuilding relations with possible security and economic partners, such as NATO and China. However, abandoning the struggle against capitalist countries and normalizing relations with the West were not the only innovative elements in Moscow’s foreign policy. Indeed, Gorbachev was also aimed at including universal human rights and principles of international law in the political and legal practice in the USSR²⁴.

Gorbachev’s new thinking introduced major innovations in the Soviet foreign policy and security thinking, which has led to a debate among officials and scholars about the underlying factors leading Gorbachev to this step. In the rich scholarly debate on the origins of new thinking, some authors have underlined the role of material constraints in the formation of this course²⁵, while others have highlighted the key role that ideas and intellectual entrepreneurship played²⁶. In this regard, one should notice that the presence of strong ideational sources for new thinking does not implicate *per se* that reducing material possibilities were not a factor in Moscow’s foreign policy under Gorbachev. As a matter of fact, many military officials and Party members were certainly concerned by the Soviet inability to answer to the new arms race threatened by Reagan, and initially supported Gorbachev’s course as a necessary tactical adjustment. However, the role played by ideas and moral arguments in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev cannot be underestimated, as this course was highly influenced by the intellectual evolution of the country’s leader.

At the core of new thinking lay a realization on the increasing interdependence between states, whose position in the international arena was compared by the General Secretary to the one of “mountaineers on a slope, who can either get to the top or fall all together”²⁷. Gorbachev often presented global challenges (nuclear proliferation, militarization of international relations, environment protection,

23 Andrey P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 2nd edition, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, p. 37.

24 Aleksey D. Bogaturov, *Raspad yaltinsko-potsdamskogo poryadka* (Fall of the Yalta-Potsdam Order), vol.3, chap.11, in *Sistemnaya istoriya mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenij 1918-2003* (Systemic history of international relations 1918-2003), vol.3, curated by Aleksey D. Bogaturov et al., Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 2003, p.461-462.

25 For example, Brooks and Wohlforth argue that globalization played a significant role in limiting material capabilities of Soviet isolated economy and thus pushed Gorbachev toward a strategy of unilateral concessions towards the West. Stephen G. Brooks, William C. Wohlforth, “Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2000), pp. 5-53.

26 On the other hand, English criticizes Brook's and Wohlforth's incapacity to provide evidence that globalization was understood in these terms by Soviet leadership and that there was a broad agreement on strategic retreat as a remedy. Robert D. English, “Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End: A Reply to Brooks and Wohlforth”, *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2002), pp. 70-92. See also: Mark Kramer, “Ideology and the Cold War”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No.4 (1999), pp. 539-576.

27 Mikhail S. Gorbachev, ‘O druzhbe mezhdu Chekoslovakiej i Sovetskim Soyuzom’ (Speech on the Friendship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union), *Pravda*, 11/4/1987.

poverty) as a zero-sum game, whose possible dramatic outcome imposed “political leaders to elevate from a narrow conception of state interests and to embrace the dramatic character of the contemporary situation”²⁸. Understanding this course solely as a tactical rapprochement with Western countries aimed at scoring material gains is thus misleading. At its highest aspiration, expressed in Gorbachev’s speech at the United Nations in December 1988, the new thinking was a philosophy of humanistic universalism grounded on social democratic values whose goal was to reshape “international politics on moral and ethical norms common to all humankind”²⁹ and to create a new world order of states subordinating their external conduct to international law. In his own words:

The de-ideologization of interstate relations is something demanded by the new reality. [...] We are not going to shut ourselves up within the range of our values [...] for it would mean renouncing such a powerful source of development like sharing all the original things created independently by each nation. [...] We must search jointly for a way to achieve the supremacy of the common human idea over the countless multiplicity of centrifugal forces³⁰.

Moral arguments formed an important element of Gorbachev’s approach to security issues: he conceived nuclear weapons as “an absolute evil”³¹, promoted the disappearance of military alliances in Europe and suggested that permanent members of the UN Security Council should refrain from using military power, since peacekeeping would be handled completely by the United Nations. This conception of security was not put forward just to accommodate relations with the Transatlantic community: on the contrary, it directly challenged the realist and Hobbesian approach to international relations of Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl and Margaret Thatcher, which he compared to the “Cold war thinking of the 40’s and the 50’s”³².

The origin of the concepts adopted by Gorbachev is also controversial, and many scholars devoted their research to single out the historical and cultural roots of new thinking³³. Some ideas had been developed by Soviet scientists and experts through their work in “transnational networks of arms

28 Gorbachev, ‘O druzhbe’ (Speech on Friendship).

29 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p.141.

30 Quote from Gorbachev’s speech at the United Nations (7/12/1988), in Anatoly S. Chernyaev et al., *Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni, Vneshnyaya politika perestroiki: dokumentalnie svidetel’sstva* (Answering to the Call of an Era, the Foreign Policy of Perestroika: Documental proofs), chap.1, curated by Anatoly S. Chernyaev, Yury A. Krasin, Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2010, p. 101.

31 Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym: po dnevnikovym zapisyam* (Six years with Gorbachev: Diary Annotations), Moscow: Progress, 1993, pp. 137-139.

32 Quote from a Gorbachev’s meeting with Shevardnadze, Dobrynin, Chernyaev, Yakovlev and Medvedev (1/4/1987), in Chernyaev et al., *Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni* (Answering to the Call of an Era), p. 65.

33 For more details, see: Matthew Evangelista, “Sources of Moderation in Soviet Security Policy”, in *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War (Vol.2)*, edited by Philip E. Tetlock et al., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.254-354; Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War”, *International Organization*, Vol.48, No.2 (1994), pp. 185-214.

controllers, natural scientists, peace researchers and left-of-center parties in Europe³⁴. Moreover, Gorbachev himself admitted that he was inspired by the economic and foreign policy activities of European social-democrats, for instance in Spain, Germany and Scandinavian countries³⁵.

However, despite the importance of external sources of inspiration, this foreign policy course was fully entrenched in the post-1953 Soviet historical experience. First of all, the rejection of the inevitable conflict between capitalism and socialism was not a new element in Soviet foreign policy, since for many within-system dissidents “Khrushchev de-Stalinization had been a formative experience [...], just as it was for Gorbachev³⁶. Secondly, Soviet reformers could also relate culturally to the works of democratic scholars and scientists like Sakharov, who stressed the importance of global challenges (overpopulation, pollution and human rights) over the ideological opposition to capitalism. Moreover, the reformist program advocated by Gorbachev also responded to the demands of the new Soviet middle class, a group that had increased its demographic weight in the post-Stalinist USSR. These urbanized, highly educated and qualified specialists often had more chance to travel abroad and to compare Soviet welfare with foreign countries. Hence, they gradually adopted an approach opposed to one of the nomenklatura and the military, favoring economic freedom, political openness and technological modernization³⁷. Finally, Gorbachev’s opposition to the use of violence to suppress domestic and foreign uprisings, which paved the way for the fall of the socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, was clearly grounded on the memory of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. This event deeply touched Gorbachev (also because of his personal ties with one of the leaders of the Prague Spring, Zdenek Mlynar) and served as “a major impulse to [his] critical thinking³⁸. The hesitant approach toward the use of violence was one of the key important elements of Gorbachev’s thinking and further proves that, in the opinion of Soviet reformers, the distinction between old and new thinking was based on moral grounds. As Shevardnadze argued in 1990:

34 For example, Andrey Kokoshkin, deputy director of the Institute for the Study of U.S.A. And Canada (ISKAN) and an influential theorist of “non-offensive defense”, participated in the Pugwash working group on conventional forces established in 1984, where he was exposed to the ideas on “alternative defense” of Anders Boserup, a Danish physicist and sociologist, and other Western European peace researchers”. Deborah W. Larson, Aleksey Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness: the New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy”, *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No.1 (2003), p.85-86.

35 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p.196, 206-207.

36 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 29.

37 See: Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

38 English, *Russia and the Idea of West*, p.181.

If we used force, it would be the end of perestroika. We would have failed... We wouldn't be better than our predecessors.³⁹

As argued by Zubok, Gorbachev's foreign policy was thus in many ways the product of long-term social and political processes inside the Soviet system, such as the increasing dependence of the elites on Western countries as source of technology and international prestige and the appearance of a small group inside the Soviet elite (the 1960s generation, or *shestidesyatniki*) inspired by the de-Stalinization era and longing for a peaceful evolution of the Soviet regime into a modern reformist technocracy⁴⁰.

However, despite the importance of contacts with the West as a source of inspiration, the new thinking still reflected many common features with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. It was in fact "highly moralistic, missionary, and self-righteous in presenting the Soviet Union as a beacon for world public opinion"⁴¹. In line with traditional Soviet optimism and Leninist ontology, it presented a radiant future in the international system whose potential could be realized only through consciousness-raising. This was the mission of the Soviet leadership, that, provided with special insight into the necessities imposed by history, was ready to mobilize global forces in order to discredit the remnants of old thinking in all countries⁴². The stress on moral authority over material capabilities theoretically would allow the Soviet Union to preserve its position both as superpower in relation to the United States and as the leading country among socialist states: in the words of Benvenuti and Pons, it was an attempt "to shift the basis of Soviet universalism on to new grounds"⁴³. The evident contradiction between the need to focus on domestic reforms and the desire to preserve the Soviet international status on moral grounds can be understood only as the reflection of the ambivalent nature of Gorbachev's reforms, which tried at once to solve domestic problems and to reshape the traditional leading role of the Soviet model for international socialism.

Robbing the imperialists of enemy image

The first phase of Gorbachev's foreign policy was centered around a key issue - the rebuilding of diplomatic contacts with the United States on disarmament, since the chances of success of the new policy depended considerably on the American response to the new Soviet leadership. Although the

39 These words were used by the Soviet Foreign Minister in a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Baker in July 1990, after that *Solidarnosc* won the free elections in Poland. Graziosi A., *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.589.

40 See: Zubok, "Unwrapping an enigma", pp. 137-164.

41 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 73-74.

42 For a more detailed analysis on the continuity between New Thinking and Leninist tradition: Albert A. Cruickshank, Vendulka Kubalkova, *Thinking New About Soviet "New Thinking"*, Berkeley: University of California, 1989.

43 Francesco Benvenuti, Silvio Pons, "The end of Soviet communism: a review", chap. 12, in *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations*, p. 210.

relations between the two superpowers had seriously deteriorated in the previous years, the White House and the Kremlin had agreed in late 1984 to start bilateral talks on the issue of space and nuclear arms: a clear sign that, beyond the harsh rhetoric, both sides understood that achievements could be reached only with a more pragmatic approach. The Reagan administration, still in place after the 1984 electoral victory, was particularly motivated to seek cooperation, aware of the deep concerns inside the American society about the dangers of nuclear escalation. The talks were officially opened in Geneva on March 1985, in parallel with the nomination of the new General Secretary.

Gorbachev understood the importance of this process and undertook several initiatives to show his willingness to come to a compromise and to open a new phase of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In April he announced a unilateral moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles and proposed an international moratorium on all nuclear tests⁴⁴. In July, as a sign of good will he confirmed a unilateral five-month moratorium on such tests, whose extension would depend on the American agreement to adopt it too. This signals were noticed by the Reagan administration, which started to test the waters for a meeting with Gorbachev: thus, the first summit between the American and Soviet leader since the election of Reagan took place in Geneva on the 19th and 20th of November.

Although the parties did not want to reach an immediate agreement and important elements of disagreement were still present between them (especially on the issue of the Strategic Defense Initiative), the outcome of the Geneva Summit was considered as positive both by Moscow and Washington, which managed to agree on the inadmissibility of a nuclear conflict and on their willingness to keep the diplomatic channel open for these issues⁴⁵. This summit gave the Soviet leadership the chance to put forward a proposal formulated by deputy Foreign Minister Kornienko and Chief of General Staff Marshall Akhromeev and presented by Gorbachev in a January 1986 letter to Reagan: a road map for the achievement of complete de-nuclearization in 2000 and for the reduction of conventional weapons. This step taken by the Soviet leadership was welcomed in Washington as an opportunity to tackle the issue of intermediate and short-range nuclear missiles in Europe opened by the infamous controversy on euro-missiles. The prospect of a full-fledged agreement between the two parties finally appeared on the horizon when, at the Reykjavik Summit (11-12 October 1986), Reagan and Gorbachev agreed on the “double-zero option”⁴⁶. Gorbachev, who managed to build a good relationship with the American President, was from the start deeply engaged

44 English, *Russia and the Idea of West*, pp.201-202.

45 For a full account of the Geneva meeting from the Soviet side, see: Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), pp.490-494.

46 Still, the Reykjavik Summit ended as a seeming failure because of an irreconcilable conflict on the Strategic Defense Initiative: despite its actual strategic influence, Gorbachev insisted to have on the stop to the project as a necessary condition to reach an agreement on ballistic weapons, whereas Reagan, who had used the program as an effective campaign tool, did not agree to block the laboratory testing.

in these talks, which he judged fundamental in the light of domestic reforms. His engagement in bilateral diplomacy and foreign affairs would only increase in the following years, especially after the Chernobyl crisis in April 1986, which further radicalized his concerns about the country's backwardness and the dangers of nuclear power⁴⁷. However, since Gorbachev did not have a precise plan for the reform of the economy, he started to increasingly focus on foreign policy and to rely on results in this field as a source of political legitimacy. As Shevardnadze's aide Sergey Tarasenko would later confess:

[w]hen we encountered domestic difficulties, we began to realize that we would be able to stay afloat for a while and even to preserve the status of a great power only if we could lean on the United States. [...] We had to be as close as possible to the United States.⁴⁸

This feature particularly emerged during the talks with US Secretary of State, George P. Shultz, in April 1987, when the General Secretary deliberately ignored the advice of the Soviet high command and agreed to the destruction of short-range SS-23 missiles. Dobrynin argued in his memoirs that:

In a few seconds of talks with Shultz, he decided to destroy these billion-rubles new missiles, without asking nor receiving anything in return. [...] He understood that, if he put the matter in front of the Politburo, hardly would he be supported by the General Staff. [...] This is why Gorbachev opted to present the whole thing as a *fait accompli*, the final "compromise" that opened the door to an agreement with the USA⁴⁹.

Moreover, upon arrival in Washington on December 8th 1987 to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), which gave way to the elimination of 1.600 intermediate and 1.100 short-range missiles in Europe, he unilaterally decided to accept the American proposal to destroy SS-20 missiles in Asia, which served as a counterweight to US bases in Japan and to Chinese nuclear weapons. The Soviet leader did not understand these significant concessions to Western partners as a sign of weakness, but as a conscious step aimed at showing that the global cooperation he promised was indeed possible. It was, in the definition of Breslauer, Gorbachev's attempt to rob the imperialists of their enemy image⁵⁰: this success would in fact delegitimize the powerful Soviet security

47 Gorbachev himself commented the accident with these words in his memoir *Perestroika*: "Our work is to open the whole nation and the whole world. To think that we can settle for halfhearted measures and dodge an issue is inadmissible. [...] We witnessed again how much malice and malevolence there was in the world". Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p.235-236. See also: Chernyaev et al., *Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni* (Answering to the Call of an Era), p.32.

48 Zubok, "Unwrapping an enigma", p.149.

49 Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), p.514.

50 Breslauer G., *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p.75.

establishment and those American circles who “need the Soviet Union as an enemy”⁵¹. The reliance on this virtuous circle disposed the General Secretary to make significant concessions to his counterparts without any demand for reciprocity. Obviously, the concessions on the INF Treaty erupted in serious clashes with the military and with other Politburo members. However, the General Secretary managed to use systemic failures to silence the conservative opposition: for example, he exploited the landing on the Red Square of a small private German plane to ask for the resignation of the Defense Minister Marshal Sokolov and of the most prominent military leaders who opposed his foreign policy and his concessions to the Americans. Instead, the General Secretary nominated the more cooperative and unexperienced Yazov as the head of the Defense Ministry⁵².

This purge of the military from the Politburo allowed Gorbachev to step up in his diplomatic activity towards the West without significant domestic opposition: between 1987 and 1988 he involved the Soviet Union in the CSCE Vienna talks on human rights, announced the retreat of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and started considering military retreat from Eastern Europe and a possible agreement on German unification⁵³. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from third-world countries was coherent with his refusal of the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’, as were the Soviet contributions to international peacekeeping: in these years the USSR not only contributed to the diplomatic resolutions of conflicts between Nicaragua and El Salvador, but also agreed to finance UN peacekeeping missions with \$200 million⁵⁴. The international reputation of Gorbachev reached its peak on December 7th 1988, when in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly he announced a reduction of Soviet armed forces stationed in Europe of 500.000 soldiers and the withdrawal of six divisions from the Warsaw Pact countries, while celebrating the peacekeeping role of the United Nations and the supremacy of international law⁵⁵.

Domestic crises and new political actors

The success achieved by Gorbachev in the international arena was counterbalanced by domestic troubles. In 1987 Gorbachev and the Soviet nomenklatura prepared economic reforms inspired by the Hungarian and Yugoslavian experiences in the 1960s as an attempt to find a compromise between different reformist schools, but the outcome was disappointing: prices were not liberalized, the private sector was ignored, and the attempt to give state enterprises more autonomy by allowing the election

51 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p. 217.

52 Dobrynin refers to this events as “a silent coup in the USSR Armed Forces”. Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel’no* (Strictly Confidential), pp. 515-516.

53 Chernyaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym* (Six years with Gorbachev), p. 41.

54 Larson, Shevchenko, *Shortcut to Greatness*, p.98.

55 Chernyaev et al., *Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni* (Answering to the Call of an Era), p.101.

of executives by workers resulted in an unrealistic increase in salaries and production⁵⁶. The choice not to limit the emissions of the Central Bank caused an overabundance of the monetary base in relation to the available amount of goods, which implied queues in front of stores, shortage and increase of corruption, black market and crime. Surprisingly, in 1988 Gorbachev introduced a reform of the party Central Committee that effectively suppressed the departments entitled to monitor key economic spheres. The mix of the weakening of state control with the absence of real market drivers pushed the Soviet economy into chaos, which led the journalist Igor Klyamkin to argue that:

Gorbachev and the reformers adopted concepts like market, property and democracy, but, since they were sons of a party born to overcome said concepts, they did so reluctantly and with endless contradictions. In a system where the economy was in the hands of the state, democracy and good will translated [...] into the attempt to satisfy every request, which caused inflation and crisis.⁵⁷

As Gorbachev witnessed the ineffectiveness of his own measures, he started to believe that no economic revitalization would be possible without a sweeping political reform and to seek grass roots support to his reforms against the Party. Therefore, starting from 1987 the General Secretary started to promote social activism and to advocate a reform of the political system under the slogans of *glasnost'* (transparency) and *demokratizatsiya* (democratization). The first concept, initially elaborated as a stimulus to the Party for more widespread circulation of information and openness to self-criticism, gradually changed its meaning and, especially after the traumatic experience of Chernobyl, came to imply a moderate tolerance for freedom of expression in the media and intellectual emancipation from the official line. Although Gorbachev had arguably an instrumental notion of the concept and never believed in unlimited freedom of expression⁵⁸, his efforts to mobilize civil society in support of reforms by 1988 translated into the conduction of unofficial demonstrations in Moscow and the publication of news on elite privileges and Western lifestyle, which harmed public support for the Soviet model. The new wave of freedom also meant the diffusion of previously banned publications and of the works of intellectuals and research centers.

In parallel with *glasnost'*, Gorbachev started an institutional reform aimed at raising the effectiveness of the ruling institutions by introducing elements of pluralism and accountability to civil society. The rationale of this strategy lay in Gorbachev's belief that "the people [...] are loyal to the Party, to

56 For a comprehensive account of the economic debate between 1987 and 1989, see: Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of Soviet Economy*, pp. 212-217.

57 From an article written by Igor M. Klyamkin and published in 1990 on *Ogonek*. See: Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), pp.605-606.

58 While declaring the importance of *glasnost'*, Gorbachev often underlined how it was aimed at strengthening the socialist society in the Soviet Union. John Keep argues that he used *glasnost'* as a device to mobilize the intelligentsia against conservative elements of the nomenklatura. Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 342.

perestroika, and to the system”⁵⁹, and their mobilization would weaken his conservative opponents and help the fulfillment of reforms. Therefore, in 1989 the General Secretary introduced a two-tier legislature that was supposed to act as a check on the executive and was composed by the Congress of People’s Deputies (*S’ezd nadornykh deputatov*) and by the Supreme Soviet (*Verkhovnyj sovet*). The underlying problem of his attempt to find a compromise between Party rule and democratic accountability was that “[i]t underestimated the tensions generated by decades of abuse by an omnipotent apparat and the political dynamism which perestroika inevitably unleashed, particularly in the non-Russian areas, where a wide spectrum of political opinions was emerging”⁶⁰. Indeed, the relaxation of Party control had a particularly destabilizing influence on the nationality issues in the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, the debate on the 1930’s famine (*holod*) clearly countered the idealized vision of the Soviet past as promoted by Gorbachev, and the creation of the Baltic movement against the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact directly threatened the integrity of the Union. The release of political prisoners, among whom many nationalist militants, was also an important factor leading to the creation in several republics of ‘popular fronts’, which under the label of democratization and environmentalism started to campaign for the independence of Soviet republics from Moscow. In the meanwhile, interethnic tensions in the Southern Caucasus were dangerously escalating, with the conflict over the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh poisoning relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The repression in Tbilisi on April 9th 1989 of a nationalist Georgian demonstration by Interior Ministry troops, with 19 deaths and thousands of injured citizens, was an alarming sign that the situation was running out of hand. However, Gorbachev, instead of tightening control over public activity, drew from this incident a surprising conclusion:

We have accepted that even in foreign policy force does not help (*nichego ne daet*). So especially internally – we cannot resort and will not resort to force.⁶¹

It is clear that the General Secretary overestimated his ability to control the political debate in a country with freedom of the press, lack of repression and competitive elections. After decades of democratic centralism and formal adherence to Marxism-Leninism, his reforms created a public space for political debate outside the Party that revolutionized the Leninist policymaking process that had dominated throughout the Soviet history. *Demokratizatsiya* and *glasnost*’ went far beyond the initial goal of making the Party more efficient: they “revived and encouraged the culture of robust political

59 English, *Russia and the Idea of West*, p. 68. See also: Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, pp.55-57.

60 Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 356.

61 Anatoly S. Chernyaev et al., *Soyuz možno bylo sokhranit’: Belaya kniga: Dokumenty i fakty o politike M.S.Gorbacheva po reformirovaniyu I sokhraneniyu mnogonatsional’nogo gosudarstva* (The Union Could Be Preserved: The White Book: Documents and Facts about the Policy of M.S. Gorbachev to Reform and Preserve the Multinational State), Moscow: Gorbachev Foundation, 1995, p. 75.

debate in Russia”⁶² and opened the way for the mobilization of mass-constituencies that included anti-communist and anti-elite social forces. Because of the role that these movements would play in the Russian political debate in the 1990s, we will now look at some political actors that emerged during perestroika, as well as at the Russian political traditions they were inspired by and at their view on the role of Russia in the world.

The first group coming out in the open was the Russian nationalist one, whose opinions were expressed by the Union of Russian writers and by the movement Memory (*Pamyat'*), which from December 1989 on organized rallies in Moscow that under the flag of monument conservation celebrated the Soviet past and spread anti-Western and anti-Semitic positions⁶³. The success enjoyed by right-wing movements in the late 1980's reflected the spread of a defensive psychology inside Russian society, whereby many citizens felt that their nation's interests had indeed been neglected by Soviet institutions. They blamed minorities which allegedly had derived unfair advantages from the system and advocated the protection of Russian nationals in other republics. The categorization of the Russian nationalist milieu is particularly complex because its different components (national restorationist, neocommunist and slavophile⁶⁴) shared as many common features as points of disagreement. National restorationists like Gennady Zyuganov⁶⁵ and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy⁶⁶ agreed with neocommunist leader Yegor Ligachev on Russia's mission to restore its power over the Soviet territory, but the first advocated the use of economic, political and even military coercion, while the second group favored perestroika and cooperation with reformers and democrats. Slavophiles like Aksyuchits⁶⁷ shared with some restorationists the acknowledgment of the central role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the national identity, but completely rejected the communist model. While informed by different cultural traditions, the common nationalist and anti-Western orientations allowed these subgroups to share political goals, like in the last years of perestroika, when they mobilized against Gorbachev and the disintegration of the country⁶⁸.

62 Margot Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking", in Neil Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors of Russian Foreign Policy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 41.

63 Keep, *Last of the Empires*, pp. 385-386.

64 The division of the Russian nationalist milieu in these subgroups is proposed in: Anne Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 67-72. For a broader interpretation of Russian nationalism in the 1990s and 2000s, see: Marlène Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

65 Gennady Andreevich Zyuganov (1944) was a leading critic of *perestroika* and *glasnost'*. In 1990 he helped the creation of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and in 1993 he became its First Secretary.

66 Vladimir Volfovich Zhirinovskiy (1946) was the founder of the first officially sanctioned Russian opposition party, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Yakovlev suggested that its foundation in 1989 had been masterminded by the KGB.

67 Viktor Vladimirovich Aksyuchits (1949) was between 1990 and 1997 the leader of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and a critic of *perestroika* and market reforms.

68 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, pp.38-39.

On the other side of the political spectrum, a democratic opposition to perestroika started to appear as Gorbachev's reforms were failing to live up to the expectations. Dismissing the "harmful utopia"⁶⁹ of perestroika, the democratic vision was diametrically opposed to the nationalist one, in the sense that it proposed a future Russia whose foundations would be "based on the criteria of the Western civilization, with its liberal-democratic values and the level of scientific-technological development"⁷⁰. Advocated by the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR), founded in May 1990 with the participation of chess champion Kasparov and Gennady Burbulis⁷¹, this movement followed the tradition of Russian liberal-minded scientists (Vernadsky, Kapitsa, Sakahrov) and of the westernist thinking, which suggested that Russia should follow the Western model of development and integrate in the international community. This group managed to expand beyond its usual elitist niche and to become the strongest opposition to perestroika thanks to a combination of domestic and international factors that will be analyzed at the beginning of the second chapter.

Starting from 1989, the domestic and international position of the Soviet Union started to look increasingly hopeless. Gorbachev found himself coping at once with economic collapse, secessionist movements, political reform and the fall of the socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. His choice to introduce democratic institutions and abolish the power monopoly of the Party created a competition between different reformist projects that dominated the last years of the Soviet political life until December 1991. While foreign policy remained until the very end an area in which the autonomy of the General Secretary was not overshadowed by other political actors, the increasing domestic destabilization played a major role in one the last foreign policy challenges faced by Gorbachev: the reunification of Germany.

Gorbachev and European security: the challenge of NATO

Gorbachev's approach to the European security was driven by the goal to build the so-called common European home, which he came around in October 1985 in France during his first visit abroad as a Soviet leader⁷². As usual with the General Secretary, this project was never really translated into a full-fledged roadmap for a new European security order: therefore, interpreting what Gorbachev actually meant with the idea of the common home has proven quite controversial. On one side, it seemed an attempt to turn Russia's historical, geographical and cultural ties with Europe into a

69 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 40.

70 Elgiz A. Pozdnyakov, *Formatsionnyj i tsivilizatsionnij podkhody i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenya* (Formational and Civilizational Approaches and International Relations), in: *SSSR v mirovom soobshestve: ot starogo myshleniya k novomu* (USSR in the World Community: from Old Thinking to the New), curated by Nodari Simoniya, Moscow: Progress, 1990, pp. 137-150.

71 Gennady Eduardovich Burbulis (1945) was politician from Sverdlovsk elected in 1989 to the Congress of People's Deputies, where he established contacts with Boris Yeltsin. In the 1990's he was one Yeltsin's closest associates and occupied several offices in the Russian government and Presidential administration.

72 Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London: Doubleday, 1996, p.428.

security community and was probably inspired by the *Ostpolitik* by Chancellor Willy Brandt and by the détente era. However, this project could also be interpreted in line with traditional Soviet attempts to drive a wedge between the United States and its European allies. After a first unsuccessful attempt in 1953-54 to start a security dialogue in Europe that excluded the United States, the expression ‘Europe is our Common Home’ had in fact already been used by Brezhnev in November 1981 during talks with Chancellor Schmidt. In that context, the Soviet leader was arguably trying to weaken the Soviet international isolation after the invasion of Afghanistan, growing unrest in Poland and NATO’s decision to deploy euro-missiles⁷³. However, Brezhnev clearly stated in his speech that Moscow saw the United States as a foreign power only interested in Europe as a theater of military operations, which suggested that even after the acknowledgement of the American role in Europe inside the CSCE, the Soviet leadership remained committed to a divisive agenda as far as European security was concerned.

The doubts on the nature of the common home were confirmed by the same Gorbachev. While his foreign policy course dramatically improved bilateral relations between Washington and Moscow, the General Secretary always remained ambivalent about the role of the United States in European security. In his early speeches and works there were several echoes of the traditional Soviet vision of the United States as an essentially alien and worrisome presence in Europe⁷⁴. In a 1989 discussion with Soviet diplomats, Gorbachev

talked with enthusiasm about his conception of the European security system in the form of a “common European home”, where every nation in Europe will live in mutual peace, as good neighbors in a common ‘home’, whereby the USA and Canada will ‘live’ in the same street, even if in not in the same ‘home’.⁷⁵

Starting from 1989 Gorbachev started to mention more frequently the United States as a natural part of Europe together with the Soviet Union: however, as Smith points out, this was probably more an answer to the fear of Moscow’s increasing isolation in Europe, as well as a signal of the increasing Soviet dependence on Western financial, diplomatic and humanitarian support⁷⁶. As for the structure of the new European security system, between 1989 and 1990 the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) started to focus on the CSCE, which, since it was the only organization in which NATO members and Warsaw Pact countries enjoyed equal status, was seen as the possible foundation of the

73 ‘Vizit v Federativnuyu Respubliku Germanii: Rech’ L.I. Brezhneva’ (Visit in the Federative Republic: Brezhnev’s Speech), *Pravda*, 24/11/1981.

74 Aside from a personal animosity against American culture, the fact that Gorbachev did not believe the United States to be a full and righteous member of the Common European Home is confirmed by many statements. See: Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p.208.

75 Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel’no* (Strictly Confidential), p.519.

76 Martin A. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership?*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 5.

new security architecture. What the foundation of a common home implied, as some Soviet commentators underlined, was the end of the division of Europe into two opposing military blocks⁷⁷. However, the main problem with the concept of common European home was that it was interpreted differently by the two sides of the Iron Curtain: for NATO members it meant the end of Soviet military occupation of Central and Eastern Europe, while for Moscow it meant the reduction of the American military presence in Western Europe.

This latent discrepancy became very clear between 1989 and 1991, when the fall of socialist regimes in Europe caused the end of Soviet hegemony over Central and Eastern European states. This historical event was directly tied with Gorbachev's new thinking. As a matter of fact, while in the first years of power the Soviet leader continued to favor greater economic integration inside the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, or SEV in the Russian version) and political-military cooperation inside the Warsaw Pact, he clarified as soon as in 1985 to some Eastern European leaders that they "should no longer imagine that the Soviet Union would send tanks to their rescue if they failed to establish a *modus vivendi* with their own populations"⁷⁸. Moreover, since 1988 the Soviet leadership played a significantly active role in the collapse of satellite socialist regimes. As Kramer suggests, Gorbachev and his aides started to worry about the domestic sustainability of unpopular regimes and to predict that lack of reforms in Eastern Europe could in the medium term spark massive anti-Soviet violence that would pressure the Kremlin to restore the order through military intervention⁷⁹. This concern was voiced in a secret memorandum prepared by Shakhnazarov for the Politburo that described the situation in socialist countries in stark terms:

There are countless signs that all the fraternal countries are plagued by basically the same problems, which are rapidly growing and intensifying. The fact that the symptoms are alike in all these countries shows that the disease is caused [...] by concrete factors rooted in the underlying economic and political model of socialism that was first developed in our country [...]. Some countries have followed our example or have even gone beyond it in undertaking profound reforms, but others, like the GDR, Romania and [Czechoslovakia], have still not acknowledged the need for reforms [...]. Those who stubbornly refuse to heed the pressures for change are just intensifying the ills they face and greatly complicating matters for the future. This affects us in the most direct way. [...] If the situation were to reach a crisis point in one or

77 Vitaly Zhurkin, 'Obshchij dom dlya Yevropy: rasmysleniya o tom, kak ego stroit' (Common Home for Europe: Reflections on How to Build it), *Pravda*, 17/5/1989.

78 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p.249.

79 Mark Kramer, "Gorbachev and the demise of east European communism", in *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations*, edited by Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, New York: Frank Cass, 2005, pp. 182-185.

more socialist countries, we would have to come to their rescue at the cost of enormous material, political and even human losses.⁸⁰

In the following year, Gorbachev took several steps aimed at weakening the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe: he announced several times that the USSR would not intervene in other states' internal affairs, he recognized the result of the Polish elections won by *Solidarność* in June 1989 and he did not react to the decision to open the Hungarian-Austrian border that destabilized the domestic situation in Eastern Germany. With this moves, the General Secretary did not intend to undermine the preservation of the socialist bloc, but on the contrary hoped to create favorable conditions for the emergence of communist governments committed to perestroika-like reforms and therefore for the preservation of the Warsaw Pact in the long term without the need to use Soviet military force⁸¹. Nonetheless, these decisions played a decisive role, albeit non-voluntary, in the collapse of European socialist regimes and in the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In turn, this event opened the door to the opportunity of German reunification, which Chancellor Kohl started to advocate as early as 1989 through a Ten-Point plan. Officially, the Soviet leadership was ready to accept the German reunification only as “the final product of the gradual transformation of the political climate, when both blocks – NATO and Warsaw Pact – will be disbanded or merged by mutual agreement”⁸², which *de facto* was Gorbachev's transposition of the old Soviet proposal of a unified and neutral Germany⁸³, with its security granted by the CSCE and not by other military blocks⁸⁴. However, Moscow's management of the issue of German unification displayed many of the limits that marked the Soviet foreign policy conduct under Gorbachev. First of all, the Soviet leader procrastinated for months the formulation of a Soviet strategy to avoid the collapse of the GDR, and when he first addressed the issue inside the Soviet leadership, as late as on October 16th 1989, he chose to do so not in the Politburo but in a small conference of close advisors, without military representatives nor experts on Germany and arguably without even a real discussion⁸⁵. Secondly, the priority given by Gorbachev to the project of the common European home, and therefore to relations with Western countries, led him to disregard Soviet interests toward satellite countries and to relinquish ties with Eastern European socialist leaders. This was reflected by the trust accorded by the Soviet leader to Kohl, which allowed the German Chancellor to outmaneuver Gorbachev with the

80 This secret document was reproduced in: Georgy K. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchnika* (The cost of liberty: Gorbachev's reform from the eyes of his assistant), Moscow: Rossika-Zevs, 1993, pp. 367-369.

81 Kramer, “Gorbachev and the demise of east European communism”, p. 186.

82 Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), p. 520.

83 Richard A. Leiby, *The Unification of Germany: 1989-1990*, London: Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 58.

84 Dov Lynch, “Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe”, in Mark Webber, *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, New York: Macmillan, 2000, p.101-102.

85 The episode underlined “the strangely ad hoc nature of Soviet decision making regarding the German question”. Zubok, “Unwrapping an enigma”, p. 154.

opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border and the Ten-Point plan, as well as by his position at the Malta Summit (2-3 December 1989) with President H.W. Bush, where the General Secretary argued that discussing the military and political status of a unified Germany “would be premature”⁸⁶. Gorbachev’s lack of interest in the German question was furthermore reflected by the enigmatic Soviet decision to accept the “Two-plus-Four” formula over the “Four-plus-Two”: this step, which arguably prevented the Soviet leadership to exploit the French and British uneasiness toward the reunification, was in fact taken unilaterally by Shevardnadze without any input nor reaction from Gorbachev⁸⁷. This decision further reduced Moscow’s influence over the process, and made the proposal for a neutral military status sustainable only with an independent GDR taking part to the negotiations on an equal level to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, it appears in hindsight that Soviet policymakers overestimated the degree of legitimacy of the socialist ideology in Central Europe and underestimated both the economic and symbolic appeal of unification and the degree of resistance shown by Kohl on the issue of NATO membership⁸⁸. Therefore, Gorbachev’s hopes first in the preservation of the GDR under the reformist leadership and later in a socialist victory in the general elections held in GDR on March 18th 1990 proved unrealistic and were easily shattered by the victory achieved by the CDU.

In face of the clear German support for unification, Gorbachev found himself divided between on one hand the need to preserve his image as champion of freedom and on the other to find arguments against the domestic critics that accused him of surrendering the legacy of Soviet victory in WWII to the West. The solution proposed by FRG Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, to have a German unification with a special military status for Eastern Germany, was not acceptable for the Soviet elite for a simple reason.

I can understand that Americans and many Europeans have their own perception about [NATO]. They assign it the function of preserving peace throughout the whole Cold War. And for this now they try to convince us, that the role of NATO in this new phase will exclusively positive and will even serve the interests of the Soviet Union. But this is not serious. Whatever they may tell us now about NATO, for us it is a symbol of a confrontational past which is dangerous for peace. And we will never agree to entrust it with the leading role in the construction of the new Europe⁸⁹.

86 See: Vladislav Zubok, “German Unification from the Soviet (Russian) Perspective”, chap.6, in Kiron K. Skinner, *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*, Washington DC: Hoover Institution Press, 2007, p. 268.

87 This surprising circumstance is confirmed both by Chernyaev and by Valentin Falin, the leading Soviet expert on the German question. *Ibid.*, p.265.

88 For this overview, I used the materials and documents published in: Anatonly S. Chernyaev, Aleksandr A. Galkin, *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskij vopros: sbornik dokumentov 1986-1991* (Mikhail Gorbachev and the German Issue: Collection of Documents 1986-1991), Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2006.

89 From an interview given by Gorbachev to the *Time* magazine on May 22th 1990. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

Between January and May 1990, Gorbachev stated this position publicly as well as in private meetings with foreign leaders. The Soviet Union clearly had the power to stall the unification process, thanks to the presence of Soviet divisions in Eastern Germany, and the deep contrast on the issue of NATO's future forced Bonn and Washington to contemplate the idea that negotiations on this issue would last several years⁹⁰. In the end, skilled diplomatic work and domestic conditions played a decisive role in softening the position of Gorbachev.

In fact, the United States picked up the first proposal made by Genscher and elaborated "a list of concessions that the United States could give in return for Soviet acceptance of unification"⁹¹. The nine single proposals were little more than diplomatic tokens, but their presentation as a single package exposed by Secretary of State Baker during bilateral talks gave Gorbachev a viable proof of the American efforts to take Soviet concerns into consideration. Apart from concessions on negotiations on conventional forces, tactical nuclear weapons and on military and border issues concerning Germany, Baker promised to transform NATO into a more political organization, to develop CSCE as a permanent institution ("the cornerstone of the new Europe"⁹²) and to take into due consideration the economic needs of the Soviet Union in the process of German unification. Following this proposal, Gorbachev undertook two diplomatic initiatives that surprised the Western foreign policy community and shocked the Soviet one. In the Washington meeting with H.W. Bush, during a rather difficult discussion on the issue of NATO membership, he suddenly declared the Soviet readiness to let the German people decide autonomously on the issue of military blocks, which, despite Gorbachev's argument that this could very well lead to neutrality or to membership in the Warsaw Pact, *de facto* opened the way to NATO membership for the unified Germany⁹³. Following this agreement, Chancellor Kohl was invited to the Soviet Union on July 14th and 15th for a final round of negotiations with Gorbachev, which took place in the private residence of the General Secretary in the Caucasus and led to the signature of the Treaty of Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (also known as Two-plus-Four Agreement) which allowed for the German unification to take place on October 3rd 1990.

These decisions, made personally by Gorbachev with inputs only from his closest advisers⁹⁴, were hardly defensible from the point of view of the Soviet foreign policy community, which did not

90 Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), p.521.

91 Leiby, *The Unification of Germany: 1989-1990*, p.61.

92 Chernyaev, Galkin, *Gorbachev i germanskij vopros* (Gorbachev and the German Issue), p.440.

93 Ibid., p.474.

94 "Valentin Falin, reputed to be Andrei Gromyko's best pupil and the leading Soviet expert on the German Question, said in a recent interview that decisions regarding German reunification in 1989-1990 were made personally by Gorbachev, advised by Anatoly Chernyaev and Georgi Shakhnazarov. The Party Central Committee [...] and even Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze were generally not in the loop". Dmitri V. Trenin, Bobo Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p.9.

hesitate to criticize the General Secretary for his choice. It was obvious that Gorbachev had surrendered an important strategic asset without receiving from the West anything more than a substantial financial donation from Bonn. However, one must take into consideration several elements in order to explain why Gorbachev decided to take such a surprising step. Firstly, his domestic position was weakening day after day, with the threat of Baltic secession, the emergence of Yeltsin more serious than ever after the adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (June 12th 1990) and the economy on the way of total collapse. Secondly, the NATO London Summit (July 5th-6th 1990) was concluded with the message that important changes in the Alliance strategy and relations with the Warsaw Pact were needed. Apparently, this simple declaration was a sufficiently important step for Gorbachev, who admitted in his bilateral meeting with Kohl that “the political context [had] substantially changed in the last two-three months, [...and] the fact that the Soviet Union is not seen as an enemy anymore by NATO wielded a great importance for the development of future plans”⁹⁵. The decision to allow for German reunification without receiving anything in return was certainly in line with the initial Gorbachev’s approach to negotiations and concessions, and with the priority given to keeping alive the virtuous circle of international cooperation as opposed to strategic calculations and relative advantages. Nonetheless, the quick change of heart of the General Secretary on the permanence of NATO at the center of European security was a powerful signal that, “as pressure from Western powers strengthened and domestic reforms were slipping away, Gorbachev started to surrender positions, relying on cooperation with the West as his main trump card”⁹⁶.

In hindsight, the German reunification in 1990 was an exceptional diplomatic success that failed to tackle the issue that most concerned Moscow: the architecture of European security beyond the Cold War and the end of the Soviet clash with the Transatlantic community. Since the events that took place in 1989-1990 confirmed and renewed the central role of NATO in Western European security, Gorbachev was aware that any attempt to break the Soviet strategic isolation - the ultimate goal of the vision of a common European home - logically passed through the issue of NATO membership for the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, when Baker underlined the irreplaceable role played by NATO for European stability and the dangerous character of German neutrality, Gorbachev would reply that “if NATO, as you say, is not directed against us, but it is only a security structure that evolves to changing realities, then we propose to enter NATO”⁹⁷. Later on, on the eve of the

95 Chernyaev, Galkin, *Gorbachev i germanskij vopros* (Gorbachev and the German Issue), p.499.

96 Dobrynin, *Sugubo doveritel'no* (Strictly Confidential), p.521.

97 Gorbachev made this statement during his meeting with Baker on May 18th, adding a few times that such a proposal was not a fantasy or an absurdity. He later confirmed this position in a conversation with Margaret Thatcher on June 8th. Chernyaev, Galkin, *Gorbachev i germanskij vopros* (Gorbachev and the German Issue), pp.442-444; 478-485.

dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty, he brought forward the proposal another time⁹⁸, but Western leaders were clearly not ready nor interested to seriously tackle the issue. With the reunification of Germany, Gorbachev had lost the opportunity to put the issue of Moscow's engagement in European security at the top of the Western agenda, and the resolution of this unresolved matter would ultimately be passed on to the Russian Federation.

Achievements, failures and legacy

As a consequence of increasing domestic instability and dependence from diplomatic and financial cooperation with Western countries, Gorbachev's capacity to undertake independent initiatives in the foreign policy arena was weakened. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the project of reforming communism started to lose international appeal and was affected by a lack of conceptual ideas and a deficit of counterarguments in comparison with the apparent triumph of the Western economic and political model. In spite of the Malta Joint Declaration on the end of the Cold War and of President Bush suggesting that "it would be destructive to look at the Cold War from the viewpoint of who won and who lost [since] everybody won"⁹⁹, Moscow did not surely look on the winning side of history: the Soviet Union was the only communist regime left in Europe, unable to ensure economic and social order without substantial Western aid and threatened by the prospect of secession of its republics.

In this predicament, it was hardly surprising that the General Secretary continued to rely on relations with the West and to award further concessions. Aside from the ones on German unification, Gorbachev also retreated other positions inside the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, signed in Paris on November 19th 1990 by sixteen NATO and six Warsaw Pact members. This treaty not only meant the end of Soviet military superiority in Europe, but also imposed rigid conditions on the domestic arrangement of Russian military forces that hampered Moscow's readiness to answer to security threats in the Caucasus. A final blow for Moscow's foreign policy happened during the Gulf War, when Gorbachev chose to stand by the international condemnation of Kuwait's invasion expressed by the United Nations, even if this implied admitting the failure of his diplomatic attempts to influence Baghdad and "watching the humiliation of an ally supported and supplied with weapons for decades without any reaction"¹⁰⁰.

There were few alternatives to continuing the international cooperation with the West, despite the fact that Gorbachev's expectations on massive foreign investment and aid to the USSR were probably

98 This request was voiced again in a conversation between Gorbachev and the German Foreign Minister Genscher on March 18, 1991. See: Vladlen T. Loginov (cur.), *Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev: Sobranie sochinenij* (Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev: Collected Works), Vol.25, Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2010, pp. 76-77, 571-572.

99 *Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya Gorbacheva i Busha* (Joint press-conference between Gorbachev and Bush), *Pravda*, 7/7/1990.

100 Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.629.

unrealistic given the dramatic state of the Soviet economy: in the first six months of 1991 the Soviet GNP fell by 10%, the budget deficit (originally set at 26.6 billion rubles for the entire year) was growing by 22 billion each month and inflation was rising at the rate of 2-3% *a week*¹⁰¹. His domestic authority was plummeting¹⁰², and he even failed to exploit the institution of the Presidency of the USSR (March 1990) as a confirmation of his leadership, since he chose not to stand for popular election. Between November and December 1990, as a consequence of pressures coming from conservative circles and of concerns over the integrity of the Union, he apparently agreed to a conservative turn, which was signaled by the nomination of hard-liners Boris Pugo, Gennady Yanaev and Valentin Pavlov to the office of Interior Minister, Vice-President of the USSR and Prime Minister. As an answer to this turn, Shevardnadze unexpectedly resigned on December 20th and warned against the return of a dictatorship¹⁰³. Indeed, starting from January 13th 1991, a coup attempt took stage in Lithuania and Latvia: Soviet troops attacked a media center in Vilnius, occupied the Interior Ministry in Riga and two national salvation committees aimed at taking the power were formed in the two republics. Condemned by the international community and by Boris Yeltsin, the coup eventually failed because of the resistance by the Lithuanian population and because of Gorbachev's hesitation and final opposition to the bloodshed. This choice opened the last year of Gorbachev's rule, marked by the hopes on a compromise between the center and the secessionist republics on a new Union treaty. However, these hopes were eventually shattered, together with the political career of the General Secretary, by the attempted coup of August 1991.

An outlook on the overall record of new thinking reveals that, even by Gorbachev's standards, this foreign policy course proved largely unsuccessful. The General Secretary did not manage to convince Western leaders to support his project of radical reform of international relations, nor to achieve the end of military blocks in Europe. His choice to give Eastern Europe freedom of choice and to favor political change allowed him to gather international appraisal and to avoid the scenario of post-imperial wars, but his absolute rejection to use military force resulted in a lack of flexibility and a weak bargaining position in the wake of German reunification, Baltic independence and republican secessionism. His exit strategy from Afghanistan was similar to the one from Eastern Europe, in the sense that it was grounded on moral arguments and centered on Soviet domestic concerns and not on a comprehensive view over regional security issues. Even the key goal of perestroika, that is to build a human socialism and to reform communism, failed to bring new legitimacy to the Soviet model and instead fostered the return of national and ethnic divisions in the country's territory. His focus on the

101 Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 399.

102For instance, in 1989, 39% of the population associated the difficulties of reforms with the indecisiveness of the government. Yury Levada, *Yest' mnenie! Itogi sotsiologicheskogo oprosa* (Results of sociological survey), Moscow: Progress, 1990, p. 290.

103 Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 397.

human factor and on the priority of cultural change over economic structures and state power made him, after the August *coup*, a statesman without a state¹⁰⁴.

Despite all these shortcomings, Gorbachev's new thinking gathered international appeal as innovative project to reboot social initiative and to put the human being at the center of state policies. Moreover, its impact went beyond the intellectual effort and political courage shown by the Soviet leader. The greatest achievements were attained in the military sphere, where this course allowed to break the tradition of Soviet isolationism, to restructure the military budget to more realistic figures and to make the threat of a war with Western countries disappear. Apart from improvements in the international security of the Soviet Union, it contributed to the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War and eased a bloodless disruption of the Soviet empire. Many of these achievements had been a consequence of perhaps the most important legacy of new thinking, that is the radical improvement of diplomatic relations with the United States and the breakthroughs in the field of nuclear cooperation. This outcome is all the more surprising since it was achieved through diplomatic contact with two staunch anti-communist Presidents like Reagan and H.W. Bush. The positive outcome of this improvement was confirmed by Bush during his visit to the Soviet Union in Summer 1991, when not only did he sign START I¹⁰⁵, but he also gave a speech to the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine in Kiev where he showed support to Gorbachev, to his attempt to preserve the Soviet Union and warned Ukrainians against the threat of nationalism¹⁰⁶. Despite the failure of Gorbachev to exploit this foreign support, the cooperation with the United States nonetheless continued to occupy a prominent role in Moscow's foreign policy even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

104 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 66.

105 The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) was a bilateral treaty signed on 31st July 1991 by USA and USSR on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. The treaty barred the two states from deploying more than 6.000 nuclear warheads, atop a total of 1.600 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and bombers.

106 This speech outraged both Ukrainian and American right-wing forces, and would become famous as 'Chicken Kiev speech'. 'Excerpts from Bush's Ukraine Speech: Working 'for the Good of Both of Us'', *The New York Times*, 2/8/1991.

2nd Chapter

A transformed Russia in a new world

The problems of dismantling the command economy and stabilizing its new market structure were daunting enough. In addition, Russia had to be remade politically in every sense: as a state, as a nation, as a federation, as a strong and legitimate government, as well as a democracy. [...] Elites had to find a foundation on which to rebuild their relationship with an emergent civil society – one vocal and diverse in its interests, unpracticed in democracy, and contending with privation, lawlessness, and a general sense of insecurity. [...] At the same time [...] Russia had to be remade as a world actor in a new, post-Cold War world.

(Eric Shiraev, Deone Terrio¹⁰⁷)

An inevitable turn West?

The disappearance of the Soviet Union on December 25th 1991 was the result of several domestic failures, among which the Soviet republics' struggle for independence played a decisive role. This struggle, triggered by the Baltic republics and eased by Gorbachev's policies, awakened the latent Russian national issue inside the Union, which, together with the aspiration to make Russia a democratic country with market economy, became one of the main driving forces of the political activity of Boris Yeltsin as an opposition leader. His rise to the Kremlin, and the prosecution of Moscow's pro-Western foreign policy started by Gorbachev, was the result of an interplay between several domestic and international factors.

Firstly, of course, it was a consequence of Gorbachev's inability to deliver on its promises of economic and social reform, which resulted in deep crisis, loss of popular support and polarization of the political arena¹⁰⁸. Still, the emergence of new political actors would not have been possible without the political reforms pushed by the General Secretary. In particular, the rise of Yeltsin, elected to the Soviet Congress in 1989 with a landslide victory (89,4%) in Moscow, was a powerful signal of the eclipse of the Leninist political environment. Yeltsin, invited from Sverdlovsk to Moscow in 1985 by Gorbachev and Ligachev in order to fight corruption in the capital, had already clashed with his political mentors because of his egalitarian populism, his insubordination to superiors and his impatience¹⁰⁹; but inside the Party structure his disrespect of the institutional discipline and his challenge to the Politburo merely led to political isolation¹¹⁰. However, the reform of the political

107 Eric Shiraev, Deone Terrio, "Russian Decision-Making Regarding Bosnia: Indifferent Public and Feuding Elites", chap. 5, in *International Public Opinion and the Bosnia Crisis*, edited by Richard Sobel, Eric Shiraev, New York: Lexington Books, 2003, pp. 136-137.

108 In comparison with growing Western economies, Russian GDP had declined about 60% from 1985 to 1992. 'Rossiya – velikaya derzhava vtorogo ranga' (Russia is a second-rate great power), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 4/4/1995.

109 For a more detailed account of Yeltsin's personality and of his period as First Secretary of the Moscow CPSU, see: Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, pp. 31-38, 108-115.

110 Yeltsin's hostility to Gorbachev and the Party nomenklatura, which dominated his political career until 1991, dates back to 1987, when, after a critical speech against the Politburo inside the Central Committee, he was forced by

system gave Yeltsin, banned from the Party, the opportunity to rebuild his political legitimacy on popular support and within the representative framework created by Gorbachev. The creation of the Congress of USSR People's Deputies allowed him to join a broad coalition, inspired by a democratic and moderately nationalist platform and uniting figures from the democratic milieu (Sakharov, Yeltsin, Sobchak) and from the regional groups (future Kyrgyz and Belarusian presidents Akaev and Shushkevich) first in the Interregional Deputies group and then in the Democratic Russia Election Bloc. In May 1990 he won a close battle for the chairmanship of the newly created Russian Supreme Soviet, and a year later he exploited this position to engineer a public referendum that endorsed the establishment of free elections of a Russian Presidency, which he easily won in June 1991. Apart from the mistakes of Gorbachev, who supported the rise of Yeltsin as a counterweight to the opponents of perestroika¹¹¹ and failed to control his 'loose-cannon' attitude, the newly elected Russian President also profited from the August 1991 coup. In fact, the failure of the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKCP), composed by members of Gorbachev's administration¹¹², finally delegitimized the General Secretary, radicalized republican leaders in their struggle independence and gave Yeltsin his greatest political success.

Nonetheless, an account of the fall of the Soviet Union, *de facto* triggered by the Ukrainian referendum on independence and *de iure* sanctioned by the Belovezh Accords¹¹³, would not be complete without a reference to the role played by the delegitimization of the Soviet system. As other socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union disappeared because "nobody – not even a Party local committee secretary, not to talk about the KGB and the army [...] - went out on the streets to defend it with weapons"¹¹⁴. The reaction of the Army, which ultimately decided to swear allegiance to the new state, was quite telling. In a military conference held in mid-January 1992, which gathered a rather low turnout, the last Soviet Defense Minister General Shaposhnikov answered to the officers'

Gorbachev and a recent heart seizure to stand a meeting of the Moscow Party Committee where he was humiliated and fired from office. Later on, Gorbachev told Yeltsin privately that he would not be allowed to go back into politics. Boris N. Yeltsin, *Ispoved' na zadannuyu temu* (Confession on a Given Topic), Moscow: Ogonek-Variant, 1990, p. 14.

111 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, p. 171.

112 The members of the GKCP (*Gosudarstvennyj Komitet po Chrezvechainomu Polozheniyu*) were high Party and government officials (Yanaev and Pavlov), the Minister of Interior (Pugo), Army generals (Yazov), the head of KGB (Kryuchkov), members of the Central Committee (Shenin and Ivashko) and the industrial-military complex (Baklanov and Tizyakov), as well as Gorbachev's staffer Boldin.

113 The Belovezh Accords (*Belovezhskie soglasheniya* in Russian) is the agreement that dissolved the Soviet Union and established the Commonwealth of Independent States. They were signed on December 8th 1991 by the leaders of three of the four republics-signatories of the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR in 1992: Boris Yeltsin for Russia, Leonid Kravchuk for Ukraine and Stanislav Shushkevich for Belarus. For the full English text of the Accords: Andrey Melville, Tatyana Shakleina, *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005, pp. 3-8.

114 Words of General Lebed, that sabotaged the August coup and would later become Secretary of the Security Council in 1996. Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.623.

regret and resentment by asking for forgiveness and saying: “Don't you understand? What else was there left to do?”¹¹⁵.

This particular circumstance that characterized the collapse of the Soviet Union allows to make some observations about the interplay between international and domestic drivers in Russia foreign policy. As a matter of fact, the fall of the USSR was marked by the remarkable absence of an important feature in the Soviet history: the image of external threats, which often allowed the country to overcome domestic crises and to rally around its institutions. This feature was obviously inherited from Gorbachev's activity, which had enhanced relations between the Soviet Union and the West to an unprecedented level in Russian history. Between 1985 and 1991, the United States and Western European countries had recognized Moscow as a reliable international partner, supported the process of reforms, refrained from any attempt to destabilize the position of Gorbachev and simply shown no reason to be perceived as a threat to the country's security.

The assessment of Russian-Western relations as largely non-confrontational after the peaceful end of the Cold War can be seen in hindsight as largely optimistic, since between 1985 and 1991 many possible conflicts and diplomatic stalemates had been avoided because of Western caution and of Gorbachev's willingness to make substantial concessions and refrain from strategic calculations. However, this assessment was certainly an important factor in the domestic political debate, as it enabled a pro-Western foreign policy inspired by new thinking but willing to push the rapprochement with the West even further¹¹⁶.

Liberal internationalism: coalition and vision

Yeltsin had built his authority and seized the political initiative from Gorbachev in the years of perestroika on a largely negative agenda, that led him to fight in sequence corruption, privilege, the nomenklatura, the communist ideology, Gorbachev and finally the center - as opposed to the secessionist republics. When, after the August coup, he began to anticipate Russia's independence from the Soviet Union, he started to elaborate an executive agenda and to put together a team of advisors, aides and cabinet members that could help him design new programs. His desire to emulate Western civilization was coherent with his egalitarian populist thrust, his approach the democratic movement after the disappointment in the Party¹¹⁷ and with the positive impression drawn from his travels in the United States¹¹⁸. The coalition he gathered for his support was quite peculiar, since it

115 Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado* (The USSR from triumph to decay), p.662.

116 Andrey Kozyrev: “Our people use to think, and I myself thought so, that in the years of perestroika great successes in foreign policy were achieved. And they were really great, but I couldn't imagine the amount of unfinished work”. ‘Soyuz ostavil Rossii plokhoe vneshnepoliticheskoe nasledstvo’ (The Union left Russia a bad foreign policy heritage), *Nezvisimaya Gazeta*, 1/4/1992.

117 Yeltsin, *Ispoved' na zadannuyu temu* (Confession on a Given Topic), p. 204.

118 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 249.

was composed by young idealistic reformers (Gaidar, Burbulis, Kozyrev) who saw the collapse of the USSR as an historic opportunity to bring Russia in line with Western standards, and by pragmatic members of the old nomenklatura who saw the Soviet heritage as no longer sustainable. Inside the latter group, some former Komsomol members and directors of state enterprises had entered the private business in the last two years of perestroika and were now eager to obtain control over state property and become a class of new capitalists¹¹⁹.

During the struggle with Gorbachev, this liberal coalition had presented a vision of national identity that was highly critical of Russia's communist past and helped the group to distinguish itself from the failing perestroika: in this viewpoint, Russia was “an organic part of Western civilization, whose 'genuine' Western identity had been hijacked by Bolsheviks and the Soviet system”¹²⁰. Yeltsin's umbrella organization, Democratic Russia, argued that the “empire was to be dismantled for the sake of Russian prosperity”¹²¹ and that the fall of the communist regime had opened an historic opportunity to make Russia a normal Western country. On one side, this vision was in line with the tradition of Russia's liberal thinking, and in particular with XIX century historians Pavel Milyukov and Vasily Klyuchevsky, who believed that despite the country's wrongful development Russia would nonetheless follow the Western path. However, this version of Russian liberalism was also a reflection of a global trend. The emergence of the West as a cohesive and powerful community from the Cold War had in fact sparked the diffusion of a self-congratulatory mood among Western commentators, who predicted the worldwide ascendancy of Western institutions as the ultimate model of civilization¹²². This view became mainstream also among foreign policy experts and practitioners, who started to criticize the socialist character of perestroika and to advocate the emergence of a Western-like system in the Soviet Union¹²³. The inevitable rise of the West was even legitimized at the highest level when President Bush, contradicting his previous statements, announced in his 1992 State of the Union address that “America [had] won the Cold War”¹²⁴.

The executive agenda of the new coalition was composed by two key components: radical economic reform and rapid membership of the Western international institutions. Yegor Gaidar convinced Yeltsin in Fall 1991 of the necessity of an economic shock therapy: “freeing up all prices by the end

119 Nonetheless, in line with his plebiscitarian approach to executive power, Yeltsin always refused to be associated with a single political party. He imagined the President as an office representing all Russian people, and preferred to gather popular support without the mediation of any political organization. See: Lilya Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, p. 16.

120 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.57.

121 *Ibid.*, p.78.

122 The main work capturing this feeling was famously “*The End of History?*” written by the American scholar Francis Fukuyama. Other European authors like Andrew Arato, Ralf Darendorf and Timothy Garton Ash also wrote about the fall of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to revive civil society in Eastern Europe.

123 Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser of Jimmy Carter, talked as early as 1989 about this in his work “The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century”.

124 George H.W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union*, 28/1/1992, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=20544>>.

of the year [1991], rapid privatization of both industry and land, large reductions in state spending, and a tough monetary policy”¹²⁵. The Russian President adhered to this program because it promised quick results without the compromises he had criticized Gorbachev for¹²⁶ and because it was in line with the post-Stalinist administrative culture in which he grew up: it was simple, clear-cut in its principles, and required political decisiveness¹²⁷. Moreover, it paid attention to the behavioral and cultural change of the individual citizen, betting on the potential of generational change and activation of younger generations¹²⁸. Yeltsin and Gaidar were aware of the risks that this plan implied. However, they hoped that the shock therapy would benefit from a strategic partnership with the West: the argument made by new Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev was in fact that the West would recognize Moscow as one of its own and start investing in Russia to ensure a successful transition¹²⁹. The Russian President clearly expressed his expectations for massive financial assistance to foreign partners and even presented the failure of Russian reforms in a dramatic light in addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress in June 1992:

Today the freedom of America is being upheld in Russia. Should the reforms fail, it will cost hundreds of billions to upset that failure. [...] We are inviting the private sector of the United States to invest in the unique and untapped Russian market and I’m saying: “Do not be late”.¹³⁰

The importance of foreign direct investments was underlined by Yeltsin also at a G-7 summit in July 1992, and in September Kozyrev launched a Strategic Democratic initiative (SDI, as opposed to Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative), which foresaw Western investments supporting Russian small and medium business, military conversion and increase of Russia’s exports¹³¹. Many Russian politicians suggested a new Marshall Plan for Russia, something that had already been present in the “500 Days plan” yet not implemented during the Gorbachev era¹³². Joining international organizations was a critical element of this strategy, especially to the eyes of Kozyrev. The new Minister, having worked from 1974 to 1990 in the Directorate for International Organizations in the Soviet MFA, saw international organizations as “the main avenue for resolving conflicts outside the

125 Andrey P. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, p.90.

126 Anders Aslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy*, Washington DC: Brookings, 1995, p. 64.

127 Valentin P. Fedorov, *El'tsin* (Yeltsin), Moscow: Golos, 1995, pp. 27-28, 55.

128 Yeltsin, *Ispoved' na zadannuyu temu* (Confession on a Given Topic), p. 183.

129 Andrey V. Kozyrev, “Strategiya partnerstva” (Strategy for Partnership), *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* (International Affairs), No.5 (1994), p.5.

130 Boris N. Yeltsin, *Address to U.S. Congress*, 17/6/1992, <http://www.speeches-usa.com/Transcripts/047_yeltsin.html>

131 Andrey V. Kozyrev, ‘Osnovnaya opasnost’ – v nomenklaturnom revanshe’ (The greatest danger lies in the revenge of the nomenklatura), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8/10/1992.

132 The “500 Days plan” estimated a \$100 billion four-year support program provided by the IMF, which was calculated as the equivalent of the aid to Eastern Europe in the period 1989-1991. Nigel Gould-Davies, Ngaire Woods, “Russia and the IMF”, *International Affairs*, Vol.75, No.1, 1999, p.5.

essentially peaceful and prosperous Western Hemisphere, including between the former Soviet republics”¹³³. Thanks to the new alliance with Western countries, he deemed Russia ready to enter the Transatlantic economic and security community and to gain full membership to IMF, World Bank and G-7, while as for the European Union Russia initially only looked for access for its products to the single market¹³⁴.

The unprecedented level of rapprochement between Russia and the West was made possible by the new conception of national security proposed by Russian liberals. The belief that “the struggle of ideologies [had] come to an end” and that “the West [was] ceasing to be a military and political concept in the conventional power sense”¹³⁵ implied that Russia should abandon its traditionally state-centered approach to national security and adopt the priorities historically associated to Western liberalism:

[...] transforming Russia into a free, independent state, formalizing democratic institutions, setting up an effective economy, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of all Russians, making our people’s life rich both materially and spiritually¹³⁶.

Inspired by the Gorbachev’s experience, this vision was still way more ambitious than new thinking on the development prospects of the country: instead of cooperating with the West and preserving a specific identity, now Russia was to become part of the West and to join the “community of civilized nations”¹³⁷. Not surprisingly, the new approach had a clear zero-sum component. The argument that Russia should move away “from its Asian roots of oriental despotism and toward the Western democratic camp”¹³⁸ had negative consequences on Moscow’s engagement of non-Western countries. The dialogue opened with Beijing by Gorbachev was stalled because of the clear ideological opposition after Tienanmen and China’s support to the 1991 August coup. A similar decrease in Russia’s level of engagement could be also witnessed in the relations with other countries (Afghanistan, North Korea, the whole Middle East), which was in line with Kozyrev denial that “Russia had any specific interests in Asia aside from those of maintaining security”¹³⁹. A similar position was raised inside liberal circles regarding the Russian policy toward the post-Soviet area. Prominent Russian foreign policy experts advocated the need to “give up the CIS in favor of

133 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.60.

134 Kozyrev, “Strategiya partnerstva” (Strategy for Partnership), p.15.

135 The 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation can be found in: Melville, Shackleina, *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, p.27-64.

136 Andrey V. Kozyrev, “Preobrazhennaya Rossiya v novom mire” (Transformed Russia in the New World), *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn’* (International Affairs), No. 3 (1992), pp. 86-113.

137 Andrey V. Kozyrev, “Russia: A Chance for Survival”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.71, No.2 (1992), pp. 9-10.

138 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.75.

139 *Ibid.*

orientation toward Europe”¹⁴⁰. Until Autumn 1992, Kozyrev argued that “ethnic Russians outside Russia did not constitute a special problem for the Russian government”¹⁴¹. However, the advocates of Russia’s isolationism in the CIS region were called into question when the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria broke out in Spring 1992 and the attempt to involve CSCE failed. The decision to broker a cease-fire and to take responsibility for peace in the region was initially condemned by Kozyrev: in fact, the Foreign Minister warned against the emergence of a ‘party of war’¹⁴² advocating an independent Russian policy aimed at defending the industrial-military complex and the country’s international influence seen as befitting a great power¹⁴³. However, by late June the Foreign Minister decided to show support for the deployment of Russia’s military in order to avoid civil war in Moldova¹⁴⁴. This crisis was the first sign of a major disagreement on foreign policy and security issues between the Foreign and the newly founded Russian Defense Ministry, who enjoyed considerable autonomy on CIS conflicts because of the presence of Russian division in former Soviet republics. It will be useful then, before looking at the liberal vision on European security, to analyze how the foreign policymaking process changed compared to the Soviet period, which agencies started to play an independent role and which trends marked the Yeltsin era.

Foreign policymaking in the Russian Federation

The collapse of the Soviet Union deeply impacted the process of foreign policy decision-making, but in the Russian Federation elements of both change and continuity continued to exist in this field. The first element of continuity that must be mentioned in this regard was that decision making on foreign policy preserved in the Russian Federation the “elitist and secretive”¹⁴⁵ nature it enjoyed during Soviet times. While the lack of transparency - a virtue in bureaucratic-centered cultures - represents a significant obstacle in the analysis of this process, it is still possible to point out several trends and features that on significant practices in Russian foreign policy-making from the 1990s.

Despite its vagueness on the structure of foreign policymaking, the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation assigned a central role to the figure of the President, who determines the guidelines of the foreign policies of the State (article 80) and in general governs Russian foreign policy, holds negotiations and signs international treaties (article 86). The only other institutional actors reminded

140 Andrey V. Zagorsky et al., *Posle raspada SSSR: Rossiya v novom mire* (After the USSR breakup: Russia in the new world), Report from MGIMO Center of International Research, 1992, p.17.

141 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.81.

142 The key figures of this assertive political-military coalition were, in the eyes of Russian liberals in 1992, Vice-President Rutskoy, Major-General Lebed, Ruslan Khasbulatov, Yury Skokov, Colonel-General Boris Gromov and Arkady Volsky. See: ‘Mira dobilas’ partiya voyny’ (The Party of War Achieved Peace), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 12/8/1992.

143 Roy Allison, “Military Factors in Foreign Policy”, in Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 235.

144 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.80.

145 Ulam, *Anatomy of Policymaking*, p. 71.

in the Constitution as involved in the foreign policy process are: the subjects of the Federation, who must coordinate with the State international and foreign economic relations (article 72); the legislative branch, involved in the ratification and denunciation of international treaties and agreements (article 106); and the Government, responsible for the implementation of foreign policy (article 114)¹⁴⁶. However, the predominant position of the President over the executive is reinforced by the Federal Constitutional Law on the Government of the Russian Federation, which establishes the so-called ‘Presidential Bloc’¹⁴⁷: a group of agencies and federal ministries involved in defense, security, internal affairs, justice, foreign affairs and extraordinary situations whose activity is directed by the President¹⁴⁸.

The Presidency presented clear elements of continuity with the Tsarist and Communist periods, in that the Head of the Russian state continued to influence more than just the processes of domestic and foreign policymaking. As Hough underlined, in the Soviet era the leader’s individual traits heavily influenced the institutional arrangement of the decision-making process - the same figure of the General Secretary arose to become a *de facto* head of State just in the 1960’s, while Lenin and Stalin used to give priority to the head of the government¹⁴⁹. While this assessment may overlap the influence played on the Kremlin of extra-institutional figures over different periods¹⁵⁰, it deserves particular attention when considering the period from 1987 to 1993, “[f]or as the structures of the Soviet rule disintegrated, leaders had greater latitude to act as they wished [and] also played a major role in causing those structures to crumble in the first place”¹⁵¹.

The role of Yeltsin in this field is often overlooked by historians and theoreticians of international relations for the reason that “the President was the ultimate decision maker, but he hardly constituted a rich source of independent ideas on individual issues, let alone possessed an overall conception for Russian foreign policy.”¹⁵² While this assessment is hardly disputable, there are several signs that Yeltsin’s personality and leadership style seriously affected both single policies and the process of

146 ‘Konstitutsiya Rossijskoj Federatsii’ (The Constitution of the Russian Federation), *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, 25/12/1993.

147 Despite the lack of an official legal basis, the term ‘Presidential bloc’ (and its subset ‘Security Bloc’) have firmly established themselves in the political lexicon. Jane Henderson, *The Constitution of the Russian Federation: A Contextual Analysis*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011, p. 125.

148 *Statya 32. Osobennosti rukovodstva nekotorymi federal’nimi organami ispolnitel’noj vlasti* (Article 32. Specific Features of the Leadership of Some Federal Organs of Executive Power), *Federal’nij Konstitucionnyj zakon j Pravitel’stve Rossijskoj Federatsii* (Federal Constitutional Law “On the Government of the Russian Federation), 17/12/1997, <http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_17107/>.

149 In describing how these processes were influenced by the different personalities of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the scholar assessed that “any change [in the institutional arrangement] may be well caused by the accident of personality”. Hough, *Evolution in the Soviet Political System*, p. 131.

150 For an argument in favor of the influence of extra-institutional factors on the Yeltsin administration, see: Martin Carrier, *Executive Politics in Semi-Presidential Regimes: Power Distribution and Conflicts between Presidents and Prime Ministers*, London: Lexington Books, 2015, p. 77-89.

151 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 232.

152 Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 36.

foreign policy-making as a whole in the 1990s. Aleksey Bogaturov, a renowned Russian scholar of the systemic history of international relations, devoted a whole article to outline the influence of Yeltsin's personality on several foreign policy areas, such as relations with Western partners, with Ukraine, Baltic countries, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Eastern Europe, and affecting even the country's international image¹⁵³. And while it is true that the author was particularly critic of the pro-Western foreign policy¹⁵⁴, his case on the impact of Yeltsin's individual traits is justified: the President's stress on personal relations with foreign leaders (which made the low-yield Russian membership in G-7 an important foreign policy goal) derived from the classic Russian conception of foreign policy-making as "a *tsarskoe delo* [a czar's business] – to such an extent that Yeltsin regarded Russian foreign policy essentially as the sum total of his personal relations with foreign leaders"¹⁵⁵.

Moreover, apart from the mixed impact of his personality on bilateral relations, the process of foreign policy-making during the Yeltsin era was deeply affected by "his divide-and-rule approach to power"¹⁵⁶. As Roy Medvedev underlined, Yeltsin's political longevity was enhanced by his ability to change his position and his emphasis on power rather than ideology¹⁵⁷. Yeltsin's choice to play the role of supreme arbiter between conflicting groups allowed him to consolidate his position in a time of endemic political uncertainty, but the mix of lack of leadership, unstable institutional framework and politicization of foreign policy resulted in "policy paralysis and bureaucratic anarchy [...] aggravated by Yeltsin's failing health during his second term."¹⁵⁸

An important role in the process of foreign policymaking is also played by the Presidential Administration. Its accommodation in the former offices of the CPSU Central Committee in the Old Square (*Staraya ploshchad*) of the Kremlin outlined the continuity between the two bodies, although the newest version was more clearly subordinated to the Head of State. In parallel with Soviet traditions, the Kremlin's apparatus enjoyed wide executive powers and checked the coherence of institutional policies. In many ways, "[t]he Administration is the true national government, fully and

153 In the text, the author particularly mentions five syndromes influencing Yeltsin's approach to foreign policy: his desire to distinguish himself from the Communist leaders (even if that meant looking ridiculous), his obsession for external signs of respect, his regrets toward Baltic and Ukrainian independence (which he had half-heartedly recognized just to take Gorbachev out), his resentment toward former Soviet officials (who had opposed him in his fight against Gorbachev) and his frustration toward Eastern Europe (a region he was forced to be interested in by the issue of NATO enlargement). Aleksey D. Bogaturov, "Pyat' sindromov El'tsina i pyat' obrazov Putina. Retrospektiva lichnostnoy diplomatii v Rossii" (Five syndromes of Yeltsin and five images of Putin. Retrospective of personal diplomacy in Russia), in *Vneshnyaya politika Rossii: 1991-2000* (Russian foreign policy: 1991-2000), 1st part, *Pro et Contra*, Vol.6, n. 1-2 (2001), pp.122-136.

154 Bogaturov criticized Russian adherence to Western interests on the issue of NATO enlargement and hoped for a new foreign policy that would respect traditional Russian national interests "in the way that previous generations of Russian politicians used to think of them". Aleksey D. Bogaturov, 'Sami amerikancy ne ostanovyatsya nikogda: tekushye otnosheniya i perspektivy vzaymodeistviya Rossii i SSHA' (Americans alone will never stop: current Russian-American relations and perspectives for cooperation), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/6/1996.

155 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p.9.

156 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p. 35.

157 Roy Medvedev, *I vse-taki – epokha El'tsina* (The Yeltsin era, after all), *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, 6/1/2000.

158 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p. 35.

exclusively answerable to the president”¹⁵⁹. The head of the Administration is the Kremlin’s chief of staff, who can play important foreign-policy roles thanks to its proximity to the President - and did so, especially in the cases of Anatoly Chubais between 1997 and 1998 and Aleksandr Voloshin between 1998 and 2003. The scope of his activity can vary depending on individual inclinations and on the effective level of relations with the President, but the chief of staff has been mainly used as a high-level channel of communication with foreign leaders and as a key negotiating link between Russia and its closest CIS neighbors, Ukraine and Belarus, where the position of head of the Administration is likewise present. Deputy chiefs of staff can also assume important roles in foreign policy-making or implementation, whereas the figure of the foreign policy advisor to the head of State is usually occupied by career diplomats who are “primarily concerned with preparation of the president’s numerous international engagements”¹⁶⁰.

Another important institution is the Security Council (*Sovet Bezopasnosti*). Established in 1992 as a renewed version of the Politburo, this body acts as the President’s main private council and as an indirect check on the autonomy of the Foreign Ministry¹⁶¹. The Council holds informal weekly meetings with the participation of top officials engaged in foreign affairs and national security: usually the Prime Minister, the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Finance Ministers, the head of the Presidential Administration and the directors of domestic security and foreign intelligence services, which after the reform of KGB were split into the FSB (Federal Security Service) and SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service). However, still in parallel with the Politburo, the circle of principal co-decision-makers around the President is likely to be even smaller, although the definition of such circle is in the hands of the President: for example, Yeltsin, who had terrible memories of the Politburo, preferred to decide alone while imposing checks and balances on his associates¹⁶². The body is headed by a secretary and has sporadically assisted the Administration on security issues (such as the first war in Chechnya), foreign policy initiatives and preparation of official documents, like the National Security Concept.

Given the predominance of the President in foreign affairs, the Government is mainly involved in ‘low-policy’ issues, which in Russia often means economic administration, finance, welfare and others. The Prime Minister himself is active in foreign policy just on an occasional basis and depending on his political stature. Nonetheless, the increasing importance of the economic dimension of foreign policy allowed the Russian government to play an important role on a number of key issues,

159 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p. 10.

160 *Ibid.*

161 “Tensions between the Presidential apparatus and the Foreign Ministry were to become a leitmotiv of Yeltsin’s Presidency, and prove a real bugbear for both Kozyrev and Primakov.” Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p.33.

162 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p.11

like the IMF and World Bank loans under Yeltsin. Still, the MFA obviously occupies a central role in the foreign policy process. Many observers tend to dismiss its role and underline how it has been supplanted by the Presidential Administration as the center of foreign policy decision-making, especially under Putin¹⁶³. And while its input into strategic decisions on the overall approach and orientation of Russia's foreign relations is modest, not all changes from the Soviet period have weakened this institution. In fact, the disappearance of the Central Committee allowed the Ministry to expand its previous merely executive role: at the moment, the MFA can feed the President's thinking, influence non-fashionable but critical foreign policy issues and, when unable to assert its own agenda, it can still slow down or frustrate the agenda of others thanks to its privileged position in the management of international affairs. Moreover, the presence of career diplomats as Yeltsin's (and later, Putin's) foreign policy advisors further suggests how relations between the Presidential Administration and the Ministry are not as unidirectional as they may look¹⁶⁴.

The institutional framework laid by the 1993 Constitution clearly tries to establish the unity of the decision-making process in the institution of the Presidency and to ensure the role of the MFA as the subject responsible for the implementation of foreign policy. However, the constitutional provisions were not automatically translated into an effective mechanism of coordination with all the other institutional actors in the field of foreign policy. As a matter of fact, one of the most important features of Russian foreign policy during the Yeltsin era was the so-called 'sectionalization'¹⁶⁵. The gap created at the disappearance of the Party, that for 70 years had overseen and granted the cohesiveness of the policymaking process, was not filled by Yeltsin's political leadership nor by a shared consensus on the identity and the international priorities of the newborn state. Thus, "the diversification and proliferation of different and often competing interests [...] and the creation of a vastly more complex, interests-based policy environment"¹⁶⁶ allowed by Russia's democratization ended up in a policymaking quagmire. As pointed out by a Western scholar,

[i]n contrast to the tight control of foreign policy during the period of MFA and Central Committee duopoly, individual ministries regularly broke government ranks by issuing separate policy statements and undertaking independent initiatives¹⁶⁷.

163 This is the opinion of Sergey Markov expressed in: Gregory Feifer, *Who Stands Behind Russia's Foreign Policy?*, St. Petersburg Times, 9/4/2002, <<http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/Publ/2002/papers/spb-times-090402.html>>.

164 Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State and Clinton's advisor on Russia, suggests in his memoirs that Dmitri Ryurikov, Yeltsin's advisor from 1991 to 1997, appeared less and independent advisor than a conduit of ministerial views. Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003, p.182-183.

165 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p.5.

166 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p.8.

167 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p.30.

Even the presence of strong Foreign Ministers like Kozyrev and Primakov did not prevent the fact that in the 1990s the formal supreme role played by the MFA was undermined by the activity of other institutions and bureaucratic agencies. Chief among them was the Defense Ministry, which, as we have seen in the case of Transnistria, took a leading role in conflict management in the CIS region. The outcome of this arrangement was remarkable: throughout the whole decade “there was substantial military input in virtually every security-related issue of consequence – NATO enlargement, national threat assessments, Chechnya, strategic arms control, the former Yugoslavia - [...] and on certain issues, such as the deployment of Russian peacekeeping contingents in the CIS, Bosnia and Kosovo, important decisions were made without prior consultation with the MFA”¹⁶⁸.

The influence on Moscow’s foreign policy of key power (*silovye*) institutions, like the Interior Ministry and the security apparatus composed by FSB and SVR, was more discrete but still notable. In parallel with the Soviet period, these institutions managed to considerably raise the profile of security issues: as we will see, Yevgeny Primakov, a former Gorbachev’s advisor who served as head of the SVR after 1991, played a key role in the Russian opposition to NATO enlargement. Moreover, the security community also managed to retain considerable influence on the information feed provided to the President both on domestic and on foreign issues, which implied that “the formulation of all major foreign policy decisions [came] with a strong input from that wing of the government”¹⁶⁹. As for the academic community, which under Gorbachev enjoyed several representatives in top government position (Primakov, Kokoshkin, Lukin), it retained some direct influence on the foreign policy process inside the body of the Presidential Council and continued to play an important role in the development of the debate inside the foreign policy community¹⁷⁰.

Another distinctive phenomenon that marked Russian foreign policy after the fall of the Soviet Union was the increased relevance of economic interests, which did not play a considerable role in Soviet foreign policy due to the autarchic and centralized character of its economy. Both private oligarchs and state monopolies successfully managed to lobby for their interests thanks to their connections to high officials and their ability to build flexible coalitions influencing various foreign policy issues (Caspian Sea energy projects, the Russia-Belarus Union treaty and the issue of WTO membership¹⁷¹). Russian military industrialists successfully managed to advocate business interests through a platform called ‘Civic Union’ (*Grazhdansky soyuz*), which even ran in the December 1993 parliamentary

168 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p.32.

169 *Ibid.*, p.33.

170 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p12.

171 In the first case, economic ministries and Lukoil convinced Prime Minister and former Soviet Minister of Gas Industries Viktor Chernomyrdin to overrule MFA’s objections. In the second case, the alliance of oligarch Boris Berezovsky with liberal reformers as Chubais and Gaidar managed to weaken a treaty backed by Interior and Defense Ministries, the Duma and Moscow Mayor Luzhkov. The last case saw a battle between oligarchs, Khodorkosky, CEO of the oil-giant Yukos eager to attract foreign capitals, and Deripaska, head of RusAl willing to protect the aluminium and car industries from international competition. Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p.34.

elections¹⁷². The diversification of the foreign policy environment after the fall of the Soviet Union is a feature that has often been overlooked by Western observers, keen to overdramatize the influence of the Yeltsin's 'Family' on Moscow's decision making process. In fact, the trivialization of said process as driven by the clash between pro-Western and anti-Western factions around the Kremlin has played a considerable influence in the Western misunderstanding of Russia's aggressive arms exports policy and nuclear assistance to Iran¹⁷³, which did not "highlight 'unreconstructed' anti-Western attitudes so much as the pull of economic self-interest"¹⁷⁴ on the activities of the military-industrial complex and the Ministry of Atomic Energy.

The democratization of the Russian political environment also allowed for the growth of the influence exerted by political minorities and other social organizations on the government's agenda. Besides the historical influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the activity of religious and ethnic lobbies minorities and the independent foreign policy carried out by some regional leaders¹⁷⁵, a special role was played in this regard by the lower branch of the parliament, that is the State Duma. In continuity with the late Gorbachev period, the legislative branch affirmed its role in the 1990s "as a forum articulating and amplifying opinions which affected the political climate in which the executive decisions were made"¹⁷⁶ thanks to the good electoral results achieved by the conservative Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) in 1993 and 1995 legislative elections. While it is still not clear if the Duma effectively managed to block presidential foreign policy initiatives or if the Administration itself used the opposition as an alibi for inaction or as a scarecrow in international negotiations, there is no doubt that tensions between the executive and the legislature constrained Russian foreign policy in the Yeltsin era.

[T]he legislature may not have been strong enough to impose a predominantly nationalist logic on the Kremlin, but it was able to undermine the latter's commitment and capacity to pursue a liberal post-Soviet vision for Russia's relations with the outside world.¹⁷⁷

172 Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia*, p.92.

173 Russian cooperation with Iran was indeed understood in the Clinton Administration as a reflection of Moscow's geopolitical ambition. Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p.254.

174 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p.17.

175 State institutions recognized the role of the ROC in relations with the Vatican and with countries of traditional Orthodox presence (Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia), and showed significant concern for Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist minorities in relations with the Middle East, Israel and Tibet. As for regional leaders, Russian Far East regions exerted pressure on the Kremlin in territorial disputes with China, whereas the republic of Tatarstan developed a full-fledged independent foreign policy in light of an extensive interpretation of its federal autonomy. *Ibid.*, p.13-14.

176 Alex Pravda, "The Public Politics of Foreign Policy", in Malcom et al., *Internal Factors of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 218.

177 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet Era*, p. 30.

As for the influence of public opinion on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, it was similarly often overplayed by the Russian government in relations with foreign leaders as a tool to ensure better deals. However, apart from a generally moderating influence on pre-electoral policies and sensitive issues like demarcation of border or border-crossing regimes, “what is at issue here are elite attitudes, not those of a population that has little interest in foreign policy and that, in any event, has been consistently excluded from its deliberations”¹⁷⁸.

Honeymoon with NATO and domestic approaches to European security

The period between Fall 1991 and 1992 is often defined the ‘honeymoon’ of relations between Russia and the West for solid reasons: the unprecedented pro-Western approach adopted by Yeltsin was in fact reciprocated by both Presidents Bush and Clinton in light of Moscow’s democratization efforts and on the importance of cooperation on nuclear agreements and nuclear proliferation in the former Soviet Union. Yeltsin’s willingness to make the most out of this positive juncture was signaled by his very first foreign policy decision, taken just a few days after taking control over the Soviet MFA. On December 20th 1991 Yeltsin, in line with his lifelong risk-taking approach, dispatched a letter to the leaders of NATO governments that read: “today we are raising the question of Russia’s membership of NATO as a ‘long-term political aim’.”¹⁷⁹ This initiative, that immediately caught international attention, showed once again the continuity with the last period of Gorbachev’s activity and with its concern over the integration of Russia in a European security community. The new government was probably even readier to acknowledge the permanence of NATO in the European security framework in light of its overall liberal interpretation of national security. However, this letter, certainly impressive on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, received no official response.

The lack of feedback entailed a mix of several factors. The first one was the timing of the letter, which arrived at NATO Headquarters during the first ministerial meeting of the institution’s new North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), a forum composed by NATO members, non-Soviet members of the former Warsaw Pact and the Baltic states. The NATO leaders saw this initiative merely as Yeltsin’s attempt “to ensure that Russia was invited to participate in this new forum, as was duly agreed”¹⁸⁰. The second factor was the lack of any follow-up from the Russian leadership after the letter to confirm the seriousness of this initiative, which led Western and Russian analysts to downplay Moscow’s intent to actually join NATO and to believe that Russia would be satisfied with participation in NACC. The third reason for the lack of Western response was that this initiative, while echoing similar statements made by Central European leaders, arrived in a moment when

178 Trenin, Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p.13.

179 *History Turns inside out as Russia asks to join NATO*, Daily Telegraph, 21/12/1991.

180 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p.52.

membership enlargement was not on NATO's agenda. The instability affecting the CIS region between 1991 and 1992 formed a hardly conducive juncture for Western countries to engage in the project of integrating Russia to NATO, an engaging challenge both on the conceptual and on the practical level.

Still, despite the circumstances that made Western feedback unlikely, in hindsight the absence of a response had negative consequences. A few days later the Yeltsin government, maybe in order to cover its feeling of humiliation¹⁸¹, put out the story that the message had been mistranslated and was supposed to state that Russia was *not* stating the question of NATO membership. While being accepted by some Russian commentators¹⁸², in the eyes of Western governments this denial confirmed the doubts on the seriousness of the initiative and on its domestic sustainability for Yeltsin in the absence of Western validation. A few months later, Kozyrev himself closed the speculations on this issue when he told to the NATO General Secretary Manfred Wornat that Russia would set the breathtaking issue of membership aside and concentrate on the development of effective mechanisms of international cooperation¹⁸³.

This initiative sparked a low-key but interesting debate inside the domestic foreign policy community on the Russian approach to the Transatlantic community. This debate highlighted, as noted inside many studies about 1990s foreign policy debate, that the Russian political milieu was not a mere opposition between pro-Western and anti-Western constituencies, but that was divided into at least three main schools of thought¹⁸⁴. The first was the liberal (or Atlantic) one, headed by Foreign Minister Kozyrev: underlining the natural partnership between Western countries and democratic Russia, its advocates defended a rapid integration of Russia in the Transatlantic security community through NATO membership¹⁸⁵. The second group was made up by anti-Western nationalists, who supported the development of relations with CIS and Asian countries and gave a negative judgment of cooperation between Russia and NATO¹⁸⁶. Aside from these factions, which reflected the

181 This thesis was suggested in: Ira Straus, "Western common homes and Russian national identities: how Far East can the EU and NATO go, and where does that leave Russia?", *European Security*, Vol. 8, No.4 (2001), p.19.

182 Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russian Foreign Policy Priorities and Euroatlantic Multilateral Institutions", *International Spectator*, Vol. 30, No.1 (1995), p. 38.

183 'NATO s Rossiej – soyuz navsegda? Byvshye protivniki gotovy k partnerstvu' (NATO with Russia – Eternal Friends? Past foes ready to become partners), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26/2/1992.

184 For examples of the three-way division of the Russian debate on foreign policy, see: Aleksey G. Arbatov, *Rossiyskaya natsional'naya ideya i vneshnyaya politika: mify i realnosti* (Russian national idea and foreign policy: myths and realities), Moscow: Moskovskij obshchestvennij nauchnij fond, 1998; Light, *Foreign Policy Thinking*, in Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*; Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*.

185 Andrey V. Fedorovich, "Ustanovlenie i rasvitiye otnoshenij mezhdru Rossiskoy Federatsii i NATO v 1991-1993 godakh" (Establishment and Development of Relations between Russian Federation and NATO in 1991-1993), *Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenij* (Journal of International Law and International Relations), No.3 (2006).

186 Andrey Kortunov, "Russian national interests: the state of discussion", in Kurt Spillmann, Andreas Wenger, *Russia's place in Europe: a security debate*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 21-45.

emergence of political groups allowed by Gorbachev's reforms and analyzed in the first chapter, starting from 1992 another group appeared, which was associated with the realist perspective on international relations and was composed by so-called 'statists' (*gosudarstvenniki*) arguing for a partnership with all countries in the world, and not only with the West. This conception was expressed in a report issued in August 1992 by the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy¹⁸⁷ with the title 'Strategy for Russia', which suggested to balance the unilateral priority given to Western partners and warned against the dangers of isolation in case of failure of domestic reforms. The authors of the report also cited "the enlargement of the sphere of influence of Western security structures"¹⁸⁸, like NATO and the Western European Union (WEU), as a possible factor of isolation for Russia. While this group was notably favorable to cooperation with Western partners, the likeliness of NATO membership for Russia was thought to be very low: as suggested by the director of the Center for Disarmament and Strategic Stability Aleksey Arbatov, the endemic instability affecting Russia made this perspective "senseless and impossible"¹⁸⁹. The main point of concern expressed by statisticians regarded the continuity between Gorbachev and Yeltsin on the lack of reciprocity in relations with Western countries, which was signaled by the agreement to apply to Russia the terms agreed in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces, which had been tailored to the geography of the Soviet Union. Further evidence on this point was provided by START II, signed on January 3rd 1993 by Yeltsin and Bush and sharply criticized by moderate commentators since it foresaw the abandonment of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with multiple warheads without any provision on the same warheads in American submarines¹⁹⁰. Asked how could Russia abandon the heart of its strategic arsenals in exchange for nothing, Yeltsin answered that strategic parity did not make sense in the light of "the fundamental change in the political and economic relations between the United States of America and Russia"¹⁹¹.

Indeed, the cooperation between Russia and NATO proceeded smoothly in this period. A Committee for Humanitarian Aid was formed inside NACC on December 1991, and Russia received its first humanitarian cargo in February 1992. The new cooperation was welcomed by the Minister-Counsellor of the Russian Embassy in Belgium Timoshkin, who headed the group for relations with NATO and stated that:

187 The Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (*Sovet po vneshnej i oboronnoj politike*) was a NGO founded on February 1992 in Moscow by politicians, entrepreneurs, scholars and former officials of security agencies and of the industrial-military complex. It is headed by the scholars Fyodor Lukyanov and Sergey Karaganov.

188 'Strategiya dlya Rossii: nekotorye tezisy dlya doklada Soveta po vneshnej i oboronnoj politike' (Strategy for Russia: theses of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19/8/1992.

189 Aleksey G. Arbatov, 'Rossiya i NATO: nuzhny li my durg drugu?' (Russia and NATO: Do We Really Need each other?), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11/3/1992.

190 Leszek Buszynski, *Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, Westport CT: Praeger, 1996, p.54.

191 Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009, p.193.

For the first time in history, the North Atlantic Alliance plays in relation to us a necessary and, we must underline, respectable role.¹⁹²

Another area of cooperation between NATO and Western partners was the one of peacekeeping, but the attempts to elaborate a common framework between Russia and NATO proved to be more difficult. On one side, there was no consensus in Russia for allowing NATO to conduct peacekeeping operations in the CIS, but on the other the Russian government was interested in political and material support to its peacekeeping operations in Transnistria, Tajikistan and South Ossetia. This is why the CSCE and the United Nations continued to occupy a central role in Moscow's security thinking in the 'honeymoon' period: although Russian leaders did not believe they needed international authorization for peacekeeping operations in the CIS, they welcomed the international cooperation on this matter inside those institutions where Russia had a prominent status and enjoyed veto power¹⁹³. Therefore, Yeltsin agreed in the CSCE Helsinki Summit Declaration that NATO should have the right to conduct peacekeeping operations only under a UN or CSCE mandate¹⁹⁴. As for peacekeeping coordination between NATO and Russia outside the former Soviet region, there seemed to be a consensus on the need to conduct common cooperation¹⁹⁵, but several doubts remained and were expressed by former SACEUR General Galvin, who stated that "at the present time, Russia is not in the position to conduct any serious military operation on a large scale"¹⁹⁶.

Therefore, while this period was marked by an unprecedented level of trust and cooperation at an official level between Russia and the West on security matters, the accomplished progress was little and showed patterns of continuity with the Gorbachev period, particularly in the ambiguity on Russia's possible integration in the European security and on the habit of dismissing military and strategic calculations in agreements with Western partners. The following years would be marked by both external and domestic factors that would cause a progressive change in relations between Russia and the West, as well as the abandonment of the liberal foreign policy.

192 *The Coordinator of NATO Aid* (Koordinator pomoshchi NATO), Pravda, 17/2/1992.

193 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p. 11.

194 *Helsinki Summit Declaration*. Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (10/7/1992). <<http://www.osce.org/mc/39530?download=true>>.

195 'V Genshtabe NATO: Pavel Grachev obsuzhdaet vozmozhnost' rossijskogo uchastiya v mirotvorcheskikh operatsiyakh OON' (Inside NATO Headquarters: Pavel Grachev discusses the opportunity of Russian participation to UN peacekeeping missions), *Izvestiya*, 31/3/1993.

196 See: *Pravda*, 8/9/1992.

3rd Chapter

The statist revival

Foreign policy with us does not proceed from the directions a priorities of a developed statehood. On the contrary, the practice of our foreign policy will help Russia become Russia.

(Sergey Stankevich¹⁹⁷)

External challenges to liberal internationalism

The Russian government was correct in assessing that domestic reforms could not succeed without high-interest international loans, assistance in debt restructuring, and a massive flow of Western investments. Indeed, the good relations established with the United States allowed Russia to benefit from a \$24 billion package announced by Bush with Kohl's support in April 1992 and a \$43.4 billion program of assistance opened at the Tokyo G-7 summit thanks to Clinton's efforts, together with an agreement with the Paris Club for the restructuring of the \$70 billion Soviet debt assumed by Russia¹⁹⁸. Moreover, membership in the IMF and World Bank in June 1992 allowed Russia access to useful credits for macroeconomic stabilization and budget balancing. However, the fact that assistance came prevalently in the form of loans, as opposed to grants, had Russians concerned on the heavy debt burden, and the loan conditions seemed to Moscow unnecessarily stringent and intrusive¹⁹⁹. The highly inflated expectations of Russian liberals were disappointed also by the lack of free access to European markets and by the small amount of Western foreign direct investments attracted by Russia in comparison with other post-socialist states²⁰⁰. Russian officials were also frustrated by the evident lack of reciprocity in the interactions between Russia and the West in the arms market: a report published by *Izvestiya* showed in fact that Moscow's choice to support Western sanctions against major partners in arms trade (Libya, Iraq and Yugoslavia) had generated clear Western gains and Russian losses²⁰¹.

In this predicament, a correlation between lagging international cooperation and the domestic position of the Russian government was drawn by the Russian Foreign Minister during a famous speech held in December 1992 at a CSCE meeting in Stockholm. Surprisingly, Kozyrev initially shocked his fellow diplomats and "denounced Western interference in the Baltic states and the United Nations,

197 Sergey B. Stankevich, 'Derzhava v poiskakh sebya' (A power in search of itself), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28/3/1992.

198 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 71.

199 Light, *Foreign Policy Thinking*, p. 84.

200 Between 1990 and 1995, the level of foreign direct investments (measured in relation to the 1990 GDP) enjoyed by Hungary (32.2%), Czech Republic (12.6%) and Poland (11%) had in fact been comparatively higher in comparison to the one enjoyed by Russia (0,6%). Steven M. Fish, "The Determinants of Economic Reform in the Post-Communist World", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.12, No.1, 1998, p.38.

201 According to the Russian liberal newspaper, between 1991 and 1993 Russia's share in global arms markets dropped from 38% to 17%, whereas American share had increased from 30% to 58%. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p.73.

claimed that CSCE norms did not apply to the former Soviet Union, and declared the ‘near abroad’ as Russia’s sphere of interest, where it would feel free to protect its interests by all available means”²⁰². Only after a few seconds, Kozyrev explained that these were not his words, but the ones of the next Russian Foreign Minister, who would inevitably take his place if the West kept on refusing serious diplomatic and financial support to Russia.

In this adventurous move aimed at saving the legitimacy of the liberal coalition, Kozyrev had also the Bosnian war in mind. The Russian policy in the conflict had in fact been largely driven by his pro-Western approach, thanks to the influence that the Foreign Minister enjoyed after the December 1991 MFA staff reorganization and until the establishment of the Russian Minister of Defense in April 1992²⁰³. In the initial phase of the conflict Russia showed substantial support to the Western agenda in the Balkans as opposed to the traditional ties with Serbia: Moscow joined the international economic and arms embargo on Yugoslavia, approved the UN Security Council resolution n.770²⁰⁴, supported the Vance-Owen plan²⁰⁵ and engaged Russian troops in the UN peacekeeping units. While coherent with the strategy of providing diplomatic support to the West in exchange for Western financial aid, Kozyrev’s commitment to a rapid and bloodless conclusion of the conflict had also important domestic policy implications, which we will outline in the next section. What must be underlined here is that Russia’s Bosnia policy was putting its stake on cooperation with the West on an equal and reciprocal basis. As Smith argued,

[f]or many Russians, something far more important than the future of Bosnia itself was perceived to be at stake: nothing less than their country’s status as a great power, particularly in the European context, and its right to be respected as such²⁰⁶.

The desire to derive from the Bosnian conflict a confirmation of Russia’s great power status was the rationale under the March 1992 proposal of the Contact Group on the Balkans, an informal framework where Russia and major Western powers would coordinate their activities. However, the achievement of a rapid resolution of the conflict was hampered by the lack of consensus among Europeans, Americans and Russians over a wide set of issues (international framework for the peacekeeping mission, rules of engagement, etc.), with Moscow pushing to have the conflict regulated by the United

202 Light, *Foreign Policy Thinking*, p. 81.

203 John Scott Masker, “Signs of a Democratized Foreign Policy? Russian Politics, Public Opinion and the Bosnia Crisis”, *World Affairs*, Vol.160, No.4, 1998, p. 188.

204 This resolution called all parties to stop violations of the international humanitarian law acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and would be later used as the legal basis for NATO intervention. *Resolution 770/1992*, <[<http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/770\(1992\)>](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/770(1992))>.

205 Drafted in 1993 by UN Special Envoy Cyrus Vance and EC representative Lord Owen, this proposal involved the division of Bosnia into 10 semi-autonomous regions but did not establish the definitive outline of these cantons, leaving its definition to negotiations between Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

206 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p.60.

Nations without major American involvement²⁰⁷. The weakness of the consensus reached on the Vance-Owen plan was unveiled after May 1993, when the Bosnian Serbs rejected the plan (also showing the lack of influence of Moscow on Serbian leaders). In the occasion, even the usually liberal and pro-government newspaper *Izvestiya* took a critical stance toward Kozyrev's policy, stating that the Bosnian war was "bringing to the light some features of the changed international situation, in which the self-interest reigns supreme, not only in the bloody feud wars between Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and Croats, but also in the disagreements between partners – the Americans and the Europeans – and in fictions between Washington and Moscow that we had seemingly put behind us"²⁰⁸.

Soon after, the partnership between Russia and the West as advocated by liberals was weakened on another international front: the issue of NATO enlargement. This topic had been present in the international debate since the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact: the prospect of the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops opened a regional security vacuum that stimulated leaders inside and outside the Transatlantic community to imagine alternative scenarios. While shifting its focus from direct military attacks to security threats fostered by economic, social and political factors, NATO indicated that "[e]ven in a non-adversarial and cooperative relationship, Soviet military capability and build-up potential, including its nuclear dimension, still constitute[d] the most significant factor of which the Alliance ha[d] to take account in maintaining the strategic balance in Europe"²⁰⁹.

At the same time, leaders in Central and Eastern Europe, Yeltsin included, started to show their interest in the prospect of NATO membership. However, between 1991 and the first half of 1993 the Western approach to the prospect of NATO enlargement was on the whole lukewarm: there seemed to be no direct threats to the security of Central and Eastern European states that requested an immediate enlargement, and other European security organizations, like WEU and CSCE, were prospected to further develop. The position of the American administration obviously played a decisive role. While Washington had shown in 1991 that it was not ready to entertain the mind-dazzling prospect of Russian membership in NATO, the Bush and the Clinton administrations until 1994 were still strongly committed not to spoil relations with Moscow by engaging the opportunity of NATO membership for Visegrad countries²¹⁰. They were in fact aware that such a move would be

207 For a full account on the controversy between the US, EU and Russia on Bosnia, see: Beverly Crawford, "The Bosnian Road to NATO Enlargement", part II, in *Explaining NATO Enlargement*, edited by Robert W. Rauchhaus, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001, pp.40-57.

208 'Rossiya samoutverzhdaetsya cherez Bosniyu' (Russia asserts itself through Bosnia), *Izvestiya*, 28/5/1993.

209 *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council*, 7-8/11/1991, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm>.

210 The Visegrad Group was an alliances established in 1991 between Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (later on, Czech Republic and Slovakia) for the purposes of enhancing the cooperation with one another and furthering their prospect of integration inside the European Union and NATO.

seen by Moscow as a new *cordon sanitaire* isolating the country²¹¹ and would have negative effects on the sensitive negotiations over the management of the Soviet nuclear arsenal held by Ukraine²¹². Nonetheless, the absence of viable proposals for a comprehensive European security framework resulted in a stalemate, the stability of which was increasingly tested by Central European demands and domestic pressures in Western countries to support the process of reforms in post-socialist states. Surprisingly, the stalemate was unlocked by Yeltsin himself, who during his visit to Warsaw in August 1993 agreed to release a joint declaration with Polish President Lech Walesa that read:

The presidents touched on the matter of Poland's intention to join NATO. President L. Walesa set forth Poland's well-known position on this count, which was met with understanding by President B. N. Yeltsin. In the long term, such a decision taken by a sovereign Poland in the interests of overall European integration does not go against the interests of other states, including the interests of Russia.²¹³

A few days later, he reaffirmed in Prague that this concept was valid also for the Czech Republic. These words obviously attracted international attention. On one side, Polish officials, like Walesa's spokesman Andrzej Drzyczismki immediately pointed out Yeltsin's endorsement as the main achievement of the visit and suggested that the main Western argument used to oppose Poland's bid to NATO membership had now decayed. The same reasoning was used by Republican Senator Richard Lugar, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in order to support his advocacy of the expansion of NATO's area of activity as a viable strategy to tackle ethnic conflicts like the ones in Yugoslavia²¹⁴. However, the use of the joint declaration by pro-NATO enlargement officials was consistently biased. Firstly, the expression 'the presidents touched on the matter' indicated that NATO enlargement was not the dominant themes of the meeting: the visit of the Russian President was in fact mainly focused on rebooting the bilateral dialogue and the economic relations between Moscow and Central European states after the collapse of the Soviet Union and was marked by several symbolic moments that highlighted Yeltsin's willingness to overcome the tragic Soviet legacy in Eastern Europe and to open a new directive for Russian foreign policy²¹⁵. Secondly, the

211 Russian officials present at a session of the North Atlantic Council underlined these concerns as expressed by representatives of NATO member countries. Report on the session of the North Atlantic Assembly in Berlin (20-24/5/1993). *Documents on the participation of a delegation from the Committee to the activities of the North Atlantic Assembly in the NATO Headquarters in Brussels (reports. news. letter)*. Committee for Defense and Security Issues, Congress of People's Deputies, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Moscow.

212 After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine held about one third of the Soviet nuclear arsenal as well as as significant means of its design and production, while the operational control was dependent on Russia. The controversy was ended only in December 1994 with the signature of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, whereby Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States provided Ukraine with security assurances and Kiev agreed to destroy the weapons and to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (TNP).

213 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p. 53

214 Jane Perlez, 'Yeltsin 'Understands' Polish Bid for a Role in NATO', *New York Times*, 26/11/1993.

215 Nikolay I. Bukharin, *Rossiya: povorot v storony vostochnoj Evropy?* (Russia: A Turn towards Eastern Europe?), *Obozrevatel'*, No.25, 1993, <http://observer.materik.ru/observer/N25_93/25_05.HTM>.

joint declaration did not contradict the traditional Russian opinion on the issue, which indicated that NATO enlargement had to be part of the process of 'overall European integration' (*obshcheevropejskaya integratsiya*), an interesting echo of the previous Soviet position on German unification. Despite all possible clarifications, the joint declaration was an important factor in bringing the issue of NATO enlargement back in the Western and in the Russian political debate, while in the meanwhile the interaction of international and domestic dynamics was fostering a shift in the political balance unfavorable to the advocates of Russian-Western partnership.

A new political balance: regional and domestic factors

By the end of 1992, it was clear that the pro-Western mood that had dominated the Russian public and elite opinion in the last years of perestroika was quickly fading. The opinion of the moderate analyst who suggested that “the USA and the West have not yet thrown their authority or the material means they have...into assisting Russia”²¹⁶ was the counterpoint of the scapegoating of the Russian population, which, frustrated by the liberal policies that sparked a steep rise of inflation and the drain of private savings and pensions, blamed the West for the country’s economic woes²¹⁷. In light of increasing economic hardships, the opposition to Yeltsin’s course did not hesitate to exploit foreign policy unsuccesses to attack the government. Yevgeny Amabrtsumov²¹⁸, chairman of the International and Foreign Economic Affairs Committee, took a radically pro-Serbian stance on the Bosnian war, criticizing the executive’s policy as a breach of Russia’s traditional policy and calling the Orthodox Slavs to “counter the Islamic revanchism that threatens the region from the Adriatic to the Black and Caspian Sea”²¹⁹. The ‘red-brown coalition’, composed by Zyuganov’s Communist Party (KPRF) and Zhirinovksy’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), started to use an aggressive nationalist rhetoric inside the Supreme Soviet that was reminiscent of Soviet Cold War propaganda, accusing Kozyrev of having betrayed the Serbs and criticizing the United States, Germany and the UN²²⁰. The media also played an important role in spreading the views of political leaders and intellectuals criticizing Russia’s Bosnia policy: newspapers like *Pravda*, *Sovietskaya Rossiya* and *Kuranty* repeatedly campaigned against Kozyrev and accused the government of betraying the interests of the Russian people²²¹. However, as far as the public approach to the Bosnian war was concerned, several

216 Nikolay A. Kosolapov, “Kakaya Rossiya nuzhna Zapadu?” (What kind of Russia does the West need?), *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, No.2 (1994), p. 9.

217 Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p.198.

218 Yevgeny Arshakovich Ambartsumov (1929-2010) was a Russian politician elected in 1990 to the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies and to the Supreme Soviet, who initially entered in the parliamentary fraction of ‘Democratic Russia but founded in 1992 the group ‘Motherland’ (Rodina). In these years, he took part to some controversial visits to Yugoslavia, where he defended pro-Serbian positions and denied the existence of Serbian war crimes.

219 See: *Izvestiya*, 11/8/1992.

220 Masker, *Russian Politics, Public Opinion and the Bosnia Crisis*, p. 180.

221 For example, see: ‘Za spinov naroda i protiv serbov’ (Behind the People’s Back and Against the Serbs), *Pravda*, 20/11/1992.

surveys conducted between 1992 and 1995 showed that only a minority of the population took a pro-Serbian stance on the conflict, while, as a Russian scholar underlined at the time, “the average Russian thinks about his salary and prices and is not in the position to think about foreign policy”²²².

Irrespective of the low public appeal of foreign policy issues, the Russian parliament nonetheless was able in these years to assert its power to amplify public opinions and affect the domestic political climate. Aside from the debate on war in Yugoslavia, this feature was also proved by the controversy over the Kurile Islands. The Russian leadership had in fact decided to seriously engage Tokyo, seen by Moscow as a Western partner, and to reach a final settlement on the disputed islands based on the 1956 Soviet-Japanese agreement, which foresaw the return of two of the four islands to Tokyo. The conclusion of the long-lasting issue and the reboot of Russian-Japanese relations was set to start with the visit of the Russian President in Japan in Fall 1992. However, Russian deputies later called for a postponement of the visit and a more careful analysis of the whole issue, and eventually Yeltsin did cancel the visit and abandoned the previous plans for the settlement²²³. The lobbying activity of the Russian military, which staunchly opposed military withdrawal from the islands and territorial concessions, played an important role in fueling the nationalist opposition: during a Supreme Soviet meeting on the issue in July 1992 the Russian deputies were in fact presented a General Staff document which portrayed Japanese-American capabilities in the region as evidence of an aggressive buildup threatening the Russian mainland²²⁴.

However, there is evidence that the influence exerted by military establishment in the early 1990's was not limited to the Kurile Islands controversy, but that it expanded also to other foreign policy and security issues, and especially to relations with former Soviet republics. This development reflected the particular military legacy of the USSR: after the collapse of the Party, the army had remained the only national-scale organized structure in Russia and extended throughout the former Union, and its activity was now free from the ideological and institutional checks previously imposed by the CPSU. Such features fostered the appearance of a new national patriotic ideology that justified the support to Russian ethnic minorities in the region and development of Russian peacekeeping operations in order to promote Russian security interests and settlements of ethnic conflicts on acceptable terms for Moscow²²⁵. Despite its apparent affinity with the stance adopted by radical nationalist forces in favor of the restoration of the Soviet borders, the position of the army, reflected by the political-military activism of the Russian high command between 1991 and 1993, was generally informed by a different

222 The words in brackets are from Viktor Kremenyuk, who was the deputy director of the Institute on United States and Canada at the Russian Academic of Sciences (ISKRAN) in the 1990's. Shiraev, Terrio, *Russian Decision-Making Regarding Bosnia*, p. 144.

223 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

224 ‘Genshtab: Ostanovit’ sokrashenie voisk na yuzhnykh kurilakh’ (The General Staff: Stop the Army Withdrawal in Southern Kuriles), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30/7/1992.

225 For a broader analysis of this process, see: Allison, *Military Factors in Foreign Policy*, pp. 230-285.

logic. As a matter of fact, military commanders were far more aware than nationalist politicians of the underlying weaknesses in Russian military capabilities, and they were less interested in adventurist expansionism than in the creation of a common strategic space in the CIS region coherent with the tradition of Russian and Soviet security thinking²²⁶. Peacekeeping missions promoted between 1991 and 1994 in the CIS area reflected this consensus inside the military establishment. In particular, the Russian intervention in Abkhazia in 1994 (accepted by the Georgian government) was both aimed at avoiding the spread of civil war over ethnic lines and to secure the strategic presence of Russian military bases along the Georgian coastal line on the Black Sea²²⁷. At the same time, military activism in the civil war in Tajikistan was motivated by the Russian Security Council decision to continue relying on old Soviet border defenses in Central Asia²²⁸, thereby supporting military ambitions for a ‘forward defense’ in the CIS region.

In light of the weakness of Russian state institutions, escalating regional conflicts and the looming threat of the secession of Russian republics exemplified by Chechnya, it was understandable that the Russian military would assume the role of the key contributor to the country’s territorial integrity and start asserting significant political leverage. Notably, Russian top military leaders played a major role in developing both the strategic and the political part of the 1993 Military Doctrine²²⁹, which justified the intervention of armed forces in defense of Russian citizens and warned against the expansion of military blocks toward Russia’s borders²³⁰. The increasing involvement of the military establishment in policymaking, fostered by the weak tradition of civilian control over the armed forces, was welcomed by officials (Stankevich²³¹), influential deputies (Ambartsumov), scholars (Migranyan²³²) and by industrial-military dominated organizations like the Council on Foreign and Defense Policies and the Civic Union. Nonetheless, the frequent overlaps between the political and the military sphere in this period were also encouraged by instability of the institutional framework. On the one hand, the case of the involvement of General-Major Lebed²³³ in Transnistria showed that members of the

226 In a reliable opinion poll on senior officers in 1994, carried out for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung by a German polling group in cooperation with sociologists at a Russian military academy, Zhirinovskiy was in fact viewed negatively as successor of Yeltsin by the 69% of polled officers (only Gorbachev attracted a more negative response). *Military elites in Russia 1994* (Militareliten in Russland 1994), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1994, p. 19-21.

227 The strategic role of Russian bases on the Black Sea Coast of Caucasus was confirmed by Defense Minister Grachev in several public occasions. See: ‘Gruziya mozhet prevratitsya v novyi Afganistan’ (Georgia could turn into a new Afghanistan), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 25/2/1993.

228 Pavel Felgenhauer, ‘Stariye granitsy i novye bazy’ (Old borders and ‘new’ bases’), *Segodnya*, 19/9/1993.

229 Allison, *Military Factors in Foreign Policy*, p. 255.

230 ‘Rossiya prinimaet novuyu voennuyu doktrinu’ (Russia adopts New Military Doctrine), *Rossiiskiy Vesti*, 18/11/1993.

231 Sergey Borisovich Stankevich (1954) was adviser to the Russian President on political issues from June 1991 to December 1993, and proposed a less Western-centric foreign policy course, aimed at making Russia a Eurasian power bridging the West and the East and able to defend its national interests in the CIS region.

232 Andranik Migranyan (1949) is an Armenian-born Russian politologist, who was member of the Presidential Council in the 1990’s and advocated the idea the former Soviet region should be declared space of vital Russian interests.

233 Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed (1950-2002) was the Lieutenant-General who commanded the 14th Army between 1992 and 1995 and who sided with the secessionist republic of Transnistria in its conflict with Moldova, acting independently from Moscow’s leadership but with strong support from the military high command. After 1995, he

Russian high command could follow an independent agenda with open political implications. On the other, both President Yeltsin and the parliamentary opposition - led by the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov and supported by Vice-President and Major-General Aleksander Rutskoy - tried to win the support of the military high command in the clash over the adoption of the new Russian Constitution (1992-1993). Indeed, the fact that Yeltsin's victory was mainly due to the intervention of the military in his favor confirmed the influential position that the military establishment had acquired throughout the previous years²³⁴.

The revival of a more assertive foreign policy course was finally confirmed by the position adopted by Russian institutions after Yeltsin's faux pas on NATO enlargement. In early September, a Foreign Ministry official, Vyacheslav Yelagin, wrote an article meant to clarify the new official position. Firstly, Russia, albeit recognizing the right of every state to join NATO, was against a rapid enlargement. Secondly, the MFA's priority was to "strengthen and improve such structures as CSCE and North Atlantic Council"²³⁵. Finally, the article voiced the opinion that the Russian Federation, in light of its special position in European security, should develop a special relationship with NATO before any enlargement was considered. Mid-September, after this first correction, Yeltsin sent a letter to the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, in which he exposed similar positions: he warned that further talks on NATO enlargement would spur the risk of neo-isolationism in Russia and would cause political unrest in moderate circles. In the end, he confirmed the Russian desire to have a special partnership with NATO:

We favor a situation where the relations between our country and NATO would be by several degrees warmer than those between the Alliance and Eastern Europe. NATO–Russia rapprochement, including through their interaction in the peace-making arena, should proceed on a faster track.²³⁶

There is evidence that Western diplomats interpreted this letter as a sign of Yeltsin's increasing dependence on the military²³⁷, and the publication of the new Military Doctrine was received as a further proof of this trend²³⁸. Despite the Western dominating opinion, perhaps the most insightful document on the shift in the Russian foreign policy in this period did not come from the military, but

was elected to the State Duma in December 1995 elections and ran as an independent in 1996 Presidential elections, where he arrived in the third place (14,7%).

234 A key role was played in the 1993 November coup by Defense Minister Grachev, who refused Rutskoy's proposals because of his anti-praetorian views. For a more detailed account of Russian civil-military relations in the proximity and in the aftermath of Russia's 1993 institutional crisis, see: Brian D. Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations (1689-2000)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.269.

235 See: *Segodnya*, 14/9/1993.

236 *Russian President Boris Yeltsin's letter to US President Bill Clinton*, SIPRI Yearbook 1994, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.249-250.

237 Roger Cohen, 'Yeltsin Opposes Expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe', *New York Times*, 2/10/1993.

238 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p.55.

from the SVR, which in November 1993 presented a report named “The prospect of NATO enlargement and the interests of Russia”²³⁹. The report steered clear from any attempt to revive Cold War rhetoric and, while stating the eastward enlargement of NATO would generate an unfavorable geopolitical situation for Russia, it recognized that “it would be wrong to say that such enlargement would result in the creation of a military foothold aimed at attacking Russia and its allies”²⁴⁰. The report stressed two main areas of impact of the NATO decision on Russia. The first was on the military level, where the movement of the colossal NATO military potential in the direct proximity of Russian borders would request the military to rethink security conceptions, armed forces deployment and defense plans at their core, independently from the fact that NATO was no longer seen as an enemy and that this initiative was not aimed at creating a *cordon sanitaire* around Russia. The second area of impact of the NATO decision would be the domestic political one, where the enlargement would have a deep psychological impact, giving arguments to anti-Western forces and reviving the country's historical feeling of isolation and insecurity in the elite. Therefore, while confirming that Russia did not pretend to have the right to dictate to sovereign Central and Eastern European states whether to become a NATO members or not, the report concluded by stating that

[i]t would be in Russia's interests if the process of expanding the zone of NATO's responsibility were synchronized with a change in the nature of that alliance and with an adaptation of its functions to the special features of the present stage of historical development²⁴¹.

The report enjoyed the support of the Defense Ministry and by the General Staff, and, as the SVR Director Yevgeny Primakov underlined during its presentation, the fact that it had also been previously exposed both to the President and to the MFA, while not accounting as an official approval of its contents, signaled that no public institution could have taken a fundamental stance against this report when it was published. The most important aspect of this document was that it presented a creative vision able to engage both the military and mainstream political leaders dissatisfied with the outcome of the liberal foreign policy course but interested in further cooperation with the West and with NATO.

The final blows to the pro-Western course came in late 1993 and early 1994. The first was the defeat of the democratic coalition in the December 1993 parliamentary election, which ended with the

239 ‘Opravdano li rasshirenie NATO? Osoboe mnenie SVR’ (Is the NATO enlargement justified? The opinion of SVR), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26/11/1993.

240 *Ibid.*

241 *Ibid.*

victory of Zhirinovskiy's LDPR and a good performance of the Communist Party²⁴². While the role played by foreign policy failures in the electoral outcome is disputable²⁴³ and the legislative had little direct influence on the Kremlin's foreign policy, this defeat further weakened the position of the Foreign Minister, since Yeltsin, trying to gain credibility among its critics, "encouraged speculation that Kozyrev would be soon out of job"²⁴⁴. The second blow was caused by the first bombing at the Sarajevo market (February 5th 1994). Western countries, convinced that the attack had been carried out by Bosnian Serbs and disappointed by the Russian failure to influence Serbian leaders, mobilized NATO and started in April 1994 a series of airstrikes on Serbian targets near Sarajevo without consulting with Russia. This move, received by the Russian government as an outright humiliation, further fueled the conservative anti-Western rhetoric and became in the Russian political debate the ultimate proof that the West cared little about reciprocity toward Moscow and that the pro-Western course had to be abandoned.

A fragile compromise tested by Partnership for Peace

As an answer to international challenges to the liberal course and increasing legitimacy of statist views in the domestic political arena, the Russian government gradually acknowledged its weakened position and modified its stance in several areas. In December 1992 he fired Gaidar from the position of Prime Minister and appointed former Gazprom chairman Viktor Chernomyrdin. As for foreign policy, Yeltsin tried to counter radical nationalism by supplementing liberal internationalism with a non-exclusionary state-centrism²⁴⁵, like in the case of the canceled visit to Kurile Islands. In 1993, the Russian president attended the congress of the Civic Union, thereby acknowledging its political significance, and finally underwrote military interventions in the CIS by demanding in February the international recognition of the Russian status as a guarantor of peace and stability in the former Soviet Union²⁴⁶. However, this did not imply a decrease in Russian engagement in cooperation with Europe and the United States. In this intermediary phase, the Kremlin was trying to build a relationship based on elements of both cooperation and competition that would help the government to maintain credibility both in face of the domestic opposition and of Western partners, whose role

242 The popular vote in the Russian legislative election that took place on 12 December 1993 was thus divided: LDPR - 22,92% (12 million votes), the democratic coalition Russia's Choice - 15,5% (8 million votes), Communist Party - 12,4% (6.6 million votes).

243 Despite the low level of public concern for foreign policy issues, Zhirinovskiy's victory reflected partially the state neglect for the Army and for its basic needs. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 76.

244 Masker, *Russian Politics, Public Opinion and the Bosnia Crisis*, p.183

245 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 166.

246 Astrid Tuminez, "Russian Nationalism and the National Interest", chap.2, in Celeste A. Wallander, *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy Conduct after the Cold War*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996, p. 59.

was still critical in the accomplishment of internal reforms²⁴⁷. The MFA, despite Kozyrev's warnings about the emergence of a 'party of war', was encouraged in Spring 1992 to abandon its initial position in favor of Western participation in CIS peacekeeping missions and to develop a unified approach to the issue with the Defense Ministry.

The newfound influence enjoyed by the Defense Ministry on the MFA was evident in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by Yeltsin on April 24th 1993. Expressing basic foreign policy principles in a programmatic and officially endorsed statement was a clear reminder of the influential role played by doctrine in the Soviet political culture. The role of this document, that Kozyrev was urged to develop already in early 1992, was to fill the conceptual and ideological void left by the loss of Marxism-Leninism and to serve as an expression of national consensus, as well as a guidance for diplomats and public officials²⁴⁸. The drafting of the concept became in itself a stimulus for political debate over the new identity of the country, with the liberal vision advocated by Kozyrev disputed by Sergey Stankevich and its vision of Russia as a bridge between different civilizations. When the document was approved, it certainly still reflected the yet not faded pro-Western thrust, but it also contained some of the key language and concepts that soon after would appear in the Military Doctrine: the concept confirmed Russia's opposition to political and military presence of third countries in the former Soviet Union and indicated that one of the main priorities for Russian foreign policymakers was to strengthen the unified military-strategic space in the CIS²⁴⁹. The official turn from liberal internationalist course was acknowledged by Kozyrev only after the December 1993 elections, when he announced that the government intended to follow the preference of the voters²⁵⁰. Indeed, the liberal loss in these elections and the affirmation of anti-democratic and revanchist forces, arrived after a year of intense political clash and an outright coup, was received by Yeltsin as a blow to his ability to rally mass support²⁵¹. The psychological weight of this defeat on the President, who had increasingly presented himself over the years as a 'people's tsar', had important political implications, as Yeltsin started to be heavily preoccupied with his personal security and to center his activity on the goal of political survival²⁵².

247 The integration between Russia and the European Union was indeed the dominant theme of Yeltsin's visit to Brussels on the eve of 1993 Russian parliamentary elections. Serge Schmemmann, 'Yeltsin Campaigns for Yeltsin and Not for Mere Politicians', *New York Times*, 10/12/1993.

248 Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p. 111.

249 For the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, see: Melville, Shackleina, *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concept and Realities*, pp.27-64.

250 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 85.

251 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, pp. 174-155, 182-183.

252 This feature was confirmed by members of his staff and, most importantly, by former KGB general and Yeltsin's boduguard Aleksandr Korzhakov. See: Vyacheslav V. Kostikov, *Roman s prezidentom: zapiski press-sekretarya* (Romance with a President: Notes of the Press Secretary), Moscow: Bagryus, 1997, p. 322; Aleksandr V. Korzhakov, *Boris El'tsin: ot rassveta do zakata* (Boris Yeltsin: From Dawn to Dusk), Moscow: Interbook, 1997, p. 133.

The uncertainty over the possible rise to power of radical political forces became a recurring theme in relations with the West²⁵³ and a rhetorical tool often used in correspondence of IMF deliberations on loan extensions²⁵⁴. The decreasing Russian availability to international concessions was signaled by Yeltsin in his Address to the Federal Assembly on February 1994:

It is in Russia's interests to create favorable external conditions for the country's development. This must be achieved by a proper and friendly but at the same time firm and consistent foreign policy, in which the desire for cooperation does not conflict with the country's national interests and Russian citizens' sense of national pride²⁵⁵.

The difficulty of striking a balance between these two components was shown by the cooperation with the West in 1994-1995, and in particular by the controversial issue of Russian participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). This program, suggested by the United States to NATO members in Fall 1993 and presented on January 1994 at the Brussels summit, had two dimensions: a military one, which consisted of a framework of contacts and cooperation activities between NATO members and non-members in Europe (joint military training, multinational force planning...); and a political one, which contemplated dialogue on issues such as democratic control of armed forces²⁵⁶. On the whole, PfP represented the Alliance's attempt to deflect international pressure on the issue of NATO enlargement, and, as one senior American diplomat described it, the program was "a very skillful compromise between people who said we should do nothing to offend the Russians and people who said we should let the east Europeans in now"²⁵⁷. When U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher presented the program to Yeltsin in October 1993, the latter reacted enthusiastically, although in retrospect it was clear that this reaction was based on his assumption that PfP would exclude NATO enlargement²⁵⁸, which at this point was a prospect opposed by almost the whole Russian foreign policy community, Kozyrev included²⁵⁹.

253 See: Kozyrev, *Strategiya partnerstva* (Strategy for Partnership), pp. 5-15.

254 Jerry Hough underlined this connection and argued that the received loans were counted upon to support the payment of public state sector workers and in this sense were meant to prevent potential social unrest. See: Jerry Hough, *The Logic of Economic Reform in Russia*, Washington DC: Brookings, 2001.

255 'Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoj Federatsii Federal'nomu Sobraniu: Ob ukreplenii rossijskogo gosudarstva' (Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly: On the Reinforcement of the State), *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, 25/2/1994.

256 James Sherr, "The dual enlargements and Ukraine", chap.6, in Anatol Lieven, Dmitri V. Trenin, *Ambivalent Neighbors: The EU, NATO and the Price of Membership*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, pp. 113-114.

257 Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization", chap.2, in Webber, *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, p. 52.

258 James Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO*, Washington DC: Brookings, 1999, p. 59.

259 Andrey V. Kozyrev, 'Vneshnyaya politika i rossijskiy parlament' (Foreign policy and the Russian parliament), *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, 2/2/1994.

Irrespective of the prospect of NATO enlargement, PfP sparked an ambivalent reaction in the Russian foreign policy community, with many critical points the Russian officials pointed out would hamper the country's participation. The first was the format of the program (16+1), which contemplated just bilateral relations between NATO members and third countries. This feature was deemed unfit, since Russia would not be provided with any special role nor allowed to have a say in the separate bilateral agreements between NATO and other Eastern European states. Secondly, PfP raised serious concerns on the future position of the Russian industrial-military complex in the European arms market. The third point was that evidently this initiative, extended to CIS members, would hamper Russian projects for a united military-strategic structure in the post-Soviet space²⁶⁰. These sensitive points were recognized even by those who advocated the need to participate in the PfP in order to avoid further self-isolation by Russia²⁶¹. However, these concerns were rapidly overshadowed by the Brussels Summit Declaration, which clearly showed that Yeltsin had misunderstood the program and that PfP did not exclude NATO enlargement²⁶². The frustration shared by moderate and nationalist officials inside the Russian establishment was embodied by Vladimir Lukin²⁶³, who compared the Partnership for Peace to "the compromise that a rapist makes with a girl dragged in a corner"²⁶⁴. Gorbachev, who had devoted his political career to the affirmation of a non-conflictual conception of security interests, also recognized that "Partnership for Peace means that the NATO infrastructure would gradually draw closer to Russia's borders...with all the ensuing consequences"²⁶⁵. The increasingly negative image of NATO in Russian political debate was further enhanced by the Alliance's unilateral decision to attack Serbian positions in Bosnia in April 1994, which angered Russian officials and forced Kozyrev to halt the negotiations with NATO on PfP. However, the pause did not last long, and in this period the Foreign Minister managed to formulate a request that would allow Russia to adhere the program: NATO members had to guarantee "that surprises and unilateral measures, especially military ones, can be ruled out in those zones where we must cooperate very

260 For a comprehensive presentation of all these concerns, see: Vyacheslav A. Nikonov, 'Partnerstvo vo imya mira: povestka dnya dlya Federal'nogo Sobraniya' (Partnership for Peace: Order of the Day for the Federal Assembly), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 7/4/1994.

261 This was, for example, the position adopted by Pavel Zolotarev, a representative of the Defense Ministry. *Transcript of the Parliamentary Hearing on Partnership for Peace*, in Documents on the Preparation and Conduction of the Parliamentary Hearing on the document 'Partnership for Peace' adopted in the session of the North Atlantic Council, Defense Committee of the State Duma, 17/3/1994, p. 10-13.

262 *Declaration of the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council* (11/1/1994). NATO website: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24470.htm?selectedLocale=en>.

263 Vladimir Petrovich Lukin (1937) was one of the founders of the liberal-democratic party Yabloko. After two years as Russian Ambassador to the United States, from 1994 to 1995 he served as Deputy Chairman of the State Duma and chair of the Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee.

264 *Transcript of the Parliamentary Hearing on Partnership for Peace*, in Documents on the Preparation and Conduction of the Parliamentary Hearing on the document 'Partnership for Peace' adopted in the session of the North Atlantic Council, Defense Committee of the State Duma, 17/3/1994, p. 7-10.

265 Intervyu s Gorbachevym (Interview with Gorbachev), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23/2/1994.

closely”²⁶⁶. As Vladimir Baranovsky later stated, the Russian request for a special relationship with NATO which included privileged consultation rights suggested that Moscow deemed “being equal [to other PFP participants] as unacceptable as being isolated”²⁶⁷. The Alliance was aware that the absence of Russia would damage the credibility of the Partnership, and immediately signaled its willingness to discuss an adequate arrangement²⁶⁸. Finally, NATO released an important communique at the end of the June meeting between NATO Foreign Ministers, which for the first time approved the idea of developing a separate and special relationship with Russia outside the Partnership for Peace²⁶⁹. Thus, on June 22nd 1994, Kozyrev flew to Brussels, issued a ‘Summary of Conclusions’ of discussions with NATO members and signed the Framework Document, the first step for participation in the program²⁷⁰.

The nationalist opposition did not lose time to criticize the Foreign Minister, and did so pointing out that the deal had been struck in the anniversary of the 1941 attack of Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union²⁷¹. Indeed, all that Kozyrev had managed to achieve was a non-binding document where NATO declared it would not take major decisions without first consulting Russia, a commitment that came to be known with the formula ‘no vetoes, no surprises’. The leading members of NATO decided to agree, as a sign of good gesture, to the establishment of an informal Contact Group on the Bosnian war. However, Kozyrev made clear that the Russian government, without aspiring to a veto right over NATO enlargement, interpreted the deal as an assurance that Russia would be preemptively warned before any serious steps forward would be taken in the process of NATO enlargement²⁷². All it took to frustrate the weak compromise achieved by the Russian Foreign Ministry was a political shift in the Clinton administration.

Indeed, the U.S. President radically changed his position on NATO enlargement throughout 1994: after dismissing a rapid enlargement and expressing hopes for Russian reforms during his January visit to Prague, in a Summer trip to Poland in a Summer he openly stated that the enlargement would not depend on the appearance of a new threat in Europe²⁷³. Kupchan²⁷⁴ argued that this shift was the result of several factors: disappointment about the Russian approach in the Bosnian war, lobbying by Clinton’s liberal advisors, increasing critics toward the PFP and the partnership with Russia inside the

266 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p.61.

267 Baranovsky, *Russian foreign policy priorities and Euroatlantic multilateral institutions*, p. 38.

268 Andrew Marshall, ‘Alliance will discuss special relationship if Russia backs Partnership for Peace’, *Independent*, 19/4/1994.

269 *Press Communiqué M-NAC-1(94)46*, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940609b.htm>.

270 *Summary of Conclusion: Discussions between the North Atlantic Council, and the Foreign Minister of Russia Andrei Kozyrev*, 22/6/1994, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940622a.htm>>.

271 For critics to the decision of Kozyrev, see: *Pravda*, 23/6/1994; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22/6/1994.

272 Andrew Marshall, ‘Russians sign up for closer NATO link’, *Independent*, 23/6/1994.

273 *Presidential Address to the Polish Parliament*, 7/7/1994, <<http://www.c-span.org/video/?58554-1/presidential-address-polish-parliament>>.

274 Charles Kupchan (1958) is an American political expert and was a member of the National Security Council during the Clinton administration.

foreign policy community²⁷⁵ and the electoral significance of East-European minorities voting in the 1994 mid-term elections²⁷⁶. The ensuing Republican victory further strengthened the momentum for NATO enlargement and arguably led the Clinton administration to affirm that NATO members should start discussing *among themselves* the next steps in the enlargement process, which was at least disputable under the ‘no vetoes, no surprises’ regime²⁷⁷. Thus, when the NATO Foreign Ministers agreed in December 1994 to “initiate a process of examination inside the Alliance to determine how NATO will enlarge, the principles to guide this process and the implications of membership”²⁷⁸, the Russian reaction was considerably angered. As much as NATO could underline the technical nature of the study process and the absence of wider implications on enlargement, Kozyrev argued that this was a clear violation of the principle of ‘no surprises’, and therefore canceled his trip to Brussels, where he had to sign the Individual Partnership Program that would seal the Russian participation to Partnership for Peace²⁷⁹. The new chill in relations between Russia and NATO was confirmed when, during the CSCE summit in Budapest, Yeltsin gave a famous speech where he warned that NATO expansion would plunge Europe from Cold War to a cold peace²⁸⁰.

In the following months, the participation of Russia to PfP was secured only after a visit of President Clinton to Moscow and the further promise that Russia would have “a voice, but not a veto over Alliance decisions”²⁸¹. The completion of the final step for accession to the program opened a period marked by several diplomatic breakthroughs: the 16+1 consultative format between NATO members and Russia developed in a surprisingly fast and successful way²⁸², Moscow agreed with the Dayton Agreement to join the peacekeeping mission led by the Alliance in Bosnia (IFOR) and, most importantly for Russia, NATO members informally assured that the enlargement would not take place before the Russian parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for December 1995 and June 1996²⁸³. However, these improvements amounted to small tokens in comparison to the bitter pill that Moscow had to swallow: there was nothing that Russia could do to move the United States away from the project of NATO enlargement, which at once questioned the country’s status as great power and reawakened traditional concerns over international isolation and strategic vulnerability. Inside the political establishment and the foreign policy community, there was a widespread feeling that after

275 Henry Kissinger, *Not This Partnership*, Washington Post, 24/11/1993; Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.73, No.2 (1994), pp. 67-82.

276 Charles A. Kupchan, “The Origins and Future of NATO Enlargement”, part IV, in Rauchhaus, *Explaining NATO Enlargement*, pp. 127-148.

277 Kenndy-Pipe, *Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, p. 54.

278 *Final Communiqué NATO M-NAC-2(94)116 issued at the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at NATO Headquarters* (1/12/1994). <<http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c941201a.htm>>

279 See: *Segodnya*, 3/12/1994.

280 Elaine Sciolino, ‘Yeltsin says NATO is trying to split continent again’, *The New York Times*, 6/12/1994.

281 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p.66.

282 By early 1997, the format had been used on more than twenty occasions. Andrew J. Pierre, Dmitri V. Trenin, “Developing NATO-Russian relations”, *Survival*, Vol. 39, No.1 (1997), p.7.

283 Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 156, 161-162.

the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had been “betrayed”²⁸⁴. In front a move that “Russia [could] not see as anything but unfriendly”²⁸⁵, whatever liberal internationalist aspect remaining in Moscow’s foreign policy looked senseless and Kozyrev, who more than anybody embodied that course, seemed indefensible. In the months before the December 1995 elections, the position of the delegitimized MFA reached an all-time low: the Bosnia policy was completely passed in the hands of the military, with the Foreign Minister “practically excluded from negotiations in Dayton”²⁸⁶ and without even being informed by the Defense Minister Grachev²⁸⁷.

This new arrangement did little to prevent another electoral defeat for the democratic coalition in the upcoming parliamentary elections, won this time by the Communist Party led by Gennady Zyuganov with 34.9% of the popular vote. The defeat was particularly worrisome for Yeltsin, who six months before the Presidential elections had three quarters of the country blaming him for Russia’s failures²⁸⁸. In this predicament, he planned to dismiss the Foreign Minister in order to avoid being weakened by the foreign policy card during the presidential run. However, Kozyrev had already foreseen this possibility and decided to spare himself the humiliation of being sacked: he ran for election in a district in the Murmansk region and, elected as a member of the Duma, was forced to resign from the post of Minister by the Russian law a few days after the formal signing ceremony of the Dayton Agreement.

Primakov’s statist vision

While Kozyrev’s resignation in December 1995 looked mainly as a tactical concession made by Yeltsin to the conservative opposition in the light of the incoming Presidential elections²⁸⁹, this event was just the culminating moment of the crisis of Russian liberalism and rise of statist positions that were outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter. The liberal internationalist foreign policy had failed because it was based on a faulty assessment of the Russian macroeconomic juncture and on an unrealistic reform project²⁹⁰, as well as on the optimistic assumption that a more convinced adherence to Western values would trigger the massive financial and diplomatic support that Gorbachev failed to receive from the United States and European countries. However, the West was far less enthusiastic

284 Vladimir P. Lukin, ‘Chto stroitsya v Evrope: novyi dom ili staryi zabor?’ (What is being built in Europe: a new home or old fence?), *Izvestiya*, 12/5/1995

285 This statement about NATO enlargement was made by Yeltsin’s national security assistant Yury Baturin. Aleksey Pushkov, *Russia and NATO: Dangerous Games in a Verbal Mist*, Moscow News, 7/4/1995.

286 Shiraev, Terrio, *Russian Decision-Making Regarding Bosnia*, p.162.

287 See: *Izvestiya*, 5/12/1995.

288 Stephen White, Richard Rose, Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, Chatham NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1997, p. 122.

289 Indeed, some observers commentated the appointment of Primakov to the MFA as a signal of Yeltsin’s intention to run the 1996 elections despite poor health conditions and low approval ratings. Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p. 230.

290 Throughout 1991, Yeltsin repeatedly promised that the pain from the shock therapy would last only between six months and a year. See: *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 29/10/1991.

about the prospect of integrating Russia than expected: in a few years the combination of IMF-advised economic policies and the prospect of NATO enlargement erased the political capital of Russian liberals just when escalating conflicts in the CIS and threats to Russian territorial integrity were awakening the activism of the military. In this scenario, a new coalition composed by state bureaucrats, industrialists and prominent figures in the military and in the security services took the political initiative arguing for a stronger role for the Russian state in dealing with instabilities at home and abroad. The rise of this coalition was made possible by the “historically dominant nationalist political culture”²⁹¹ and by the opportunities provided by the democratic system. As a matter of fact, despite their little electoral appeal in the early 1990’s²⁹², statist positions started to spread among those disappointed in the liberal course, to be upheld in the Supreme Soviet, in the Security Council, in the Presidential administration, inside the mainstream media and to be advocated by influential NGOs²⁹³.

The choice of the former head of the SVR Yevgeny Primakov was motivated by many factors. Through a career dedicated to theoretical and practical activity in the field of international relations and in particular to the Middle East he had established a solid reputation as a professional with an aura of competence able to appeal a wide range of oppositional and establishment forces²⁹⁴. He had risen to national politics in the last years of perestroika as advisor to Gorbachev, which made him palatable to national communists, but had never been associated with Brezhnev’s era and had avoided conflicts with Yeltsin during his rise²⁹⁵, which made him acceptable in the eyes of the President and his collaborators. Furthermore, his vision was bound to appeal a wide section of the Russian establishment, since it was based on the idea of Russia as *derzhava* (which can be translated as ‘great power’ but is better expressed by the definition ‘holder of international equilibrium of power’). In Primakov’s mind, the definition of Russia as a great power was not a fantasy fostered by nostalgia, but a reality entrenched in the country’s traditions and in its material capabilities (geographic extension, nuclear arsenal, permanent seat in the UN Security Council, economic potential, industrial-military production, scientific and technological potential and high level of education of the Russian

291 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 65.

292 Parties and movements associated with the Statist coalition never achieved significant electoral results. In 1993, the Civic Union gathered a mere 1,9% in the legislative elections. In the 1995 elections there were no parties running with a remarkably Statist agenda.

293 For an example of a renowned liberal scholar increasingly concerned by security concerns and disappointed in the pro-Western course, see: Dmitri V. Trenin, ‘Budet li NATO rasshiryat’sya na vostok i kakaya dolzhna byt’ v etom voprose politika Rossii?’ (Will NATO enlarge eastward and what should the Russian policy on this issue?), *Novoe Vremya*, October 1994.

294 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 225.

295 Indeed, Yeltsin had already agreed to the appointment of Primakov as head of the SVR in Fall 1991, conceding that he was the members of the Gorbachev’s team with whom the Russian President had the best relationship. See: Yevgeny M. Primakov, *Gody v bol’shoj politike* (The Years in Politics), Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno, 1999, p. 104.

population²⁹⁶). The new Minister did not ignore the lesson of the early 1990's, which had seen Russia's autonomy in the international arena increasingly diminished because of restricting material capabilities. However, in face of this situation he counterintuitively advocated for an active foreign policy aimed at ensuring better international conditions for domestic reforms, chiefly the defense of the country's territorial integrity and access to world markets "not as a discriminated and marginal provider of raw materials but as an equal participant"²⁹⁷. In this design, Primakov said he had been inspired by the figure of Aleksandr Gorchakov, the Tsarist Foreign Minister who took over after the humiliation of the Crimean War (1853-1856) and was one of the most inspiring figures for statist. The rationale of this strategy was that Russia's vulnerable position in the international environment forced the country's leadership to play an active role.

The strive to strengthen Russia's position as an independent power pole in the global arena was connected to the Foreign Minister's vision of the emergence of a democratic multipolar world order after the end of the Cold War, whereby different international actors (the European Union, China, Japan, but also Visegrad countries) started to undertake initiatives aimed at building a more independent and assertive position. The world was understood by statist as a power competition between sovereign states whose interests should be balanced in order to maximize peace and stability: a familiar picture reminiscent of XIX century European politics and of the realist school of international relations²⁹⁸. In this scenario, Russia would be able to preserve its sphere of influence and to exploit its comparative advantages, like the privileged position inside the United Nations, indicated by Primakov as the key international framework for the conservation of the multipolar balance of power. Therefore, this vision was coherent with the critical approach toward the 1990s hegemonic aspiration of American foreign policy and with the decision to enlarge NATO to Central Europe. On this issue Primakov developed a controversial position, arguing that between 1989 and 1991 "the Western delivered explicit assurances to the Soviet Union that NATO would not expand its sphere of influence to the east"²⁹⁹. The interpretation that Western countries had betrayed a previous pledge not to enlarge NATO became very popular in the Russian establishment, also thanks to the confirmation of some Western officials like former Ambassador Matlock³⁰⁰, and sparked a widely politicized historiographical debate³⁰¹.

296 See: 'Ministr, kotorogo ne rugaet oppositsiya' (The Minister who's not criticized by the opposition: Interview with Yevgeny Primakov), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 19-25/9/1996.

297 Yevgeny M. Primakov, "Rossiya v mirovoy politike" (Russia in World Politics), *Diplomaticheskij Vestnik*, No.10 (1998).

298 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

299 Primakov, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya nakanune 21 veka* (International Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century).

300 Jack Foust Matlock Jr. (1929) was a specialist in Soviet Affairs during the Cold War and served as U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991.

301 This controversy was tackled by Mark Kramer inside his work "The Myth of a No-NATO Enlargement Pledge", which in the late 2000's revisited the controversy in the light of the release of previously secret documents on the meetings between Gorbachev and foreign leaders. Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to

The stress on the common Soviet and American efforts to end the Cold war was also coherent with the critique to liberal internationalism, who with their ‘leaders-and-followers’ mentality ignored Russia’s interests and “sacrificed values and traditions accumulated throughout the whole Russian history, including the imperial and the Soviet period”³⁰². Indeed, in opposition both to the Marxist-Leninist and to the liberal vision Primakov argued that “there are no constant opponents, but there are constant national interests”³⁰³, which he believed to be “stability, resolution of the conflicts in the territory of the former Soviet Union, development of integration processes in the post-Soviet space, Russian territorial integrity”³⁰⁴.

Consequently, the Western uneasiness after the appointment of a supposed hard-liner at the head of the Russian MFA was partially misplaced³⁰⁵: as long as Russian essential foreign policy interests were taken into consideration, Primakov would be favorable to further enhance the cooperation with Western partners in NATO and other international frameworks. Nonetheless, Russia would now abandon the Western-centered approach and start a

Russia”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No.2 (2009), p. 39-61. Starting from the evidence exposed by Kramer, I started a research on Gorbachev’s conversations with foreign leaders between 1989 and 1991 through the documents published by the Gorbachev’s foundation. I directed my focus especially on the material from the end of 1990 and 1991, since Kramer’s work was focused only to the presence of the pledge during the negotiations on the reunification of Germany. Indeed, it is hardly admissible to take into consideration the assurances on the NATO refusal to enlarge eastward in these negotiations as applicable to any Warsaw Pact state other than Eastern Germany: the focus of the controversy between Soviet and NATO leaders was in fact, as explained in the first chapter, on the enlargement of NATO infrastructure to the former DDR. Nonetheless, Primakov is right in reminding Mitterrand’s negative assessment of NATO membership for Central European states in a conversation with Gorbachev on May 6th 1991, that is after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, there is evidence of similar statements made by other Western leaders in the same period. While these statements hold no value in light of international law, they certainly pointed out at a political commitment expressed by NATO members not to exclude the Soviet Union from the dialogue on European security and not to weaken the already shaky position of Gorbachev. From my viewpoint, the position of Primakov and other Russian scholars and politicians on this issue further underlines one of the major shortcomings of NATO enlargement, that is the postponement of the task of integrating Russia in a common security framework which triggered a dangerous security dilemma between Moscow, the Alliance and the new Central and Eastern European NATO members. However, their revisionism, while being politically relevant, is misplaced from a purely historiographical perspective. In fact, it overlooks that the aforementioned political commitments were expressed by Western countries toward a Soviet leadership that was highly reliant on Western support and ready to ensure unprecedented concessions on foreign policy and security issues. In other words, the pledge was entrenched in a cooperation framework between Moscow and the West built on a trust that Gorbachev achieved by consistently ignoring traditional elements of Soviet power and national interest against the opinion of a large part of the Soviet foreign policy community. This controversy highlights an inner contradiction in the Statist approach to the figure of Gorbachev: while celebrating on one side the common efforts to overcome the Cold war logic of confrontation, they generally blame the General Secretary for having betrayed the country’s national interests. This contradiction, in my view, hints at one of the most interesting features of the Russian elaboration of Soviet history, that is the stress on the external similarities between the two blocks without significant appreciation of the fundamental differences in their internal structure and with a subsequent neglect for the role of that military coercion played in the stability of the Warsaw Pact and ultimately in his demise. Therefore, more than a myth on the pledge not to enlarge NATO, one could point at the existence of a ‘myth on the consensual end of the Cold war’.

302 Primakov, *Rossiya v mirovoy politike* (Russia in World Politics).

303 *Ibid.*

304 ‘Ministr, kotorogo ne rugaet oppositsiya’ (The Minister who’s not criticized by the opposition: Interview with Yevgeny Primakov), *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 19-25/9/1996.

305 As the Western press put it, Primakov was “probably the least welcome in Washington. By selecting him, President Boris Yeltsin has signaled that he cares more about assuaging nationalism at home than soothing US fears”. ‘The Need for a New Ostpolitik’, *Financial Times*, 16/1/1996.

multipronged foreign policy aimed at drawing ties between Russia and other international actors interested in cooperation and in the affirmation of a multipolar order without hegemonic tendencies³⁰⁶. In parallel, Primakov advocated in favor of further integration in the CIS area by stating clearly that, while Russia would obviously enjoy a dominant position in the region, there would be no attempts to restore the USSR and that the sovereignty achieved by the former republics was irreversible³⁰⁷. On the whole, Primakov's vision looked more balanced and bound to steer clear from past excesses of Moscow's foreign policy. However, as with Gorbachev and Kozyrev, his theories would be soon asked to produce concrete results too.

³⁰⁶ As a matter of fact, Primakov indicated all future partners in a list: USA, Europe, China, Japan, India, Middle East, the Asian-Pacific region, Latin America and Africa. Primakov, *Rossiya v mirovoy politike* (Russia in World Politics).

³⁰⁷ Primakov, *Gody v bol'shoj politike* (The Years in Politics), pp. 218-219.

4th Chapter

The evolution of statist foreign policy

The West, for all its shortcomings, was still overwhelmingly the source of political, military, economic and technological might in the world; the question, therefore, was not whether Russia should develop a more cooperative relationship with it, but on what basis.

(Bobo Lo³⁰⁸)

Different chessboards, one strategy

Primakov, now at the head of the MFA and with a reelected Yeltsin *de facto* inactive from July 1996 to January 1997 as a consequence of a heart surgery, had the opportunity to shape the Russian approach to the controversial issue of NATO enlargement. A first meeting with U.S Secretary Warren Christopher in Helsinki (9th February 1996) convinced the new Foreign Minister that the United States were not inclined to allow Russia to set limits on the expansion of the Alliance. Given this position, Primakov acknowledged that Moscow had three options. The first was the one proposed by domestic nationalist forces: to refuse every possible contact with NATO and go back to a Cold war stance. In stark contrast with this one, Western countries argued that Russia should refrain from any objection against the enlargement and focus on the formalization of NATO-Russia relations. However, Primakov thought that the best course was an intermediate one, which balanced a firm negative approach toward the enlargement with the attempt to make the best out of the bad situation, that was to cooperate with NATO members so as to minimize the most unpalatable consequences of the enlargement for Moscow³⁰⁹.

The choice for this more moderate approach allowed Moscow to start conducting ‘exploratory missions’ with NATO member countries aimed at testing the consensus inside the Alliance on making concessions to Russia. This move proved quite successful in irritating the U.S. administration, that, worried that Russian activity would drive a wedge in the Allies’ position on NATO enlargement, started to demand an immediate opening of the negotiations between Russian officials and NATO Secretary General Javier Solana as early as in Fall 1996³¹⁰. The core of Moscow’s requests to the Alliance, elaborated by the MFA in cooperation with the Defense Ministry and the SVR, was divided into four sections: a set of military agreements, which included assurances on NATO’s refusal to deploy nuclear weapons (as well as foreign troops and military infrastructure on a permanent basis)

308 Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 43.

309 This approach was clearly favored by Primakov, who confessed that the desire to minimize the damages provoked by NATO enlargement was his focus during the draft of the aforementioned 1993 SVR report. The possibility of NATO membership for Russia, voiced by some Russian commentators in early 1997, was dismissed by the Foreign Minister as unrealistic. Primakov, *Gody v bol'shoj politike* (The Years in Politics), pp. 226, 242-244.

310 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p. 69.

in the territory of new member states and a new framework for the modernization of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE); the formation of a Russia-NATO consultative forum for the consensual resolution of controversies affecting Russian interests; the evolution of NATO into a more political organization; the fixation of these conditions inside a legally binding treaty signed by the head of state of NATO member countries and by the Russian President, as opposed to a mere charter or a declaration³¹¹. During an early phase of the negotiations, Primakov also argued that NATO should rule out a future membership for Baltic states and CIS countries, although this item was soon deleted from the agenda³¹².

The first request was agreed quickly with NATO members, who declared in December 1996 that they had “no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members”³¹³. After this, the Alliance also agreed that it would “carry out its collective defense and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces”³¹⁴. Both of these commitments were in line with the evolution of NATO from a defensive alliance into an organization focused on stability and engaged in costly and prolonged out-of-area operations (like SFOR in Bosnia³¹⁵), which implied the need to decrease the deployment of nuclear weapons and to restructure the organization of conventional forces in Europe³¹⁶. Nonetheless, the definition of the framework for the modernization of the CFE treaty was the object of prolonged talks between Primakov and the new U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. The bilateral Helsinki Summit between the United States and Russia (20-21 March 1997) played an especially important role inside the negotiations, since it was there that Yeltsin accepted that the document would have just a political and not a legally binding value, apparently in exchange for economic and commercial concessions from Washington³¹⁷. The fact that the parties reached an agreement by May came somewhat as a surprise, since Russian and NATO officials did not even agree on the name that the document should have³¹⁸.

311 Primakov, *Gody v bol'shoj politike* (The Years in Politics), p. 246-253.

312 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

313 *Press Communiqué M-NAC-2 (96)165 issued at the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council held in Brussels* (10/12/1996), <<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1996/p96-165e.htm>>.

314 *Statement by the North Atlantic Council*, 14/3/1997, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1997/p97-027e.htm>>.

315 The Stabilization Force (SFOR) was the NATO-led peacekeeping force deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1996 to 2004. Troops for this mission were provided by all NATO member states and by some third countries. Russia was included in the mission after long negotiations aimed at finding a compromise between the principle of unified command defended by NATO and the Russian uneasiness at deploying troops under the command of the Alliance.

316 Between September 1990 and September 2000, the number of American strategic weapons deployed in Europe declined by about half, from 12.646 to 6.000. Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons since 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 330. See also: Sean Kay, “Collective Defense and the New Nuclear Deterrence”, chap.1, in James Sperling, Victor S. Papacosma, *NATO after Sixty Years*, Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 2012, pp. 31-55.

317 Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 237-243.

318 As Primakov recalls, NATO members were favorable to call it ‘charter’ in order to underline its informal value, whereas Moscow for the same reason preferred ‘agreement’ or ‘treaty’. Primakov, *Gody v bol'shoj politike* (The Years in Politics), p. 298.

However, it was clear that, despite Primakov's attempt to focus on actual contents rather than on the timing of the agreement, both NATO and Russia clearly wanted the 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation' to be signed before the NATO Madrid Summit (8-9 July 1997), when the invitation of Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic into the Alliance was scheduled. Therefore, concerns about the symbolic value of formally establishing a NATO-Russia framework before the enlargement gained the priority over the concerns on the actual viability of the said framework and, most importantly, on the presence of a sustainable political will that would guarantee its effectiveness. Indeed, there is evidence that even after the signature of the Founding Act, which stated that NATO would undertake transformation "[w]hile preserving the capability to meet the commitments undertaken in the Washington Treaty"³¹⁹, the Russian leadership remained confident in a transformation of the Alliance or at least in the possibility that NATO could be balanced by other institutions in the panorama of European security. This belief was reflected both by Primakov's statements about a future complementarity between NATO and OSCE as a protection against "NATOcentrism"³²⁰ and by the interest shown by Russian media between 1997 and 1998 in German and French independent initiatives in the security field as a possible counterweight to America's monopolism, which once again recalled the Soviet divisive approach to European security³²¹.

Nonetheless, the attempt to gain some influence over NATO activity was just of one the elements of Primakov's strategy to confirm Russia's status as an international holder of power. The new Foreign Minister, in line with his formation as an Orientalist³²², highly valued the relations between Moscow and the countries of the Middle East. Russia had several interests in this region: to develop relations with Turkey and Iran conducive for the stability of traditional areas of Russian concern (Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asia); to secure diplomatic and commercial ties with historical Soviet allies (Iraq, Syria); to defend its position as arms provider and exporter of natural resources by fostering ties with OPEC countries; to cooperate with Muslim countries against the spread of Islamic radicalism,

319 *Founding Act, on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, 27/5/1997, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm>.

320 Aleksey Pushkov, 'Evgenij Primakov: Ya chuvstvuyu doverie prezidenta' (Yevgeny Primakov: "I Can Feel Yeltsin's Trust"), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30/12/1997.

321 In particular, Russian media and officials developed particular interest in the development of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, in France's assertiveness inside the Alliance and in the suggestion by German Foreign Minister Fischer that NATO could renounce its nuclear first strike option. See: Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, p. 57-59.

322 Primakov was educated at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies (MIV). From 1956 to 1970, he worked as a Middle Eastern correspondent for *Pravda* newspaper, and before entering the political career served as Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and as Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences.

particularly among the Russian minorities; and to be recognized as a promoter of stability in regional conflicts by balancing American military interventionism and pro-Israel stance³²³.

In particular, Russia started to oppose the Western attempts to undertake military actions against Saddam's regime, as signaled by Yeltsin's protests in 1996 against the American and British unilateral decision to launch cruise missile strikes targeting Iraqi air defense infrastructure³²⁴. Despite Western speculations, this newfound assertiveness had less to do with Primakov's personal ties with Saddam than with Russian concerns for national interests: the support to the primacy of the United Nations Security Council for conflict resolution was coherent with Moscow's attempts to lift international sanctions on Baghdad - which would allow Saddam Hussein to repay the huge \$7 billion debt with Moscow³²⁵ – and with the growing interest shown by Lukoil in Iraq's oil production³²⁶. The new stance adopted by Russia played a decisive role in Fall 1997, when Saddam ordered the expulsion of American members of the UN inspection team searching for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, which in turn triggered the withdrawal of the entire team and the increase of American military presence in the Gulf region amid rumors of an impending attack. Primakov, provided with the opportunity to capitalize on his ties with the Iraqi leadership and on the French opposition to a direct military intervention, managed to deliver an agreement with Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz whereby Iraq allowed the inspectors back in exchange for assurances on the lifting of sanctions made by permanent members of the UN Security Council and thus to avoid the escalation of the conflict. This diplomatic victory allowed Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posovalyuk to argue that "Russia is emerging [...] from its period of confusion and major problems, and it is now oriented toward conducting an energetic and constructive foreign policy. [...] Iraq must be shown that there is light at the end of the tunnel."³²⁷ Still, Moscow's hopes would not last for long, and when Saddam refused to allow UN inspectors access to presidential sites in January 1998, the threat of military action against Baghdad

323 In the 1990's, Moscow notably tried to correct the perception of Moscow's foreign policy as driven against Israel and to develop a positive dialogue with the Israeli leadership. For more details, see: Robert O. Freedman, "Russian Policy Toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin Legacy and the Putin Challenge", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 55, No.1, 2001, pp. 58-90; Talai Nizameddin, *Russia and the Middle East: Towards a New Foreign Policy*, London: Hurst and Company, 1999; Yevgeny M. Primakov, *Konfidentsial'no: Blizhny Vostok na stsene i za kulisami* (Confidential: The Middle East Onstage and Backstage), Rossijskaya Gazeta, 2006.

324 The Western initiative, sparked by Iraq's decision to intervene in the Kurdish Civil War taking place in the northern part of the country, was denounced by the Russian President as an attempt to supplant the UN Security Council and a violation of international law. Donaldson, Nogee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 2009, p.303.

325 Iraq's Ba'athist regime had in fact purchased weapons and military equipment from the Soviet Union worth several billions of dollars between 1960's and 1980's. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and Gorbachev's decision to join the international sanctions against Baghdad put Moscow in danger of forfeiting \$6 billion worth of contracts. Together with the favorable position on American military intervention, this was one of the points that sparked domestic opposition against the position on Iraq adopted by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, which in turn led to the decision of the General Secretary to send Primakov to Baghdad as mediator between Saddam and the international community. See: Nizameddin, *Russia and the Middle East*, pp. 197-202.

326 'Nef't' i dengi potekut v Rossiyu cherez irakskij truboprovod' (Oil and money will flow to Russia through the 'Iraqi pipeline'), *Segodnya*, 11/12/1996.

327 'Saddam – eto bomba zamedlennogo dejstviya' (Saddam is a time bomb), *Moskovskie Novosti*, 23-30/11/1997.

was averted just because of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's mediation. The fact that Primakov's approach accomplished little in relations with Iraq was mainly due Saddam's uncooperative behavior and was ultimately recognized in December 1999, when Russia chose not to exercise its veto on Security Council Resolution 1284, which demanded Baghdad's compliance with the inspectors' ruling³²⁸. Nonetheless, thanks to its active approach Moscow was able to hold its point on the primacy of the United Nations for key decisions with regard to Iraq, thereby successfully balancing Western unilateral military initiatives – at least until 2003.

Aside from the Middle East, Primakov's activity was also directed at developing ties with traditional non-Western partners of Moscow. The Foreign Minister exploited the gradual enhancement of Russo-Chinese relations after 1992³²⁹, which was crowned by the Joint Declaration on the Multipolar World and on the Formation of a New International Order (23rd April 1997) where the two countries stated the necessity of "mutual respect, equality and mutual advantages, as opposed to hegemony and power politics"³³⁰. Moreover, the Russian leadership tried also to revive relations with India³³¹, in the form of agreements on the Russian sale of nuclear reactors for power plants³³² and on a \$7 billion arms supply contract which, with tensions mounting with Pakistan, made India the top Russian arms customer³³³. However, Primakov's conception of the Russia-India-China as a strategic alliance aimed at creating a new pole in world politics³³⁴ was not followed up both because of the looming contrasts between Delhi and Beijing and because, despite their interest in acquiring more influence in the regional and international arena, none of them was interested in openly anti-American projects. The

328 Arguably, this choice was motivated by disappointment in Baghdad, by the lack of other viable options in the face of American military pressure and in part as a trade-off with the United States in order not to raise the issue of the Second Chechnya war in the UN Security Council. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 107.

329 The relations between Moscow and Beijing, after an initial rapprochement in the first years of New Thinking, considerably worsened as the process of Soviet political reforms went on: Gorbachev's visit to China in 1989 was one of the triggers of the famous Tiananmen protests, and the Chinese leadership stated its support for the Soviet military coup in August 1991. The controversies continued with the new Russian leadership on issues such as human rights and relations with Taiwan, but the gradual loss of influence of Liberal Westernists in Moscow coincided with better relations between the two bordering states. See: Sherman W. Garnett (ed.), *Rapprochement or Rivalry? Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000.

330 *Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on the Multipolar World and on the Formation of a New International Order*, 23/4/1997, <http://lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_743/doc743a830x878.htm>.

331 Throughout the Cold War, India was arguably the Third World country that developed the best relations with the Soviet Union, and, despite ideological contrasts, Moscow played a major influence in Delhi's foreign policy and in relations with its two most prominent neighbors, China and Pakistan. For more details, see: Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, pp. 318-329; Sumit Ganguly, *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, London: Oxford University Press, 2010.

332 This deal evoked the reaction of Washington, which denounced the violation of a 1992 agreement among nuclear suppliers. Michael R. Gordon, *Russia is Selling Nuclear Reactors to India; U.S. Protests*, The New York Times, 6/2/1997.

333 Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p. 316.

334 In his visit to New Delhi in December 1998, where he was already Prime Minister, Primakov indeed proposed a strategic triangle Moscow-Beijing-Delhi focused on common interests and on global stability. Despite the lack of clear military or political implications, many scholars and officials interpreted this declaration in light of the contrasts between Moscow and Washington on Iraq. 'Partnerstvo radi VPK: Moskva, Deli, Pekin, dalee vezde' (Partnership for the industrial-military complex: Moscow, Delhi, Beijing, then everywhere), *Vremya MN*, 22/12/1998.

same Russia, given its dependence on IMF loans, was not in the position to completely ignore the U.S. reaction to his foreign policy initiatives. This was particularly clear in the cooperation between Moscow and Teheran, another traditional Russian partner that wanted to build nuclear reactors and was more sensitive on the issue of American unilateralism³³⁵. Russia repeatedly denied U.S. allegations that Iran was trying to build a nuclear weapon in violation of the existing nonproliferation regime, but ultimately chose to develop with Teheran what one expert labeled a ‘minimax policy’, whereby the Russian government tried to maintain a maximum amount of influence on the partner while minimizing damage in relations with Washington³³⁶.

Another factor that complicated the establishment of strategic ties with other regional powers was the Russian focus on integration projects inside the CIS. A concept of integration had been first articulated on September 1995 with a presidential decree inspired by a previous SVR report³³⁷ and entitled ‘Strategic Course of Russia toward Member States of the CIS’. The document, which would later be transformed into the CIS Concept of Economic Integrational Development (March 1997)³³⁸, proposed the formation of a Customs Union, of a Payment Union with the Russian ruble as reserve currency and the development of common interstate investment programs. The decree implied that Russia would be the center of the integration project in the former Soviet area and warned that the failure to adhere to the model proposed by Russia could have consequences in terms of the scale of economic, political and military support from Moscow³³⁹. On the whole, this step seemed to confirm the adoption by the Russian government of the program previously advocated by military officials and security institutions and focused on preserving Russia’s military presence in the region and on protecting ethnic Russians. The fulfillment of these goals would allow Moscow to strengthen both the regional stability and its prominent position in the area, ensured by the possession of several informal leverage sources without the risk of further accusations of imperial revival projects³⁴⁰. However, the increase in Russia’s assertiveness in the CIS region was bound to create controversies

335 Since the death of Stalin, who had tried to take control over parts of Iran, relations between Moscow and the Shah developed on a fairly positive note on the basis of common interests in regional stability and economic cooperation. This partnership took a major turn only with the Islamic Revolution in 1979: in fact, despite the initial Soviet approval of the anti-American stance taken by Khomeini, Teheran showed no interests in relations with the Soviet Union and started persecuting the Tudeh (Communist Party in Iran). Nonetheless, relations gradually improved over the 1980’s, and before Khomeini’s death Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze was even able to pay a visit to the country in 1989. See: Galia Golan, *Russia and Iran: A Strategic Partnership?*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998.

336 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 112.

337 A summary of the SVR report produced under Primakov and of its resonance within the Russian political establishment can be found in: Aleksandr Koretsky, ‘Problemy integratsii v SNG: Razvedchiki prosto tak dokladov ne pishut’ (Issues with CIS integration: secret services do not write reports haphazard), *Kommersant*, 24/09/1994.

338 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 107.

339 ‘Strategicheskij kurs Rossii s gosudarstvami – uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv’ (Strategic Course of Russia toward Member States of the CIS), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 23/9/1995.

340 ‘Vozrodit’sya li soyuz? Buduscheye postsovetskogo prostranstva’ (Will a new Union appear? The Future of the Post-Soviet Space), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23/5/1996.

with neighboring states, given the presence of Russian minorities outside the territory of the Russian Federation. The attempts to balance this influence in the region was signaled by the creation of a new regional organization, named GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development and composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova³⁴¹.

The presence of an influential Foreign Minister also helped Russia's leadership reestablish a balance between political and military tools in its CIS policy and to take back the initiative on peacekeeping and conflict settlement, which was signaled by the Memorandum normalizing relations between Transnistria and Moldova (8th May 1997) and by the Protocol of Mutual Understanding between the Tajik government and the opposition (27th June 1997), both signed in Moscow³⁴². However, aside from these successes, Primakov also experienced some failures, especially in the stabilization of the conflict in Georgia, where Russia's authority as a mediator had been delegitimized by previous support of Abkhaz separatists³⁴³.

NATO and the national security debate

The choice of the government to engage the West “in order to reduce the costs of NATO enlargement for [Russia]”³⁴⁴ while retaining a critical approach proved to be politically controversial and sparked the development of a heated domestic debate which revealed that the Russian establishment was in fact composed of “people who had different (sometimes mutually exclusive) explanations of and motives for their opposition to NATO enlargement”³⁴⁵. One part of the Russian elite mobilized in support of Primakov. Liberal scholars of the Carnegie Endowment favored cooperation and argued that the development of a legal framework for Russia-NATO relations would strengthen, and not weaken, the project of NATO enlargement³⁴⁶. The Russian government also enjoyed the support of

341 GUAM was initially established only as a consultative forum in October 1997, but it gradually developed over the following years with the participation of Uzbekistan and the redaction of a charter. However, it soon started to lose appeal in face of the Russian-based and European integration projects directed at post-Soviet countries.

342 The Transnistria War broke out in 1990 in the Moldovan region at the border with Ukraine between ethnic Russian forces, supported by elements of the 14th Russian army, and Moldovan police. By 1992 the conflict had escalated into a military conflict between independent Moldova and the self-proclaimed republic of Transnistria, but a ceasefire agreement was signed on July 1992 between Yeltsin the Moldovan President Snegur. The Tajikistani Civil War also broke out after the collapse of the Soviet Union on ethnic lines, and developed as a conflict between underrepresented ethnic groups from Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan and the national government. See: Bruno Coppieters, Aleksey V. Malashenko, Michael Waller (ed.), *Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998.

343 The historical conflict between ethnic Georgians and minorities living in Abkhazia (Abkhazians, Armenians, Russians) broke out in a war in August 1992. Despite an agreement to cease hostilities in 1993, the conflict escalated again in several phases (1998, 2001, 2008) and is still the source of major controversies between Georgia and Russia. See: Céline Francis, *Conflict Resolution and Status: The Case of Georgia and Abkhazia (1989-2008)*, Brussels: VUBPress, 2011.

344 Primakov, *Gody v bol'shoy politike* (The Years in Politics), p. 268.

345 Vladimir Baranovsky, “Russian Views on NATO and the EU”, chap.12, in Anatol Lieven, Dmitri V. Trenin (ed.), *Ambivalent Neighbours: the EU, NATO and the Price of Membership*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, p. 276.

346 Andrew J. Pierre, Dmitri V. Trenin, ‘Rossiya i NATO: kontrakt na budushcheye’ (Russia and NATO: Contract for the Future), *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, No.1 (28), 11/1/1997.

the Moscow ‘Club of Realists’, a Statist-oriented think tank formed in 1994 which criticized the enlargement but refused isolationism and supported “the prevention of violations to Russia’s rightful interests as a consequence of NATO enlargement”³⁴⁷. Moreover, in April 1997 a parliamentary group ‘For the Atlantic dialogue’ was formed in the State Duma: it was made up by the liberal deputy Konstantin Borovoy, members of Yabloko³⁴⁸ and of the moderate and pro-Yeltsin party ‘Our Home is Russia’ (*Nash dom – Rossiya*)³⁴⁹.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Gennady Zyuganov started already in January 1996 to argue that in face of the process of NATO expansion Russia had to find means to compensate its now disadvantaged strategic and military position³⁵⁰. This position was particularly relevant because the State Duma, dominated by the Communist party after the 1995 elections, was actually in the position to use the expected ratification of START II as a leverage tool against the government. The opposition to the cooperative stance adopted by the Russian government toward NATO was justified by strategic concerns as much as by domestic political dynamics: indeed, the Russian President’s poor health conditions motivated Zyuganov not to abandon the inflammatory rhetoric used in the 1996 Presidential elections and to keep on exploiting anti-Western arguments so as to delegitimize the Russian leadership. Therefore, after passing a State Duma resolution in October which condemned NATO enlargement, communists started to complain about the diplomatic contacts between Russian and NATO officials as a sign that Russia implicitly accepted the eastward expansion of the Alliance. Similar positions were echoed by the former General Aleksandr Lebed, who had managed to exploit a good performance in the 1996 elections and was nominated by Yeltsin as Secretary of the Security Council and advisor on national security. However, the cohabitation with the reelected President proved quite fragile: Lebed was in fact rapidly rising to the rank of national leader thanks to his popularity inside the army and to the role he played at the end of the First Chechen War³⁵¹, but his intention to fight corruption up to the higher ranks of the government sparked unrest among oligarchs and threatened several Yeltsin’s relatives. In October 1996, allegations about the former General

347 Sergey M. Rogov, “U Rossii tri varianta: kapitulyatsiya, konfrontatsiya, kompromiss” (Russia has Three Options: Capitulation, Confrontation, Compromise), in *Rasshirenje NATO na vostok: k miru ili k voine? Po materialam zasedaniy Kluba Realisty i kruglogo stola (NATO Enlargement to East: to Peace or to War? From the Materials of the sessions and the roundtable of the Club of Realists)*, Moscow: Klub ‘Realisty’, 1998, p. 9.

348 The Russian United Democratic Party Yabloko is a social liberal movement founded in 1993 and transformed into a political party in 2001. Its name, which means ‘apple’ in Russian, is an acronym of the names of its founders: ‘Ya’ for Grigory Yavlinsky, ‘B’ for Yuri Boldryev, ‘L’ for Vladimir Lukin.

349 Joseph L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms?*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 43.

350 See: *Segodnya*, 31/1/1996.

351 The First Chechen War (1994-1996) was officially terminated by the Khasavyurt Agreements (30 August 1996) between Russia and Chechnya, and constituted a ceasefire treaty whereby Moscow agreed to withdraw federal forces from the region by the end of the year and to negotiate with Chechnya a treaty on mutual relations by the end of 2001. General Lebed represented Moscow and was later accused of having agreed to a violation of Russia’s territorial integrity.

plotting a coup were voiced by Interior Minister Kulikov under the pressure of influential governmental figures like Anatoly Chubais and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin³⁵², and Yeltsin ultimately decided to fire Lebed from public office.

This dismissal and the return of the Russian President to active politics in early 1997 did little to weaken the call for more aggressive security measures, since Lebed's successor Ivan Rybkin advocated Russia's right to first use of nuclear weapons in case of military attacks³⁵³. This argument was also raised by the vice Speaker of the Duma, Sergey Baburin, when he introduced the parliamentary association 'Anti-NATO' in January 1997, which by April gathered 250 Russian deputies and was aimed at conducting anti-expansion propaganda, advocating a stronger national security legislation and enhancing the country's international position³⁵⁴. In parallel with the conservative opposition, the liberal party Yabloko also exploited the issue of enlargement in its campaign against the Kremlin, although on a completely different note: its leader Grigory Yavlinsky coupled a negative evaluation of NATO expansion with the demand for a more serious approach to economic and social reforms, as well as with a polemic stance against the political establishment, eager to boost anti-NATO propaganda in order to divert the attention of the public opinion from domestic troubles³⁵⁵. However, despite the universally negative approach to NATO enlargement inside the political arena and in the Russian media, public surveys revealed that by January 1997 the Russian public was still largely uninterested and uninformed regarding this issue³⁵⁶.

The divisiveness of the relations with NATO inside the Russian political community probably explained the hesitant approach adopted by the government following the agreement on the Founding Act: Primakov did not release a draft copy of the deal for the Russian press after the end of the negotiations³⁵⁷, and when the Foreign Minister finally brought the document to the Duma for discussion, the press was not admitted and the deputies did not get to see the actual document³⁵⁸. Despite official claims that the government had managed to receive important concessions, Yeltsin himself admitted in a television interview that Russia had been forced to play "a weak hand"³⁵⁹. Not

352 See: Natalya Kalashnikova, 'Otstavka Aleksandra Lebedya: uproshenie domoroshennogo Bonaparta' (The resignation of Aleksandr Lebed: taming a home-grown), *Kommersant*, 18/10/1996.

353 Despite the controversies around this declaration, Rybkin's position indeed was consistent with the contents of the 1993 military doctrine. See: Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, p. 56.

354 Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, p. 26.

355 'Opasnost' ne v NATO, a v Kreml'e: intervyyu s Yavlinskim o rasshirenii NATO' (The danger is not NATO, but the Kremlin: interview with Yavlinsky on NATO enlargement), *Yabloko Podmoskov'ya*, No.9 (57), 4/3/1997.

356 Indeed, a January 1997 survey showed how half of the minority claiming to be informed and concerned about NATO enlargement believed that the expansion would involve the Baltic states. William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives 1993-2000*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 192-195.

357 Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, p. 49.

358 'Novaya taktika El'tsina' (Yeltsin's new tactics), *Rossiiskie Vesti*, 27/5/1997.

359 Michael R. Gordon, 'Russia Agrees to NATO Plan Pushed by Clinton to Admit Nations from Eastern Bloc', *The New York Times*, 15/5/1997.

surprisingly, the deal started to receive harsh critiques in the mainstream press, which argued that the Paris Summit “evoked the picture of a country parting with the role of great power”³⁶⁰. Migranyan criticized the fact that NATO countries refused to make any precise commitment on the future activity of the Alliance³⁶¹. Moreover, the Communist party started to use the Founding Act to discredit Yeltsin’s government and to evoke the image of the United States as a powerful foreign enemy claiming global leadership at Russia’s expense using statements of American leaders, quoting works of American scholars and drawing a parallel between NATO enlargement and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union³⁶².

The new wave of anti-Western sentiments in the elite had considerable influence on the debate on Russian national security, as noted by Aleksey Arbatov in the aftermath of NATO Madrid Summit, which according to the scholar had been “universally perceived (by some with grief, by others with malevolence) as a major defeat of Moscow’s policy of broad partnership with the West”³⁶³. The controversy over the ratification of START II developed along the same lines as that over the Founding Act. On one side, moderates and experts argued in favor of the ratification by reasoning in terms of the opportunity costs for the Russian economy of maintaining or destroying the nuclear arsenal, as well as by underlining how the conclusion of an agreement with the United States would help Moscow preserve its status as co-guarantor of international stability and leave the door open for talks on START III and on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM)³⁶⁴. On the other side, conservatives and nationalists continued to hold the principle of nuclear parity with the United States as critical for the maintenance of great power status and argued that START II would allow Washington to reach a substantial nuclear superiority over Russia³⁶⁵. Ultimately, the widespread feeling that the West was trying to capitalize on the country’s weakness prevailed over the rational elements of the discourse, and “START II became a symbol of the increased inequality in the U.S.-Russian relationship”³⁶⁶. This development, which prevented Russia from agreeing with the Clinton administration on the preservation of the ABM Treaty and of a verifiable and mutually binding

360 See: *Izvestiya*, 28/5/1997.

361 See: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27/5/1997.

362 In particular, the radical press concentrated on Albright’s statements about American global leadership and used them as a confirmation of the idea of U.S. hegemony advanced in Brzezinski’s “The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives”. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, p. 56-57. In June 1997, the communist press published a cartoon where with Xavier Solana dressed as Adolf Hitler holding a banner with the words ‘Drang Nach Osten’, thus drawing a comparison with German expansionism in Eastern Europe. See: *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 5/6/1997.

363 Aleksey G. Arbatov A., ‘As NATO Grows, START 2 Shudders’, *The New York Times*, 26/8/1997.

364 Aleksey G. Arbatov, Petr B. Romashkin, ‘Ratifikatsii SNV-2 net alternativy, ibo Rossii krayne neobkhodim sleduyushij dogovor – SNV-3’ (There is not alternative to ratification of START II, since Russia badly needs START III), *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 20-26/2/1998.

365 See: Dmitri V. Trenin, *Russia’s Nuclear Policy in the 21st Century Environment*, Proliferation Papers, IFRI Security Studies Department, 2005, p. 7-8.

366 Aleksandr A. Pikaev, *The Rise and Fall of START II: The Russian View*, Working Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, p. 35.

framework for arms reduction, confirmed the inclination already shown by Moscow in the Balkan wars, where the Russian policymakers looked more focused on the defense of the country's traditional great power status and less on a rational assessment of the state interests and capabilities in the security field³⁶⁷.

Connected to the evolution of Russia's nuclear policy, the broader debate on military reform was also influenced by the tensions between Russia and NATO. The controversy on this subject had begun when the Russian government started to cut military expenditures in 1995: as a matter of fact, the attempts between 1992 and 1994 to maintain a large number of troops while retaining parity with the West in conventional and nuclear weaponry had left the military expenses to amount at 15% of the federal budget and 5% of the GDP, which was deemed unsustainable for the weak Russian economy³⁶⁸. The cuts to the military budget were clearly opposed by the Russian high command, and for the first time in January 1997, Defense Minister Igor Rodionov and Chief of the General Staff Viktor Samsonov used the argument of NATO enlargement to support their calls for an increase in defense spending³⁶⁹. However, the research for a balance between budgetary needs and security concerns pushed the Russian leadership toward cheaper means of national defense, giving thus priority to the relatively affordable conservation and modernization of the Russian nuclear arsenal - which also assured an immediate deterrence potential to the Russian leadership against imminent threats like future NATO membership for Baltic states³⁷⁰. The relevance of the economic dimension to the security debate was also shown by the new National Security Concept, adopted by Yeltsin on December 1997³⁷¹. The document focused on the central role of reforms, stability and development and, despite the mentions to Russia's great power status and to the multipolar nature of international relations, indicated that military and defense concerns would not overwhelm the priority given to the economic prerequisites of national security: an interesting balance between liberal and statist arguments that anticipated the reformist shift adopted by Yeltsin in early 1998, when he sacked Chernomyrdin and nominated a liberal reformer like Kirienko as Prime Minister³⁷².

Finally, the enlargement of NATO exerted some degree of influence on Moscow's policy toward Ukraine and Belarus: the fact that the Alliance was approaching Russia's western borders served in

367 For a more theoretical analysis of the impact of Russia's historical aspiration on the definition of national interests in European security and in strategic arms reductions, see: Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, pp. 145-202.

368 Derek Averre, "Russia and Issues of Demilitarization", chap.6, in Webber, *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, p. 166.

369 'Reforma v armii' (Reform in the army), *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 17/1/1997.

370 A full account of the nuclear debate by 1998 and of the influence of NATO enlargement can be found in: Nikolay Sokov, *Nuclear Weapons and Russia's economic crisis*, PONARS Policy Memo, N.43, 1998.

371 'Kontseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiiskoy Federatsii' (National Security Concept of the Russian Federation), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26/12/1997.

372 Celeste A. Wallander, *The Russian National Security Concept: A Liberal-Statist Synthesis*, PONARS Policy Memo, No.30, 1998.

fact as a sufficiently compelling case for resolving the post-1991 controversies and strengthening the bonds with the two former Soviet republics. On May 1997 Yeltsin managed to reach an agreement with Ukrainian President Kuchma on the status of the Black Sea Fleet whereby Russia abandoned all territorial claims on Crimea in exchange for the permission to station Russian naval forces in Sevastopol for twenty years. As for Belarus, the government decided to promote the creation of a Union State (*Soyuznoe Gosudarstvo*). Despite the pan-Slavic rhetoric exploited to appeal nationalists, this integrations project enjoyed support among the Russian leadership prevalently for its security implications, that is the prospect of stationing Russian troops in Belarusian territory³⁷³.

Domestic crises and the Kosovo War

Yeltsin won in the 1996 presidential elections despite a rather uninspiring record: the domestic market reforms had failed to enhance the welfare of the Russian population, relations with Western partners were cooling down and the invasion of Chechnya (1994-1996) strongly backed by the President failed to establish Moscow's control over the secessionist republic despite the overwhelming superiority in manpower and weaponry of Russian federal forces.

Nonetheless, the incumbent President managed to pull out a surprising victory, also thanks to the financial support of several oligarchs that had greatly benefited from the 1995 round of privatizations (loans for shares) and to blatant violations of the Russian electoral law. After five troubled years as the Head of the Russian state, Yeltsin now presented himself as the guarantor against attempts of communist restoration and the guide to a progressive future³⁷⁴. However, his ability to deliver on the promise of radical reforms was hampered by the influential lobbying activity of the oligarchs and by poor health conditions, and in his last years the Russian President started to increasingly look like an arbiter trying to balance the interests of oligarchs and liberal reformers with "limited understanding of policy and a narrow repertoire of intuitive response to frustration"³⁷⁵.

Nonetheless, Yeltsin's personality and political record suggested that he would not accept to abandon his reform project without fighting back. His desire to set the political agenda in line with the electoral promises was shown in early 1997: when he returned to politics after a heart surgery and pneumonia, he proceeded with a government reshuffle and brought in the liberal reformer Boris Nemtsov in order to balance the oligarch-oriented cabinet of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. Growing disappointed with the macroeconomic results delivered by the government³⁷⁶, Yeltsin announced yet an even more

373 Donaldson, Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p. 209-211.

374 Boris N. Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, New York: Public Affairs, 2000, p. 17.

375 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 219.

376 The Russian President declared in his 1998 State of the Federation speech that the government would be sacked if it was not able to accomplish the expected strategic and economic tasks. 'Poslanie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federatsii Federalnomu Sobraniju: Obshchimi silami – k pod'emy Rossii' (Address from the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly: Toward the Rise of Russia with Our United Forces), *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, 17/2/1998.

radical reshuffle in March 1998, when he dismissed top governmental figures charged with economic administration (Chubais, Kulikov and Chernomyrdin) and proposed for the post of Prime Minister Sergey Kirienko, a young technocrat willing to rescue the country from stagnation but lacking the political stature to threaten the President's position. In order to confirm his authority, Yeltsin was also willing to run considerable political risks, and he decided to enter in a one-month struggle with the communist-dominated State Duma, who refused to ratify the appointment of Kirienko for two votes only to give in at the third one under the threat of early parliamentary elections.

Still, government reshuffles did little to tackle Russia's structural problems (declining productivity, high fixed exchange rate between ruble and foreign currencies, chronic fiscal deficit), which broke out dramatically in 1998 as a consequence of the Asian financial crisis and the decline in the price of crude oil. On 17 August 1998, in response to massive capital flight, ruble devaluation and stress on the Central Bank's foreign reserves, the Russian government declared default: the ruble lost in exchange with the dollar two thirds of its value in one month, inflation reached 84% and many banks were forced to close. In face of a crisis that discredited the Russian economic system and the leadership that devised it, Yeltsin could do little but to fire Kirienko and try to assemble a governmental team able to deliver a modicum of economic and political stability. After the State Duma rejected reappointment of Chernomyrdin twice, the Russian President was forced to propose the name of Primakov, who was enthusiastically confirmed by the parliament. The appointment in September 1998 of the popular Foreign Minister at the head of the government opened a turbulent phase for Russian politics, which lasted until December 1999, and was marked by pre-electoral instability and an increasing focus of the Russian President on personal security in response to impeachment threats and charges of corruption accumulating around his family³⁷⁷.

The appointment of Primakov and the domestic turbulence had negative consequences on the relations between Russia and the West, which had been trailing since the signature of the Founding Act. The accession talks between NATO and its new member states (Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) coincided with repeated warnings from Primakov and new Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov on the presence of a 'red line' for NATO expansion in the membership for former Soviet republics³⁷⁸. Moscow's uneasiness derived both from the signature of a 'Charter of Partnership' between Washington and the Baltic states - which confirmed that NATO membership remained "open to all European democracies willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities and obligations of

377 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 225.

378 See: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 12/5/1998; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30/9/1998.

membership”³⁷⁹ - and by the increasing contacts between Ukraine and NATO, symbolized by the controversial American-led naval exercises off the Crimean coast in August 1997³⁸⁰.

In the meanwhile, the Permanent Joint Council (PJC)³⁸¹ that the Founding Act had established between Russia and NATO was not living up to expectations. Domestic pressures influenced both sides to interpret the ambiguous provisions of the document in ways that restricted the potential for cooperation. Igor Ivanov, when he was still Deputy Foreign Minister under Primakov, openly declared that for Moscow the purpose of the PJC was to minimize the process of NATO expansion³⁸². At the same time the Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Pickering responded to those who criticized the Founding Act for granting Russia a veto right over NATO, arguing that the Alliance was not obliged to undertake discussions on sensitive issues and was in any case free to establish a common position between the 16 member states *before* answering to Moscow³⁸³. Unsurprisingly, these attitudes quickly turned PJC into “a talking shop for a rather stale dialogue”³⁸⁴ and pushed Russia to give priority to bilateral relations with NATO member states. Still, by the end of 1998, the tensions between Russia and the West were well on the way to escalation, with the American and British bombing of Iraq (Operation Desert Fox) raising the level of anti-Americanism in the Russian press³⁸⁵ and communists denouncing the U.S. exploiting Russia’s financial dependence on IMF loans to limit its foreign policy independence³⁸⁶.

The domestic instability and the high level of politicization of relations with the West in Russian public debate were major factors influencing Moscow’s approach to the Kosovo War in 1999, when relations between Moscow and the West arguably went back to Cold War levels. The conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army³⁸⁷ and the Yugoslav army had been brewing for the whole 1998, with the international community immediately involved in order to avoid a replica of the Bosnian war.

379 *A Charter of Partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania*, 16/1/1998, <<http://vm.ee/en/us-baltic-charter>>.

380 NATO’s initial plan for Operation Sea Breeze ‘97 was even to stage “a simulated amphibian invasion of Crimea”, although this idea was scrapped from Kiev because of pro-Russian groups protests. Despite the presence of contingents from Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia, Russia refused to participate or to send observers, and a Russian Black Sea Fleet commander, Viktor Kravchenko, argued that the exercise was “unethical and conflict-provoking”. Dmitri Zaks, ‘Russians Bristle at NATO Sea Breeze’, *The Moscow Times*, 26/8/1997.

381 The Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was the mechanism established inside the Founding Act for consultation and cooperation between Russia and NATO. It was a 16+1 forum that gathered twice a year at the level of Foreign and Defense Ministers and once a month at the level of ambassadors and permanent representatives. Inside this forum NATO members and Russia were free to consult each other on non-domestic issues and to develop joint initiatives in military cooperation and also peacekeeping missions. See: Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p. 71-77; Peter Trenin-Straussov, *The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council in 1997-1999: Anatomy of a Failure*, BITS Research Note 99.1, 1999.

382 Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, p. 75.

383 Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991*, p. 74.

384 Trenin-Straussov, *Anatomy of a Failure*.

385 See: *Izvestiya*, 18/12/1998; *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 18/12/1998.

386 ‘Doktrina vmeshatelstva’ (The doctrine of intereference), *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 31/10/1998.

387 The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was an ethnic-Albanian paramilitary organization who supported the secession of Kosovo from Yugoslavia. Their original name was Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosovës (UCK).

The Russian government was in this predicament caught in the same dilemma that characterized its previous involvement in Balkan peacekeeping: Moscow was looking forward to confirm its great power status by playing an active role in the resolution of a conflict fought in a region of traditional concern, but it actually had limited interests and few resources to assert its role in this war. Therefore, the Kremlin adopted a position in favor of a peaceful settlement of the conflict within the frameworks in which it enjoyed an equal status with Western countries (OSCE, UN, Contact Group) with a skeptical attitude towards imposing sanctions on Belgrade. Moreover, the position adopted by Russia against Kosovar independence but in favor of an enhanced autonomy in the respect of Yugoslavian territorial integrity was encouraged by the increasing domestic concerns over the situation in Chechnya³⁸⁸. In 1998 Russia agreed to vote in favor of two resolutions issued by the UN Security Council (1160 and 1199) which called for the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army and for an enhanced autonomy for Kosovo. However, Moscow arguably undertook these steps in order not to spoil the vital negotiations that were going on with the IMF³⁸⁹, and was careful to issue declarative statements after the adoption of each resolution which pointed out clearly that these acts did not amount to an authorization of the use of force³⁹⁰. Russia and the West were in fact again divided by disagreements on the way to enforce the shared plan: Moscow first declared that it would veto in the UN Security Council any military intervention organized by NATO³⁹¹ and during the Rambouillet conference (February 1999) also made it clear that a settlement of the conflict with NATO commanding the peacekeeping operations was not acceptable³⁹².

With this scenario in mind, one can understand the irate Russian reaction to NATO's decision to start an air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Operation Allied Force) on March 24th after the failure of the Rambouillet conference and the continued offensive of the Yugoslav army in Kosovo. Primakov was on a flight to Washington for negotiations with the IMF when he was informed by U.S. Vice President Al Gore of the start of the air campaign, and took the iconic decision to have his plane execute a U-turn and go back to Moscow³⁹³, which was praised by the national press as "a brave and patriotic act"³⁹⁴. The pressure on the Russian government to take a robust response against NATO actions spiked to unprecedented levels: Zhirinovskiy's LDPR started recruiting volunteers to

388 This position was confirmed by then Foreign Minister Primakov in his visit to Belgrade in March 1998. Michael Andersen, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia", chap.7, in: Webber, *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, p. 196.

389 The Resolution 1160 was in fact adopted at the end of March 1998, that is four months before that the IMF and the World Bank agreed to provide Russia with a \$22.6 billion financial package to stabilize the domestic financial market. However, after the August default Russia was forced once again to ask support to the IMF and was therefore still reliant on Western approval when the Resolution 1199 was discussed in the UN Security Council in September 1998.

390 Catherine Guicherd, "International Law and the War in Kosovo", *Survival*, Vol.41, No.2, 1999, p. 26.

391 Andersen, *Russia and the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 197.

392 Marc Weller, "The Rambouillet Conference on Kosovo", *International Affairs*, Vol.75, No.2, 1999, pp. 227-229.

393 John Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, Westport CO: Praeger Publishers, 2005, p. 3.

394 See: *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 25/3/1999.

fight alongside Serbian forces, Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and Sergey Baburin suggested that Russia should give military assistance to the FRY and the commander of Russia's Far East Military District, Viktor Cherevatov, declared his readiness to lead Russian volunteers in support of Yugoslav units³⁹⁵. The widespread media coverage of the intervention in Kosovo had also an important effect, in the sense that it brought the concern of the mass publics about U.S. military and NATO interventionism closer to the one of the elite³⁹⁶. A series of polls conducted after the beginning of the war revealed that the Russian population not only condemned the attack launched without UN authorization, but also felt directly threatened by NATO acting as global policeman: "[c]lose to 80% of the respondents believed that it was only a matter of time before NATO attacked Russia"³⁹⁷ for the presence of interethnic tensions in Chechnya.

Yeltsin too had a vocal reaction, declaring that "Russia retains the right to take adequate measures, including military ones, to defend itself and the overall security of Europe"³⁹⁸. The decision to adopt this stance was probably a mix of domestic pressures and of the personal disappointment in the move adopted by Clinton that increasingly weakened the position of the Russian President a few months before the start of parliamentary hearings on his impeachment. However, the actual measures of retaliation adopted by Moscow were little more than symbolic: Russia suspended its participation to PFP, its presence in the PJC, recalled the senior military representative to NATO, General Viktor Zavarzin, and blocked the talks on the establishment of the NATO military liaison mission in the Russian capital. Indeed, the only viable answer short of foreign policy adventurism for the Kremlin was a return to diplomacy allowing the country to regain recognition as an important actor in European affairs and to preserve its cooperation with the West, who played a key role not only in the important negotiations between Russia and the IMF, but also in Moscow's efforts to enter the WTO, to sign a free trade agreement with the EU and to review the CFE treaty. Consequently, Yeltsin tried at first to call for a meeting of the Contact Group and later promoted a high-level diplomatic mission to Belgrade, composed by Primakov, Ivanov, Defense Minister Sergeyev and head of SVR Trubnikov, which negotiated a peace plan with Milosevic which was ultimately rejected by Western countries. The Russian initiative to reopen the diplomatic channel regained steam in mid-April, when, as a result of the disappointment voiced by several European NATO member states (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) on the seeming lack of achievements of the air campaign, German Minister Joschka Fischer proposed a peace plan to Milosevic that foresaw a 24-hour suspension of NATO

395 Andersen, *Russia and the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 198.

396 See: Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy*, p. 196-197

397 Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, p. 15.

398 Jill Dougherty. *Yeltsin to meet with aides on response to bombings*. (24/3/1999). CNN, <<http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9903/24/kosovo.reax.02/>>.

strikes in parallel with the FRY withdrawal from Kosovo³⁹⁹. While the plan was not endorsed by the United States, the Clinton administration agreed on the idea of a diplomatic breakthrough and organized a meeting in Oslo between Ivanov and Albright, which gave the two Ministers the occasion to restate the points agreed by Moscow and Washington (withdrawal of Serbian forces, safe return of refugees, entry of international humanitarian organizations)⁴⁰⁰. The resumption of Russian-American contacts encouraged Yeltsin to nominate former Chernomyrdin as special presidential representative for the Kosovo war. The former Prime Minister was an authoritative figure with remarkable experience in negotiations who enjoyed respect both in Belgrade and in Washington. However, his appointment also signaled “the depth of the estrangement between Yeltsin and Primakov”⁴⁰¹: the Russian President was in fact starting to suspect the Prime Minister because of his attempt to strike a deal with the State Duma that would suspend the impeachment proceedings and give Yeltsin a grant of immunity from prosecution in exchange for constitutional amendments that would reduce the powers of the Presidency⁴⁰². Therefore, while Yeltsin’s initiative managed to reduce Primakov’s influence in Moscow, it arguably worsened the lack of coordination between different Russian ministries and agencies on the Kosovo War⁴⁰³.

In any case, this move was followed up by President Clinton, who nominated Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott as the American counterpart to the Russian special envoy. Their cooperation to find a common position between Moscow and Washington and exert mutual pressure on Milosevic was quite fruitful thanks to Talbott’s considerable experience with Russian negotiators and because of the freedom of initiative enjoyed by Chernomyrdin, who was relatively free from ministerial and governmental pressures. Another important factor in the negotiations was the insightful decision to invite Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari in the mediation process: in fact, the presence of a reliable neutral figure during Chernomyrdin’s trip to Belgrade allowed Russia to avoid playing the role of NATO’s messenger in front of the Yugoslav president and ultimately to guarantee the successful

399 ‘Germany Pitches Plan to Halt Kosovo Conflict’, *The Moscow Times*, 15/4/1999.

400 ‘Rossiyu obozvali velikoj derzhavoj’ (Russia recognized a great power), *Kommersant*, 14/4/1999.

401 Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, p. 43.

402 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 226.

403 For an argument on the relevance of Russian domestic dynamics in the management of the Kosovo crisis, see: Yury P. Davydov, “Problema Kosovo v rossiiskom vnutripoliticheskom kontekste” (The problem of Kosovo in the Russian domestic political context), chap.6, in Yekaterina A. Stepanova, Dmitri V. Trenin (ed.), *Kosovo: mezhdunarodnye aspekty krizisa (Kosovo: International Aspects of the Crisis)*, Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, pp. 247-279.

outcome of the mission⁴⁰⁴, which was announced on June 3rd when Milosevic agreed to the proposed peace plan⁴⁰⁵.

While the war seemed to be almost over, the peace plan was still incomplete: an agreement was still needed between NATO and FRY military commands on the terms for the Yugoslav withdrawal and entry of the mission of the Alliance (Kosovo Force, or KFOR). Moreover, the composition of the peacekeeping mission between NATO and Russia needed to be defined. Moscow's negotiating team, composed of Defense Minister Sergeyev, Foreign Minister Ivanov and notorious hardliner General Leonid Ivashov, proved quite reluctant to accept the terms negotiated by Chernomyrdin and insisted on two particular requests: Russia wanted a sector of its own in northern Kosovo (the area traditionally populated by ethnic Serbians) and refused to have its peacekeeping force serving under NATO command⁴⁰⁶. The first demand was particularly difficult for NATO to accept, since it would lead to a *de facto* partition of Kosovo and hampered the whole process of conflict resolution. However, the Russian high command was determined to secure that its requests were satisfied, with or without Western approval: as General Ivashov declared a few days after the Belgrade meeting, "if they continue not taking us into consideration, we will act independently"⁴⁰⁷.

This was not an empty threat. The Russian military started to prepare a secret plan aimed at moving a division of Russian peacekeepers from the SFOR mission in Bosnia inside Kosovo simultaneously with NATO peacekeepers and occupying the Slatina airport in Pristina – the largest airfield in the region and an important strategic objective who was planned to serve as headquarters for NATO's KFOR mission. The rationale of the plan was fairly simple: Russia would send 7.000-12.000 troops to Kosovo (and for this aim Moscow asked flight clearance to Ukraine and Hungary) in order to have them occupy northern Kosovo irrespective of NATO's compliance. While the level of involvement of the MFA in the operation and the awareness of Foreign Minister Ivanov are still controversial⁴⁰⁸, it is clear that the plan was drafted by the Defense Ministry, the General Staff and the SVR⁴⁰⁹ and received the approval of the Russian President, who arguably saw the operation as an opportunity to

404 As National Security Advisor for President Clinton, Sandy Berger, named it, the Ahtisaari-Chernomyrdin strategy toward Milosevic was based on a 'hammer and anvil' approach: the Finnish President would be the anvil, setting out NATO's demands for Yugoslavia, whereas the Russian special envoy would act as the hammer, making clear that Russia would be no longer able to protect the Yugoslav President. See: Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, pp. 84-88.

405 *Text of Kosovo Peace Plan (3/6/1999)*, (translated by the Associated Press): <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/june99/plantext03.htm>>.

406 Andersen, *Russia and the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 203.

407 Several details on the elaboration of the 'dash to Pristina' operation were revealed by the same General in an interview published in 2009. Leonid G. Ivashov, *Brosok na Prishtinu* (The dash to Pristina), 31/3/2009, <<http://jarki.ru/wpress/2009/03/31/581>>.

408 *Ibid*. For example, Ivashov argues that he had been briefed, together with Deputy Foreign Minister Avdeyev, on the general outline of the plan, but that "the details" of the operation were known only to the military high command.

409 Aside from chief of General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin, Defense Minister Sergeev and SVR head Vyacheslav Trubnikov, the Russia military representative to NATO Viktor Zavarzin and the Russian military attaché in Yugoslavia Yevgeny Barmyantsev also played an active role in the operation. Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, p. 218.

strengthen his domestic position by scoring “a moral victory [...] under the nose of NATO’s huge military alliance”⁴¹⁰. However, there is evidence of disagreement between Defense Minister Sergeyev and Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin after the start of the ‘dash to Pristina’, which suggests that the Russian military was divided on the actual opportunity to implement the plan in light of the risk of a military standoff with NATO. Therefore, it appears that the most assertive components of the Russian high command took the initiative to proceed with the operation exploiting the presidential approval and reports from the secret services confirming that NATO special forces had crossed the Kosovo-Macedonia border⁴¹¹.

In the end the ‘dash to Pristina’ was a partial success. On June 12th, the Russian high command managed to move its peacekeepers from Bosnia in secrecy and to occupy the Slatina airport before the arrival of NATO troops. However, Moscow did not succeed in receiving the flight clearance from Kiev in time, as the Alliance had already been informed of the operation and had agreed with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria that no Russian plane would be allowed to transit. After a few days, Russian peacekeepers ran out of supplies and were forced to let NATO troops in to take control of the airport. Nonetheless, a direct confrontation between Russian and NATO forces was avoided only because the Russian high command chose not to challenge this air blockade, and because KFOR commander, General Mike Jackson, refused to execute the order of SACEUR Wesley Clark to overpower the Russian troops stationed in the airport so as not “to start a Third World War”⁴¹². Furthermore, the operation, drafted with little consideration for foreign policy, had no positive impact on the final Russian participation to peacekeeping in Kosovo: in the end a convoluted chain of command was formed similar to the one in IFOR and SFOR in order to secure the Russian presence, which would be spread across several sectors (but not the strategically significant northern one) with only 3.600 troops as opposed to NATO’s 55.000⁴¹³. More importantly, the crisis had revealed a troubling lack of coordination between Russian institutions and the limits of civilian oversight over the military in Moscow. A group of assertive generals had in fact managed to blindside the Foreign and the Defense Ministries, to exploit Yeltsin’s vulnerability and to exclude the government from the most controversial and dangerous foreign policy initiative since the collapse of the Soviet Union⁴¹⁴. On an official level, the operation was celebrated as a patriotic expedition that managed to “restore Russia’s

410 Boris N. Yeltsin, *Prezidentskij marafon: razmyshleniya, vospominaniya, vpechatleniya* (Presidential marathon: thoughts, memories, impressions), Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2000, p. 208.

411 While the Defense Minister Sergeyev supported drafting the plan for the operation, the fact that it was implemented without his consent is confirmed both by Talbott and Ivashov.

412 Elizabeth Grice, ‘General Sir Mike Jackson speaks out’, *The Telegraph*, 1/9/2007.

413 Andersen, *Russia and the Former Yugoslavia*, p. 204.

414 As a matter of fact, well after the start of the operation Prime Minister Sergey Stepashin, Security Council Secretary Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Ivanov ensured the American representatives in Moscow that no Russian troops had entered Kosovo. The confirmation of the move was given hours later by Ivanov, after that CNN had started showing images of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo. Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, p. 240-244.

international prestige⁴¹⁵, medals were awarded to Russian paratroopers and Zavarzin was promoted from Lieutenant-General to Colonel-General by the President. However, the attempt to preserve Russia's image as a great power this time had put the country on the brink of a dangerous military crisis and had unveiled a power vacuum in Moscow that had to be addressed before the presidential elections in 2000.

Putin's foreign policy and the lessons of the 1990s

Yeltsin's decision to dismiss the popular Prime Minister Primakov, whom he saw as a potential threat both to his power and to the institution of the Presidency because of his alleged alliance with the opposition⁴¹⁶, was not the only message sent by the Russian President to the State Duma in his last year of activity. The call for "order in the corridors of power"⁴¹⁷ expressed in his 1999 Address to the Federal Assembly was in fact followed by the appointment of former Interior Minister Sergey Stepashin as Prime Minister and by signals that the Russian President would not back down this time and, facing impeachment charges, he was ready either to dissolve the Duma or to declare a state of emergency⁴¹⁸. However, Stepashin's mandate did not last long after Yeltsin survived the attempt of impeachment (15 May 1999), since in August the Russian President again fired the whole cabinet and proceeded with the appointment of Vladimir Putin. The new Prime Minister was a relatively unknown member of the Presidential Administration who had been head of the FSB in 1998 and Secretary of the Russian Security Council in 1999, and his appointment was ratified four months before the following elections by a weary Duma. Although the President immediately named Putin his successor, the selection of a man with a 16-year experience in the security services was in fact motivated by Yeltsin's desire for a tougher Prime Minister in order to deal with political opponents (Primakov, Luzhkov) and with the escalating violence in the Caucasus, where a Chechen-based Islamist group had invaded the Russian republic of Dagestan (7 August 1999)⁴¹⁹.

The unexpected rise of Putin to the rank of national leader was decisively tied with the conflict in Chechnya and with the sharp increase in popular feelings of insecurity and fear in response to a series of explosions in apartment buildings in Moscow and other Russian cities (Bunyansk, Volgodonsk and Ryazan) in September 1999⁴²⁰. While there are conspiracy theories arguing that the attacks were part

415 See: Ivashov, *Brosok na Prishtinu* (The dash to Pristina).

416 Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, pp. 202-205.

417 'Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii Federalnomu Sobraniyu: Rossiya na rubezhe epoch' (Address from the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly: Russia at the Turn of Epochs), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 31/3/1998.

418 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 227.

419 Michael R. Gordon, 'A Look at How the Kremlin Slid into the Chechen War', *The New York Times*, 1/2/2000.

420 After the bombings, a poll revealed that 40% of Russian citizens ranked the need for personal security first among social priorities. Crime (47%) and instability (46%) also ranked first among the concerns of the Russian population. See: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16/12/1999.

of an operation staged by the security services to create a more conducive political environment for a military intervention, Yeltsin and Putin cited the explosions as the main rationale for the invasion of Chechnya, with the Prime Minister embracing nationalist rhetoric and presenting himself as sponsor of the campaign.

We will pursue terrorists everywhere. [...] So, excuse me, we will catch them in toilets, and we will wipe them out in outhouses⁴²¹.

The Russian government then proceeded with a stern campaign against Chechen guerrillas by airpower, artillery and ground troops. This sequence of events allowed a surge in Putin's rating polls and the victory in the December 1999 parliamentary elections of the pro-government political coalition Unity (*Edinstvo*), which thanks to its patriotic discourse and the financial support of the Kremlin⁴²² managed to defeat the electoral block headed by Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov⁴²³. The electoral success of the new Prime Minister convinced Yeltsin to announce his resignation on 31 December 1999: he was in fact aware that this decision would shift the date of the 2000 Presidential elections to March and that the popularity of Putin, now nominated Acting President, would allow him to score a safe victory within three months⁴²⁴.

Putin's first attempt to propose a full-fledged vision for the country arrived one day before Yeltsin's resignation with an article published on *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* with the title "Russia at the turn of the millennium"⁴²⁵. On the whole, the text was not particularly telling: in the effort not to damage his popularity before the 2000 elections, Putin refused to make precise commitments and mentioned a variety of cultural concepts in order to appeal to all possible constituencies (social solidarity, economic reforms, importance of competencies, the need for Russia to follow a special path etc.). However, the article was insightful in that it signaled an attempt to balance liberal and statist elements by drawing lessons from the failures of Russian foreign policy in the previous decade. On one side, the opening statement arguing that the globalized world provided Moscow with both threats and opportunities was a clue that the new President was trying to depart from Primakov's course and to focus on the win-win aspects of Russia's cooperation with international partners. Putin's

421 Michael Wines, 'Why Putin Boils Over: Chechnya Is His Personal War', *The New York Times*, 13/11/2002.

422 Lilya Shevtsova, "From Yeltsin to Putin: the Evolution of Presidential Power", chap.4, in Archie Brown, Lilya Shevtsova (ed.), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001, p. 94.

423 Indeed, in the 1999 Russian legislative elections Unity managed to gather 23,3% of the votes, a lower result in relation to the Communist party (24,3%) but much more successful than the one achieved by Primakov's electoral block Fatherland-All Russia (13,3%) and by Kirienko's Union of Rightist Forces (8,5%). Yabloko (5,9%) and LDPR (6,0%) confirmed their position of minority parties.

424 The Acting President Vladimir Putin was in fact elected in the first round of elections with the overall majority of votes (53,4%), well beyond the second candidate Gennady Zyuganov (29,5%).

425 Vladimir V. Putin, 'Rossiya na rubzhe tysyacheletij' (Russia at the turn of the millennium), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30/12/1999.

acknowledgment that Russian GDP should grow for 15 years at a 8% pace in order to reach the level of an average European state like Portugal was a tough but frank admission that indicated how the new government would be focused less on geopolitical strategies and more on the issue of Russia's development, which dominated the article. A further proof of the government's attempt to reduce the gap between foreign policy and actual capabilities arrived in an open letter published by Putin before the 2000 Presidential elections, in which he argued that the 1998 financial crisis and the Kosovo war had delegitimized the advocates of Russia's balancing approach towards the West in world affairs.

We need to recognize the primacy of internal goals over external. [...] If somebody argues that Russia needs to deal with global affairs that cost a lot of money, and we live in debt, unable to pay salaries to our people, then we need to first weigh the possibilities and, perhaps, wait. There is not and there cannot be a great power where there are weakness and poverty⁴²⁶.

However, the stress on the limits of Primakov's course did not imply a return to a liberal internationalist vision. Indeed, Putin showed far more flexibility than Yeltsin and Kozyrev on the issue of the country's integration into global markets, affirming that "every country, Russia included, must look for its path to modernization"⁴²⁷. Moreover, the influence of the statist thinking on his approach to domestic and international challenges was unmistakable.

Here the state, its institute and structures have always played an especially important role for the life of the country and of its people. For a Russian, a strong state is not an anomaly, not something you have to fight, but on the opposite it is the source and the guarantor of order, the initiator and the main dynamic force of any change⁴²⁸.

This attempt to develop a pragmatic course allowing Moscow to overcome diplomatic and economic isolation without sacrificing domestic stability was not just the product of Putin's authority-building efforts, but reflected larger trends developing in Russian society at the end of the XX century. Indeed, the intensification of terrorist activities in the Caucasus had strengthened the assertiveness of the military and of the security agencies, who were bound to support Putin in light of its KGB and FSB background. The Russian President developed a strong connection with these institutions, which was signaled by firstly the consistent financial assistance provided by the government to the military

426 Vladimir V. Putin, 'Otkritoe pis'mo k rossijskim izbiratelyam' (Open letter to Russian voters), *Kommersant*, 25/2/2000.

427 *Ibid.*

428 Putin, 'Rossiya na rubuzhe tysyacheletij' (Russia at the turn of the millennium).

during the war in Chechnya⁴²⁹, secondly by the 2000 reform of the regional administration aimed at tackling both corruption and the contrasts between federal and local authorities⁴³⁰ and thirdly by the presidential attention to the issue of military reform⁴³¹. However, the continuity with Yeltsin's design to build a market economy in Russia and revive cooperation with the West allowed him to equally gather support from pro-Western liberals and moderates, as well as from oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky, who financed Putin's election believing he would be easier to manage than Primakov but were soon disappointed by the presidential campaign against the involvement of oligarchs into politics⁴³². The variety of the new ruling coalition was reflected by the list of Putin's closest collaborators and cabinet members: competent economic administrators (Aleksey Kudrin, German Gref), officials from security services (Sergey Ivanov) and reliable figures from the Yeltsin era (Anatoly Chubais, Igor Ivanov, Aleksandr Voloshin)⁴³³.

The authority of the President and his policies were also undoubtedly supported by the post-1998 Russian macroeconomic recovery. In fact, after the 1998 financial crisis the country not only benefited from a consistent spike in oil prices, but also enjoyed the positive effects of the spectacular devaluation of the ruble, which made national production more competitive both in Russia and abroad and decisively helped to tackle the painful issue of public debt. Furthermore, the rise of Putin also marked a significant generational change in the country's leadership: in contrast with the tradition of leaders that arrived at the Kremlin from the province and only after years of Party experience, the new President was a well-educated baby boomer from Saint Petersburg who had lived abroad and had a slim record of political activity. Finally, the fact that he had been sponsored by the previous President was a reassuring signal of continuity, but Putin's low-key and pragmatic attitude promised to the Russian elite and population a less erratic leadership than the one exerted by Yeltsin.

Indeed, Vladimir Putin's leadership style played an important role in changing the environment where interactions between ministries and agencies took place. The intra-ministerial clashes of the previous decade and the intermediary role played by Yeltsin's presidential apparatus ceased: each branch of the government was allowed substantial autonomy but was under the direct scrutiny of the President, responsible for the control of the activity of individual Ministers and for the preservation of the unity

429 Between 1999 and 2002, the Russian military budget increased from 109 to 284 billion rubles. Dale R. Herspring, "Putin and the Armed Forces", in Dale R. Herspring (ed.), *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 170.

430 This reform had been devised in 1998-1999 by the FSB when Putin headed the agency, but had been interrupted by his nomination to the Security Council. Eugene Huskey, "Political Leadership and the Center-Periphery Struggle: Putin's Administrative Reforms", chap.3, in Brown, Shevtsova (ed.), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin*, pp. 113-141.

431 See: Isabelle Falcon, "Putin, the Army and Military Reform", in Jakob Hedenskog et al. (ed.), *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 203-227.

432 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 30.

433 It must also be noted that many of them (Chubais, Kudrin, Sergey Ivanov) came from Saint Petersburg like Putin and were figures trusted by the Russian President in light of long-lasting relationships.

in the executive⁴³⁴. The new central role occupied by Putin had also considerable influence on Russian foreign policy, since the new President, in contrast with his predecessor, was interested by the details of foreign policy and was keen to wield a considerable influence both on single policies and on the vision driving Moscow's activity in the international arena.

However, in spite of the considerable domestic consensus that Putin managed to gather, there was always an inner tension in his attempt to build a market democracy and engage the West without abandoning Russia's distinctive features. Firstly, his commitment to democracy was on an ideological level at least disputable, given his belief that "the stronger the state, the freer the individual"⁴³⁵ and his early efforts to fight regional instability by centralizing the administrative process. The influence of statist thinking in the vision of the Russian President was also reflected by the ambiguous way in which the goal of economic development was refrained: in other words, it was never clear if the task of building a more effective, modern and integrated economic system was conceived as a goal in itself or just as a more pragmatic tool to achieve Russia's recognition as a great power.

In the contemporary world, the might of a great power is not manifested not so much in military power as in the ability to be a leader in the creation and the application of advanced technologies, the guarantee of a high level of welfare for the people and in the capacity to reliably protect the one's security and to defend one's national interests in the international arena⁴³⁶.

This tension was equally confirmed by the ambivalent attitude shown by the Russian leadership on the issue of international economic integration. As much as Putin could stress the importance of WTO membership and economic cooperation with the European Union and the Asia-Pacific region, the fact "that integration necessarily entails a certain loss of national sovereignty and freedom of action"⁴³⁷ sparked considerable discomfort in Russia both at an economic level, due to the presence of monopolies in many industrial sectors, and at a psychological one, given the country's traditional attachment to its special status in the international arena.

The continuity between Primakov and Putin was even more evident in the sphere of national security. Putin's choice to resume the activity of the PJC soon after his election was more the result of a pragmatic acknowledgment of the Alliance as the central institution in European security than a sign of a radical revision of Moscow's strategic thinking⁴³⁸. The Russian leadership continued in fact to

434 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 47.

435 Putin, 'Otkritoe pis'mo k rossijskim izbiratelyam' (Open letter to Russian voters).

436 Putin, 'Rossiya na rubuzhe tysyacheletij' (Russia at the turn of the millennium).

437 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 60.

438 This move was adopted in May 2000, soon after Putin's election, and was indeed positively welcomed by U.S. Secretary of State Albright. See: *Statement by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright at the Meeting of the Permanent Joint Council*, 2000, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2000/s000524f.htm>>.

hold a negative opinion regarding NATO, to oppose the enlargement of the Alliance to the Baltic states and to give attention to the formation of EU-security based mechanisms as a counterbalance to the role of the United States in European security. NATO involvement in the former Soviet area continued to arouse concerns as a possible security threat to Moscow, which was highlighted by Russian opposition to American assistance to a Georgian anti-terrorist operation in Pankisi gorge in March 2002⁴³⁹.

Nonetheless, the poor relations with the West developed under Primakov had Putin realize that, given the country's poor material conditions, Russia's goal to be recognized as a great power was better achievable by cooperating with the West: therefore, the initial goal of the Russian President was to try and frame Moscow's interests as consistent with the ones of its Western partners. This was arguably a difficult task after the Kosovo crisis, but Putin had a major opportunity to trigger this change and did not waste it: in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the United States the Russian President immediately called the White House, expressed his solidarity to the American people and offered President Bush broad support in the fight against terrorism.

This initiative proved quite successful in the context of the international reaction to the terrorist attacks: the Bush administration adopted in fact an uncompromising position on the fight against terrorism ("either you are with us or against us"⁴⁴⁰) which encouraged leaders interested in partnership with Washington to take initiatives in support of the United States. In the context of American plans to find Osama Bin-Laden and to destroy every Al-Qaeda training facility in the Taliban-led Afghanistan, four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) offered the use of their airspace to Washington. In this situation, Putin took the decision not to oppose the American military presence in the former Soviet area in contrast with the opinion of Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov and Chief of General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin. There is further evidence on the lack of consensus at various levels of the Russian society for this unconditional support to U.S. anti-terrorist operations. In a meeting held by Putin with 21 parliamentary representatives in order to discuss Russia's international position after 9/11, almost all the participants argued in favor of Moscow's neutrality⁴⁴¹. Data from the Center for the Study of Public Opinion revealed that the majority of Russians perceived U.S. military activities in Afghanistan as a security threat and argued that the attacks had been a "retribution for American foreign policy"⁴⁴².

439 Bertil Nygren, "Russia's relations with Georgia under Putin: the impact of 11 September", in Hedenskog et al. (ed.), *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin*, pp. 177-178.

440 *Address to the Nation from President Bush*, 20/9/2001, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html>.

441 See: Grigory A. Yavlinsky, *Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges in Russia*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, <<http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/People/YAVL/310102.html>>.

442 Aleksandr A. Oslon, *SSHA posle 11 sentyabrya: vzglyad iz Rossii* (The USA after 9/11: a view from Russia), Moscow: Institut Fonda Obshchestvennoe mnenie, 2001, p. 27, 124.

However, Putin saw in the 9/11 attack a valuable opportunity to legitimize the war in Chechnya as part of the fight against terrorism and to reverse the traditional prejudice that Russia could score important international successes just *in opposition* to Washington⁴⁴³. The initiative taken by the Russian President managed to achieve both goals without even the need to commit the Russian military in the invasion of Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, after 9/11 the American leadership decided to adopt a noncommittal stance on the sensitive issue of Russian conduct during the war in Chechnya. If Clinton had stated in 1999 that Russia would pay “a heavy price”⁴⁴⁴ for Chechen civil victims and the U.S. State Department had established contacts with Chechen President Maskhadov⁴⁴⁵, after 2001 several members of the Bush administration, President included, started praising Putin for his efforts in fighting terrorism in Chechnya⁴⁴⁶. Moreover, the positive dialogue established with Bush allowed Putin to further elaborate his strategy to engage the West. After 2001 the Russian President started to point out new areas of cooperation with Western partners (in security as well as in the energy sector⁴⁴⁷) and to downplay controversial issues in order to avoid the diplomatic standoffs of the Primakov era. This attitude was evident on several issues. Firstly, when the United States in 2002 decided to unilaterally withdraw from the ABM Treaty the Russian President answered that the initiative was a mistake but that it did not constitute a threat to Russia’s security⁴⁴⁸. Secondly, as NATO seemed willing to include the Baltic states in the Alliance, Putin chose to avoid starting another anti-enlargement campaign, which in the 1990s had caused nothing but harm to Russia’s interests⁴⁴⁹. Instead, he attempted to reset relations with the Alliance on the basis of common interests (anti-terrorism, WMD non-proliferation, peacekeeping in the Balkans) and was rewarded in 2002 with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, which was ambitiously defined as a forum where

443 This attitude was exemplified by the opinions inside the Russian foreign policy community at the time of the Kosovo crisis, where both Aleksey Pushkov and Andranik Migranyan underlined that a failure in NATO intervention would have shown “more regard for Russia’s interests in Europe” and that Russia was “still a country that matters”. See: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11/6/1999; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28/4/1999.

444 See: Michael Laris, ‘In China, Yeltsin Lashes Out at Clinton: Criticisms of Chechen War Are Met with Blunt Reminder of Russian Nuclear Power’, *Washington Post*, 10/12/1999.

445 Aleksey V. Malashenko, Dmitri V. Trenin, Anatol Lieven, *Russia’s Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004, p. 199.

446 While the war in Chechnya was discussed by Push and Putin in the June 2001 Summit in Slovenia and still after 9/11 the American administration continued to stress that the issue was still reminded to Russia behind closed doors, public criticism on the matter was never voiced again by President Bush after 2001. Secretary of State Colin Powell even stated after a 2002 Moscow Summit that “Russia is fighting terrorists in Chechnya, there is no question about that, and we understand that”. See: Michael McFaul, *US Foreign Policy and Chechnya: A Joint Project on Domestic Politics and America’s Russia Policy*, Century Foundation – Stanley Foundation, 2003, p. 22- 27.

447 In 2002, Putin started to emphasize his country’s potential as a reliable source of oil and gas for the United States as opposed to the troubled Middle East. See: *Transcript of Putin’s interview with the Wall Street Journal*, 11/2/2002, <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21498>>.

448 The position adopted by Putin was also in line with the opinion of the Russian Defense Ministry. Michael Wines, ‘After U.S. Scraps ABM Treaty, Russia Rejects Curbs of START II’, *The New York Times*, 15/6/2002.

449 It is particularly interesting to underline how this choice was advocated by Putin already before 9/11. See: Ingmar Oldberg, “Foreign Policy Priorities under Putin: A Tour d’Horizon”, chap.2, in Hedenskog et al. (ed.), *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin*, p. 34.

Moscow and the 19 NATO member states would “take joint decisions and will bear equal responsibility, individually and jointly, for their implementation”⁴⁵⁰.

Nonetheless, the rapprochement with the United States did not imply Russia’s undisputed support to the American international agenda shown by Kozyrev. In fact, the opposition to the American decision to invade Iraq without the approval of the UN Security Council (2003) showed how Moscow’s foreign policy under Putin was not driven by a fixed set of concepts regarding the outside world, but was developed more as a flexible calculation over advantages and drawbacks of international conduct based on the realist goal to maximize state power⁴⁵¹. In this decision, aside from the considerable commercial and financial interests that Russia had in relations with Baghdad, the opportunity to stand side by side with Paris and Berlin in opposition to American unilateralism also played an important role, and gave Putin the opportunity to resume the once delegitimized concept of the gradual construction of a multipolar world⁴⁵². The controversy with Washington over Iraq also encouraged the Kremlin to increasingly refocus its project of partnership with the West toward the European Union, which was signaled by the Putin’s 2005 Address to the Federal Assembly, wholly devoted to the theme of Russian participation to European history and to its values⁴⁵³. However, a stronger engagement of the European Union, motivated by the increasingly central role played by Russia as supplier of natural resources, was not without its contradictions. Aside from a clearly different interpretation of concepts like democracy, free market and human rights, there was a latent contrast between Moscow’s plan to maintain ties and strengthen its influence toward in the post-Soviet area and EU enlargement, a project aimed at building a common European home where Russia found itself “an outcast relegated to a sideline role”⁴⁵⁴.

On the whole, Putin’s foreign policy helped Russia abandon the isolation after the Kosovo War and develop a more flexible approach to defend Russian national interests in the international arena. However, the troubles faced by the new President in striking an acceptable balance between the task of global integration and the need to strengthen state power reminded the limits of Kozyrev’s liberal foreign policy, called by a Russian scholar “a pro-Western course that could only produce non-Western, at times even anti-Western economic and political outcomes”⁴⁵⁵. In a similar way, Putin’s

450 *NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality*, 28/5/2002, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19572.htm>.

451 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 143-144.

452 Jakub M. Godzimirski, “Russia and NATO: Community of Values or Community of Interests?”, chap.3, in Hedenskog et al. (ed.), *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin*, p. 73.

453 “Russia is, was and will be a major European nation. The ideals of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy achieved and deeply by the European culture have been throughout many centuries the defining reference point for the values of our society”. ‘Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii Federalnomu Sobraniyu’ (Address from the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 26/4/2005.

454 Stephen Foye, *The EU's Enlargement: Russia Plays Bridesmaid*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Jamestown Foundation, 2/5/2004, <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26444&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=175&no_cache=1#.VrdJZvnhDIU>.

455 See: Tsygankov A., *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 89.

attempt to balance integration with the West and elements from Russian statism was bound to emphasize the distance that still separated Western market democracies from Russia and its political traditions.

Conclusion

The sources of Russian conduct

Only political shortsightedness can explain the readiness to write off Russia from the group of great powers, underestimate its potential, dynamism and perspectives of development.

(Yevgeny Primakov⁴⁵⁶)

A constructivist approach to foreign policy change

The historical period analyzed in previous chapters, from Gorbachev's appointment to the start of Putin's mandate, represented a revolutionary phase in Russian history: not unlike at the beginning of the XX century, failures to reform an old system sparked multiple conflicts that ended up with the emergence of different borders, countries and power relations in the traditional area of influence of the Russian state. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the uncertain rise of the Russian Federation and other 14 new states were marked by economic crisis, social unrest, polarization of the political arena, institutional instability and development of local conflicts over ethnic lines. In this scenario Moscow's foreign policy started to change at a fast pace and to become increasingly less predictable for outside observers.

I chose to approach the study of this period from the viewpoint of constructivist theories, which approach national identity as a dynamic concept and study the process of determination of identity and national interests in detail⁴⁵⁷. Indeed, an important factor of instability in the analyzed period was the disagreement inside the Russian elite about the new identity of the state after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the definitive abandonment of Marxist-Leninist ideology. In the early 1990s, three main historically established national self-images emerged in the political arena, and each one of them advocated a different vision of the country's position in international affairs. This three-way division, despite the presence of different names for the self-images, is employed by many scholars⁴⁵⁸. The first is the westernist image, which underlines Russia's allegiance to the Western civilization. The second is the statist one, which highlights the need for a strong Russian state on both domestic and

456 Yevgeny M. Primakov, *Mir bez Rossii? K chemu vedet politicheskaya blizorukost'* (The World without Russia? Where political shortsightedness leads), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 2009, p. 5.

457 In particular, I referred to the studies of Clunan and Tsygankov. See: Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*; Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*.

458 For examples of the three-way identification of national self-images, see: Aleksey G. Arbatov, *Rossiiskaya natsional'naya ideya i vneshnyaya politika: mify i realnosti* (Russian national idea and foreign policy: myths and realities), Moscow: Moskovskij obshchestvennij nauchnij fond, 1998; Dmitri V. Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002; James Richter, "Russian Foreign Policy and the Politics of National Identity", chap.4, in Celeste A. Wallander (ed.), *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996, pp.69-93; Light, *Foreign Policy Thinking*, in Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*; Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*; Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*.

international level⁴⁵⁹. Finally, the third image, called by Tsygankov ‘civilizationist’, underlines Russia’s alterity vis-à-vis Western countries. All of these images gradually developed distinctive subgroups, whose different positions became over the time politically relevant⁴⁶⁰. Inside civilizationism, as described in the first chapter, these subgroups underlined distinctive aspects of Russia’s uniqueness from the West, be it the imperial tradition, the communist heritage, the orthodox faith or even its Asian identity as opposed to the European one⁴⁶¹. These subgroups, despite the significant electoral results of conservative and nationalist forces, did not manage to impose their vision as dominant in the national discourse throughout the 1990’s but increased their influence over the following decade.

As for the advocates of the westernist image, it is possible to distinguish three subgroups between 1985 and 2001. The first, Gorbachev’s new thinking, was certainly embedded in the Leninist tradition of Soviet universalism and lost legitimacy after the fall of the Soviet Union, but because of its stress on the USSR as a European power and on cooperation with the West can be positioned inside this tradition, albeit with considerable distinctive features. The second subgroup, the liberal internationalist, is perhaps the most recognizable since many of its advocates (Gaidar, Kozyrev, Chubais) governed the country in the early 1990s. Inspired by the idealistic belief in the role played by the spread of Western political and economic model throughout the world, this group argued that Russia would quickly become a market democracy and be integrated inside Western-led international institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO, tentatively even NATO and the EU). This vision, which

459 The term ‘statist’ has started to be used in the literature about the Russian political debate in the 1990’s and in the 2000’s as a translation of the Russian noun *gosudarstvennik*, derived from the Russian word for State (*Gosudarstvo*) and used in reference to advocates of an assertive course on domestic and international affairs. While this definition is used both by Russian and Western scholars to underline the central role occupied by state institutes inside this conception, some authors prefer to point out different features. Mankoff, while recognizing the increasing dominance of concepts like *gosudarstvennost’* (statism) and *derzhavnost’* (great power status) in the Russian elite since the 1990s, uses the definition ‘centrists’ in order to point out the intermediate position of this group between westernists and radical nationalists. Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009, pp. 68-71. Laruelle instead focuses on the attempt started by Yeltsin and fully developed by Putin to take control over the political debate with the use of nationalist rhetoric, and talks about “patriotic centrism, that is a hegemony over the spectrum of political belonging which places the unity of the nation, and therefore the unity of its political representation, under the unique banner of the presidential party”. See: Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. 10.

460 Moreover, the presence of these subgroups suggests that these Russian national self-images should not be seen as completely distinct traditions. As Mankoff points out, “while the notion of distinct camps or schools remain a useful heuristic device, and given the size and breadth of mainstream, thinking about the center [of the political spectrum] as a continuum rather than as a series of discontinuous units offers greater insight into the interplay of forces”. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, p. 62.

461 Notably, during the 1990’s Eurasianism entered in the political mainstream with the diffusion of works by famous Eurasianists like Georgy Vernadsky and Lev Gumilev, who argued against Russia’s allegiance to the Western civilization and to underline the country’s Asian traditions and legacy. See: Lev N. Gumilev, *Ot Rusi k Rossii: ocherki etnicheskoj istorii* (From Rus’ to Russia: Essays on Ethnic History), Moscow: Ekopros 1992; George Vernadsky, “The Mongols and Russia”, vol.3, in George Vernadsky, Michael Karpovich, *A History of Russia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. For a complete account on the debate on Russia’s European and Asian identities, see: Mark Bassin, “Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space”, *Slavic Review*, Vol.50, No.1, 1991, pp.1-17.

envisioned foreign policy as a tool for domestic reforms far more directly than Gorbachev had done, was based on an optimistic assessment on Western financial support and did not take into consideration Russia's distinctiveness or great power tradition to be an obstacle. However, their beliefs on the country's mission to become a normal member of the Western community were not shared by the so-called democratic developmentalist⁴⁶². Despite the agreement on giving priority to relations with Western market democracies, this subgroup defended the utilitarian foundation of international cooperation and the principle that every state should pursue its own national interests. The advocates of this vision (Yavlinsky, Kirienko, Nemtsov) argued that Russia, as a global and European power, should support democracy and multilateralism without sacrificing its specific interests.

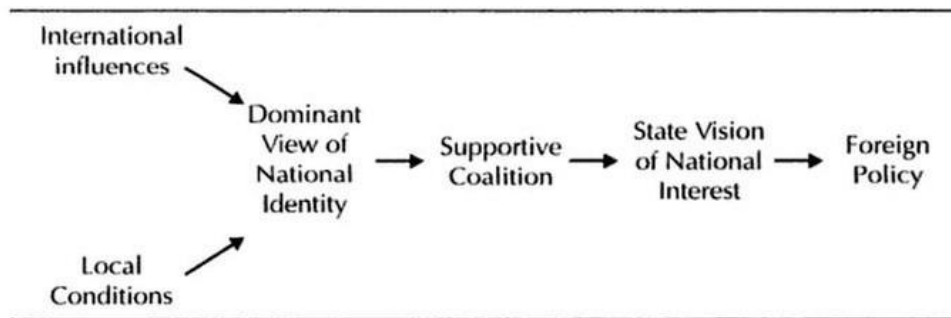
The subgroups associated with statist thinking broadly agreed on Russia's international status as a great power and on a conception of international relations on realist terms, but identified different political purposes for the country. On one hand, Eurasian statism highlighted traditional sources of Russia's power in the military, diplomatic and cultural areas and advocated the presence of a quasi-messianic mission for the country with global implications. Its advocates (Primakov, Migranyan, Stankevich) agreed that, in light of its history and geography, Russia should occupy an equidistant position between West and East while fostering integration in the former Soviet Union. On the other, a different version of statism, called statist developmentalism and advocated by Putin in his first mandate, highlighted the growing importance of economic competition in international affairs and suggested enhancing relations with advanced industrial powers through integration in the global economy on specific terms dictated by Russia's special identity.

Having defined the competing Russian national self-images, constructivist theories also try to understand the process that drives one of the images to be acknowledged as dominant and the factors that influence such process. For instance, Tsygankov highlights how the definition of national interests is "a product of discursive competition among different groups and coalitions, drawing on different actions of the Other and interpreting contemporary international and local influences in a way that suits the groups' interests"⁴⁶³. In his work, he argues that this competition ends when one of the available self-images becomes predominant and is adopted by the state as a guide in policymaking.

462 These names follow the definitions given by Clunan in her work. See: Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, pp. 53-74.

463 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 16.

Constructivist Explanation of Foreign Policy⁴⁶⁴



Clunan tries to give a more detailed account of the criteria that allow a particular national self-image to be recognized as the dominant and to influence both the definition of national interests and of foreign policy priorities. In particular, she points out that all national self-images go through a process of elite legitimacy tests. “If Russian political elites view policy outcomes associated with the national self-image as failures, then the self-image should likewise be considered ineffective and elites should find it unpersuasive”⁴⁶⁵. In other words, the national self-image that manages to dominate over its competitors and to be recognized as state vision of national interest is the one perceived by the elite as in line with a country’s historical aspirations and capable of achieving its proposed goals in practical terms.

Indeed, all of the official foreign policy courses adopted between 1985 and 2001 were subject to this legitimacy test. Gorbachev’s new thinking is not an exception to this argument, despite its distinctive features and the fact that it stopped being the official Soviet foreign policy not because it was delegitimized but because the USSR collapsed. As a matter of fact, it failed to achieve its primary goals, that is to prove the viability of a more democratic version of socialism and to convince the Western countries to agree to the projects of de-nuclearization and de-militarization of international politics, and started to lose steam since the fall of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, Gorbachev’s successes in the international arena achieved to spread an image of Moscow’s relations with the United States and European countries as essentially cooperative, which eased the following affirmation of a westernist national self-image. Between 1991 and 1992, the international rise of the Western civilization and conducive domestic factors helped the rise of a liberal internationalist conception of Russia’s identity and national interests, whereby Foreign Minister Kozyrev and Yeltsin advocated a cooperative foreign policy toward Western countries and were eager

464 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 17.

465 Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, p. 103.

to downplay Russia's status both as a great power and inside the former Soviet Union. However, the failure to complete the transition toward a market economy, to limit the social costs of macroeconomic stabilization and the Western seeming unwillingness to fully and rapidly integrate Russia in its community seriously harmed the popular support for domestic reforms, sparked doubts among the elite over the actual feasibility of the assimilation to the West and provided ammunition to those who denied legitimacy to Kozyrev's conception of Russia as a normal country in the community of Western states. The development of interethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union and the looming perspective of NATO enlargement definitely delegitimized the liberal internationalist course and pushed several traditionally influential constituencies of Russian foreign policy and security community (the military, the security services, the statist bureaucracy) to advocate a different national self-image centered on Russia's great power status and leading role in the CIS.

After he was appointed at the head of the Foreign Ministry, Primakov developed a new strategy of competition with the West inside the existing international framework. He was eager to underline the country's historical role and to enhance Russia's diplomatic activism in several areas (Russia-NATO relations, Iraq, relations with non-Western powers) in order to achieve international recognition of Russia as a great power. Nonetheless, he also advocated a vision of international affairs where the country's international status, instead of being downgraded as a consequence of the Western military and economic superiority, was in fact presented as a positive counterbalance to American unilateralism. This course relied on a broader national consensus in comparison with the liberal internationalist one: nonetheless, Primakov's vision also failed to pass legitimacy tests. Between 1998 and 1999 the gap between Russia's international assertiveness and its shrinking material capabilities dramatically widened: on one side, the 1998 financial crisis confirmed the fragility of Russian economy and the politically sensitive dependence from IMF loans, while on the other the Kosovo War was seen in Moscow as a proof that Russia had little leverage in European security and that its opposition to NATO was unfruitful and even damaging the country's economic and commercial ties with the West. Pro-Western liberals and moderate critics of Primakov's course underlined these failures and argued that Moscow's best hopes for being recognized as a great power passed through a renewed engagement in domestic reforms. These concerns were acknowledged by Vladimir Putin, who after his election at the head of the Russian Federation proposed a vision of statist developmentalism with liberal features and devoted his early efforts to the tasks of strengthening the central power and rebooting the country's integration in the international economy. As for foreign policy, he tried to reframe competition with Western countries more on economic than in military terms by referring to "fight for a place under the economic sun"⁴⁶⁶, and to propose to the West

466 See: *Poslanie Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii Federalnomu Sobraniyu* (Address of the President of the Russian Federation at the Russian Federal Assembly), Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 19/4/2002.

cooperation for the preservation of global stability against the threat of terrorism. As predicted by these constructivist models, domestic and international events were critical factors in the evolution of Russian national identity and foreign policy in the 1990's. While it would be tempting to bring the interpretation of foreign policy change down to a simple analysis of the interplay between internal and external forces, it is important to underline some elements of historical continuity that played an important role between 1985 and 2001.

Russia as a great power: historical continuity and contemporary relevance

The outcome of the competition for determining the country's national identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the rise of a statism, that first with Primakov and later with Putin managed to gather consensus on the vision of the Russian state as a great power in the international arena, as the center of integration in the former Soviet Union and as the guarantor of citizens' rights and internal reforms in the domestic environment. While, as pointed out in the earlier chapter, that competition was influenced by both domestic and international factors and by the assessment of the Russian elite over the viability of national self-images and their policies *in the given context*, we cannot ignore the role played by historical memories and aspirations in this process.

As we pointed out in the third chapter, after the failure of liberal internationalism Primakov proposed the vision of Russia as *derzhava* (holder of international equilibrium of power), an idea that had been developed throughout the country's history in response to the peculiar challenges that Russian rulers had to face. The first of these challenges was the geographic position: located in the middle of the Eurasian landmass, the Russians could not exploit natural barriers for defense and were strategically vulnerable in the face of military threats from the East (the Tatar-Mongol Khanate of the Golden Horde) and from the West (Teutonic Knights). In this environment, "one either had to perish as a result of perennial raids or rebuff them, pacify the plain through armed force, and [then] develop it"⁴⁶⁷. The use of territorial expansion in order to acquire strategic depth and to take military threats as far as possible from Moscow was an answer that allowed the survival of the Russian state, but this pattern of expansion forced the country to face two other challenges. Firstly, the westward expansion of Russia implied its clash against more advanced European states – Poland, Sweden and finally Germany. As noted by Wohlforth, in its competition with these countries Russia partially emulated the Western model, especially in the military and bureaucratic sphere after Peter the Great, while trying to "exploit the initial comparative advantages of his empire's very backwardness: the sheer size of its territory and population mobilized by an especially ruthless autocratic regime"⁴⁶⁸. Indeed,

467 Ivan Ilyin, *Put' k ochevidnosti (The Path toward Evidence)*, Moscow: Exmo-Press, 1998, p. 247, quoted in Trenin, *The End of Eurasia*, p. 42.

468 William C. Wohlforth, "The Russian-Soviet empire: a test of neorealism", *Review of International Studies*, Vol.27, No.5, 2001, p. 218.

these features were used successfully at different times in modern Russian history and were passed directly to the Soviet Union, which under Stalin exploited them first in the process of forced industrialization and then in the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany.

However, the bias in favor of territorial expansion pushed Russia to develop since XVI century as a multinational empire and to submit populations that, like in the case of Poland, had a strong tradition of sovereignty and national identity and that therefore refused the integration in Russia's autocratic empire⁴⁶⁹. In order to remain a multinational empire, Russia had therefore to pursue a bi-level deterrence strategy: on one side, it had to maintain its internal reputation and to suppress secessionist movements, while on the other it had to be recognized as a great power and to play the European balance of power game so as not to fall prey of an aggressive military alliance⁴⁷⁰. The argument in favor of the affirmation of the strength of the Russian state both at an internal and external level was also strengthened by the association of historical periods marked by weak or contested state authority (the *Smuta* in the early XVII century⁴⁷¹ or the 1917-1922 Civil War) with domestic unrest and foreign interventions. As Putin stressed in 2003,

[d]uring all its times of weakness, Russia was invariably confronted with the threat of disintegration⁴⁷².

These challenges all but disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, the Russian Federation inherited from its predecessor the same aforementioned basic features: imperial-like territorial extension, multinational population, relative backwardness in relation to the West. Moreover, in the early 1990s Russian elites were also forced to tackle the challenges presented by the appearance of new interstate borders in the once unified Soviet territory, with the sensitive issue of the treatment of ethnic Russians abroad, and the shrinking influence in the field of European security. Statist thinking, with its stress on traditional great power status and power centralization, enjoyed widespread legitimacy among Russian elites as a historically reliable answer to recurring issues in security and order maintenance⁴⁷³.

469 For a detailed account of relations between the central state and the nationalities from the Grand Duchy of Moscow to the Soviet Union, see: Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

470 Wohlforth, "The Russian-Soviet empire", p. 220.

471 The *Smuta*, or Time of Troubles, was the period of Russian history between the death of the last Tsar of the Rurik Dynasty (1598) and the establishment of the Romanov Dynasty (1613). It was marked by widespread famine, wars with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, foreign occupation, civil uprisings and the interference of foreign countries in the process of dynastic succession.

472 *Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoy Federatsii* (Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation), Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 16/5/2003.

473 Notably, inside the neorealist framework there are also other interpretations that explain Russia's inclination toward hegemony in the CIS as a consequence of power distribution inside the former Soviet Union. See: Neil MacFarlane, "Realism and Russian Strategy after the Collapse of the USSR", chap.7, in Ethan B. Kapstein, Michael Mastanduno, *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 218-260.

The approach adopted by Moscow throughout the 1990s on the issue of NATO's role in European security is a convincing argument in favor of historical continuity in Russian foreign policy. From the issue of German reunification in 1990 to the second round of NATO enlargement in 2004, both Gorbachev and following Russian elites showed considerable uneasiness toward the rise of a military alliance historically perceived as hostile at the center of the European security framework. The controversy developed on two main levels. The first was psychological: the reunification of Germany, the first round of the Alliance's enlargement (including Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic) and the settlement of ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo fostered a generalized sense of frustration inside the Russian elite because they seemingly denied Moscow's role in the European balance of power game and therefore its great power status. However, NATO's increasing activity in the former Soviet territory, brought first to the attention of Russian elites with the discussion over PfP and later strengthened by cooperation with Ukraine as well as by the second round of enlargement (including the Baltic states), revived historically established concerns over "military penetration in the traditional sphere of influence of Russia"⁴⁷⁴ and sparked a revision of the country's military and security policies. In several circumstances throughout the analyzed period, both on European security and on nuclear policy (as in the case of the opposition to the ratification of START II), the Russian foreign policy and security community interpreted Russian national interests less on the base of cost-benefit assessments or on the perception of actual threats and more on the grounds of the country's aspiration to regain "the great power status that Russians believe their country enjoyed during the Tsarist and the Soviet past"⁴⁷⁵.

Despite its overall significance in shaping the mindset and policies adopted by Russian elites throughout the centuries, the reliance of the Russia on the efficacy of the strong state both at home and abroad had also significant setbacks. On one side, the country's tradition of suppressing the political autonomy of the national communities at its borders enhanced the security dilemma in the long term: in fact, with the affirmation of the model of nation states in Europe Moscow found itself surrounded by nations resentful of its influence and wishing to cut historical ties with Russia. On the other, the centralization of power evolved in a system highly dependent from the ability of one leader to identify the country's challenges, initiate a process of adaptation and control it with the use of coercion. This dependence on the ideas and on the personality of leaders has allowed the country to achieve at time significant international successes, but has also significantly raised the costs of such achievements and favored the occurrence of periods marked by political stagnation. The

474 This term was used by realist scholar Aleksandr Bogaturov in a famous article which advocated a new approach to NATO enlargement based on the aforementioned traditional strategic concepts developed throughout Russian history. See: Bogaturov, *Sami amerikancy ne ostanovyatsya nikogda* (Americans alone will never stop), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29/6/1996.

475 Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, pp. 15-16.

mismanagement of said historical periods by the country's elite has chronically sparked the economic, institutional and interethnic crises mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. However, the same Wohlforth acknowledges that the systemic pressures underlined by the neorealist school of international relations as a critical factor for the explanation of repetitive patterns in Russian and Soviet behavior "cannot fully explain domestic institutions and ideas"⁴⁷⁶. National historical experience and past choices limit the autonomy of Russian leaders, but they do not determine automatically their decisions both on the domestic and on the international level.

Change and continuity in Russian foreign policy from 1985 to 2001

The historical period taken into consideration by this thesis confirmed that both the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and the Russian Federation in the transition between Yeltsin's and Putin's leaderships have shown significant concerns for their status of great power in the international arena and in particular have tried to confirm this status in the framework of European security. These features highlight a significant continuity with the historical experience of the Russian state, which over the centuries had been increasingly involved in the European balance of power game in order to expand its strategic depth and to prevent the formation of threatening military alliances. Nonetheless, the analyzed period has also shown that, while Moscow's approach to foreign policy may certainly be influenced by its geographic position and its historical path, these are by far not the only significant elements in the definition of national interests and in the formulation of foreign policy priorities⁴⁷⁷.

The first foreign policy course analyzed, Gorbachev's new thinking, is a clear example of this argument. The choice to engage the United States and to sign agreements on conventional and nuclear arms, which were initially refrained as a pragmatic assessment on the unsustainability of a new arms race, was soon transformed by the CPSU General Secretary in the initial step of a radical reform of international relations, aimed not only at ending the Cold War but at limiting the use of military force worldwide and at rallying the global community in support of a humanized international order. This upturn was arguably caused by disappointment in the slow reaction of the Party to the degradation of the system, symbolized by the Chernobyl incident, to which the General Secretary of the CPSU answered with a strategy aimed at mobilizing the domestic and international public opinion against the divisive and militaristic old thinking of the Cold War and in favor of perestroika and the New Thinking. This strategy, while inspired by the Leninist political tradition, aimed at reforming the Soviet model and informed by a populist optimism on mass mobilization, was anyway revolutionary in its rejection of coercive power and was decisively influenced by Gorbachev's personal and

476 Wohlforth, "The Russian-Soviet empire", p. 226.

477 For a different argumentation on this point, see: Alfred J. Rieber, "How Persistent Are Persistent Factors?", chap.4, in Robert Legvold (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 205-278.

intellectual journey, as well as by political and academic contacts developed throughout the 1960's and 1970's between the Soviet Union and Western countries. Gorbachev's engagement in delegitimizing remnants of the old thinking and showing the feasibility of his proposal of cooperation with the West pushed him to make foreign policy concessions that directly contradicted national interests as conceived in a realist framework, while his complete rejection of the Brezhnev doctrine allowed the relatively peaceful fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War. As pointed out in the first and second chapter, the rise of Yeltsin and of liberal internationalism as the official foreign policy of the Russian government after the failed August coup was arguably the result of both Gorbachev's failing to control the democratized political arena established by his reforms and the international rise of the Western model in the early 1990s. The foreign policy carried on by Yeltsin and Kozyrev was a prosecution of the previous engagement on the West on even more radical terms: Russia was, in the intention of this government, to be integrated in the West and to become a full-fledged market democracy over a decade. Its failure was not provoked as much by a lack of financial support from the West as by the short-sighted assessments relative to social costs of the transition and of the Western readiness to fully recognized Russia as one of its own – a belief arguably inspired by the deceitfully positive relations established by Gorbachev with Washington on the base of substantial Soviet concessions. Whatever the inspiration, both of these assessments were proven faulty in a few years' time and both Yeltsin and Kozyrev were forced to adapt their foreign policy in response to popular dissatisfaction with reforms and growing concerns inside the Russian elite.

Between 1985 and 1993 Moscow's foreign policy was conceived as instrumental to domestic reforms, although after the collapse of the Soviet Union this link became more direct since liberals tied the cooperative foreign policy course with Western financial assistance. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin tried to overcome the country's backwardness and to solve its historical security dilemma vis-à-vis the West. The first faced the challenge to adapt the system built by Stalin to the new global realities, but failed to establish a clear roadmap for reforms and in his focus on foreign affairs and institutional reforms ultimately lost control of the economy and the issue of nationalities. The second, despite his choice in favor of a radical emulation of the Western model, reflected on the contrary many similarities with traditional Soviet leaders, making overoptimistic promises of development, adopting a campaignist approach and relying on a mix of popular mobilization, cadre selection, investments and technology for economic modernization⁴⁷⁸. In hindsight, it is possible to interpret the period between 1985 and 1993 as a moment of crisis of the Soviet model, which allowed the rise of two different projects of domestic reforms. These two projects were marked by a cooperative approach toward the United States and European countries, an attempt to reinterpret Moscow's role in the

478 Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, p. 317.

international arena and a critical approach toward the country's past. However, their failure was in many ways caused by excessively selective interpretations of the country's history: on one hand, Gorbachev chose to downplay the role played by coercion in the Soviet model and underestimated the consequence of its complete rejection of repression, while on the other liberals completely rejected Russia's imperial tradition and therefore overlooked the possible destabilizing effect of traditional security concerns entrenched in the country's history.

Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's unsuccessful attempts to reshape the identity of the Soviet Union and of the Russian Federation in the international arena led to the affirmation of the well-tested statist vision, which coupled its call for great power status and hegemony in the CIS with a less negative approach toward the country's past. However, it should be pointed out the revival of traditional Russian concern for international recognition and strategic depth did not imply *tout court* the return to a logic of territorial expansion in strategic regions, suppression of democratic institutions and confrontation with the West – a strategy closer to the proposals of Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov than to what Primakov and Putin actually attempted between 1996 and 2001. Indeed, both Primakov and Putin tried to present Russia as a modern great power with distinctive security interests but involved in the process of contemporary global governance. The first, having to deal at the head of the Foreign Ministry with NATO enlargement and the diplomatic controversies over Iraq, refrained this engagement as a struggle to counter the destabilizing unilateral approach adopted by the United States and advocated in favor of an alliance with other potentially assertive international actors (China, India, Iran). However, both his anti-American assertiveness and his advocacy of a new Russian-centered integration project in the former Soviet Union did not yield the expected results and were delegitimized by the 1998 financial crisis and the diplomatic defeat in 1999 over NATO airstrikes in Yugoslavia. In response to the challenge imposed by the shortcomings of Primakov's course, Putin tried to underline the importance of the economic dimension for the Russian claim to great power and to stress on the importance of technological competitiveness with other industrialized countries. His effort to reinterpret the sources of Russia's status was signaled by his attention to the development of pipelines in order to exploit oil and gas exports not only to enhance Moscow's leverage in relation to its post-Soviet neighbors, but also to project the country's influence inside Western markets and particularly inside the European Union.

These evolutions in the tools and priorities adopted by Russian foreign policy in parallel with international dynamics and domestic processes did not resolve long term dilemmas connected to Russia's international status and security interests. As a matter of fact, the domestic stabilization and the increasing predictability of Moscow's international activity started with Putin's first mandate left some questions unanswered. On one side, the process of Russia's integration in the global economy, also thanks to the process of acquisition of WTO membership, seemed to be hampered by the uneasy

approach toward limitations to sovereignty and toward the possible destabilization of the domestic market, especially in those areas dominated by monopolies. On the other, despite its active engagement of both NATO and the European Union, it remained unclear whether Putin's Russia would be able to put up with future enlargements in the post-Soviet area. The former Soviet Union continued to be considered by the Kremlin as its informal sphere of influence, which was bound to foster conflictual relations with assertive neighbors. Nonetheless, the beginning of Putin's mandate seemed to confirm that Russian foreign policy remained a dynamic process of determination of national interests, a competition between several options influenced by historical aspirations and traditions as much as by international phenomena and domestic needs.

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RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND EUROPEAN SECURITY
FROM GORBACHEV TO PUTIN (1985-2001)

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Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the study of Russian foreign policy between 1985 and 2001, with a special focus on the factors that influence its evolution and the features of continuity inside the country's historical experience. In particular, this work analyzes Russia's international conduct and domestic debate concerning relations with Western countries and especially in the area of European security, where Moscow has traditionally sought to confirm its great power status and to avoid the consolidation of military alliances directed against Russia.

The first chapter deals with the affirmation and the failure of Gorbachev's 'new thinking'. I argue that his radical revision of the Soviet approach to international affairs was the result of the stagnation of the Brezhnev era and of the affirmation of a new generation of politicians and intellectuals educated in the years of détente who advocated a reform of the socialist model and a rapprochement with Western countries. Initially oriented toward the need to avoid a new arms race in light of increasing material constraints, Gorbachev's foreign policy was turned after 1987 into an attempt to reshape Soviet universalism on new ground, which became the main source of legitimization for perestroika in light of the failures in domestic reforms. In fact, Gorbachev's reforms were marked by a lack of strategic planning and an overoptimistic approach to popular mobilization, which led him to underestimate the role played by coercion in the Soviet system and to allow the appearance of political movements advocating the collapse of the Soviet Union. The decision to firmly reject violent suppression of dissent had especially significant consequences on European socialist regimes. While Gorbachev tried to favor the emergence of reformist socialist governments, his preference for relations with Western partners and the poor management of the crises in Eastern Europe costed the Soviet Union its influence in European security and strengthened the position of NATO. In the end, Gorbachev's inability to control the political and economic situation at home resulted in a limited autonomy in foreign policy.

The second chapter is devoted to the affirmation of a liberal and pro-Western foreign policy course after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which in my opinion was the result of domestic dynamics, of the international affirmation of the Western civilization and of the arguably overoptimistic evaluation of relations between Moscow and the West as inherently non conflictual after Gorbachev's years. The new Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, rose to the Kremlin thanks to his political talent and to the opportunity provided him by Gorbachev, and formed a coalition that united liberal intellectuals and economists with former Soviet managers interested to become a class of new capitalists. This group advocated a radical break with the past imperialism and socialist dictatorship, and argued that Russia could become a Western market democratic integrated in the international community in a few years through severe reforms. Yeltsin even put forward the prospect of Russian membership in NATO in the long term, but the proposal was not followed up by the member countries and, despite the increasing cooperation between Moscow and the Alliance, the issue of Russia's role in the European security framework was left unsolved.

The crisis of the pro-Western foreign policy and the affirmation of a more assertive course is treated in the third chapter. The partnership between Russia and Western countries started to be criticized by both nationalists and moderates because the apparent lack of reciprocity and the scarcity of Western financial support and investments in the Russian economy. In foreign policy, the cooperation was showing considerable limits in the

management of the war in Bosnia and was further strained by the prospect of NATO enlargement to Central Europe, mistakenly brought up by Yeltsin and followed up by Western countries against Russia's opinion. In this predicament, a new consensus appeared inside the Russian establishment in favor of a more assertive approach toward security threats in the CIS and toward Western partners: this course was advocated by the Russian military, by the nationalist opposition in the parliament and by large parts of the foreign policy community, which rallied under the figure of Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service. Yeltsin and the Foreign Minister Kozyrev, especially under the electoral defeat in December 1993, acknowledged the shifted political balance and started to balance their pro-Western agenda with an increased attention to integration in the CIS and NATO enlargement. This new approach was reflected by the Russian attempt to be recognized by the Alliance as a special partner in European security, which was not initially contemplated in the NATO proposal of the Partnership for Peace program. The Russian government obtained this recognition but could not convince Western countries to abandon the project of NATO enlargement, a prospect which, together with the disappointing outcome of domestic liberal reforms, encouraged Yeltsin to abandon the liberal foreign policy course and to appoint Primakov as Foreign Minister.

The fourth chapter highlights the new strategy adopted by Moscow to limit the negative consequences of NATO enlargement with the establishment of an official framework for relations with the Alliance, while trying to revive ties with non-Western traditional allies (China, India, Iran) and strengthening Russia's influence in the CIS area. Nonetheless, the expansion of NATO further raised the level of anti-Americanism in the Russian establishment and had a major impact on the domestic debate on national security, nuclear policy and military reform. Despite Yeltsin's reelection in 1996, the domestic situation was seriously destabilized by the 1998 financial crisis and by the impeachment charges started by the nationalist opposition. This internal instability seriously affected Russia's international conduct, and in the Kosovo War the country found itself in the danger of direct confrontation with NATO because of the assertiveness of the military and the insufficient level of institutional coordination. The power vacuum in Moscow ended with the affirmation of the relatively unknown Vladimir Putin, who was appointed by Yeltsin as Prime Minister and managed to quickly gain popularity thanks to his tough conduct of the war in Chechnya. The new President tried to establish a balance between the need to preserve Russia's great power status and to enhance its economic development by adopting a mixed course marked by internal centralization of power and cooperation with Western countries abroad. He seized the opportunity presented by the terrorist attacks on 9/11 to rebuild relations with the United States and tried to exploit Russia's energy resources to strengthen the country's position vis-à-vis its CIS and European neighbors. However, his favorable approach to integration in the West was hampered by persisting concerns about the NATO and EU enlargement in the post-Soviet region.

In the conclusion of the thesis, I analyze these changes in Russia's foreign policy from the perspective of constructivist theories, which highlight how the determination of national interests is the outcome of a competition between different national self-images, which are tested by the elite in light of their viability to accomplish the expected results in the given international and domestic context and of their correspondence with the country's historical aspirations. However, Russia's approach in the analyzed period to European security, and especially to NATO enlargement, seems to confirm the neorealist argument on the continuity of

the country's concern for great power status and strategic depth in the national security thinking. Nonetheless, the return to a more traditional conception of Russia's international role after the failures of perestroika and liberal reforms did not coincide with an outright aggressive foreign policy: in fact, both Primakov and Putin balanced their pursuit of great power status in the world arena with attempts to refrain this concept into the realities of the contemporary international framework and, especially for the latter, with a significant concern for the economic foundation of Russia's power. Therefore, the weight of the historical experience and of traditional aspirations should not be downplayed but instead understood and interpreted in the context of shifting international and domestic dynamics.

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