



Department of Political Sciences - Master in International Relations

Comparative History of Political Systems

**“THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN
CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS: A GREAT
POWER ON THE RISE”**

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INTRODUCTION

Looking at the development of world politics since 2014, Russia has emerged as major player in all the most important geopolitical scenarios, above all the Ukrainian crisis and the Syrian civil war. In both cases, the Russian Federation has shown, through its foreign policy decisions and plans, an assertiveness and determination that had been missing for many years, at least from the fall of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s.

The **assumption of the research** is that the Russian Federation, through many difficulties and in the wake of a long process lasted almost fifteen years, has now recovered its Great Power status typical of the imperial and Soviet eras and its influence in world politics is growing in the wake of recent international developments. Consequently, the **aim** of the text is to demonstrate this assumption, considering how the Great Power status and the historical tradition have influenced Russia's foreign policy strategies in the last seventeen years, characterised by the permanence at power of Vladimir Putin. The first signs indicating that the Kremlin was ready to undertake a new behaviour at the international level had already emerged both in 2008 and 2011, during Dimitri Medvedev's mandate at the Presidency of the Federation: in the first case, responding to Georgian invasion of the self-declared independent state of South Ossetia, Moscow sent its troops to the region in order to push back the Georgians and formally protect the Ossetian right to self-determination; in the second case, despite not using its veto power, Russia strongly opposed the no-fly zone on Libya proposed by France, the UK and the USA to damage former Chief of State of Libya killed during the revolution started in 2011. Even if the relevance of these episodes is undeniable, the real turning point in Russian behaviour took place in March 2014 with the contested reconciliation of Crimea and the alleged intervention of the Russian army in the Ukrainian civil war to support the separatist republics of Lugansk and Donetsk. A focal point that reiterated more than one year later, in September 2015, when, due to a series of reasons that we are going to see further in the text, Vladimir Putin decided to deploy troops in Syria to fight the Islamic terrorists and sustain the struggle of its ally Bashar al-Assad. It is exactly in the current President that we can find one of the strongest and more constant elements of contemporary Russian foreign policy, the main goal of which has been, starting from 1999 – year of Putin's advent to power – the restoration of the Great Power status that Russia had lost in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR. Did the Russian leadership manage to achieve this objective? As mentioned previously, answering to this question is particularly important because of the impact that Russia plays on the international level nowadays: a stronger and more incisive impact, as it was during both the Imperial and Soviet times. Understanding Russia's global new role is a fundamental

step to accomplish, in particular in view of a future economic and political cooperation between the West and Moscow: I consider this factor essential to the resolution of the most pressing issues for the international community and to the construction of a more peaceful and stable world in the future.

Basing on these premises, the research will follow a defined **structure**. First, since talking about Great Powers without precisely identifying what is a “Great Power” would weaken the findings of the work, the **first chapter** will be entirely dedicated – after a brief introduction on methodology – to the analysis of this concept in the world of international relations: to make the argumentations more effective, I will consider two different methods, one based on lists of capabilities and one based on consensus among a selected group of scholars. In brief, while in the first case I will try to define a Great Power via a bunch of characteristics that a country should have in order to be defined as such, in the second case I will examine a group of countries that are considered Great Powers more frequently by IR scholars (United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, Russia and China), comparing their opinions to identify which states are – or have been – the most adaptable to this definition. In this chapter, I will base my research mainly on the work of Paul Kennedy, “*The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers*”, and on the writings of prominent academics such as Jack S. Levy, Abraham F. K. Organski, J. David Singer, Kenneth Waltz, Barry Buzan and Leopold von Ranke. From the Russian side, I will refer to Tatiana Shakleina and Sergey Markedonov, important representatives of Russian IR school. Closely linked to the definition of “Great Power” is then the concept of “subsystem”, to be understood as a physical space or a set of territories - which therefore have a regional dimension – with its own political and socio-economic characteristics, often influenced by the presence of a large State that imposes itself as a hegemonic in a determined area. In particular, I will talk about the subsystems and Russia referring especially to the regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, since those are the areas subjected to greater Russian influence due to the common Soviet past. After having examined the different definitions of “Great Power” proposed by the considered authors, the analysis will end with the identification of the best criteria available to apply this concept to countries.

After having defined the parameters and the theoretical bases of the research, in the **second chapter** I will examine the material and non-material capabilities of the Federation, from territory and natural resources to military strength and technological development. As other Great Powers, Russia has several strengths but, on the other hand, it suffers also from structural weaknesses – in this case mainly in the economic sphere – that risk to hamper the country’s foreign policy objectives in the long term. However, as it will be explained, these weaknesses, despite being damaging for the state’s international potential, do not represent a serious threat to the status of Great Power recently restored. Thus, Russia will be inserted in the group of Great Powers, where, after the analysis of its

main features and capabilities, I will present a brief comparison among these countries to highlight the fact that Moscow, on the global scale, is not inferior to other major states in terms of political potential and influence. In this regard, it is necessary to specify that France, Italy, the UK and Germany will be considered as a unique Great Power in the framework of the European Union, despite Britain's imminent defection. Moreover, the list will exclude Japan in favour of new emerging powers like India and Brazil, here believed to play a key role in international politics together with the other members of BRIC concert. Main objective of this chapter will be the examination of Russia's political, social, economic and military features, to identify the greatest strengths and the greatest weakness of the Federation nowadays. Indeed, a great or little ability to become protagonist in the various international issues depends on the political, economic, social, and military potential that a state possesses.

In the **third chapter**, the last issue examined deals with the Russian influence on regional and global scenarios. In brief, after having defined what is a Great Power and seen why the Federation deserves to be included in the concert of the most powerful states, the analysis will focus on how the Great Power status influences national foreign policy and how Russia sees international relations from a Great Power perspective. However, being this topic quite wide and not summarised in a few pages, the study of Russian foreign policy will be developed as follows: first, it will cover only a short period of time, namely the first Putin presidencies, the Medvedev presidency and the third Putin's mandate (from 2000 to present time); second, the study will be carried out in the form of comparative analysis among the last four editions of the national Foreign Policy Concept (2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016), in order to highlight the constants, the variables, the interests and the pillars of Russian behaviour beyond national borders; third, in order to further support the thesis of Russia as a Great Power, I will present the historical bases of Russian foreign policy, showing how much the national identity has contributed, along centuries, to the formation of a Great Power sentiment not only among Russian leaders, but also among Russian citizens themselves. History is a fundamental element of a country's national identity and, in the case of Russia, has played a key role in building the modern perception of the state: we will see that the idea of great country, similar to the French *grandeur*, started to thrive at the beginning of the 18th century thanks to Peter the Great, who first formally transformed the Tsardom of Russia into the Russian Empire, and continued with the territorial expansions promoted by Catherine II at the end of that century, enhanced by the work of the Russian intelligentsia during the 19th (not only Fedor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy, but also Nikolay Danilevskiy and Vladimir Solovyov). Therefore, Russia has always behaved as a Great Power and, to achieve or maintain this international status, has adopted different choices and attitudes depending on the needs of the historical moment: the evidence of its historical past is well identifiable in the

modern foreign policy doctrine and useful not only to decode its results, but also to understand which will be the country's challenges and opportunities in the future.

Regarding **methodology**, in order to verify the aforementioned assumption, I chose to use primarily a neo-realist approach, which is, in this case, the most compliant: in the neo-realist rhetoric, power – being it economic, military, political, or social – is considered a fundamental element of international relations, since the development of world politics is based on the grade of influence that countries can exert on different scenarios. Therefore, this approach is also the most suitable when talking about Great Powers, being power and influence the main ratio explaining any behaviour on the part of states in the international arena. Further details on methodology will be provided in the first part of the first chapter, before beginning with the analysis.

For what concerns **sources**, I chose both Western and Russian to make the analysis as balanced as possible. The necessity to adopt different sources derives from the fact that Western media and Russian media often release non-objective opinions and statements on Russian affairs, and the same sometimes happens with scholars and academic sources. Since this thesis does not want to be neither pro-Western neither pro-Russia, the realisation of a complete and impartial research can be accomplished only considering both sides of the coin. During the collection of material, I consulted over a hundred sources among papers, websites, books and video-documentaries, whose details can be consulted in the bibliography section. Shown below are only the main ones for each chapter. In the first one, I employed the work of Paul Kennedy, *“The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers”*, Kenneth Waltz's *“Theory of International Politics”* and writings by Jack S. Levy, Abraham F. K. Organski, J. David Singer, Barry Buzan, Leopold von Ranke, Tatiana Shakleina and Sergey Markedonov. For the second chapter I referred mainly to the book *“Contours of an Alarming Future”* by Andrey Bezrukov and Andrey Sushentsov, in which the authors provide a complete overview of the weaknesses and strengths of the Russian Federation: together with this work, I used different papers published by international organizations (World Bank, IMF, United Nations, OECD), Western institutions (NATO, European Union) and manuals such as *“Accommodating Rising Powers. Past, Present and Future”*, edited by T. V. Paul, *“The Next 100 Years”* by George Friedman and *“Emerging Powers in a Comparative Perspective”*, edited by Vidya Nadkarni and Norma C. Noonan, whose information were precious for the draft of the entire text. The final chapter, instead, can be divided in two parts: the first deals with the historical foundations of Russian foreign policy, the analysis of which has been eased by Igor Zevelev's 2016 publication for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); for the second part, dedicated to national foreign policy, I based my study mainly on the official documents released by the Government of the Russian Federation, namely the Foreign Policy Concepts of 2016, 2013, 2008 and 2000. Moreover, regarding Russian foreign policy,

“Russian Foreign Policy in Transition”, by Tatiana Shakleina and Andrei Melville, and *“The Foreign Policy of Russia”* by Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee and Vidya Nadkarni also offered valuable support to the whole research.

In general, dealing with the role of Russia in the international geopolitical arena is always a controversial issue, mainly due to the image that this country has before the international public opinion. “Empire of the evil”, recalling Ronald Reagan’s definition, or simply a state trying to protect its interests like any other country? The Russian Federation, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and their story has always been object of interest of many Western scholars, historians, journalists and analysts: for many Westerners, Russia is particularly charming, being considered not too different from Western world but, at the same time, diverse enough to catch their attention. This work, whose basis was born during a very intense academic year spent at MGIMO University in Moscow, perfectly reflects the interest that Russia could raise in a Westerner.

Concerning the **motivation of the research**, the most important reasons that brought me to write this work are the following. First, the deepening of my personal knowledge on Russia started at the beginning of my experience at MGIMO, which provided me with a complete background on different areas, from the social to the economic, from the political to the cultural. Studying Russia from abroad and studying Russia directly in Russia is a completely different experience, since the everyday contact with the Russian environment highly contributed, both physically and morally, to inspire this work week by week. Second, the fact that Western literature on Russia is often biased by superficiality and, in some cases, by a manifest hostility towards this country and an explicit anti-Russian rhetoric. To be fair, also from the Russian part, this one-sided trend regards Russian media and scholars, who tend to depict the West as the enemy. In this work, the intention is to be as impartial as possible, analysing the topic basing only on empirical facts and using both Western and Russian sources: the factionalism adopted by both sides is, unfortunately, the major obstacle to a fair, complete and precise analysis. How can the Western powers understand Russian moves if they do not recognize their own mistakes of analysis? How can Russia do the same with the West by continuing to promote a hampering nationalistic rhetoric? The aim of this research is also to produce an impartial analysis of Russia’s role in the geopolitical asset, looking in detail at the history of its foreign policy, its major threats and challenges for the near future and its strengths and weaknesses in comparison with other major powers. The third reason why I chose this delicate topic is the status of the international geopolitical arena, which has seen, particularly starting from September 2015 with the Russian military intervention in Syria, a gradual increase of importance of the Russian Federation in global affairs. As we will see later in the text, the intervention launched to support Bashar al-Assad helped Moscow to interrupt the condition of international isolation in which it had fallen after the Crimean

issue in February 2014. Consequently, from being an internationally isolated power, Russia rapidly overthrew this trend and emerged again as a fundamental actor in the contemporary world politics: the Russian Federation is now a key player in all the most important scenarios, from the struggle against Islamic terrorism to the containment of the migration flow from the Middle East and Africa.

My hope is that this research would be a useful tool for a more careful, detailed and aware analysis of Russian international behaviour and role in international relations, with the intent to give a little, but sincere, contribution to the development of a comprehensive, open and friendly dialogue between Moscow and the Western world, whose existence is necessary more now than ever.

CHAPTER I

“Great Power”: the theoretical bases of the concept and its application to contemporary international relations

1.1. Methodological approach

Before beginning the analysis, I will briefly reopen the topic of methodology mentioned in the introduction. The theory I chose to adopt is the neorealist, firstly formulated by Kenneth Waltz and further developed by John Mearsheimer. Neorealism is the most adapt theory to face the topic of Great Powers and the reasons of this choice are several. The intention here is not to explain in detail the theory, but only to delineate a brief outline aimed at pointing out its key points, especially those strictly related to Great Powers. In this work, neorealist theory has been used to carry out both a quantitative and qualitative research, depending on the aims and the topics of each chapter. The first and the third chapter, for example, are the result of a qualitative study based on official documents released by the Russian government, international relations studies and academic articles on geopolitics and international issues. The nature of the second chapter, instead, is more quantitative, since the material used are mainly data and numbers taken from international organizations that measure parameters such as economic growth, military potential, technological development, demography and natural resources. For this reason, in chapter two the analysis has been carried out in the form of an objective data reading and interpretation.

The first crucial element of neorealism is the concept of anarchy, a kind of ordering principle that characterizes the nature of international scenario together with the distribution of capabilities among countries. The international structure is anarchic because it does not have a central authority but, instead, is characterized by a given number of actors – or sovereign states – that are, in theory, equal. Decentralization of international structure is, on this regard, the second crucial element of the neorealist world order. A third important element is the behaviour of countries, whose main aim is to perceive and protect their interests to the detriment of other countries: states always think only about themselves, in a completely self-oriented approach. They behave in such a way because, first, they want to ensure their own survival and, according to offensive realism, they also try to maximise their influence. While survival is the essential requirement to the accomplishment of national goals, the development of strong military, economic, commercial and political capabilities is the means through which countries increase their power and satisfy their needs, considering that they cannot trust the intentions of other states and they are, therefore, constantly stuck in the so-called “*security*

dilemma".¹ Since capabilities are not equal and objectives are different, the international arena is characterized by a tendency to mutual mistrust that affects the cooperation among states and creates a balance of power scenario where the major powers, or Great Powers, do not possess enough capabilities to overthrow the others. The balancing can be obtained in two different ways: by internal balancing, when Great Powers increase their economic or military potential from inside, and by external balancing, when they try to increase their influence by establishing alliances with other Great Powers or countries. According to neorealist scholars, this kind of international structure can produce three different results in term of geopolitical order, depending on the distribution of capabilities and the number of existent Great Powers. A system can be, therefore, unipolar, when there is only one Great Power, bipolar, when there are three Great Powers, or multipolar, when the world is dominated by more than two Great Powers. In particular, the last one is potentially the most dangerous asset, since the presence of a third Great Power could start a game of alliances likely to lead to a large-scale conflict, where states cannot control their reactions. The neorealist theory would certainly deserve further detailed study, but it would not be compliant with the exigencies of this work. Here, what is important is to see that neorealism is the most complete theory in terms of explanation of the concept of Great Powers, which is the basis of this research on the role of the Russian Federation.

Given this theoretical background, I will briefly explain the methodological approach adopted to complete the research. The collection of the necessary material started at the beginning of academic year 2015-2016 at MGIMO University, where I had the chance to read and study several useful documents and books concerning Russian foreign policy and analyse documents regarding data on Russian economy, society and military sector. That period was, moreover, a very interesting one in terms of international relations dynamics. Before the intervention in Syria and due to the Ukrainian war and the Crimean dossier, Russia seemed clearly isolated: in September 2015, none would have imagined that the following season would have presented such a dynamic scenario. However, the Kremlin's decision to intervene and the shooting down of the Russian SU-24 in November 2015 by the Turkish Airforce suddenly awoke analysts from all over the world, focusing again on the moves of President Vladimir Putin, who had become again a major protagonist in the international scenario. Consequently, my research benefited a lot from this newly agitated situation. After the aforementioned events, and with the presidential elections in the United States entering their crucial phase in spring 2016, articles and academic papers on Russian foreign policy and U.S.-Russia relations flourished. In a constant and accurate work, I kept on collecting and reading material, writing summaries of the longest sources and identifying the key points of each text. The research was particularly interesting and productive during my brief but satisfying experience at the Russian

¹ Herz J. H., 1951.

International Affairs Council, where I had the occasion to deepen my already complete knowledge on Russian foreign policy and publish a paper on Italian-Russian diplomatic and commercial relations. Due to the large amount of material collected, I did a meticulous selection of the sources, choosing the most relevant and adapt to the research.

The result was the writing of a work aimed at integrating, despite the limits derived from my experience in the Russian Federation, relatively brief if compared to other studies published on the same topic, the existent literature on foreign policy doctrines of this huge country and its intrinsic potential to play as major actor in the contemporary geopolitical scenario.

1.2. “Great Power”: definition and main theories

What is a “Great Power”? The first step of our analysis must be necessarily the definition of this concept, together with the notion of “subsystem”, on which we will focus in the next paragraph. These two concepts are the main tools through which the neorealist theory analyses the contemporary international arena where, in practice, the Great Powers continue to have a decisive influence on the developments of regional areas of the world: this game of Great Powers determines, according to neorealism, the evolution of global affairs.

Before looking in detail at the concept of Great Power as intended by neorealist scholars, I will present a definition of the concept that summarises all its main features and that I will use as reference point for the following chapters. According to Tatiana Shakleina², we can define “*contemporary Great Power a country that exhibits the following characteristics:*

1. *The traditional characteristics of a Great Power: territory, natural resources, population, intellectual resources, economic, military, technological potential, and high cultural and educational potential.*
2. *It is largely independent in conducting its domestic and foreign policy in order to safeguard its national interests.*
3. *It exerts visible influence on macro-regional and world politics and on the policies of other countries (world regulation policy).*
4. *It has a historic tradition of thinking and acting globally, a tradition and culture of exerting influence on world politics and acting as a dominant or very active and influential player.*
5. *It has the will to realize a Great Power strategy.”*

This definition contains both material and non-material features: if the first ones are capabilities related to hard power (for example, military, economy, natural resources and technology), the second deal more with soft power tools, international strategy and behaviour of a country (for example, influence in world politics, historical tradition and foreign policy ambitions). Together with these features, we should integrate the definition with another important non-material characteristic, emphasized especially by the English school IR tradition: international recognition, as to say the fact that a Great Power, to be defined as such, must be recognized by other Great Powers. In this regard, Hedley Bull’s definition of Great Power is exemplar. In addition to having strong key material capabilities (military, economic etc.), Great Powers must be “*recognized by others to have [...] certain special rights and duties. Great Powers, for example, assert the right, and are accorded to the right, to play a part in determining issues that affect the pace and security of the international*

² Shakleina T., 2016.

system as a whole.”³ The role of a Great Power, indeed, is relevant not only because it tries to establish the paradigms of the game at the international level, but also because there are other countries who acknowledge such a behaviour, seeking to do the same with the aim of protecting their interests in a region of the world.

Integrated or not with other details, Shakleina’s definition conveys a clear message on the nature of a Great Power. Most of all, it is a country that exerts a greater influence on world politics than the others, concentrating its efforts – political, economic and military – in a specific region where the influence of other Great Powers is less evident or dangerous for its interests. Because of this fundamental role, it is impossible to look at contemporary international relations without taking into consideration the Great Powers. Scholars and political scientists have always looked at Great Powers as the main actors of world politics, since it is around them that the development of international relations takes place and it is in their politics that the ratio of global affairs is. Nevertheless, many scholars have also highlighted the difficulty of defining a Great Power and this concept does not seem identifiable through scientific method: in other words, it is difficult to measure the power of a State. In this regard, the definition is an attempt to clarify an uncertainty of definition that even Kenneth Waltz, the father of neorealism, had raised in the past: “*Any ranking at times involves difficulties of comparison and uncertainties about where to draw lines. Historically, despite the difficulties, one finds general agreement about who the great powers of a period are, with occasional doubt about marginal case. [...] Counting the great powers of an era [...] and common sense can answer it*”.⁴

The definition of the concept of Great Power is evidently problematic. As mentioned before, there is no a specific empiric procedure to identify which state is a Great Powers and which not. Barry Buzan states that in classical literature on Great Powers we can find at least “*two clear threads in the attempts to formulate the criteria by which to distinguish Great Powers from other states in the system: material capabilities and social role*”.⁵ In this case, the role of a so-called Great Powers as recognized by other countries in a certain period of history: it is exactly the same approach used in the aforementioned H. Bull’s definition, which poses the emphasis on the international society rather than on material capabilities. These ones, instead, are considered predominant by the American materialist IR tradition, of which Kenneth Waltz is the best example and representative. Not by chance, his definition of Great Power is very much focused on material capabilities:

*“In international politics, as in any self-help system, the units of greatest capability set the scene of action for others as well as themselves.”*⁶ [...] *The economic, military and other capabilities of*

³ Bull H., 1977: 200-2, in Buzan B., 2004.

⁴ Waltz K., 1979: 131.

⁵ Buzan B., 2004.

⁶ Waltz K., 1979: 72-3.

nations cannot be sectored and separately weighted. States are not placed in the top rank because they excel in one way or another. Their rank depends on how they score on all of the following items: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence [...]. Ranking states, however, does not require predicting their success in war or in other endeavours. We need only rank them roughly by capability.⁷ [...] The greater the relative size of a unit the more it identifies its own interest with the interest of the system.”⁸

Despite material capabilities and social, or formal, role can help us to elaborate a definition of Great Powers, both the elements cannot provide a precise criterion of definition. As for social role, prominent scholars as Martin Wight and Morgenthau express their doubts on the reliability of this criterion. According to Wight, formal role is evidently conditioned and influenced by political reasons: “*It is only part of the truth to say that a Great Power is a power that is recognized as great by its contemporaries. Such recognition may contain an element of the wishful or the conventional, as when the Big Three coopted China and France at the end of the Second World War*”⁹. Hans Morgenthau, according to whom, in 1815, “*the diplomatic rank of Great Power*” was conceded to Sweden, Spain and Portugal “*only out of courtesy*”, provides a similar example.¹⁰

Identifying Great Powers for different historical epochs is not an easy task, especially because not all the scholars agree on the status that a certain country had in a specified period. Therefore, since there is no a precise scheme through which classify Great Powers, some argue that this argument is not open to a scientific discussion.¹¹ However, following what maintained by Barry Buzan and further analysed by Jon Rynn, the major criteria used in the international relations literature to define when a country is a Great Power are two: the consensus choice, used when everybody agrees on the fact that a state was a Great Power during an historical period; and the already mentioned material capabilities, the level of which determines the status of Great Power possessed or not by a country (in this case there is often a threshold above which this status is guaranteed). In the following paragraphs, I will present the opinions of main international relations scholars concerning Great Powers.

⁷ Waltz K., 1979: 131.

⁸ Waltz K., 1979: 198.

⁹ Wight M., 1979: 45-6.

¹⁰ Morgenthau H., 1978: 348-9.

¹¹ Rynn J., 2001.

1.3. Definitions of “Great Power” based on consensus and capabilities criteria

The following tables demonstrate what we have been saying so far, or that there are huge difficulties in defining a Great Power¹² and its characteristics:

China	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880						
1890						
1900						
1910						
1920						
1930						
1940						
1950		Green	Blue			Red
1960		Green	Blue			Red
1970		Green	Blue			Red

France	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1890	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1920		Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1940	Yellow	Green		Dark Blue		Red
1950		Green	Blue			Red
1960		Green	Blue			Red
1970		Green	Blue			Red

Germany	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1890	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1920	Yellow	Green		Dark Blue	Brown	
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1940	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue	Brown	Red
1950		Green				
1960		Green				
1970		Green				

Italy	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1890	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1920	Yellow	Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1930		Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1940		Green	Blue	Dark Blue		Red
1950						
1960						
1970						

¹² Personal elaboration from Rynn J., 2001. The dates reported in the tables shall be intended as decades rather than single years (for example, with “1940” I mean the period going from 1940 to 1949).

Russia/ USSR	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1890	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1910	White	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1920	Yellow	Green	White	Grey	Brown	White
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	White
1940	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1950	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1960	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1970	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red

UK	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1890	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1920	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1940	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1950	White	Green	Blue	White	White	Red
1960	White	Green	Blue	White	White	Red
1970	White	Green	Blue	White	White	Red

USA	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	White	White	White	White	White	Red
1890	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Red
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	White	White	Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1920	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1940	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1950	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1960	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red
1970	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	Brown	Red

Japan	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Singer</i>	<i>Waltz</i>	<i>Organski</i>	<i>Wight</i>
1880	White	White	White	White	White	White
1890	White	White	Blue	White	White	White
1900	Yellow	Green	Blue	White	White	Red
1910	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1920	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1930	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1940	Yellow	Green	Blue	Grey	White	Red
1950	White	Green	White	White	Brown	White
1960	White	Green	White	White	Brown	White
1970	White	Green	White	White	Brown	White

Among the analysed authors (Kennedy, Levy, Organski, Singer, Waltz and Wight) there is clearly no consensus on which countries were Great Powers in different historical periods starting from 1870, the year of the Franco-Prussian war that legitimised the debut of Germany as major actor in international politics. On the other hand, as we are going to see, also material capabilities are often difficult to identify, since every author attributes different levels of importance to capabilities that are most of the times similar (for example, military capacity and economic potential, which are the main indicators to find out whether a country is a Great Power or not). In general, capabilities are more reliable than consensus to understand the concept of Great Power and create a list of powerful countries, at least because they allow us to understand that some countries are more powerful than

others, and these are usually identified as the Great Powers. However, to understand which are the bases of authors' choices, we shall analyse them one by one.

In the famous “*Correlates of War*” project, started in 1963 at the University of Michigan, David J. Singer made a concrete attempt to classify countries in terms of potential on a global scale.¹³ The most important result of this huge academic research is, with no doubt, the creation of the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), a statistical measure of national power that considers several elements registered and analysed yearly from 1816. This index is still the most reliable and used instrument to measure the potential of a country. Singer selected a list of six indicators: urban population, energy consumption, military expenditures, size of the army (military personnel), total population and production of iron and steel. These indicators, calculated in terms of percentage of the world total for every country, are aggregated to give a single number that serves as criterion of classification. Despite quite complete, Singer's classification demonstrates some inconsistencies, mainly because population is given too much weight in comparison with other indicators: large population, indeed, does not make a country powerful just because it has a larger army or consumes more energy. The result is that, for example, China is considered twice as powerful as Japan during the 1930s, when Japanese troops were occupying a large part of Chinese territories.¹⁴ Furthermore, since it measures only the hard power of a state (military capacity, population and energy consumption) and does not take into consideration its soft power, CINC has an intrinsic bias that affects the reliability of Great Powers' classification. Nevertheless, Singer was almost the only scholar trying to establish a scientific method aimed at measuring Great Powers: other scholars, as we are going to see in the following paragraphs, limited their efforts to the formulation of a generic definition of this concept.

Kenneth Waltz maintains that, generally, historians and scholars can reach a quite precise agreement on Great Powers, with doubts regarding only “*marginal cases*”.¹⁵ He states that “*counting the great powers of an era is about as difficult, or as easy, as saying how many major firms populate an oligopolistic sector of an economy. The question is an empirical one, and common sense can answer it.*” His classification of Great Powers is based on the work of Quincy Wright, “*A Study of War*”, published in 1965, in which the author supports the thesis that, in every epoch starting from 1600, every Great Power, in order to be recognized as such, should have participated in the major conflicts taking place in that period of time. Indeed, Waltz maintains that the United States became a Great Power only after World War I, Japan between the two World Wars, Italy after its three wars of

¹³ Singer D. J. & Small M., 1993.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Waltz K., 1979: 131.

independence and Germany after the Franco-Prussian war. France, the United Kingdom and Russia are instead the only countries that have always had the status of Great Power, with the exclusion of France and the UK after the collapse of their respective colonial empires.

Looking at Martin Wight, he does not provide a proper definition of Great Power. However, by readapting a definition already used by Leopold von Ranke in mid-19th century, he tries to answer by defining two kinds of powers: a dominant power and a Great Power. “*A dominant power is a power that can confidently contemplate war against any likely combination of other powers, so a great power is a power that can confidently contemplate war against any other existing single power.*”¹⁶ In this case, the problem is that Wight does not explain how a certain country can achieve the grade of confidence thanks to which it can contemplate a conflict against other states. Therefore, also here there is no criteria of definition for the concept of Great Power: we cannot define it only by assuming that it can conduct a war against a country the entity of which is not specified. Anyway, looking Wight’s classification of Great Powers, it seems that, starting from 1870, only France and the United Kingdom have never stopped exerting this role in world politics.

We have seen so far that the concept of war is always linked to the one of Great Power: indeed, most of the times, scholars have bumped into the attempt to define a Great Power when analysing the issue of war in international relations. This is also the case of Abraham Organski and Jack Kugler who, in their book “*The War Ledger*” (1980) try to explain the causes of global major conflicts. Organski himself, thanks to his famous Power Transition Theory formulated in 1958, had already provided a theoretical basis for this analysis, marking a difference between Great Powers and the dominant power. It is probably thanks to this work that they do not feel the difficulty of identifying which are the major powers promoting wars, since they possess “*such critical dimensions as population, economic productivity, and military might*”.¹⁷ In their list of Great Powers, we can identify two important features: first, the relevance of the so-called “*contending powers*”, or all the nations who compete in world politics to protect their interests and develop their influence; second, the aforementioned cleavage between the dominant power and Great Powers. Basically, Organski and Kruger consider Great Powers all the nations who can become contenders of the dominant nation, the capabilities of which represents the basic meter to evaluate the potential of other countries. Every nation that can score as high as 80% of the capabilities of the strongest nation is considered a contender¹⁸. Following this method, they differ from other scholars to the extent that they do not see the United States as a contender until the end of World War II: in this regard, we could add that,

¹⁶ Wight M., 1978: 52-53.

¹⁷ Organski A. F. K. & Kugler J., 1980: 42.

¹⁸ Organski A. F. K. & Kugler J., 1980: 44.

according to their analysis, the USA have never played as Great Powers, but only as dominant power after 1945. Differently from other authors, Organski important only two material capabilities: economic and political capability¹⁹. This theory is very well developed in his 1958 book “*World Politics*”, where the author, examining a bunch of elements composing national power, excludes geographical size as determinant for the status of Great Power. Organski’s focus is more on economic potential, which is the basis of political influence in international affairs. Consequently, crucial elements for Great Powers are manufacturing capability and technology, which allow powerful states to transform raw materials into manufactured goods. As Jon Rynn observes, “*Organski highlights two critical ideas: that technological progress in machinery leads to changes in national power, and that there is a positive feedback process at work in the economy, in which investment in capital yields more capital, that is at the heart of modern industrial economies.*”²⁰ Productivity is therefore central, as well as population and, above all, the efficiency of the governments in using natural resources in order to accomplish national goals and protect national interests. Thus, efficiency in exploiting resources and a stable bureaucratic system are ultimately the essential capabilities for becoming a Great Power.

Jack S. Levy tries to give another interesting contribution to the analysis of the term Great Power in his book “*War in the Modern Great Power System: 1495-1975*”, proposing different criteria to be applied to different states to classify them as Great Powers or not. In this case, the topic of war and the reasons hidden behind conflicts among powers are the central focus of the work. Levy’s criteria are not only material capabilities, mainly military and economic capacity, but also the behaviour of a country, its interests and the perception that other countries have towards it.²¹ The result is that Great Powers are identified as those states playing a relevant role in world politics and inside international institutions such as the United Nations, especially about the security issues and, therefore, the use of military force. Eventually, as mentioned before, an important requirement to be a Great Power is the recognition of other countries. Despite more complete than others, Levy’s definition evidences once more the difficulties encountered by scholars in adopting scientific criteria for Great Powers.

In “*The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers*” (1987), Paul Kennedy, an historian, takes inspiration from all the aforementioned definitions in order to express his concept of Great Power, as to say a “*state capable of holding its own against any other nation*”.²² Despite being quite precise when enlisting the strengths and weaknesses of major powers, analysed especially under an economic

¹⁹ Organski A. F., 1958.

²⁰ Rynn J., 2001.

²¹ Levy J. S., 1983.

²² Kennedy P., 1987: 539.

and industrial perspective, Kennedy does not provide us with a complete list of Great Powers and we cannot understand very well which countries enjoyed this status in a certain historical period. However, looking through the pages of his book, we can at least understand that there are certain countries which had been Great Powers at least once from year 1890: Austria (Austro-Hungarian Empire), China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Russia (both as Russian Empire and USSR) and the United States. Among these countries, the one towards which Kennedy demonstrates more perplexity is China, firstly defined as the weakest of major powers and then included in the group. Moreover, to this list of countries Kennedy adds also another actor: the European Economic Community (EEC), which in fact was strengthening its bases during the 1980s, when the historian wrote his book. According to Kennedy, the EEC has, indeed, “*clearly has the size, the wealth, and the productive capacity of a Great Power*”²³, so it could be included in a hypothetical list of major powers that almost nobody provides.

Hans Morgenthau’s capabilities are similar to Organski’s ones, even if he pays more attention to non-material aspects as the quality of government, as to say the level of distribution of power in a democracy or a dictatorship, and the quality of diplomacy.²⁴ However, he is also aware of the importance of material capabilities:

*“Since victory in modern war depends upon the number and quality of highways, railroads, trucks, ships, airplanes, tanks and equipment and weapons of all kinds, from mosquito nets and automatic rifles to oxygen masks and guided missiles, the competition among nations for power transforms itself largely into competition for the production of bigger, better, and more implements of war. The quality and productive capacity of the industrial plant, the know-how of the working man, the skill of the engineer, the inventive genius of the scientist, the managerial organization - all these are factors upon which the industrial capacity of a nation and, hence, its power depend. Thus it is inevitable that the leading industrial nations should be identified with the great powers, and a change in industrial rank, for better or for worse, should be accompanied or followed by a corresponding change in the hierarchy of power.”*²⁵

Moreover, he continues:

“What distinguishes the superpowers from all other nations, aside from their ability to wage all-out nuclear war and absorb a less than all-out nuclear attack, is their virtual industrial self-sufficiency and their technological capacity to stay abreast of the other nations [...] the fate of nations and of

²³ Kennedy P., 1987: 472.

²⁴ Morgenthau H., 1973.

²⁵ Morgenthau H., 1973: 124-25.

civilizations has often been determined by a differential in the technology of warfare for which the inferior side was unable to compensate in other ways.”²⁶

Despite considering geographical position and population relevant elements, Morgenthau considers fundamental industrial power, which leads to military power and, ultimately, to national power and influence in world politics.

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, it is clear that there is not very much consensus among prominent scholars concerning the characteristics of Great Powers and the method to identify them. We can conclude saying that, because of that, consensus is not the best criterion to analyse Great Powers and establish which countries enjoy this status in world politics. On the other hand, it is also true that material capabilities cannot provide a precise criterion of definition shared by the analysed scholars. For this reason, at the beginning of this chapter, I presented Shackleina’s definition because it resumes all the features presented by Singer, Morgenthau, Waltz, Kennedy, Wight, Levy and Organski: in this sense, it is the most complete. This definition is also useful to approach the topic that we will cover in the next section, or the identification of contemporary Great Powers according to the analysed parameters. We will see that, the countries possessing this status correspond to the ones mentioned by the aforementioned authors, with the integration of the European Union as unique actor and, especially, the inclusion of new powers like India, Brazil – members of BRICS group – and Turkey.

²⁶ Morgenthau H., 1973: 126.

1.4. Contemporary Great Powers

Talking about modern Great Powers in the book *“Challenge and Change”*, Tatiana Shakleina marks an evident difference between the 21st and the 20th century’s influential states as follows:

*“In the twentieth century, the G7 plus the USSR as the second world superpower (“7+1 club” or “2+6 Club”) exerted a decisive influence on international relations. Two superpowers - the USA and the USSR - were key players in world politics, seriously influencing, and even at times determining the policies of their allies, thus dominating world politics. In the twenty-first century, the group of influential countries is larger: the G20 emerged in 2008. Within this larger group, one could identify a new Group of eight most influential countries: the USA, Germany, Great Britain, France, Russia, China, India, and Japan.”*²⁷

Further, she also includes Turkey and Brazil in this group, highlighting the big differences existing among G20 members, particularly in terms of potential, interests and resources. As in 20th century’s Great Powers game, the main question related to international order is whether these powers will be able to compose a new concert or will act independently and competitively, avoiding any kind of collaboration. There is enough evidence to state that the United States, which are nowadays the only superpower in a multipolar asset, seem not very much interested in cooperating with emerging powers like BRICS countries and Turkey, making the creation of a concert very complicated. Furthermore, if, on the one hand, the G7 members are linked to each other with common values, common interests and common views of the international politics, the G20 is a larger group and, consequently, also more multicultural and diversified. G20 members are, indeed, diverse in terms of cultural background, in terms of political and economic interests and, ultimately, diverse in the way they interpret global affairs. Cultural differences and diversities in national and international goals highly affect the effectiveness of these institutions: while, inside the G7, countries manage to coordinate more easily, inside the G20 coordination is very difficult and full of obstacles. In order to be tackled, humanitarian, environmental, security, political, economic and religious challenges would need a stronger level of cooperation among states, with the Great Powers taking the lead in these processes. In this regard, a virtuous example is the last G20 summit, held in Hangzhou in September 2016, in occasion of which Barack Obama and Xi Jinping announced the official ratification of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. The 2016 summit is, however, more an exception than a rule, because usually G20’s actions are ineffective or less effective than planned by countries themselves. Comparing G20’s conduct with the one of other concerts of powers, namely the G7 – former G8 with the inclusion of the Russian Federation – and the tight relationship between NATO

²⁷ Shakleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

and the European Union, Shakleina notes a clear lack of consensus among the Great Powers composing the first. That is because “*the G7 represents a group of countries with a common strategy aimed at safeguarding the interests of its member-states and a policy aimed at protecting their beneficial/special position in world politics, especially in the sphere of the economy. [...] The same is often said about the EU where Germany and France play a very important and sometimes dominant role and about NATO that is often seen as an organization that does not solve security problems but generates many new ones.*”²⁸ Establishing whether European, Atlantic, American or G7 policies are damaging for international order is not the main of the research. What is interesting here is the fact that, being they right or wrong, actions decided by member states are often taken based on a large consensus or, at least, in the case of NATO and EU, based on a consensus shared by the dominant powers in these concerts. Another element damaging the effectiveness of G20’s decisions and policies is the presence of a non-explicit dichotomy between Western powers (major European countries, the United States and Canada) and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which in the last years have promoted several independent initiatives aimed at strengthening the cooperation among new developing Great Powers. In this field, the most active actors have certainly been the Russian Federation and China, as demonstrated by the foundation and creation of several financial, economic and political entities: the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which see the participation of Western capitals very marginalized, in 2015; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 1996, further enhanced in 2013; the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), created in 2015 on the EU model and preceded by the Custom Union among Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. All these institutions, being not inclusive toward Western powers, might both weaken or integrate the policies promoted by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, which instead see the participation of the great majority of states. In the upcoming years, BRICS countries could exercise a larger influence than they do in the present time, not only because of their strengths, but paradoxically also thanks to their weaknesses.

Economic, military, social and political features of BRICS countries will be presented in the second chapter; however, we can disclose some basic elements regarding Russia and China, the most powerful among BRICS group. According to our definition, due to the dimensions of their economies, their population, their military strengths and their political influence, these countries can be considered Great Powers with no doubt. Despite having some economic and technological deficits in comparison with the United States and European Great Powers, in the last twenty years all the BRICS have exponentially improved their performances in these fields, experiencing also relevant

²⁸ Shakleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

improvements in the energetic and military fields. For example China, despite having a GNI per capita evidently lower than the U.S. (7,930\$ against 55,980\$ in 2015), is increasing its GDP incredibly fast, reducing the gap with the Americans (11,008\$ trillion against 18,037\$ trillion in 2015).²⁹ The Russian Federation has not the same economic potential as China, but is the second country for military and nuclear power behind the United States.³⁰ Anyway, in both countries, as well as in India, Brazil and South Africa, weaknesses are common, namely uneven growth and technological gap with Western powers. As mentioned before, these weaknesses can be an additional incentive for BRICS to promote cooperation inside their club, projecting a common strategy on the international arena that often presents differences with the solutions proposed by the G7 countries. On this regard, Russia is at the forefront in criticising Western policies, to promote its foreign policy guidelines and, especially, to foster the creation of a multipolar world not dominated by the United States. Nevertheless, the fact that BRICS countries are all Great Powers does not always contribute positively to their joint action. Indeed, *“there is no agreement among the great powers on many security issues and on international norms, such as sovereignty and the right to defend national sovereignty and state integrity, foreign interference in domestic affairs and humanitarian interventions involving the use of military force, and issues of separatism and secession.”*³¹ Concerning humanitarian intervention, she mainly refers to the military actions undertaken by the United States and NATO allies in the Middle Eastern and Northern African regions – hardly opposed by the Russian Federation inside and outside the United Nations – the results of which have been rather counterproductive (Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011, Syria in 2013-14).

As widely explained in the paragraphs above, talking about the contemporary balance of powers, Shakleina supports the idea of “selective engagement” rather than the “concert of powers”, meaning that Great Powers have currently diverse and, sometimes, contradictory views of world order. Because of that, they will tend to choose both the scenarios where to intervene, per their interests, and the partners or allies to cooperate with in case of intervention (military, political, financial, humanitarian or economic). Even if there is not a precise scheme or rule according to which Great Powers and smaller countries pledge alliances, overall there are two major groups of states that influence the most world politics, being regionally engaged in compliance with their foreign policy exigencies. The United States and their allies, as to say the majority of NATO and EU members, compose the first group, often identified with the West. The second group, instead, includes the BRICS and Great Powers like Turkey, which is the least filo-Atlantic among NATO members.

²⁹ World Bank, 2017.

³⁰ Credit Suisse, 2015.

³¹ Shakleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

This simple distinction is indeed necessary to introduce the concept of regional “subsystem”, already mentioned in the introduction and essential to complete the definition of Great Power that we have been trying to build so far.

1.5. Great Powers’ influence on regional subsystems

The major efforts to define the concept of regional subsystem has been made by William R. Thompson in his book *“The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory”* (1973). Together with him, also Bruce Russett, Louis J. Cantori and Joseph Spiegel tried to give a definition starting from the 1960s, when the concept of “system” became very popular and frequently used in regionalism studies with the aim of adopting an effective methodology to compare different areas of the world. All these authors start from a basic assumption, or that the world is a political arena divided in different systems on different levels, from the local to the national and the international. Among these levels, there is also the regional dimension, which is defined by them according to diverse criteria. In order to highlight the strong link between regional subsystem and Great Powers, I will briefly present the most relevant efforts made to define this concept.

Bruce Russett, for example, gave a definition of regional subsystem by identifying five basic characteristics:³² 1) socio-cultural homogeneity; 2) similar political attitudes and behaviour; 3) common membership in international organisations; 4) economic interdependence (measured per trade volumes in proportion with national income); 5) geographical contiguity. Among these features, the most uncertain seem to be the common membership in international organisations and the economic interdependence. Concerning the first, indeed, the BRICS asset is not compliant, since members are located in different continents. We can observe the same for NATO and OPEC, for example. Concerning instead the second one, the case of Israel tells us the opposite: taking intra-regional trade as the only parameter, this country cannot be part of the Middle Eastern region. Cantori and Spiegel also propose a set of features and apply them to single cases. They consider a regional subsystem as an entity characterised by *“two or more geographically proximate and interacting states which share in some degree common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and historical bonds and whose sense of identity is sometimes increased by the actions and attitudes of states external to the system.”*³³ The aforementioned authors are the most important when it comes to the attempts made to define regional subsystem. Among these scholars, William Thompson tried, by taking inspiration from other definitions already provided by others, to build a more precise definition by specifying

³² Russett B., 1967.

³³ Cantori J. L. and Spiegel S., 1969.

twenty-one different attributes that regional subsystem should have.³⁴ This list includes, among the others, essential elements like: 1) proximity or primary stress on a geographic region; 2) “*intrarelatedness*” (a condition wherein a change at one point in the system, affects); 3) explicit institutional relations or subsystem organization; 4) common developmental status. Nevertheless, since analysing the elements characterising regional subsystem is not the aim of this work, we will not deepen this argument but, instead, we will use the few information provided above to look at the creation of areas of influence in the contemporary geopolitical asset.

As already mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph, the notion of regional subsystem is crucial when it comes to Great Powers. Regional subsystem often affect countries’ behaviour, since these geographical areas represents interests and foreign policy objectives. Moreover, the absence of an assertive international governance and the deregulation of international relations is a further incentive for major powers to promote independent strategies aimed at accomplishing these objectives. Great Powers, mainly the United States, Russia, Brazil, China and the European Union, take advantage from this lack of central authority at the global level and try to exert their influence on certain regions, depending on economic, military and political aims. By doing so, they basically create subsystems around them. The mechanism of creation of regional subsystems and their consequent importance is well explained by Shakleina as follows:

*“Great power politics are crucial when we speak about subsystems. Even though the concept of spheres of influence has fallen out of favour in scholarly and policy circles, big regional powers (Russia, China, Brazil, India, Turkey), and the USA, as a superpower, try to establish their influence, first of all, in the region closest to them geographically and connected with them economically.”*³⁵

A crucial element for the creation of regional subsystems is the presence of a core country, the Great Power that dominates a certain geographical area and around which the subsystem is shaped. Without a core country, there is no regional subsystem: that is why areas like the Middle East, the Greater Central Asia or the Arctic region cannot be considered as such, because there is no a Great Power that controls the area. In particular, concerning the Middle East, the growing political instability further obstacles the creation of a subsystem. This an area where too many political actors are currently trying to shape the scenario: Iran, Turkey, Egypt, the European Union, the Gulf Monarchies, the Russian Federation and, of course, the United States (without counting the presence of several terroristic groups, the Islamic State and secessionist armed fractions like the Kurds). Practically speaking, we can identify at least four established subsystems: the North American, the South American, the European and the Russian. The United States are clearly the dominant actor in

³⁴ Thompson W. R., 1973.

³⁵ Shakleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

North America and, starting from the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, in Central America. Despite being quite powerful countries – even if not Great Powers – Canada and Mexico are inevitably included in the American sphere of influence, so that some scholars talk about an “all-American subsystem”.³⁶ American initiatives often affects also South American affairs, where Brazil is trying to consolidate a Latin American subsystem under its leadership, which is largely more stable than the Argentinian one. Nevertheless, despite having a great economic potential and being an active protagonist inside the BRICS, Brazil has also many weaknesses that could affect its leadership in South America. As for the European subsystem, here the major powers are Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, which influence the EU’s policies in compliance with the exigencies of NATO, an element that makes the American weight in the Old Continent still very strong. Anyway, EU’s regional priorities are in Eastern Europe, North Africa and, in general, in the Mediterranean area, where the presence of Turkey (NATO member but not included in the EU) represents a factor of uncertainty.

For what concerns Russia, once disappeared the Soviet Union, the new emerging regional subsystem depending on it is the so-called “Small Eurasia”³⁷, a space that includes most former members of the USSR and that continues to one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy. As we are going to see in the third chapter, Eurasia is the major area of concern for Moscow. However, before going in depth with Russian foreign policy, it is necessary to prove the assumption made in the introduction, or that Russia is a Great Power. In the previous paragraphs, we have observed what this concept defines: it is now time to look at Russia’s strengths and weaknesses to understand whether it can play a relevant role in modern world politics.

³⁶ Lanthemann M., 2014.

³⁷ Shakleina T., 2013.

CHAPTER II

The material and non-material capabilities of the Russian Federation: evaluating its Great Power status in modern world politics

2.1. Strengths and weaknesses of the Russian Federation

The definitions of Great Power and the theories linked to this concept shown in the first chapter provided us with the necessary instruments to analyse practically the characteristics of such a kind of state. The adopted definition is most adapt to accomplish this aim, mainly because it resumes clearly the main features that a modern Great Powers possess. In this paragraph, I will examine in detail both material (territory, natural resources, population, military potential, economy, education and technological potential) and non-material (tradition to act globally and its consequences) features to establish whether they represent strengths or weaknesses for the Russian Federation. After the analysis of Russian features, I will move to a brief comparison with other contemporary Great Powers, selected according to the parameters set in chapter one: the European Union, the United States, India, Brazil and China. In this comparison, I will not take into consideration Japan and Turkey. Concerning Japan, even though it can be included in the group of Great Powers, I prefer to consider it as the third actor in a hypothetical Western block, were the USA and the EU act as major players. Regarding Turkey, instead, there are no enough elements to prove that this country is a Great Power: such a study would deserve a separate research and for this reason I will not include it here.

Recalling what said in chapter one, it is worth pointing out that, together with the material features, a Great Power must present a certain bunch of non-material capabilities or conditions:

- it conducts autonomously its domestic and foreign policy to safeguard its interests;
- it can exert influence on other countries and on world politics in general, focusing on those regional subsystems that reflects the best its objectives;
- it has a Great Power strategy, a clear and wide vision of national goals, interests and dynamics of the international scenario, being recognised by other countries as such;
- it has a solid historic tradition of acting globally and projecting its influence beyond national borders.

A country that does not show these conditions, it is certainly not a Great Power. Understanding whether the Russian Federation is compliant to what we have been maintaining so far is the main goal of the following paragraphs.

2.1.2. Territory and natural resources

Among the most important features characterizing Great Powers, territory is probably the first of the list. Even if it is not always true that a geographically extended country is powerful, the wideness of territories often comes as a prerequisite for a state's influence and potential. Concerning Russia, this assumption is true, especially considering that the central government has the complete control of all the regions: in this regard, historically speaking, the capabilities of the centre to control the peripheries, sometimes incredibly wide and far from the core of national power, has been always one of the biggest strengths of the Russian Federation. Nowadays, the authority of Moscow is evidently perceived also in the farthest areas of Russia, mainly thanks to the organization of the federal entities. According to the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation, the country is divided in 85 different federal subjects, including the contested Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol. Originally, at the time of the approval of the Constitution, federal entities were 89, among which some were merged together later. Currently, the federal subjects are distributed as follows:³⁸ 46 provinces (*Oblast'*), where governor is elected locally; 22 republics, which have to adopt their own constitutions in compliance to the federal and are authorized to recognize as official also their own languages together with the Russian (indeed, they often represents ethnic minorities spread in the Federation); 9 territories (*Kraj*), very similar to the provinces in terms of autonomy; 4 autonomous *Okrugs*, also created to protect ethnic minorities; 3 federal cities, or Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Sevastopol; and one autonomous province, the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast'*. The constituent entities of Russia were created in compliance with an evident necessity: protect the autonomy and guarantee the rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities living inside the borders of the country. In fact, we should not forget that territory is very much linked with population, another feature characterizing Great Powers that we will analyse further in this chapter.

Concerning territory, wideness can be both a pro and a con for the development of Russian foreign and national policy objectives.³⁹ While covering the largest part of land on Earth can certainly be an advantage in terms of potential areas of influence that can come under Russian control, the Russian Federation has always been penalized mainly by four factors: excessively large distances between cities; the absence of natural barriers against enemies; weak and underdeveloped communication lines (which is a combined result of large distances and non-sufficient investments in infrastructures); and the presence of a northern, hard climate in the majority of national territory, which affects agricultural production and life conditions. Consequently, these factors risk to

³⁸ Official Portal of the Government of the Russian Federation: www.gov.ru.

³⁹ Bezrukov A. & Sushentsov A., 2015.

compromise the government's action to provide energy to all the areas of the country, ensure an equal level of education to all the citizens and guarantee the same standards of healthcare and security. As Andrey Bezrukov and Andrey Sushentsov point out in their book "*Contours of an Alarming Future*", this complicated situation was very well summarized in the 19th century by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, who wrote that "*geography is the stepmother of Russian history.*"⁴⁰ Looking at the map of the Russian Federation, this sentence seems more than justified.

Figure 1. Geographical position of the Russian Federation (RBTH, 2017).



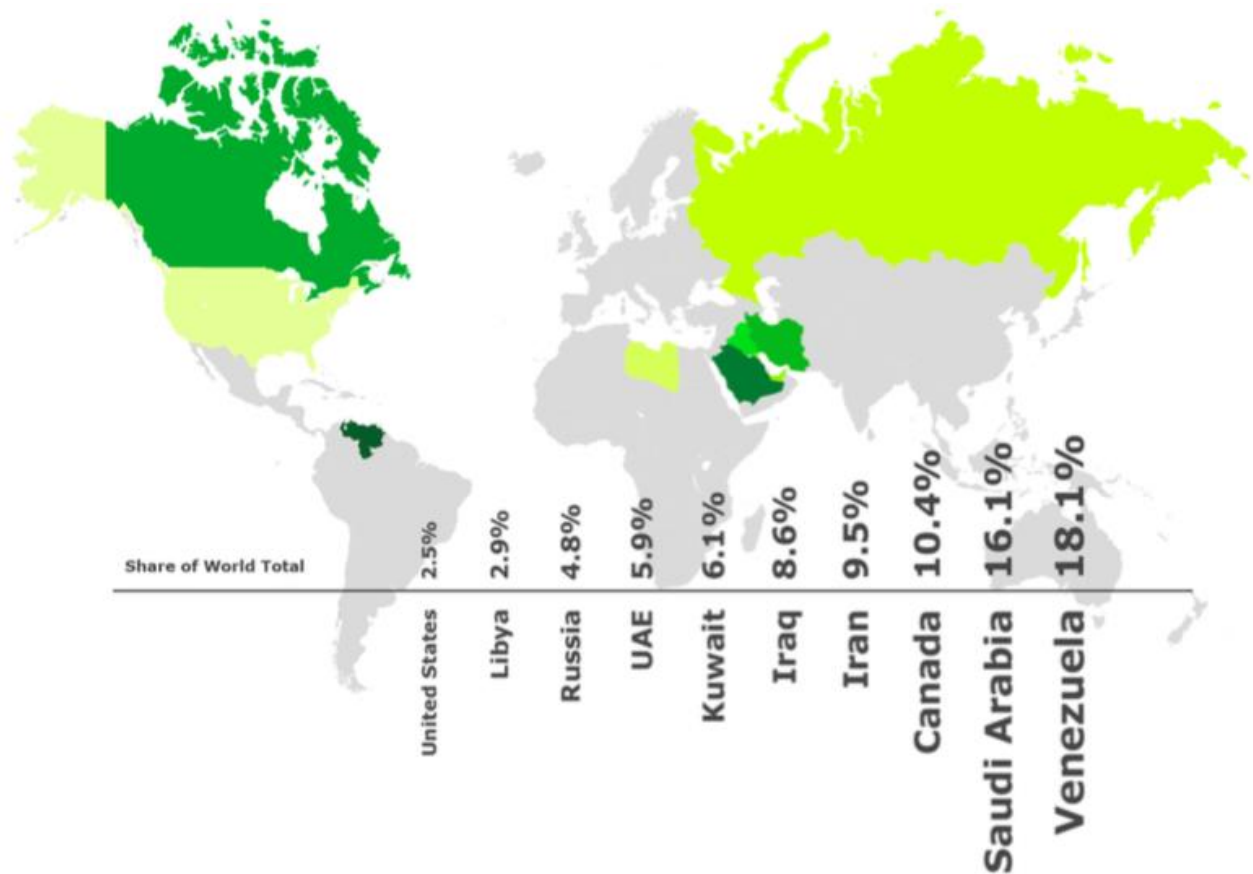
Nevertheless, large territory brings also several pros. Indeed, the Russian Federation is not only the largest country in the world, but also one of the richest in terms of natural resources, which are the main advantage of controlling a wide portion of territory. From Kaliningrad to Vladivostok – covering a total surface of 17.125.191 km² – Russia disposes of an incredible amount of different raw materials: not only oil and gas, but also timber, copper, diamonds, lead, zinc, bauxite, nickel, tin, mercury, uranium, gold and silver, the reserves of which are located mostly in the Far East and in Siberia, often in inaccessible areas. Not by chance, Russia is namely in the top 10 of countries detaining the largest reserves of both oil and natural gas.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bezrukov A. & Sushentsov A., 2015.

⁴¹ Figures and data are taken from ENI's World Oil and Gas Outlook 2015.

Figure 2. List of countries by oil reserves, million barrels as at 31st December 2014 (ENI, 2014).

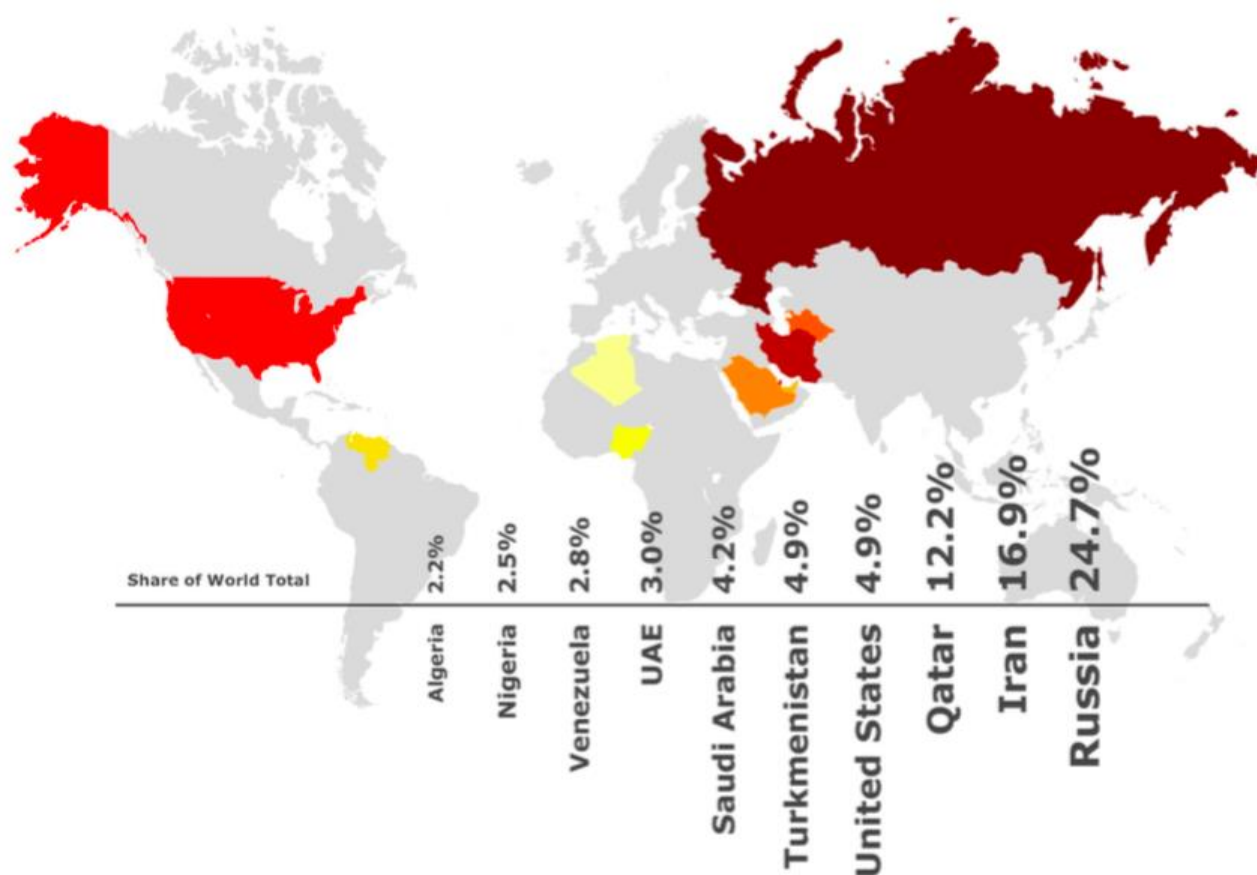
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Δ y/y (2014-2013)	CAGR (2014-2000)
Venezuela	76,848	80,012	296,501	297,571	297,735	298,350	299,953	0.5%	10.2%
Saudi Arabia	262,766	264,211	264,516	265,405	265,850	265,789	266,578	0.3%	0.1%
Canada	181,200	178,792	175,214	173,625	173,105	173,200	172,481	-0.4%	-0.4%
Iran	99,530	136,270	151,170	154,580	157,300	157,800	157,530	-0.2%	3.3%
Iraq	112,500	115,000	143,100	141,350	140,300	144,211	143,069	-0.8%	1.7%
Kuwait	96,500	101,500	101,500	101,500	101,500	101,500	101,500	0.0%	0.4%
United Arab Emirates	97,800	97,800	97,800	97,800	97,800	97,800	97,800	0.0%	0.0%
Russia	48,573	60,000	60,000	60,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	0.0%	3.6%
Libya	36,000	41,464	47,097	48,014	48,472	48,363	48,363	0.0%	2.1%
United States (**)	23,517	23,019	25,181	28,950	33,403	36,520	41,450	13.5%	4.1%
The World Top 10	1,035,234	1,098,068	1,362,079	1,368,795	1,395,465	1,403,533	1,408,724	0.4%	2.2%
Rest of the world	204,140	218,415	245,727	247,564	251,514	252,835	250,648	-0.9%	1.5%
World	1,239,374	1,316,483	1,607,806	1,616,360	1,646,979	1,656,368	1,659,372	0.2%	2.1%



** Eni's estimates on EIA DOE data

Figure 3. List of countries by natural gas reserves, million cubic meters as at 31st December 2014 (ENI, 2014).

	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Δ y/y (2014-2013)	CAGR (2014-2000)
Russia	43,809	44,860	46,000	48,676	48,810	49,335	49,896	1.1%	0.9%
Iran	26,600	27,580	33,090	33,620	33,780	34,020	34,020	0.0%	1.8%
Qatar	14,443	25,636	25,201	25,110	25,069	24,681	24,531	-0.6%	3.9%
United States (**)	5,021	5,784	8,621	9,454	8,717	9,573	9,960	4.0%	5.0%
Turkmenistan	2,680	2,680	10,000	10,000	9,967	9,934	9,904	-0.3%	9.8%
Saudi Arabia	6,301	6,900	8,016	8,151	8,235	8,317	8,489	2.1%	2.2%
United Arab Emirates	6,060	6,060	6,091	6,091	6,091	6,091	6,091	0.0%	0.0%
Venezuela	4,152	4,315	5,525	5,528	5,563	5,581	5,617	0.6%	2.2%
Nigeria	4,106	5,152	5,110	5,154	5,118	5,111	5,111	0.0%	1.6%
Algeria	4,523	4,504	4,504	4,504	4,504	4,504	4,504	0.0%	0.0%
The World Top 10	117,695	133,471	152,158	156,288	155,854	157,147	158,123	0.6%	2.1%
Rest of the World	41,288	41,984	43,737	43,411	43,583	43,577	43,648	0.2%	0.4%
World	158,983	175,456	195,895	199,700	199,438	200,724	201,771	0.5%	1.7%

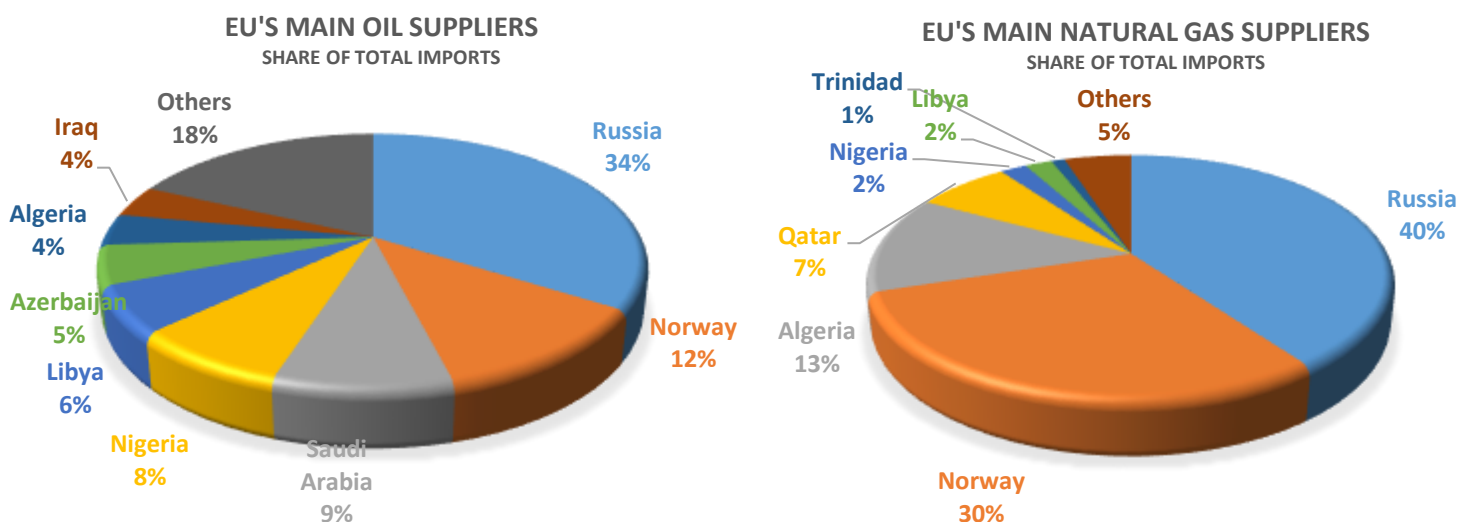


** Eni's estimates on EIA DOE data

A large portion of Russian influence and potential in international relations derives from this abundance of natural resources, which however can bring both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the presence of large oil and gas reserves guarantees to the Russian government a constant flow of incomes, since these materials are still the most used to produce energy all over the world. Nevertheless, on the other hand, energy revenues can be damaging for the development of Russian high-tech and manufacturing sectors, since the easy money coming from oil and gas exports is not an incentive to economic diversification. Evidently, as we will deepen further in this chapter, Russian economy is widely dependent on oil and gas revenues and, therefore, its governmental budget largely belongs to the market prices of these materials: this fact has become evident particularly during the last two years, when prices were very low (and are still far under the 2013 levels).

If, on the one hand, oil and gas prices' fluctuations can be a major concern for Russia, the global shrinkage of resources seems not to be such worrying for the Kremlin, mainly because the country has still huge reserves that are still unknown.⁴² The enhancement and the modernization of geographical exploration focused on finding new natural deposits must be a priority for the country, since natural resources, if exploited wisely and skilfully, can guarantee to Russia the status of Great Power at least because its reserves are important for neighbour states, especially in the European Union, for which Moscow is the major supplier both for oil and natural gas (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).⁴³ Moreover, we should not forget that Russia is still the world's largest exporter of natural gas and the second largest exporter of oil behind Saudi Arabia.⁴⁴

Figures 4 and 5. EU's main oil and natural gas suppliers (EU, CIA, 2014).



⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ European Commission, 2014.

⁴⁴ The World Factbook, Field Listing: Exports – Commodities, Central Intelligence Agency, 2015.

2.1.3. Demography

According to CIA World Factbook statistics, in 2016 the population of the Russian Federation counted overall 142.355.415 inhabitants.⁴⁵ This number is in deep contrast with the data published by Rosstat, the Federal Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, which maintains that, in the same year, the population of the country was 146.5 million.⁴⁶ As for international organizations, OECD's data cover only until 2013, when population was estimated being around 143.5 million⁴⁷, while World Bank's data demonstrate that, in 2015, the total population was 144.096.82 inhabitants.⁴⁸

The differences between the data presented above make us understand that it is probably impossible to find a unique measurement: we can conclude saying that the population of Russia is certainly around 144-145 million of inhabitants. In any case, rather than establishing the exact quantity of Russians, it is more important to look at the trend of population growth starting from the 1960s: for this reason, I chose to use the impartial data published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division⁴⁹, and elaborated by Worldometers RTS algorithm.⁵⁰ The table proposed below represent several figures related to population, which give a very complete picture of Russian demography: total population, growth rate, migrants, median age, fertility rate, density, urban population and country's position at a global level.

Figure 6. Demography in Russia (UN, Worldometers, 2017).

Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Yearly Change	Migrants (net)	Median Age	Fertility Rate	Density (P/Km ²)	Urban Pop %	Urban Population	Country's Share of World Pop	World Population	Russia Global Rank
2017	143,375,006	-0.05 %	-64,826	161,789	38.9	1.67	9	73.2 %	104,883,814	1.91 %	7,515,284,153	9
2016	143,439,832	-0.01 %	-17,086	161,789	38.9	1.67	9	73.2 %	105,022,052	1.93 %	7,432,663,275	9
2015	143,456,918	0.04 %	59,764	223,600	39	1.66	9	73.3 %	105,163,529	1.95 %	7,349,472,099	9
2010	143,158,099	-0.06 %	-92,893	431,500	38	1.44	9	73.9 %	105,827,920	2.07 %	6,929,725,043	9
2005	143,622,566	-0.38 %	-555,677	347,100	37	1.3	9	73.6 %	105,737,205	2.2 %	6,519,635,850	7
2000	146,400,951	-0.26 %	-378,463	461,600	37	1.25	9	73.5 %	107,650,471	2.39 %	6,126,622,121	6
1995	148,293,265	0.1 %	144,943	503,900	35	1.55	9	73.5 %	109,032,034	2.59 %	5,735,123,084	6
1990	147,568,552	0.63 %	918,560	181,300	33	2.12	9	73.7 %	108,731,707	2.78 %	5,309,667,699	6

⁴⁵ CIA World Factbook, 2016.

⁴⁶ Rosstat, 2016.

⁴⁷ OECD, 2013.

⁴⁸ World Bank, 2015.

⁴⁹ UN World Population Prospects, 2015 revision.

⁵⁰ Worldometers, 2017.

1985	142,975,753	0.7 %	982,538	221,400	32	2.04	9	72.2 %	103,227,186	2.95 %	4,852,540,569	5
1980	138,063,062	0.63 %	854,990	128,000	31	1.94	8	70 %	96,630,762	3.11 %	4,439,632,465	5
1975	133,788,113	0.56 %	732,346	-58,100	31	2.03	8	66.6 %	89,101,683	3.29 %	4,061,399,228	4
1970	130,126,383	0.57 %	728,502	-110,100	31	2.02	8	62.6 %	81,436,342	3.53 %	3,682,487,691	4
1965	126,483,874	1.08 %	1,324,717	6,600	26	2.85	7	58.3 %	73,693,748	3.81 %	3,322,495,121	4
1960	119,860,289	1.48 %	1,701,013	-242,700	27	2.82	7	53.8 %	64,507,900	3.97 %	3,018,343,828	4
1955	111,355,224	1.61 %	1,711,313	6,600	26	2.85	7	49 %	54,610,733	4.04 %	2,758,314,525	4

Looking at the wideness of Russian territory, Russia appears as an underpopulated country, with a very low density: Russia would need a much higher fertility rate to cover its vacuum, especially if it wants to contrast massive immigration phenomena involving the borders with China and Kazakhstan. Low population is certainly one of the most important challenges for Russia in the future, and Russian scholars themselves express different perceptions towards this situation.⁵¹ T. Shakleina, for example, states that, despite the low density and high immigration, “*at present Russia exerts complete control of its entire territorial expanse.*”⁵² Other scholars, namely A. Sushentsov and A. Bezrukov, express major concerns on this issue, stating that “*Russia’s demography will be the main challenge*” for the future, since “*no matter how successfully the Russian economy and technologies may develop, everything will be in vain if the Russian population continues to decline.*”⁵³ These concerns are proved by demographic forecast provided by the Russian Federal Statistics Service (Rosstat), which individuate three scenarios of development for Russian population from 2014 to 2020⁵⁴: the first scenario would bring an evident decrease of the Russian population, which would decline to around 141.700.000 people; the second and third scenarios, instead, forecast respectively a small (144.473.400 people) and large (146.939.400 people) increase of the population. Among these scenarios, the third one would certainly be the most useful for the underpopulated Federation: however, this increase could not enough, since “*Russia’s successful and sustainable development requires a population at least twice as large. This problem could be solved gradually if the population grows by 0.5-1 percent annually. At present, the population growth rate stands at 0.2 percent.*”⁵⁵

Another important element related to demography is mortality, which is still very high in Russia mainly due to the harsh conditions that many citizens experience in some areas of the country. The

⁵¹ Friedman G., 2009.

⁵² Shakleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

⁵³ Bezrukov A. & Sushentsov A., 2015.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* According to Worldometers’s algorithm, the Russian population would be decreasing by 0.05%. However, since the population growth rate mentioned by the authors (0.2%) is reported also by OECD Statistics, we take it as our official parameter.

table below, taken from Rosstat official portal, shows the main causes of death in the Russian Federation starting from 1992.⁵⁶

Figure 7. Mortality in Russia, number of deaths per 100 000 of population (Rosstat, 2017).

	1992	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Deaths by all causes	1217	1529	1605	1420	1347	1331	1304	1306	1307
including:									
diseases of circulatory system	647	846	905	806	753	737	698	654	632
neoplasm	202	205	201	205	205	203	203	202	203
external causes of mortality	173	219	220	152	139	135	129	130	112
of which:									
transport injuries (all types)	30	27	28	20	21	21	20	20	17
accidental poisoning by alcohol	18	26	28	13	11	11	10	11	7
accidental drowning	9	11	10	8	6	6	5	5	4
suicides	31	39	32	23	22	21	20	18	17
homicides	23	28	25	13	12	11	10	9	8
diseases of respiratory system	58	70	66	52	52	49	52	54	51
diseases of digestive system	33	44	65	64	62	62	62	67	69
certain infectious and parasitic diseases	13	25	27	24	24	22	22	22	22

Among the causes of death, we note that the most common are circulatory diseases and neoplasm, strictly related to the high consumption of alcohol, tobacco and to the unhealthy lifestyle that many citizens conduct. Therefore, promoting a healthy lifestyle and fighting the consumption of damaging drugs will be a delicate task for the Russian government, considering that the increase of the population passes, at first, from the reduction of mortality rate.

One last element to consider is immigration, which will contribute in the future to the possible increase of inhabitants in Russia. Per the United Nations Population Division, in 2013 Russia has been the second country in the world, after the United States, for number of immigrants assimilated⁵⁷, a trend that could be confirmed in the upcoming years especially thanks to the fact that many Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine are emigrating to Russia due to the civil war taking place in the Eastern part of the country. On this matter, previsions are very uncertain: for example, the UN Population

⁵⁶ Rosstat, 2017.

⁵⁷ UN Population Division, 2013.

Division itself forecast that, in the decade 2020-2030, the net migration rate (per 1.000 population) will decrease from 1.6 to 0.7.⁵⁸ In any case, either positively or negatively, migration will certainly affect the growth of Russian population.

2.1.4. Military potential

A field where the Russian Federation is extremely strong is the military one, where potential has always been exceptional since the time of the Russian Empire. The numbers of Russian military strength are impressive: overall, Russia disposes of almost 800.000 active frontline soldiers, more than 2.400.000 reserves, about 60.000 land system machines (tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, self-propelled guns, towed-artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems), almost 4.000 aircrafts, 352 battleships (among which 1 aircraft carrier, 4 frigates and 60 submarines) and a strong logistical system available for military proposes.⁵⁹

As demonstrated by the figures below⁶⁰, Russia is in the world's top-5 classification both for defence budget – having spent, in 2015, \$46.600.000.000 for military equipment – and for military strength. According to the Global Firepower Index, Russia is the second strongest country in the world after the United States and before other Great Powers as China, Brazil, India and EU countries.⁶¹

Figure 8. Countries by Military Strength Index (Global Firepower, 2016).

Position	Country	Score (Global Firepower Index)
1	United States	0.0897
2	<u>Russian Federation</u>	0.0964
3	China	0.0988
4	India	0.1661
5	France	0.1993
6	United Kingdom	0.2164
7	Japan	0.2466

⁵⁸ UN Population Division, 2017.

⁵⁹ Global Firepower, 2016.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ The index is elaborated taking into account over fifty different factors and considering 0.00 as the maximum result achievable.

8	Turkey	0.2623
9	Germany	0.2646
10	Italy	0.2724

Figure 9. Countries by defense budget (billion US\$, Global Firepower, 2016).

Position	Country	Defense budget (US\$ bill.)
1	United States	581
2	China	155,6
3	Saudi Arabia	56,7
4	United Kingdom	55
5	<u>Russian Federation</u>	46
6	Japan	40,3
7	India	40
8	Germany	36,3
9	France	35
10	Italy	34

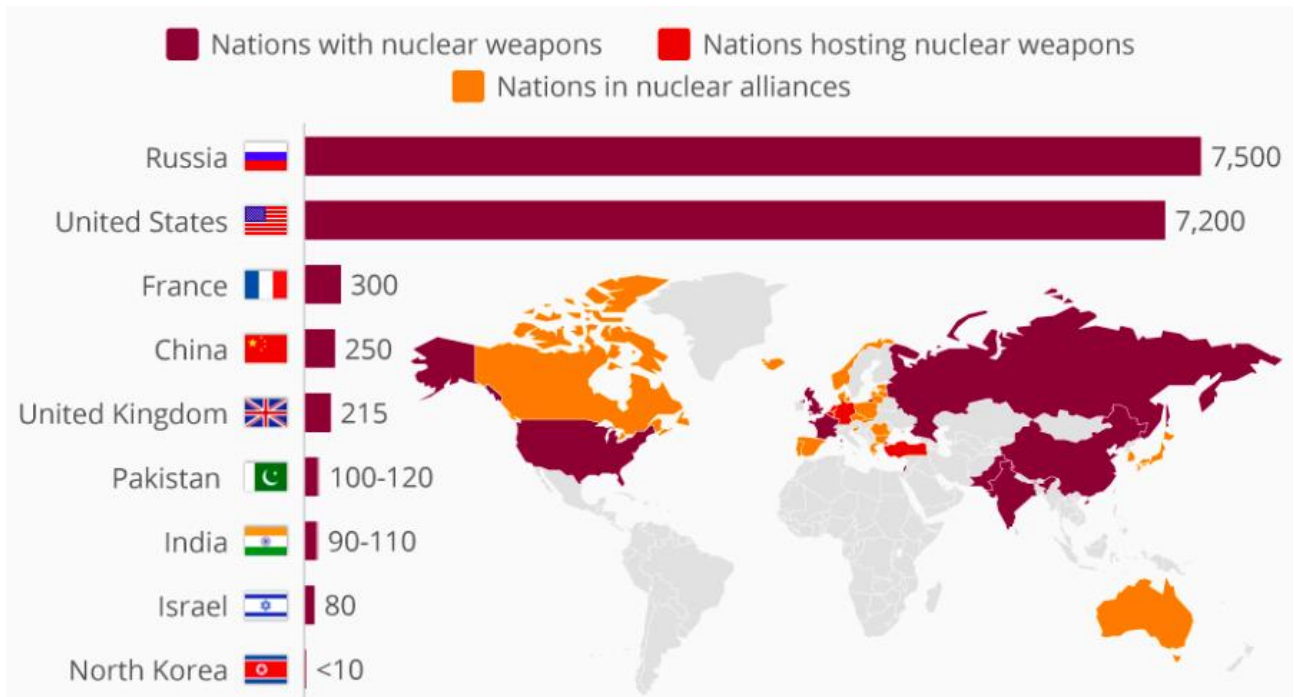
Despite the shrinkage of available governmental budget due to the economic crisis and the regime of sanctions imposed by the Western countries, Russia has been increasing its military expenditure in order to modernise its weaponry and finance the development of new military warfare technologies.⁶² The Russian Federation is not only a leader in terms of conventional weapons, but also in terms of nuclear potential, a field where the country cooperates with the United States in order to reduce the amount of nuclear weapons in spite of Indian and Chinese growing nuclear arsenals. As a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI) demonstrates⁶³, only nine countries have access to nuclear weapons (United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, China, North Korea, India, Pakistan and Israel), which in total are alleged to be more or less 16.300: among these countries,

⁶² NATO Review Magazine, 2016.

⁶³ SIPRI, 2016.

Russia and the USA detain almost the 93% of the existing weapons. The following figure, provided by Statista.com, better represents these data.

Figure 10. Countries with biggest nuclear arsenals (Statista, 2015).

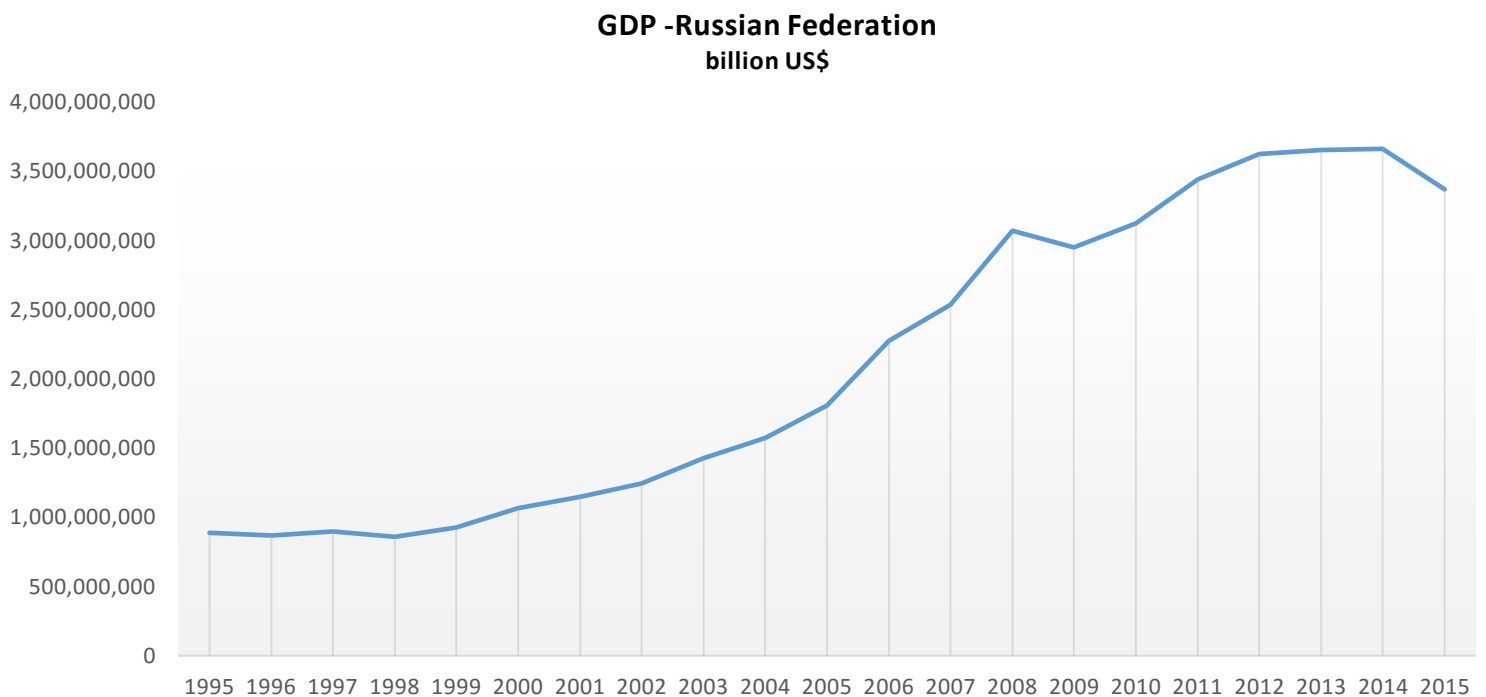


All things considered, military power is at the same time one of Russia’s major strengths and maybe the main factor that allows the country to be defined as Great Power. Indeed, in the first chapter we have seen how the majority of scholars underlines the importance of material capabilities in international politics: among them, military potential is evidently at the frontline.

2.1.5. Economy

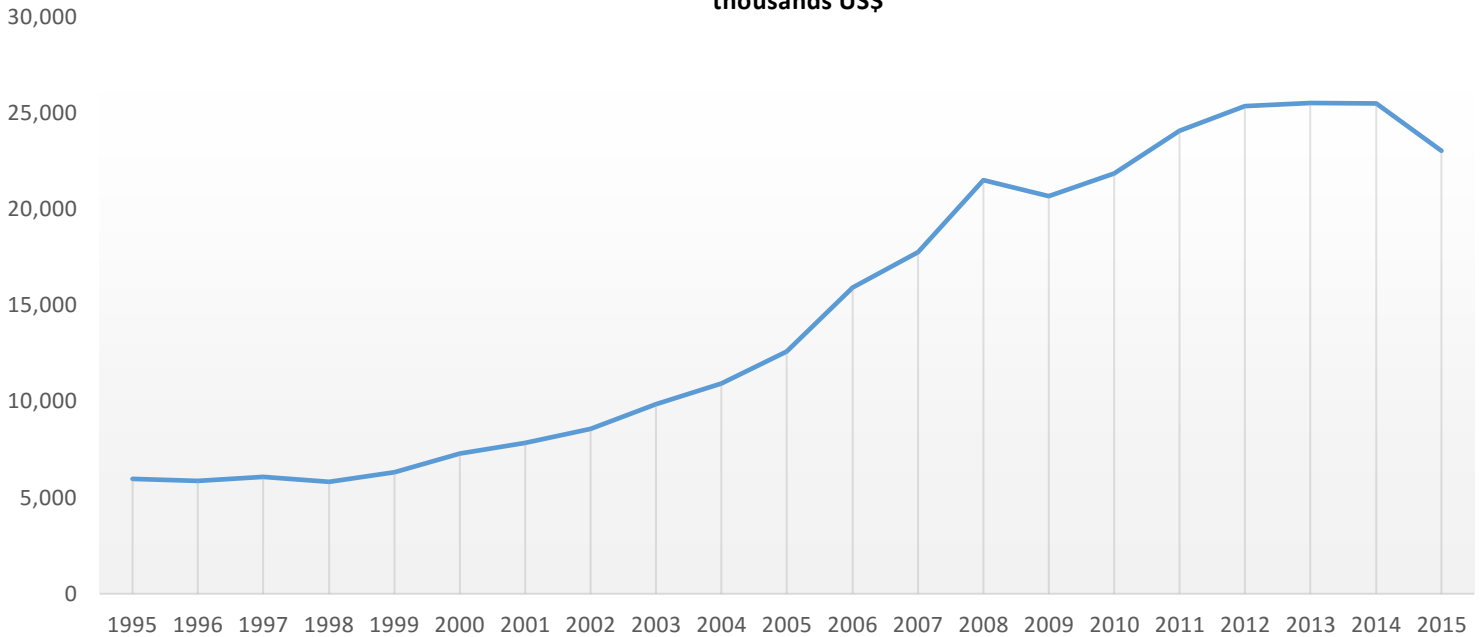
Among the features we are analysing, economy is not only the most important, but it is also the field where Russia suffers from the greatest weaknesses. To some extent, 2014 was a crucial year for Russia on this regard: the Ukrainian crisis triggered the well-known mechanism of sanctions and countersanctions that allowed the country to understand that, in order to improve its international position, it cannot postpone the confrontation with its economic weaknesses. European sanctions are obviously a very important obstacle for the Russian Federation and they seem to be semi-permanent in many aspects. Besides, Russia seems not to have any influence on this matter, because it all depends on European countries and their decisions: sanctions will have very relevant and negative effects on economy, technology and development. The figures below represent the trend of Russian GDP and GDP per capita, demonstrating that the introduction of sanctions, combined with a tremendous fall of oil prices between 2014 and 2015, caused an evident decrease of national economic potential: GDP per capita fell from \$25.490 to \$23.027, while GDP fell from \$3.663.025.487 to \$3.368.994.619.⁶⁴

Figures 11 and 12. Russian GDP and GDP per capita (OECD, 2017).



⁶⁴ OECD, 2017.

GDP per capita - Russian Federation thousands US\$



Nevertheless, the World Bank estimates that Russian economy will start again growing in 2017. The institution, indeed, corrected its former previsions concerning Russian GDP, projecting a growth at -0.6% in 2016 – instead of the previous forecast of -1.2% – and a positive growth both in 2017 and 2018: +1.5% and 1.7% respectively.⁶⁵ This positivistic attitude is mainly because also oil prices are projected to recover, reaching almost \$60/barrel at the end of 2018⁶⁶. However, in comparison with other Great Powers, Russian GDP growth remains one of the weakest, declining by 3.7%: in 2015, indeed, India grew by 7.6%, China by 6.9%, the United States by 2.6% and the European Union by 2%. Only Brazil did worse than Russia, decreasing its GDP by 3.9%. These data highlight the strong link existing between Russian GDP and oil prices, suggesting that the main weakness of Russian economy is its dependency on oil and gas exports. Commodity price volatility remains the main menace for Russia, and the program of import substitution promoted by the government to strengthen non-oil sectors after 2014 seem to have reduced effects so far. In fact, despite improvements in sectors like wood processing, textiles, metals and agriculture, the World Bank reports that “*the total value of non-oil exports of goods decreased by 13.4% in the first nine months of 2016 [...] The diversification process advances slowly due to a relatively low level of spare capacity in most tradable sectors and*

⁶⁵ World Bank, 2016.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

limited availability of labor, including structural and institutional constraints that need to be lifted first.”⁶⁷ Russian dependency on oil and gas is very well represented in the table below.⁶⁸

Figure 13. Incidence of oil and gas on Russian export, 2007-2014 (CIA, IEA, 2014).

Year	Tot. export (billion \$)	Oil export (val. bill. \$/% of export)	Gas export (val. bill. \$/% of export)	Oil products export (val. bill. \$/% of export)	Bearing on export
2007	346 mld	121 mld 34%	44 mld 12%	52 mld 15%	61%
2008	466 mld	161 mld 34%	69 mld 14%	79 mld 16%	64%
2009	297 mld	100 mld 33%	41 mld 13%	48 mld 16%	61%
2010	392 mld	135 mld 34%	47 mld 11%	70 mld 17%	62%
2011	515 mld	181 mld 35%	64 mld 12%	95 mld 18%	65%
2012	527 mld	180 mld 34%	62 mld 11%	103 mld 19%	64%
2013	523 mld	173 mld 33%	67 mld 12%	109 mld 20%	65%
2014	497 mld	153 mld 30%	55.2 mld 11%	115 mld 23%	64%

Due to this dependency from the energetic revenues and to the conflicting relationships with Europe, one of Moscow’s major trade partners, Russia needed to introduce a massive replacement of imports, trying to attract foreign investors in order not to experience a complete disappearance of European know-how. The effects, even if it is too early to evaluate, can be both positive and negative: if, for example, agriculture and food market are rapidly growing, on the other hand Russia cannot easily replace a lot of high-tech machinery that was imported before from Western countries. Without technologies and machinery, economic development will be a more difficult challenge for the Russian government: the success or the failure in dealing with these difficulties will be a key factor in defining the future capabilities of Russian foreign policy and economic growth.

In any case, as we have seen, forecasts are positive and the current recession seems less dramatic than in 2009, when Russia was hit by the global financial crisis started in the United States. Inflation is now much lower than before (9.75%), unemployment (5.5%) is close to minimum levels, public debt is low and the internal budget is also relatively stable despite the cuttings made due to the economic difficulties.⁶⁹ If we go back in 2008, at that time the Kremlin had to face a much more

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, 2015.
International Energy Agency, 2015.

⁶⁹ World Bank, 2016.

difficult operation, since it spent almost \$200 billion to stop the depreciation of the rouble.⁷⁰ It is true that Central Bank's reserves are decreasing, but the loss is slow and smaller than seven years ago.⁷¹ To conclude, the future of Russian development will depend on the capabilities of Russian economy to change and correct its already mentioned structural weaknesses, which risk to compromise its Great Power status. Apart from excessive dependency on energy revenues and necessity to enhance its technological sector to fill the gap with Western producers, Russian economy is penalized by some features inherited directly from the Soviet economic asset, like diffused corruption, excessive pervasive bureaucracy, low demand for innovation products, lack of strong domestic competition (due to the excessive amount of state-owned companies) and lack of entrepreneurial culture in business and education. All characteristics that can be a serious obstacle to technological development and innovation, as we are going to see in the next paragraph.

2.1.6. Technological development and innovation

If the economy presents both strengths and weaknesses, a field where Russia experiences more difficulties than successes is technological development and innovation. Thanks to the great scientific potential inherited from the Soviet Union, whose major strengths came from the ability to innovate in the aerospace and military industries, the Russian Federation still possesses good research and development capabilities. However, the country must urgently catch up with the most developed countries in scientific research: indeed, as demonstrated by the figure below, Russia is far behind the United States, the European Union and China in terms of expenditures for R&D.⁷² Because of that, a priority for Russia must be the enhancement of its technological potential, which passes through a modernization of its strategies in the field of innovation. On this regard, the high quality of R&D in the aerospace and military fields can be a useful driver to stimulate improvements also in other spheres of R&D, as demonstrated by the foundation, in 2012, of a “*Future Research Fund*” to finance the study of new military technologies (nanoelectronics, hypersonics and unmanned aerial vehicles).

Currently, the main actor taking care of R&D enhancement is the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, whose main aim is to “*encourage innovation in existing enterprises, to promote innovative new companies, to increase demand for innovative products and to support the innovative orientation of the sector of science and education.*”⁷³

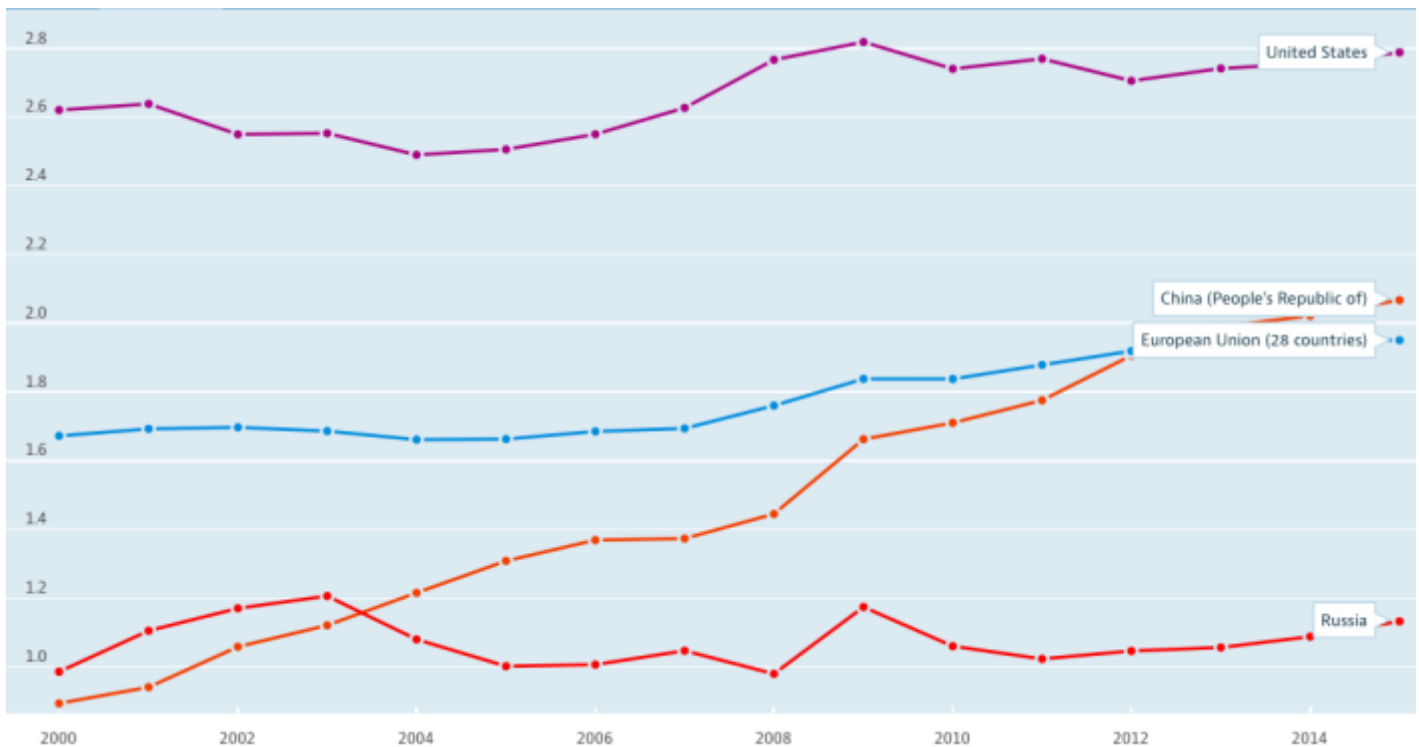
⁷⁰ EU Institute for Security Studies, 2014.

⁷¹ Central Bank of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁷² OECD, 2017.

⁷³ Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, 2017.

Figure 14. Public spending for R&D, % of GDP, 2000-2016 (OECD, 2017).



Starting from 2009, when the “*Action Plan*” to stimulate the innovation activity of enterprises was approved by governmental decree⁷⁴, the Ministry has been working on an improvement of legislation in R&D sphere, fully aware of the necessity to develop also infrastructures to promote business and investments. Together the Action Plan, the development of Russian R&D and S&T sectors is based on the “*Strategy 2020*” document, released in 2011 by President D. Medvedev and setting goals for innovation. Its pillars are the following: incentives to students, improvement of education system, development of technology platform and promotion of stronger international cooperation on innovation). In accordance to the national strategy, the Ministry’s action has created different types of infrastructures to reach these goals and strengthen the integration of the academic world with industries:⁷⁵

- Special Economic Zones (ZES): federal or regional areas provided with advantages in relation to taxation, access to infrastructures, administration and real-estate in order to attract foreign investors.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), 2013.

- Technoparks: planned to concentrate resources in areas where there is a proven technical expertise with the hope of creating local spillovers (Zelenograd, Skolkovo, Dubna, Tomsk and others).
- Business incubators: created to support small businesses and fast-growing start-up companies, mainly located in Moscow and St. Petersburg region. Nevertheless, IDA's report suggests that, while in the USA there is one incubator for every 280.000 people, Russia averages only one for every 2.7 million people. There is still much to do.

This infrastructural plan will certainly be beneficial for the Federation, which however has to deal with some deficits and weaknesses linked to its economic system.⁷⁶ The abundance of natural resources has always guaranteed to Russia a constant and large flow of incomes, which nevertheless has not helped the nation to develop competitive policy choices outside the field of energy revenues. In brief, easy money deriving from oil and natural gas export is not beneficial for innovation, research and technological progress. Another problem is the heritage of the Soviet hyper-bureaucratic system, which in recent years has been an obstacle for the creation of an innovation-based economy: top-down control, lack of transparency, corruption and inefficiency of the Russian administration are not, of course, incentives for entrepreneurship and business development. To these elements, we must also add the emigration of several Russian scientists and specialists from the country during the 1990s, when Moscow was experiencing an economically and politically troubled period of transition. However, at the beginning of the 2000s, the government tried to improve the situation by investing more resources on R&D, adopting a different strategy in comparison with many OECD countries – mainly due to its different economic asset, a kind of free market controlled by the State. In fact, while in OECD countries funders are private investors, Russian innovation is widely financed by the government: state-owned companies' resources account for about the 65% of R&D expenditures and for almost the 100% of the total budgetary funding for science and technology.

All things considered, to improve its expertise in R&D and S&T branches, Russia should invest more resources, further encourage the diffusion of private business, reduce the role of bureaucracy and boost the cooperation with foreign know-how, being it essential to develop the national one. Only by doing that Russia will be able to follow the trend of other Great Powers.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ OECD, 2011.

Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), 2013.

⁷⁷ OECD, 2011.

2.1.7. Education

In comparison with economy, technological development and innovation, where Russia's weaknesses are more evident than strengths, education represents one of the country's strongest points. Thanks to the educational system structured during the Soviet Union, Russian population is among the most alphabetized of the world: indeed, on the USSR's main strengths has always been the capability to guarantee a basic and equal education standard to every Soviet citizen, either living in Kaliningrad or in Vladivostok. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991, of course, brought bad consequences to this strong educational system, witnessing a serious decrease in governmental expenditure in this field and a fall in educational budget:⁷⁸ consequently, many schools and universities experienced a severe financial crisis, seeing also a decrease in the number of both teachers and students in comparison with the Soviet time.⁷⁹

The change of political regime brought an evident change also in the academic sphere: together with public universities and institutes, private entities started growing around Russia, especially in the most populated cities (Moscow, Saint-Petersburg). If, on the one hand, these private institutions could partially fill the void left by public institutions, on the other hand, they often did not respect high academic standards. Starting from the first Putin administration, at the beginning of the 2000s, Russia began again to raise its national expenditure for education, allowing public schools and universities to invest more money in the improvement of infrastructures and academic programs, forming highly specialized profiles.

Figure 15. Public spending on education, 2000-2013 (World Bank, 2017).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expenditure for education (% of GDP)</i>
2000	2.9%
2002	3.8%
2004	3.5%
2006	3.8%
2008	4.1%

⁷⁸ World Bank, 2017.

Index Mundi, 2012.

⁷⁹ Zubacheva K., 2016.

2012	4.1%
2013	3.8%

The revitalized Russian educational system was built taking inspiration from the European standards inside the so called “Bologna process”, thanks to which Russian institutions are now rapidly filling the gap with Western systems.

Talking about education data, overall the Russian Federation is now experiencing encouraging trends. According to OECD Statistics⁸⁰, Russia has the world’s “*second highest share of adults attaining tertiary level education*” after Canada: indeed, the 54% of Russian adults – or people from 25 to 65 years-old – has obtained a tertiary level diploma, while the OECD countries’ average is only 35%. Moreover, Russia has “*one of the lowest ratios of students to teachers at tertiary level*”: the ratio is 11 to 1, 6 students less than the OECD average (which is 17 students to each teacher). Considering OECD countries’ data, a small deficiency can be found in the public expenditure for education which, despite having been rising for the last ten years, is still below the OECD average: in 2013, for example, Russia spent only the 3.8% of its GDP on education, while OECD countries spent on average the 5.2%. However, if we look at primary education, Russian budget is higher than the OECD countries’ one (1.1% of GDP against 0.8%): this is the reason why, in comparison with OECD countries, where only the 36% of 2-year-old children are enrolled to childhood education, the 47% of Russian children takes advantage from national primary education services.

Overall, Russian education seems in good status: even if some figures, as we have seen, are below the OECD average, some studies suggest that Russia is the country performing the best results in this sphere among BRICS.⁸¹ However, scholars highlight that doing a comparative study on educational systems in BRICS countries is still a very difficult task because of the lack of compatible material and the absence of a unique source of data. In any case, our interest is to conclude that, despite difficulties experienced during the 1990s, where in fact Russia did not have the status of Great Power, nowadays the country has reached again brilliant standards of education that represent one of its most relevant strengths.

⁸⁰ Education at a Glance, OECD, 2016.

⁸¹ Lara de Arruda P. & others, 2016.

2.1.8. Tradition to act globally

The elements that we have analysed so far are all traditional features characterizing Great Powers: they all recall the requirements exposed in the first chapter while talking about material capabilities, which are for many scholars the basis upon which building theories on this delicate concept. Together with material capabilities, there are also other features that are not analysable in a quantitative way, but rather from a qualitative perspective. These features are, indeed, linked with the history of a nation and can be summarized under the tradition of a determined Great Power to act globally, where, for a country, acting globally means mainly two things:

- 1) having the capabilities and the experience to pursue its foreign policy goals in world politics and to exert influence on specific regions of interest; and
- 2) being capable to protect its interests independently and act as an influential player, being recognised by other countries as such.⁸²

These characteristics must not be undervalued because they form the basis to use material capabilities on a global scale. Of course, the tradition to act globally needs long periods of time to be assimilated and developed by a country: as analysed in the first chapter, there only a few states that have always possessed the status of Great Power, and Russia is among these states. In comparison with European powers, whose status in world politics have always been changing since the birth of national states in the 16th century, and the United States, who became internationally very important only after World War I, Russia has been playing globally since the very beginning of its history or, at least, starting from the end of the Mongol-Tatar occupation in the 15th century. Shackleina maintains that *“the Russian historic paradigm has always been that of a Great Power, though its role in world affairs changed with the change in the scope of world politics. Among contemporary great powers Russia is not the mightiest, but remains influential at global and regional levels.”* All things considered, if the tradition to act globally can be considered a fundamental requirement for a Great Power, Russia possesses this quality with no doubt.

Seeing how Russia managed to build this tradition and analysing the way it behaves in the international scenario according to its possibilities and its limits will be the main concern of the third chapter of this work, entirely dedicated to the analysis of Russian foreign policy. However, before doing that, we shall present a brief comparison with chosen Great Powers (USA, EU, China, Brazil and India) to have a more complete perception of the issue and finally establish whether Russia is a Great Power or not.

⁸² Shackleina T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

2.2. Comparison with world Great Powers

Earlier in the work we have seen how difficult is to define a Great Power, or at least find precise and quantitative methods of measurement to explain this concept. Among the presented scholars and features, I have tried to identify the countries on the Great Power status of which most of them agrees. As already anticipated, and including also the Russian Federation, these countries are the United States, China, Brazil, India and the European Union, considered as a unique player on the international level despite the presence of different national interests inside it. The aim of the comparison is not to realise a kind of final classification of Great Powers, but to provide the reader with a further tool to compare Russia with other countries at the forefront in international issues. At the end of this paragraph, I will present a table of comparison among Great Powers, elaborated to resume all the information and data analysed so far. In any case, the comparison with USA, EU, China, Brazil and India will be very brief and it does not aim at conveying a detailed analysis of countries that are only of secondary interest in this work.

As for the **United States**, the first observation to do is that the main question to answer is whether it will maintain their role of superpower in next decades or not⁸³. In this regard, scholars are very much divided: on the one hand, some argue that the decline of the United States has already become, with the 2008 financial crisis as focal point of this process (J. Quinlan, P. Starobin, J. Mearsheimer, N. Chomsky); on the other hand, others maintain that the USA is still the global leading power, but they can keep this role only by solving some internal criticises and by adopting a new strategy to face contemporary challenges, especially considering the emergence of other countries willing to take the lead of the world (Z. Brzezinski, T. Friedman, T. Barnett, J. Nye). Anyway, whether the matter of American global supremacy is highly debatable, data on U.S. economy, military, education, territory, demography and technological development are enough to state that no other countries in the world can compete with it on the same level. Per both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the USA is the first country for GDP and the third in terms of population⁸⁴; it also occupies the first place in Global Firepower Index's rank⁸⁵, while being the fourth country for territory size⁸⁶ and the first country for public spending on research and development.⁸⁷ Moreover, thanks to its wideness the USA is the second country for natural resources, behind the Russian

⁸³ Noonan N. C. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

⁸⁴ IMF, 2016.

World Bank, 2016

⁸⁵ Global Firepower, 2017.

⁸⁶ CIA World Factbook, 2005.

⁸⁷ OECD, 2012.

Federation.⁸⁸ Apart from this last sphere, the USA is superior to Russia in almost all the indicators analysed here.

Among the scholars we have presented so far, the **European Union** is never considered as a Great Power per se. Usually, when talking about Great Powers, scholars take into consideration European states singularly: in particular, countries with a Great Power tradition are often France, Great Britain, Germany and, to some extent, Italy. If in the past the concept of united Europe was still under construction, nowadays, due to the recent concerns on the political level and the wide differences among foreign policy objectives of EU member states, it is still not clear if it is possible to talk about Europe as a unique actor in international politics. In this regard, some highlight the difficulties of considering the EU as a global power, especially due to the absence of a European military force and to the fact that European diplomacy is often conducted on the background of international relations.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, we should take in consideration that Europe declines its power in different ways. As maintained by Mary Troy Johnston, “*the EU exists as a multidimensional international actor which exercises power in a variety of contexts and on a range of issues.*”⁹⁰ Therefore, “*Europe has to be viewed in a multi-level context consisting of states*” and regional and international organizations. In this context, the EU plays always a primary role. Moreover, data concerning the parameters used here to define the concept of Great Power suggest that Europe, if considered as a unique entity, can be viewed as such. Collectively, the European Union is the world’s 7th largest political entity, even if its territory is not the richest in terms of natural resources. However, per the United Nations, for both population and GDP the European Union is before the United States with a total population of about 510 million of people (third largest behind China and India) and a GDP, in 2015, of \$18.518.430 millions.⁹¹ Of course, the planned exit of the United Kingdom, once in force, will sensibly change these data, weakening European economic and demographic potential. In order to strengthen its role of Great Power in the upcoming years, the EU will need to cope with the consequences of Brexit, promote a common and integrated foreign policy and, above all, build reliable European armed forces to protect the interests of the confederation.

In terms of natural resources and territory, BRICS countries are very similar for two features: territory and natural resources. As the Russian Federation, Brazil, China and India are among the largest countries in the world in terms of territory and among the richest states in terms of natural

⁸⁸ Investopedia, 2016.

⁸⁹ Ginsberg R. H., 2010.

Johnston M. T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

⁹⁰ Johnston M. T. in Noonan N. C. & Nadkarni V., 2016.

⁹¹ United Nations, 2015.

resources. In this case, however, India is an exception, since its territory is not very rich. Among the Great Powers, Brazil, China and India are also the main rivals for the Russian Federation, since they are all considered emerging powers in comparison with EU countries and the United States, which are instead considered the world leading powers together with Japan and, in some cases, Australia.

Of course, every BRICS has its own peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses, that differentiate it from Russia. As for **Brazil**, for example, one of the main strengths together with natural resources and territory – together with massive gold and iron reserves, almost the 12% of world's timber supply comes from this country⁹² – is demography: Brazil is the 5th most populated country and one of the states with the highest levels of urbanization. If the country will manage to continue the extraordinary process of poverty reduction and face the problem of rising inequality, population will continue to be an evident strength for Brazil. Nevertheless, the economic recession started in 2015 – with a GDP decreasing by 3.8% and projected to decrease by 3% in 2016 – is affecting, together with political troubles following the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff, the country's possibility to promote an assertive foreign policy. The fortunes of the country will depend, in the future, on the capability to produce the necessary financial adjustments and smooth the rigid budget constraints.⁹³

Among BRICS, the most powerful is certainly **China**. Since the introduction of market reforms at the end of the 1970s, China's GDP has been growing on average by 10% yearly, an impressive growth that has become to slow down only after the 2008 global financial crisis (but still, with a yearly growth of about 7%, China maintains incredible standards: in 2015, GDP growth was 6.9%).⁹⁴ With a population of 1.3 billion, China is the most populated country in the world and the second largest economy after the United States, accounting for the 17% of global GDP growth in 2015. Despite being also the third country in terms of military potential⁹⁵ and having an estimated \$23 trillion worth of natural resources⁹⁶, China is still considered a developing country due to the socio-economic challenges it must face: implementation of market reforms, reduction of poverty and inequality, promotion of environmental sustainability, containment of population ageing and management of rapid urbanization. However, being the Chinese government very active and determined to improve the country's situation, China has all the means to exert a big influence on international politics.

⁹² Investopedia, 2016.

⁹³ World Bank, 2017.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Global Firepower, 2017.

⁹⁶ Investopedia, 2016.

The last BRICS country included in our list of Great Powers is **India**, the second most populated country behind China, the 7th in terms of territory size and the 4th in terms of military potential – a fact that provides India with the necessary requirements to play actively in its regional subsystems. India's weakest points are education – which is also a Brazil's and China's weakness – and natural resources. In comparison with the colonial period, literacy rate has more than quadrupled (from 12% in 1947 to almost 74% in 2011), but remains under the world average of 84%.⁹⁷ However, from the economic point of view India has done impressive improvements: the country is now the 4th world's largest economy, it has one of the youngest workforce and it is becoming a global leader in fields as pharmaceuticals, steel, informatics and space technologies. As for China, also for India future challenges are several: together with the need of massive investments in infrastructures, public services and housing, the country will have to face the problem of inequality among federal states and the vulnerability to poverty, the risk of which is enhanced by the impressive population growth. Also in this case, the country's Great Power potential will be fully expressed only if the government will successfully cope with these difficulties.

⁹⁷ World Bank, 2017.

2.3. Final remarks: Russia as a Great Power

The brief overview of Great Powers presented above is not aimed at analysing in depth the countries, but rather to introduce a comparative table on Great Powers, elaborated on the base of the results of the research.⁹⁸ Being this work focused on the Russian Federation, data on other countries are not presented in detail.

The table below successfully provide the international image of Russia in comparison with other Great Powers, presenting the following remarks: first, the United States emerge as the only, clear superpower of contemporary geopolitics, registering strengths in all the spheres taken into consideration; second, there is a group of countries (Brazil, China and India) that, despite being considered Great Powers, still present the typical weaknesses of emerging states, especially in quantitative features like, for example, demography, and qualitative features like the tradition to act globally; third, in this scenario the European Union emerges as the only entity being able to challenge the United States in terms of economic potential, political influence and technological development. However, as mentioned before, the confederative nature of the EU itself makes the analysis very difficult: further research would be necessary to achieve a more precise evaluation.

Figure 16. Comparison among Great Powers: strenghts and weaknesses.

<i>PARAMETERS OF A GREAT POWER</i>	Russia	USA	EU	China	India	Brazil
<u>Territory</u>	+	+	+	+	+	+
<u>Natural resources</u>	+	+	-	+	-	+
<u>Demography</u>	-	+	+	+/-	+/-	+
<u>Economy</u>	-	+	+	+	+	-
<u>Military potential</u>	+	+	-	+	+	-
<u>Education</u>	+	+	+	-	-	-
<u>Technological potential</u>	-	+	+	+	+	-
<u>Tradition to act globally</u>	+	+	+	-	-	-

⁹⁸ Personal elaboration of data collected from different sources: United Nations, World Bank, IMF, OECD and academic researches. Elements of strength are given a plus (+), while elements of weakness are given a minus (-).

The table suggests that each country has its peculiarities, its strengths and its weaknesses. In this chapter, we have analysed those of Russia, trying to understand if the role of Great Power that many scholars confer is still applicable. All things considered, the Russian Federation fully exerts this role and it is still one of the most influential countries of the world. Despite economic difficulties, urgent improvements needed in technological development and the adoption of new solutions to face demographic challenges, Russia is a Great Power because, in every international issue, the country is always present with its interests, its concerns and its different view of world politics. Thanks to its military power, the wideness of its territory and the huge potential of its natural resources, Russia can protect its interests independently, promote its foreign policy objectives in neighbouring regions and maintain an assertive attitude in international issues.

In comparison with economy, demography, education, technology and military power, which are all indicators that can vary and change depending on the historical period, the tradition to act globally is a feature that countries develop slowly and, once it is well assimilated, it guarantees to the country the status of Great Power. At the same time, having a solid tradition to influence world politics is, on the one hand, the direct consequence of powerful material capabilities and, on the other hand, even a more important quality than material capabilities themselves. In this regard, under the flag of the Tsarist Empire, the Communist state or the modern Federation, Russia has always acted as a Great Power. Although during the 1990s it seemed to have lost importance consequently to the fall of the Soviet Union, at the beginning of 2000s the Kremlin started a process of national revitalization in all the spheres, from the economical to the political. The main promoter of this re-birth has been the current President, Vladimir Putin, came to power on 31 December 1999 and still the most powerful figure in Russian politics. Putin's permanence at the Kremlin has conferred to Russian foreign policy continuity and stability, in a constant effort to return to Russia its Great Power status and role as major player in contemporary geopolitics. An attitude that, as we are going to see in the chapter, has been rooted in Russian history since the beginning of the 18th century and influences the evolution of current Russian foreign policy doctrines.

CHAPTER III

Russian foreign policy: historical background and development under Putin

3.1. The historical foundations of Russian foreign policy

In the analysis of the foreign policy of a Great Power, the first step to do is the examination of its historical traditions. The same goes for the Russian Federation, which, in the previous chapter, we have concluded being a Great Power as much as the United States, the European Union, China, India and Brazil. History is always important in the development of a country's society, economy or national and foreign policy: history, indeed, determines the main interests of a state, which acts inside and beyond its border to protect them. As for other Great Powers, Russian contemporary foreign policy is deeply rooted in historical traditions and cultural bases. In this regard, several studies have been made, especially in the Russian academic environment. For instance, referring to contemporary Russian foreign policy, Igor Zevelev maintains that *“Putin operates in a specific intellectual and political context and often gives voice to the elite consensus on Russia's role in the world. This consensus holds that the special place of Russia on the global stage is predetermined by unique Russian identity based on its history, size, necessity to protect long borders, and the sense of being a great power and centre of a distinct civilization.”*⁹⁹ Again, the concept of Great Powers emerges related to Russia, not as Russian Federation in particular, but as a very well defined civilization that is different from the others and possesses the tradition to act globally about which we discussed in chapter two. This trend, of course, does not apply only to Putin's third presidency, but also to the former Presidents of the Federation, the ones who will come after him, the Secretaries of the Communist Party during the Soviet era and, to some extent, also to Russian Tsars starting from Peter the Great (1682-1725). However, many authors¹⁰⁰ have noticed that the return of a nationalistic rhetoric in the Russian political discourse has been particularly assertive and strong in the last five years, starting from the popular manifestations against Putin's government in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Later, the Ukrainian crisis, the Crimean issue and the Syrian war have demonstrated these observations. Therefore, contemporary Russian foreign policy would be the result of several elements: national security exigencies, international objectives and, of course, national identity narratives.

⁹⁹ Zevelev I., 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Hale H. E., 2014.

Various authors on Stratfor, 2016.

Arnold R., 2016.

Concerning the last element, history demonstrates that the discourse of Russian national identity was born due to the confrontation, sometimes conflictual and sometimes peaceful, with another civilization: the Western one.¹⁰¹ This fact can be traced already in the earlier phases of the Russian nationalist debate, in the 19th century, between Slavophiles and Westernizers. While the first, basing on the Orthodox tradition, thought that the Russian civilization was unique and entirely different from the rationalist Western, the second promoted a fruitful confrontation with the West, considered as an example to follow in many spheres, from the military to the socio-economic. In this atmosphere, were born the bases of pan-Slavism (including not only Russia, but also Ukraine, Poland, Serbia and Bulgaria), which would have been further developed by Nicholas Danilevsky during the 1860s¹⁰²: he made the first attempt to merge the pan-Slavic project with the conservative imperialist policy, in his view aimed at creating a huge Slavic entity governed from Constantinople, the so-called “New Rome”. The result of such theories and ideas was the birth of the concept of universal character of the Russian identity, supported by Slavophiles and particularly developed by Feodor Dostoevsky, who identified the Russian nationality as an entity without borders, completely devoted to friendship, openness and inclusion. Dostoevsky was not the only one developing this thought: as Zevelev points out, he was followed by Vladimir Solovyov who, in comparison with Dostoevsky, makes a stronger endorsement to the expansionist foreign policy of the Russian Empire, referring to the conquests led by Catherine the Great. Indeed, in his writings he states that “*Russia acted here not as a nation, which conquered and suppressed the others, but as a superior force of peace and truth, which gave every nation what it was entitled to.*”¹⁰³ The country emerging from these lines is a universal Russia, whose aims were strictly linked with its traditional and, to some extent, holy mission of unifying all the people under the same Christian Orthodox flag of the Russian Empire, without geographical, ethnical or political limits.

In the late 18th century, Catherine the Great’s territorial expansion was the practical demonstration of the Russian will to realise the imperialistic projects theorised later by Danilevskiy, Dostoevsky and Solovyov. Starting from the second part of the 19th century, Russian culture began to adopt an evident imperial framework, justified in the name of universalism and inspired also by European imperialism. Of course, as every imperialistic ideology, also the Kremlin’s will to influence other people through Russification encountered resistance from neighbouring countries. Negative consequences of this clash would have appeared soon because of the adoption of the Empires’ official doctrine, formulated by Sergei Uvarov and based on three pillars: orthodoxy, autocracy and

¹⁰¹ Zevelev I., 2016.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Solovyov V. in Zevelev I., 2016.

nationality. Like the whole Russian intelligentsia of that time, Uvarov's ideas were focused on the contrast between the Russian civilization, considered as a unique entity from Poland to the Far East, and the Western civilization (or Europe), ignoring the separatist tendencies growing among non-Russian people (namely Lithuanians, Polish, Ukrainians and Byelorussians). At that time, indeed, in the Western part of the Empire the national consciousness was diffused, as demonstrated by the two Polish revolts in 1830 and 1863.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, non-Slavic people were later considered in the national discourse at the beginning of the Soviet era, in the 1920s, thanks to the philosophical work of a small group of intellectuals, later named Eurasians. Looking for the origins of the Russian nation, they thought that the Turkic and Finno-Ugric elements also gave their contribution, together with the Slavic one. According to their theories, the most important features uniting the Russian nation was the geographical space called "Eurasia", meaning a huge territorial dimension including both Europe and Asia.

The topic of Russian national identity was also one of the main concerns for the Bolsheviks, who promoted concessions for different ethnicities inside the USSR under the centralised control of the Communist Party – with different levels of autonomy. To contrast the Russian chauvinism and the suppression of people existing during the tsarist times, the Communist proclaimed the right for self-determination for all the nationalities, recreating however the highly centralised system typical of the Russian Empire.¹⁰⁵ The organisation of the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, created in December 1922, and the levels of autonomy accorded to the nationalities was also one of the main debates of the Bolshevik establishment before Lenin's death, exacerbating the contrast between Stalin and Trotsky¹⁰⁶. However, the system created in the 1920s, despite being full of defects, managed to survive until the late 1980s, when the fall of the Soviet giant was already inevitable. As Zevelev states, "*the collapse of the Soviet Union meant much more for Russia than just be the loss of colonies. It was a loss of identity. Political, historical, cultural, ethnic boundaries, as well as subjective mental map held by most Russians, share no congruence.*"¹⁰⁷ That is why the end of the USSR brought confusion to the minds of people who, for centuries – before under the tsars and after under the Communist Party – had been looking at Russia as a unique subject in international affairs, fragmented into different ethnicities but brought together by the same borders. This confusion derived from the fact that, at the end of the 1980s, the Russian nationalist discourse had been developed on different bases, combining elements derived from the tsarist period with elements typical of the Soviet tradition. The result was that Russians perceived – and to some extent they still do it nowadays –

¹⁰⁴ Bogdan H., 1991.

¹⁰⁵ Graziosi A., 2008.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Zevelev I., 2016.

themselves as part of an entity much more important than a simple nation made by certain linguistic, social and religious characteristics: the Russian entity was and still is a distinct, universal and spiritual civilization that finds a large part of its unity in the perennial contrast with the European civilization, at the same time considering neighbouring peoples, especially Ukrainians and Byelorussians, as “other Russians” rather than independent and separate nations.

In this regard, the development of such a kind of Russian national identity has visible consequences on the contemporary foreign policy of the Russian Federation. As we are going to see in the next paragraph, the conflict with the West occupies most Russian geopolitical concerns, being the ongoing NATO’s and EU’s expansion towards Eastern Europe and Caucasus (post- Soviet space) perceived as a violation of the traditional Russian area of influence. But, above all, Western policies are perceived as “*an attempt to deny Russia its distinct identity and historic mission*”.¹⁰⁸

3.2. The role of national identity in contemporary Russian foreign policy

In years 1991-1993, right after the fall of USSR, Russians began to build another state. The situation of political uncertainty and economic crisis under Yeltsin’s presidency strongly contributed not only to create project the image of a weak country and the international level, but also to diffuse popular unrest and disaffection toward the theme of national identity: the level of national consciousness was very low in those years and the Soviet Union, with the presence of several nationalities and ethnicities inside its borders, did not manage to create a unique and strong Russian identity – despite its collapse had initially caused a diffused shock among citizens. Indeed, in those years, most Russian political parties tended to ignore the issue of national identity, being it analysed and considered as important only by nationalists. According to I. Zevelev, this situation persisted until 2012, when Vladimir Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation for the third time.¹⁰⁹

The restoration of national identity discourse is part of President Putin’s will to restore the image of the Russian Federation abroad, making it again a major player in global affairs. We have already discussed the issue of Russia as a Great Power in the previous chapters, concluding that the country possesses all the requirements to promote an assertive foreign policy as a world leader: the credits for this result goes, among others, especially to Vladimir Putin. His rhetoric focused on a Great Russian can be summarised in the following lines: according to the President, the power of a country “*depends on whether the citizens [...] consider themselves a nation, to what extent they identify with*

¹⁰⁸ Zevelev I., 2016.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

their own history, values and traditions, and whether they are united by common goals and responsibilities. In this sense, the question of finding and strengthening national identity is fundamental for Russia".¹¹⁰ This Putin's speech at Valdai Discussion Club in September 2013 is widely considered the official re-birth of Russian national identity issue, re-introduced in Russian society to promote cohesion and attachment to the motherland to contrast, on the one hand, an aggressive Western policy, and, on the other hand, the centrifugal consequences of globalization, due to which the West is seen as a world in decadence. Therefore, as we will see when analysing Russian foreign policy concepts and national security strategies, with Putin's third presidential term, the question of Russian national identity has acquired the features of a proper security and foreign policy issue, useful before international crises like the Ukrainian and the Syrian ones.

By saying that "*Russia's history forms the foundation for [the country's] worldview and culture*" and that "*it is unquestionably a source of our identity and our mission as a civilization*"¹¹¹, Putin demonstrates to consider Russian history, its legacy and its traditions as one of the main pillars of the contemporary state, both in internal and external affairs. History is important because it represents unity and continuity in the Russian national discourse: in this sense, ideological, political and socio-economic differences between Imperial Russia, Soviet Russia or the Russian Federation appear less important than cultural and historical codes, which have always been present and belong to the genetic heritage of Russian people. At the same time, all these elements are fundamental for the maintenance of a country's independence and the sovereignty, the indispensable requirements for a successful national rhetoric. In this regard, as mentioned before, the main threat to Russian independence and identity seems to be, for Putin, the dangerous decadence of the West, meaning Europe and North America. Addressing to the Federal Assembly on December 4th, 2014, he warned the Russian people against the Western degrading policies: "*a serious challenge to Russian identity is linked to events taking place in the world. [...] We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual.*"¹¹²

The contrast with the West has always been one of Russia's main foreign policy concerns: the Ukrainian crisis and the Crimean issue further proved tensions between American-Europeans and Russians, leading Putin to accuse the West to carry out a modern policy of containment on the model

¹¹⁰ Putin V., Valdai Discussion Club, September 19, 2013.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Putin V., Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, December 4, 2014.

of 18th, 19th and 20th centuries' political moves.¹¹³ According to the Russian nationalistic rhetoric, with the promotion of destabilising wars in the Middle East and the enlargement of NATO and EU towards Eastern Europe, the primary necessity for Russia is to contrast this expansion in order to protect the diversity of the world, safeguard universal harmony and bring balance to the international stage. This is exactly the messianic and universal ideas characterising the Russian nation elaborated by the aforementioned authors (Dostoevsky, Solovyov). It is not a surprise that this nationalistic dialectic was used by Putin to somehow justify the reconciliation, or annexation, of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, following the contested popular referendum. As Zevelev, points out, Putin justified this event “*not only in geopolitical terms, but in spiritual terms of sacral meanings*”¹¹⁴, stating that for Russia the Crimean cities have a deep cultural and traditional meaning, since they recall the Christian origins of the Russian nation at the times of Kiev's Rus.

Since Putin's narrative has direct consequences on Russian foreign policy, the same approach has been adopted by Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, who, in all his speeches, has always supported Putin's ideas. Among his declarations, the most interesting can be found in an article published by Lavrov on *Russia in Global Affairs* in March 2016, where the Minister deepens the topic of differences between Russia and the West, which is constantly attempting “*to put Russian lands under full control and to deprive Russians of their identity*”. Indeed, Lavrov maintains that “*Russian people possessed a cultural matrix of their own and an original type of spirituality and never merged with the West*”.¹¹⁵

All things considered, analysing the narrative proposed by the major Russian leaders, we may summarise the role of national identity in Russian foreign policy as follows:

- 1) the Great Power status that Russia exerts in the international scenario is not only derived from and achieved thanks to the military strength, the political influence and the tradition to act globally of the country; it is, instead, also a direct consequence of Russian national identity and culture, and, therefore, of Russian messianic and spiritual mission: contribute to the maintenance of the international order, guarantee the balance of powers and contrast the aggressive policies promoted by the corrupted and decadent Western world.
- 2) The nationalistic narrative promoted by Russian leaders influences very much the foreign policy doctrine of the country, and it has a well-identified opponent: the West (America and Europe), the imaginary of which diffused in Russia is often very negative and seen as a menace for traditional Russian values (Orthodox Christianity, gender roles, patriotism,

¹¹³ Zevelev I., 2016.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Lavrov S., *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 3, 2016.

nationalism and strong leadership). As pointed out before, the NATO and EU enlargement policies have only confirmed Russian fears, leading the Kremlin to portray it as dangerous actor that can bring instability in the Eurasian region and threaten Russian culture.

- 3) The Russian national identity inevitably influences also the relationships between the Russian Federation and its neighbouring countries, the states included in the post-Soviet space, alongside with economic and military interests. In this regard, some argue that, in the last three years, three concepts have characterised the Kremlin's narrative with these countries: the concept of "compatriots", the concept of "Russian World" and the concept of "greater Russian civilization".¹¹⁶

All these concepts compose, together, the national Russian narrative promoted by authorities starting from 2014, aimed at affirming the country's Great Power role in world politics, not only in the post-Soviet space, but also in the Middle East. The concept of "compatriots abroad" was firstly introduced by former President Boris Yeltsin and his Minister for Foreign affairs, Andrey Kozyrev, in 1992, to identify all the people who, despite living outside national borders, had some linkage with Russian culture: this concept is reflected on contemporary Russian tendency to look with extreme attention the interests of filo-Russian people abroad. The second term, "Russian World", was instead coined by Vladimir Putin to somehow recognize the existence of a Russian sphere of influence that the Kremlin was not, and still is not, eager to lose in favour of Europeans and Americans. This term looks beyond the issues of culture and language: it assumes the existence of a kind of Russian responsibility to protect the interests and guarantee the safety of other pro-Russian dimensions. In particular, as we can understand from Putin's words, this concept has been very useful to justify Russian behaviour during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014: "*with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line [...]. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea [...]. Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from.*"¹¹⁷ Zevelev rightly observes that the Russian intervention in Ukraine and Crimea was a clear "*shift from security at the nation-state level to security at the level of a vague community larger than the nation state*", the boundaries of which are however very ambiguous.¹¹⁸ This shift in foreign policy has been supported by the third concept seen before, the one of "greater Russian civilization": this definition, however, seems to have more philosophical and academic bases than the previous ones. Indeed, together with the already mentioned N. Danilevsky, the theme of civilization has been analysed also by other famous Russian intellectuals, above all Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Gennady Zyuganov and, more recently, Alexander Dugin, whose

¹¹⁶ Zevelev I., 2016.

¹¹⁷ Putin V., Address by President of the Russian Federation, March 18, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Zevelev I., 2016.

ideas provided a great contribution to the creation and diffusion of the concept of “Eurasia” and “Eurasian civilization” (strictly linked to the “Small Eurasia” we mentioned in the first chapter).¹¹⁹ Also in this case, even if cooperation is still possible on different levels, the existence of a Russian civilization extended beyond national borders implies the existence of a conflict with other civilizations, namely the Western one.

Talking about “compatriots abroad”, about “Russian World” or “greater Russian civilization” leads always to the same conclusions:

- 1) nowadays, Russia strongly believes that the world cannot be dominated by only one culture and one view – the Western – since other development models characterise countries having different historical identities in comparison with Europe or Northern America.
- 2) Russia is a separate and different civilization in comparison with the Western one.
- 3) Russian leadership believes that the country is still a Great Power, not particularly because of its strengths, but rather for the historical role of major player in world politics that have been existing since the early 18th century.
- 4) The perception of post-Soviet space is still ambiguous, since ex-Soviet countries are treated or as independent states or as fraternal neighbours without any precise scheme.

According to its leaders, the holy and spiritual mission of Russia is to keep the differences among cultures alive, ensuring international stability and contributing as much as possible to global peace among peoples. On the other hand, however, using historical identity and national rhetoric to justify both the annexation of new territories and to support separatist movements in post-Soviet countries can be a quite worrying threat for regional security. What is certain is that, in Russia, the nationalistic narrative based on history has been growing constantly after the failure of the “reset” promoted by Medvedev and Obama¹²⁰, characterising Putin’s third mandate with a more assertive and determined behaviour in the international scenario: in this regard, the changes inserted in the foreign policy doctrines starting from 2000 are an indispensable tool for a complete analysis of the issue.

¹¹⁹ De Benoist A. & Dugin A., 2014.

¹²⁰ Stent A., 2014.

3.3. The evolution of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept from 2000 to 2016

The documents we are going to analyse in this paragraph are the Foreign Policy Concepts published by the Russian government in 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016. A comparative analysis among these official documents is useful to understand the changes of Russian international behaviour, which sometimes are substantial and sometimes only superficial. As we are going to see in this chapter, together with changes, Foreign Policy Concepts have also elements of continuity, above all the fact that they were all released, except from the 2008 edition, under Putin's presidencies – who, however, from 2008 to 2012 served as Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, contributing with Medvedev and Lavrov to the maintenance and development of foreign policy principles, objectives and strategies. In this regard, Vladimir Putin himself can be considered the main element of continuity for Russian foreign policy, since the long process of Russian economic, military, political and cultural re-birth after the crisis of the 1990s started precisely when Putin came to power. Putin is the undisputable main decision maker in Russia: indeed, since the very beginning of his first mandate, the President has tried to build a strong executive and restore Moscow's influence on regions and departments, where the appointment of every governor is strictly controlled by the Kremlin.¹²¹ The strong and centralised leadership guiding the Russian Federation is certainly an advantage for the formulation of a stable foreign policy with clear priorities and goals beyond national borders: in most of the cases, continuity means effectiveness.

Talking about continuity, we shall begin from the structure of FP Concepts reported in the table below, which is almost identic in all the versions:¹²²

Figure 17. Structure of FP Concepts (2000 to 2016).

FP Concept 2000	FP Concept 2008	FP Concept 2013	FP Concept 2016
- General principles	- General provisions	- General provisions	- General provisions
- Modern world and foreign policy of the Russian Federation	- Modern world and foreign policy of the Russian Federation	- Foreign policy of the Russian Federation and modern world	- Modern world and foreign policy of the Russian Federation

¹²¹ Olikier O. & others, 2009.

¹²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

- Priorities for the Russian Federation in the resolution of global issues	- Priorities for the Russian Federation to face global issues	- Priorities for the Russian Federation to face global issues	- Priorities of the Russian Federation in overcoming global challenges shaping a fair and sustainable world order
- Regional priorities	- Regional priorities	- Regional priorities	- Regional priorities
- Design and start-up of foreign policy of the Russian Federation	- Designing and starting up the foreign policy of the Russian Federation	- Development and implementation of foreign policy of the Russian Federation	- Russia's foreign policy formulation and implementation

An interesting observation about these documents is that, excluding the last one, they all became obsolete just a few months after their release by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹²³ The 2000 FP Concept lost its value already in 2001, when the September 11th attacks to the Twin Towers brought the terroristic menace at the forefront of major global issues, leading Western countries to conduct contested military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The 2008 FP Concept, instead, became obsolete after the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, after which the relations between Russia and the West seemed seriously compromised (they would have improved later thanks to the “reset” policy promoted by Obama and Medvedev). Finally, the 2013 FP Concept had to be updated because of the Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian war and the likely victory of Hillary Clinton at the American Presidential elections in November 2016, at the end won surprisingly by the Republican candidate Donald J. Trump – whose unpredictability and still unclear foreign policy goals could make the new Concept already obsolete.

In the following lines, I will analyse in detail the first four sections of every document to better illustrate the evolution of Foreign Policy Concepts. The fifth one, “*Development and Implementation of the Russian Foreign Policy*”, will not be taken into consideration because it deals with institutional information that are not essential to the aims of the research.

¹²³ Kureev A., 2016.

3.3.1. Section I: General principles and provisions

As for the first section, “General Provisions” or, in the case of 2000 FP Concept, “General Principles”, the principle guiding Russian foreign policy is always the same: protecting the interests of Russian citizens, Russian society and, starting from 2008 FP Concept, also the interests of the Russian State – which is only a mere reference, since in 2000 FP Concept the fact that the interests of the State had to be protected was implied. According to some¹²⁴, the insertion of this reference is not only the proof of the importance of the State in the Russian narrative, but also the demonstration of the growing government’s power, the control of which on important strategic resources, for example in the energy sector, has been increasing sharply during Putin’s presidencies.

If the introduction is very similar in every FP Concept, the biggest differences can be found in the core part of the documents, where the foreign policy goals of the Russian Federation are enlisted in detail. On average, we can individuate at least seven groups of most important goals (in the last Concept there are eleven main goals, for example), the organization of which is, in the texts, slightly different in terms of classification. I elaborated a division in groups to facilitate the analysis and comprehension of all the documents.

First group: sovereignty, international position and territorial integrity

In 2016 Concept, the first group of goals is to “*ensure national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strengthen the rule of law and democratic institutions [...]*”¹²⁵, therefore linked to the basic duties of a sovereign state: to protect citizens and ensure its own survival. In this regard, there are important differences among the documents. First, in 2000 the phrase “*getting a standing position*”¹²⁶ was substituted by “*getting a strengthening position*”¹²⁷, again changed in 2016 with the sentence “*consolidate the Russian Federation’s position as a centre of influence in today’s world*”¹²⁸, the meaning of which is similar in the 2013 document. The change between 2000 and 2008 was due to the different attitude of the Russian government in international issues: while the first Putin’s presidency (2000-2004) was characterised by an international discourse focused more on soft power, during his second mandate Putin became to adopt hard power tools, especially in the sphere of relationships with the West – a possible cause could have been the wide EU expansion of 2004, when many ex-Communist countries joined the union (the Baltic countries, Czech Republic, Slovakia,

¹²⁴ Ruiz Gonzalez F. J., 2013.

¹²⁵ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹²⁶ 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹²⁷ 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹²⁸ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

Slovenia, Hungary and Poland). Furthermore, the shift from 2000-2008 (reference to the efforts aiming at restoring Russia's role of Great Power) to 2013-2016 (reference to a consolidation of Russian influence around the world) is due to the fact that, in 2013, the Kremlin perceived that the restoration of Russian Great Power status had already been completed.

Second group: international cooperation and global peace

Concerning the second group of goals, the focus in 2000, 2008 and 2013 Concepts is completely on Russian participation to the construction of a safe, peaceful and internationally law-regulated world. Russian efforts to contribute to global security within the frameworks decided by the United Nations is reiterated also in 2016 Concept, where there is a stronger reference to the Russian will to cooperate with international partners to find common and shared solutions to common problems such as Islamic terrorism and climate change. The references to the UN are always important because, of course, Russian has the veto power in the Security Council and, therefore, all the actions decided outside this framework can escape from Moscow's control. Anyway, world peace and security are, for Russia, an absolute priority.

Third group: economy

Economy is a crucial sector for the Russian Federation, so that the creation of a "*favourable external environment*" aimed at supporting a regular economic growth, a strong modernization and a steady technological development is an absolute priority for the Kremlin. In all the documents, there is always a reference to the improvement of life standards for the population, a feature that was introduced firstly in 2000 since, at the beginning of first Putin's presidency, Russian citizens suffered from a terrible lack of basic services due to the 1998 financial crisis' consequences. In this section, major changes are two: in 2013, the insertion of a particular section dedicated to the "*preservation of Russian companies' interests abroad*"¹²⁹, caused by conflicts with EU legislation (for example the Third Energy Package, which according to Russia is discriminatory); and, both in 2013 and 2016, the insertion of the aim to "*prevent any discrimination against Russian goods, services and investments by using the options afforded by international and regional economic and financial organizations*".¹³⁰ As for 2016, the implicit reference to Western sanctions seems quite well fitting.

¹²⁹ Ruiz Gonzalez F. J., 2013.

¹³⁰ 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

Fourth group: relationship with neighbouring countries

The fourth group is related to the maintenance of a good neighbourhood with post-Soviet states and it does not change in the documents. The formula is always the following: “*to pursue neighbourly relations with adjacent States, assist them in eliminating the existing and preventing the emergence of the new hotbeds of tension and conflicts on their territory*”.¹³¹ Contributing to the stabilization of bordering countries is a key goal for the Russian Federation, since eventual troubles happening in one of these states risk to affect also the stability of Russia, especially considering the common past characterising the relationships between Moscow and post-Soviet countries. In this regard, the importance to promote peace and stability is particularly urgent in Muslim neighbouring countries, where the risk of a rapid diffusion of Islamist and jihadist ideologies is concrete and dangerous, especially after the direct involvement of Russia in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria.

Fifth group: relationship with foreign countries and Russian behaviour in international relations

The fifth group is very similar to the second one, related to international cooperation, since it describes the principles guiding Russian behaviour in international relations. Also in this case, the formula has always been unvaried: “*to promote, within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, mutually beneficial and equal partnerships with foreign countries, inter-State associations, international organizations and within forums, guided by the principles of independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, predictability, a multidirectional approach and the commitment to pursue national priorities on a non-confrontational basis; expand international cooperation on a non-discriminatory basis; facilitate the emergence of network alliances and Russia’s proactive participation in them*”.¹³² As written in these lines, we can understand that the Russian view of international relations is liberal-institutionalist, where international institutions are a core element to promote stability and the respect of international laws is fundamental to strengthen global peace and create fruitful relations among countries, which can protect their common interests and fight common threats. The reference to network alliances deals with Russian-led international organizations such as the security-focused Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the trade-focused Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

¹³¹ 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Sixth group: Russian citizens abroad

The sixth group is related to Russian citizens living abroad, the protection of which is a priority for the Russian Federation. The goal has never changed in the documents, always maintaining the same format: “*to ensure comprehensive, effective protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad, including within various international frameworks*”.¹³³ Guaranteeing that all Russian citizens have basic rights in foreign countries is a concern derived from the fact that, after the fall of USSR and the consequent territorial losses experienced by Moscow, almost 20 million ethnic Russian found themselves “trapped” in regions that had suddenly become independent and foreign countries.¹³⁴ In this regard, the integration level of Russian citizens in these countries has been either effective and peaceful, as in Lithuania or Kazakhstan, or uncomplete and violent, as in Estonia and Latvia, where Russians are often discriminated.¹³⁵ Russian attitude towards the protection of minorities and citizens abroad is very assertive, as demonstrated by the reconciliation of Crimea in 2014, following the contested referendum on the status of the peninsula. In that case, while the West did not recognize the referendum as valid and considered the operation as an illegal aggression against a sovereign state, Russia used to tool of Russian ethnicity to retake the territory. Since the intention of the author is not to analyse the Crimean issue, we will just observe that the Ukrainian crisis is the practical demonstration of the Russian will to safeguard at any cost the life conditions of Russian citizens abroad.

Seventh group: culture and soft power

The seventh group of goals deals with soft power, such as “*strengthen Russia’s role in international culture*”¹³⁶ by promoting the diffusion of Russian language, Russian cultural traditions, historical legacy and education. A special mention is done regarding the Russian-speaking diaspora, that the Russian foreign policy has the duty to consolidate. Soft power tools, especially culture and language, have always been a priority for Russia since the imperial time. Nowadays, the main tool of Russian soft power are official state media as Russia Today, founded in 2005 and directly financed by the Russian government, and Sputnik News, created in 2014 by Rossiya Sevodnya to replace the old media agency RIA Novosti. Both agencies are considered, by the European Union, tools used by the Kremlin to spread its anti-European and anti-Western propaganda, a task facilitated by the diffusion of these media in different languages (Arab, English and French above all): in November 2016, indeed, the EU Parliament condemned Moscow’s attempts to “*challenge democratic values, divide*

¹³³ 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹³⁴ Ruiz Gonzalez F. J., 2013.

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, 2006.

¹³⁶ 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood".¹³⁷ In addition to these elements, in 2013 and 2016 FP Concepts there is a reference to the need to promote a peaceful and fruitful dialogue between the Russian civilization and other civilizations of the international community. This reference seems adapt to the dialogue with the Islamic world, the relationship with whom is fundamental for the maintenance of social stability in Russia.

3.3.2. Section II: Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation and the Modern World

After the general provisions, as seen in the previous table, all documents contain a section dedicated to Russian foreign policy and modern world. In this section, differences among documents are evident after 2008, especially regarding the Russian view of world politics and the relationship with the West. While in 2000 and 2008 there were still references to a post-Cold War period, with the West, led by the United States, dominating the international scenario, in 2013 and 2016 the role of the West is said to be declining year by year, with a clear shift of global power and development towards Asia. Moreover, there is a more evident difference also between 2013 and 2016: if, in 2013, the process leading to the Western decline was still considered in progress, in 2016 the birth of a completely multipolar world with a shift towards Asia is considered complete, as we can understand from the following lines: *"The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system. The structure of international relations is becoming increasingly complex. [...] Global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers. Cultural and civilizational diversity of the world and the existence of multiple development models have been clearer than ever."*¹³⁸ In this regard, it is important to say that the Russian Federation feels completely part of this shift, promoting a rhetoric that considers the West as the main enemy for all the other actors, especially those located in Eurasia and Asia (as to say, Russia and China).

The strong reference to the post-Cold War asset in 2000 and 2008 documents reflects the deep Russian condemnation against Western initiatives, mainly those led by the United States starting from the beginning of 2000s, Afghanistan and Iraq. According to the Kremlin, the main aim of the USA would be to strengthen its superpower role, trying to contain the growth, the development and the expansion of emerging Great Powers such as China and Russia, who, on the other hand, would be a

¹³⁷ European Parliament, 2016.

¹³⁸ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

kind of guardian of diversity. Of course, the historical moments when each Foreign Policy Concept influenced the draft very much.¹³⁹ For example, the events happened at the end of the 1990s had direct consequences on the draft of the FP Concept in 2000: in 1999, indeed, in the framework of an international community shocked by the Atlantic bombings in Serbia (not authorised by the UN Security Council), NATO had just promoted the enlargement of the alliance towards east, including three ex-Communist countries (Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic). In this case, the promises done after the fall of the USSR to the Russian authorities – or that the NATO enlargement would not have never taken place – were broken. The American and, in general, Western interference in foreign countries has grown exponentially since 2001, leading the Russian government to confirm, in 2008 FP Concept, the concerns against Western interventions, the impact of which was certainly enlarged by the installation of American defence missiles close to the Russian borders. Episodes were, indeed, several: the war in Afghanistan against Talibans (2001), the war in Iraq against Saddam Hussain (2003), the support to the so-called “Colour Revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) and, finally, the Western condemnation to the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. That is why, the 2008 Concepts states that “*traditional cumbersome military and political alliances can no longer provide for counteracting the whole range of modern challenges and threats*”, supporting the creation of a new “*network diplomacy based on flexible forms of participation in international structures for the search of joint solutions to common tasks.*”¹⁴⁰ Already in 2008, despite the beginning of the process that would have led, two years later, to the signature of the New START Agreement, the relationships between Russia and the West were full of uncertainties. As for 2013, the events related to the “Arab Spring” were the main driver for the development of Russian foreign policy and interpretation of world order. Indeed, in 2011 the Security Council had adopted, thanks to the Russian abstention, the Resolution 1973/2011, which authorised a military intervention led by Western powers, mainly United States, Great Britain and France, against the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. It is not a mystery that Russia strongly opposed the Western intervention in Libya, considering the destabilization of the country derived from it, as it is criticising the Western behaviour in the Syrian crisis.

¹³⁹ Ruiz Gonzalez F. J., 2013.

¹⁴⁰ 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

3.3.3. Section III: Priorities for the Russian Federation to face global issues

The third part of each Foreign Policy Concept is dedicated to the priorities of the Russian Federation in relation to global issues, the premises of which are already explained in the General Provisions or Principles. This part, being the most complete and detailed of the documents, is divided in six sections, each of them dealing with different spheres concerning foreign policy¹⁴¹:

- “Emergence of a New World Order” (in 2016 “Shaping a Fair and Sustainable World Order”);
- “Legislation in International Relations” (in 2016 “Rule of Law in International Relations”);
- “Strengthening of the International Security”;
- “International Economic and Environmental Cooperation of the Russian Federation”;
- “International Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights”;
- “Information support to Foreign Policy Actions”.

Apart from the first two subsections, the titles are the same in all the Concepts, demonstrating that the Russian Foreign Policy has strong elements of continuity – a fact that is made easier by the presence of a stable political leadership.

Among the subsections, the first two are the less detailed, since they give a general image of the Russian perception of world order. In this regard, differences with the General Provisions are almost non-existent. According to Russia, world politics are constantly evolving, year by year, shifting from a unipolar asset at the end of the 1990s towards a multipolar asset where all the Great Powers can play on the same level. This is the case, for example, of the last Foreign Policy Concept, where the Russian cooperation with BRICS countries is particularly highlighted to convey the message of an open-minded and active power trying to contrast American supremacy. In the first subsection, it is interesting to note the change of title in comparison with 2013: in 2016, indeed, the phrase “Emergence of a New World Order” was replaced by the sentence “Shaping a Fair and Sustainable World Order”, as to say that, in this year, the process of emergence has been completed. This is a clear endorsement to the creation of the multipolar world order mentioned several times so far in the text. Together with the Russian commitment to the creation of a sustainable and stable system of international relations, the first two sections contain an evident endorsement for the United Nations, the role of which is fundamental for the development of global affairs: *“The UN should maintain its central role in regulating international relations and coordinating world politics in the 21st century, as it has proven to have no alternative and possesses international legitimacy. Russia*

¹⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

supports the efforts aimed at strengthening the UN's central and coordinating role."¹⁴² Support the United Nations is absolutely a constant in all Foreign Policy Concepts: it was stated in 2000, in 2008, in 2013 and in 2016, always with the same great emphasis and always with the same strong promotion of a total adherence to the UN Charter.

If the references to the UN are a constant, the references to other international forums of cooperation can vary: for example, in 2000 Russia mentioned the importance of the G-8 summit, the participation to which gave Russia the formal recognition by major world economies; in 2008, the attention shifted to other international forums, such as the BRICS countries and the RIC group (Russia, China and India), considered as the leading powers of emerging economies; in 2013, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the G-20 were added to the list of important international forums. A big change was done in 2016 Concept, where the reference to the G-8 is not present due to the Russian exclusion following the Ukrainian crisis: this is another demonstration of Russian will to look more assertively towards East. Moreover, in comparison with 2000, the paragraph about the legislation in international relations was a new entry inserted in 2008 with the title "The Primacy of Laws in International Relations". The Russian Federation strongly supports the international law, the respect of which is essential for the maintenance of global stability and fundamental to reach important goals on a global scale: contrasting the action of revisionist countries (willing to overthrow the rules of world order), resolving disputes among countries in international forums, respecting the right of people to self-determination and the sovereignty of states (indeed, in 2013 the Russian opposition to any foreign military intervention justified by the "responsibility to protect" is very well stated¹⁴³).

The section "Strengthening of the International Security" contains the main tools that Russia wants to use in order to enhance strategic and regional stability. Among them, we can highlight the following, which demonstrates the continuity in the Kremlin's approach¹⁴⁴: encouraging the respect of international arms control obligations aimed at preventing arm races; promoting non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction according to international and bilateral agreements; developing the use of information and communication technology to counteract cyber terrorism; supporting international norms regulating the sphere of cyber security; contrasting the illegal trade of weapons; promoting cooperation with European countries to reduce the proliferation of conventional weapons; supporting the peacekeeping missions of the United Nations; recognising the Security Council as the unique institution able to authorise the use of force and the validity of

¹⁴² 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁴³ Ruiz Gonzalez F. J., 2013.

¹⁴⁴ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

Article 51 on the legitimate self-defence; fighting international terrorism, which has been a key priority for the Russian Federation since 2000 due to the Chechen wars; counteracting organised crime and illegal trafficking of drugs and other narcotic substances; helping the United Nations and other international organisations to face emergencies caused by natural disasters; regulating the migrations processes and the integration of migrants; and, finally, promoting the existence of a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, guaranteeing harmony and stability. Among these points, the more controversial seems the one concerning the reduction of Russian nuclear arsenal aimed at preventing the risk of a global arm race: all the Great Powers, included Russia, often state that they support the reduction of weapons in general; however, most of the times, it is exactly the nuclear power that plays a major deterrence tool against other countries and guarantees, therefore, the status of Great Power. Anyway, if not drastically reduced, the Russian nuclear arsenal has already been limited by the requirements of the New START agreement signed in 2010 with the United States: a constant cooperation is, therefore, possible also in the nuclear sphere.

Shifting to economic issues, the main differences exists between documents written before 2012, the year of Russian adhesion to the World Trade Organization, and those written after that year. Even though the references to the respect of international rules is always inserted, in 2000 and 2008 Concepts we can see a more protectionist tendency, with a state willing to protect its goods from the risks of the open globalized market and the policies promoted by other states. Once joined the WTO, the FP Concept further stresses the proactive role that the Russian Federation wants to play in the creation of an equal and stable global economy, with the country willing to contribute to “*the efficiency of the multilateral trade system with the WTO at its core [...]*”.¹⁴⁵ In this section, a very constant element is the Kremlin’s concerns toward the diversification of national economy that, despite the huge revenues guaranteed by energy exports, must be addressed by the government as urgently as possible. The diversification of the economy is linked to the modernization of the country’s infrastructures and the development of R&D and S&T sectors – already analysed in the second chapter – to achieve which it is necessary to attract foreign investment and, especially in the current regime of sanctions, convince foreign companies to localise in Russia and bring their know-how: if Russia wants to grow fast and create a dynamic business environment, it needs the help of foreign – mostly Western – knowledge. These elements are mentioned in every Foreign Policy Concept, while in 2013 and 2016 the economic sphere is integrated with an important reference to the geographical role of the Russian Federation in relation to world trade: indeed, the country must act “*to benefit from its unique geographic location by increasing transit cargo shipments with a view to facilitating the development of trade and economic relations between Europe and the Asia-Pacific*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Region".¹⁴⁶ The reference to the role of Russia as bridge between Asia and Europe is functional to the country's increasing influence in Central Asia, in cooperation with China after the foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the creation of the New Silk Road. The subsection ends with some statements related to healthcare, sea navigation safety and environmental issues: Russia is fully involved in the fight against climate change and strongly supports the Paris Agreement signed in 2015 (as we can read in the 2016 Concept); moreover, the country contributes to the efforts made by the World Health Organization and is engaged in the struggle against sea piracy.

Continuity in foreign policy objectives exists also in the subsection dedicated to international humanitarian cooperation and human rights: hosting more than 185 different ethnic groups inside its borders¹⁴⁷, the Russian Federation has always been tolerant before minorities and the protection of human rights is particularly important in relation to Russian citizens abroad. In 2016 Concept, indeed, the message is clear: Russia acts "*to ensure the protection of rights and legitimate interests of Russian nationals abroad subject to international law and international treaties concluded by the Russian Federation*".¹⁴⁸ According to its foreign policy doctrine, Russia is willing to promote a fruitful cooperation in human rights sphere, enhancing dialogue among civilizations; however, the documents clearly underline that this cooperation could encounter limits in case of attempts by other countries to interfere in other nations' affairs by using human rights issues or violations as pretext for interventions. In this regard, while in 2013 FP Concept is more focused on cooperation and the interference by other states is not mentioned, the 2016 document is more similar to the 2008 doctrine, where references to the imposition of foreign values deal with "*democratic transformations*" imposed through "*borrowed value systems*".¹⁴⁹ In 2016, the Russian position on this matter is even more unequivocal: the aim is "*to counter attempts to use human rights theories to exert political pressure and interfere in internal affairs of States, including with a view to destabilizing them and overthrowing legitimate governments*".¹⁵⁰ In both cases, the reference is on United States, the attempts of which to export Western values are not accepted by Russia. Finally, as mentioned before, in all the documents the same attention is dedicated to the protection of rights of Russian citizens – in particular children – living abroad and to the support of Russian language and culture.

¹⁴⁶ 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ IndexMundi, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁵⁰ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

3.3.4. Section IV: Regional Priorities

The section dedicated to regional priorities is shorter than the previous one, but equally important in terms of contents. Furthermore, this is also the section where continuity among documents is more evident. The Foreign Policy Concepts analyse each region in the following order, with the only difference that, in 2000 and 2008 documents, Africa was inserted before Latin America:¹⁵¹

1. Countries part of the post-Soviet space: CIS, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), CSTO, Ukraine, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia;
2. Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions;
3. Western countries: European Union, OSCE members, NATO, United States, Canada, Balkan states and members of the Arctic Council;
4. Asia Pacific region: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ASEAN, China, India, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Indochina, Australia and New Zealand;
5. Middle Eastern and Northern African countries: Iraq, Israel, Iran, Syria, Palestine, Arab League, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Lebanon;
6. Latin-Central American countries: MERCOSUR members, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and others.;
7. African countries: African Union members and all African states.

Among the regions, the most relevant for Russia is certainly the post-Soviet space, including countries both in Europe and Asia¹⁵² and often called “Small Eurasia”, an area including the following countries and major Russian regional subsystem: Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Together with strong cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties, these countries – especially Belarus and Ukraine – share with Russia a common historical past, first in the frame of the Russian Empire and later within the Soviet Union. Russia has many times demonstrated to believe having an exclusive influence in this region, an influence declined in different spheres, from the military to the economic. While the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Union State with Belarus represent the Russian political will to play a key role in the post-Soviet space, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and, on the other hand, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) represent, respectively, the Russian military and economic hand in the region. These tools are, for Russia, useful to perceive a set of goals: preserving the cultural heritage of Slavic civilization, guaranteeing the rights of Russian citizens

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁵² Dyner A. M., 2016.

living in the CIS space, maintaining a strong military presence, building solid economic ties under Russian hegemony and manage frozen conflicts and threats in unstable regions such as the Caucasus and Central Asia. Dealing with Caucasus, indeed, in comparison with 2000 and 2008 documents, the 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states: of course, this recognition will not be beneficial for relations with Georgia, which claims those regions as legitimate parts of its territory and it is looking more assertively towards a partnership with both the EU and NATO. The Caucasus is a region of concern also due to its strategic importance.¹⁵³ a natural defence of Russian borders thanks to the rugged terrain and an important buffer with Turkey and Iran. In this sense, holding Chechnya and Dagestan fighting Islamic extremism is a core goal for Moscow. Furthermore, differences exist between 2013 and 2016 document concerning the status of Ukraine, CIS member until 2014. In the old Foreign Policy Concept, Ukraine was perceived by Russia as a key partner in the Commonwealth of Independent States, while in the new one there is a reference to the Russian will to cooperate with other countries to achieve a peaceful resolution of Ukrainian internal conflict: evidently, relations with Kiev are much colder and more deteriorated than before.¹⁵⁴

The second most important region for Russia is Europe. The fact that the Caspian and Black Sea regions come before Europe in the list is due to the geographical position of those seas, which are attached to Russian borders and represent a small part of Russian national waters. Developments in this region must be addressed carefully especially in the framework of a stable commercial cooperation among countries (Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Kazakhstan) and a fair and equal exploitation of natural resources. In comparison with Black Sea and Caspian Sea countries, the relationships with Western states are much more tense and delicate, in particular after the events that took place between 2014 and 2016.¹⁵⁵ The serious deterioration of Russia-EU relations is very well expressed in the 2016 FP Concept, where Russia stopped considering itself as a European state, at least formally. This is a very strong signal towards the European Union and the whole Western world. Indeed, in this document sentences referring to the European nature of Russia have been deleted: “*Priority is given to relations with the Euro-Atlantic states which, besides geography, economy and history, have common deep-rooted civilizational ties with Russia.*” And again: “*In its relations with the European Union, the main task for Russia as an integral and inseparable part of European civilization is to promote creating a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific*”.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Russia keeps considering Europe as a key trade, economic and foreign policy partner and it is interested in improving relations with Brussels despite the

¹⁵³ Friedman G., 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Dyner A. M., 2016.

¹⁵⁵ Stent A., 2014.

¹⁵⁶ 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

difficulties (in this regard, the reciprocal obstacles in the visa regime are seen as one of the most negative points). Among European partners, the Foreign Policy Concept mentions explicitly Italy, Germany, Spain and France, demonstrating the strong economic and political ties existing with the Russian Federation. The United States and Canada are also mentioned in this section: while the second is an important partner for dialogue related to the Arctic region – the relevance of which has increased in the new version due to its strategic position and its natural resources – the first one is a key player in world affairs and, therefore, it is expected to seek cooperation with the Russian Federation on all the most urgent issues, from terrorism to nuclear security.

Concerning Atlantic and Communitarian organizations, in all the documents seems that the Kremlin considers the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as more essential than NATO for European security: the attention on NATO in the last version is, indeed, reduced.¹⁵⁷ After all, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization led by the United States is seen as a menace by Russia¹⁵⁸: “*The Russian Federation maintains its negative perspective towards NATO’s expansion, the Alliance’s military infrastructure approaching Russian borders, and its growing military activity in regions neighbouring Russia, viewing them as a violation of the principle of equal and indivisible security and leading to the deepening of old dividing lines in Europe and to the emergence of new ones.*”¹⁵⁹ The Russian opinion on NATO is further underlined by a statement on countries choosing not to join any military alliance, which, according to Russia, give a fair contribution to European security.

Regarding the other regions, the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East are much more important for Russia than Africa and Latin America, where the Russian presence is politically, military and economically scarce. Due to the political tensions with the West and the economic and financial sanctions, the Asia-Pacific is becoming year by year more important for Russia, especially in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation with China. Indeed, “*Russia attaches importance to further strengthening the SCO’s role in regional and global affairs and expanding its membership, and stands for increasing the SCO’s political and economic potential, and implementing practical measures within its framework to consolidate mutual trust and partnership in Central Asia [...].*”¹⁶⁰ China represents a valuable trade partner also for the development of Siberian and Eastern regions, which are in constant need of investment to build infrastructure and civil facilities. For this reason, in the Concepts China is always mentioned as a key partner of cooperation in all areas. The second most important Asian country to cooperate with is India, one of the biggest customer of

¹⁵⁷ Dyner A. M., 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Stent A., 2014.

¹⁵⁹ 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Russian military industry, while Japan – with which the territorial dispute on Kuril Islands is still open – occupies the third position ahead of South and North Korea, where Russia supports a *détente* and a de-escalation on nuclear weapons.

The Middle East has become increasingly important after the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, so there is a difference between 2013 FP Concept and the 2016 FP Concept. While in the first one there is no precise paragraph dedicated to Syria, in the second one the Russian support to the government of the Syrian Republic is evident: “*Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic and pluralistic State with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights and opportunities.*”¹⁶¹ However, Russia does not express its direct support to Bashar al-Assad, preferring to maintain a balanced approach by seeking a resolution to the crisis: “*Russia stands for a political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future*” according to the UN framework. In this case, by directly intervening in the Syrian war, Russia violated one of the remarks made in 2013 doctrine: the non-interference in internal affairs of Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless, the different view of the Syrian crisis (respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity) in comparison with Western powers is an element of continuity in the document, as well as the concerns related to the situation in Afghanistan, where the withdrawal of most NATO troops in 2014 has exposed Russia and CIS countries to a serious security threat, even if the country is likely to remain in the Russian sphere of influence.¹⁶² In 2016 Concept, Russia expresses the will to cooperate with its Eurasian allies in order to stabilise the country, enhance the security of the region, contrast terrorism and fight against arm and drug trafficking. Finally, the Kremlin expresses, in 2013 and 2016 documents, its support to the nuclear agreement with Iran regulated by UN Security Council resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015.

3.4. Final remarks on the Foreign Policy Concept: thinking as a Great Power

Reading the Foreign Policy Concepts presented in the previous paragraphs, the first remark we can do is that the main guidelines of Russian international behaviour, characterised by an evident structural continuity in the documents and showing a country with a Great Power mentality, derive from the structure proposed and created by the same man, Yevgeny Primakov, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1996 to 1998 and the main promoter of Russia’s Great Power status restoration before Vladimir Putin. If in the early 1990s, dominated by the filo-American foreign policy doctrine of

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Friedman G., 2009.

Minister Andrey Kozyrev, Russia was looking more to the West hoping to receive economical support, the arrival of Mr. Primakov at the Ministry was a fundamental turning point for Russian doctrine. Followed later by Vladimir Putin in his policy, Primakov understood that Russia had the necessity not to concentrate only on one direction, but on both East and West. Central Asia was perceived as a core region for Russia, where, together with economic interests (natural resources, transportation routes), there are also many real and possible threats (arms trafficking, drug trafficking, WMDs proliferation, political instability, terroristic diffusion). Because of that, Russia needed and still needs to secure its borders by cooperating with its neighbours. It is not only a matter of commercial or political advantages, but also and mostly a matter of national security, since the instability of these countries could affect Russian internal equilibrium, leading to religious and ethnic conflicts¹⁶³. The Kremlin sees the creation of a Central-Asian subsystem as a source of stability for the future¹⁶⁴, as it considers CIS countries as its main priority in every document we have analysed: this continuity is the proof of a clear national strategy to defend precise interests.

The pillars of the Russian national strategy are stable as well: the reliance on the UN Security Council as the only legitimate regulator of international politics and use of force; the support to international organizations able to promote peace and security, as the OSCE; the perception of a multi-polar world where emerging powers are increasing their potentials and where the balance is shifting towards East due to the Western decline; the protection of human rights at all costs; the fight against international threats like illegal trafficking and terrorism; the respect of national sovereignty and the condemnation of foreign interference on the basis of alleged human rights violations.

This set of principles is often very similar to the values promoted by the West, even if the condemnation of foreign interference is the clear demonstration of Russian disapproval of European and American policies in unstable areas as the Middle East and Northern Africa. The relationships with the West are, indeed, another constant element of the Foreign Policy Concepts, which slightly change their content according to the development of EU/US-Russia relations periodically. Starting from the fact that the European Union is, for Russia, a key partner in several spheres, the strengthening of bilateral cooperation is always the main goal, sometimes easier to achieve and sometimes very complicated to accomplish due to political tensions. In all the documents, similarities with European security priorities and major threats are several, especially regarding international menaces like terrorism and illegal trafficking. Cooperation and strategic partnership are needed also in the energy field, where advantages can be reciprocal: Europe needs an amount of oil and gas that only Russia can provide at accessible prices, while Russia needs a stable customer to keep its huge energy

¹⁶³ Brzezinski Z., 1997.

¹⁶⁴ Lukyanov F., 2012.

revenues. Reading the documents, we can understand that, from the Russian part, opportunities for a constructive dialogue with Brussels exist despite the difficulties and the numerous fields of contrast (EU enlargement, Third Energy Package, Ukrainian crisis, Syrian war, alleged violations of human rights etc.). Indeed, despite still citing, in 2016 Concept, the implementation of a visa-free regime with Europe and the will to promote a joint fight against terrorism, the document has been modified in the wake of tensions in Ukraine and Syria: while in the 2013 Concept Russia defined itself as an “*organic part of the European civilization*”, in the new Concept this reference is absent.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, if the relations with European institutions are tense, the Kremlin is trying to strengthen better bilateral relations with some key European actors, which are always mentioned in the Concepts: Germany, France, Italy and Spain. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis has seriously compromised the relationships with the European Union: in the 2016 EU’s Global Strategy, we can read that “*Russia’s violation of international law and the destabilisation of Ukraine, on top of protracted conflicts in the wider Black Sea region, have challenged the European security order at its core.*”¹⁶⁶ The European Union will clearly not accept the Russian interference in Eastern countries’ affairs, but Brussels’ attitude towards Moscow is more appeasing and reconciling than the American one: indeed, while condemning Russian behaviour, the EU also recognises that there is an interdependence with the Kremlin and, therefore, it will “*engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when [...] interests overlap.*”

Concerning the Western world, the relationship with the United States is even more complicated, since the coincidence of interests between the two countries is less evident in comparison with Europe, which is the most important among Russia’s neighbours. The arrival of Donald Trump at the White House, despite the encouraging hints during the Presidential campaign, is an element of uncertainty, particularly in delicate scenarios like the Syrian war, where a cooperation seems very difficult. In any case, while Europe is a key partner on the regional level, the United States are key partners on the global level, forcing Russia to seek dialogue at any cost: in the Concepts, we can note that the Kremlin always adopt a benevolent and constructive attitude towards Washington, even if it does not renounce to rebuke the White House in the presence of evident disagreements. These tensions are well expressed also in the American National Defense Strategy released in 2015, where the Russian Federation is seen as a menace for international security: “*While Russia has contributed in select security areas, such as counternarcotics and counterterrorism, it also has repeatedly demonstrated that it does not respect the sovereignty of its neighbors and it is willing to use force to achieve its goals. Russia’s military actions are undermining regional security directly*

¹⁶⁵ Kureev A., 2016.

¹⁶⁶ European Union Global Strategy, 2016.

*and through proxy forces.*¹⁶⁷ Moreover, since the United States clearly consider the Russian behaviour in Eastern Europe as aggressive and disrespectful of foreign national sovereignty, in this document Washington expresses the will to maintain and even enhance its commitment inside the NATO, a tendency that could be changed by the Trump administration. Given these premises, the future of US-Russia relations is more than uncertain and unpredictable.

Regarding the other regions, the main remarks are the following: first, concerning Middle East, the influence of Russia has grown after the military intervention in Syria, so that a peaceful resolution of the conflict passes compulsorily through a dialogue with the Moscow; second, since the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and in the framework of BRICS countries, the cooperation with China has become for Russia a priority, in particular after the introduction of Western sanctions, the development of the New Silk Road across Central Asia and the socio-economic difficulties in the Eastern regions of the country (for example Zabaykalsk, Amur, Khabarovsk and Primorsky): Asia-Pacific has increased its importance within Russian national interests. In both cases, indeed, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept differs a lot from the 2013 Concept, where Syria is not mentioned directly as a Russian priority and the role of China is slightly less relevant than later. About the relationships with Beijing, the new Concept is much more assertive.

All things considered, the presence of several areas of interest and precise foreign policy objectives is not only the proof of continuity in Russian thinking as a Great Power, but also the demonstration that the Russian Federation views itself as a separate entity in comparison with the West, willing to promote its own values, its own perception of world order and defend its own traditions and historical heritage in the contemporary globalised and multipolar asset. On the other hand, however, the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia shows, in all its versions, the sincere will of the Kremlin to cooperate actively with other actors to create a more stable and secure world.

¹⁶⁷ U.S. National Defense Strategy, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Foreign policy results: present and future concerns

At the beginning of this research, we assumed that, in the last seventeen years, the Russian Federation has evidently recovered the status of Great Power in the contemporary geopolitical scenario, a status that both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union possessed in the past. The fundamental requirement to prove this assumption was to elaborate a definition of this concept, a task widely developed in the first chapter: as shown, the attempts to define Great Powers have been numerous in the history of international relations, even if not always satisfying from the analytical point of view. In this regard, difficulties and obstacles are many, either using consensus criteria or capabilities criteria: every author presented adopts his own parameters of definition, attempting to enlist certain characteristics proper of Great Powers. The list used in this research, reported in chapter one, summarises the findings of these authors, trying to provide the reader with a definition as precise as possible. The core remark of this list is the evident difference between material and non-material features or capabilities, which are equally important in the evaluation of a country's status of Great Power and, at the same time, equally affect its influence on world politics.

Basing on these features, we have maintained that a country can be considered a Great Power only if it satisfies the following conditions:

- first, it proves to have a strong potential and bases in core spheres like territory, natural resources, demography, economy, military, education and technology, which are all material features: in this case, we have demonstrated that Russia has certainly more strengths than weaknesses. The wide territory, the immense natural resources, the strong military warfare and the high standards of education are the strongest points for Russia and, probably, will represent in the future the bases upon which strengthening the country's importance at the international level. On the other hand, difficulties and uncertainties persist in spheres such as economy, where the excessive dependence on energy revenues risk to paralyse the development of other strategic sectors despite the program of import substitution, research and development of technologies, which is hampered by low investments and bureaucratic obstacles, and demography, where Russia risks to suffer the expansion of neighbouring countries, especially the one of China in the Far Eastern regions of the state.
- Second, a Great Power must be in possession of non-material features that are related to the concept of tradition to act globally previously mentioned in the research. Conducting autonomously both domestic and foreign policies, protecting vital interests, being capable to

exert influence on world politics, having a solid historical tradition to act beyond national borders and obtaining the recognition of other countries as a major player are all requirements that Russia has, especially following the recent developments in Ukraine and Syria, where the Kremlin managed to catch the attention of Western powers and gain the role of indispensable partner in global issues.

Together with these features, the comparison with other Great Powers presented in the second chapter further demonstrates Russia's compatibility with this status. Beyond material capabilities, being at the same time member of the UN Security Council, member of the G-20 and the most important member of BRICS countries with China, the Russian Federation has also the necessary international recognition of being a Great Power, confirming the tradition to act globally discussed previously in the research.

A tradition, as seen, deeply rooted in Russian historical heritage since the very beginning of the country's international behaviour. The idea of a great Russian nation, ready to conquer new territories and unify the Slavic civilization around Europe and Asia, find its bases, on the one hand, in the expansionist policy promoted by Empress Catherine the Great in the second half of the 18th century and, on the other hand, in the ideology formulated by authors like Danilevskiy, Dostoevsky and Solovyov during the 19th century, in the wake of the Slavophil awakening. The history of Russia, both in the Imperial era and in the Soviet one, has always been the history of a great country. Since the unification of Russian independent states under the leadership of the Principality of Moscow in the 15th century, Russia has increased decade by decade its power on a huge area, which goes from the Far East to the European Black Sea. Its territorial dimension allowed Russia to become one of the biggest entities of the world bringing, on the other hand, important commitments in the areas under its control, especially concerning security of borders. However, from its territorial largeness derives also a sort of existential problem, regarding the nature of its soul: European country, Asian country or rather a bridge between Europe and Asia? In the third chapter, we have seen that the 19th century debate between Westerners and Slavophiles, integrated by the more recent ideas concerning Eurasianism and Eurasia, has tried to find an answer to this question, building the Russian national identity on the following pillars: orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. Three pillars that, year by year, would have formed the imperialistic and international character of the Russian country, building the Great Power conscience that we can observe today in Moscow's behaviour in world politics. Therefore, Russia did not start to think as a Great Power only at the end of the 1990s, but it had always been seeking the accomplishment of ambitious and universal foreign policy objectives: being a Great Power is not a novelty of the recent years, but rather something related to the soul and the identity of Russia and its citizens. Moreover, the references inserted in the official documents related to foreign

policy and security demonstrates the sincere will of the Russian government to rely, also in the contemporary era, on these principles and traditional bases. For example, in the 2015 National Security Strategy we can read that the “*traditional Russian spiritual and moral values are being revived. A proper attitude toward Russia's history is being shaped in the rising generation. We are seeing the consolidation of civil society around the common values that shape the foundations of statehood such as Russia's freedom and independence, humanism, interethnic peace and accord, the unity of the cultures of the Russian Federation's multiethnic people, respect for family and faith traditions, and patriotism.*”¹⁶⁸ The same concepts are repeated several times in the Foreign Policy Concepts analysed in the previous chapter, where the governmental support to traditional values and Russian identity is even more evident. The attempts, led by a pro-Western leadership during the 1990s, to promote liberal values in Russia in the aftermath of the failure of the Communist ideology failed to achieve this goal, paving the way for an assertive return to patriotism, state nationalism and traditional values supported by the majority of citizens, in the framework of a cultural confrontation with the Western interference.

Nevertheless, as it seems today, it is impossible to affirm whether Russia is a European or an Asian state, since from Moscow to Vladivostok there are hundreds of different cultures, different habits and different resources, all brought together by the common element of Russian language, reminding the exceptional strength of Russian education. The fact that the expansion of the Russian Empire began in Eastern Europe does not mean that Russia has always maintained only European political, economic, cultural and social features: even when the administration is massively centralized, the central power inevitably absorbs elements from the societies it rules on. We can say, instead, that Russia constitutes a separate and unique civilization, including several elements from Europe and Asia, even if far from being a bridge between the two continents. Despite having been built on the interaction among European and Asian features and traditions, Russia has now completed the process of identity formation, becoming a unique and independent entity.

It is on these premises that the Russian leadership has always based its foreign policy goals and interests, paving the way for the modern strategy adopted by the Kremlin. After the advent of Vladimir Putin, it seems that Russia has well overcome the initial shock of loss of influence caused by the fall of the USSR in 1991. Together with the recovery of its traditional self-confidence, Russia appears in the international scenario as a Great Power on the rise, also because the unipolar world dominated by the United States is turning towards a multipolar asset where the balance of powers depends on the will of several countries, convinced that they can play a key role in world politics. Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war, where the Middle East has always been an American

¹⁶⁸ National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, 2015.

sphere of influence, demonstrates that international relations are changing rapidly: paradoxically, in such a scenario, uncertainty is the only certainty we have. Because of its traditional high profile policy in international issues, Russia strongly wants to participate in the stabilization of this and other scenarios, promoting the cooperation with all the actors willing to build a safe world.¹⁶⁹ Russian policy is multi-dimensional by definition, since its soul is multicultural and includes, as mentioned before, elements from two continents. The Kremlin understood that, in such a globalized world, even problems must be faced globally and collectively: cooperation with other states is essential and Russia is demonstrating to have all the means and the willpower to promote it, as Mr Putin said at the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 28th, 2015.¹⁷⁰ In this regard, the biggest difference with the Western countries seems the approach to fulfil this objective:¹⁷¹ while the West defends the principle of self-determination of people, justifying military intervention to protect human rights, Russia instead supports the sovereignty of the States, an unalienable value that should never be violated. It is not a clash of civilizations or a war between two ideologies – as it was during the Cold War – but rather a different way to perceive international relations.

After years of political inhibition, in 2000 Russia knew a crucial turning point, re-adopting a dynamic and resourceful foreign policy.¹⁷² Overall, in the past decade, Russian foreign policy managed to achieve important goals, above all the restoration of Great Power status for the country and its military capability, which is now much more evident than before. This renewed status is confirmed by the recent Russian behaviour before the Western moves in Eastern Europe and Middle East that, in the first decade of the present century, had consisted in very assertive and, according to some, disrespectful of national sovereignty policies. Despite at heavy cost, Russia managed to contain the expansion of Western alliances and institutions towards its sphere of influence, trying to discourage Americans and Europeans to operate massive inclusions as happened between 2004 and 2007, when almost all the ex-Communist countries of Eastern Europe joined either the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (or even both).¹⁷³ As mentioned several times in the research, Eastern Europe, as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia, are vital areas for the Russian national security and they must remain, if not under the complete influence of the Kremlin, at least neutral or buffer zones that protect the Federation from potential external threats like NATO, which is actually considered a real menace by the Russian National Security Strategy released in 2015: “*The build-up of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the*

¹⁶⁹ Pavlovsky G., 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Putin V., speech at the plenary meeting of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Brzezinski Z., 1997.

¹⁷² Baunov A., 2015.

¹⁷³ Karaganov S., 2016.

endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security."¹⁷⁴ NATO and EU expansions have not certainly been beneficial for the development of Russia-West relations, causing growing tensions that are unlikely to decrease in the near future. After the good premises, inherent to the New START agreement signed in 2010, the years 2011-2013 saw a gradual deterioration of these relationships in the wake of popular protests in Moscow against Putin's administration and the confrontation related to civil wars in Libya, Syria and, later, Ukraine. Being the peaceful and diplomatic dialogue between Moscow and the Brussels-Washington tandem unfruitful, Russia changed strategy after the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, including de facto the Crimean peninsula in the federal territories on the basis of a contested referendum and, more than one year later, intervening militarily in Syria in order to interrupt the condition of isolation organised by the Western countries to punish Russia for the Ukrainian dossier. The results of this policy have been, after all, positive for Russia:¹⁷⁵ first, the West has been forced to consider the Kremlin as an indispensable partner for dialogue in crisis scenarios and international issues; second, the Russian demonstration of force in Crimea and Syria has conferred to the country a more respectable image, posing the basis for a mutual respectful dialogue with the West. A dialogue hampered by a series of political and cultural biases: the different systems of values, the continuous Western attempts to export its development models also in other countries' influence areas, the military, diplomatic and economic weakness of Russia until the early 2000s, the initial Kremlin's will to import liberal structures from America and Europe, and the mismatch of interests in some regional scenarios. The challenge for the future will be to avoid a further deterioration of the relationships and, above all, prevent the burst of a new and more dangerous Cold War (already named by some "New Cold War" or "Cold War II").¹⁷⁶

At the same time, menaces and threats come from the post-Soviet world both in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where Russia must act in order to prevent dangerous conflicts along its borders as happened in 2014 in Ukraine – a scenario that, nevertheless, is likely to remain a frozen conflict for the next decades or to face further disintegration. The Ukrainian civil war is certainly the worst case of degradation in the post-Soviet space, where every actor involved has its responsibilities: first, the Ukrainian leadership has demonstrated its incompetence in managing the country's economic situation and social turmoil; second, the European Union's will to include Ukraine in its sphere of

¹⁷⁴ National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Karaganov S., 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Trenin D., 2014.

influence by signing an association agreement gave a crucial contribution to the destabilization of the state and the explosion of the civil war; third, the Russian Federation tried to compensate a confused Ukraine strategy with attempts to obtain the collaboration of the Ukrainian élite through the proposition of cheaper energy supply and, moreover, did not take into consideration the will of many Ukrainians to distance themselves from Russia. Thus, Ukraine is, and will be for a long time, an element of uncertainty and instability for the development of Russia-EU relations.

Concerning Eurasia, the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, the strengthening of the CSTO and the SCO are all tools useful for consolidation and stability around Russian border and the beginning of an economic and political turn towards East, derived not only by the necessity to counterbalance Western sanctions but also to support the development of forgotten regions in Eastern Siberia. However, as the other regions of interest, also Eurasia contains both opportunities and risks. Talking about risks, the major one has been already mentioned before: Islamic terrorism. The implementation of Eurasian project can be, in fact, slackened by an increase of Islamic extremism due to the raise of influence of the Islamic State, which can actually find many supporters in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. Many terroristic attacks have already been prevented in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kirghizstan and the situation can worsen in the future. Besides, the presence of terrorists in the Eurasian area would impede the movement of people and make the borders much more controlled: Eurasian integration would, in this case, pay the price. Furthermore, the economic growth of these areas within the Economic Union could influence the possible spread of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia: the intensity of growth will, indeed, lead many young people in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan towards the jihadist ideology or towards the search for better work conditions in Russia, where the use of unqualified labor force is diffused in many sectors, from construction to public services.

In relation to economic development, even if constructive policies must be adopted also towards actors like India and Iran, the partnership with Beijing is the main requirement, both in the frameworks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB): the agreement signed by Russia and China in May 2015 for integration between the New Silk Road and the EAEU is, despite the lack of practical results, the demonstration of a reciprocal will to cooperate. Greater cooperation with China is a core dimension of Russian foreign and economic policy, in particular regarding joint projects aiming to boost Far-Eastern railways and to connect the Silk Road Economic Belt with infrastructure plans programmed by the Eurasian Economic Union: to achieve important results, the two countries will have to set long-term co-development goals, currently hampered by a veiled – but evident – economic and commercial rivalry in Central Asia.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Karaganov S., 2016.

Nevertheless, Eurasian Integration and partnership with China will probably not be able to replace Russia collaboration with the EU, especially because the economic implications of these economic relations are deeply different. While Eurasian integration is about harmonizing the economies of member states that are at similar level of development, the cooperation with the European Union has been always asymmetric and characterized by structural differences between the Russian economic system and the European one. Besides, the Eurasian Economic Union is clearly not useful for Russia to modernize technologically, even if it could be useful to find new markets and reduce transport expenses, as well as to find new consumers of hydrocarbons in the Asia-Pacific region – China and Vietnam above all¹⁷⁸. Although it will be very difficult to reduce the impact of sanctions simply turning toward East, Russia seems to have no alternatives in this sense: it must focus on internal development – especially trying to diversify its economic system as much as possible – and look for opportunities abroad, both to the West and to the East. On this behalf, Asia can be for sure an important resource for Russia, since many of these countries are hunting new sources of growth: the Kremlin can be one of the major suppliers of Asian-Pacific demand.

Another scenario where the country is directly involved is the Middle East – and, less, Northern Africa – where Russian policies aimed at fighting Islamic terrorism and stabilizing the region have been incisive and, to some extent, effective. Above all, Russian dynamicity in these regions, together with assertiveness in Eastern Europe, has contributed to the strengthening of Moscow's position in world politics as a Great Power. In the Syrian scenario, the objectives of the coalition led by the USA and Russian intervention were different from the beginning of the war against the Caliphate in 2014. Military operations launched by NATO members and Gulf States have not been very effective and, so far, have also damaged Assad's forces: it is clear that Western countries and Arab states do not want a Syria governed by its current leader. Currently, despite the poor results obtained by the Geneva talks in all its rounds, all the actors involved in the conflict are trying to reach an agreement on the future of Syria and much will depend on the result of air raids in the Middle East: if, on the one hand, Mr. Trump's advent to the White House could carry changes in America Syrian strategy, on the other hand the major initiative towards a stable peace seems in the hand of the Russians, backed in their action by Iran and Turkey (see the Astana meetings on Syria held between January and March 2017). In the wake of its strong military presence in Syria, Russian geopolitical position has evidently improved and the intervention decided in September 2015 has proven to be a smart political move by

¹⁷⁸ Timofeev A., Alekseenkova E., 2015.

the Kremlin.¹⁷⁹ The main goals of the intervention, whose benefits can be observed now, were mainly the following:¹⁸⁰

- Russia has intervened to support its ally Bashar al-Assad against ISIS and rebels. Since Western intervention, at that time, had not led yet to a serious withdrawal of jihadists, in the Russian analysis, Syria risked to follow the fate of Libya, with IS eventually win and conquer Damascus.
- Russia intervened to eliminate the Islamic State, which is a great menace for Russian security due, mainly, to two facts. Firstly, ISIS is a global jihadist organization that looks to all Muslim-populated areas, including those belonging to the Russian Federation or along its borders (Central Asian countries, North Caucasus, Tatarstan). An eventual collapse of these countries would lead to a regional crisis with uncontrollable territories and Islamic militias spread everywhere, difficult to fight due to the geographical nature of the Central Asian and Caucasian lands: this scenario would look like the Afghani one. Secondly, many Muslim fighters left Russian territories or neighbouring territories to fight in Iraq and Syria for ISIS: soon, these jihadists can come back home and make troubles there, where the political stability is already fragile. It is clearly easier and cheaper to fight terrorists in the Middle East rather than along national borders. To successfully continue its campaign in Syria, Russia should be very careful in dealing with Islam as a religion, since the cooperation with Iran and Iraq will inevitably lead to stronger bonds with Shiite regimes. It does not mean that Vladimir Putin took a side in the Sunni-Shia conflict, but risks of a Sunni revenge are still high.
- Russia intervention aimed at exiting from the diplomatic isolation created after the Crimean issue: thus, a new channel of dialogue with the West is now open. If in Eastern Europe Russia is trying to protect its interests against the enlargement of NATO, in the Middle East the Kremlin wanted to demonstrate that it can play a relevant role in the fight against ISIS, as well as the Americans. Military deployment in Syria has proven to be very effective and Russia has demonstrated to the whole world that it can intervene also in an area traditionally monopolized by American presence after 2003. If NATO countries and Gulf States want to fight ISIS, they must do it together with Russia: maybe with different goals, but now Russian presence is well established and it cannot be ignored.

Politically speaking, for all the reasons mentioned above, the Russian intervention in Syria was a genial move. In this case, Russian foreign policy has brought positive consequences and results to the

¹⁷⁹ Gaiani G., 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Trenin D., 2015.

Russian nation, representing an important milestone in the process of Great Power status re-acquisition, started with the first Putin's presidency and now completed.

Russian dynamicity as Great Power is evident also in the Arctic region, where the melting ice caused by climate change could open, soon, new commercial routes in the Arctic sea and new possibilities to exploit the existent natural resources. Even if Arctic drillings are still low developed, the decrease of traditional oil and gas natural reserves will probably lead countries to improve their techniques to exploit these deep deposits. The Russian Federation and the United States are, also in this case, the two main actors playing a relevant role in the Arctic game. Russia is still behind the USA and Europe in terms of technological capabilities, but Russian presence in the region is, due to its geographical extension, massive. Moreover, its military build-up is impressive: together with four new brigades and 14 new operational airfields, Russia recently built 16 ports and 40 icebreakers, with an additional 11 under construction.¹⁸¹ In the future, the features of this "Arctic race" will be the following¹⁸²: the discovery of new gas deposits, which will be useful when the energy demand will grow again; technological development, which makes these resources more accessible, increasing competition among countries; the competition related to fishing reserves of the Arctic sea; and the global warming, which widely menaces the existence of Arctic populations, contributes, on the other hand, to make this region more accessible for industrial activities. All these factors combined, will probably make the Arctic one of the most troubled scenarios of upcoming international relations.

In all the aforementioned scenarios, Russia plays a key role. Its foreign policy doctrine demonstrates that the country thinks and acts as a Great Power, ready to use hard power when necessary and always available for a fair a fruitful confrontation with Asian, American or European counterparts. Despite having a global and universal vocation, as proven by the messianic mission of its historical identity, the contemporary Russia seems more concentrated on its neighbourhood, focusing on opportunities and threats developing along national borders. The protection of borders is based on a few, simple pillars that constitute the core of Russian foreign policy and security strategy: maintain peace and stability in neighbouring countries; control and possibly contain the expansion of Western institutions and military alliances (NATO, EU); promote the Eurasian project and cooperate with China in order to enhance its influence in Asia and improve the development of Far Eastern regions; seek mutually beneficial and, when possible, non-conflictual dialogue with the United States and European countries; contribute as much as possible to the fight against global threats and to the creation of a more stable and peaceful world, respecting international rules expect in the case of

¹⁸¹ Gramer R., 2017.

¹⁸² Borresen J., 2012.

visible threat for Russian national interests (the Crimean dossier has shown that the Kremlin, before scenarios of uncertainty and danger, can easily intervene forcefully despite international principles).

These pillars will have to be adopted in a global scenario that, overall, is not very favourable for the Russian Federation, both economically and politically. At the same time, also national developments are going to put the Russian leadership under pressure: the demographic issue in the Far East will be very difficult to solve, massive investments will be necessary for technological improvement and urgent measures must be adopted to reduce the Russian dependency on oil and gas revenues. The entity of international potential passes compulsorily through the resolution of internal issues. For Moscow, the future will be full of challenges and unexpected developments, especially regarding the relationships with the West, which are unlikely to improve sharply soon: however, at least, thanks to the assertiveness of its foreign policy, Russia is now perceived as an important geopolitical partner by the EU and the USA, leaving space for a constructive dialogue in different spheres. In this sphere, the Russian Federation should be patient and build its ties with these countries slowly and carefully, hoping that the European Union will distance itself from the Atlantic axis after the Donald Trump's election at the White House. Also, in the upcoming years the Kremlin shall be prudent and play a smart game in global and regional issues, avoiding to be dragged into wars and conflicts that would only carry negative effects for the country: the involvement in Ukraine and Syria is already enough and the Great Power status has been reconquered successfully. The same attitude should be adopted to maintain good relationships with neighbouring countries and avoid frictions with them, especially in view of Russian interest in Central Asia and Caucasus: the Eurasian integration must be a priority for Moscow and should be built using the frameworks already created (the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), aimed at developing a thick network of energetic, commercial, civil and military infrastructures. The growth of Russian economy, even if strictly tied with Europe, passes also through the growth of Eurasian market. Finally, the maintenance of the national identity will be as important as the aforementioned priorities, since identity is the basis of foreign policy actions and the pillar of Russian behaviour at the international level. The contemporary world, highly dynamic and volatile, will bring rapid changes and difficult challenges, to face which Russia needs to rely in part also on its history and traditions: Kremlin's will to strengthen national identity is, indeed, one of the possible answers to stem the negative effects of globalised world and enhance security.

The recovery of Great Power status achieved during Putin's mandates will facilitate this task, allowing the Russian nation to forget the sufferings - and, to some extent, the humiliations - experienced after the fall of the Soviet Union and, therefore, to restore the historical tie existing between modern Russia and the Tsarist Empire of Peter I and Catherine II, passing through the

grandeur of the Communist time. A heritage that, however, should not be the means for the promotion of an aggressive foreign policy, but rather the basis to use Russia's influential position to cooperate with the concert of Great Powers in the commitment towards the creation of a solid, stable and peaceful world order.

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SUMMARY

Starting from 2014, the development of international relations has highlighted the important return of the Russian Federation as a prominent actor in many theatres, especially in Ukraine and Syria. Thanks to the strong political stability derived from the continuity of Putin's leadership and to a renewed dynamism in foreign policy, Russia became able, gradually, to break the diplomatic isolation in which it had fallen following the debated Crimean question, establishing itself as a fundamental interlocutor not only with regard to Eastern Europe, but also in relation to the fragile balances of the Middle East torn apart by the Syrian civil war and by the destructive action of the Islamic State. Taking into account the post-Soviet period, it is evident that the international role of Moscow has grown exponentially in importance: from the fragile and unstable Federation that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and survived among a thousand difficulties in the course of the Nineties, Russia has once again transformed into a great power, a status which, before 1991, had always had, both in the form of Tsarist empire and Socialist republic.

Even if, in this work, the two-year period 2014-2015 is indicated as the main moment of the Kremlin's return as the protagonist of international relations, the first signs of this radical change of role had appeared already in several occasions between 2008 and 2013. First, indeed, in summer 2008, Russia showed a certain assertiveness by intervening in favour of the populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia against Georgia, pushing the troops of president Mikhail Saakashvili to the gates of Tbilisi in the name of the right to self-determination of Ossetians and Abkhazians. Subsequently, in 2010, Medvedev led Russia to the signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty - known simply as the "New START" - in Prague, demonstrating an exceptional collaboration with the president of the United States Barack Obama: this agreement on the reduction of nuclear weapons, recalling the bilateral treaties in the field of armaments signed by Washington and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, meant not only the beginning of a more solid Russian-American cooperation, but also the Kremlin's intention to actively participate to the construction of a stable and peaceful global governance. Third, Russia has demonstrated the assertiveness of its foreign policy even in the context of the Libyan civil war, where, even though not using its veto power in the Security Council of the United Nations, it opposed firmly to the no-fly zone proposed and implemented by Western powers to cause the fall of Gaddafi's regime, the end of which has brought the collapse of the entire Libyan state. A determination repeated, in several occasions, even in the economic-commercial sphere, especially in relation to Asian countries, which represent a new horizon of expansion for the Russian business: the enhancement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2013 and the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, completed at the end of 2015, represent the

two pillars of the renewed Russian international dynamism in this region. However, although the significance of the aforementioned events is not negligible, the real turning point in Russia's international behaviour took place, as anticipated, in the period 2014-2015: first, with the controversial reconciliation of the Crimean peninsula and the support, direct or indirect, to the separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk; and secondly, with the massive military intervention in Syria to support the regime of Bashar al-Assad against the rebels and the Islamic State. Two decisions taken, at first, by the current president of the Federation, who, in the course of the analysis, will be presented as one of the main elements of continuity and strength of the country's foreign policy, especially thanks to the main objective that Vladimir Putin himself has tried to pursue since the beginning of his first mandate: the restoration of the great power role lost with the dissolution of the Ussr.

The assumption of the research proposed here precisely regards, in fact, this change of role carried out by the Federation under Putin's leadership and, in the years 2008-2012, by the current Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. To this end, the analysis was set according to a precise scheme, attentive to examine, at first, the theoretical principles that define the concept of "great power", which is the main object of the first chapter and a founding element of the neo-realist approach adopted here. The assumptions of the theory neorealist, in fact, are definitely the most suitable when it comes to great powers, since the power – be it political, economic or military – is considered the ratio of the functioning of international relations and, equally, the influence that individual states exert on the development of world politics is essential to the understanding of the same. Especially during the Twentieth century, many authors have written about this concept, trying to give a definition and, consequently, to identify which states of the world were possessing such a status. In this work several authors are mentioned, but the main contribution comes from the work of scholars such as Paul Kennedy, Jack S. Levy, Abraham F. K. Organski, David J. Singer, Kenneth Waltz, Hans Morgenthau, and Barry Buzan, whose elaborate allow us to identify, at the historical level, a group of eight countries that have always been considered great powers, i.e. the United States, Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany, Japan, China and Russia: further in the text, according to the definition of great power proposed in the first chapter, this list of states will be updated, considering the European Union as a single actor and adding emerging countries such as Brazil and India. Together with the above-mentioned authors, in order to carry out a research as much as possible transparent, objective and detailed, the writer has also used Russian sources, mainly written by Tatiana Shakleina, Fyodor Lukyanov, Andrey Bezrukov, Andrey Sushentsov and Sergey Markedonov: in fact, the differences between Western authors and Russian authors are often many, especially with regard to the interpretation of international relations. As anticipated, on the basis of these sources, the first chapter

of the dissertation tries to formulate a precise definition of “great power” by using two different criteria: the consensus among authors, which allows to verify, in a group of chosen scholars (Kennedy, Levy, Singer, Wight, Waltz and Organski), which countries are considered great powers in a given historical period (limited, in this case, between 1880 and 1980); and, secondly, the criterion of capabilities, or the characteristics making a state a great power on the international scene. In both cases, finding a widely shared definition will be very complicated, since all the authors taken into consideration often use subjective methods of evaluation and very different schemes of analysis: the only attempt to establish a scientific and precise method of definition is represented by the project “*Correlates of War*” led David J. Singer, whose conclusions are, however, hampered by some biases, above all a too dominant role given to the element of demography (such that China, for example, appears twice as powerful as Japan in the Thirties).

In the considered academic scenario, the Russian scholar Tatiana Shakleina tries to clarify the concept of great power, elaborating a definition that resumes all the features listed by the Western and Russian authors taken into account, highlighting, besides, a distinction already considered by Hans Morgenthau: the one between material characteristics, such as territory, size of military, population and economic potential, and non-material features, such as, for example, the ability to formulate an independent and assertive foreign policy, to protect national interests in the most relevant geopolitical scenarios and, when necessary, to influence the development of international relations. Consequently, on the basis of what analysed, a state can be considered a great power only if it satisfies the following conditions:

- first, it possesses some fundamental material characteristics:
 - (a) the territory;
 - (b) the natural resources;
 - (c) the economy;
 - (d) the military sector;
 - (e) the educational system;
 - (f) demography;
 - (g) technological development;
- second, it proves to have the above-mentioned non-material characteristics, synonymous of a strong foreign policy and proof of what Shakleina defines “*tradition to act globally*”, that is, for a country, the constancy to act at the international level as an undisputed protagonist.

Therefore, if a nation has these characteristics can be considered a great power. However, if, on the one hand, the material elements can be measured empirically (there are scientific data that demonstrate the extent of an examined feature), on the other hand non-material elements are difficult

to be evaluated on a scientific level, since there is no concrete data that measure, for example, the influence that a state exercises over a certain geopolitical scenario. It follows that, at least in part, the definition of great power cannot be separated from a purely subjective component, linked to the perception that the author has of international relations and their development: hence the need to consider and compare points of view that are both culturally and politically different.

In any case, the parameters analysed and summarized in the first chapter of the thesis are suitable to evaluate whether the Russian Federation has actually recovered its great power role possessed in the past, as stated at the beginning. Analysing the strengths and weaknesses of Russia in the material and non-material spheres is, indeed, fundamental to understand its potentialities and difficulties, which will inevitably directly affect the country's foreign policy and its international behaviour. Regarding the material characteristics, territory, natural resources, educational system and military are the most visible strengths for Russia, which, with a surface area of 17.125.191 km², is the largest country in the world. Despite the territorial dimensions carry a few difficulties for the central government – especially in terms of infrastructure development and defence – the Kremlin has always given proof of being able to easily keep under control all the regions of the country, thanks to an administrative system divided into local entities that are autonomous but, at the same time, indissolubly linked to Moscow and, moreover, that share an element of capital importance: the Russian language, which, conveyed through one of the world's highest literacy rates, has contributed and continues to contribute to the formation of a solid national identity, well rooted in every corner of the Federation. Along with the difficulties, however, the size of the territory entails a particular advantage: the presence of enormous quantities of various natural resources, especially fossil fuels, timber and minerals. Not surprisingly, Russia figures among the largest exporters of oil and natural gas in the world, holding about 5% of the global reserves of the first and even the 24% of the reserves of the second: Moscow's main customer in the energy sector is the European Union, a fact that provides Russia with a crucial geopolitical weight in the region.

The presence of natural resources is not, however, sufficient to ensure the role of great power: in order to be a protagonist on the international level, it is necessary to have a well-developed military and a solid economy. With regard to the first element, Russia is with no doubt a global leading power, disposing of the fifth highest military budget in the world and the largest nuclear arsenal. In terms of military potential, only the United States and, to a lesser extent, China may compete with the Kremlin, which enjoys strategic advantages in key regions for the future as the Arctic. Regarding, instead, the economy, this is an area where the country has always found several difficulties and still suffers from serious structural problems. The chronic dependence on energy revenues (which represent more than 60% of the total export), the excessive state control on the market and the almost total absence of a

middle class, together with insufficient investment in research and technology and a scarce business mentality, damage the development potential of the Federation, which, however, excluding 2009, 2014, 2015 and 2016, has always seen its GDP in constant growth over the last seventeen years. Although the forecasts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are substantially positive, the Russian economy needs radical structural reforms, and this sector is not certainly one of the major forces for the country. These reforms must be promoted also in the wake of the Western sanctions introduced following the Ukrainian crisis, since they seem deemed to persist for a long time and, therefore, should be considered as a constant in the Euro-Russian commercial framework.

The same applies for demography, the other thorn in the side of Putin's leadership. With a density of around 9 inhabitants per square kilometre, Russia is widely underpopulated, since most of the citizens are concentrated in the European part of the country and along the belt of industrialized cities that goes from Ekaterinburg to Vladivostok. In this regard, particularly serious are the relatively high mortality rate (the Russian one is in the world's top ten, exceeding that of many African countries), driven by the presence of numerous cardiovascular diseases, and a wobbly fertility rate, which, in 2016, proved to be much lower than that of 1990 (1.67 children per mother against 2.12). Population growth is, therefore, an absolute priority for Russia, because without a more incisive increase it will be difficult to sustain economic development and, secondly, to counter the demographic expansion of neighbouring countries like China that, along the Far-Eastern borders, threaten to create a too harmful imbalance for Moscow.

Nevertheless, in the context of the definition of great power, these weaknesses are well balanced by the presence of non-material features that are highly advantageous for Russia, linked to the tradition of acting on a global scale mentioned above. The conduct of an autonomous and goal-oriented foreign policy, the capacity to protect its interests beyond the national borders, the will to participate to the construction of a solid global system and the opportunity to exercise its geopolitical weight in different scenarios - thanks in part to the very important veto power that the Kremlin enjoys at the UN Security Council - are all elements that the Federation possesses, or, better, has restored after the geopolitical irrelevance suffered with the fall of the Soviet Union. In this regard, as mentioned, the Ukrainian crisis and the Syrian civil war demonstrate that Russia has taken back the role of essential interlocutor for any major power, even promoting ambitious and, in a certain sense, dangerous initiatives as the military intervention in the Middle East. In these scenarios, as well as in the Libyan war and in the Eurasian integration process, Moscow has returned to behave as a great power, with an intensity and a force that had never used after 1991: more than thanks to its military potential, its energy resources and its social stability, Russia is a great power simply because it acts

as such, and, excluding the Nineties, has always acted as such, based on its national identity and historical tradition, which correspond to those of a great power.

A tradition, as highlighted in the first part of the third chapter of the thesis, deeply rooted in the historical legacy of the Russian state and conveyed, decade after decade, through the writings of prominent representatives of the national cultural panorama as Fedor Dostoevsky, Nikolay Danilevsky, Vladimir Solovyov and Konstantin Leontiev. In their works, the idea of a great Russian nation is invested with a kind of eschatological and mystical historical mission aimed at gathering under the same flag all the Slavic peoples of Europe and Asia, often combined with the element of conflict with the catholic-protestant Western world that certainly helps to shape a Russian identity not only related to the Slavic ethnicity, but also to the Christian orthodoxy (hence, Moscow's claims as a natural "Third Rome" after the fall of Constantinople in the hands of Muhammad II in 1453). These ideas have been designed to reflect on the history of Russian foreign policy since the early 18th century, when the kingdoms of Peter I and, later, Catherine II, coincided with a period of exceptional dynamism for the country, which during the 19th century would have been a core actor in the concert of powers shaped on the ruins of Napoleonic wars, becoming an undisputed protagonist in Europe and in the world. At the same time, the territorial expansion transformed Russian identity from a merely Eastern European country to a wide Euro-Asian entity, paving the way for the universal vocation and the imperialist attitude that historically identify all the great powers. Nowadays, evidently, these elements have different characteristics, no more related to an expansionist desire, but the awareness of being a great power that Russia demonstrates today is the direct product of the historical-cultural heritage of those years. Being a great power, then, is not a peculiarity acquired under Putin's leadership, but rather an historical constant, strongly tied to the identity of Russia and its people.

The analysis of the main documents concerning the foreign policy conducted by the Kremlin, object of examination in the second part of the third chapter, confirms what has been said so far about the historical-cultural roots of Russian conviction to be a great power. In this regard, the recent National Security Strategy, published in 2015, says clearly that "*traditional Russian spiritual and moral values are being revived. A proper attitude toward Russia's history is being shaped in the rising generation. We are seeing the consolidation of civil society around the common values that shape the foundations of statehood such as Russia's freedom and independence, humanism, interethnic peace and accord, the unity of the cultures of the Russian Federation's multiethnic people, respect for family and faith traditions, and patriotism.*" These references are the index of a renewed national spirit that seemed lost after the fall of the Ussr, but recovered in recent years thanks to the initiative of the Russian leadership itself: a modern nationalism, even if not imbued with chauvinist elements as in

the past, which often aims at enhancing the unity of the Russian people against the West, a rival to fight and, at the same time, with whom to collaborate. The strength of this rhetoric is present also in numerous sections of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian government (of which here are analysed only the last four: 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016), as well as in the speeches given by Vladimir Putin himself, among which the most emblematic is undoubtedly the one held at the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2013, when the president stated that “*Russia’s history forms the foundation for [the country’s] worldview and culture*” and that “*it is unquestionably a source of [Russia’s] identity and mission as a civilization*”. Equally emblematic is the lack of reference, in the Foreign Policy Concept (2016), to Russia as an integral part of the European civilization, which was dropped following the tensions in Ukraine and Syria. In this sense, the conflict emerged between Brussels and Moscow has certainly accelerated the process of tradition and national identity recovery led by Putin, the first true manifestation of which is the speech mentioned above, pronounced after the wave of popular protests held in 2011 against the Russian leadership and considered by the Kremlin as a move of the Western governments. Before 2013, in fact, the references to the Russian civilisation were much more sporadic and, at least, the official documents on foreign policy and national security did not focus so evidently on this element. On the other hand, however, the willingness of Russia to show itself as a leader of an alternative vision of international relations, opposed to the one proposed by the West, had already appeared clearly in February 2007, when Mr Putin intervened at the Munich Conference not only denouncing NATO’s and EU’s dangerous enlargement towards East, but also announced the birth of a multipolar world, opposed to the unipolar one led by the United States, of which he criticized the tendency to interfere in the national affairs of other countries, especially in the Middle East. Nevertheless, rather than a rupture with the White House and Europe, that was to show to the entire world what would have been the intentions of a vigorous Russian Federation in the years to come; on the contrary, Putin’s third presidential mandate has registered a steady worsening of Russian-Western relations, leading, as said, to a strong restoration of the nationalist tradition mentioned before.

If the element of nationalism is to be emphasized in recent years, the guidelines of foreign policy seem to be, at least from 2000 onwards, a solid and stable constant, as well as the interests of the Kremlin at the regional level: both topics are included in two special sections of the Foreign Policy Concept (“*Priorities for the Russian Federation to face global issues*” and “*Regional Priorities*”). As for the pillars of foreign policy, the Russian Federation seems to know very well its international objectives and needs, thus acting according to certain parameters: the confidence and trust vis-à-vis the organs of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, considered as the sole legitimate regulator of the development of international relations and of the use of coercion; the unconditional

support to all the international organizations that can promote peace and security, such as the OSCE (which, in the official documents, enjoys more credit in comparison with the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance); the promotion of a multipolar world where a group of emerging powers is increasing significantly its influence, and of which the central focus is moving towards East in the wake of the inevitable Western decline; the protection of human rights in areas where these are not guaranteed, preferring, however, to abstain from military interventions to implement them (the operations in Syria are, in this case, an exception, whose ratio goes far beyond the protection of human rights); the fight against international threats such as weapons and drugs trafficking and Islamic terrorism, a problem that is particularly urgent for Russia due to the high number of Muslims living in the country and to the presence of many Muslim states along national borders; and, finally, the respect of national sovereignty and the condemnation, as stated above, of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other countries under the pretext human rights violation.

For what concerns, instead, regional priorities, the greatest change that has taken place in recent years is Asia's increase of importance in comparison with Europe and North America. However, this change does not mean that the West has lost its strategic value for Russia: it is, rather, a consequence, on the one hand, of the diplomatic tensions with Brussels and Washington and, on the other hand, of the launch of the ambitious New Silk Road project promoted by China, that Moscow looks with high interest in the perspective of modernizing its infrastructures in the Eastern regions. In fact, more than renouncing to a strengthening of trade relations with Europe, the Kremlin seems to aim at the exploitation of its geographical position, as mentioned in the last two versions of the Foreign Policy Concepts (2013 to 2016), which states that the state must act "*to benefit from its unique geographic location by increasing transit cargo shipments with a view to facilitating the development of trade and economic relations between Europe and the Asia-Pacific Region*", acting therefore as a bridge between the two continents. In any case, Europe is still and will always be an area of absolute priority for Russia, given that the latter represents the first supplier of natural gas and oil for the Union (with, respectively, 40% and 34% of total imports), as well as one of the main markets for different manufactured products: in this regard, the Foreign Policy Concept explicitly mentions France, Germany, Italy and Spain as essential partners. Among the regions included in the document, it is then mandatory to mention the so-called "*Small Eurasia*", or the set of ex-Soviet territories now back to independence in the form of national states along the borders of the Russian Federation: in particular, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. While the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Union State with Belarus represent the Russian political will to play a key role in the post-Soviet space, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and, on the other hand, the Eurasian Economic

Union (EAEU) represent, respectively, the Russian military and economic hand in the region. These tools are, for Russia, useful to perceive a set of goals: preserving the cultural heritage of Slavic civilization, guaranteeing the rights of Russian citizens living in the CIS space, maintaining a strong military presence, building solid economic ties under Russian hegemony and manage frozen conflicts and threats in unstable regions such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.

High relevance is dedicated also to the countries included in the BRICS group, among which China and India are the most important for Russia in terms of commercial and political cooperation. This is particularly highlighted in in the last version of the Foreign Policy Concept, to convey the message of an open-minded an active power trying to contrast American supremacy. Indeed, in the first subsection of the document, it is interesting to note the change of title in comparison with 2013: in 2016, indeed, the phrase “*Emergence of a New World Order*” was replaced by the sentence “*Shaping a Fair and Sustainable World Order*”, as to say that, in this year, the process of emergence has been completed. This is a clear endorsement to the creation of the multipolar world order that Russia pursues. Indeed, also the references to international forums of cooperation follow this path: for example, in the Foreign Policy Concept (2000) Russia mentioned the importance of the G-8 summit, the participation to which gave Russia the formal recognition by major world economies; in 2008, the attention shifted to other international forums, such as the BRICS countries and the RIC group (Russia, China and India), considered as the leading powers of emerging economies; in 2013, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the G-20 were added to the list of important international forums. A big change was done in the last version, where the reference to the G-8 is not present due to the Russian exclusion following the Ukrainian crisis: this is another demonstration of Russian will to look more assertively towards East.

All the aforementioned references to the multipolar world order, of which the Russian behaviour in some international crises is the direct consequence (as in Syria and Ukraine), demonstrate the country’s intention to propose a proper version of the international relations: in order to do so, and after having overtaken the inhibition of the Nineties, Moscow tends to adopt a very assertive foreign policy, which could not be pursued without the bases of a great power that Russia possesses thanks to its material capabilities and its deep-rooted historical tradition. Not by chance, in the modern world politics Russia plays a key role. Its foreign policy doctrine demonstrates that the country thinks and acts as a great power, ready to use hard power when necessary and, at the same time, available for a fair a fruitful confrontation with Asian, American or European counterparts. Judging from the recent developments in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe, it seems that the Russian behaviour will follow these guidelines also in the future, also considering the existence of a global scenario that, overall, is not very favourable for the country, both economically

and politically. At the same time, also national developments are going to put the Russian leadership under pressure: the demographic issue in the Far East will be very difficult to solve, massive investments will be necessary for technological improvement and urgent measures must be adopted to reduce the Russian dependency on oil and gas revenues. The entity of international potential passes compulsorily through the resolution of internal issues. For Moscow, the future will be full of challenges and unexpected developments, both towards East and West: the recovery of great power status achieved during Putin's mandates will certainly help the country to overtake them, allowing the Russian nation to forget the sufferings - and, to some extent, the humiliations - experienced after the fall of the Soviet Union and, therefore, to somehow restore the historical tie existing between modern Russia and the Tsarist Empire, passing through the *grandeur* of the Communist time. A heritage that, however, should not be the means for the promotion of an aggressive foreign policy, but rather the basis to use Russia's influential position to cooperate with other nations in the commitment towards the creation of a solid, stable and peaceful world order.