From concert to confrontation: the ideational motives of Russia's wars with Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014)

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FROM CONCERT TO CONFRONTATION: 
THE IDEATIONAL MOTIVES OF RUSSIA’S WARS WITH 

by 

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This dissertation examines the ideational background of Russian foreign policy, with a particular focus on ideas relevant to Russia’s conflicts with Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. Two broad approaches to Russian foreign policy – nationalism and pragmatism – present distinct views on Russia’s international role. Nationalism incorporates strong anti-Western and neo-imperialistic ideas with emphasis on Russia’s unique international mission and advocates a confrontational stance. Pragmatism conceptualizes Russia as a great world power but proposes a concert-based foreign policy that avoids a direct military confrontation. Both schools of thought are prevalent in Russia’s foreign policy discourse, and their ideas have been adopted in official circles. This dissertation identifies specific nationalist and pragmatic ideas in Russian foreign policy discourse and traces their respective role in Russia’s military involvement in Georgia and Ukraine. Sources for this research include publications of nationalist and pragmatic foreign policy think tanks and official communications from 2000 to 2014.

The analysis of pragmatic and nationalist policy suggestions reveals that Russia’s conflict with Georgia was mostly influenced by pragmatic considerations, but the war in Ukraine was primarily shaped by nationalist ideas. Due to pragmatism, the Russo-Georgian war was of a restricted nature; Russian foreign policy toward Georgia was guided by a general concert-based approach. In contrast, Russia’s involvement in Ukraine was dominated by more confrontational nationalist ideas, leading to an extended conflict. During 2000-2014, the pragmatic framework was displaced by increasingly nationalist ideas, signifying a broad shift in Russian foreign policy from concert to confrontation. By identifying broad concepts and specific ideas important to Russian foreign policy, this dissertation increases our understanding of the complexity of Russian foreign policy. This dissertation contributes to the limited existing research on relations
between Russian intellectual foundations and foreign policy and also adds new insights about the role of ideas, identity, and policy changes, thus contributing to the broader fields of international relations and comparative politics.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With sincere thanks to Professor Rey Koslowski, Professor Cheng Chen, and Professor David Rousseau for their support and patience.
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CHAPTER I. Introduction

The assertion that foreign policy is a complex process which involves many actors, action models, biases, and preferences, would find few counterarguments. But in contrast with the general recognition that a country’s foreign policy depends on a variety of materialistic and identity aspects, there is little agreement about whether, how, and why ideational factors specifically contribute to foreign policy making. This research examines the nuanced ideational background which can sway the course of Russian foreign policy and examines how these ideas have been translated into policy, ranging from a concert-based foreign policy to a more confrontational stance. This chapter begins by outlining the argument – the underlying role of ideational factors in Russian foreign policy and then proceeds to describe the puzzle and the context related to the argument, the concepts, and the research methodology.

1. The argument

The current state of ambitious and bellicose Russian foreign policy would have not been imaginable in the post-Soviet period of the 1990s when Russia’s international influence had ebbed to its lowest point and its foreign policy was inclined toward compromise. However, since the early 2000s, Russia has been increasingly present at the front stage of global politics and has pursued more assertive foreign policy, particularly regarding the West. Explanations for this change range from a singular emphasis on Russia’s revanchism or authoritarianism to more complex arguments involving Russia’s domestic development and international environment (Herpen, 2016; Mankoff, 2009; Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2011). While all these factors have indeed contributed to current Russian foreign policy, they offer incomplete insights into the motivation and the actions of Russian foreign policy.
This dissertation examines how specific ideational concepts and approaches to Russian foreign policy have shaped Russian foreign policy discourse and influenced Russia’s decisions to pursue military involvement in Georgia and Ukraine. What ideas contributed to Russia’s choice to pursue concert- or confrontation-based foreign policy? This dissertation proposes that, since the 2000s, foreign policy ideas based on nationalistic and pragmatic approaches have had a considerable, yet variable influence on Russian foreign policy discourse and on subsequent policy. Both approaches have offered different recommendations which had been exemplified in Russian foreign policy crises regarding Georgia and Ukraine. The nationalistic approach has been generally more supportive of using the military force, invoking Russian compatriots abroad, Russia’s history, and other identity-based factors. The pragmatic approach has been reluctant to advocate for military involvement and, while permitting a judicious military confrontation, more commonly relied on ensuring Russia’s interests through flexible diplomacy and economic measures. Since the mid-2000s, the nationalistic approach has gradually gained prominence in the discourse of Russian foreign policy and served as a catalyst for Russia’s turn to confrontation regarding its interactions with the West and Russia’s adjoining regions. This research posits that Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 largely reflected the pragmatic approach. In line with scholars who emphasize the role of pragmatism in Russian foreign policy (e.g., Lukyanov, 2020), this posits that Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 largely reflected the pragmatic approach. By contrast, the nationalistic approach appears to have been central to Russia’s motivation for its extended military involvement in Ukraine in 2014, as noted by other scholars (e.g., Light, 2015).

However, an assessment of the impact of pragmatism or nationalism is incomplete without allowing for other contributing factors. Between 2000 and 2014, there were marked changes in Russia’s international and domestic conditions. Many scholars have noted that
progressively disadvantageous international conditions, such as NATO’s expansion or the dismissal of Russia’s interests by the West, played a decisive role in the formation of Russian foreign policy ideas (Sakwa, 2017, pp. 69-70). Various perceived international pressures and infringements contributed to the growing perception of threat and, in turn, conditioned Russian foreign policy discourse. Among the domestic developments relevant to the formation of Russian foreign policy ideas were the consolidation of presidential power and economic recovery. There were also less noticeable, yet tangible, changes such as the rise of foreign policy think tanks that helped to consolidate nationalistic and pragmatic approaches and created outlets for these ideas. These changes marked the ideational environment within Russia, even though their precise weight and effects are difficult to separate and identify (Cadier and Light, 2015; Sakwa, 2017). For these reasons, this dissertation regards changes in international and domestic environments as important contributing factors in the shaping of Russian foreign policy ideas.

2. The puzzle and the context

Many existing approaches and interpretations of Russian foreign policy raise more than a few questions. If, as some international relations and foreign policy theories suggest, Russia rationally seeks to maximize its international power and military capabilities, this does not explain Russia’s preoccupation with historic continuities and cultural considerations which often come at a cost to its international position. If Russia’s confrontational foreign policy reflects its autocratic regime’s desire to increase its domestic legitimacy, it may be difficult to explain why Russia would not resort to a more populistic foreign policy featuring increased military involvement abroad. If Russia’s foreign policy goals are to ensure its regional dominance and territorial security, it is puzzling why Russia would not escalate its presence in vulnerable border areas. If Russia’s foreign policy follows a grand strategy, how does one explain its seemingly
irrational and fragmented policies which have created significant international disadvantages for Russia? It would also scarcely explain Russia’s prolonged pursuance of concert-based foreign policy under the perceived hostility from the West or its continuous participation in international frameworks in spite of increasingly diminishing results. Contradictory foreign policy is not exclusive to Russia, but, in the case of Russia, its response to foreign policy crises in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003-2004 was considerably more moderate and concert-based than a few years later when Russia responded militarily following nationalistic principles. While we should not dismiss the function of time and other contextual factors present in Russia’s involvement in Georgia and Ukraine, it is likely that these contrasting responses were the effect of the changing foreign policy discourse which conditioned Russia’s policy choices.

This research subscribes to the oft quoted phrase, “Wars begin in the minds of men” (UNESCO Constitution Preamble, 1945). By investigating the role of ideas which encourage or hinder a country’s decision to resort to a military involvement abroad, this study follows the social constructivist approach to foreign policy. Constructivist scholars have engaged in the examination of identity-based factors, namely, how ideational frameworks translate into foreign policy ideas which, in turn, condition preferences for specific policies (Banchoff, 1996; Hopf, 1998; Kratochvil, 2004; Wendt, 1993). They have noted that a state’s foreign policy is inherently linked to leaders’ beliefs which, in turn, reflect in their policy choices. While policy justification might be veiled in rhetorical statements or pay lip-service to ideological cliches, fundamentally, they do remain conditioned by the policy makers’ internal beliefs. At the same time, constructivists note that external factors, also, affect state behavior. For example, the international distribution of power can determine the timing and intensity of bellicose policies (Rousseau, 2006, p. 44-46). Furthermore, the perception of threat plays an important role in
foreign policy decisions and is strongly influenced by preconceptions (Bock and Henneberg, 2013, p. 25). Relatedly, constructivist scholars have noted that foreign policy choices regarding the war can depend on the state’s strategic culture – a historic ideational framework which prescribes desirable policies and conditions the policymakers’ inclination toward military actions (Johnston, 1993, p. 37). Should the prevailing belief system favor a more assertive foreign policy, the state would be likely to pursue military actions. Thus, in international interactions, compatible or opposing belief systems, and, by extension, the perception of international threats, can be decisive to a state’s foreign policy choices. Should states share identity-based factors, their cooperation is likely to increase (Rousseau, 2006, p. 213). While state identity (and its underlying ideational foundation) is often seen as an abstract and amorphous concept, it is contingent on tangible agents and conditions, including ideological entrepreneurs, elite polarization, and media concentration. These agents, through their dissemination of ideas, shape states’ identities and thus can determine the choice of antagonistic or cooperative policies (Rousseau, 2006, p. 142).

The diagram below sketches the complicated environment of foreign policy ideas which are subject to various contextual factors yet are central to foreign policy decisions.

**Fig. 1. Ideas and foreign policy**

| Domestic conditions: internal power distribution, economic development, social changes, domestic institutions | Broad ideational frameworks: general worldviews on country’s role in the world, its national interests, and regional relations | FOREIGN POLICY IDEAS in unofficial and official discourse | Foreign policy decisions, including diplomacy and military confrontation | External conditions: direct and indirect international threats |

(Based on Ipek, 2015)

By building on these principles, scholars of Russian foreign policy have sought to identify relevant identity-based frameworks, schools of thought, and other ideational aspects. They also have noted that “domestic identity contestation is crucial to understanding Russia’s
international behavior” (Feklyunina, 2018, p. 9). At the same time, the international context is often noted as a decisive factor -- not only in shaping the discourse -- but also in limiting the range of foreign policy choices (Sakwa, 2017, p.70).

Russia’s increasingly bellicose foreign policy has been ascribed to ideas related to Russia’s self-perception, its conflicting national identity, conditioned by inhospitable international environment (Feklyunina, 2018, p. 8-13; Kratochvil, 2004, p. 14). Along the lines of constructivist scholars who have noted that historic memories and images, particularly those related to previous international marginalization, echo in a state’s foreign policy for prolonged periods (Banchoff, 1996), many scholars of Russian foreign policy assert that Russia’s perception of history has affected its foreign policy course. “Putin’s regime is haunted by the specter of Gorbachev and the end of the USSR” (Shevtsova, 2019). Moreover, events from the Russian Empire also have been traced to current Russian foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2012; Tsygankov, 2013). Russia’s conceptual dissatisfaction with the Western-dominated post-Cold War international order and Russia’s subsequent alienation from it have been considered particularly relevant to Russian foreign policy (Sakwa, 2017, p. 6). Some scholars have noted that an excessive focus on Russian perception of international relations and foreign policy may result in an “apology of Moscow’s international behavior” (Feklyunina, 2018, p. 18). However, a dismissal of the ideational foundations that underlie Russian foreign policy would impede a nuanced understanding of Russia’s international behavior.

Many scholars have also focused on the examination of more tangible and identifiable preferences of leaders and groups as essential in understanding the role of foreign policy ideas. Russian policy makers’ preferences, shaped by their internal motives and external factors, have been identified as decisive in foreign policy decisions (Allison, 2006). In this, interests of
President Vladimir Putin and his close allies are particularly relevant in setting Russia’s foreign policy course (Dawisha, 2011; Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2011). Putin’s associates are thought to include elite groups, known as the Kremlin, Inc., “clans”, and the notorious siloviki, the powerful, mostly security structures-based group in the Kremlin who share not only material interests, but also beliefs (Staun, 2007). Most Russian foreign policy experts hold that Putin and to a lesser degree, these elite groups define the Russian national interest and thus decide the foreign policy strategy. However, scholars also note that the concept of Russian national interest, and, by extension, Russian foreign policy is malleable and depends on diverse preferences and worldviews (Fukuyama, 1996; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013; Sakwa, 2017, Tsygankov, 2011). It is likely that the foreign policy debates and decision-making within Russian elites are “based as much on pragmatism as aspirations, illusions and fluid perceptions” (Allison, 2006, p. 73). While there may be overarching, broadly accepted foreign policy principles endorsed by Russia’s leadership, underneath there is a variety of “competing and coexisting conceptions and interests” which are continuously conditioned by domestic and external influences (Dawisha, 2011, p. 332).

Accordingly, one may wonder about the ideational sources which underlie the preferences of Russian policy makers. A number of scholars have acknowledged the importance of values, ideas and other identity-based factors in international relations and foreign policy, only a few scholars have interpreted Russian foreign policy as primarily based on ideational frameworks (Clunan, 2009; Hopf, 2002; Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2010). There has been relatively little scholarly attention paid to the discourse of Russian foreign policy. In the past decades, this discourse has grown increasingly ubiquitous and convoluted. Along with a variety of approaches to foreign policy, there are various interpretations of Russia’s place in the world
and Russian national interests that are circulating in Russia (Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2013; Laruelle, 2016). This study maintains that these ideas and their impact on Russian foreign policy deserve more attention. In spite of clichés which often portray Russian foreign policy as singularly associated with ideas based on nationalism, populism, or ressentiment, the ideological 

milieu of Russian foreign policy is far from simply “being shaped by anti-Western hard-liners” (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 30). A number of ideological strands and sub-strands of different schools of thought constitute the discourse of Russian foreign policy. These strands overlap or contradict each other, they have evolved over time, and have varying levels of support in the Kremlin. The fact that these ideas and their impact have not been consistently defined or conceptualized, handicaps the understanding of Russian foreign policy. By identifying ideas that motivated Russian foreign policy actions, particularly toward Georgia and Ukraine, this dissertation contributes to an in-depth understanding of current Russian foreign policy.

The diagram below outlines the most important conditions related to the ideational development of Russian foreign policy.

**Fig. 2. Ideas and Russian foreign policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic conditions: economic growth, centralization of power, societal, social development, the rise of new institutions, including think tanks</th>
<th>Broad ideational frameworks: Nationalism and pragmatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY IDEAS in unofficial and official discourse</td>
<td>Russian foreign policy decisions, including economic integration and other cooperative actions, and more coercive measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External conditions: pressures from the West, expansion of NATO, perceptions of threats posed by the West</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar pattern of interactions between intellectual frameworks, domestic changes, and disadvantageous international conditions is evident in other states. Due to these developments, foreign policy discourses in many Eastern European and non-Western states have become more anti-Western and anti-liberal. In particular, Poland and Hungary have experienced a rise of
conservative foreign policy think tanks which have encouraged nationalism and anti-EU sentiments. Comparable developments are evident in non-European countries, such as Turkey, India, and South Africa (Husar, 2016; Varga, 2020). Thus, the findings of this dissertation are pertinent to the study of foreign policy ideas beyond Russia itself.

A brief overview of the main concepts which form the building blocks of this research, follows.

3. Concepts

For the purposes of this study, foreign policy ideas are defined as both general and specific views and prescriptions for Russia’s foreign policy which are explicitly or implicitly present at all stages of foreign policy decision making. These ideas arise from broad ideational frameworks akin to complex, historically contingent, strategic culture models (Johnston, 1993). They can be rooted in specific historical memories, cultural associations, or general worldviews (Banchoff, 1996; Kratochvil, 2004). Such ideas underlie the policy makers’ conceptualization of Russia’s international goals and strategy and the prioritization of specific foreign policy goals. Subsequently, they become reflected in Russia’s specific foreign policy decisions, such as whether to resort to military actions or to rely on diplomacy, economic pressures or some other, nonmilitary, measures instead. These ideas, when articulated by prominent public individuals both informally and formally, are likely to be considered for the inclusion in official agendas and they eventually can become translated into foreign policy actions (Jackson, 2005).

These ideas circulate throughout the foreign policy milieu – a public sphere where officials, public intellectuals, institutions, publishing platforms, “thought leaders” and other public figures introduce their “array of intellectual outputs and opinions about foreign affairs” (Drezner, 2018, p. 8). For the purposes of this dissertation, the Russian foreign policy milieu, in
addition to traditional foreign policy participants, such as the President of Russia, his closely knit circle of associates, and members of government and other state institutions, also includes prominent public intellectuals who are recognized as Russian foreign policy experts. Many of them are associated with think tanks and have become part-and-parcel of the public discourse of Russian foreign policy (Pallin and Oxiensterna, 2017). This milieu generates the Russian foreign policy discourse which comprises a wide variety of communications ranging from informal publications and interviews by public intellectuals, government officials, and think tanks to official governmental communications from the Kremlin. These communications address various issues, directly and indirectly concerning international affairs and Russian foreign policy. These materials are disseminated through public media, usually through printed and online publications. Inevitably, these communications reflect the authors’ mindset based on a specific ideational framework and their goal is to advance broad or specific foreign policies.

What ideas and ideational frameworks are relevant to and likely to have an impact on Russian foreign policy? Many scholars claim that the Kremlin lacks a cohesive regime ideology and its foreign policy principles are based on a few broad consensual mainstays, such as the affirmation of Russia as a great world power with its special rights and responsibilities (Chen, 2016; Tsygankov, 2011). However, within the discourse of Russian foreign policy there have been considerable ideational divergences about the desired ways and degrees of Russia’s international involvement and about Russia’s affinity toward Western and non-Western powers. These disagreements are currently embodied in the two broad ideational schools of thought currently present in Russian foreign policy: nationalism and pragmatism (Light, 2015; Tsygankov, 2013). Instead of this dualistic pragmatism/nationalism approach, some scholars have identified foreign policy ideas with specific elite interest groups, such as siloviki (associated
with the security and military-industrial circles) or civiliki (more liberally-inclined elites which are closer to financial, service, and hi-tech sectors), or, more broadly, the “Kremlin” (Light, 2015; Sakwa, 2017; Staun, 2007; Tsygankov, 2013). However, such approaches marginalize the broad conceptual divergences which are present within these groups. For this reason, this study primarily focuses on the examination of nationalism and pragmatism as overarching frameworks. These two ideational approaches to Russian foreign policy are distinct in their foci and policy suggestions but not entirely incompatible or irreconcilable. Both approaches share the idea of Russia as a great power with an important global role but emphasize different aspects of Russian foreign policy. Scholars have noted that, in theoretical constructs, overemphasis of binary distinction can be counterproductive (Berlin, 1953/1978, p. 3). However, the combination of nationalism and pragmatism used as a theoretical tool provides a sound initial basis for the understanding of the ideational foundation of Russian foreign policy, thus offering a “starting point for genuine investigation” (Drezner, 2017, p.10).

Nationalism

Specific ideas which constitute the mainstays of nationalism and pragmatism are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but, in brief, nationalism is conceptualized in this study as a broadly dichotomous world view, with the West as Russia’s global counterpart; the Russian Orthodox Church as the core of the Russian nation; and the image of Russia as an international peacekeeper with a global mission. Russia is also portrayed as the leader of Eurasian or Slavic civilizational entities and as the protector of its satellite neighbors. It should be noted that Russian nationalism is an umbrella term which comprises a diverse array of ideas. Some strands of Russian nationalism may emphasize the Russian Orthodox Christianity, others emphasize Eurasianism, or “civilizationalism”, while others may be associated with neo-
Communism or Russia’s imperial past (Clunan, 2009; Sakwa, 2007). Nationalism in the context of Russian foreign policy is often associated with revanchism, ethno-centrism, and advocacy of military involvement (Herpen, 2014; Powers, 2016). In the Russian milieu of foreign policy there are influential proponents of nationalism, including many popular public figures associated with nationalistic right-wing organizations and the Kremlin (Laruelle, 2016). A core concept of nationalism is the “Russian world” (Russkiy Mir), a vague but symbolic entity based on Russian cultural and linguistic presence beyond Russia’s current political borders. It often overlaps with Eurasianism which also envisions Russia’s unique cultural characteristics as basis for its geopolitical dominance in Eurasia. The nationalistic approach to Russian foreign policy envisions preservation of the “Russian world” and the rise of Eurasia, usually through military means, as a primary task of Russian foreign policy. Significantly, a prominent nationalist foreign policy think tank bears the name Russkiy Mir (the Russian World).

It should be noted that the concept of nationalism is becoming more relevant to foreign policy at large. Foreign policy ideas based on “civilizational” antagonism toward the EU, conservative interpretation of national identity, and demands for revisions of the existing international order have become prominent in both Eastern Europe and Western Europe (Bult, 2016; Kaita, 2019; Krastev, 2018; Kupchan, 2019). Thus, Russian nationalism can be an indicative of important global shift in foreign policy thinking.

**Pragmatism**

In this study, pragmatism is defined as an approach to Russian foreign policy focused on Russia’s geopolitical characteristics. Pragmatism avoids overtly emotional sentiments or dualistic worldviews which dominates the nationalistic approach. The mainstays of pragmatism in Russian foreign policy include a preference for a multipolar, “concert-based” international
system, the primacy of the state sovereignty and prioritization of Russia’s security interests. For pragmatism, the main goal of Russian foreign policy is to re-establish Russia as a great power in a multipolar international order among other major powers and to preserve its historical spheres of influence in its adjacent regions. This is to be accomplished by conducting extensive diplomacy, economic integration, and maintaining flexible international alliances, i.e., through concert-based interactions. While military options should not be excluded in achieving these goals, warfare should be conducted efficaciously and judiciously (Adler-Nissen, 2015; Baunov, 2015; Lavrov, 2013; Lukin, 2012). In contrast with the nationalistic approach to Russian foreign policy, the pragmatic approach explicitly seeks to follow expedient foreign policy without exceedingly ideological overtones, such as emphasis on specific cultural or religious affinities. A few Western scholars have noted that the pragmatic approach broadly corresponds to the classical realist school of thought, a mainstay of international relations theory. There have been suggestions that Putin and the Statist approach (closely associated with the pragmatist school of thought), like classical realists, are primarily focused on external threats (Dawisha, 2011, p. 346). However, in the discourse of Russian foreign policy, pragmatism is regarded as a Russian-specific ideational approach which was originally articulated by Prince Gorchakov, Russia’s Foreign Minister in the 19th century (Legvold, 2007; Tsygankov, 2016; Trenin, 2003). Currently, neo-Gorchakovism is seen as a relevant and efficacious foreign policy approach by many of the current Russian foreign policy makers and prominent foreign policy experts (Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002). In spite of frequently being conflated with Russian nationalism by the Western media, pragmatism remains a distinct set of ideas, which challenge the basic tenets of Russian nationalism. Similar foreign policy ideas which focus on the state primacy in international interactions are evident in other countries’ foreign policy discourses. An example of this is a
growing economic nationalism and other state-centric policies in Poland and Hungary which have been advocated by prominent pragmatic-minded intellectuals and think tanks (Varga, 2020).

Some scholars note important overlaps between the two approaches, such as their antagonism toward the West, the vision of Russia as a great power and as a regional hegemon with historic spheres of influence. Also, nationalism and pragmatism are united in their dislike of liberalism and supra-national institutions which restrict state sovereignty. These elements, common to both narratives, are prevalent in the discourse of Russian foreign policy (Light, 2015; Sakwa, 2017).

However, both approaches have characteristics that are difficult to reconcile, such as their levels of antagonism to the West and preferences for international alliances, and thus they have remained sufficiently differentiated (Nikonov, 2002; Tsygankov, 2013). In the past and present, there have been significant frictions between the proponents of nationalism and pragmatism in academia, public media, and the official circles of Russian foreign policy. Diverging conceptual approaches to foreign policy have been present throughout Russia’s history. Both pragmatism and nationalism acknowledge their intellectual roots in the debates of the 19th century Russian political philosophy. Also, during the Soviet Union period, foreign policy was subject to limited debates, however, usually, a flexible strategic approach, similar to pragmatism, dominated (Hoffmann, 2005, pp. 49-51). Presently, this ideational divergence is exemplified by the ongoing acerbic debate between the representatives of nationalistic Izborskiy Club think tank and the more pragmatic politicians and organizations about the debacle of the current Russian foreign policy in Ukraine and ways to remedy these failures (Laruelle, 2016; Light, 2015). For these reasons, it is likely that these two approaches to Russian foreign policy have been and will
remain important as separate ideational frameworks for the examination of Russian foreign policy. This forms the premise of the main argument in this dissertation.

4. The approach and methodology

This dissertation engages in case studies of Russian foreign policy toward Georgia and Ukraine. These two countries were selected for their comparability with respect to their importance to Russia and for their volatile relations with Russia. Georgia and Ukraine share significant similarities regarding their location bordering Russia, their history and geopolitical context vis-à-vis Russia. Russian foreign policy toward both Georgia and Ukraine resulted in a military involvement, however, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict starting in 2014 had significant differences. The scale of military involvement was short and limited in the case of Georgia but became more prolonged and extensive in the case of Ukraine. Even though both cases feature a military confrontation, Russia’s decision to intervene militarily could be ascribed to different ideational foundations in each case. When examining the development of Russian foreign policy ideas and their reflection in subsequent policy, in the case of Georgia, preliminary research suggests that this short and limited war was initially only mildly supported by the pragmatists in the Russian government, but it was conducted largely following the principles of pragmatism. Even as Russian nationalists warmly endorsed the war, their voices were marginal in the official discourse and policy. By contrast, nationalistic principles largely motivated Russia’s war with Ukraine, as nationalism had gained prominence in the official discourse by 2014, in opposition to the many Russia’s foreign policy figures who were identified with the pragmatic school.

Both case studies are examined through a comparative analysis of Russian foreign policy discourse that traces the development, influence and interactions of foreign policy ideas and
examines their role in foreign policy decisions. In the scholarly literature, the examination of the evolution of foreign policy ideas is recognized as essential in understanding the context and the ensuing response to current foreign policy problems (Banchoff, 1996; Collier, 2011). Furthermore, the analysis of narratives within Russian foreign policy discourse is becoming increasingly recognized as particularly conducive to the understanding of Russian foreign policy (Feklyunina, 2018, p. 16). Along these lines, this dissertation examines the development and interactions of nationalism and pragmatism, and their broad and specific foreign policy recommendations toward Georgia and Ukraine in informal and formal discourses. Subsequently, the dissertation evaluates how these ideas are reflected in foreign policy actions.

The discourse analysis in this study follows these general steps: 1) Examination of domestic and international developments which conditioned the discourse. 2) Identification of foreign policy ideas and prescriptions regarding Georgia and Ukraine which were present in the unofficial Russian foreign policy discourse from 2000 until the onset of the foreign policy crises in 2008 and 2014. 3) Assessment of the inclusion of these ideas and policy suggestions in the official foreign policy agenda, and, subsequently, in actual policies. 4) Analysis of how these ideas were reflected in Russia’s foreign policy activities and whether they resulted in successful or failed policies.

Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to investigate whether, why, and how these ideational approaches may have contributed to Russia’s decisions to resort to military action. This research does not suggest that ideational reasons were solely responsible for Russia’s military actions. However, it intends to show that distinct ideational frameworks were present, that they played a role in Russia’s decisions to pursue a military involvement, and that they affected the nature of the conflict.
A simplified analysis of Russia’s foreign policy ideas toward Georgia could be traced along these steps:

1. **International and domestic factors conditioned Russian and Georgian politics and foreign policies.** In the early 2000s, Russia underwent domestic reforms and had achieved considerable economic growth. Russia also sought closer cooperation with the West and was largely accommodating toward Georgia. However, from 2003, Russia’s relations with the West and Georgia began to deteriorate largely due to the expansion of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe and the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia. Georgia’s anti-Russian stance solidified, resulting in an impromptu war between Russia and Georgia in 2008. These developments were correspondingly reflected in the discourse of Russian foreign policy.

2. **In 2000-2008, Russian foreign policy experts of pragmatist and nationalist approaches had presented numerous foreign policy prescriptions regarding growing complications with Georgia.** In particular, post-2003 political developments in Georgia were viewed as increasingly threatening to Russia. To ensure Russia’s interests, the pragmatists suggested enhancing Russo-Georgian economic and trade relations, maintaining Russian peace-keepers in the contested border regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, employing diplomatic pressures, and supporting Georgian government’s domestic political opposition, all while avoiding a direct confrontation with Georgia and maintaining a fragile status quo. In contrast, many nationalists viewed Georgia as an irreconcilably hostile state and a proxy of the West, called for the severance of relations between Georgia and Russia, and outright
military occupation of Georgia, an overthrow of Georgia’s government, and an annexation of contested border regions.

3. Russia’s policy toward Georgia incorporated ideas previously suggested by both nationalistic and pragmatic schools of thought. In 2004, Russia’s Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov (identified with the pragmatist school of thought), ensured a peaceful transfer of power from Georgia’s post-Soviet president Shevardnadze to a new president Saakashvili. After Saakashvili initiated anti-Russian policies, for several years, Russian foreign policy makers pursued varied policies, mostly pragmatic, such as enacting diplomatic pressures, economic sanctions, brief military incursions, the international isolation of Georgia, and increasing Russia’s support to Georgia’s separatist regions. The outbreak of the war in 2008 was seen as a set-back to the pragmatist principles, but the course of the war and Russia’s post-war policy toward Georgia was seen as largely pragmatically grounded.

4. At different points in Russo-Georgian relations, some foreign policy ideas gained greater prominence, but, overall, ideas related to pragmatism prevailed. In the years before the war, many pragmatism-based policies had at least some success in maintaining Russia’s leverage over Georgia. Toward the end of the 2008 war, Russia sought and accepted Western mediation and conducted multilateral peace talks along the lines of pragmatic principles, seeking no immediate change of regime in Georgia and no territorial gains. Overall, Russia’s policy toward Georgia demonstrated a concert-based approach.

By contrast, in the case of Ukraine, the pragmatic approach became muted in favor of more nationalistic ideas and nationalism contributed to Russia’s subsequent prolonged military
engagement in Ukraine (Rutland, 2016). The ideational roots of Russia’s policy toward Ukraine could be briefly traced along these lines:

1. In spite of generally unfavorable conditions, Russia maintained a degree of status quo with Ukraine from 2000 until 2013. Many of Russia’s identity-related and security concerns regarding Ukraine’s pro-Western tendencies, particularly in the aftermath of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of 2004, were alleviated by treaties and economic interdependence between Russia and Ukraine, in spite many unresolved issues regarding Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine. However, in 2013-2014, the change of the regime in Ukraine prompted Russia to annex Crimea and to extend its military involvement in the separatist Eastern Ukraine. In the face of prolonged complications regarding Ukraine, nationalism and pragmatism had presented differing foreign policy recommendations.

2. Ukraine had been the focus of Russian foreign policy discourse in terms its importance to Russian identity and security. The pragmatic approach had advocated various economic integration projects, extending diplomatic negotiations, and supporting Ukrainian domestic opposition, while the nationalistic approach focused on identity-based threats and called for more assertive measures, including the annexation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The nationalistic approach gradually gained popular and official support in Russia, reaching its apex in late 2013 (Light, 2015; Sakwa, 2017).

3. These ideas were reflected in Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine. Until 2013, economic and diplomatic actions, advocated by pragmatism, such as “gas wars” and diplomatic treaties ensured a fragile balance in Russo-Ukrainian relations even after
the crisis of 2004. Russia was reasonably successful in neutralizing Ukraine’s attempts to pursue more pro-Western course by economic and diplomatic means, had secured its naval base in Crimea, and had realistic hopes to integrate Ukraine in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Identity-based concerns regarding Crimea and Eastern Ukraine had limited yet increasing presence in Russian policy. By 2013, with the failures of pragmatism and the foreign policy crisis intensifying, the nationalistic approach which had been strongly present in the unofficial discourse, became dominant in the official discourse, and Russia’s military take-over of Crimea and involvement in Eastern Ukraine was based on clearly nationalistic ideas.

4. Which of the nationalist and pragmatist ideas were successful and which failed in actual policies toward Ukraine? Until 2013, many pragmatic policies were reasonably successful. Russia had dealt with the 2004 crisis along pragmatic principles and hoped to repeat it in 2013. However, anti-Russian sentiments and political upheavals in Ukraine stimulated Russian nationalism and to a degree, tilted pragmatists toward more coercive policies. By the convergence of many factors, Russia’s take-over of Crimea had support from both nationalists and pragmatists. Nationalists justified the annexation by the history of Crimea and its Russian citizens, while pragmatists focused on Crimea’s geopolitical role. However, pragmatists clearly opposed Russia’s subsequent involvement in Eastern Ukraine which was emphatically endorsed by Russian nationalists.

Limitations of the analysis

It should be noted that defining, tracing, and estimating the importance of foreign policy ideas on subsequent foreign policy decisions is unlikely to be precise or definite. The steps
described above can only partially reflect the importance of ideas and their complex path to foreign policy actions. The separation of ideas, regardless of how apparent their presence, from other factors, which condition foreign policy making, is among the anticipated difficulties inherent in this research. Scholars have noted that it would be overly presumptuous to attempt to establish with “perfect certainty” the decisive role of ideational background on the course of foreign policy (Allison, 2006; Banchoff, 1996, p. 39). Moreover, in the examination of ideas and their reflection in foreign policy, researchers inevitably imprint their own interpretation and understanding (Feklyunina, 2018, p. 17). To partially negate these difficulties, the international context and domestic developments should be at least briefly accounted for. In this research, each case study will address a variety of factors relevant to Russian foreign policy at given times, including the international context and domestic developments. This will set the background for the examination of the discourse of Russian foreign policy and how these external aspects may have affected foreign policy ideas and policies. When examining Russia’s conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine, the function of time is very important. Russia’s previous experience with Georgia left marks on Russia’s subsequent policy toward Ukraine. Also, differences in the relative importance of Georgia and Ukraine to Russia in terms of identity-based and geopolitical factors are crucial. Nevertheless, even though a precise measure of the relative importance of ideas on foreign policy may be impossible, they can be identified, and the extent of their influence can be reasonably estimated.

Another difficulty in conducting this research is the presence of a “revolving door” between participants of the broader Russian foreign milieu and members of government (Table A). This hinders the identification of foreign policy idea development independent of the government and possibly suggests a “closed ideational circuit” (Abelson et al, 2016). For
example, a Russian politician and author Vyacheslav Nikonov, the founder of the nationalistic think tank _Russkiy Mir_ and a prominent popular figure, became the head of Duma’s parliamentary committee of foreign affairs in December 2016. During the previous decade, he had publicly presented a number of bellicose policy propositions toward Georgia and Ukraine, long before Russia’s military conflicts with these countries. Aleksandr Dugin, author of nationalistic foreign policy theories and an advocate for wars with Georgia and Ukraine, has been regarded as a semi-official advisor to President Putin (Shuster, 2016). Dmitry Rogozin, a popular nationalistic politician and a representative of the nationalistic _Izbornik Club_ think tank has currently joined the highest ranks of Russian government. Leonid Ivashov, a retired Russian general and government official, a long-time associate of Dugin and a participant of _Izbornik Club_, has retained his ties with Russia’s current military leadership (Laruelle, 2016). Such examples bring forth a question of whether ideas and policy suggestions are prior to the Kremlin’s foreign policies, or whether these ideas retroactively promote official policies (Zakem et al, 2018). If policies chronologically follow ideas, it may indicate that such ideas may have served as catalysts for policies, but it is hardly proof that ideas advocated by these individuals are singularly important in generating policies. Similar difficulties have been noted in the context of other countries’ foreign policies. There has been considerable research on the influence of ideas generated by individuals who had been associated with prominent think tanks in the United States and Europe and their important role in policy development (Abelson and Hua, 2016; Cadier and Sus, 2017; Drezner, 2017). Systemic and ideological differences between Russia and the West notwithstanding, a focus on prominent individuals (and organizations associated with them, such think tanks) as generators of ideas illustrates the many facets of the ideational milieu
of foreign policy making, and it encourages a similar approach to the study of Russian foreign policy.

Furthermore, an examination of Russian foreign policy ideas contributes not only to more thorough understanding of Russian foreign policy, but also to insights in the role of conceptual underpinnings in other states’ foreign policies. In some countries, nationalism has been associated with increased international assertiveness (Adar, 2020; Krastev, 2018). In other cases, ideational changes along the lines of pragmatism have advanced policies based on soft power (Ipek, 2015). Thus, the findings of this dissertation can be generalized to contribute to a broader understanding of the role of ideas in foreign policy shifts.

In the discourse analysis described earlier, the examination of publications, particularly those by prominent representatives of Russian foreign policy think tanks, should be particularly conducive to an understanding of the role of ideas in the formation and application of foreign policy.

5. Empirical research

This research relies on the qualitative analysis of a variety of Russian primary and secondary sources which were published in 2000-2015. Primary sources include official communications by Russian Presidents Putin and Medvedev, Russian foreign ministers, Russian Foreign Policy Concepts, Security Concepts, briefings of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and official agendas. These formal communications demonstrate changes in the official foreign policy discourse regarding Russia’s broader goals within the international system as well as discourse specifically regarding Georgia and Ukraine. Often, it is difficult to pinpoint the germane ideas in such discourse and to identify the precise role of these concepts and other official documents in the formation and practice of foreign policy. However, themes in these
documents “constitute discursive landmarks around which foreign policy choices need to be articulated to correspond with the state’s vision of itself” (Light, 2015, pp.13-14).

Another group of primary sources is comprised of foreign policy analyses and prescriptions by public figures, commonly associated with Russian foreign policy think tanks (Table A). These sources have been seldom examined in the research of Russian foreign policy. However, it has been noted that they had been important in shaping Russian foreign policy since the 1990s, when the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy allegedly contributed to the removal of the Foreign Minister Kozyrev (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 47). Currently, Russian foreign policy think tanks present both broad foreign policy frameworks and specific policy prescriptions, which are often referenced by Russian policy makers. Most Russian foreign policy think tanks are clearly identified by their ideological affiliation with nationalism (e.g. Russkiy Mir Foundation or Izborsk Club) or pragmatism (e.g. the Council on Defense and Foreign Policy, the Gorchakov Foundation, Russian International Affairs Council, or, lately, the Carnegie Moscow Foundation). For the purposes of this research, Russian foreign policy think tanks are selected, partially, by their listing in McGann’s (2016) Think Tank Index 2015 and, partially, by their identification in scholarly literature (Bluhm, 2015; Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012; Laruelle, 2016). This approach ensures the representation of nationalistic think tanks which are seen as influential by both the Russian public and Russian scholars, but for various reasons are not included in the international McGann’s Index of think tanks. Some Russian foreign policy think tanks may occupy a “gray area” between the official and non-official intellectual circles, yet most them have a strong presence in academia and political elites. Their representatives have access to government circles and public media, thus being in an advantageous position to propose and propagate Russian foreign policy ideas (Laruelle, 2016). This study uses publicly
available online archives of Russian foreign policy think tanks. In this dissertation, publications by think tanks and their representatives are regarded as representative of unofficial discourse. For the purposes of this study, unofficial and official discourses of Russian foreign policy are discussed separately, in order to better illustrate the transition of nationalistic and pragmatic ideas to official policy-making circles.

6. Organization of this study

This dissertation is organized into six chapters as follows: Chapter 1, the Introduction, has outlined the state of research regarding ideas and foreign policy. It has offered a brief examination of the role of ideas on Russian foreign policy decisions and justified the in-depth studies of Georgia and Ukraine. Chapter 2 describes theoretical approaches and arguments which underpin the ideational foundation of Russian foreign policy. Chapter 3 examines domestic and international developments, including changes in the milieu of Russian foreign policy, which conditioned Russian foreign policy in the post-2000 period. Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the two case studies of Georgia and Ukraine. Both chapters offer an overview of domestic developments in Georgia and Ukraine. Then the chapters proceed to examine nationalistic and pragmatic ideas in informal and formal foreign policy discourses and the reflection of these ideas in actual foreign policy events. Chapter 6, the Conclusion, summarizes the comparison of the two case studies and discusses the findings and their implications.

The following chapter will discuss relevant theoretical frameworks used in the analysis of Russian foreign policy and provide an outline of the broad ideational foundation of Russian foreign policy.
### Table A. Selected Russian foreign policy think tanks (in alphabetical order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think tank</th>
<th>Broad influence and relations w/gov.’t</th>
<th>Noted members</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Specialty/expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMEMO</strong>&lt;br&gt;<a href="https://www.imemo.ru/en/about">https://www.imemo.ru/en/about</a></td>
<td>Staff: 60 members of the “academic council”, 14 members of the directorate. 19 research departments. Advisors and consultants to govt, but mostly academically oriented. Strong ties with international research organizations</td>
<td>A. Dynkin</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Highly respected research/academic activities in all aspects of international relations and foreign policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MGIMO, 1944</strong>&lt;br&gt;<a href="https://english.mgimo.ru/">https://english.mgimo.ru/</a></td>
<td>Staff: 1,432. Highest academic reputation; publications of research, papers Gov.’t. presence: educates Russian and Eastern European gov.’t; close ties with international diplomatic elites. 8 annual international conferences and other public events&lt;br&gt;Its researcher A. Zubov was dismissed in 2014 for criticizing war with Ukraine (Koshkin, 2015)</td>
<td>S. Lavrov</td>
<td>State, but recently a memorandum of understanding with the NIS (Serbian energy co)</td>
<td>Broad range of international issues. Advisement to the Presidential Administration, the Government, the Council of Federation and the State Duma, the Security Council and the Ministry of Defense, the Collective Security Treaty Organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Tank</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdai Club, 2004</td>
<td><a href="http://valdaiclub.com/">http://valdaiclub.com/</a></td>
<td>850+ “contributors”, an “academy of 30 experts”. Membership overlaps with SVOP, RIAC, MGIMO, IMEMO, Russia in Global Affairs. President Putin participates in its annual Valdai Conference and other events; other regional/international events; public discussions, publications</td>
<td>Mixed private (banks, industries) and other think tanks: SVOP; MGIMO.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kirchick, 2015; Koshkin, 2015; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; websites of respective think tanks
CHAPTER II. Intellectual Foundations of Russian Foreign Policy

This chapter examines the intellectual underpinnings which are relevant to the study of Russian foreign policy. It addresses theoretical approaches to the study of ideas in foreign policy; examines how these theories have been applied to Russian foreign policy; outlines specifically Russian theoretical approaches to foreign policy; and notes limitations and impediments in this field of research.

1. Theoretical approaches to the role of ideas in foreign policy

It is likely that no single theory captures the complexity of the role of ideas in foreign policy. Any causality in foreign policy is notoriously difficult to establish. State’s internal political dynamics, external constraints, psychological attributes and preferences of leaders and groups are counted among the most important factors, but the evaluation of the impact of ideas in foreign policy remains particularly evasive and can verge on becoming circular (Light, 1994, pp. 95-98). By its nature, foreign policy is a bridge discipline which, while being a part of the study of international relations, incorporates elements of comparative politics, and public policy, particularly when examining foreign policy decision making. This dissertation is guided by the insights derived from various theoretical approaches regarding the ideational aspects in foreign policy.

In the field of international relations, states’ international behavior has been examined by considering the role of ideas and identity-based factors. Particularly pertinent to this research is the work of social constructivist scholars, who, along with Max Weber (1958), have noted that ideas, at the very least, are responsible for providing the initial stimulus for further action. These scholars do not question whether identity-based factors matter, but how they matter and in what way these factors can be systematically studied in international relations. This study follows a
broad social constructivist-based approach which suggests that ideational factors are likely to play a decisive impact in the formation and the course of foreign policy. Through various identity-construction processes, ideas are diffused across society, a few of them gain dominance and become the intellectual foundation for official foreign policy. In this regard, individual proponents of these ideas are essential for developing, disseminating, and modifying these ideas and conveying them to elites (Banchoff, 1996; Drezner, 2017; Rousseau, 2006). Constructivist scholars also assume that the identities of states, and, by extension, foreign policy, are conditioned by a variety of historical, cultural, political, and social factors (Hopf, 1998; Kratochvil, 2004; Kubalkova, 2001; Rousseau, 2006; Wendt, 1994). Similarly, many comparative politics scholars acknowledge the important role ideational approaches play in domestic politics and in the formation of foreign policy through the trifecta of ideas, interests, and institutions (Banchoff 1996; Gerring, 1998; George, 1993; Tsygankov, 2012). These scholars all do not necessarily suggest that ideas are the single most important factor; instead, many assert that ideas in combination with interests and/or institutions explain and condition human action. However, they also maintain that without examining these ideas, the underlying motivation of foreign policy cannot be fully understood.

But how do ideas become converted into foreign policy? There have been prolonged debates about whether ideas are a bona fide mainspring of policy, to what degree ideas and policies are mutually constitutive, and the use of ideas by elites for legitimizing policies. There is a broad consensus that, while the research of these aspects is wrought with complexities, conditionalities, and possibly unsurmountable difficulties, ideational motives can be the primary determinants of foreign policy. In their examination of ideational motives in state behavior, a number of international relations scholars have focused on the role of strategic culture – shared
assumptions about the world at large and broad agreements about preferred course of action—
which can guide national security policy. Changes to these ideas about state’s international role
and goals may introduce a new direction for its foreign policy or modify the existing policy.
Strategic culture depends on a variety of identity-related factors, including historical memories,
norms, and beliefs and contextual factors, such as political institutions and multilateral
commitments. The accounting for these factors can present a convincing explanation of the
state’s international behavior, including its foreign policy (Goldstein and Keohane, 1996;
Johnston, 1995; Katzenstein, 1996; Lantis, 2005). Akin to strategic culture studies, scholars also
have noted that national identity and strategic culture are directly associated with security
concerns and the perception of threats (Katzenstein, 1996; Petro, 2016; Rousseau, 2006).

Furthermore, scholars have suggested other pathways from ideas to policy which can
begin in historic memories, spontaneous public sentiments, or even academic concepts, and
result in tangible foreign policy ideas. Banchoff (1996) suggests that relevant historic memories,
when policy makers face foreign policy choices, can become deciding factors. However, the
interpretation of history is inevitably open-ended, and, as Banchoff (1996) notes, drastically
differing policy prescriptions have been drawn from the interpretation of the same historic
events. Scholars have also noted that preconceived perceptions of threat— not necessarily
corresponding to “real” threats— and construed “threat images” also are reflected in foreign
policy (Bock and Henneberg, 2013; Kratochvil, 2004). This presents an important caveat, but it
also, paradoxically, affirms the importance of ideas and their power to affect the course of
foreign policy. Foreign policy ideas can also evolve from spontaneous public sentiments which
are picked up by public figures. Politicians who have been elected on the strength of such
sentiments, are likely to transfer such ideas to foreign policy-related institutions and policy.
Similar developments were seen during and after the 2004 elections in Russia when many newly-elected, nationalistic-minded Russian politicians proposed anti-Western foreign policy (White, 2006, pp. 130-131). Also in Russia, a 2012 popular movement commemorating the World War II in a Siberian city expanded to other cities, gained national popularity, and became purposefully appropriated and integrated in the official Kremlin rhetoric (Nemtsev, 2019). Alternatively, foreign policy ideas can originate from theoretical or academic concepts and gain wider exposure. The idea of BRICS was first proposed in Goldman Sachs research papers in 2001 and 2003 which identified global economic leaders. This concept quickly acquired wider use and became a mainstay of foreign policy vocabulary (Mankoff, 2020). Similarly, the concepts of the “clash of civilizations” and “soft power” arose from academic concepts and gained foothold in policy recommendations (Eriksson and Normal, 2011). In Russia, foreign policy makers frequently invoke ideas of “imperial overstretch”, “balance of power”, “hegemony”, or “bandwagoning” – concepts which have originated in the theory of international relations (Bordachev, 2019).

In the propagation and dissemination of these ideas, individual public figures are often indispensable. They create, present, and diffuse ideas, thus affecting the policy discourse and potentially extending to significant ideational changes within society. Due to their prestige and power, they carry “disproportionate influence in the spread of ideas due to their position of power” and are able to “transmit their values and beliefs to large audiences”. Some political entrepreneurs may be more flexible in their core beliefs than others who are more ideologically driven, but their impact on the formation of foreign policy ideas is apparent (Rousseau, 2006, p. 73-78). At the same time, these ideological entrepreneurs often are associated with influential institutions and organizations. The breadth and intensity of the dissemination of political ideas
has noticeably increased due to the rising number of policy research and advisory institutions which have gained incommensurate influence (Drezner, 2017). The *milieu* of foreign policy has not been exempt from this process. Alexander George (1993) has noted that institutions such as think tanks are in a particularly advantageous position for generating foreign policy ideas and for successfully transferring them to the practical policy domain. World-wide, the growing number of think tanks which present new foreign policy ideas and models, frame specific policy issues, and can often decisively affect foreign policy agenda (Abelson et al 2016; McGann, 2016).

In sum, a perfunctory examination of the scholarly field suggests that the study of ideational aspects in foreign policy has auspicious theoretical foundations. This gives support to the premise of this study that ideas can spur and influence foreign policy, and they are not merely supplementary factors. While acknowledging the importance of contingencies and other contextual aspects, this research sees Russian foreign policy as being significantly affected by a variety of ideational models. Without appreciating these ideational models’ nuances, origins, and interactions, the current Russian foreign policy cannot be fully understood.

2. **Theoretical approaches to Russian foreign policy**

In recent years, many scholars of Russian foreign policy have examined Russia’s international security concerns, its economic interests, and the complicated internal dynamics and constraints of its increasingly authoritarian regime. These factors are often interpreted as driving factors of Russian foreign policy. However, few exceptions notwithstanding (Clunan, 2009; Hopf, 2002; Tsygankov, 2013; Tuminez, 2000), there has been limited research focusing on the role of ideational factors present in the discourse of Russian foreign policy and their realization in policies. The following overview identifies research which is relevant to this study and highlights existing deficiencies.
A number of Russian foreign policy scholars have ascribed the increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy of the post 2000s to the formation of a new national identity (Clunan, 2009; Hopf, 2002). They note that the “debate within the Russian foreign policy elite is based as much on pragmatism as aspirations, illusions and fluid perceptions” (Allison, 2006, p. 73). Conversely, many Russian scholars see Russian foreign policy as guided by its national identity which has been shaped by geopolitical and historic challenges (Tsygankov, 2016; Trenin, 2002). Indeed, many scholars agree that Russia’s history may form the single most important explanation for its foreign policy (Legvold, 2007; Lo, 2002; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014; Tsygankov, 2012). Also, scholars have noted the mutually constitutive effects between foreign policy and Russian national identity. A variety of historical events from the days of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, such as the Russian victories over foreign invaders, have been identified as essential to the consolidation of Russian national identity and as such, relevant to the current Russian foreign policy (Smith, 2012; Tsygankov, 2013). Additionally, the demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent period of Russia’s international marginalization are seen as particularly relevant to the current international behavior of Russia. Relatedly, the post-2000 assertive Russian foreign policy has been ascribed to a new, self-confident Russian national identity (Clunan, 2009; Hopf, 2002; Tsygankov, 2011).

Nonetheless, there is an ongoing scholarly discussion about whether an identifiable and coherent Russian foreign policy ideology exists. Many scholars note that the current Kremlin regime still remains in search of a meaningful ideological framework. To fill the gap, the Kremlin relies on a number of cliches about Russia as a great world power and on the incorporation of these cliches in a largely ad hoc foreign policy (Chen, 2016; Teper, 2016; Trenin, 2007). Also, many inherent conceptual contradictions between national ideology and
regime ideology complicate the evaluation of ideas which may underlie Russian foreign policy (Chen, 2016). There are opinions that the ruling Russian regime tailors and controls the ideational framework of Russian foreign policy, and that the majority of foreign policy experts in Russia are sycophants of the Kremlin (Khvostunova, 2015). Correspondingly, many scholars see Russian foreign policy principles as overwhelmingly conditioned by the authoritarian character of the Kremlin (Herpen, 2014; Lough et al, 2014; Motyl, 2015). Indeed, the long shadow of the Kremlin and its elite groups, particularly siloviki with their strong economic and military associations, over the intellectual domain of Russia is well documented (Galeotti, 2016; Laruelle, 2016; March, 2012; Sakwa, 2017). However, there is dissent within the Kremlin regarding specific foreign policy actions and factions, as seen in frictions between the groups associated with military-industrial and security sectors and more Orthodox Church-associated groups and intellectuals (Laruelle, 2016). However, the question of how and to what degree the Kremlin designs and manipulates ideas to suit its agenda, and, conversely, whether and how the Kremlin’s agenda is modified to fit within the existing ideational frameworks, remains. This problem has been acknowledged by scholars, and an infallible answer to it is yet to be found. Russian scholars and foreign policy experts also note that participants in Russia’s foreign policy discourse are cognizant of these factors. Many individuals and institutions seek to maintain their intellectual independence and distance themselves from Putin’s regime, while the Kremlin continues to attempt to craft a coherent Russian foreign policy strategy, being dependent on ideas arising from the Russian intellectual milieu.

In these dynamics, Russian think tanks have played a prominent role. Russia has not been exempt from the global trend of growing influence of think tanks, and many members of Russian think tanks are among the best-known public figures of foreign policy discourse who often
generate and disseminate foreign policy recommendations to the Kremlin. In contrast with Western think tanks, most Russian foreign policy think tanks are often seen as closely associated with and financially linked with the Russian government (Table A). This complicates the examination of their contribution of independent foreign policy suggestions. However, it does not necessarily preclude the ability of these think tanks and individuals to generate substantial foreign policy ideas and recommendations which echo popular sentiments or critique the Kremlin policies. Scholars have noted that think tanks retain considerable intellectual leeway even in strongly authoritarian states (Abelson et al, 2016; Khvostunova, 2015; Lough et al, 2014). In addition to the official Kremlin doctrine and semi-official foreign policy discourse, there is an abundant variety of “ideological currents circulating at a level below that of official discourse” (Hutchings and Szostek, 2016, p. 179).

In addition to these theoretical approaches and insights to Russian foreign policy, there is a number of specifically Russian outlooks on Russian foreign policy. They have originated in Russia and have created many-layered intellectual foundation for Russian foreign policy. The following section outlines these Russian theoretical frameworks which are essential for understanding the origins and the evolution of the ideas present in the current Russian foreign policy.

3. **Foreign policy ideas in Russia: Westernism, nationalism, and pragmatism**

In Russia, after the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union, a complex political debate evolved over Russian foreign policy principles which were no longer formally subject to the Communist party doctrine. During this period, in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy, there was not only a battle for tangible power, influence, and resources, but also a battle of conflicting ideas and visions of Russia’s future. Russian foreign policy actors faced uncertainties as to how
to craft the guidelines of a new foreign policy under the new conditions of uncertain democratic political culture and ill-defined political institutions. The new Russian foreign policy elite was undermined by diverse domestic pressures reaching beyond merely practical constraints of economic and political power struggles. In the intellectual void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the scene was set for new ideas which would contribute to forming a new national identity. Public intellectuals and institutions developed a wide range of ideas which incorporated Russia’s pre-Communist past, its Communist history, and the post-Communist realities in different ways (Jackson, 2003, p. 70-73). To a large degree, these ideas developed as a response to international conditions which Russia faced in the 1990s, among which Russia’s perspectives regarding the West were preeminent.

Three broad ideational frameworks of Russian foreign policy emerged: liberalism/Westernism, nationalism/civilizationalism, and nationalism’s more moderate counterpart, pragmatism/statism (Clunan, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012; Light et al, 2003; Tsygankov, 2013). Each of these broad ideational approaches suggested a distinct “road map” for Russian foreign policy for the foreseeable future. They presented their versions of Russian national interests and security concerns, outlined their perception of Russian national identity, defined Russia’s place regarding the West and in broader international context, and suggested specific policies. While these approaches are broad theoretical constructs, and, in reality, their ideas and policy suggestions can overlap, these ideational frameworks help to conceptualize the core ideas and models which form the foundation of Russian foreign policy.

As Berlin (1978/2008) has noted, “like all over-simple classifications (…), the dichotomy becomes, if pressed, artificial, scholastic, and ultimately, absurd. But if it is not an aid to serious criticism, neither should it be rejected” (p. 25). One should remain cognizant of pitfalls of rigid
theoretical models, but it is the premise of this research that these distinct ideational frameworks help to understand Russian foreign policy.

**Westernism**

This school of thought envisioned Russia as a modern federal state, with civil liberties and Western-style political, economic, and social institutions. Russia was to become a liberal democracy within a benign international environment of democratic states. In many of its principles, Westernism echoed the Westernizer school of the 19th century debates between Russian Slavophiles and Westernizers. These debates were prominent in the formation of Russian identity discourse throughout the following century, and thus offered the Westernizer school of thought additional historic legitimacy (Tsygankov, 2013). According to Westernism, Russia’s foreign policy goals should be the integration with Western-led international institutions, such as the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and even NATO. This was to be accomplished by abolishing Russia’s self-perceived super-power mentality in international affairs and closely cooperating with the West (Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012, pp. 148-149).

Many representatives of this school of thought emphasized that Russia’s new national identity and national interests would no longer be based on imperialistic or neo-colonialism principles. Instead, Russia was to seek an integration with former Soviet states on peaceful and mutually equitable terms, without changes to the post-Cold war political borders. In the post-Cold War international order, Russia was to be a “normal” state without special rights or privileges toward its neighbors, and its interests would largely coincide with the West (Clunan, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Tsygankov, 2013). Under this foreign policy framework, Russia should avoid military involvement, not only for philosophical reasons, but also because wars were too
costly and inefficient. Russia’s security interests could be ensured through international negotiations and integration. The sensitive issue of Russian diaspora and Russian citizens abroad could be resolved through human rights and international law organizations. Influential representatives of this approach to foreign policy included Russia’s President Yeltsin (1990-1999), Prime Minister Gaidar (1992), and Foreign Minister Kozyrev (1990-1996) (Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012).

However, in a few years, the supporters of Westernism became disillusioned with the ensuing chaos within Russia and with Russia’s marginalized international status (Khvostunova, 2015; Tsygankov, 2013). Isaiah Berlin’s view of the Westernizers of the 19th century Russia whose counterproductive “ready-made solutions, imported from the West and capable only of artificially being grafted on to the recalcitrant growth provided by their own countrymen (...) to the peculiar problems posed by Russia alone” could be equally applicable to the Westernizer school of thought of the 1990s (Berlin, 1978/2008, pp. 5-6). In several ways, with its emphasis on international cooperation the foreign policy ideas underlying the Westernist school of thought echoed elements of the approach to international affairs which had been proposed by the idealists of E. H. Carr (1964) or Kantian liberals of Doyle (1997). The brief dominance and the overall fleeting impact of the Westernist school illustrates the limitations of over-reliance on theoretical ideational models in foreign policy analysis. A number of former Westernist figures eventually became associated with the pragmatist school of thought, as was seen in the ideological transformation of the Carnegie Moscow Foundation in the late 2000s (Kirchik, 2019). Some scholars have noted that from its onset, the Westernist model of foreign policy may have been more prominent in theory than in practice, and many nominal “Westerners” of the 1990s were, in fact, mostly anti-Western in their real-life outlook and actions (Jackson, 2003; Rutland, 2016).
However, even in the early 2000s, there were self-identified “liberal westernizers” active in Russian political life and the legislature (e.g. Alexi Arbatov, the Deputy Chair of the Duma Defense Committee and the leader of Yabloko political party) (Allison, 2006, p. 75; Omelicheva, 2016).

Nationalism

Decisive attributes of Russian nationalism as a school of foreign policy thought are often disputed. It remains a broad umbrella concept, and the definitions of Russian identity and Russian nationalism display ambivalence and contradictions (Bluhm, 2016; Hale, 2014; Rancour-Laferrier, 2000; Laruelle, 2015; Laruelle, 2016a). However, many scholars have noted that the modern Russian nationalism inherently relies on anti-Western sentiments as a unifying aspect. Such attitudes had been shaped by Russia’s ambiguous experiences with the West in the 1990s which resulted in push-back sentiments and corresponding policy suggestions (Ponarin and Sokolov, 2013). Such view conforms with the nationalistic reусsentiment model of Greenfeld (1992). However, this offers an only partial insight in Russian nationalism. In domestic politics, Russian nationalism is associated with the interpretation of Russia’s history as a guideline for its future policies and with emphasis on strong leadership in domestic politics and the state control over economics, and society. These aspects are favorably contrasted with unfettered capitalism, democracy, and individualism. Also, the Russian Orthodox Church is seen as a universal arbiter for political and social development, and Russia is viewed as being a unique civilizational and geopolitical entity with its own global mission. Many of these principles had been articulated in the 19th century disputes between Slavophiles and Westernizers, with the modern Russian nationalism echoing the Slavophile camp and the Pan-Slavism movement of the 19th century. Noted early Russian nationalists include Vladimir Solovyev (1853-1900) and his definition of
the “Russian Idea”, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) and his concept of Russia as the “New Jerusalem”, and Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954) who presented an elaborate strategy for Russia’s development. Many of their ideas referenced the medieval Kievan Rus, Byzantine Empire, and other periods of Russian history and still remain staples of Russian nationalism, extending into recommendations for foreign policy. Their importance is exemplified by numerous references by President Putin of Berdyayev, Ilyin, and other Russian nationalist philosophers (Light, 2015; Rancour-Laferrier, 2000; Tsygankov, 2013).

Specific nationalistic recommendations for Russian foreign policy are varied, but they all draw their legitimacy from Russia’s history and culture. They may present divergent visions of Russia’s international role as a great power, but commonly advocate a militant approach to foreign affairs. The suggested levels of international involvement for Russia range from self-imposed distancing from the West in favor to the East to a more common advocacy of neo-imperial or neo-Communistic revanchism and, most importantly, to a focus on Russia as a unique Eurasian entity. The Kremlin’s official foreign policy has been frequently criticized by Russian nationalists for its neglect of Russia’s co-ethnics abroad and its incompatibility with Russian national identity (Rancour-Ferrier, 2000; Tsygankov, 2013). Russian nationalists almost universally consider the existing political borders as unjust and seek their revision. Many of them also seek broader Slavic unity internationally and support the establishment of the Eurasian Union under Russia’s hegemony.

An important unifying concept of Russian nationalism is the quasi-spiritual Russkiy Mir (the Russian World). It denotes a broad culturally and historically connected region of Russian speakers which comprises many territories of the former Soviet Union beyond Russia’s current borders. Russkiy Mir, in addition to Russia and Belorussia, also includes the disputed territories
of Eastern Ukraine, Northern Kazakhstan, Transnistria in Moldova, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. This designation is used with varying political, cultural, and religious connotations, but in foreign policy, it is closely associated with Russia’s obligation to ensure its uncontested political and cultural influence in the areas of Russian-speakers or “historic Russian lands” regardless of the existing political borders (Laruelle, 2016b; Light, 2015). Sometimes, to rationalize Russia’s dominance in regions where the Russian World had less historical context, as in places which have close affiliations with Islam, nationalists recommended also focusing on economic relations (Petro, 2015).

In foreign policy, the nationalistic framework routinely supported military solutions. The nationalistic approach to foreign policy had strong advocacy in the Russian military leadership. Scholars noted that nationalism, particularly the more neo-imperialistic ideas, had become the guiding ideology for the Russian military in early 1990s when the Russian military was undergoing an ideological crisis (Rumer, 1994; Mankoff, 2009). By chance or by design, the Russian World’s periphery currently has considerable militarized enclaves, “frozen conflicts”, and military bases (Kravchuk, 2015). Overall, the West, its institutions, and organizations are seen at best as incompatible with Russian interests, and more commonly, as an irreconcilable enemy with whom a military confrontation is inevitable (Laruelle, 2016b).

Within the broad nationalistic approach to foreign policy, scholars identified strands of Eurasianism, pan-Slavism, civilizationism, neo-Imperialism, and neo-Communism. Eurasianism was the best defined and prominent branch of Russian nationalism, which presented a vision of Russia as a global Eurasian heartland destined to control the continents of Europe and Asia. In the 1990s, this strand of nationalism was articulated by philosophers Lev Gumilev, and Alexander Dugin (Jackson, 2003). For Russia’s international role, they recommend a
reconciliation of Islam and Christianity and a union of Slavic and Central Asian states in order to counterbalance the hostile Atlantic power block (Hutchings and Szostek, 2016; Zevelev, 2009). For this, the Russia’s dominance and the expansion of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Union were seen as important and immediate goals in Russian foreign policy. Other, less prominent Russian nationalistic strand, Pan-Slavism advocated close cooperation and potential unification of all Slavic countries and regions in Europe and regions of Asia. Its best-known representative and the leader was Alexander Solzhenytsin, a renowned writer and intellectual. His writings explicitly called for the unification of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine and the resurrection of Russian Empire. Closely associated with pan-Slavism, but explicitly focusing on ethnic Russians only, was ethnic Russian nationalism, characterized by extreme xenophobia, anti-Islamic and anti-migration sentiments. It opposed Russia’s enlargement beyond its ethnic borders, but advocated incorporating Belarus, parts or whole of Ukraine, and the northern Kazakhstan within Russia (Hutchings and Szostek, 2016; Zevelev, 2009). Civilizational nationalism relied on the Russian Orthodox church as a unifier of the Russian and Slavic worlds along their religious affinities (Zevelev, 2009). This group regarded Ukraine as part of Russia due to the role of Kiev as the birthplace of Russian Orthodox Christianity and assigned Moscow the global role as an imperialistic “Third Rome”. This group is the current leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kiril. Along similar lines, other supra-nationalistic and neo-Imperialistic groups sought a rebirth of the Russian Empire as a multi-ethnic state and support the creation of the Eurasian Union based on economic integration and supranational, not ethnic values (Giuliano, 2011). Their representatives at some time included well-known Eurasianists Alexander Prokhanov and Dmitry Rogozin. Lastly, Russian neo-Communists demanded an immediate re-unification of Russian language speakers and other former Soviet citizens abroad.
along the borders of the former Soviet Union. Many former minorities of the Soviet Union, such as Tatars and Ossetians were seen as Russian citizens, a part of the Soviet Union’s heritage, and, as such, “belonging” to Russia. This nationalistic group advocated a particularly bellicose foreign policy and expansionism. Its representatives include well-known public figures such as Gennady Zyuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and many representatives of the military elites, including the former defense minister Pavel Grachev and his deputies (Jackson, 2003; Laruelle, 2015; Mankoff, 2009).

Many scholars note that Russian nationalism, a largely populistic and fragmented philosophy, was not a meaningful political force or a coherent ideational foreign policy source in the 1990s. However, over the next decades its influence grew considerably, and since the mid-2000s it developed as a more consolidated ideational and political platform, often opposing official foreign policies (Bluhm, 2016; March, 2011; Tsygankov, 2013; Umland, 2012). Several prominent think tanks of nationalistic affiliation, such as the Izborsk Club and the Russkiy Mir Foundation and their front figures Aleksandr Dugin, Aleksandr Prokhanov, Dmitry Rogozin, and Sergei Glaziyev became prominent in the Russian foreign policy discourse. However, a considerable scholarly disagreement about the role of nationalism in Russian foreign policy remains. While many scholars characterize Russian foreign policy as outright “nationalistic”, a few scholars assert that, in spite of appearances, nationalism has no discernible influence on Russian foreign policy actions (Jarzynska, 2014).

Pragmatism

The basic domestic policy principle of pragmatism is the assumption that a strong, centralized state power in Russia is essential for Russia’s development and sovereignty. This is evident in its alternative designation, “statism” (Tsygankov, 2013). However, along with an
emphasis on the supremacy of the state, pragmatism also recognizes the potential importance of economic and military reform and social development to permit Russia to maintain its status among other major powers. Thus, pragmatism sees economic development and limited democratization as useful for Russia’s advancement, provided it does not foster socio-economic fragmentation. Shevtsova (2016) offers this summary of the pragmatic approach: “Pragmatists certainly gravitate toward rationalism: They want to have a clear understanding of reality and aim at furnishing politicians with practical recommendations. Such an approach requires a focus on clearly defined criteria, which are expressed in terms of interest, force, or both. (...) Among these are a belief in the end of ideology and commitment to the idea that politicians should stick to traditional political mechanisms. Moreover, pragmatism is oriented toward maintaining stability and the status quo.”

In foreign policy, pragmatism sees geopolitics, spheres of influence, multipolarity, and, when advantageous, collective security or limited military intervention, as a sound ideational foundation for advancing Russian foreign policy. While Russia is seen as a unique geopolitical entity with its specific privileges, the pragmatic approach envisions Russia as a part of the international society and as one of the foremost global powers. Russian pragmatism strongly favors the establishment of a concert-based international order, to supplant the global dominance of the US and the West with a more balanced distribution of decision making by major world powers, including Russia. The restoration of the balance of powers with Russia as one of the top international decision makers is seen as the best insurance for international stability (Tsygankov, 2013).

Pragmatists see the maintenance of Russia’s privileged spheres of interest, particularly in Eastern Europe, as essential not only for national security reasons, but also for the purpose of
global stability. If Russia’s control over its spheres of interests are not maintained, pragmatists assert, the West would expand at Russia’s expense, thus creating global imbalance and forcing Russia to enact countermeasures. To avoid this, Russian foreign policy goals include continuous vigilance of Russian influence over its adjacent regions. However, Russia’s overextension abroad is seen to be as dangerous as overly contracted borders. For pragmatism, foreign policy should be based along ensuring Russia’s security and economic interests, not ethnic or religious considerations. During the past decade, the pragmatic concepts foreign policy have focused on Russia’s dominance over its spheres of influence through economic integration under the Eurasian Union projects which have resulted in the Eurasian Economic Union (2015). These largely economics-focused projects should not be equated with the Eurasianism of nationalistic approach. However, pragmatists have advocated a creation of Greater Eurasia through gradual integration between the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and, possibly, BRICS (Sakwa, 2017, p.305). In contrast with nationalism, the Russian diaspora, the Orthodox Christianity or other identity-based considerations are negligible in foreign policy (Shevtsova, 2016).

Another core concept of pragmatism is multipolarity. Pragmatists denounce the existing unipolar world order, which is variably understood as global dominance by the United States, the West, the Atlantic powers, or NATO. A concert-based international system, the world order based upon agreements among the major world powers, is seen as a natural extension of multipolarity which would permit Russia to ensure its interests through diplomacy, economic cooperation and flexible alliances. Russian pragmatists have emphatically stated that the European Concert of the 19th century should be re-invented with some modifications, such as the inclusion of China. The new concert would be more Asia-centered, and it would incorporate the
Eurasian Union, BRICS, and the SCO, but would not entirely exclude the West (Sakwa 2017, p. 321). Some scholars note that such concert could be acceptable to proponents of nationalism, too (Makarychev and Braghioli, 2016). The implications of multipolarity and the concert extend beyond a theoretical concept; multipolarity and concert has been a mainstay of the official vocabulary. Such calls for multipolarity are seen with alarm by Russia’s immediate neighbors who are concerned about Russia’s claims to spheres of influence.

Contrary to popular perception, pragmatism is neither inherently anti-Western, nor inherently bellicose. Frequently, pragmatist public figures have affirmed their identification with Europe and with European values, albeit conditionally, and have called for seeking compromises with the West (Lavrov, 2016; Tsygankov, 2013). The existing international institutions and organizations are not all seen as inherently anti-Russian or incompatible with Russia’s geopolitical goals. Many Russian political intellectuals have proclaimed that Russia seeks to join the “historical” community of European states, even though the bureaucracy, globalization, and the influence of the United States and NATO may have corrupted the true nature of the “Europeanness” (Makyrevich and Braghioli, 2016; Rutland, 2016). Pragmatists have advocated judicious cooperation with many Western-led institutions. In 1997, NATO and Russia established a permanent Joint Council; in 1998, Russia joined G-7; and in 2012, Russia joined the WTO. These are seen as examples of Russian foreign policy being conducted along pragmatic recommendations. Paradoxically, the pragmatic foreign policy model often presents Russia as being more “European” than the structures of the European Union and recommends bilateral cooperation with separate European countries, particularly Germany (Hutchings and Szostek, 2016). Scholars have noted that the concept of a Greater Europe with Russia as an inherent part constitutes an important narrative in the Russian international vision (Sakwa, 2016).
Concurrently, most pragmatists admit that judicious and limited wars may be necessary to protect Russia’s interests and to preserve global stability, particularly wars with nearby renegade nationalistic states who have become proxies of the West (Morozov, 2009; Sakwa, 2017). But overall, for pragmatists, judicious international cooperation based on economic and security interests and the use of flexible alliances, is preferable to military action.

The pragmatist ideational model also invokes international law, at least nominally, as an important part of its foreign policy model. NATO actions in the Balkans in the late 1990s were considered particularly damaging to Russian-Western relations largely because Russia saw it as a departure from legitimate or “civilized” conduct in international relations and threats to the principle of state sovereignty (Wagnsson, 2001). Often, the pragmatic approach emphasizes Russia’s role as a neutral upholder of international law and state sovereignty rights. However, while the Western military intervention in the Balkans and its support for Kosovo independence were vehemently opposed by Russia on legal grounds, they were re-interpreted to support Russia’s intervention in South Ossetia and Ukraine a decade later (Petro, 2016).

The pragmatist school of thought is well represented within official Russian foreign policy circles. Many Russian foreign policy figures are self-proclaimed followers of pragmatic foreign policy and have advocated a concert-based international order, multipolarity and spheres of interest. Russian Foreign Ministers Yevgeny Primakov, Igor Ivanov, and Sergei Lavrov explicitly identify themselves with pragmatic foreign policy (Lavrov, 2016). In contrast with nationalism, pragmatism has had a continuous presence in both Russian foreign policy discourse and official policy makers circles since the 1990s (Light, 2015, pp. 18-27). In particular, Yevgeniy Primakov has been credited with single-handedly developing concepts which reflect the pragmatic approach to foreign policy and the definition of Russian national interests along
geopolitical principles which distinctly differed from the liberal or nationalistic approach (Lukyanov, 2020).

Scholars have noted that many principles of Russian pragmatist approach to international affairs echo the international relations theories of classical realism and defensive realism, particularly in its emphasis on balancing and multipolarity. This may raise doubts about whether pragmatism can be considered a *bona fide* Russian ideational approach to foreign policy. However, Russian pragmatism sees its foundation in the Russian foreign policy principles based on Russia’s history, particularly during the 19th century when Russia was a part of the Concert of Europe and conducted reciprocal relations with other major powers. Many areas of concern in Russian foreign policy of the 19th century -- the Middle East, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Crimean War of the 1850s and the subsequent international marginalization of Russia, are seen as valid analogies and blueprints for the current Russian foreign policy. In the 19th century, Russia’s Foreign Minister Prince Gorchakov successfully guided Russia out of its defeat in the Crimean War by conducting defensive and flexible foreign policy and supporting extensive domestic reforms and, significantly, many pragmatists call themselves neo-Gorchakovists. There are persuasive indications that Gorchakov’s model of foreign policy has served as the intellectual foundation for the pragmatist school of thought (Tsygankov, 2012).

It is likely that Kremlin borrows from both nationalist and pragmatic foreign policy ideas, but there is little consensus between the two schools of thought. Kremlin’s policies are far from being so clearly affiliated with a single ideational approach, and, conversely, there is little unconditional support from both approaches to the Kremlin’s policy. Pragmatists have criticized the current Russo-Ukrainian policies which they see as nationalist-ideology driven, counterproductive, and largely incompatible with sound principles of foreign policy. While
many scholars see the Kremlin’s foreign policies as clearly nationalistic, others note that both Russian foreign ministers Yevgeniy Primakov and Sergei Lavrov have represented principles of the pragmatic school and have opposed the rise of Russian nationalism (Tsygankov, 2013). As Shevtsova (2016) has noted, “…by rejecting the linkage between the Kremlin’s foreign policy and the Russian System’s domestic agenda, and by opposing Western efforts to exert a normative influence on Russia’s internal development, the pragmatists are supporting the “de-ideologization” of foreign policy. “Ideology stopped being the criterion behind the world order,” the pragmatists claim, echoing the thoughts of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who likes to talk about “the liberation from the ideological blinders of the past.” (p.)

At the same time, pragmatists and nationalists may share a few basic principles. They agree about Russia’s unique geopolitical position, its rights to its spheres of influence, and its historic leading role in world affairs (Chen, 2016; Trenin, 2007). Domestically, neither pragmatists nor nationalists would like to see Russia as a liberal western-style democracy with its corresponding values affecting its foreign policy. Both theoretical models often cultivate the view that Russia was undefeated in the Cold War and was denied an “honorable peace” and its rightful place in the international society in the 1990s (Bordachev, 2009). Scholars believe that this aspect of Russian foreign policy thinking has been often underestimated, even though it can potentially negate other ideational differences and make pragmatists and nationalists occasional allies, thus consolidating the Kremlin ideology (Sakwa, 2018; Shuster, 2016; Tsygankov, 2013). However, there is a little hope for a meaningful compromise between nationalism and pragmatism in the future. Pragmatists often accuse nationalists of ideologizing foreign policy, and there have been numerous examples of open antagonism and acrimonious polemics between the representatives of pragmatism and nationalism (Goble, 2014; Laruelle, 2016b; Nozhenko,
2013; Suslov, 2013). In particular, the pragmatists have expressed their aversion to the “territorial and ideological expansionism” which characterizes nationalism (Suslov, 2013, pp. 368-372). In 2016, at the height of Russia’s nationalistic, anti-Western fervor, a political analysis by prominent pragmatists proclaimed “Russia’s unbreakable bond with Europe” (Makarychev and Braghioli, 2016). At the same time, nationalism decries the pragmatic foreign policy model as counterproductive to Russian values and Russia’s international mission. In short, while some elements of nationalism and pragmatism do overlap, both ideational approaches remain distinctly separate.

The table below summarizes the key assumptions of nationalistic and pragmatic approaches to Russian foreign policy, 1990s-2000s.

**Summary of dominant Russian foreign policy ideas 1991-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of foreign policy legitimacy</th>
<th>Westernism</th>
<th>Nationalism</th>
<th>Ideas shared by both nationalism and pragmatism</th>
<th>Pragmatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia as a post-Cold War state</td>
<td>Mostly Russian cultural aspects: language, history, and religion</td>
<td>Russian history as a guide to foreign policy</td>
<td>Mostly 19th century Russian foreign policy and geopolitics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General views on domestic development</td>
<td>Focus on democracy and economic reforms</td>
<td>Focus on collective identity, opposition to democratization and globalization.</td>
<td>Overall conservative world view, support of centralized state, opposition to radical changes</td>
<td>Focus on the state interests, gradual economic and social reforms, integration in international economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on international order and Russia’s international role</td>
<td>Cooperation and integration with the West</td>
<td>Russia is not fully comparable to other states; very limited cooperation with other states possible</td>
<td>The importance of state sovereignty; limited international cooperation</td>
<td>Multipolarity is optimal for protecting Russia’s interests and international stability; flexible alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with neighboring states</td>
<td>Conducted along equanimous terms</td>
<td>Russia’s neighbors are historically determined to be under Russia’s protection and control for mutual benefits</td>
<td>Spheres of interest and regional hegemony</td>
<td>Russia’s influence over its spheres of interest is essential but not necessarily by military means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on Russia’s international adversaries</td>
<td>Russia’s interests are in harmony with the West</td>
<td>Dichotomous world view; strong anti-Western sentiments</td>
<td>West is the most likely enemy</td>
<td>Dealing with its adversaries by diplomacy, flexible alliances, soft power, and domestic consolidation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Views on war in foreign policy

- Unilateral military engagements as highly undesirable
- All Russian wars are conducted for moral reasons and the greater good
- Wars are forced upon Russia
- Wars should be avoided, but may be conducted judiciously

Views on Georgia and Ukraine, 1991-2000

- Ukraine and Georgia as potential partner states to Russia
- Advocacy of military actions and annexations; Ukraine is seen as particularly important
- The Crimea should be under Russian control
- Russia needs to stabilize these regions, but nationalism may provoke a war; generally opposed to territorial annexations

Key Concepts

- Democratic domestic development and Russia as part of the international society
- The “Russian World”; Russia as a unique civilization
- Russia as a major world power with its historic spheres of influence
- The concert-based international system, multipolarity, flexible alliances

4. Changes in the discourse of Russian foreign policy: the exit of Westernism and the rise of nationalism and pragmatism

How were these three ideational approaches reflected in Russian foreign policy discourse, and how did they affect and interact with each other? In the Russian foreign policy milieu, there were significant intellectual disagreements between pragmatism, nationalism, and westernism. Their support by official circles varied, and, in the long term, some approaches and their ideas proved more long-lasting than others. During the immediate post-Cold War years, the worldview of many Russian political leaders and policy experts remained relatively consistent – they mourned the loss of the Russian and Soviet historic territories, population, and cultural heritage and largely blamed the West for Russia’s international humiliation. However, while the “great power rhetoric” was used in the informal and semi-formal discourse, it was hardly reflected in the official discourse or policy which largely echoed the liberal Westernizer philosophy (Tsygankov, 2013). From the mid-1990s, with the dismal course of domestic reforms and the popular disappointment with the Westernism, pragmatism gradually gained ground in the official
and unofficial discourse. Eventually, many former Westernizers began to advocate state-led economic and social interventions and criticized the Western political and socio-economic models. In foreign policy, many former Westernizers aligned with the pragmatic approach. At the same time, pragmatists and nationalists increasingly articulated their differences (Mankoff, 2009; Suslov, 2013; Tsygankov, 2013).

By the late 1990s, the Westernism had largely faded from the foreign policy discourse. Numerous Russian political groups, intellectuals, and the Russian society at large had decidedly become disillusioned with the Westernism-inspired foreign policy – its inability to stem the perceived Western encroachment and Russia’s international marginalization (Jackson, 2003; Ponarin and Sokolov, 2013). Instead, pragmatic and nationalist foreign policy ideas gained popularity and prominence in the foreign policy discourse and stimulated the public debate. Even though the official lip service to Westernism continued, the pragmatic school of thought gained influence in the official Russian foreign policy circles, academia, and government. By contrast, most nationalistic groups, while also gaining popularity, remained largely outside the official foreign policy discourse (Jackson, 2003; Tsygankov, 2013). In 1996, the accession of the Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, a self-ascribed pragmatist, signified a decisive ideational turn of official Russian foreign policy principles. This evolution can be seen by a brief examination of the foreign policy documents of the 1990s. The Foreign Policy Concept of 1992 emphasized Russia’s integration through Western international organizations along the Westernism lines. The Military Doctrine of 1993 asserted Russia’s right to intervene in the CIS territories for peacekeeping purposes. While it did raise questions about Russia’s potential international ambitions, it also largely confirmed Russia’s investment in ensuring regional stability in the turbulent, ethnic-conflict ridden post-Soviet space (Jackson, 2003). By contrast,
The Concept of National Security of 1997 referenced Russia as an equal partner to other great powers and voiced a need to re-evaluate “the new geopolitical and international situation”, thus reflecting a shift in defining Russia’s national interests along principles of pragmatism (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 100). The Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 with its references to Russia as a great power which is responsible for regional and global stability, further affirmed this ideational shift (Tsygankov, 2013).

By 2000, the pragmatism school of thought in Russian foreign policy discourse had become firmly established and broadly accepted as the foundational philosophy of Russian foreign policy (Light, 2015; Tsygankov, 2013). Nationalists who were gaining recognition at a slower pace, criticized it for insufficiently protecting Russia’s interests and regarded it as a continuation of submission to the Western influence. They urged for more assertive foreign policies, such as the protection of Russian speakers abroad and the revision of post-Soviet borders (Tsygankov, 2013). Paradoxically, in the early 2000s, many leading representatives of pragmatism of the next decade, including Sergei Karaganov, Vladimir Lukin, and Sergei Stankevich, were associated with the liberal political party Yabloko, the rival of Vladimir Putin’s party United Russia (Allison, 2006; Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012). This created an unusual backdrop for ideational and political interaction between the representatives of the two schools of thought in the next decade when many nationalists, who, otherwise associated with conservative right-wing and authoritarianism, often opposed Putin’s policies.

5. Contradictions and inconsistencies in theories, concepts, and practice

The study of Russian political ideas often is handicapped by divergent interpretations of common political ideas in Russian and in the non-Russian milieus. For example, as Hale (2011) and Khvostunova (2015) note, Russian understanding of democracy differs from the western
liberal interpretation of democracy. Russians tend to view some aspects of authoritarianism as essential for democracy, while not supporting a true authoritarian regime or dictatorship. Similarly, in foreign policy, concepts and advocacy of multipolarity, spheres of interest, and international law resonate differently for Russia and for its Western counterparts. Moreover, Russian political preferences and foreign policy views are heavily conditioned by their interpretation of history. This is exemplified in the Russian perception of historic events figures (most notably, the World War II and Stalin) which have drastically different connotations in Russian and non-Russian discourses. As Hale (2011) remarks, these differing perspectives are often overlooked and skew conclusions about the true nature of Russian political preferences and origin of policies (p.1369). For these reasons, in order to gain a better understanding of Russia foreign policy, it is important to examine ideas expressed in the discourse of Russian foreign policy. The understanding of the undercurrents of Russian foreign policy, is hardly possible without the examination of “what Russians themselves said about the international political system and about Russian foreign policy, (...) and the recurrent themes which form permanent part of the perceptions of decision makers (...) which are still repeated by officials when they discuss foreign policy” (Light, 2015, pp. 13-15).

There is a considerable conceptual confusion between the Western and Russian use of the terms “nationalism” and “pragmatism” in the scholarly and popular literature which should need clarification. As mentioned earlier, in the analysis of Russian foreign policy, pragmatism is often conflated with nationalism. The differentiation of pragmatism and nationalism is often confounding, as when Russian foreign policy is seen as divided between the camps of “modernist geopolitics” and “traditional geopolitics” (Morozova, 2009). Some scholars (Allison, 2006; Jackson, 2003; Light et al, 2003, and March, 2011) designate pragmatists as “pragmatic
nationalists” or “statist nationalists” while “other nationalists” are also called “fundamental nationalists and Communists”, “extreme nationalists”, or “civilizational nationalists”. Other scholars differentiate “marginalized nationalists”, “underground nationalists”, “incorporated nationalists” or “neo-traditionalists” (Nozhenko, 2013; Omelicheva, 2016; Sakwa, 2017). Sometimes, Russian nationalism is termed “conservatism” (Khvostunova, 2015), and Russian nationalists use this term to describe themselves (Bluhm, 2016; Laruelle, 2016b; Light, 2015). In the terminology of pragmatism, Tsygankov (2013) differentiates statism from pragmatism, while other scholars prefer terms “realist” (Motyl, 2015), “imperial” (Teper, 2016), “modernist geopolitics” (Morozova, 2009), or Eurasianists (Sakwa, 2017). To add to the confusion, some fervent nationalists, such as Gennady Zyuganov, call themselves “healthy pragmatists”. Alexander Lebed, a radical nationalist by many measures, is classified as pragmatic nationalist by Jackson (2003). Shevtsova (2016), when addressing the pragmatic approach to foreign policy, mostly focuses on the Westernism-inclined pragmatists, while sparsely applying this term to leading foreign policy figures in Russia. To avoid such obfuscations, this research generally adheres to the terms of Westernism, nationalism, and pragmatism as they are defined by Tsygankov (2013).

This chapter provided a brief insight in the scholarly ways of thinking about the role of ideas in foreign policy and an overview of the origins, nuances, and complexities of ideas which have framed the Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet period. The next chapter will examine the domestic and international background which conditioned the evolution and fruition of these theoretical approaches to Russia’s foreign policy in the 2000s.
CHAPTER III. Developments in the Milieu of Russian Foreign Policy:

New and Old Ideas and Actors

By most accounts, from 2000, Russia had entered a new period of its foreign policy (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014; Mankoff, 2009; Tsygankov, 2013). One may wonder what conditions facilitated this transformation. The previous decade was marked by President Yeltsin’s inability to ensure Russia’s interests in the post-Cold War international order which was dominated by the West. However, as noted in the previous chapter, in Russia, a variety of foreign policy ideas had been percolating in response to this failure. This chapter addresses the more tangible aspects and changes in the milieu of foreign policy which ensured the further advancement of these ideas. Such factors include Russia’s economic revival, domestic political changes, and various identity-related issues as well as external pressures. Furthermore, significant changes in the milieu of Russian foreign policy were brought by new participants in the discourse of Russian foreign policy, most notably, foreign policy think tanks. They produced large and varied output of policy recommendations; they had significant public presence; and they had close ties with the policy makers in the Kremlin. The convergence of these factors ensured that the foreign policy ideas which were generated in the previous decade had both favorable intellectual setting and sufficient material support for further development and dissemination. This chapter highlights, in two parts, firstly, domestic and international conditions which formed the background and the problematique of Russian foreign policy, and, secondly, the rise of new actors in the milieu of Russian foreign policy, with a particular focus on the rise of think tanks. Without the discussion of these developments, the understanding of Russian foreign policy ideas would remain incomplete.

I. An overview of Russia’s domestic and international background, 2000-2014
A number of domestic developments and external conditions conditioned Russia’s foreign policy ideas in 2000-2014. The following overview of these events begins with the summary of domestic economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions and their relevance to the discourse of foreign policy. The it proceeds to the examination of international conditions which created Russian foreign policy crises. These events formed the background for Russian foreign policy and thus are essential for understanding the ideational development and subsequent changes Russian foreign policy.

A. Russia’s domestic development and foreign policy

The domestic changes in Russia – the growth of Russia’s economy, its political consolidation, and national identity-related issues – affected the tone and the direction of foreign policy discourse. While interactions between domestic factors and foreign policy are complicated and uncertain, many scholars have noted that domestic stability contributed to the growing assertiveness of Russian foreign policy by generally creating beneficial domestic conditions for Russia’s growing international ambitions.

1. Russia’s economic revival

Among underlying domestic conditions which affect the foreign policy of a state, the economic development is commonly seen as preeminent. Commonly, a state’s economic growth inaugurates thinking about implementing foreign ambitions and enhancing international presence. These were hardly possible with Russia’s economic collapse of the 1990s. But in the 2000s, Russia’s “soaring gas and oil prices made energy-rich Russia powerful, less cooperative, more arrogant and (...) dramatically decreased the Russian state’s dependence on foreign funding” (Krastev, 2007). There is little doubt that, in the early 2000s, Russia’s booming economy, its trade surpluses, and the accumulated currency reserves provided the Kremlin with a
welcome insulation from fiscal, political, and social pressures which handicapped the Russian government in the previous decade. At home, the economic recovery enabled to extend the budget for the social sector and to conduct the military reform. Social expenditures ensured popular support to the Russian government, and the military reform increased Russia’s confidence to project its power internationally. Abroad, it also permitted Russia to expand its soft power through trade, investments, and increased cultural presence. As a result, Russia’s global imprint broadened. Occasional economic setbacks, such as the financial crisis of 2008 and international economic sanctions on Russia after its war with Georgia, did not seem to hamper either Russia’s economy or its continuously assertive foreign policy course (Tsygankov, 2011).

At the same time, Russia’s economic development also complicated Russian foreign policy preferences. There has been little agreement about the precise effect of Russia’s economic development on choices for its foreign policy direction. Scholars have noted that, in the debate about Russia’s “energy weapon” as a foreign policy leveraging tool, there were uncertainties about the level of the state’s control over the big energy companies and the degree of influence of the energy sector on Russian foreign and domestic policy. A multitude of interests and “intersecting vectors” which have competing foreign and domestic policy imperatives can skew both energy sector’s interests and the foreign policy agenda (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 45). Also, Russian foreign policy experts noted that being an energy superpower has been a double-edged sword for Russia’s foreign policy: its dominance in the regional energy markets may have made Europe and other neighboring regions more amenable to Russia’s international demands and had brought large profits to Russia, but it may also have made its neighbors wary of being overly dependent on Russia, thus adversely affecting Russia’s long-term foreign policy goals. To
offset such disadvantages, Russia should be diversifying its economic activities abroad by extending its investments, trade, and services (Tsygankov, 2011).

Russia’s economic revival also brought forth suggestions to usher extended regional economic integration under Russia’s leadership through the new international economic organizations, such as the Eurasian Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. These organizations affirmed Russia’s international ambitions and its economic sway, however, they were encumbered by participants’ contradictory interests and their often-volatile relations (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014). If Armenia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan were broadly receptive to becoming economically integrated with Russia, other former Soviet states, notably Ukraine and Moldova, had little interest in participating in the Customs Union or the Eurasian Union. In sum, due to these inherent contradictions, Russia’s economic recovery and its effects on foreign policy, while undoubtedly important, were conditional and perhaps should not be overestimated in its shaping the ideas, the agenda and the course of Russian foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2013).

However, Russia’s economic revival in the early 2000s had at least two broad consequences. It set the scene for a public foreign policy debate about Russia’s global role, and it created favorable materialistic conditions for the funding of new actors of foreign policy, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

2. The centralization of power

Among domestic political changes in Russia, 2000-2014, the centralization of power under President Putin is indisputably the most prominent. Since his ascent to power in 2000, in contrast with the tenuous President Yeltsin’s hold on power, the political power in Russia became firmly embedded with Putin and his narrow inner circle. Their power was secured the marginalization of political opposition and regional reforms (White, 2006). This ensured that
Russia’s president became singularly important in the making of Russian foreign policy and exercised a high degree of control over foreign policy decisions. These developments conditioned the formation and nature of the discourse of foreign policy which was at least partially influenced by the presidential preferences.

However, while Russia’s president has become the defining figure of Russian politics, he remains subject to significant domestic constraints, and he does not exert absolute control over domestic and foreign policy nor is he indifferent to popular opinion (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014; Tsygankov, 2012; White, 2006). A number of institutions and structures retain a significant advisory role. Among them, the Foreign Ministry, the Security Council, the Ministry of Defense, various committees, and the presidential administration, retain some leeway in modifying policy agendas, articulating official statements, and adopting foreign policy-related resolutions. Also, informal advisors and unofficial institutions, such as think tanks, are known to have shaped Putin’s decisions. Their precise relative influence may be difficult to calculate, but, overall, their presence conditions the singular power of presidency and likely inhibits Putin from undertaking particularly controversial or contentious actions at home and abroad (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014; Light, 2015; White, 2006, p. 42-43). These limitations became obvious during the popular dissatisfaction with Russian foreign policy in 2004 or during the contested 2012 elections and the subsequent “Russian Spring”. The opposition to Putin by both liberal and ultra-nationalistic political and social groups highlighted the fragility and conditionality of Putin’s leadership. Many scholars assert that these events were crucial for Putin’s turn to nationalism (Light, 2015; Laruelle, 2016). As a result, since the mid-2000s, the Kremlin sporadically pursued more populistic foreign policy to increase its domestic support. In short, while “most crucial foreign policy decisions were made (…) in the Kremlin”, many contextual factors, including conflicting
intellectual underpinnings and contrasting views on Russian foreign policy made Russian foreign policy prone to waver (White, 2006, p. 26). And, in spite of the increased political centralization, the Kremlin has seemed to be receptive to various foreign policy ideas arising in Russian foreign policy discourse.

3. Search for a new national identity

As noted earlier, the social constructivist approach to foreign policy highlights the importance of identity-based aspects which condition thinking about foreign policy, the framing of national interests and international goals, and the selection of ways how to achieve them. These aspects relate to the Kremlin’s attempts to consolidate a new Russian national identity. The official advocacy of a non-ethnic and civic national identity of the 1990s, which in many ways complemented the Westernizer school of foreign policy, had faded. By the mid-2000s, it was replaced by an amalgamation of “sovereign democracy”, Russia’s history, anti-Western sentiments, and external threats. The “official” national identity advocated by the Kremlin relied on the vague concepts of “sovereign democracy” or “managed democracy” as ideational underpinnings of Russian society. These concepts were based on the centralization of power, the state primacy in economics and politics, military revitalization, autonomous cultural identity, and, for the purposes of foreign policy, the premise of Russia regaining its international position as a great power (Averre, 2007; Chen, 2011; Krastev, 2007; March, 2012; Morozov, 2009). Overall, these concepts did not gain wider national recognition and had limited significance in regard to foreign policy.

However, the reliance on selected aspects of Russia’s history and culture became ubiquitous. By the late 2000s, Russians were rewriting their history books, and, as some noted, were entering “historic amnesia” (Lucas, 2008). Historic elements which were particularly
encouraged by the official circles included aspects of the 19th century Russian Empire and the achievements of the Soviet Union, particularly the Soviet victory in the World War II (March, 2012; Tsygankov, 2012). Putin’s reference to the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century illustrated the growing emphasis on Russia’s Soviet past, but also revealed inherent inconsistencies and contradictions in the deployment of history at the service of the Kremlin. Paradoxically, the Russian Orthodox Church was also lauded as a paragon of Russian national values. In the future, such cultivation of historic-cultural aspects became increasingly important in foreign policy discourse (Galeotti and Bowen 2014; Tsygankov, 2013).

The national identity debate also rekindled questions about Russia’s position vis-à-vis the West. Increasingly, Russia was juxta-positioned to the West. Such dichotomy may or may not have handicapped the formation of Russian national identity, but it definitely contributed to Russia’s general aloofness from the West (Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2013). Scholars have questioned why broad swaths of Russian society, generally well-educated, relatively prosperous, and far from insular, would become anti-Western (Lucas, 2008, p. 4). A possible answer was that the Kremlin had successfully scripted a self-justifying populistic myth of national identity for neo-imperialistic purposes (Bugajski, 2008; Lucas, 2008; Mankoff, 2009; Trenin, 2007). However, scholars also noted that national identity could not be manufactured by the Kremlin without sufficient societal support and that international events greatly contributed to the popular anti-Western sentiments in Russia (Graham, 2007; Tsygankov, 2013). The debate about Russia’s relations with the West also became the focal point of foreign policy discourse.

Related to attitudes toward the West, issues arising from Russia’s curtailed borders and the Russian diaspora figured prominently in both national identity discussion and the foreign
policy discourse. The large number of Russians abroad, a “mismatch between Russia’s new state borders and its ethnic borders” and the perception of this condition as a “great historical injustice and a key threat to Russia’s security” related both to the Russian national identity aspects and to the framing of foreign policy ideas (Zevelev, 2007, p. 6). Concerns over Russia’s border security and associated threats to Russia and its citizens fostered a general sense of historic injustice, insecurity, the growth of anti-Western attitudes, and an impetus for changing the existing international order (Sakwa, 2017).

Overall, the prolonged national identity debate of the 2000s remained closely intertwined with the conceptual development of Russian foreign policy. After decades-long search for a consensual national identity, in 2013, Sergei Karaganov, a prominent Russian foreign policy expert, lamented that a cohesive Russian identity remained an unfulfilled precondition for coherently defining Russia’s new global role and its goals (Karaganov, 2013). Even though the formation of a clear-cut Russian national identity remained elusive, Russia’s veritable “political bazaar” of foreign policy narratives which included “communism, ultra-national theocracy, Eurasianism, pan-Slavism, radical liberalism, and pragmatism” provided insights in many identity-related issues (Lucas, 2008, p. 102; March, 2012, p. 402). Conversely, the increased public attention to Russian national identity indirectly contributed to the consolidation of the broad ideational camps of foreign policy, pragmatism and nationalism, which proposed different approaches to such identity-related issues as Russia’s relations with the West, the Russian diaspora, and Russian history and culture (Galeotti and Boden, 2014; Light, 2006; Lucas, 2008).

In sum, Russia’s domestic development was wrought with contradictions arising from economic growth, political consolidation, and the attempts to shape Russian national identity which, while contributing to lively foreign policy discourse, generally disadvantaged the
formation of a comprehensive foreign policy strategy (March, 2012, p. 403; Tsygankov, 2012). Furthermore, the domestic development of Russia – the combination of Russia’s economic growth, its authoritarian centralization of power, and often disquieting national identity issues – made Russia’s neighbors and other countries question Russia’s international intentions and thus contributed to many foreign policy crises. These foreign policy crises, which, in turn, significantly affected the discourse and development of Russian foreign policy, are discussed in the following section.

A. External conditions: International dynamics and Russian foreign policy crises

In addition to the domestic development, external conditions are at least as equally important in shaping foreign policy ideas and in affecting the course of foreign policy. Effects of foreign policy crises on foreign policy ideas have been examined by many scholars who have noted that foreign policy crises can affect the development of foreign policy ideas in at least two ways: by directing attention to immediate pressures and by reevaluating concepts and long-term goals. During foreign policy crises, views of official and unofficial policy advisors, public opinion, available policy choices, diplomatic and economic means, and changes in official and popular discourse often play a decisive role (Light, 1994). In addition, social constructivist scholars have noted the importance of ideational precepts in foreign policy crises and the interpretation of the urgency of threats (Allison, 2006; Bock and Henneberg, 2013; Kratochvil, 2004; Kubalkova, 2001; Onuf, 2001). Along these lines, external events have strongly conditioned the development of Russian foreign policy ideas. The many foreign policy crises facing Russia in the 2000s harked back to the post-Cold War events and their imprint on Russian identity; they were also compounded by attitudes and actions of Russia’s neighbors and the West (Sakwa, 2017, p. 30; Tsygankov, 2012; Tsygankov, 2013). While the precise hierarchy of these foreign policy crises
remains debatable, there is little doubt that international events have significantly affected Russia’s foreign policy discourse and agenda. Among particularly important Russian foreign policy crises, scholars list the expansion of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe in 2004-2012, the Color Revolutions 2003-2005 in Eastern Europe, the Kosovo Crisis in 2008, and the upheavals of the Arab Spring in 2011 (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, Tsygankov, 2016). The expansion of the EU and NATO and the Color Revolutions may have contributed to the rise of Russian nationalism and the growing influence of nationalistic approach to foreign policy (Light, 2015; Laruelle, 2016).

1. The expansion of the EU and NATO

The enlargement of the European Union and NATO in Eastern Europe in 2004-2012 created a preeminent yet largely unresolvable problem for Russian foreign policy and conditioned Russia’s attitude toward the West. Since the 1990s, Russia had expressed concerns about the projected expansion of the EU and NATO. Half-hearted attempts of cooperation between Russia and NATO in the 1990s were irrevocably damaged by the Russian-opposed NATO strikes against Serbia in 1999. After 9/11, Russia’s limited cooperation with NATO briefly resumed, but steadily deteriorated throughout the 2000s. The establishment of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002 may have been designed to “soften the blow” of the subsequent EU and NATO enlargement, but it failed to alleviate Russia’s worries. The 2004 NATO inclusion of the eager new members, former Soviet satellite states Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the former Soviet republics Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, created a particularly acute crisis for Russia. NATO’s proposed missile defense shield in Eastern Europe in 2007 and additional membership expansion in 2009 additionally heightened Russia’s security concerns.

Cumulatively, Russia interpreted the existing and anticipated expansion of NATO and the plans
for the missile defense shield as unmistakable security threats, a symbol of Russia’s purposeful international exclusion by the West, and a signal of global instability in the future. In many ways, NATO expansion galvanized Russia’s anti-Western sentiments and prompted Russia’s military modernization and other security measures, such as the placement of nuclear-capable missiles in its Kaliningrad enclave. Russia’s official, generally pragmatically orientated, discourse of the time “regretted” rather than condemned the 2004 expansion and suggested economic and diplomatic countermeasures. However, Russian nationalistic rhetoric was more fervent, and there were few illusions about the popular outcry against the West and disapproval of Russia’s ineffective policy.

Russia’s relations with the EU, in comparison with the Russo-NATO relations, were somewhat less antagonistic. Russia regarded the admission of a number of Eastern European states to the EU in 2004 as generally counterproductive to Russia’s international interests. However, Russia’s integration with the EU and Europe generally remained an option; it was even characterized as a “key area of Russian foreign policy” in the official discourse (Light, 2006, pp. 5-12; Lynch, 2004). While Russia continuously objected to the EU’s infringements on Russia through the EU structures, norms, and ideas, Russia did not regard the EU as a pressing security threat. This allowed for more nuanced and flexible foreign policy suggestions which anticipated economic benefits from cooperation with the EU and its member states (Light, 2006).

At the same time, the continuous expansion of the EU and NATO seriously handicapped Russia’s relations with the EU and NATO since the early 2000s. In spite of Russian foreign policy becoming somewhat more nuanced and calibrated, it achieved little success in establishing meaningful cooperation with the EU or NATO. Overall, Russia’s policies regarding the EU and NATO seemed unmitigated failures to a large part of Russian society and elites who
criticized the Kremlin’s policies. Russian foreign policy discourse offered alternatives, such as the development of more Eurasia-orientated international organizations, the establishment of closer relations with China and associated organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and a general “pivot to the East” (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014). However, Russia’s policy failure toward the EU and NATO remained unresolved.

2. The fallout of 9/11

Initially, Russia regarded the events of 9/11 as beneficial for furthering Russia’s international goals. International cooperation between the major Western powers and Russia ensued. Russian government shared intelligence and granted US access to military bases in Central Asia (Galeotti and Bowen, 2014). These actions soon created a contentious foreign policy discussion in Russia. The prevailing, largely pragmatically inclined, public and elite opinion held that Russia would benefit from the cooperation by decreasing international terrorism, furthering Russia’s international prestige, and perhaps postponing the looming NATO enlargement. At the same time, the more nationally inclined members of the Russian military elites and other groups opposed the cooperation with the US. After the US renounced the anti-ballistic missile treaty and signaled its enmity toward Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, states with whom Russia maintained working relations, such antagonism became more prevalent (Light, 2006, p. 11). Russia unqualifiedly denounced the subsequent Iraq War of 2003 and sought to create international opprobrium against the US. President Putin, with support of the pragmatist camp at home, succeeded in forging a modest alliance with the leaders of France and Germany against the Iraq war (Lough et al, 2014). Overall, Russo-US relations after the 9/11 crisis reinforced Russia’s views of the US and NATO as duplicit and untrustworthy and prompted Russia to soon denounce its formerly reconciliatory policy.
3. The “Color Revolutions”

The “Color Revolutions” in Georgia, 2003, Ukraine, 2004, and Kirgizstan, 2005 created a series of foreign policy crisis for Russia, the repercussions of which lasted into the following decade. These popular uprisings against corrupt, generally pro-Russian regimes signified the fragility of Russia’s regional influence. When the new governments of Georgia and Ukraine subsequently announced plans to seek membership in the EU and NATO, it was seen by Russia as unequivocal threats which imperiled Russia’s regional security, its energy supply routes and borders, and, equally important, Russia’s international prestige (Tsygankov, 2012). The concept of “sovereign democracy”, the Kremlin’s attempt to consolidate Russian national identity, was created in direct response to the 2004-2005 “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine to pre-empt similar developments in Russia (Krastev, 2007). Eventually, through various foreign policy maneuvers, and the use of economic and political pressures, Russia was able to deter Ukraine and Kirgizstan from their Western ambitions. However, Russia’s foreign policy toward Georgia was less successful and Georgia remained decidedly anti-Russian. Events associated with the Color Revolutions and their aftermath in Georgia and Ukraine are described in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5. Broadly, the Color Revolutions were debacles of Russian foreign policy and served as a confirmation of the Western intentions to encroach and to marginalize Russia. These events widely resonated in Russia and were the focus of many subsequent foreign policy analyses and debates in Russia (Laruelle, 2009; Tsygankov, 2012).

4. The Kosovo crisis

While the Kosovo crisis of 2008 received sparse attention in the West, it had a profound impact on Russian foreign policy. Triggered by the Western recognition of Kosovo’s independence from Serbia, it was viewed with alarm in Russia. It suggested not only a perceived
victory of the Western interests against Russia in the Balkans, but also signaled the breach of national sovereignty and arbitrary foreign intervention. For Russia, the 2008 events in Kosovo appeared an extension of the Western actions against Serbia which Russia had vehemently opposed in the 1990s. Russian nationalists regarded this crisis in the context of the centuries’ long Russian political and cultural affiliation with Serbia and as evidence of Western animosity to Russia, which called for Russia’s military assistance to Serbia. Pragmatists, who saw the Kosovo Crisis as a dangerous legal precedent which would increase global instability and threaten state sovereignty, constrained to advocating diplomatic intervention and economic pressures. Russia was unable to block Kosovo’s international recognition, but in the following years, this event served as a legal precedent in Russia’s arguments in favor of self-determination rights for South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Crimea (Asmus, 2010).

5. The Arab Spring

In the Arab Spring-related foreign policy crises which began in 2011, upheavals in Libya and Syria were of particular importance to Russian foreign policy. The Western interventions in Libya and Syria, whose leaders Gadaffi and Assad had been Russia’s oldest allies in the Arab world, rekindled foreign policy debates in Russia over state sovereignty and the arbitrary international activities of the US and the West. Additionally, the disorder along the Mediterranean highlighted the importance of the Black Sea for Russia’s access to the Mediterranean, and thus brought additional focus to Ukraine and Georgia due to their proximity to the Black Sea and Turkey.

In Russian foreign policy discourse, nationalists, while having few meaningful identity issues in regard Libya or Syria, generally resented Russia’s exclusion from international decision making; they referenced historic connections between the Russian Empire and the Middle East
and ties between the Soviet Union and these countries. They advocated military support and pushback against the Western presence. Pragmatists, while having little sympathy for these regimes, focused on the dubious legality of NATO actions, threats to the regional stability, and the need to counteract the presence of the USA in the Middle East. Russia’s limited involvement in Libya created an argument in favor of Russia’s subsequent involvement in Syria (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014).

When one summarizes the domestic and international conditions which directly and indirectly affected the discourse and the development of Russian foreign policy, it is apparent that these conditions were complex and intertwined. These conditions were further compounded by the rise of new participants in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy. The role of these newcomers in shaping Russian foreign policy discourse is discussed below.

### II. Changes in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy: think tanks and other new participants

From 2000, in addition to the traditional participants of Russian foreign policy – the President, his close associates, and the governmental structures, several new entities increasingly gained prominence in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy. They included non-governmental organizations, such as foreign policy think tanks and foreign policy experts associated with them, and, to a lesser degree, the Russian Orthodox church, political parties, Russian diaspora, and business entrepreneurs who contributed to the foreign policy discourse and the agenda (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, pp. 39-49). By 2014, there were 150 NGOs associated with Russian Foreign Ministry alone. This development was similar to the surge of a “large number of platforms, forums, and outlets” who disseminated numerous, often novel policy ideas in the West (Drezner, 2017, p. 11). While many of these groups in Russia had some degree of partnership with the
government, others maintained their distance from the Kremlin (Lough et al, 2014). These new participants of foreign policy had different ideational foundations and operating rationales, but their arrival significantly enlivened the development of Russian foreign policy milieu and its discourse.

A. The rise of think tanks

As Russian foreign policy think tanks gained prominence in the milieu of foreign policy, they mimicked a global trend. In the West, think tanks had become important through their expertise, authority, the involvement of prominent intellectuals, scientists, and other public and political figures, and their close association with policy makers (Drezner, 2017; Fraussen and Halpin, 2017; Savage, 2016). In foreign policy, think tanks have participated in setting policy agenda; they have initiated policy recommendations in regional or area issues and broad ideological platforms or policy trends. Their contribution to foreign policy making is often overlooked, even though in contrast with more traditional foreign policy participants, think tanks tend to offer more “innovative solutions” to policy problems (Cadier and Sus, 2017, p.116; Drezner, 2017, p. 81). Even if their recommendations are not directly reflected in immediate policy, think tanks shape the discourse and the milieu of foreign policy through their participation in the public debate (Cadier and Sus, 2017; Drezner, 2017). Think tanks’ influence on foreign policy in the West has been noted in the example of the neo-conservative think tank Project for the New American Century whose policy proposals considerably affected the post-9/11 US foreign policy (Abelson, 2007). Also, think tanks in Israel, UK, Italy, Poland, and Czechoslovakia have contributed to their countries’ foreign policies (Cadier and Sus, 2017; Longhini, 2015; Maryan and Ehsan, 2018). However, there are questions concerning the intellectual autonomy of think tanks and their relationship to the government. Indeed, many governments are benignly disposed
toward specific think tanks due to the “revolving door” and the intertwined relationship between elite groups of foreign policy makers, academia, civil service, and think tanks. In the US, many top national security and foreign policy advisors to the US government including Walt Rostow, Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinsky have freely moved from academia to government to think tanks while continuously retaining their influence (Drezner, 2017, p. 79).

Before 2000, think tanks had a limited presence in the Russian foreign policy discourse. A few think tanks, such as the Carnegie Moscow Center (est. 1994) and the Council for Defense and Foreign Policy (est. 1992), were well regarded in academic circles in the 1990s, but they had narrow audiences, limited public exposure, and thus, had limited impact on foreign policy. However, from the mid-2000s, their numbers markedly increased, due to renewed public interest in foreign policy and the availability of resources. Since then, many Russian think tanks have become essential participants in the discourse of Russian foreign policy. Currently, there are 215 internationally recognized think tanks in Russia, and Russia globally ranks #7 in the total number of think tanks (McGann, 2016; McGann, 2018). Their respective rankings affirm the international reputation and authority that many Russian think tanks have on par with other global think tanks. The Carnegie Moscow Foundation, IMEMO, Iskran, MGIMO, RIAC and SVOP think tanks are top ranked Russian foreign policy think tanks (Table 1). The nationalistic think tank the Russian World Foundation is the highest-ranking Russian think tank with a political party affiliation. While these rankings are not entirely representative of the presence and influence of think tanks in Russia, nor they address issues arising from their funding by the state, these rankings indicate that many Russian think tanks have been globally acknowledged as influential and reputable.
However, the real-life influence of Russian foreign policy think tanks might not be reflected by their rankings. Leaders of Russian think tanks have argued that the current international ranking methodology suffers from biases and therefore skews the actual importance of Russian think tanks (Koshkin, 2014; Koshkin, 2016). Nationalistic Russian think tanks (with the exception of Russian World Foundation) have not been listed in the McGann’s indexes, probably due to their limited exposure to non-Russian media. Several Russian think tanks, such as the World Council of the Russian People, publish only in the Russian language and do not provide English translation, nor have they webpages in English. While this hinders their international exposure, it does not necessarily reduce their domestic influence. There have been proposals to establish an alternative evaluation of Russian think tanks (Koshkin, 2014; Mendizabal, 2018).

Russian think tanks’ publications, their public presence, and their connections with the highest foreign policy circles have ensured their weight in the discourse of Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy think tanks and their political experts are known to present policy recommendations directly to the policy decision makers. As they usually are not overly encumbered by bureaucratic procedure, they are more likely to present views which resonate with Russian society at large (Sytin, 2015). At the same time, public figures associated with think tanks include prominent Russian businessmen, current and former state officials in private capacity, including Russian foreign ministers, members of the presidential administration and Duma committees (Cadier and Sus, 2017; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017). Think tanks have participated in the formation of foreign policy strategy and conceptual foreign policy (Dolinsky, 2013; Zakem et al, 2018). For example, the Foreign Policy Concepts of 2014 and 2016 which called for increased public diplomacy are traced back to suggestions by
Russian think tanks (FOI, 2018; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017). Russian think tanks have proposed specific foreign policy suggestions which became policies. RISI and the Foundation for Effective Politics think tanks have been indicated in advocating the invasion of Ukraine, and prescribing Russia’s interference in elections in Belarus (2005) and the US (2016) (Goble, 2015; Parker et al, 2017; Wilson 2011). Alexander Dugin, a prominent nationalistic political writer, later associated with Izborsk Club think tank, as an advisor to the Duma Speaker has prepared official communications regarding Yugoslavia and the Caucasus for the Kremlin and the United Nations (Dugin, 1999). Throughout years, Dugin developed close ties with official and semi-official Russian foreign policy circles. He was associated with Russia’s military elite, such as the Defense Minister and close associates of President Putin. Gennadi Zyuganov, the leader of neo-Communist political party in the Duma, adopted many geopolitical ideas of Dugin. Through these and other channels, Dugin’s concept of Eurasia and Eurasianism allegedly gained foothold in the Kremlin. Dugin’s Eurasia party, established in 2001, had the patronage of Russia’s security structures (Fellows, 2018). These examples illustrate the varied and convoluted ways Russian think tanks have left their mark on policy.

Undoubtedly, Russian think tanks common reliance on state funding is a caveat when researching their role in foreign policy. Not exclusive to Russian think tanks, similar concerns over funding has been also voiced in regard to the Western think tanks who rely on funding from individuals, corporations, foreign and domestic governments, thus inevitably resulting in “intellectual tradeoffs” (Drezner, 2017; Mendizabal, 2018). However, with the exception of Carnegie Moscow Foundation, most think tanks, to various degrees, are at least partially funded by the state (Table 2). In some cases, their association with the state or state educational institutions partially is a historical carryover from when several think tanks (such as the IMEMO,
est. 1956) were established as the Soviet research institutes. The precise funding data of Russian think tanks are usually confidential. In the early 2000s, Russian think tanks were regarded as largely underfunded and the “links between government and think tanks seemed (...) almost nonexistent” (Mathews, 2004). By the 2010s, the funding of Russian think tanks from both state and private sources had markedly increased, but currently, due to the state’s budgetary shortfalls, many formerly state-only funded Russian think tanks receive funding from a combination of state and private or semi-private sources from trustees or other private donors (Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; UA Wire, 2017). On the other hand, issues, related to foreign funding, which have dodged many Western foreign policy think tanks, are likely to be negligible for Russian think tanks (Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017).

It is apparent that relations between think tanks and state actors, personal connections, and specific interest groups are convoluted and conditional (Cadier and Sus, 2017; Drezner, 2017; Laruelle, 2017). This is additionally complicated by the presence of the “revolving door”. Ties between the private sector and think tanks are exemplified by Russian billionaires Mikhail Prokhorov, a trustee of the Gorchakov Foundation and a former political opponent of Putin; Konstantin Malofeyev, dubbed “Putin’s Soros” who is closely associated with Russian Orthodox Church, and the well-connected railroad CEO Vladimir Yakunin, the founder of the Dialogue of Civilizations (Koshkin, 2015; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; Salhani, 2017). Fyodor Lukyanov, a foreign policy expert is a veteran of the various state news outlets, but for the past decade has been a leading member of several think tanks, a regular participant of high-level international venues, and currently is the editor of the influential quarterly Russia in Global Affairs. Such aspects cast doubts over think tanks’ claims of intellectual independence. Undoubtedly, agendas of think tanks’ funders and participants can and do influence agendas of think tanks. However,
while these aspects may raise doubts about the true influence of Russian think tanks; they should not be regarded as singularly disadvantageous in the evaluation of the role Russian think tanks. On the contrary, they indirectly affirm the influence of think tanks in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy. **Table 3a** and **Table 3b** illustrate the “revolving door” relationship of think tanks’ members, government, academia, and their interests in specific foreign policy issues.

Russian think tanks’ frequent (but not universal) affiliation with government may cast doubts about their intellectual autonomy, but it also has enabled them to fund long-term projects and in-depth research. It has also created additional incentives for think tanks to affirm their authority, to validate their policy suggestions, and to ensure their public visibility and relevance. Members of Russian think tanks have opposed official policies, often to personal sacrifices, as exemplified by researchers Andrei Zubov of MGIMO and Aleksandr Sytin of RISI who allegedly lost their positions for criticizing Russia’s policies toward Ukraine, and Aleksandr Dugin who lost his professorship at the Moscow State University due to his advocacy of Eurasianism. This suggests that these think tanks might not necessarily be subservient to the state, and, as they enjoy significant domestic legitimacy and authority, they should be regarded as *bona fide* participants in the formation of foreign policy ideas and actions (Laruelle, 2017; Lough et al, 2014). Additionally, Russian foreign policy crises have created “professional opportunities” for think tanks and Russian intellectuals to participate in foreign policy directly through public diplomacy (Doblinskiy, 2011; Smagliy, 2018).

Many of Russian foreign policy think tanks are explicitly associated nationalism or pragmatism (Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012, p. 149). The comparison of the Valdai Discussion Club and the Izborsk Club highlights a few significant differences between their ideational and structural foundations. The pragmatic Valdai Discussion Club, which was co-founded by several
other prominent pragmatic think tanks, is currently recognized as one of the “global big think confabs” (Drezner, 2017, p. 11). In its “practical work at forming the global agenda and delivering (…) assessment of global political and economic issues”, the Valdai Club publishes voluminous policy analyses and recommendations and has considerable international recognition. Among its noted accomplishments was its 2014-2016 flagship research project of Greater Eurasia which served as a reference for Putin’s proposed economic cooperation in Eurasia in 2016 St. Petersburg International Economic (Kuznetsova, 2017). It has also presented analyses and recommendations for dealing with the post-2014 economic sanctions (Connoly, 2018). In addition, it hosts high-level international conferences, including annual economic forums in St. Petersburg and Vladivostok. Its yearly conferences feature round-table sessions between President Putin and other high Russian and foreign dignitaries and members of the Club. There are also regular “closed door sessions” which discuss global security concerns (Valdai Club, 2018). President Putin’s yearly “Valdai Speeches” are considered important indicators of future trends for Russian foreign policy.

A think tank of opposing ideational affiliation, the nationalistic Izborsk Club, has an equally prominent, yet less internationally visible place in the milieu of Russian foreign policy. Its leader and a prominent political figure Sergei Glazyev has been Putin’s advisor on Russia’s Euroasian integration (Bluth, 2017; Galstyan, 2016; Laruelle, 2016). Izborsk Club’s founder, Aleksandr Prokhanov, has made regular appearances on media; he has had several personal meetings with Putin, but he has also been highly critical of Putin’s policies (Balmforth, 2014). Another prominent participant of Izborsk Club, Aleksandr Dugin, is noted for his explicit blueprints for Russian foreign policy based on his concept of Eurasianism. Dugin’s book *The Fundamentals of Geopolitics* (1997) is required reading in Russian military academies (Bluth,
Zavtra, a newspaper closely associated with the Izborsk Club, has a large circulation in print. Its journalists have been personally involved in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 (Balmforth, 2014). While the precise impact of ideas, originating from Izborsk Club on Russian policy makers may be difficult to estimate, they are distinctly echoed in the rhetoric of many high-standing Russian foreign policy figures, as in the speech of Lavrov (2016) which described Russian foreign policy as conditioned by Russia’s historic global role and based on Russia’s moral prerogatives.

A few prominent Russian foreign policy think tanks, broadly categorized by their nationalist or pragmatist affiliations, are briefly described below. Their summary information is also found in Table 2.

1. Nationalistic think tanks

As Vitaly Averyanov, a prominent Russian nationalist, noted, the early 2000s signified the beginning of a “new era for Russian foreign policy debate”. From the onset, Russian nationalists successfully tapped the skepticism toward the West within Russian society and found many supporters in official circles (Bluhm, 2016). The beginnings of Russian nationalistic think tanks in the early 2000s has been described as due to the “demand in Russian society for a conservative political agenda” (Koshkin, 2015). From 2003, numerous initiatives and manifestos sought to “establish conservatism as the new ideological brand (…) on which hinged the future of Russian political discourse” (Bluhm, 2016, pp.7-8).

Broadly, the Russian nationalistic approach to foreign policy advocates decidedly confrontational stance toward the West (Tsygankov, 2010). Nationalists commonly associated with Izborsk Club insisted on the “toughest possible response as the way toward restoring Russia’s geopolitical status in Eurasia and to ensure Russia’s imperial self-sufficiency” (Bassin
and Aksenov, 2006). Many nationalists regarded the course of international affairs in the 1990s (such as the 1999 bombing of Serbia) and the 2000s (the Color Revolutions and their aftermath) as an affirmation of the inevitability of Russia’s conflict with the West heir conflict-centered theories (Shlapentokh, 2014). Among Russian nationalists, Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin, and Gennadi Zyuganov are noted for their bellicose policy suggestions (Laruelle, 2016; Laung, 2013; Tsygankov, 2010).

However, in the early 2000s, there also was a large group of nationalists who did not call for an outright military confrontation with the West but emphasized Russia’s philosophical incompatibility with the West and advocated either modified isolationism or of closer relations with the Islamic nations or China (Allison, 2006, p.100). Such views were propagated by the *World Council of Russian People* which was formed under the patronage of the Russian Orthodox Church and by some strands of Eurasianism (Dunlop, 2004; Morozova, 2009). This group of nationalists temporarily included a prominent Russian political figure Dmitry Rogozin and a variety of public intellectuals such as Vladimir Baranovsky Aleksandr Panarin, Gleb Pavlovski, and Mikhail Shakhnazarov, who turned to a more confrontational world view and ultimately became participants in nationalistic think tanks, such as Izborsk Club and the Russian World (Allison, 2006; Baranovsky, 2003; Tsygankov, 2010).

This trend ended with the NATO enlargement and the Color Revolutions in 2003-2004. Previously more reconciliatory Dmitry Rogozin and other nationalists proposed that Russia should increasingly militarize its Kaliningrad region and deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus (Allison, 2006, pp. 103-117). In regard to the 2003-2004 Color Revolutions, a number of nationalist think tanks participants, including Sergei Kurginyan, Aleksandr Dugin, Mikhail Leontyev, Aleksandr Prokhanov, and Nikolai Starikov formed the bellicose *Anti-Orange*
Committee in response to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which they saw as instigated by the “CIA and local nationalists” (Umland, 2012; Umland, 2016). Nationalists’ outspoken opposition to NATO’s expansion and the Color Revolutions and their policy recommendations considerably enhanced their political popularity in Russia, and in 2003, nationalistic political parties received considerable public support (Allison, 2006, p. 106).

During the 2011-2012 domestic crisis, most think tanks opposed the domestic liberal movement, thus gaining official approval (Rutland, 2016; Umland, 2012). The presence of nationalistic concepts in official communications was exemplified in the unexpected emphasis on Russia’s Christianization history in Putin’s address to the Duma in 2014 (Bacon, 2016). However, while Putin did announce himself to be the “biggest nationalist in Russia”, the Kremlin was cautious not to show excessive support to nationalist leaders or organizations (Coalson, 2014). However, the prominence of nationalism in the official discourse of Russian foreign policy was indisputable.

The following think tanks, Izborsk Club, the Russian World, the World Council of Russia People, and the Dialogue of Civilizations are among the most prominent in the discourse of Russian foreign policy.

Izborsk Club (2012) is probably the foremost nationalistic think tank in Russia. Its founders and leading members include Sergei Glazyev, an adviser to the president; Dmitry Rogozin, a politician; Aleksandr Prokhanov, a journalist and writer; and other nationalist intellectuals, including Aleksandr Dugin, Vitaly Averyanov, Mikhail Kalashnikov, and Nikolai Starikov (Laruelle, 2017, p. 93). Upon its establishment, the Izborsk Club explicitly announced itself as a counterforce to the numerous “clubs and platforms of liberal inclinations which had sought to monopolize the intellectual foundation of Russian politics”. Allegedly, it was founded
as an intellectual counterbalance to the pragmatist-dominated Valdai Club think tank (Laruelle, 2016). Its founding document, Mobilization Project a.k.a. the “Memorandum” presented four “scenarios for the future of the country” which outlined coordinated policies against the West, advocated “Russian sovereignty in a multi-polar world”, and highlighted pressing security concerns. The “Memorandum” gained popularity among Russian public at large (Bluhm, 2016; Laurinavicius, 2014).

Izborsk Club members had established their intellectual authority already in the previous decade when they advanced the Russian Doctrine project (Russkaya Doktrina) (2005-2007), a state-funded “comprehensive project of a conservative agenda”, an 800-page collaborative work by a wide circle of nationalistic intellectuals. It outlined a course for Russia’s political, economic, social, and international development. For the purposes of foreign policy, it proposed creating a “regional order capable of resisting the West” (Tsygankov, 2010). It recommended Russia’s “geopolitical repositioning”, modernization of the military, and the consolidation of Russian elites. In addition to practical recommendations, the Doctrine placed an overwhelming emphasis on Russia’s “civilizational-messianistic” international role and the Russian Orthodox Church. While the Doctrine also mentioned Islamic threats and the rise of China, these concerns were of secondary importance compared to the more fundamental threats from the West (Bluhm, 2016, pp. 15-18; Russkaya Doktrina, 2007). Many of these ideas became nationalist mainstays.

Izborsk Club has provided a platform for Aleksandr Dugin’s theory of Eurasianism. His concept of two hostile geopolitical blocks, the Eurasianists (Russia, Germany, Iran, and possibly Japan) and the Atlanticists (the United States and Britain), proposed the creating of a Eurasian, Russia-centered empire (Clover, 2016; Dugin, 2000a; Tsygankov, 2010). He had been developing his concept of Eurasia since the 1990s, and his concept of Russia as a unique
connector between Europe and Asia and a leader of Eurasian integration, quickly gained popularity (Dugin, 2002; Dugin 2005). In the early 2000s, Dugin was informally serving as an unofficial presidential advisor. He also had a considerable influence within military circles and the leadership of the state Duma, and he was considered as “one of the drafters of the concept of national security” (Dunlop, 2004). His best-selling book Geopolitics (1997) has been used as a textbook by Russian military institutions for decades. In his writings, Aleksandr Dugin explicitly advocated Russia’s annexation of Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, but also advocated the development of more sophisticated foreign policy methods based on information resources, social organizations, faith-based groups, and social movements (Dugin, 2009; Shevtsov, 2016).

Izborsk Club is probably the most influential of nationalistic foreign policy outlets. Foreign policy recommendations arising from Izborsk Club are a combination of Orthodox “spirituality”, Eurasianism, militarism, and historic nostalgia. In addition to its headquarters in Moscow, in close proximity to the Kremlin, the Izborsk Club has 22 regional branches throughout Russia, Crimea, Donetsk, and Moldova, and, in addition to holding extensive conferences in Russia, it also has been organizing public events abroad (Bluhm, 2016; Bluth, 2017). It has been described as the “defining intellectual force of the new Russia conservatism” (Bluhm, 2016). Scholars have noted that Izborsk Club has had more success than other nationalistic organizations in producing nationalistic narratives which accommodate Sovietophiles, neo-Imperialists, and the Russian Orthodox Church (Laruelle, 2017, p. 98).

Izborsk Club’s public exposure is boosted by its monthly journal “Izborsk Club: Russian Strategies” which provides news about the Club’s activities and accounts of domestic and foreign policy events. It also endorses The Collection of Izborsk Club book series which present nationalistic takes on Russia’s past and present. If in 2012, the precepts of Izborsk Club still
seemed rather eccentric, by 2014, they had become more widely accepted by various social strata in Russia (Bacon, 2016). An example of Izborsk Club’s influence on the official foreign policy discourse was seen in President Putin’s Conservative Doctrine which he presented to the Federal Assembly in December 2013 (Lavrinavicius, 2014). At the beginning of Russia’s conflict with Ukraine, there was openly close relationship and mutual support between Putin and Izborsk Club. However, since 2014, Izborsk Club has become critical of Russia’s “elitist” foreign policy and has been presenting alternative recommendations to form international alliances to overcome the Ukraine crisis. In 2015, the club joined other nationalist groups in criticizing Putin’s withdrawal of the support for the “New Russia” project in southeastern Ukraine (Bluth, 2017).

As a side note, Izborsk Club’s prominence in popular foreign policy discourse and its affiliation with the military and Russian international ambitions was accented in a curious manner, when a Russian long-range bomber plane with nuclear capabilities which frequently broached the Western air space was renamed “Izborsk”. Izborsk Club’s leader Alexander Prokhanov was allegedly invited to join the flight (Snyder, 2018, p. 97). This suggests that Izborsk Club has popular recognition and support by Russian public-at large and is not entirely deferential to the Kremlin.

The Russian World Foundation (Fond Russkiy Mir) (est. 2007) is another prominent Russian nationalistic think tank. Its formal goal is to propagate and protect Russian language and culture abroad. Due to its emphatically apolitical character, it may have been seen as more acceptable to the Kremlin than other nationalistic think tanks. However, in spite of its claims to focus on cultural aspects, its influence has extended into the discourse and making of foreign policy. The leader of the Russian World Vyacheslav Nikonov, a popular revisionist historian and the grandson of the former Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, is the chair of Duma’s
Foreign Affairs Committee since 2016. He has initiated debates in Duma regarding the Soviet 
foreign policy and the legacy of the Soviet Union (Nemtsev, 2019).

Overall, this think tank itself has been noted for its preeminent role as a foreign policy 
instrument of Russia’s soft power, particularly in regard to Russian-speaking minorities in the 
“near abroad”. Its international presence seems to be increasing, and by 2010, Russkiy Mir had 
set up 50 Russian centers in 29 countries, including the US, Germany, and China (Kudors, 2010). 
In 2010-2011, Nikonov explicitly criticized the official Russian foreign policy outline presented 
in President Medvedev’s 2010 Vectors of Russian Policy as ineffective and overly vague and 
proposed his own solutions, based on the expansion of Russia’s cultural influence abroad 
(Dolinsky, 2011).

The World Council of Russia People (Vsemirskiy Russkiy Narodniy Sobor) (est. 1993) 
was established under the patronage of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its chair is Patriarch Kirill, 
and its leadership comprise many prominent political and public figures, representatives of the 
science, culture, education and the military, and diaspora members. Its presence in Russian 
foreign policy discourse was established by the 2001 conference Russia: Faith and Civilization 
with Putin among its speakers. Since then, the World Council’s annual conferences have become 
meeting grounds for government representatives, Church officials, and public intellectuals. In 
2005, the WCRP became an advisory organization to the United Nations and established an 
official representation at the UN. Since then, it has gained international authority on various 
Russian-identity related issues. The World Council has often cooperated with other nationalistic 
conceptual projects and movements, such as the Russian Doctrine and pan-Slavism (March, 
2012). However, even though Putin has been a regular participant of the WCRP conferences, the 
Kremlin has been ambivalent about extending it official support. Allegedly, many of the World
Council’s proposals and recommendations have been rejected by the Kremlin to preserve its relations with other, more secular intellectual groups and the Muslim community, but the presence of the World Council in the Russian foreign policy milieu continues (Laruelle, 2016).

The Dialogue of Civilizations (formally est. 2016, informally c. 2000) is a Russian nationalist think tank, closely associated with the annual Rhodes Forum, another nationalistic venue. The DOC is located in Germany and Austria, and it also runs a research institute in Berlin (Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017). The DOC organizes conferences, round tables and has been seeking to establish international network of academics and experts. The self-described mission of the DOC and the Rhodes Forum is to provide the meeting ground for prominent Russian and foreign public figures who seek to foster conservative world views, to enhance Russia’s international image and to promote a multi-polar world order (Michel, 2019). The founder and patron the DOC and the Rhodes Forum is Vladimir Yakunin, the former CEO of Russian Railways, an ex-KGB general, and a personal friend of President Putin. Vladimir Yakunin’s connections abroad and funding ensures the international imprint of the DOC and the Rhodes Forum. Both entities host international annual gatherings of public figures, including many Russian oligarchs, and policy makers who share their dislike of the US global dominance and Euro-scepticism. These gatherings of several hundred participants are mostly sponsored privately, but also known to be occasionally co-sponsored by India and Greece. Aleksandr Dugin has been a prominent participant and a key speaker at Rhodes Forum and the Dialogue of Civilizations where he disseminated his theory of Eurasianism. His concept of Eurasia dovetails with the pro-Eurasian Union which had been strongly advocated by the DOC (Salhani, 2017).

2. Pragmatic think tanks
In comparison with the relatively late development of nationalism, by the early 2000s, many principles of Russian pragmatism were already well articulated, and it had established a solid presence in the milieu and the official discourse of Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign ministers Yevgeny Primakov, Igor Ivanov and Sergey Lavrov were self-described pragmatists and active participants in many pragmatic think tanks (Laurinavicius, 2014). Pragmatic think tanks had been publishing a number of authoritative foreign policy analyses and recommendations, such as the Council on Defense and Foreign Policy’s Strategies for Russia (1992, 1993), and Will the Union Return? The Future of the Post-Soviet Space (1996). Significantly, from the early 2000s, Russian pragmatism became increasingly historically oriented and increasingly referenced historic concepts, such as the 19th century European Concert and Prince Gorchakov (Russian Foreign Minister, 1856-1882). A best-selling Gorchakov biography by Viktor Lopatnikov, a prominent Russian politician and diplomat, exemplified this trend (Goble, 1999). At the same time, pragmatism retained its characteristics which had been established in the previous years, notably its reluctance toward military conflicts and its striving to preserve a working relationship with the West while seeking new, flexible alliances in a multipolar world order.

In the foreign policy discourse, pragmatists had introduced several important concepts regarding the post-Soviet geopolitical space. In the 1990s, the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy introduced the concept of the former Soviet region as a post-imperial region under broad leadership of neutral Russia as a guarantor of regional security. Subsequently, it was further developed by other pragmatic think tanks and reflected in many official foreign policy documents and communications. For example, the National Security Concept of 1997 presented Russia as an “influential European and Asian power” which should be equidistant from other
European and Asian economic and political actors. The Concept also introduced a program for the security-based integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The subsequent Foreign Policy Concept of 2000, with its emphasis on Russia as a great power with responsibility to ensure global and regional security and advocacy of cooperation with selected international institutions also reflected many pragmatic ideas (Allison, 2006; Rutland, 2016; Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2010).

Throughout the 2000-2014 Russian foreign policy crises, pragmatists provided a considerable number of policy recommendations. After 9/11, cooperation with the West was advocated by the identification of common international adversaries. Many pragmatists, including Igor Ivanov, Russia’s Foreign Minister, suggested that threats to Russia would originate not from the West but from Asia and the Caucasus (Shlapentokh, 2014). President Putin’s rapprochement with the US and NATO was ”cautiously encouraged” by many Russian pragmatists (Allison, 2006). In response to the 2003-2004 Color Revolutions, pragmatists generally advocated restraint and supported the removal of the old corrupt regimes to facilitate a fresh start for Russian foreign policy. In this, they significantly differed from many nationalist prescriptions which voiced support the old pro-Russian regimes. Sergei Karaganov, a prominent pragmatic foreign policy expert, explicitly blamed the Russian government for its incompetent handling of the Ukrainian elections of 2004. According to the pragmatists, Russian foreign policy had been too focused on energy politics, and neglected professional diplomacy (White, 2006, p. 35). While pragmatists had generally pessimistic views about the expansion of the EU and NATO, they advocated measured and nuanced approach. Sergei Karaganov (2005), the head of the Council for the Defense and Foreign Policy, in his working group How to deal with the EU expansion concluded that the present Russian foreign policy makers were handicapped by
conflicting domestic interests and agendas. To counteract this, he recommended the establishment of a “broad public-consultative council” as public diplomacy measure (White, 2006, quoting Karaganov). Sergei Markov, the Director of the Institute of Political Studies, who in 2002 had argued for close cooperation with NATO, by 2004, presented NATO replacement alternatives (Allison, 2006, p.101). Kamaludin Gadzhiyev (2007), a noted scholar and an associate of Foreign Minister of Yevgeny Primakov, argued that Russia should remain largely impartial toward the West and should on the existing collective Eurasian security system, the CSTO. A few pragmatic foreign policy scholars recommended a judicious cooperation with NATO as a step toward establishing a new balance-of-power international order. However, more pragmatists recommended that Russia establishes closer relations with the East (China and/or Japan) to gain leverage in negotiations with the West (Shlapentokh, 2014). Significantly, many pragmatists also anticipated additional complications from the rise of nationalist sentiments in Russia and the anti-Russian bias within NATO due its new Eastern European members (Allison, 2006, p. 100). In spite of its established place in the Russian foreign policy discourse and seemingly close ties with the official foreign policy circles, pragmatists often were among the harshest critics of Putin’s policies.

A brief overview of the important pragmatic Russian think tanks follows. It should be noted that the formerly Westernist-affiliated Carnegie Moscow Center, due to changes in its leadership, during the past few years has become largely pragmatic in its approach to Russian foreign policy and even is considered to be pro-Kremlin. (Koshkin, 2015; Kirchick, 2015). Due to these relatively new and drastic changes in its ideational affiliation, Carnegie is not included in the description of other, more long-time pragmatic foreign think tanks which follows.
IMEMO, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (Institut Mirovoy Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnikh Otnoshenyi) (est.1956) is considered one of the oldest and highest-ranking Russian think tanks. It is part of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and it publishes many scholarly periodicals, including its highly regarded annual forecasts. Aleksandr Dynkin, its chair, was the advisor of Russia’s Foreign Minister Primakov, and is currently known to be one of the architects for the peace treaty with Ukraine since 2014 (Laurinavicius, 2014, p.5). In 2014, four representatives of the IMEMO participated in informal Boisto working group which met in Finland to organize peace talks between Russia and Ukraine and to draft a Russo-Ukrainian cease-fire treaty. This illustrates its importance in Russia’s public diplomacy activities (Friedman, 2014; Kichick, 2015).

MGIMO-University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyi Institut Mezhdunarodnikh Otnoshenyi) (est. 1944), is an elite Russian university think tank, and it is particularly closely associated with the Russian Foreign Ministry. Its many research centers conduct, compile and disseminate extensive policy research and recommendations regarding various areas of world politics. Among its alumni are Sergei Lavrov, the current Foreign Minister and many high-ranking Eastern European and Central Asian foreign policy figures. This ensures its connections abroad and enhances its international prestige. MGIMO has a considerable international reputation, repeatedly being ranked as the highest university-affiliated think tank in Russia (McGann, 2016). Its board of trustees includes high foreign policy officials and many top Russian business figures. It, too, was represented in the above mentioned 2014 meeting in Finland to draft cease-fire treaty between Russia and Ukraine (Friedman, 2014).
RIAC, Russian International Affairs Council (Russkiy Sovet po Mezdunarodnikh Delakh) (est. 2010) is the newest of the large pragmatic Russian foreign policy think tanks. It is primarily financed by the state via the Foreign Ministry. Its president, Igor Ivanov, is the former Foreign Minister of Russia. Among its trustees are elite representatives of the Russian foreign policy milieu: Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of the eminent foreign policy journal *Russia in Global Politics*, is also a member of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy; Dmitry Peskov, the current Press Secretary to the President of Russia and Deputy Head of the Russian Presidential Administration; and Anatoly Adamishin, a veteran diplomat and politician. RIAC is closely associated with the Foreign Ministry and Education and Science Ministry and claims to “link the state, scholarly community, and civil society in an effort to find foreign policy solutions to complex conflict issues” and to provide analyses and forecasts of “global risks and opportunities for the benefit of Russian diplomacy, businesses, educational centers, public organizations, and their foreign peers. RIAC has published more than 1,000 books on foreign policy and international relations as well as large number of papers, reports, infographic, data bases. In conjunction with the CDFP (below) it publishes the influential quarterly journal *Russia in Global Affairs*. Recently, it presented a comprehensive foreign policy strategy for 2017-2024 with emphasis on Russia as an “integral part of European civilization” and the need to ensure Russia’s sovereignty by develop Russian economy and governance rather than focusing on military threats. Another recent report advocated Russia’s re-integration in the global economy and to use Russia’s foreign policy for economic development (Barbashin and Graef, 2019).

CDFP, the Council for Defense and Foreign Policy (SVOP, Sovet po Vneshnyei i Oboronnoi Politike) (est. 1992) is a non-government analytical center. Unlike other important think tanks, it receives no state funding. In the 1990s, this think tank published extensive
strategies for the development of Russian foreign and security policy and strongly criticized
President Yeltsin’s policies. Among its 200 members are politicians, business leaders, public and
political activists, as well as representatives of defense and security ministries, defense
companies, research centers and mass media. In its many publications, research projects and
public lectures, it generally advocates the establishment of cooperative international structures,
and a multi-vector approach to foreign policy. The leaders of the CDFP, Fyodor Lukyanov and
Sergei Karaganov, are considered Russia’s preeminent experts of international relations. They
have been long-standing critics of the current Russian foreign policy, noting that the Russian
government “lacks a system of foreign policy planning and forecasting altogether” (Karaganov,
2005). The CDFP publications generally pursue the line of thought that, while Russia should
become an independent and self-sufficient international power, it would be detrimental to
to become an empire or to succumb to aggressive nationalism. For the lack of a reasonable
alternative, it advises Russia to assume leadership in the integration of the post-Soviet territories.
In the past few years, the CDFP has had less public exposure and, in spite of the continuing
membership of Foreign Minister Lavrov and his deputies, it reportedly has lost its formerly close
ties with government institutions (Barbashin and Graef, 2019; Tsygankov, 2010).

RISI, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (est. 1992). Until recently, it had probably
the least ideological associations among other think tanks. It has been particularly closely
associated with Russia’s foreign intelligence; thus it has been covert about its research activities
and has had somewhat limited public exposure. Its leaders have been high-ranking officials
within the Foreign Intelligence service. Its mission is to provide analyses for the Presidential
Administration, the Security Council, and other government entities. However, during the past
decade, it also has focused on addressing Russian historical grievances. Its suggestions toward
Ukraine have advocated covert military involvement, often mimicking sentiments of Russian nationalists. During the past decade, the formerly pragmatic RISI has changed to a nationalistic approach to Russian foreign policy, possibly due to religious and neo-imperialistic views of its new director’s Reshetnikov’s personal views (Sytin, 2015). By 2013, RISI had taken a uniformly bellicose view toward Ukraine which may have played a role in the Kremlin’s decisions (Sytin, 2015). It has provided advice and other assistance to a separatist leader in Eastern Ukraine who (allegedly) is a former operative of Russian intelligence and a friend of the RISI director (Kirchik, 2017). Its more recent notoriety arose from claims that the RISI had suggested and orchestrated Russia’s interference in the US presidential elections in 2016. Partially due to such unwelcome publicity, RISI has been recently reorganized to direct its research toward regional studies and to separate its cultural, economic, and military-political studies (Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017). Currently it has branches and official representatives in many Russian cities, also in Crimea, Tiraspol (Transdniestria), Helsinki, Belgrade, and Warsaw. It publishes a quarterly *Problems of National Strategy* journal, its own book series on religious-historical themes; it has established RISI TV and has produced several films, particularly on Ukraine, making the case for the Crimean annexation, thus making it probably the most media-involved think tank (Barbashin and Graef, 2019).

**Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation** (*Fond Gorchakova*) (est. 2010) which is associated with the prestigious Moscow University, lists Foreign Ministers Lavrov and Ivanov and other Russian and foreign political dignitaries among its members. It is noted for its annual academic conferences and research. Its formal goal is to facilitate Russia’s public diplomacy through a wide spectrum of social, cultural, educational, research and management programs. In
particular, its Russian-Georgian Public Center, established 2013, has contributed to fostering closer cooperation between Russia and Georgia in the aftermath of Russo-Georgian war.

**The Valdai Discussion Club** (Mezhdunarodniy Diskusionniy Klub Valdai) (est. 2004) is an eminent umbrella organization of the aforementioned pragmatic think tanks. It is formally independent and does not receive direct financial support from the government. Its yearly conferences attract hundreds of prominent Russian and Western political figures and intellectuals, including Vladimir Putin whose annual “Valdai speeches” are considered to be a weather wane of Russian politics (Lough et al, 2014). As it has been noted, this think tank is a preeminent platform for Russian foreign policy participants and scholars to interact and to address various foreign policy problems and concerns (Drezner, 2017; Sakwa, 2017, p. vii). It publishes books by its *Valdai Club Publishing*, generates large number of reports, papers (including the well-known Valdai Papers), organizes conferences, round tables. Its members include high-standing Western politicians, businessmen and intellectuals (Barbashin and Graef, 2019). It has been said about the Valdai Discussion Club, it matters because “what Vladimir Putin or Sergei Lavrov or Alexei Kudrin says here is worth observing” (Drezner, 2016).

In conclusion, regarding the role of think tanks in the discourse and the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy, there is ample evidence to consider think tanks as important and active actors of Russian foreign policy. They have a unique and often privileged position to suggest agendas and policy solutions to Russian foreign policy makers. While their advice is not necessarily followed by the Kremlin, there is sufficient evidence to see that, at the very least, their contributions influence the foreign policy debate (Barbashin and Graef, 2019).

**B. Other new participants in the post-2000 milieu of Russian foreign policy**
In addition to the emergence of foreign policy think tanks, the 2000s brought other newcomers to the discourse of Russian foreign policy: the Russian Orthodox Church, political parties and organizations, the business community, and the Russian diaspora. These categories are not mutually exclusive or entirely separate from the previously described think tanks or official foreign policy circles. There is a significant overlap, particularly between think tanks, the Russian Orthodox Christian Church, and the business community. A brief survey of these groups and their role in the discourse of foreign policy follows. While not entirely independent, each category does have their specific interests, which affect their support for specific foreign policy goals and may also tilt the Kremlin’s choice of policies (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014). For example, Sergei Karaganov, a preeminent Russian foreign policy expert, scholar, and the leader of the Council on Defense and Foreign policy think tank. He also is closely associated with Vnesheconombank, a state-owned development bank who received large loans from China when the Russian economy failed in 2008 due to its dependence on the Western energy markets. While there is little evidence that this is directly related to his advocacy for “Pivot to Asia” which was announced by Putin in 2012, it highlights the many inherent conflicts of interest and continuities between foreign policy, think tanks, and the business community. Similar intertwined patterns can be seen in the conflicting interests of the natural gas and oil infrastructure development, Russian technological companies, and the military industrial sector (Gabuev, 2015; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014) or in the interactions between the Kremlin, think tanks, Russian diaspora, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian businessmen (Laruelle, 2018). However, while often the interests of these groups overlap or coincide, they usually are not identical with the interests of the Kremlin. The diaspora often criticizes the Kremlin for its neglect in favor of more pragmatic considerations, and the business community often pushes their economic interests. Beyond close
association between the Russian Orthodox Church and nationalism, there is no clear connection between these groups and nationalistic or pragmatic affiliations. Commonly, the actors described below are amenable to both approaches. Many of them are moderately, but not excessively dependent on the Kremlin. The Russian Orthodox Church and the business community are probably closest to the Kremlin while the diaspora groups are least dependent on the Russian government.

1. **Russian Orthodox Church**

Since the early 2000s, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been one of the most consistent and visible supporters of Putin. Its impact on the official discourse of Russian foreign policy has been well documented (Engstrom, 2014). The ROC has presented itself as focused on international human rights, but its influence has extended into soft power and contentious foreign policy as well. The role of the ROC in public diplomacy, establishing cultural and economic connections abroad, and maintaining ties with Russian diaspora has been well documented (Laruelle, 2018).

The ROC has had more than a few disagreements with the Kremlin’s policies. It has reservations regarding Russia’s military involvements; it criticizes the hagiography of the Soviet Union; it still has unresolved legal claims against the state; and it conducts memorial activities which the Kremlin frowns upon (Laruelle, 2017). However, inherent strong ties and mutual interests between the ROC and the Kremlin prevail. Many of the largest patrons of the ROC, such as Konstantin Malofeev and Vladimir Yanunin are among Putin’s closest associates. This has led to the ROC’s presence in the inner circle of the Kremlin. With the support of the Kremlin, the ROC has been building new churches abroad, thus extending Russia’s soft power (Curanovic, 2014; Galeotti and Boden, 2014). The ROC leadership has been closely involved in
the Russkiy Mir Foundation and in a number of quasi-religious foundations which are largely funded by the Russian business elite. The ROC has also been directly involved in the Ukrainian policies. In 2018, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s split with the Moscow Patriarchy created unresolved arguments about the ROC’s properties in Ukraine. The ROC’s St. Basil’s Foundation is known to have signed a formal memorandum of cooperation in 2014 with the Donetsk People’s Republic (Lough et al, 2014) and it has been noted that Malofeev has been financing the Donbas separatists in Eastern Ukraine (Bugriy, 2014). Additionally, the ROC had been tainted by the “holy war” imagery of Russian volunteers in Eastern Ukraine. These examples suggest that the role of the ROC in Russian foreign policy may extend beyond merely projecting Russia’s soft power abroad.

2. Russian business community

The infusion of the business community and technocrats in the milieu of Russian foreign policy milieu is often overlooked or regarded as limited to the period of President Medvedev’s administration, 2008-2012. They are far from a homogenous group and often have conflicting interests, as seen in the friction between representatives of gas and oil industry, the financial sector, and the military industry. They share a significant degree of dependence on government, as many of the large enterprises are at least state-controlled and the appointment of CEOs often is at the discretion of Putin. At the same time, many of them have not only conflicting business interests but also different personal preferences. In the foreign policy discourse, they have advocated a variety of hard-line and moderate ideas, but often sought to revive social, economic, and political coherence of the former Soviet region (Tsygankov, 2010). These considerations often made them fluctuate in their support to the official course of Russian foreign policy. While the representatives of military industry would likely support Russia’s military involvement
abroad, the energy and financial sector would be concerned about effects of international sanctions. However, for the purposes of this brief overview they are treated a single category (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014).

In the early 2000s, many members of the business community, including former liberal reformers of the 1990s, became affiliated with the pragmatist ideas regarding Russia’s economic modernization and international economic integration as a precondition for Russia’s restoration as a great power. They were dismissive of, if not outright opposed, to the many radical ideas presented by most Russian nationalists. At the same time, many prominent business figures, particularly those associated with the Russian defense sector and siloviki, supported more nationalist approach to foreign policy and aligned themselves with the Russian Orthodox Church (Allison, 2006, p. 105). A number of influential businessmen established foundations in support of the Russian Orthodox Church or cultivated the monarchist émigré circles. Increasingly, many business figures became directly involved in foreign policy. A prominent Russian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev, dubbed “Putin’s Soros” explicitly supported and funded the Donbas insurgency (Laruelle, 2017, p.94; Salhani, 2017). Reportedly, various Russian industries and businesses have successfully lobbied the governments of Germany, Italy, and France throughout the 2000s and 2010s (Lough et al, 2014). In short, the Russian business community, particularly its energy and financial sector, has contributed to Russian foreign policy discourse, official agenda, and have directly participated in foreign policy through their international business ties and their sponsorship of international organizations and events.

3. Russian diaspora

Even though Russian diaspora comprises between twenty and thirty million Russian-speaking former Soviet citizens, and it had been a subject of popular debates about Russian
national identity and foreign policy, it had, until the mid-2000s, largely muted presence in the official discourse of Russian foreign policy (Kudors, 2010). It should be noted that Russian diaspora is far from homogenous group, and its interests in the former Soviet countries, as in the Baltic states, may be considerably different from Russian diaspora in Germany or the United Kingdom (Laruelle, 2018). However, in 2003, Putin highlighted the Russian diaspora as a specific group of concern for Russian foreign policy and, in 2005, he characterized it as a category of “compatriots who had been subject to a major geopolitical disaster of the century” (Panov, 2010, p. 90). The problem Russian diaspora is fundamental to the concept of the Russian World and to the think tank of the same name. Currently, Russian diaspora has close affinity with nationalist think tanks in Russia, thus strengthening its voice in the discourse of Russian foreign policy. Russian diaspora has organized numerous street demonstrations in their respective countries, often with minimal encouragement from Russia (Lough et al 2014). Notable examples of Russian diaspora representatives who have a formal role in foreign policy include Tatiana Zhdanova of Latvia, a member of the European Parliament (2004-2018) who was elected by her ethnic Russian constituents. In 2014 she acted as an observer for the Crimean referendum, and currently, she has been under investigation as a foreign agent of influence for Russia (McGuinness, 2014). Miroslav Mitrofanov, another member of the European Parliament from Latvia, has acquired reputation as a defender of “Russian issues” abroad. He has considerable ties with Russian diaspora members throughout Europe and associates with far-right European Parliament members from Greece, Hungary, and Cyprus (Berezovskaya, 2018)

4. Political parties and organizations

During the early 2000s, there was considerable political party representation of nationalists and communists in the Duma and in local governments. When the ruling party
United Russia eventually excluded them, along with other political rivals, from the political arena, the role of political parties in foreign policy became negligible. However, many participants of former political parties remained in the public light, articulated foreign policy recommendations, and sought to influence the course of foreign policy by presenting various foreign policy options (Lough et al, 2014; White, 2006). United Russia, too, pursued several large conceptual projects related to foreign policy, most notably the Russian Manifesto a.k.a The Russian Project (Russkiy Proyekt) (2005-2007) which was initiated by the party leaders, Ivan Demidov, Boris Gryzlov and (allegedly) Dmitry Rogozin. The Russian Project criticized the influence of the West on Russia’s domestic development and had strong affiliation with the Soviet Union (Russkiy Proyekt, 2007). Eventually, the United Russia withdrew its support for the Russian Project it due to its extreme pro-Soviet revanchism, xenophobia, and militancy, and it became politically obsolete. However, the Russian Project later formed the basis for the Social-Conservative Union (2011), a nationalistic think tank within United Russia (Bluhm, 2016, Kuhrt, 2014; Laruelle, 2009; March, 2012).

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which repeatedly became the second largest party in Russia, in its foreign policy advocated hardline neo-imperialism and a wholesale restoration of the Soviet Union (http://cprf.ru/). Its leader Gennadi Zyuganov was among most prominent nationalists. The Communist Party called for the formal recognition of Eastern Ukraine’s separatist republics (TASS, 2014). Another political party, Rodina, (2003, reinstated in 2012), temporarily the largest nationalistic political party in Russia, underwent many structural changes, but its leader Dmitry Rogozin continuously remained a popular political figure in Russia (March, 2012). After being an ambassador to NATO 2006-2011, Rogozin became the deputy prime minister in charge of the military-industrial complex. Rodina had considerable
foreign ties through various European populist parties and far-right groups abroad (Laruelle, 2017). In addition to his participation in Izborsk Club, Rogozin is also closely connected to Russia’s military industrial complex, Cossack organizations, regional governments, “siloviki”, and the Donetsk/Lugansk governments (Laurinavicius, 2014). The National Bolshevik Party had established branches in Latvia, Ukraine, and Belorussia, in addition to it “unofficial representation in other Western and Central Asian countries” (Limonov, 2004). For a considerable time, it actively supported neo-communist and socialistic parties abroad, particularly in Moldova (Lough et al, 2014). In 2002 its members attacked the NATO summit in Prague to protest NATO’s expansion. The National Democrat Party which in 2011-2012 supported Putin’s political rival Navalny, was comparatively more pro-European than the National Bolsheviks. Its leader Krylov had considerable transnational ties with far-right and conservative parties in France, Austria, and Hungary (Laruelle, 2017). The short-lived Eurasia Party (2002) under its leader Alexander Dugin presented elaborate foreign policy recommendations along the lines of Dugin’s Eurasianism, including cooperation with Germany and Iran.

Overall, the political parties of the 2000s had a minor yet noticeable role in the milieu and the discourse of foreign policy. Other political organizations which emerged in the 2000s and had some involvement in the milieu of Russian foreign policy, included various activist groups. Youth organizations, such as the Eurasian Youth Movement under the leadership of Dugin served as outreach groups abroad, providing informational outlets and organizing events to the diaspora (Umland, 2012). Nashi, a loosely coordinated activist group, has carried out political actions of harassment domestically and abroad, including campaigns against the British and Estonian ambassadors in 2006-2007 and (allegedly) coordinated large-scale cyber-attacks on Estonian
websites in 2007. Like the *Russian Project, Nashi* was closed down by the Kremlin after the 2012 elections to disassociate itself from extreme nationalists (March, 2012).

Lastly, another, albeit minor, example which illustrates the often-subtle involvement of new or *ad hoc* participants and organizations in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy. In 2007, Yevgeniy Primakov, a former Russian Foreign Minister and Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, established a working group *Russia-USA: A look into the future* (2007-2009) with the goal of contributing to the “forming the agenda of the US-Russia bilateral relations”. Its membership consisted of “retired senior ministers, high officials, and military leaders from Russia and the United States” (Kissinger, 2016). While it did not prevent the Russian military conflict with Georgia in 2008, it may have significantly mitigated the United States’ response during and after the Russo-Georgian war (Laurinavicius, 2014, p. 6)

**Summary**

In concluding the overview of the new participants in post-2000 Russian foreign policy, it is apparent, that many of these new participants in the *milieu* of Russian foreign policy along with their foreign policy ideas, played an important role in shaping the discourse of Russian foreign policy. In particular, Russian think tanks, through their volume and variety of policy recommendations as well as connections to official foreign policy circles, became firmly established in the *milieu* and the discourse of Russian foreign policy. Regarding their nationalistic and pragmatic affiliations, it is apparent that there were ambiguous and uncertain relations between the nationalist and pragmatic approach to foreign policy and the embracement of these ideas by the Kremlin. Detailed contributions of think tanks to Russia’s responses to the Georgian and Ukrainian crises shall be discussed in the next chapters, but it should be noted that Izborsk club may have “provided the ideological basis for Russia’s aggression in Ukraine”
(Lavrinavicius, 2014). Their manifesto *Saving Ukraine*, published before the onset of 2014 crisis in Kiev, entered the Russian foreign policy discourse and may have contributed to Putin’s decision to pursue extended military involvement in Ukraine (Lavrinavicius, 2014). By contrast, the pragmatists, while generally approving the annexation of Crimea, have also, for a prolonged time, been recommending peace talks with Ukraine, as seen in the recommendations by the recent *Council for Defense and Foreign Policy* policy outline toward Ukraine (Goble, 2016).

In short, if the roots of Russian foreign policy and Russia’s responses to foreign policy crises cannot be fully understood without examining the “nuances, origins, and complexities of Russian ideational environment”, then the examination of domestic and international circumstances which conditioned this ideational environment is essential (Tsygankov, 2010). This chapter delineated changes in the domestic and international scene which set the background for Russian foreign policy toward Georgia and Ukraine which is examined in the following chapters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among top TTs (non-US)</td>
<td>Carnegie #14 IMEMO #46 MGIMO #85</td>
<td>Carnegie #14 IMEMO #97 MGIMO #100</td>
<td>Carnegie #23 IMEMO #45 MGIMO #95</td>
<td>Carnegie #20 IMEMO #34 MGIMO #90</td>
<td>Carnegie #22 IMEMO #36 MGIMO #93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among top TTs (US and non-US)</td>
<td>Carnegie #26 IMEMO #32 SVOP #98 MGIMO #102</td>
<td>Carnegie #26 IMEMO #32 SVOP #98 MGIMO #102</td>
<td>Carnegie #2 IMEMO #45 MGIMO #124</td>
<td>Carnegie #25 IMEMO #28 MGIMO #123</td>
<td>Carnegie #27 IMEMO #34 MGIMO #125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Carnegie #1 IMEMO #4 MGIMO #11 ISKRAN #25 RIAC #55</td>
<td>Carnegie #1 IMEMO #4 MGIMO #11 ISKRAN #25 RIAC #55</td>
<td>Carnegie #2 IMEMO #4 MGIMO #13 ISKRAN #26 RIAC #63</td>
<td>Carnegie #2 IMEMO #3 RIAC #6 MGIMO #12 ISKRAN #25</td>
<td>Carnegie #4 IMEMO #9 MGIMO #17 ISKRAN #27 RIAC #48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>ISKRAN #33 SVOP #38</td>
<td>IMEMO #31 ISKRAN #32 SVOP #42 MGIMO #128 RIAC #132</td>
<td>IMEMO #32 SVOP #41 ISKRAN #48 MGIMO #129 RIAC #133</td>
<td>IMEMO #32 SVOP #45 MGIMO #128 RIAC #132</td>
<td>IMEMO #37 SVOP #68 ISKRAN #134 MGIMO #139 RIAC #145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense and national security policy</td>
<td>ISKRAN #30 IMEMO #51 SVOP #57 MGIMO #66</td>
<td>ISKRAN #30 IMEMO #51 SVOP #57 MGIMO #64 RIAC #105</td>
<td>SVOP #5 ISKRAN #33 IMEMO #52 MGIMO #65 RIAC #107</td>
<td>ISKRAN #34 IMEMO #44 SVOP #55 MGIMO #62 RIAC #101</td>
<td>IMEMO #39 ISKRAN #41 SVOP #59 MGIMO #70 RIAC #108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Development</td>
<td>MEMO #53 IMEMO #53 MGIMO #119</td>
<td>IMEMO #53 MGIMO #119</td>
<td>IMEMO #55 MGIMO #120</td>
<td>IMEMO #56 MGIMO #121</td>
<td>IMEMO #56 MGIMO #121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Economic Policy</td>
<td>IMEMO #8 MGIMO #46</td>
<td>IMEMO #10 MGIMO #51</td>
<td>IMEMO #12 MGIMO #54</td>
<td>IMEMO #12 MGIMO #54</td>
<td>IMEMO #12 MGIMO #54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government affiliated</td>
<td>IMEMO #19 SVOP #24</td>
<td>IMEMO #18 SVOP #23</td>
<td>IMEMO #19 SVOP #24</td>
<td>IMEMO #19 SVOP #24</td>
<td>IMEMO #19 SVOP #26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Affiliated</td>
<td>MGIMO #12 SVOP #29</td>
<td>MGIMO #12 SVOP #33</td>
<td>MGIMO #12 SVOP #34</td>
<td>MGIMO #13 SVOP #33</td>
<td>IMEMO #19 SVOP #26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best managed</td>
<td>Carnegie #35 IMEMO #38;</td>
<td>Carnegie #34 IMEMO #37 MGIMO #78</td>
<td>Carnegie #37 IMEMO #25 MGIMO #78</td>
<td>Carnegie #36 IMEMO #25 MGIMO #77</td>
<td>IMEMO #29 Carnegie #36 MGIMO #73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Best Policy Study-Report:
- IMEMO’s “Monitoring Mutual Investments in the CIS Countries” (#27)
- IMEMO and the Atlantic Council’s “Global System on the Brink: Pathways Toward a New Normal”

### Think tank to watch
- IMEMO #24 RIAC #65
- IMEMO #14 RIAC #71
- IMEMO #19 RIAC #75
- IMEMO #19 RIAC #76
- RIAC #84

### Impact on public policy
- MGIMO #36 SVOP #52
- MGIMO #30
- MGIMO #32
- MGIMO #32
- MGIMO #34

### Outstanding public-policy oriented programs
- Carnegie #30 IMEMO #50
- Carnegie #30 IMEMO #52
- Carnegie #33 IMEMO #47
- Carnegie #36 IMEMO #48
- IMEMO #48

### Among the best independent TT (not ranked)
- SVOP RIAC
- SVOP RIAC
- SVOP RIAC
- SVOP RIAC

### Political-party affiliated
- Russkiy Mir #39
- Russkiy Mir #40
- Russkiy Mir #39

**Abbreviations:**
- Carnegie= Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Moscow Center
- IMEMO= Institute of World Economics and International Relations, acronym of Институт мировой экономики и международных отношений
- ISKRAN=Institute for the US and Canadian studies, acronym of Институт США и Канады РАН
- MGIMO=Moscow State Institute of International Relations, acronym of Московский государственный институт международных отношений
- RIAC=Russian International Affairs Council, acronym of Российский совет по международным делам
- Russkiy Mir=Russian World, transcription of Фонд Русский мир
- SVOP=Council of Defense and Foreign Policy, acronym of Совет по внешней и оборонной политике

**Sources:** McGann’s Global Think Tanks Index Reports, 2014-2018.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think tank</th>
<th>Broad influence and relations w/gov.’t</th>
<th>Noted members</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Specialty/expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Moscow Center, 1993</td>
<td>Staff: 30. Consistent international reputation; since 2012, moderately pro-Kremlin and increased ties w/gov.’t. Many publications, research, expert commentaries.</td>
<td>D. Trenin A. Baumov</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Broad range of domestic and international issues. Since 2013, more emphasis on Eurasian issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue of Civilizations, 2002/2016</td>
<td>Staff: about 20 Associated with the Rhodes Forum; ties with gov.’ts of India, Greece, Iran. Advocacy of the Eurasian Union. The founder has personal ties with Putin.</td>
<td>V. Yakunin</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Informal influence, networking with policy makers to advance nationalistic/civilizational approach. Advocates Eurasian and broad anti-Western policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorchakov Fund, 2010</td>
<td>Staff: 300 permanent and visiting participants. Close ties with Foreign Ministry. Centers in Ukraine, Georgia, organizes informal meetings and conferences with foreign governments (Germany, France, Finland, China, Iran etc). Publications.</td>
<td>S. Lavrov I. Ivanov</td>
<td>Fully state, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Wide range of various public diplomacy projects, youth education and cultural events abroad. Organizes Russian-German parliamentary meetings, the Baltic conference, runs Russian-Georgian Center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISKRAN, 1967</td>
<td>Staff: 132 Advisors to the Foreign Ministry, Security Council, the Duma</td>
<td>G. Arbatov S. Rogov</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Relations with the US, NATO, economic policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMEMO</td>
<td>Staff: 60 members of the “academic council”, 14 members of the directorate. 19 research departments. Advisors and consultants to govt, but mostly academically oriented. Strong ties with international research organizations</td>
<td>A. Dynkin</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Highly respected research/academic activities in all aspects of international relations and foreign policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGIMO, 1944</td>
<td>Staff: 1,432. Highest academic reputation; publications of research, papers Gov.’t presence: educates Russian and Eastern European gov.’t; close ties with international diplomatic elites. 8 annual international conferences and other public events</td>
<td>S. Lavrov</td>
<td>State. but recently a memorandum of understanding with the NIS (Serbian energy co)</td>
<td>Broad range of international issues. Advisement to the Presidential Administration, the Government, the Council of Federation and the State Duma, the Security Council and the Ministry of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Tank</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russkiy Mir</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td><a href="https://russkiymir.ru/fund/">https://russkiymir.ru/fund/</a></td>
<td>about 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdai Club</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td><a href="http://valdaiclub.com/">http://valdaiclub.com/</a></td>
<td>850+ “contributors”, an “academy of 30 experts”. Membership overlaps with SVOP, RIAC, MGIMO, IMEMO, Russia in Global Affairs. President Putin participates in its annual Valdai Conference and other events; other regional/international events; public discussions, publications</td>
<td>Mixed private (banks, industries) and other think tanks: SVOP; MGIMO. Explicit disassociation with govt funds and govt-owned media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kirchick, 2015; Koshkin, 2015; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; websites of respective think tanks
TABLE 3a. An overview of the revolving door: think tanks and their associations (in alphabetical order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationalistic think tanks</th>
<th>Present in unofficial discourse</th>
<th>Present in official discourse</th>
<th>Associated with government</th>
<th>Associated with business</th>
<th>Associated with academia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue of Civilizations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izborsk Club</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISI</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russkiy Mir</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The World Council of Russia People</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic think tanks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Moscow Center</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council of Defense and Foreign Policy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorchakov Foundation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMEMO</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISKRAN</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGIMO</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIAC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdai Discussion Club</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kirchik, 2017; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; and the respective think tank websites
### TABLE 3b. The REVOLVING DOOR: think tanks and their members’ ties with government, business, and other think tanks (in alphabetical order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think tank</th>
<th>Noted participants</th>
<th>Their associations with government, foreign policy, academia, or other fields</th>
<th>Involvement in specific foreign policy issues or special interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie</td>
<td>Dmitry Trenin, Director (and first Russian director), 2008 to the present,</td>
<td>1972-1993, the military 1990s to the present, academia and foreign policy expertise Also of RIAC, SVOP, and Valdai, and alum of ISKRAN</td>
<td>Kosovo Crisis, NATO, Russia’s global position, global security. Criticism of Putin’s foreign policy</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vladimir Dvorkin, Fellow since 2008</td>
<td>1993-2001, Ministry of Defense. Personally involved with preparing SALT, INF, START treaties. Also 2001 to the present, chief researcher with the IMEMO</td>
<td>Global security, nuclear weapons, missile defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council of Defense and FP (SVOP)</td>
<td>Sergei Karaganov, Co-founder/ member of the Council, 1992 to the present</td>
<td>1991 to the present, member of Foreign Ministry’s FP Council 1993-1999, member of the President’s Council 1993 to the present, advisor to the Security Council 2001 to the present, advisor to the Deputy Chair of the Administration’s foreign policy committee 2009 to the present, various positions with the state owned Vhesneconombank and the Ministry of the Economic Development Also of Valdai, RIAC, Russia in Global Affairs</td>
<td>International security, relations with the West. “Karaganov’s Doctrine” about the role of Russian diaspora in foreign policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fyodor Lukyanov, Chair of the Presidium since 2015,</td>
<td>1990s, international journalist with state and independent media 2002 to the present, editor-in-chief of Russia in Global Affairs Also of RIAC, Valdai</td>
<td>Broad presence in international media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Aleksandr Lebedev, Member</td>
<td>1990s, finances, investments, banking Since 1995, Chair, National Reserve Bank 2003-2007, in the Duma Until 2015, owner of independent media Novaya Gazeta Billionaire, opponent of Putin Trustee of several religious funds</td>
<td>Close connection with Gorbachev</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mikhail Delyagin, Member since 1999</td>
<td>1990s, various posts in Yeltsin’s government</td>
<td>Economics, global governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization, Event, Foundation</td>
<td>Person, Position, Role</td>
<td>Details and Notable Contributions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Dugin, Participant</td>
<td>Lecturer at the Academy of the General Staff Until 2014, Chair of Sociology of International Relations, Moscow State University 1990s – National Bolshevik Party 2001 founder of the Eurasian Movement Writer and public intellectual Also associated with Izborsk Club</td>
<td>Developed the civilizational and geopolitical theories and framework for the Eurasian Union since the 1990s; Ukraine, Turkey, Iran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruben Vardanyan, Supervisory Board</td>
<td></td>
<td>1991 to the present, various positions in banking, investments, stock exchange, insurance. “Social entrepreneurship”. The ROC and philanthropy Also of Dialogue of Civilizations, Gorchakov Foundation and Russia in Global Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konstantin Kosachev, Trustee</td>
<td>1991-1998 Foreign Ministry, various diplomatic posts 1999 to the present, member of Duma, Fatherland political party, various foreign policy related positions at the Duma 2012 Deputy Chair Duma Foreign Affairs Committee</td>
<td>Russian diaspora, the CIS, particularly Georgia, Moldova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position/Role</td>
<td>Time Periods</td>
<td>Affiliations/function</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aleksei Arbatov</td>
<td>Head of the Center for International Security at IMEMO</td>
<td>1995-2003, Deputy chair of the Defense Committee of the State Duma 1990s-2000s, with “liberal westernizers” and Yabloko political party Also of Carnegie, ISKRAN and SVOP</td>
<td>Nuclear arms issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyacheslav Trubnikov</td>
<td>Member of the Board of Directors</td>
<td>1996-2000, director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service 2000-2004, Deputy Prime Minister Ambassador; four-star general, state awards and medals</td>
<td>General advancement of nationalism and military responses in foreign policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergei Rogov</td>
<td>Director 1995 to the present</td>
<td>Various Advisory positions to the Foreign Ministry, Security Council, the Duma Also of Valdai Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiy Arbatov</td>
<td>Founder/Director, 1967-1995</td>
<td>1990s, advisor to govt and the Duma and member of the Foreign ministry 1991-1996</td>
<td>Advocate of Détente with the West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleksandr Prokhanov</td>
<td>Chair/Co-founder, writer,</td>
<td>1990s, neo-Communist political party 2000s, Rodina political party State and international literary prizes and orders Presence in news media Editor of newspaper Zavtra</td>
<td>Author of the neo-imperialistic Fifth Empire doctrine Fervent nationalist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikhail Leontyev</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>2000s -- Associate of Dugin and the Eurasian Movement, Hosts TV programs on state media 2014 to the present, Rosneft press secretary and the director of communications State awards</td>
<td>Popularization of nationalistic theories in media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrei Furtsev</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1990s -early 2000s, various regional govt positions related to technological development 2004-2012, Minister of Education 2012 to the present, aide to the President Also of Russkiy Mir and RIAC</td>
<td>General advancement of nationalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleksandr Dugin</td>
<td>also of Rhodes Forum and Dialogue of Civilizations</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dmitry Rogozin</td>
<td></td>
<td>1992 – 2006 the leader of Rodina political party, various position in the DUma 2008-2011 Russia’s ambassador to NATO 2011—to the present, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of defense</td>
<td>The Arctic policies, diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergei Lavrov</td>
<td>Chair, also of Gorchakov Foundation, SVOP, Russkiy Mir</td>
<td>2004 to the present, Foreign Minister of Russia</td>
<td>Russia’s security interests and global stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role and Years</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vladimir Potanin,</td>
<td>Deputy Chair (alum of the MGIMO)</td>
<td>1996-1997, First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia</td>
<td>Strong business ties</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1998 to the present CEO of Interros</td>
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<td>1990s to the present, CEO and Chair of Norilsk Nickel</td>
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<td>Since 1993 State TV host</td>
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<td>2008-2011, the Director of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Russia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2011-2016 Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrei Kortunov,</td>
<td>Director General of RIAC, 2011 to the present, also of Valdai Club, SVOP,</td>
<td>1982-1995 of ISKRON Visiting professor in the USA</td>
<td>Broad security interests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alum of MGIMO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aleksei Meshkov</td>
<td>Member, MGIMO alum</td>
<td>2001-2004, assistant to Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>2004-2012, Ambassador to Italy</td>
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<td>2012-2017, Deputy Foreign Minister</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2017 to present, Ambassador to France</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Igor Ivanov</td>
<td>Chair since 2011, also of SVOP and Valdai, Gorchakov, Russia in Global Affairs</td>
<td>1993-1998, Deputy Foreign Minister</td>
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<td>1998-2004, Foreign Minister</td>
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<td>2004-2007, Secretary of the Security Council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Piotr Aven</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1991-1992, Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, economic reformer</td>
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<td>1994-2011, Alfa bank</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2007 to the present, Russia-Latvia Business Council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dmitriy Peskov</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1990-2000, diplomatic service</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000 to the present, various positions as Putin’s spokesperson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2008 to the present, President’s press secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrei Fursenko,</td>
<td>member, also of Russkiy Mir and Izborsk club</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<td>RISI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leonid Reshetnikov,</td>
<td>Director 2009-2016</td>
<td>1976-2009, Foreign Intelligence Service Member of the Security Council and other</td>
<td>Allegedly planned the interference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role/Position</td>
<td>Experience/Positions</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mikhail Fradkov, Director</td>
<td>2017 to the present, Chair of Russian Orthodox Christian TV channel</td>
<td>1990s, various govt positions related to economics and trade</td>
<td>with the US elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igor Borovkov, Deputy Director</td>
<td>1990s, various govt positions related to the Defense department</td>
<td>2003, Russia’s representative to the EU 2004-2007, Prime Minister of Russia 2007-2016, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyacheslav Nikonov, Executive</td>
<td>2007-2012; Chair of the Board, 2012 to the present, Trustee, also of SVOP,</td>
<td>1990s, a reformer politician, advisor to Yeltsin, member of the Duma Early 2000s – various advisory positions to the president and govt 2011-2016, high ranking member of United Russia political party, a prolific writer, public figure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrey Fursenko, Trustee</td>
<td>Russia in Global Affairs, Valdai</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>General advancement of nationalism; noted for his references to the WW II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir Yakunin, Trustee</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>See above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrey Bystriskiy, Chair of the</td>
<td>1990s-2000s, various leadership positions with state and CIS media organizations</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fyodor Lukyanov, Research</td>
<td>Russia in Global Affairs</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>Considerable presence in international publications and media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The World Council of Russia People</td>
<td>Generally close ties with the Kremlin, the role of unofficial advisor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Missions abroad, close ties with other Eastern Orthodox churches abroad and the diaspora. Special status with the UN.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kirchik, 2017; Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017; and the respective think tank websites
CHAPTER IV. Georgia: the Russian Foreign Policy Discourse, Nationalistic and
Pragmatic Approaches, and the Russo-Georgian War

Introduction

For Russia, Georgia has always had a curious place in the Russian foreign policy context. Throughout its incorporation in the Russian Empire during the 19th century, its history as a Soviet Republic, and its post-Soviet independence, Georgia has been a small, yet prominent and often irascible counterpart of Russia. Under adverse circumstances, Georgia struggled to sustain its national identity, and, since becoming an independent state in 1991, Georgia had emphatically stressed its distinction from its large and overbearing neighbor. Russia, in both official and official foreign policy discourse, retaliated such sentiment, often portraying Georgia as an unreasonable and unreliable international partner, while underscoring Georgia’s historic and geopolitical position firmly within Russia’s sphere of influence. Relations between the two countries reached the nadir in 2008 with a direct military confrontation.

This chapter begins with an outline of the preconditions and the course of the Russo-Georgian War 2008. Then it discusses the treatment of Georgia in Russian foreign policy discourse: broad and specific policy prescriptions by nationalistic and pragmatic foreign policy experts in unofficial and official discourses. It proceeds to trace the connections between these ideas and official actions. The conclusion analyzes successes and failures of nationalistic and pragmatic policies regarding Georgia.

I. Georgia and Russo-Georgian relations, 1991-2008

A. Domestic developments in Georgia

1. 1991-2003: stagnation under Shevardnadze
Domestic conditions in Georgia in 1991-2003 showed little cause for optimism in the future. Eduard Shevardnadze’s uninterrupted rule since 1992, while providing relative political stability, was also notorious for its lack of domestic development, corruption, and squandering of foreign aid and national resources. To maintain his power, Shevardnadze suppressed his political opposition, essentially establishing a one-party state and cultivating political cronyism. In the early 1990s, Georgia was crippled by the civil war when two former Soviet autonomous regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, refused to integrate in the newly independent Georgia. These small, yet strategic territories which adjoined Georgia proper, feared becoming politically marginalized under the rising Georgian nationalism. After significant military conflicts with Georgia, Abkhazia (1992-1994) and South Ossetia (1991-1992) became de facto independent. Georgia suffered a humiliating defeat in its attempts to retake the separatist territories, thus further diminishing Shevardnadze’s reputation at home. From 1999, his rule became increasingly unpopular.

There were few prospects for Georgia regarding its economic development. Russia remained Georgia’s most important economic partner, importing the majority of Georgia’s agricultural produce and in return, supplying energy resources and investments which formed the basis for Georgia’s economy. Georgia had little hope to achieve energy independence from Russia. An important part of Russo-Georgian economic relations was the large-scale cross-border interactions between Russia and Georgia through tourism and labor migration. Labor migrants provided significant remittances to Georgia, thus further enhancing Russia’s importance to Georgia’s economy and politics.

Shevardnadze’s meandering foreign policy course was regarded with skepticism both at home and by Russia. He expressed vague statements about Georgia’s potential membership in...
the EU and NATO to appeal to the pro-Western sentiments in Georgia. Shevardnadze attempted to boost his international status and domestic legitimacy by seeking closer relations with the US. His motivation was, partially, to follow national sentiments, partially, to gain concessions from Russia (Suchkov, 2018). Since 1997, Georgia participated in the international association of Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova (GUAM) which had explicit support by the US, thus further indicating ambitions to break away from Russia’s sphere of influence. This organization had little practical impact, but it served as a symbol of Georgia’s general dissatisfaction with Russia’s regional dominance (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 170). While Georgia’s potential integration in the European Union and NATO was an often-reiterated theme in the official Georgian political discourse, it was hardly reflected in meaningful actions. In reality, Shevardnadze pursued generally reconciliatory policies toward Russia, noting that Georgia should remain neutral between Russia and the West (Gordon, 1999). In the 1990s, Russia retained military bases in Georgia which further fermented anti-Russian sentiments in Georgia and signified Shevardnadze’s inclination to accommodate Russia. Furthermore, Georgia remained a member of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States. Overall, such convoluted and maneuvering policies, in combination with the corrupt character of Georgia’s leadership and popular anti-Russian sentiments, contributed to the deterioration of relations between Russian and Georgia (Markedonov, 2007).

In 1991-2003, Georgia remained handicapped by the economic and political stagnation. Its relations with Russia were uneasy due to Georgia’s half-hearted moves toward closer relations with the West and the unresolved issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Paradoxically, the popular dissatisfaction with Shevardnadze contributed to the consolidation of Georgian nationalism and growing anti-Russian sentiments, and his political and economic policy failures
highlighted the importance of territorial integrity and economic vulnerability of Georgia. Shevardnadze’s rule was ended by the Rose Revolution, a popular uprising against a fraudulent parliamentary election in 2003.

2. 2004-2008: Saakashvili’s Presidency

Russia openly lauded the removal of the Shevardnadze regime in 2003. Russia extended diplomatic support to Georgia’s transitional government and negotiated the exit of Shevardnadze. Overall, Russia hoped to establish a working relationship with the new government and to reach a compromise regarding the disputed territories (German, 2006, p. 15; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 175). The new leader of Georgia, President Mikheil Saakashvili immediately began anti-corruption campaigns and democratic reforms. He announced that Georgia would seek to join the European Union and NATO. While his bid for membership in NATO was ultimately unsuccessful, for several years Georgia closely cooperated with the military of NATO and the US. He also proved to be a fervent nationalistic leader, prone to anti-Russian rhetoric. Saakashvili explicitly called for the consolidation of Georgia through direct incorporation of the de facto independent separatist territories of Abkhazia, Ajaria, and South Ossetia (German, 2006, p. 5). These regions immediately opposed Saakashvili’s plans. Ajaria was an ethnically Georgian territory, although with significant Islamic heritage. It had been largely independent of the central government in Tbilisi since the 1990s and had gained a formal status of an autonomous republic within Georgia in 2000. In 2004, a military confrontation between Ajaria and Georgia was averted due to Russia’s intervention, and Ajaria agreed to cooperate with the new Georgian government (Global Security, 2004). Subsequently, Saakashvili attempted to establish a direct Georgian control over implacably anti-Georgian South Ossetia. When Georgia intercepted a Russian peace-keeping convoy, it prompted South Ossetian
retaliatory action, and, this time, Russia supported the separatists. This flare-up prompted outcries in Russian and Georgian parliaments and initiated a short diplomatic crisis between Russia and Georgia. Saakashvili’s attempt to establish Georgia’s control over Abkhazia was similarly repulsed by the Russian-backed Abkhazians. However, Saakashvili remained determined to re-integrate these territories in Georgia proper.

Such events served as an additional inducement for Georgia to seek support in the West. Several visits by President Saakashvili to Washington and by the US President George W. Bush and the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Georgia in 2005-2008, indicated the progressively close relations between Georgia and the United States. Georgia received considerable military assistance from the US in weapons and training, and Georgia significantly contributed its military to the US operations in Iraq in 2003-2006 (Weinberger, 2008). Correspondingly, Russia grew increasingly antagonistic to Georgia’s shift to the West and to the growing US presence in Georgia, which Russia regarded as its exclusive sphere of influence.

Recognizing Georgia’s economic vulnerability, Saakashvili sought alternatives to dependency on Russia. He announced that Georgia would seek closer relations with the US, the EU, Azerbaijan, and Turkey for investments and trade. In 2005-2006, Georgia received a large-scale financial assistance from the United States, totaling over US$ 1bn which somewhat alleviated Georgia’s economic situation (German, 2006, p. 10). Georgia’s economic cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan was also mildly successful. But Georgia’s continuous economic vulnerability was exemplified by the 2006 Russia-Georgia energy crisis. When an explosion in gas lines cut off the gas supply from Russia to Georgia, it created weeks-long crisis in Georgia, and Saakashvili accused Russia of deliberate sabotage (BBC, 2006). Georgia’s energy dependency on Russia was lessened with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in 2006 which
bypassed Russia. However, Georgia’s economy still depended on Russia’s natural gas supplies. Moreover, at the same time, a Russian state electric company obtained the right for supplying nation’s electricity which gave Russia additional opportunity to influence Georgia’s economic development (Tsygankov, 2006).

In attempt to reverse Saakashvili’s anti-Russian foreign policy course, Russia resorted to varied tactics. Russia increased its covert military support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thus encouraging military skirmishes and entrenchments along the disputed territories. Russia restricted imports of Georgian agriculture (the “wine war”) and cancelled work visas for Georgians. There were frequent Russian-Georgian diplomatic frictions. In 2006, Georgia accused Russian officers of espionage. This incident resulted in widely publicized recall of diplomatic officials, strict economic sanctions, and deportations of Georgians from Russia (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p.172). There were brief periods of reconciliation, but, overall, Georgia’s turn to the West in lieu of Russia was unmistakable.

Map of Georgia and its separatist territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia
Note: From Georgia high detail map, by United Nations Cartographic Section, with amendments by ChrisO, 2008, Wikimedia Commons
B. Russo-Georgian relations, 1991-2008


Russo-Georgian relations from 1991 to 2003 were hardly amicable. Formally, Georgia remained a full member of the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States until 2008, but Georgia’s political associations with Russia were fragile. A point of contention in Russo-Georgian relations was Russia’s conflict with Chechnya. Russia regarded the Chechen separatists as an immediate threat to its security as well as to the regional stability. The first war between Russia and Chechnya in 1991-1994 established an *de facto* independent Chechnya. Russia’s conflict with Chechnya was directly associated with many acts of terrorism in Russia and resulted in a costly and humiliating defeat for Russia. Georgia had often expressed sympathy toward the Chechen rebels as well as given them aid and shelter, thus alienating Russia (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 89). Russia’s second war with Chechnya in 1999-2009 forced the Chechen rebels to retreat to more remote areas to pursue a guerilla war. Again, Georgia was seen as supporting the Chechen rebels. For several years, Russia issued official protests regarding Georgia’s allegedly subversive role. Georgia repeatedly rebuffed Russia’s requests for an access to Georgia-Chechnya border (Gordon, 1999). In 2002, Georgia attempted to uproot the Chechen rebels from its territory, notably the Pankisi Gorge which was an area noted for its covert cross-border traffic, but with mixed success. Russia’s bombardment of the alleged rebel bases created a significant anti-Russian reaction in Georgia and contributed to Georgia seeking closer ties with the United States (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 174; Peuch, 2002). Continuously, Russia accused Georgia being in association with the Chechen rebels. Eventually, Russia’s international grievances against Georgia’s support of Chechen terrorists bore results and induced United
States to pressure Georgia to cease its support to Chechen rebels and to isolate Chechnya internationally (Saunders, 2003).

Another continuously festering issue between the two countries was the uncertain status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia’s intervention on the behalf of these territories had prevented Georgia from establishing its control. In the 1990s, both territories underwent political and social consolidation and established largely authoritarian-style nationalistic governments with close political and economic ties to Russia. The South Ossetian secessionists also received considerable support from their ethnic affiliates in Russia’s North Ossetia. In spite of objections from Georgia, the Russian peace keeping mandate was established under the jurisdiction of the CIS and the UN Security Council. According to the 1992 Sochi Agreement, Russia became the intermediary between the separatists and Georgia, and the Russian military took on the role of peacekeepers along the borders of the disputed areas. Since then Abkhazia and South Ossetia had remained under Russia’s protection (German, p. 6-9; Gvosdev and Marsh, p.174). Russo-Georgian relations were also affected by identity-related aspects. Abkhazia and South Ossetia, being ethnically and linguistically different from Georgia proper, had developed closer cultural ties with Russia than with Georgia. During the 1990s, many Abkhazians and South Ossetians began claiming Russian citizenship. These aspects further alienated Georgia from Russia. Eventually, the inability to find a compromise between Georgia and these territories contributed to the downfall of Shevardnadze’s regime in 2003 and the rise of Saakashvili. (Ajaria, another separatist-minded region also had established de facto independence from Georgia, but, after gaining a formal status as an autonomous republic within Georgia in 2000, no longer was the same level concern to Russia or Georgia.)
Russia’s military conflicts in the Caucasus bridged many domestic and international concerns for Russia and influenced Russo-Georgian relations. They directly affected Russia’s security of its southern borders and Russia’s relations with other countries of the region. As Chechnya shared extended borders with Russia and Georgia, Russia’s involvement in Chechnya threatened the stability of Russo-Georgian borders. Due to the complicated ethnic composition and military conflicts, Chechens had complicated relations with their ethnic affiliates in other areas of the Caucasus, including North and South Ossetias, and other adjoining autonomous regions of Russia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia shared borders with Russia and Georgia, thus also becoming a border security issue for Russia. The issue of border control was equally urgent for Georgia who repeatedly demanded access to border control in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to “monitor its borders with Russia” (German, 2006, p.12). In Russia’s Caucasian policy, it had broad support of Azerbaijan who feared the spread of radical Islam from Chechnya into the autonomous republic of Dagestan which adjoined Azerbaijan. Russia’s involvement with Chechnya and Georgia complicated Russia’s relations with Armenia, Turkey, and Iran. In the ongoing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, Russia was an intermediary, but also was seen as Armenia’s international patron. Georgia attempted to establish closer relations alternatively with Armenia and Azerbaijan, but with limited success, because Russia had already formed close relations with these countries. (However, a decade later, during the Russo-Georgian war, Armenia maintained its neutrality, thus angering Russia who had expected at least formal support from Armenia, its fellow member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.) Georgia’s attempts to cooperate with Iran and Turkey also failed, due to Russia’s growing involvement with these countries. Thus, eventually, Georgia was left with few choices for international allies between Russia and the West (Bishk, 2015; King, 2008).
During 1991-2004, Russo-Georgian relations were additionally affected by identity-related aspects. For many Russians, Eduard Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the Soviet Union, was tainted by his association with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Anti-Soviet demonstrations in 1989 in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, have been indicated as a catalyst for the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Markedonov, 2007). This aspect added to the general mistrust and dislike of Shevardnadze by Russian public and policymakers. Since 2000, Russia began its economic recovery the political consolidation under its new President Vladimir Putin. By the early 2000s, Russia had become newly prosperous. Such conditions were largely disadvantageous for creating equitable interaction between Russia and Georgia which in the early 2000s showed little economic or political development. From 2000, Russian political experts and media at large regarded the still-struggling Georgia as a largely failed state, a source of regional instability, and a threat to Russia’s security. When the 2003 Rose Revolution ended Shevardnadze’s rule, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov readily negotiated a peaceful change of government between Shevardnadze and his political opponents.

2. Russo-Georgian relations in 2004-2008

Generally, Russia regarded the Rose revolution as a legitimate grievance against Shevardnadze’s regime. Russia hoped to cooperate with the new President Mikheil Saakashvili along rational lines, in spite of his nationalistic rhetoric. During the first months of Saakashvili’s presidency, Russia acted as an intermediary between Saakashvili and the secessionist region of Ajaria. Russia’s Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov held several hours of talks with the leader of Ajaria. In return for Georgia and Ajaria’s cooperation, Russia agreed to withdraw its military base in Ajaria by 2007, agreed to the change of government in Ajaria, and granted asylum to the former leader of Ajaria. Due to Russia’s intervention, a likely war between Ajaria
and Georgia was avoided (BBC, 2011). It was followed by a clash between Georgian troops and Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia which created a brief yet acrimonious diplomatic crisis. Shortly afterward, the conflict was deescalated by diplomatic negotiations between Georgia and Russia. But due to these developments, soon after the new government was established, many Russian political experts and media sounded alarm about Saakashvili’s nationalism. They predicted that Georgia would endanger the regional stability and Russia’s interests in the Caucasus.

In 2004-2008, Russia’s recurring problems with the Chechnyan rebels in Georgia continued. The second war between Russia and Chechnya, 1999-2009, ended with a compromise between Russia and Chechnya. Slowly, Chechnya’s threat to Russia’s security faded as Russia reached a *modus vivandi* with Chechnya by the mid-2000s. But some fractions of the Chechen rebels were implicated in seeking to establish the Caucasus Emirate in the North Caucasus. The Chechen fighters also participated in wars throughout the Middle East, thus raising the importance of Georgia in their eradication (Ter, 2015). The Chechen rebel opposition, hoping to enlist Georgia’s support in their fight with Russia, offered Georgia military cooperation against Russia in 2004, and again in 2008. These rebels, associated with militant Islam, were fighting the pro-Russian Chechen government. They were not desirable partners to Georgia who extended to them some covert protection but avoided explicit association. However, the possibility of Georgian-Chechen alliance against Russia was considered by Georgia and feared by Russia (Smirnov, 2008).

As Georgia’s ties with the US and NATO increased, so did Russia’s concerns about maintaining its regional influence and stability. Russia had long been seeking to establish a reasonable equilibrium in the Caucasus under its leadership. To achieve this, Russia had been
trying to enact a comprehensive regional foreign policy and to create a broad regional framework. Such efforts were complicated by the uncertainty surrounding Chechnya and by Georgia’s bilateral pursuits toward Azerbaijan, and Armenia and their contradictory security, economic, and identity-related interests. (Bishku, 2015; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014; Ter, 2015). The establishment of a new anti-Russian government in Tbilisi and its increased reliance on the US made the task of conducting coherent Russo-Caucasian policy downright unrealistic.

However, by 2004, Russia had become internally consolidated and economically secure. It began to re-evaluate its greater international position and foreign policy goals. If Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 focused largely on establishing Russia’s international influence on the basis of economics (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 227), Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 tasked Russian foreign policy with the “preservation of Russia’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and regional influence” and regaining Russia’s lost international status (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 5). Since the mid-2000s, Russia began increasingly focusing the Western encroachment on Russia’s interests in Eastern Europe, as exemplified by the expansion of the EU and NATO. The 2004 EU and NATO enlargement included, among other states, the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. This presented an alarming precedent to Russia. With the change of regimes in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), the prospect of their joining the EU and NATO became a distinct possibility and thus, a priority for Russian foreign policy. Russia explicitly announced its intentions to stop the westward trend in Eastern Europe. In 2005, President Vladimir Putin affirmed that Moscow would maintain its influence in the former Soviet states, in spite of the Western attempts to “manufacture democracy” in Russia’s own “strategic backyard” (German, 2006, p. 10; Putin, 2005). Predictably, such threats made the
accession to the EU and, particularly, to NATO, a priority for Georgia. Such incompatible attitudes led to steadily deteriorating relations between Russia and Georgia.

By 2008, Russia’s relations with Georgia had reached rock bottom. In April 2008 Bucharest meeting, Russia instigated Germany and France to nix Georgia’s bid for NATO membership. To further dissuade Georgia, Russia increased its support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian government established direct official relations with the secessionist authorities of Abkhazia, At the end of April, additional Russian troops were deployed to Abkhazia as peacekeeping troops. The Georgian authorities regarded these steps as aggression against Georgia and declared that Georgia and Russia were “very close to war” (Smirnov, 2008). In July 2008, less than a month before the outbreak of the war, the US/Georgian forces held military exercises in Georgia, and, shortly afterwards, Russia conducted military maneuvers near Georgian borders. (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 176-177; Cornell et al, 2008, pp. 11-13; King, 2008). Such activities indicated that a military confrontation between Russia and Georgia might be approaching.

All these multiple conditional factors, ranging from Georgia-specific to regional to global, prepared the ground for a large-scale military involvement by Russia, should a military conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia break out.

3. The military conflict and its aftermath, 2008

The outbreak of a full-scale military conflict in 2008 was preceded by months-long rising tensions and rumors of the coming war, disputed aerial attacks, the militarization of border areas, casualties of gunfire, diplomatic squabbles, the cyber-attacks on Georgian government, and mutual public accusations, and other pent-up foreign policy issues. Such conditions ensured that the military conflict, when begun, was more likely to escalate. However, the actual military
activities between Russia and Georgia were brief and their outcome was decisively in favor of Russia.

Regarding the immediate cause of the war, most foreign policy experts agree that Georgia initiated an opportunistic military strike upon South Ossetian militia positions to capture the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali. This brought on an immediate response from the Russian peacekeeping units with supplementary troops from Russia joining the South Ossetian military and the peacekeepers. Simultaneously, Russian military opened a second front in Abkhazia to assist the Abkhazian forces. Within five days, Russian forces had occupied a large area of Western Georgia and reached the proximity Georgia’s capital Tbilisi. Georgia’s army, navy, and air force were defeated, and much of Georgia’s civilian and military infrastructure was destroyed, creating humanitarian crisis (Gvosdev and Marsh, p. 177; Keating, 2009; King, 2008).

Due to the incommensurable size and power of the two countries, Russia was widely denounced internationally for its imperialistic and revanchistic policies. A number of world leaders condemned Russia’s arbitrary redrawing of post-Cold war borders, and several European countries proposed sanctions against Russia (King, 2008). Partially due to the international denouncement, but, more likely, due to sober calculations, Russia, after several decisive victories, reached out for international mediation. Russian, Georgian, and European Union mediators began developing a peace plan and negotiated Russia’s withdrawal from Georgia (Gvosdev and Marsh, p.178). French President Sarkozy on behalf of the European Council succeeded in negotiating a cease-fire agreement and a subsequent peace agreement between the Georgian government, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Russia (King, 2008). The peace agreement essentially restored the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and established fragile peace between Georgia and its secessionist territories. According to the peace terms, Russian troops
remained in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as peacekeepers to guarantee their borders. Within a month, Russian troops had withdrawn to their former positions. There were no territorial gains by Georgia or Russia, but the autonomy of the secessionist territories was ensured. Following the peace agreement, Russia also formally recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, which additionally alienated Georgia from Russia, but ensured Russia’s continuous ties with the breakaway territories (Gvosdev and Marsh, p.178; King, 2008). As a result of the war, Georgia had not achieved its goal of consolidating its territory, and it had suffered humiliating and costly defeat. But Georgia had also achieved national consolidation, gained international sympathy, and affirmed its determination to proceed with the integration with the West.

For Russia, the war had ambiguous and contradictory consequences. In many ways, it was a costly enterprise for Russia. Apart from financial and economic costs, it brought Russia’s relations with the United States to the lowest point since the Cold War. While Russia’s relations with other Western powers, such as France or Germany were not irreparably damaged, Russia’s reputation as a potential partner for the West had suffered. Russia’s actions had clearly indicated that Russia could disregard the principle of the inviolability of state borders. It also showed that Russia would, at least initially, bypass conventional channels of conflict resolutions, such as the UN security Council or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and would resort to changing international borders unilaterally. There was minimal support for Russia’s actions even from its otherwise reliable allies in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or from Russia’s most reliable partner in the Caucasus, Armenia (King, 2008). The war slowed down but did not stop Georgia from returning to its pro-Western path and search for membership in the EU through Eastern Partnership in 2009 (Sakwa, p. 139-140). Also, the war left the issue of secessionist areas in Georgia largely unresolved.
At the same time, Russia had achieved some of its objectives. It sent a powerful signal to the international community about its new, assertive foreign policy path. Russia had succeeded in dividing NATO. During the Russo-Georgian war, the United States, the supporter of Georgia, was opposed by its NATO partners Germany and France. While many Western countries had threatened sanctions against Russia, they largely did not follow through with these threats and quickly resumed routine relations with Russia (King, 2008). Thus, the war demonstrated the relative impotence of many of the existing Western structures. It discouraged other former Soviet states, particularly Ukraine, from relying on unqualified Western support against Russia. Essentially, the Russo-Georgian war temporarily stopped NATO and the EU expansion eastward (Sakwa, p. 153). In spite of the brief nadir of relations between Russia and the US, their interactions soon resumed. Shortly after the war, Russia cooperated with the US in other foreign policy issues, such as the New START in 2010 and sanctions against Iran; Russia also participated in the NATO summit 2010 and did not object to the NATO intervention in Libya 2011. This additionally sent a signal to international community that smaller states were of little importance in politics of major powers. Paradoxically, the war contributed to closer Ukraine-Russia cooperation in 2009-2012.

Russo-Georgian war had several domestic-related consequences for Russia. It boosted Russian government’s domestic legitimacy. Russia’s intervention in Georgia was “wildly popular” in Russia. It reinforced the image of the US as Russia’s opponent and the aggressive nature of Georgian’s nationalistic government (King, 2008). As Georgia and Russia began using NGOs in their interactions, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church gained prominence. The Georgian Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Church figures developed diplomatic communications and participated in the mediation. While the official Georgian rhetoric was
firmly anti-Russian, many Georgian NGOs demonstrated more flexibility and quickly re-established relations with their Russian counterparts (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p.179). The Russo-Georgian war also increased the military prowess of Russia. While Russia had achieved a quick and decisive victory in the war, it also realized its military weaknesses and shortcomings. Shortly after the war, Russia launched one of the “most far-reaching and comprehensive military reforms in its history”, further enhancing its military capabilities with new and innovative military techniques (Sakwa, p.192).

Eventually, Russo-Georgian relations resumed. Georgia continued to seek the Western support and maintained its official anti-Russian stance, vowing to block Russia’s membership in the WTO and portraying Russia as a perpetrator of genocide in the Caucasus, but with limited success (Lukyanov, 2011). Labor migration from Georgia to Russia resumed shortly after the war and Russia continued its investments in Georgia, even though the trade levels between Russia and Georgia temporarily dropped (Carnegie, 2011). In 2010-2011, several Russo-Georgian trade and economic negotiations were concluded. For several years, Georgia continued to veto Russia’s membership in the WTO, but, due to pressure from the US and the EU, it did not block Russia’s bid in 2011, and Russia joined the WTO in 2012 (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 18).

The war was too short to give an opportunity for much policy development during the actual hostilities. However, the preceding years and the aftermath of the war was an extremely productive period for Russian foreign policy discourse. Think tanks and their policy experts presented voluminous recommendations for specific and general policies in regard to Georgia. An overview and analysis of these policy suggestions follows.
II. Russian foreign policy discourse on Georgia, 2000-2008

The following part of this chapter will first discuss broad and specific pragmatic and nationalistic policy suggestions proposed by experts, writers, and public figures which were not clearly associated with the official circles. Many pragmatic policy suggestions were presented in Russia in Global Affairs, Valdai Club, and the Carnegie Moscow Foundation. Nationalistic ideas were based on the writings of the prominent nationalists Dugin, Prokhanov, and others. Then this chapter will analyze their reiteration in official communications and, lastly, will identify their reflection in actual policy events.

A. Georgia in the unofficial discourse

In the popular Russian foreign policy discourse, nationalistic and pragmatic policy experts offered various suggestions regarding Georgia which, due to its pro-Western tendency and anti-Russian sentiments, was generally seen as an acute problem for Russian foreign policy.

1. Nationalistic approach to Georgia in unofficial discourse

For nationalists, Georgia fit in the broader concepts of Eurasia and the Russian World. However, nationalistic approach to Georgia was dualistic. On one hand, nationalists viewed Georgia as part of Russia’s Eurasian “civilization” due to its history and culture. Georgia had been an enduring part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It was regarded as Russia’s outpost in the Caucasus. Russia and Georgia shared Eastern Orthodox religion. Many high standing officials and well-known public figures in Russia during the Russian Empire, the Soviet, and the post-Soviet periods, had been associated with Georgia, from the Bagrationi dynasty to Stalin to Eduard Shevardnadze to Sergei Lavrov to Alexander Prokhanov (Markedonov, 2007). Georgia, by the virtue of its association with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and its geographical position, was regarded as a part of Russia’s Eurasian
civilizational space, and nationalists suggested that Georgia, as well as the whole Caucasus region, would thrive under Russia’s protective dominance (Dugin, 1997; Dugin, 1999; Prokhanov, 2006). Thus, in the nationalist political analysis, the re-integration of Georgia in Russia’s civilizational sphere was highly desired. This importance was reflected not only in words, but in deeds. In 2006, Dugin-led Eurasianist Youth movement organized pro-Russian demonstrations in Georgia, demanding to re-establish closer ties between Georgia and Russia. In 2008, at the onset of Russo-Georgian war, Dugin explicitly called for the Russian army to advance to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, to establish direct control over Georgia (Horwath, 2008).

On the other hand, ties between Georgia and Russia were seen as fragile and contradictory. Georgia had been viewed as unreliable partner of Russia. The post-Soviet Georgian leaders and elites were commonly viewed as anti-Russian (Markedonov, 2007). Georgia had history of forming alliances with Turkey and Persia, and more recently, with the USA and the West (Prokhanov, 2006). Since the late 1990s, Dugin had warned that, due to the volatility surrounding Georgia, the Caucasus would become an area of civilizational competition between Russia and the West, and that, due to Georgia’s Western affiliations, there would be a military conflict between Russia and Georgia (Dugin, 1999). Such sentiments intensified with the 2003 Rose revolution in Georgia which nationalists regarded as a civilizational cleavage between Georgia and Russia (Dugin, 1997; Dugin, 2009). In order to counteract it, nationalists recommended coercive foreign policy, either a military intervention or punishing sanctions against Georgia (Tsygankov, 2006). In addition, Russian nationalists had criticized Georgia’s treatment of its ethnic minorities even though nationalists were noted for their xenophobia.
regarding to Georgia and Georgians, recommending the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Russia due to their criminal ties (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

In the early 2000s, nationalist experts suggested to the Kremlin that an immediate military intervention was highly desirable due to two reasons: Georgia’s support of Chechen rebels, and Georgia’s suppression of separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tsygankov, 2006, p. 25). Since the early 2000s, Georgia was regarded as hosting Chechnyan rebels, and frequent suggestions in the nationalistic discourse included recommendations to singlehandedly “liquidate the bases of Chechen terrorists” within the territory of Georgia. Russian nationalists also demanded that Russia intervened militarily to protect Abkhazia and South Ossetia from “Georgian genocide” (Horwath, 2008). To ensure that Georgia would remain under Russia’s control, they recommended to enlarge Russian military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and also supported Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s request to join the Russian Federation (Horwath, 2008; Pietrowsky, 2001).

Nationalists’ unequivocal support of the annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia dovetailed with their antagonism toward Georgia, the West, and the concept of the Russian World. As the conflicts between these separatist territories and Georgia continued, their population was favorably inclined to joining Russia as autonomous administrative regions. Their inhabitants were ethnically and linguistically different from Georgia, their languages used the Cyrillic alphabet, and Russian had been adopted as a second language. Most importantly, the majority of the population in these territories held Russian citizenship inherited from the Soviet Union (Markedonov, 2007). Georgia’s perceived persecution of Abkhazians and South Ossetians added urgency to the calls for their protection which seemed impossible to achieve without a military involvement (Dugin, 2009).
In regard to Georgia proper, nationalists recommended variations of incorporation of Georgia under Russia’s geopolitical umbrella. Alexander Dugin portrayed the post-Soviet Georgia as a small multi-national state which suppressed its many national minorities in favor of ethnic Georgians. In order to avoid Georgia’s disintegration or turning into an ethnic Georgian state, he proposed that Georgia be incorporated in the Russian Federation. This would, in a roundabout way, ensure simultaneously the integrity of Georgia and the autonomy of its ethnic regions (Dugin, 1999). Other nationalistic suggestions included complicated redrawing of borders along ethnic lines. In his 1997 *Foundations of Geopolitics* Dugin recommended granting parts of Dagestan and Ingushetia autonomous regions and the unified North and South Ossetia to Georgia in return to Georgia’s cooperation with Russia against Chechnya. However, Abkhazia would be annexed by Russia due to its geopolitical location and the wishes of its population (Dugin, 1997). Alternatively, Dugin proposed the creation of the Caucasian Federation: three Caucasus states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and several autonomous regions in Russia’s Northern Caucasus. This new entity would be economically and culturally autonomous yet remain under Russia’s “strategic leadership” (Dugin, 1997, p. 351). Finally, nationalist experts suggested that other separatist regions in Georgia, such as Svanetia, who were “persecuted” by Georgians, should seek greater autonomy from Georgia. Alexander Prokhanov explicitly encouraged a Svanetian leader to secede from Georgia (Prokhanov, 2006). In suggesting such foreign policy schemes, Alexander Prokhanov earned the nickname of the “Soviet Rudyard Kipling” (Horwath, 2008).

Nationalists greeted Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 with enthusiasm. Alexander Dugin noted that “Russia saved the peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from genocide by decisively and symmetrically responding to a direct military challenge, it recognized the political
right of the South Ossetians and Abkhazians to create their own states” (Dugin, 2009, p. 66). Ominously, he also noted that there would be more conflicts to come: “nothing has yet been finalized in Georgia. This is only the beginning of a fundamental conflict that will spread to various areas (…)” (Dugin, 2009, p.70).

In sum, the nationalistic approach to Georgia was heavily influenced by visions of Russia as a resurgent empire, unifying its citizens and former territories. The nationalistic approach was also wrought with contradictions, regarding Georgia as a part of Russian civilizational sphere, yet also as an unreliable entity. For these reasons, in the nationalist discourse emphasized the necessity for military involvement against Georgia as the most expeditious ways to ensure Russia’s building of a Eurasian empire and blocking the Western infringement on Russia.

2. The pragmatic views on Georgia in the unofficial discourse

Pragmatic political experts, while regarding Georgia as a problem for Russian foreign policy, viewed it in a more detached way, noting a lack of nuanced and consistent strategic approach to Georgia in the Russian foreign policy. According to the pragmatists, in order to overcome problems arising from Georgia, Russia should be pursuing diplomacy and exploited differences among Western states and institutions (Sergei Karaganov of the pragmatic Council for Defense and Foreign Policy, as quoted in Saunders, 2003; Trenin, 2018). Also, pragmatists advocated securing Georgia as part of Russia’s spheres of influence, but, in contrast with the nationalistic approach, not by military means, but through economic integration, diplomacy and other “soft power” policies (Kokoshin, 2001/2012). Russia’s cooperation with the United States after 9/11 was seen as an advantageous trade-off to gain international support for Russia’s policies in Chechnya and Northern Caucasus and to isolate Georgia diplomatically. And indeed,
in the early 2000s, Russia successfully induced United States to pressure Georgia to cease its support to Chechen rebels and to cut off Chechnya internationally (Saunders, 2003).

However, other concerns overshadowed this brief cooperation and highlighted limitations of cooperation. Many pragmatists emphasized the importance of Georgia in the context of regional stability and Russia’s strategic interests. They noted that the “security in Russia’s Caucasus is impossible without stability in Georgia” (Markedonov, 2007). For this reason, they often advocated assisting Georgia in settling its domestic conflicts. A prominent pragmatist analyst noted that a "collapsing Georgia only causes trouble for us" (Blagov, 2002). They noted that most conflicts in the Caucasus stemmed from ethnic rivalries of the Soviet era, the Georgian nationalism and the presence of the United States. To counteract these trends, pragmatists recommended that Russia assumes the role of a peacekeeper, mediator, and a regional balancer and advocated for Russia to assume a role of regional peacekeeper (Markedonov, 2007; Trenin, 2008a). They also noted that United States’ closer ties with Georgia not only created security threats to Russia and upset the regional power balance, but also intensified the conflict between Georgia and the separatists (Trenin, 2008b).

Georgia’s increasing ties with the US and NATO were of a particular threat to Russia’s security. Georgia held a strategic geopolitical position, adjoining the Black Sea and serving as a gateway to the rest of the Caucasus and, potentially, to the Middle East and Central Asia. The Black Sea and the Caucasus had long been regarded as particularly vulnerable area of Russia. Thus, the presence of NATO in the Black Sea and in Georgia was seen as endangering Russia’s security as well as the region (Flanagan and Chindea (2019)).
In order to protect Russia’s interests in Georgia and the surrounding region under such adverse and emotionally loaded conditions, pragmatists suggested a number of economic, diplomatic, and other soft power-based policies.

Most pragmatists experts viewed the creation of an integrated economic space under Russia’s leadership and generally increasing Russia’s economic sway as a most efficacious way for Russia to counteract Georgia’s centrifugal tendencies (Tsygankov, 2006). They proposed to initiate Russian investments and economic development policies under the framework of the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Community to utilize the reach of Russia’s energy resources and infrastructure (Kokoshin, 2001/2012). However, Georgia had its own economic agenda and was only mildly interested in closer economic integration with Russia. Due to Georgia’s reluctance, establishing direct economic presence in Georgia was often recommended as the most efficacious foreign policy. Generally, pragmatists recommended that Russia begins series of investments in Georgia, in contrast with the EU and the West who regarded Georgia as a high-risk investment. Specific policy suggestions focused on the development of cross-border transportation infrastructure to facilitate Russo-Georgian commercial trade. The previously well-developed transportation networks from the Soviet era had fallen in disrepair and significantly hampered Russo-Georgian economic activities. Other suggestions focused on the regional economic integration of North and South Caucasus. Pragmatists also suggested to supply energy to Georgia at low prices and to direct Russian state funds for Georgia’s economic reconstruction. Also, a facilitated visa regime to accommodate migrant work force from Georgia to Russia could tilt Georgia to other compromises with Russia. These policies were recommended both for Georgia proper and for the separatist territories, thus additionally leveraging Russia’s influence. Generally, the pragmatic approach advocated against harsh economic blockades or punitive trade
measures such as “wine wars”. They were seen as only consolidating and strengthening Saakashvili’s national support. Instead, enticements and moderate pressures would be more effective. Leaders of the separatist Georgian territories were seen as generally amenable to receive Russia’s energy assistance in exchange for accommodation Russia’s strategic interests (Karaganov, 2004; Markedonov, 2007; Tsygankov, 2006). However, Georgia remained reluctant to deepen its economic dependency on Russia and preferred to solicit economic aid from the West.

Regarding diplomacy, pragmatists advocated selective cooperation with European states to undermine the Western support to Georgia’s bid for NATO membership. They noted that Russia’s strong economic ties with Germany and France would negate the support of the US and Poland for Georgia’s pursuance of membership in NATO. To increase Russia’s international leverage over Georgia, pragmatists also suggested to invoke the international law, human rights issues, and the “terrorism card”. To undercut the Georgian government’s international legitimacy, pragmatists advised that Russia should portray Georgia as a “failed state” due to its corruption and ethnic conflicts. An impression of a volatile and unstable Georgia would make it less attractive to the West in terms of political partnership and economic cooperation, would enable Moscow to retain its dominance in the region, and would ensure regional stability (German, 2006, p. 11). Additionally, pragmatists political experts suggested that Georgia should be internationally denounced as a supporter of terrorism and that Russia would be authorized to conduct anti-terrorism operations in Georgia by the United Nations Security Council. In the early 2000s, when Russia accused Georgia of providing a safe haven for Chechen separatists in the Pankisi Gorge area, pragmatic experts advocated that Russia should seek international support against Georgia (Blagov, 2002). Bilaterally, pragmatists advocated continuous diplomatic
pressures on Georgia regarding its policies toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia and issues related to Chechnya (Suchkov, 2018). Pragmatists suggested that Russia should bring international observers to document Georgia’s persecution of the separatist civilian population and refugees as human rights violations (Markedonov, 2007). Sergei Karaganov explicitly suggested that, since Georgia amounted to a collapsing state, Russia could intervene within the framework of the UN Charter and the UN mandates, and collaborate with the UN and other international organizations, such as the OSCE, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Interview with Karaganov in Blagov, 2002; Zagorski, 2005). The pragmatists also invoked the international law and the precedent of Kosovo which was frequently referenced in 2006-2008 to justify Russia’s support of the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, pragmatists noted that Russia’s diplomatic efforts toward Georgia, the US, and the West had been largely unproductive. Georgia had played an important role in the creation of the GUAM/GUUAM organization, a US-supported alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Uzbekistan, a potential alternative to Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States. Pragmatists regarded this organization as an important threat to Russia’s regional influence, the CIS, and to the Treaty of Collective Defense due to the proximity of these states to Russia’s volatile Northern Caucasus and other sensitive geopolitical areas (Pietrowsky, 2001; Tsygankov, 2006). The pragmatist Council of Defense and Foreign Policy explicitly noted that the GUAM was an essentially anti-Russian alliance (Loewenhardt, 2005).

In addition to economic and diplomatic measures, the pragmatist experts noted that Russian foreign policy should try to incorporate a few issues related to diaspora and language. Several pragmatists noted that, under certain conditions, Russian linguistic and diaspora
concerns could be used in conjunction with economic and other policies or as secondary arguments in settling policy issues (Kokoshin, 2001/2012).

Russia’s support of the domestic political opposition in Georgia was seen as another way to undermine Georgia’s pro-Western policy. As the post-2003 Georgia generally embraced the path toward NATO, pragmatists were seeking to keep Georgia if not pro-Russian, then at least internationally neutral and not explicitly aligned with the West. Many pragmatists had hoped that the new President Saakashvili would be receptive to working with Russia. When Saakashvili proved to be a populistic leader, not inclined to compromises with Russia, Russian pragmatic experts suggested supporting less fervently anti-Russian political figures in Georgia. They proposed supporting the former Prime Minister Zurab Noraideli, Nino Burdzhanadze, or Shalva Natelashvili, and Georgian political movements, such the Republican Party, the New Right Forces of Georgia, or the Labor Party as alternatives which would be easier to work with than Saakashvili (Markedonov, 2007; Trenin, 2006).

Regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, pragmatists advocated judicious pressuring Georgia for more accommodating policies. Pragmatists noted the obvious advantages that Russia would gain from supporting the two separatist areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They would ensure strategic outposts for Russia within Georgia and the Caucasus, thus enhancing the security of Russia’s Northern Caucasus and undercutting Georgia’s international ambitions to exit Russia’s sphere of influence and join NATO. They would also enhance Russia’s regional prestige as a mediator, peacekeeper, and a protector of its citizens abroad. Also, pragmatists recognized other indirect beneficial consequences arising from strong cultural and ethnic links between Abkhazia and Cherkassia in Russia and Georgia’s South Ossetia and Russia’s North Ossetia (Markedonov, 2007).
But pragmatists also noted significant disadvantages arising from Russia’s overly close association with these separatist territories. They recognized that supporting separatist territories was difficult and costly. It would involve dealing with often volatile and unreliable separatist leadership while negotiating with hostile Georgian government. While the Abkhazian and South Ossetian population have been reliably largely pro-Russian, it was at least partially due to the Georgian ethno-centric policies. Should Georgian policies toward its breakaway regions become more moderate, Russia could not reliably count on its influence. Also, the support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was costly in terms of the continuous economic subsidies and the military support. A few policy experts suggested not to become overly involved in the Caucasus because there might not be feasible solutions, and Russia had its own domestic problems (Trenin, 2003).

At the same time, the pragmatists noted that Russian foreign policy could not afford to dismiss the separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Just as Russia could not have ignored these territories in the context of Chechnya in the 1990s, Abkhazia and South Ossetia could not be abandoned by Russia in terms of Georgia’s pro-Western aspirations in the 2000s. Both situations were seen as equally damaging to Russia’s foreign policy goals. Thus, pragmatists had a consensus that a unilateral withdrawal from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, without at least stabilizing these conflicts, was not a policy option for Russia (Markedonov, 2007).

Significantly, pragmatists advocated a nuanced approach, differentiating Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They noted that Georgia was more inclined to negotiate on Abkhazia’s autonomy. Abkhazia was larger and more politically and culturally independent from Georgia than South Ossetia, which was smaller, more vulnerable, and of greater strategic importance to Georgia. Also, the Abkhazian population was almost universally pro-Russian and anti-Georgian, while
South Ossetia had leaders who were moderately pro-Georgian (Markedonov, 2007). Thus, they noted that Russia might have to deal with these territories separately. They were opposed to Russia’s annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and even to Russia’s overly close association with these separatist areas. General consensus among the pragmatists was that, while Russia’s leverage over Georgia arising from Russia’s involvement Abkhazia and South Ossetia was broadly beneficial to Russia, taking full control of these territories and entering into a full-scale war with Georgia would create an incommensurably costly foreign policy crisis (German, 2006, p. 11).

In sum, pragmatists favored a variety of economic and diplomatic means of mitigating broader geopolitical problems associated with Georgia. However, Georgia, due to its general anti-Russian stance remained a difficult issue, as it single-mindedly proceeded to exit Russia’s sphere of influence and continued confrontational policies regarding the separatist territories. Such uncompromising stance cancelled many pragmatist policy suggestions and, to many pragmatists, Saakashvili’s provocative foreign policy and Georgian nationalism suggested a likely military confrontation. They noted that, in the past, Georgia had deliberately misinterpreted any Russian foreign policy actions and would not be inclined to compromise (Lehovich and Hasim, 2000).

Pragmatists noted the counterproductive effects of nationalism in both Russia and Georgia which hampered Russian foreign policy toward Georgia. They explicitly advocated to avoid stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and historical associations. Pragmatic experts were cognizant of the emotional weight attached to Georgia in Russian foreign policy discourse and the largely anti-Georgian public mood. “For most analysts of Caucasian affairs today, concepts such as militants, refugees, terrorists, or advocates of the national idea and religious revival are
not abstract notions” (Markedonov, 2007). They recognized that their policy suggestions were undermined by the new nationalistic Georgian government as well as the growing nationalism in Russia. While pragmatists advocated against labeling Georgia and its leaders, they also noted that the new president Mikheil Saakashvili represented the prevalent anti-Russian, anti-separatist national mood in Georgia. In their analyses, pragmatists noted that Georgia had framed Russia as its external enemy, thus masking Georgian government’s inability to solve its conflicts with the separatist territories (Markedonov, 2007). Overall, the pragmatist foreign policy approach to Georgia viewed history and other identity-based associations as a subordinate consideration for Russian foreign policy and continuously advocated to overcome nationalistic affectations. To overcome the handicaps of nationalism, they advocated focusing on areas which had not been monopolized by nationalistic narratives: Chechen terrorists, border security, militant Islam, and economics. In this Russia had a precedent in cooperating with Azerbaijan. In spite of Azerbaijan’s conflict with Armenia in Nagorno Karabakh, Russia had successfully circumvented it by focusing on Russo-Azeri cooperation in the Caspian, in economics, and anti-terrorism (Markedonov, 2007).

While generally reluctant to advocate military involvement and the use of openly coercive policies, most pragmatists did not exclude a possibility of war as a last resort in Russian foreign policy. Georgia’s leadership was seen as largely irrational and volatile, and pragmatists did not exclude a deterioration of relations to the point of open military confrontation. But such suggestions were exceptions, and most pragmatists regarded a military confrontation as unlikely. They noted that the Western economic interests regarding Russia and regional stability would preclude the Western support of Georgia’s bellicosity toward the separatist territories. For this reason, instead of advocating a military confrontation, pragmatists favored diplomatic and
economic solutions. While for several years, their efforts had been undermined by nationalists both at home and in Georgia, growing ties between Georgia and the US, and the general lack of international support for Russia, the actual onset of the 2008 war was largely unwelcomed by most Russian pragmatists.

B. Reflections of these nationalistic and pragmatic prescriptions in the official discourse regarding Georgia, 2000-2008

1. Nationalistic elements in the official Russian foreign policy discourse regarding Georgia

Nationalistic overtones in the official Russian foreign policy discourse usually focused on Georgia as Russia’s military opponent, particularly in the terms of NATO, and Georgia’s mistreatment of Akhazians and South Ossetians. Both arguments were used together or separately. In the early 2000s, nationalistic representatives in the Duma, such as Dmitry Rogozin and Gennadi Zyuganov called for the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and a decisive military pushback against Georgia’s membership in NATO. Dmitri Rogozin was one of the most prominent political figures explicitly associated with nationalistic approach to Russian foreign policy. He was among the most outspoken advocates of military response in the official Russian foreign policy circles, closely associated with the nationalistic organization the Congress of Russian Communities which sought to unite Russian speakers in the “near abroad”. He returned to these issues later, when he later became the leader of Rodina, a substantial political party, the Chair of Duma Committee for International Affairs, and Russia’s ambassador to NATO (Trenin, 2011). Thus, he was a prominent participant in the official discourse regarding Russian diaspora policy regarding Russian diaspora including Abkhazia and South Ossetia and regarding NATO, of which Georgia was a prospective member. The official rhetoric became more nationalistic and
confrontational with the Rose Revolution in Georgia and other “Color Revolutions”. In 2003, Rogozin called for a Russian “economic policy of expansion in all of the post-Soviet area” with a military pre-emption policy against any threats to Russian citizens or borders (Staun, 2009). In August 2004, the Russian Duma officially announced its concerns about Georgian aggressive policies regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia and asked President Putin to take measures to protect Russian citizens and compatriots in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The statement noted that threats to these Russian citizens equaled threats to Russia (The Duma, 2004). Concerns over the security of Russian citizens abroad were cited on several other occasions, when the Russian authorities stated that Moscow would not “remain indifferent towards the fate of its citizens, which compromise the absolute majority of South Ossetia” (German, 2006, p. 11).

In 2004-2006, due to the domestic political developments in Georgia and due to Russia’s closure of its two military bases in Georgia, many Russian nationalistic politicians, particularly those associated with the military, expressed their outrage at the neglect of Russia’s interests regarding Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia and viewed Russian foreign policy makers as overly accommodating to Georgia. By 2006, Georgia’s policies against its separatist areas and the general deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations united various Russian nationalistic political figures, such as the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the Deputy Chairman of the Duma, and more moderate nationalists, such as Sergei Ivanov, the Defense Minister. On September 29, 2006 Ivanov denounced Georgia as a “bandit state” and accused the Eastern European member states of NATO of illegally supplying Georgia with Soviet-era weapons to encourage Georgia to attack Russian peacekeepers in Georgia and to occupy Abkhazia and South Ossetia (NYT, 2006a). On the same day, Zhirinovsky called Russian government to enact a "most resolute action, up to the deployment of forces and air raids" (NYT, 2006b). In 2007,
many nationalist public figures criticized Putin’s Munich Speech as insufficient in the light of threats from the West which faced Russia. They included the Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov as well as from members of the General Staff and other high-ranking members of the Russian military (Staun, 2007). In 2008, demands for military action against Georgia from high standing Russian officials and the military increased. General Yuri Baluyevsky was quoted as saying that Russia was considering the possibility of taking military and other steps along its borders if Georgia joined NATO. "Russia will take unambiguous action toward ensuring its interests along its borders," he said. "These will not only be military steps, but also steps of a different character." In February 2008, Putin stated that Russia would consider directing its missiles at Ukraine if a neighboring state (implying Georgia) ever hosted NATO military installations (DW, 2008).

Nationalistic overtones became particularly prominent in the official discourse in early 2008 with increasing suggestions of the official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and their direct incorporation in the Russian Federation (DW, 2008). Konstantin Zatulin, a prominent member of Russian Parliament urged the Russian government to take immediate steps toward the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in response to the recent recognition of Kosovo by the West (Cornell et al, 2008, p.7). In the official discourse, there were suggestions to incorporate Abkhazia and South Ossetia incrementally. In March 2008, the Russian Parliament prepared a document “The Russian Federation Policies Regarding Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdniestria”. This document proposed to open Russian cultural missions in these territories. These missions would serve as de facto embassies to be used by the Russian government and businesses. There were provisions for facilitated border crossing, increased number of peacekeepers, and encouragement to establish local regional cooperation with these territories.
Among its other suggestions, there was recommendation to the President and the government to consider the recognition of these territories. This document also noted that the incorporation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be expedited if Georgia would continue to seek membership in NATO. While this document was welcomed by a few nationalistic politicians, many nationalistic members of the Duma saw it as insufficient and vague, not giving enough support to the breakaway territories and not enough to deter Georgia. Also, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were disappointed by the lack of more direct support (Perevozkina, 2008).

However, before the approaching NATO summit in Bucharest April, 2008, Russia’s Ambassador to NATO, Rogozin in several interviews announced that, should NATO consider the membership application process for Georgia, it would push Russia and other states to recognize the independence claims of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (AP, 2008). “As soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington of NATO membership, the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin,” he said in an interview with Reuters. When asked if Russia might recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Rogozin said: “My personal view is this: we will have no arguments remaining to stand in the way of this process” (Civil Georgia, 2008). After the 2008 NATO summit where Georgia’s membership prospects were shelved, another prominent nationalist politician, Gennadi Zyuganov explicitly criticized Putin and Medvedev as too accommodating to the West and making Russia to appear weak. He noted that NATO’s promises regarding the postponement of Georgia’s membership in NATO could not be trusted. Zyuganov stated that the NATO leadership conceded this postponement to Putin at the NATO summit in Bucharest because NATO thought that Putin’s successor Medvedev would be more malleable and would not object to NATO
expansion. For these reasons, Russia should not be giving any concessions to NATO or Georgia, but protecting its own interests (Sovetskaya Rossiya, 2008).

2. Pragmatic echoes in the official discourse

In spite of the growing nationalistic rhetoric, basic principles of pragmatism were continuously reflected in official Russian foreign policy documents, including the National Security Concept of 2000 and the Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation, 2000. They prominently feature such pragmatism concepts as emphasis on multipolarity, economic development and the regional economic integration, diplomatic cooperation, and international law. They also note international threats to Russian national interests, and the Security concept also admits a possibility of the use of military measures, even nuclear weapons, when all other means of repelling aggression have been exhausted (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2014, p. 129). At the public presentation of the national security doctrine, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov noted that Russia would not rule out “pre-emptive military strikes” anywhere in the world “if the interests of Russia or its alliance obligations demand it” (Staun, 2007). While neither of these documents mention Georgia specifically, they all indicate the Caucasus region as an important area of Russian foreign policy in terms of security and economic interests (The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000; The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000).

Foreign policy experts noted that since 2000, the pragmatic approach to foreign policy has had reliable support in the Kremlin over the Westernism of the 1990s (Loewenhardt, 2005, p. 24-25). In many ways, in February 2007, Putin’s Munich Speech while more confrontational than previous official rhetoric, was an extension and elaboration of the principles of pragmatism, even though it also signaled the dissatisfaction the West, its arbitrary decisions in international
affairs; and the lack of consideration for Russia’s legitimate interests. It was also seen as a sign of “new realism”, a combination of “resistance and cooperation” in foreign policy (Sakwa, 2017, pp. 112-113). Similar sentiments were expressed in the 2008 *Foreign Policy Concept* in which Russia maintained its opposition toward the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe and which specifically Ukraine and Georgia. The 2008 Foreign policy Concept also outlined the existing threats to Transcaucasia and the need for regional cooperation regarding collective security, international terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, transnational crime, and illegal migration (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008). It was more emphatic, in comparison with the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000, in characterizing Georgia as a supporter of terrorism and regional instability and, also, in emphasizing the need for Russia to regain its international status, to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to create favorable external conditions for its modernization, thus reflecting general foreign policy principles advocated by pragmatists.

Georgia was specifically addressed in numerous official communications from the Kremlin between 2002 and 2008. In the early 2000s, the Kremlin cited threats to its security arising from Georgia’s sheltering Chechnyan terrorists. In a symbolic invocation of 9/11, on September 2002, Putin, in threatened military strikes on Georgia because of Georgia sheltering terrorists, apparently hoping to appeal to the US. There were months-long series of official Russian warnings about Georgia harboring Chechen terrorists (Myers, 2002). Gradually, as the Chechen threats subsided, the official focus turned to Georgia’s ambitions regarding NATO and Georgia’s policies toward the separatist territories. In order to solve these problems, Russian official discourse in 2004-2006 focused on the use of diplomacy and invocation of international law. Overall, Russia’s official statements became stronger-worded, and Russia seemed to be
moving from largely reactive communications to more proactive, assertive policy announcements (Devdariani, 2006). An example was the August 2004 Russian Duma’s announcement about Russia’s concerns of Georgia’s aggressiveness regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This statement noted that Georgia had ignored the 1992-1994 agreements. In 2006, in several communications, Putin noted that the Kosovo independence proceedings had created a legal precedent in the international law which could be legitimately applied to Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s demands of independence from Georgia, and, in addition to Kosovo, invoked other international precedents, such as Turkey/Cyprus conflict. (Devdariani, 2006). After unsuccessful talks with Saakashvili in June 2006, Putin described the ongoing disagreements between Russia and Georgia as based on “mutual grievances and reproaches, (...) and (...) misunderstanding of the other party's actions”. However, he also noted that Russia and Georgia would overcome their political disagreements through economic cooperation (Parsons, 2006).

In 2007-2008, the official rhetoric grew more confrontational yet remained measured. In January 2008, Russia’s Foreign Minister Lavrov noted that Russia’s calls on Georgia to sign non-use of force agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia had been refused on disagreements on specific diplomatic terms which stalled but did not preclude further negotiations (Civil Georgia, 2008a). In a speech at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, April 2008, Putin praised Russia’s restraint regarding Georgia in spite of Georgia’s threats to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and called for a multi-lateral meeting with Georgia. Moreover, Putin stated that, even though these territories had been calling for Russia’s involvement for over a decade, and Russia had helped them, Russia would not recognize the independence of these “quasi-public formations”, in spite of the West recognizing Kosovo independence and the NATO
encroachment, in order to remain on good terms with Georgia (UNIAN, 2008). That NATO would not help Georgia to solve its internal problems became a recurring refrain in the official Russian discourse regarding Georgia throughout 2008. In June 2008 Lavrov, at a meeting with Saakashvili in St. Petersburg, explicitly warned that Georgia’s quest for NATO membership would not help to settle the problem of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. “We have stressed again that Georgia would not be able to achieve this by artificially pulling itself into NATO because this would lead to another stage of confrontation” (Kishkovsky, 2008).

Foreign Minister Lavrov also repeatedly warned Georgia against the use of force against its secessionist territories (RFE/RL, 2006; Country Watch, 2016). In March 2007, Russia protested Tbilisi’s creation of an alternative government of South Ossetia. Russia noted it as a deliberate subversion of a further dialogue between South Ossetia and Georgia which would erase any progress made in previous negotiations (Civil Georgia, 2007). As Russo-Georgian relations deteriorated in 2008, Russia hinted that a limited military confrontation between Russia and Georgia might be inevitable. In April 2008, Sergei Lavrov explicitly noted that Russia “would do everything it can to prevent the two countries, run by pro-Western governments, from becoming NATO members” while “trying to avoid exacerbation of relations with NATO and other neighboring states” (DW, 2008).

Overall, official discourse perpetuated Russia’s preference for diplomatic means in solving its differences with Georgia but indicated it which had been handicapped by Saakashvili’s antagonism. After the onset of the military conflict on August 7, Medvedev, Putin, and Lavrov stated they would not negotiate with Saakashvili and Lavrov also openly called for Saakashvili’s resignation (CSIS, 2008). During the war, in a lengthy interview to BBC, Lavrov described Russia’s actions as provoked by Georgian aggression, in violation of international
agreements and laws. He noted that, preceding Georgia’s attack, Georgia had been avoiding the signing of a non-force agreement which was concluded more than a year ago. He noted that Georgia had reneged on its 2005 promises to Russia. In 2005, Russia agreed to withdraw its military bases from Georgia and achieved this ahead of time to accommodate Saakashvili’s election schedule. In exchange, Georgia allegedly had promised to adopt a constitutional law prohibiting any foreign bases on Georgian soil and had agreed to establish a joint counter-terrorist center to prevent the terrorist movement across Russo-Georgian borders. Lavrov publicly invited the US, the EU, and the OSCE to mediate the situation to return Georgia and the separatist territories to the pre-war borders (BBC, 2008).

After the war, Russian communications were highly critical of the Western support of Georgia. Lavrov abruptly cut off the British Foreign Secretary David Milliband’s criticism of the Kremlin which Milliband expressed on the behalf of the EU (Daily Mail, 2008). President Medvedev in his interview about Russia’s decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia noted that Russia had been tolerant of Georgia for 17 years while trying to “hold together a state that was in effect coming apart”. He stated that Russia’s military response helped to avoid further bloodshed which had been inevitable; he also noted that Russia’s actions had been supported by other leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Medvedev outlined five principles of Russian foreign policy which had guided Russia’s response against Georgia’s provocation: The primacy of international law, multipolarity as basis for international stability, peaceful cooperation with other countries, protection of Russian citizens, and Russia’s privileged interests in its historic sphere of influence (Medvedev, 2008). Spurious as such post-factum legitimization of the military intervention was, it echoed the fundamental principles set forth by the pragmatic ideational approach.
In sum, the volatile relations between Russia and Georgia, 2000-2008, were well reflected in the official discourse. Nationalistic principles were reflected in the calls for military intervention, while the principles of pragmatism were echoed in more moderate approach, based on diplomacy and economic measures.

C. How were these ideas reflected in specific foreign policy actions, 2000 - 2008?

War with Georgia represented a first significant break with the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. Before 2008, Russia had carefully avoided being involved in conflicts abroad. The events of 2008 signified that Russia might seek unilateral changes in borders without resorting to regular international dispute settling channels. This had been conditioned by many external conditions throughout the previous years: domestic development in Georgia and Saakashvili’s antagonism, Russia’s disappointment with the Western international order, and a number of other international conditions. In 2000-2003, Russia was navigating between Georgia’s domestic stagnation, its vague international orientation, the presence of Chechen rebels, and finding its international ambitions curtailed by the Western dominance in its adjoining regions as well as globally. In 2004-2005, after the Rose Revolution in Georgia, Russia sought to find a modus vivendi regarding Georgia’s new nationalistic and explicitly pro-Western government, demands from the separatist regions in Georgia, and a large-scale encroachment of the EU and NATO in Russia’s immediate neighborhood. In 2006, relations between Georgia and Russia underwent series of crises, ranging from economic and security clashes to the distinct possibility of Georgia seeking to join NATO. Throughout 2007-2008, the schism between Russia and Georgia deepened. In 2008, Russia barely prevented Georgia from becoming a perspective member of NATO. Russia was little inclined to further compromises with Georgia or the West. When the Georgian military provocations along the South Ossetian border began around August
and initiated the Russo-Georgian War, it was a culmination of a chain of previous military confrontation, perceived insults and threats, albeit with unexpectedly strong Russian response.

However, Russia’s decision to resort to military conflict at least partially was also conditioned by the approaches based in pragmatism and nationalism which had outlined various prescriptions and scenarios regarding Georgia, and which had circulated in the Russian foreign policy discourse in the previous years. It has been noted that Russian military have generally been closer to nationalistic approach than the foreign ministry-associated figures who were self-described pragmatists. Also, the military were often opposed to more diplomatic solutions, while pragmatists were more averse to military involvement (Staun, 2007). Thus, the outbreak war might suggest the failure of the pragmatic approach and the triumph of nationalism; however, the Russo-Georgian military confrontation was a result of many complicated factors. The following part of this chapter seeks to identify the presence and interaction of nationalistic and pragmatic approaches in the course of Russian foreign policy events, 2000-2008.

1. Activities which reflected nationalism

2000-2003

In 2001-2003 for the first time, Russia undertook several military measures against Georgia, ostensibly, to curtail Georgia’s support of the Chechnyan rebels. Many Russian military, concurrently associated with the nationalistic approach to foreign policy, who had been were opposed to cooperation with the US in 2001, had strongly advocated military strikes against Chechen bases in Georgia. Their calls intensified as the United States’ military cooperation with Georgia grew and which they saw as incompatible with Russia’s security interests (Chedia, 2019). As the Kodori Gorge in Georgia/Abkhazia had prolongedly been used as a Chechen rebel
base, Russia conducted a semi-official military operation in the area. The confrontation between Chechen/Georgian and Abkhaz/Russian forces ended with the Abkhazian victory, but also involved casualties of the United Nations’ observers. Russia was accused of bombing the civilians and creating a flow of refugees, which tarnished its reputation (BBC, 2001; Pietrowsky, 2001). Furthermore, in 2002, the Russian military entered the Kodori Gorge after the UN mission had supervised the withdrawal of Georgian forces, thus violating the 2002 demilitarization agreement between Abkhazia and Georgia. For these reasons, Russian foreign policy circles largely avoided being associated with these covert military operations.

More overt were explicitly anti-Georgian policies which were designed to exclude Georgians from Russia. They directly echoed Russian ethno-centric and xenophobic nationalistic ideas. Russian nationalistic political figures continuously called for visa restrictions against migrant workers from Caucasian and Central Asian countries, including Georgia, which, in addition to undercutting of the domestic labor market, they viewed as incompatible with Russian cultural traditions. In the early 2000s, Russia repeatedly threatened Georgia with the exclusion of Georgian migrant workers through establishing a stricter visa regime. To Georgia, it would represent a significant loss of national income. Cumbersome visa requirements were imposed on the Georgians, but the Abkhazians and South Ossetians remained exempt (Piotrovsky, 2001). Such exclusions were at least partially based on the percolating nationalistic sentiments in Russia – broad cultural dislikes and the growing popular impression of Georgia’s government’s deceptiveness toward Russia.

The most prominent activity which reflected the principles of nationalism in the early 2000s was Russia’s passport policy in regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The new 2002 Russian citizenship law was more restrictive in comparison with the Citizenship Act of 1991.
Therefore, many Abkhazians rushed to get their citizenship before July 2002 under the old rules which granted the Russian citizenship to all Soviet citizens who had not acquired another citizenship (Khashig, 2002). As a result, many tens of thousands of Abkhazians received their passports in June 2002. Russian nationalistic political forces directly encouraged and participated in the issuance of passports in Abkhazia and South Ossetia which they regarded as the extension of the Russian World. They were not openly encouraged by the Kremlin, but its tacit support was evident. The Congress of Russian Communities, a small Russian regional political party established an office in Abkhazia to act as a coordinator regarding the issuance of passports. It assisted the Abkhazians with applications and forwarded documents to the office of the Russian Foreign Ministry representative in Sochi. The Chief of the Abkhaz Office of the Congress of Russian Communities claimed to have provided about 80 percent of the Abkhazian population with Russian passports (Chivers, 2004; Welt, 2004). Russian government did not officially encourage it, but, allegedly, such facilitated issuance of passports was agreed in a private meeting between Putin and Abkhazia’s leader. This activity clearly illustrated the conflation, albeit on a small scale, of nationalism and official foreign policy.

2004-2005

A semi-official affirmation of nationalism in Russian foreign policy interactions with Georgia took place in the summer of 2004 when, in clashes between South Ossetia and Georgia, several hundreds of Russian Cossacks from adjoining Russian territory (the Terek Unit) entered South Ossetia “answering the calls of South Ossetian brothers”. They participated in fighting and organized local South Ossetian Cossack units (Izvestia, 2004). The extent of the Cossack coordination with Russian authorities was difficult to gauge, and the Russian officials explicitly denied that Russian Cossacks were present in South Ossetia. The Russian Cossacks have had a
privileged position in the Russian military and had considerable autonomy, such denial was plausible. However, formally, the formal leader of the Cossacks is the Russian President, and they constitute part of the Russian military. Therefore, it was unlikely they acted without any official authorization. However, some observers noted that the Russian Cossacks operated as the “third force” in South Ossetia and might have been outside the control of the Russian government (BBC, 2004).

In 2004-2005, there were few other notable policies which could be aligned with nationalism. As many Russian nationalistic politicians criticized the official policies as insufficient and overly reconciliatory toward Georgia, several Russian politicians and South Ossetian leaders established personal ties. Particularly prominent among them was Konstantin Zatulin, a long-time advocate of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Russian Duma in the Russian Duma (Civil Georgia, 2020). Russian representatives participated in the military parade of the South Ossetian Independence Day. In October 2005, a Congress of Russian Citizens of South Ossetia submitted a petition to President Putin, asking for protection against Georgian aggression and for the incorporation of South Ossetia in the Russian Federation (Fuller, 2005). This petition did not receive official acknowledgement, but it created some stir among nationalistic politicians.

It is likely that the more nationally inclined Russian military and some members of the Duma offered not only verbal, but also tangible military support to the Georgian separatists, while the Russian president and Foreign Ministry was opposed to it and more inclined to seek cooperation with the Georgian government (Stewart, 2003).

2006

By 2006, while Russian policy during this period followed the pragmatist principles, nationalistic undertones in Russian politics were clearly present. Many observers of Russian
politics noted that punitive trade policies which Russia enacted toward Georgia and Russia’s expulsion of Georgians living in Russia was an indication of a “neo-imperial Russia trying to consolidate its interests in the former Soviet area” (Shevtsova 2006, p. 3). Even the hitherto moderate Russian politicians called for more assertive policies regarding Georgia. The Chairman of the Russian State Duma, Boris Gryzlov in October 2006 welcomed the announcement of the South Ossetian referendum and announced that Russian parliamentarians would observe the voting process (Civil Georgia, 2006). The Russian military who had long been advocating military measures toward Georgia, in 2006-2007 prepared a specific plan to repeal a possible attack from Georgia on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This plan was approved by Putin. In accordance with this plan, the Russian military begun to train the South Ossetian militia. Such plans were opposed by other policy advisors, but their objections were overruled. As Putin noted several years later, the Russian General Staff’s preparations for the war proved effective a few years later (RUVR, 2012).

2007-2008

In 2007-2008, calls for the protection of Russian citizens abroad, opportunistic military incursions, and anti-Georgian rhetoric became even more prominent in the discourse of Russian foreign policy, they were only sparsely reflected in actual policy before the outbreak of the war. In 2007-2008, the Russian government might have implicitly encouraged the activities of Alexander Dugin’s Eurasian Movement in Georgia. During these years, Dugin had become a “ubiquitous presence in Russia's circumscribed public sphere”. Shortly before the outbreak of war, in an interview to the radio station Ekho Moskvy, he accused Georgia of genocide in South Ossetia, a line that was subsequently voiced by Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev (Horvath, 2008).
In February 2008, Konstantin Zatulin, the Deputy Chairman of the Duma Committee on the CIS and Compatriot Affairs, suggested that Putin’s statement that the international recognition of Kosovo’s independence could carry consequences for Abkhazia and South Ossetia may be just the first step toward Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Zatulin, a long-time advocate for increased support of Abkhazia and south Ossetia suggested to so immediately (Cornell et al, 2008, p. 7). In March 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia submitted formal requests for their recognition to Russia's parliament. The Russian Duma adopted a resolution which called on the President of Russia and the government to consider the recognition, but it was shelved without practical results, much to the disappointment of nationalistic politicians.

As opportunistic military clashes between Georgia and the separatist territories increased, at least a few of them allegedly were initiated by Russian military commanders due to their personal nationalistic sentiments and without coordination from the Russian government. However, at least one demonstrative incursion from Russia by Russian air force jets in July 2008 was acknowledged by the Russian Foreign Ministry which noted that such purposeful demonstration served to “cool hot heads in Tbilisi” (Reuters, 2008). At the onset of the war, Russia announced a national day of mourning for South Ossetia on August 13, 2008, which seemed a clear pandering to populistic sentiments in Russia (Kremlin, 2008a). Also, during the short war, Cossack paramilitary units and volunteers fought on the Russian/separatist side in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War (The Guardian, 2008). Such incidents were of small scale, with negligible number of participants, and had limited consequences, yet they indited the onset of the growth of nationalism.
After the war, there was increased homage to nationalism. Shortly after the war, Russia’s Federal Assembly unanimously voted to urge President Medvedev to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. The following day, President signed the official recognition degree and established diplomatic relations with the new states (Simic, 2008). In October, Russia established formal diplomatic relations and granted aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Kremlin, 2008b). The Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in November 2008 noted that Russia had responsibility to protect small peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Medvedev, 2008b).

The 2008 war with Georgia was seen by many as an unfettered expression of Russian nationalism at the time. Indeed, Russia’s foreign policy toward Georgia demonstrated a break with hitherto cautious, pragmatic foreign policy approach which sought to avoid the military conflict and the revision of existing borders (Sakwa, 2017, p.114). However, in spite of support and encouragement from nationalistic politicians and public figures, the war was conducted with limited application of force and without significant presence of nationalistic approach. It ended without annexations or other tangible gains which would have satisfied the nationalistic approach.

2. Policies associated with pragmatism

2000-2003

While nationalism had a fledging presence in Russia’s policy toward Georgia, Russia’s relations with Georgia were conducted largely along pragmatic principles. In the early 2000s, Russia exerted diplomatic pressures on Tbilisi about harboring the Chechen terrorists (Suchkov, 2018). In 1999-2002, Russian officials had issued several official complaints about Georgian President’s failure to ensure Georgia’s border control and providing terrorist bases for the
Chechen terrorists, particularly Pankisi and Kodori gorges. After unsuccessfully petitioning Georgia about the increased Chechen presence in Georgia, Russia found support in the US after 9/11, when the Russo-US relations had temporarily warmed. Russia invoked the help of the US who insisted that Georgia conducted anti-terrorism operations against the Chechen bases (Blagov, 2002). The US provided military training and weapons to Georgian troops for conducting anti-terrorist operations, including Pankisi Gorge, but as Russia was interested in gaining the US support against Georgia, Russia largely overlooked such proximity of the US military forces (CRS Report for Congress (2003). However, already then, Russia began to worry about the presence of the US in Georgia which was seen as a potential security threat (Pietrowsky, 2001). But, overall, as Putin declared his solidarity with the US after the events of 9/11, Russian foreign policy actions were largely reconciliatory, seeking a middle ground between Georgia and the US and avoiding excessive military confrontation with Georgia regarding Chechnya (Staun, 2007).

In this period, Russia also begun negotiations with Georgia and its Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists, with a general goal to implement the Sochi Agreement of 1992-1993. In 2003, after a meeting between Shevardnadze and Putin on Abkhazia, the Sochi process was revived by creating a Georgian-Abkhazian-Russian work group. Throughout these negotiations, Russia hoped also that Georgia would participate in economic and security integration with Russia. Russia offered to reestablish the rail connection between Sochi and Tbilisi and other infrastructure projects and Georgia generally agreed that Russia could keep the peacekeeping forces but insisted on the return refugees. Broadly reconciliatory Russia announced that Georgia’s territorial integrity and Abkhazian interests were fully compatible and that a settlement was imminent (Kremlin, 2003). However, the peace process ultimately dwindled. However, the
2003 Sochi meeting resulted in Russia restoring (and controlling) a railway line from Russia (Sochi) to Abkhazia (Sukhumi) in 2004 in return for permitting Georgian refugees to return to Abkhazia. Russia largely acquiesced to the Abkhaz demands regarding the return of the refugees in return for their cooperation in other matters, such as Russia as being the only international mediator (Socor, 2004). Russia’s exclusive position in this regard was of great importance to Abkhazia as well to Russia, but was barely tolerated by Georgia, thus signifying contention for the future.

After the 2003 change of regime in Georgia, Russia was moderately supportive of the new Georgian government. Russia recognized that Georgia’s policies toward Chechnya were rooted in the domestic political rivalry between President Eduard Shevardnadze and his opposition in the government and in the parliament. By covert support of the Georgian opposition in Georgia and abroad, Russian policy makers sought to preempt developments in Georgia unfavorable to Russia and its Chechnya policy and, simultaneously, to lessen the international support of Shevardnadze (Pietrowsky, 2001). Eventually, Russia’s Foreign Minister mediated the exit of Georgia’s ex-President Shevardnadze, thus indicating that Russia was interested in smooth transition of power to avoid political instability in Georgia. For most of 2003-2004, Putin attempted to retain a working relationship with Georgia’s new President Saakashvili.

Even though Russia’s relations with Georgia gradually cooled after the establishment of the new government in Tbilisi, many advocates of the pragmatic approach continued to recommend moderate, diplomacy-based relations with Georgia. They cautioned against excessive involvement with the separatist territories, noting that it would be prudent to maintain minimal strategic pressure on Georgia. Many pragmatic politicians in Russia were skeptical
about the long-term value of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Russian foreign policy. This was exemplified by their lukewarm support of the granting Russian citizenship to Abkhazians and South Ossetians. They also recommended that Russia refrained from recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, even though these territories had asked Russia for official recognition (Chivers, 2004; Suchkov, 2018).

2004-2005

Russia frequently touted its complaisance and its willingness to continue diplomatic engagement in spite of Georgia’s reluctance. In 2004-2005, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov negotiated the withdrawal of Russian military bases in Georgia through a series of talks with Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili. Such concessions by Russia were enacted at least partially to ensure good relations with the new Georgian president Saakashvili. While Russia noted that the negotiations were unnecessarily prolonged due to the lack of “professionalism” and “political games”, the overall prospects for cooperation between Russia and Georgia were hopeful (Civil Georgia, 2005).

In 2004, Russia acted as an intermediary between Georgia’s president Saakashvili and the leader of Ajaria, an autonomous region of Georgia which vehemently opposed the new government. As a result, Russia negotiated the exile of the old Ajarian leader and also agreed to remove its military base in Ajaria. Allegedly, Russia made concessions to establish good relations with Georgia, even though Ajaria was more Russian-friendly, received Russian investments and had a Russian military base. By its mediation between Georgia and Ajaria, Russia prevented a likely outbreak of war between Georgia and Ajaria (Areshidze, 2004). In return, Russia hoped to receive reciprocal accommodations regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, other Russian military bases in Georgia, and the US presence in Georgia.
During these years, Russia continued diplomatic activities regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, based on the participation in the Joint Control Commission (JCC) which was established by the Sochi Agreement in 1992 to settle the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. Its participants were Russia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia, and Georgia. From 1992-2008, the JCC held dozens of meeting sessions and coordinated the peace keeping forces. Overall, they were able to prevent the escalation of sporadic conflicts. For example, in 2005, an emergency JCC meeting settled the clashes between Georgia and South Ossetia when they began arresting each other’s officials and civilians (RFE/RL, 2005). In 2004, Russia used its influence in the Abkhazian domestic politics. When its preferred candidate lost, Russia mediated negotiations to create a coalition government (Welt, 2004). Such activities indicated that Russia was not seeking military control or dominance, but moderate and strategic presence.

Overall, in spite of some significant concessions toward Georgia, the Russian foreign policy actions had little success. It was due to Georgia’s general lack of interest and Saakashvili’s personal political agenda. In 2004, Saakashvili’s election rhetoric about “taking back Abkhazia and South Ossetia” not only did not fade, but even presented a specific timeline. Simultaneously, Saakashvili developed increasingly close ties with Western leaders and cultivated Georgia’s image as a victim of aggressive Russia (Suchkov, 2018).

To increase its leverage over Georgia, Russia resorted to a variety of economic measures. In these years, Russia had established a dominance in Georgia’s gas supply market through its gas company Itera which served as the main supplier of gas to Georgia from 1996 to 2003 (Jervalidze, 2008). However, Russia was concerned about Georgia becoming a transit region for energy supplies from the Caspian region, bypassing Russia and thus undermining Russia’s energy interests. As Georgia’s energy debts to Russia increased, Russia judiciously exerted
economic pressures on Georgia. Russia’s state energy company Gazprom sought to buy shares of Georgian gas pipeline companies and aimed to create a unified and international gas infrastructure network by interconnecting Iranian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Russian, and, possibly, Armenian, pipelines. This would have enabled Russia to control the gas deliveries from the Caspian to the European Union. However, Russia was excluded from Georgian energy market in 2005 by the refusal of Georgia’s government to link political and economic issues. A representative of Georgia’s GasExport company noted in a private conversation that the Russian side had promised to support Georgia in its ambitions regarding control over South Ossetia in exchange for the transfer the ownership of the main Georgian pipelines to Russia, but Georgia refused such offer (Jervalidze, 2008). For this reason, Russia’s policies which were largely aligned with pragmatic ideas by linking economic and political goals, were of little success, even though many Russian politicians had hoped for an opportunity to secure and expand Russia’s economic and political influence in Georgia with the new government.

Russia’s diplomatic interactions with Georgia continued, but grew increasingly contentious. Often Russia accused Georgia of breaking the international law. In 2004 Russia protested against Saakashvili’s orders to sink all ships approaching Abkhazian seashore, presumably, including civilian ships. The Duma warned that such actions would be considered an act of war from Georgia. Georgian troops were accused of breaking international law when they fired on transport carrying Russian officials and peacekeepers. In sum, Russia increasingly viewed Georgia as trying to provoke Russia and to destabilize the Caucasus region (Duma, 2004). But, in spite of provocations, Russia more often than not sought international channels to circumvent Georgia. In 2005-2006, through Russia’s insistence, a UN resolution regarding the UN observer mission in Abkhazia omitted the mention of its commitment to Georgia’s territorial
integrity and the autonomous status of Abkhazia within Georgia. This enraged Georgia who submitted international complaints about the violation of the rights of ethnic Georgian returnees to Abkhazia, demanded a timeline for the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeepers, and sought to include other international mediators in its talks with Abkhazia. To this, Moscow reacted with predictable opposition and used its position at the UN Security Council to undermine such attempts. Overall, Russian diplomacy became more proactive. Putin instructed the Russian foreign ministry to prepare legal justification on the Kosovo precedent which could be applied to Abkhazia and other conflicts in the post-Soviet space (Devdariani, 2006). However, Russian officials also repeatedly noted that Russia did not seek the annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Instead, Russia would rather enact the 1992 Sochi agreement which established ceasefire between Georgia and the separatist territories, regarded Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of Georgia, and involved the OSCE monitoring.

Russia’s diplomatic activities in 2004-2005 did not foster productive relations between Russia and Georgia, even though it did confirm Russia’s commitment to settling contentions with Georgia in a peaceful manner. As relations between Russia and Georgia deteriorated, there were numerous mutual accusations of sabotaging negotiations by military threats, espionage, and economic warfare.

2006

In 2006, Russian foreign policy was faced by what Russia characterized as multiple provocations from the Georgian government: Georgian military raids and alternative governments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian spy scandals in Georgia, and deportations of individuals and trade embargos (Suchkov, 2018). The Georgian military took over the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia and established an alternative Abkhazian government. As it constituted a
third of Abkhazia’s territory, both Abkhazia and Russia protested against it as a violation of a previous border agreement from 1998, and Abkhazia severed its relations with Tbilisi government. Russia provided Abkhazia with some military support, but the Kodori Gorge remained under Georgian control, and Russia avoided a larger scale military involvement (RIA Novosti, 2008; Suchkov, 2018). There were several military clashes between South Ossetia and Georgia. More importantly, after Russian military officers in Tbilisi were arrested as spies, Russia recalled its ambassador to Georgia, initiated a trade embargo, expelled Georgian businessmen and workers, and stopped air, sea, and land traffic with Georgia (Human Rights Watch Report, 2007). Eventually the crisis was resolved, but the relations between Russia and Georgia remained volatile and largely hostile.

Throughout these events, Russia relied on diplomatic measures to solve the consecutive crises of 2006. In regard to the Kodori Crisis, Konstantin Kosachev, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee noted that Russia was acting within its mandate of the CIS peacekeeping mission and exercising its rights under international law. Russia’s attempts to serve as an intermediary between Abkhazia and Georgia were rejected by Georgia. In regard to South Ossetia, Russia attempted to revive the Joint Control Commission framework to seek a compromise between South Ossetia and Georgia and proposed to integrate peace proposals from both parties (Torbakov, 2006). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Georgia that it would "have no chance" of solving the problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the other Georgian breakaway region, by “using force”, but it had little effect (RFE/RL, 2006). Throughout 2006, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued statements denouncing Georgia’s demands to Russia to withdraw its peacekeepers from South Ossetia and reiterating that the Russian peacekeepers protected the population in the disputed areas against Georgia’s military
aggression. However, when relations between Russia and Georgia worsened with the Georgia’s arrest of Russian officers, Lavrov responded with the strongest diplomatic measures -- the removal of Russian embassy from Georgia and threatened to initiate the United Nations investigation of Georgia’s actions.

Russia also attempted to formalize the international status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in an alternative and roundabout way. After prolonged meetings with the leaders of Georgia’s separatist regions and other disputed territories, such as Transdniestria and Nagorno Karabakh, in 2006, Russia established the so-called Commonwealth of Unrecognized States (German, 2006, p.11). The establishment of this organization indicated Russia’s intentions to gradually legitimize these breakaway regions as international entities. It also permitted Russia to avoid a unilateral recognition of their independence which Russia had been dodging for several years. This organization and its member states were not recognized by any major state or international organization except for Russia, and as such had merely symbolic meaning. But it signified Russia’s interests in gaining additional international legitimacy in its relations with Georgia. Through these actions, Russia hoped to circumvent Georgia’s non-negotiable claims over its secessionist regions, to secure status quo of these areas, and to ensure their allegiance to Russia in the future.

At the same time, in 2005-2006 Russia successfully arranged terms for the withdrawal of Russian forces from their bases in Georgia by January 1, 2008. Apparently, Russia saw it more advantageous to apply soft power approach to Georgia in order to gain leverage in further negotiations (Tsygankov, 2006). Furthermore, Russia expediated these withdrawals ahead of the agreed date. By this, Russia indicated that, while Russia sought to preserve its influence over Georgia, it was not revisionist; it did not seek to excessively antagonize Georgia. Instead, it
enacted judicious and often reconciliatory policies to preserve *status quo* and not to upend Georgia’s stability (Sakwa, 2017, p.106-107).

Russia also enacted further economic pressures on Georgia. Georgia accused Russia of deliberately disrupting its gas supply to Georgia in 2006, but Russia denied an intentional disruption and pointed out its swift response (BBC, 2006). However, later in the year, as diplomatic crises between Russia and Georgia mounted, Russia did resort to unmistakable economic pressures. Russia enacted trade embargo on Georgian wines and mineral water, stopped traffic and migration between Russia and Georgia, and considerably increased Russia’s gas prices (Country Watch, 2016). Aggressive energy policy was Russia’s response partially to Georgia’s hostile domestic politics and partially to the new oil supply line from Azerbaijan, the 2006, the Western-funded Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which alleviated Georgia’s energy dependence on Russia, but raised Russia’s concerns. Russia’s calculations did not always pan out, as Georgia refused to pay the new gas prices which it regarded as exorbitant, and announced intentions to pursue closer relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey (Transparency International, 2008). Georgia also blocked Russia’s bid for the WTO in 2006, thus further frustrating Russia’s economic measures against Georgia. However, Russia’s economic input in Georgia, including remittances from Georgian workers in Russia which accounted for at least 7% of Georgia’s GDP, remained incommensurably greater than investments in Georgia from any other state in (Jongwanich, 2007; Parsons, 2006).

In order to circumvent the hostility of Saakashvili and to increase its presence in Georgia’s domestic politics, Russia supported his domestic opposition. In 2006, Russian government increased its ties with Georgia’s Labor Party who favored peaceful resolution of the conflict with separatists and opposed the bellicose policies of Saakashvili. The leader of the
Labor Party visited Moscow and held talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Loshchinin on the “current relations between Russia and Georgia and the prospects for their development” (Civil Georgia, 2006a).

**2007-2008**

Throughout 2007-2008, in spite of steadily deteriorating relations between Russia and Georgia, Russia maintained active diplomatic ties and communications with Georgia, but without results. There were extended diplomatic quibbles about fine points. In January 2008 Lavrov noted that Russia’s calls on Georgia to sign non-use of force agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia had been refused on disagreements on technical terms. Georgia refused to continue negotiations if it was implied that Abkhazia and south Ossetia were independent states on par with Georgia. Georgia insisted on regarding its conflict with the separatist territories as a domestic issue, not international. Additionally, Georgia would not accept Russia as a guarantor of such agreement, instead preferring guarantees by Western powers, thus ending its participation in Russian-led negotiations (Civil Georgia, 2008a).

Russia also sought diplomatic resolutions and international investigations regarding the numerous military incidents between the separatist territories and Georgia. Such investigations included the UN-led investigation of the deaths of Russian peacekeepers which resulted in the implication of the Georgian side as well as an investigation which blamed Russia’s involvement (OCHA, 2007). Throughout 2007, Lavrov stated that Russia would cooperate in various investigations with Georgia and international organizations to nullify Georgia’s provocations (RFE/RL, 2007). Simultaneously, Russian foreign ministry routinely criticized the United States’ support of Georgian version of events regarding these military skirmishes and invoked international authorities to undercut the position of the United States.
In 2008, Russia’s concerns over the United States, NATO, and Georgia intensified, yet Russian foreign policy did not entirely depart the framework of pragmatism. Russia relied on bilateral diplomacy to counteract the US support of Georgia’s NATO ambitions and issued vague yet ominous threats. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov warned that giving Georgia and Ukraine a membership action plan in NATO would have the “gravest consequences” for the US-Russian relations, and the Russian Duma passed a resolution in favor of the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia if Georgia joined NATO. In the meantime, Putin and Lavrov were actively seeking and finding support from France and Germany which resulted in thwarting Georgia and Ukraine’s plans (Jerusalem Post, 2008; RFE/RL, 2008; Sakwa, 2017, p.153). The postponement of these plans at the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest hardly alleviated Russia’s concerns in the long-term, but, overall, it was seen as a victory for Russian diplomacy. At the same time, Russia suspected that the United States, NATO, and Georgia would use the power transition in Russia from Putin to Medvedev as an opportunity to revisit their plans (Suchkov, 2018).

While Russo-Georgian relations were spiraling downward in 2008, briefly, it seemed that Russia had found a diplomatic solution for Georgia’s conflict with Abkhazia. In July 2008, Germany presented a peace plan for Georgia and Abkhazia, which was endorsed by Russia with minor modifications. For several years, Germany had led the so-called UN Group of Friends of the Secretary General which sought to de-escalate the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia/Russia. The main points of the plan strongly echoed principles of pragmatism, calling for ending the violence, the renewal of talks between Georgia and Abkhazia, and the return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia. It also mapped out joint reconstruction projects, and proposed, at a later point, to address Abkhazia’s political status. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that
the plan, drafted by German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, was equitable and "extremely helpful for looking for compromises and a way out of the crisis". This plan mimicked many propositions which Russia had been voicing in the previous years. While earlier, Lavrov had turned down the part about the return of refugees as “unrealistic” he later conceded the point, thus additionally demonstrating reconciliatory attitude toward Georgia (France24, 2008). Even though Abkhazia rejected the plan, Russia viewed it as a temporary setback which could be overcome with additional negotiations. An even a day before the war, Russia urged the UN Security Council to issue a call for a cease-fire; however, a disagreement about whether the statement should refer to Georgia’s territorial integrity led to the Council’s inaction (Evans, 2008).

After the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War, August 7-12, 2008, Russia’s Foreign Minister Lavrov reiterated that Russia’s goal was to promptly conclude peace treaty with Georgia. He noted that Georgia was “engaged in aggressive actions in violation of…. international humanitarian law by attacking civilians, residential quarters, humanitarian convoys” and that Russia’s attempts to establish a cease-fire agreement between Georgia and South Ossetia had been rebuffed by Georgia. Lavrov called for international mediation from the United States, France, Germany, and the OSCE to restore the pre-war borders between Georgia and its separatist areas (BBC, 2008).

However, Russia’s tone grew markedly more assertive during and after the war, when Foreign Minister Lavrov explicitly blamed the war on NATO’s narrow-sighted approach to Russo-Georgian relations and noted that the Russian peacekeeper forces would be reinforced to prevent similar attack by Georgia in the future. After the war, President Medvedev emphasized Russia’s expectations from Georgia to strictly adhere to the conditions set by the mediators, but also invoked the Abkhazian and South Ossetian rights to secede from Georgia according to the
Helsinki Act and the Charter of the United Nations and Russia’s obligations to protect of its citizens.

Contrary to general perception from abroad and from Georgia, Russia’s approach to Georgia and the secessionist territories was nuanced and differentiated and, in contrast with nationalist rhetoric, an annexation or exactment of incommensurable concessions from Georgia were not seen as advantageous to Russia. Overall, Russia was reluctant to consider official recognition or annexation of these territories and would largely prefer them formally remaining within Georgia (Suchkov, 2018). Russia did not seek large geopolitical changes which would have been in line with the nationalist approach. Instead, Russia sought to preserve the status quo or to have relatively small regional adjustments within its sphere of influence, more in line with the pragmatist approach. The actual military confrontation between Russia and Georgia was conducted swiftly and strategically, without pandering to nationalist goals of territorial annexations or the annihilation of the Georgian government or even the occupation of Georgia’s capital. Instead, Russia soon withdrew to the pre-war borders. It was a war along the pragmatist principles, conducted in a calculated manner for strategic long-term gains and brought about by (almost) unavoidable circumstances. Even though Russia immediately recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the war, and Georgia decried it as an annexation, Russia’s formal recognition of these territories did not result in their incorporation within Russia. Russia did establish diplomatic relations with these territories and initiated economic subsidies and other cooperation programs (Simic, 2008). After the war, Russia fairly quickly restored its relations with the US, the West, and Georgia. However, if Russia’s subsequent relations with the US and Georgia were not very productive, it was more due to the lack of reciprocity than because of Russia’s indifference (Sakwa, 2017, pp.106-107)
Conclusion

As the above accounts suggest, the pragmatic approach is clearly apparent in Russia’s policy toward Georgia. Russia sought to integrate Georgia within its sphere of influence through largely economic, diplomatic, and cultural means. Generally, Russia exercised restrained and judicious policies toward Georgia, even though there were few obstacles to prevent Russia from extending more support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia who were clamoring for closer ties with Russia or from pursuing larger military activities against Georgia. However, while Russia sought to maximize its influence over Georgia, it was not seeking propel itself into a full-scale war with Georgia or to gain added responsibilities in the separatist territories with had little added value. When in May 2008, Abkhazia’s leader Sergey Bagapsh requested permanent Russian military presence in Abkhazia, such plan was denied by Russia (Cornell et al, 2008, pp.9-10). At the same time, there were also indications of the growing presence of nationalistic approach in Russian foreign policy which sporadically appeared in Russia’s foreign policy toward Georgia. In 2000-2008, both the pragmatic and the nationalistic approaches met successes and failures which are summarized below.

In 2000-2003, the pragmatist advocacy for reliance on economic pressures, diplomacy, and moderate cooperation with the West seemed to be a promising path for ensuring Russia’s influence over Georgia. At the same time, Russia had little success in normalizing relations between Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Georgia. Russia’ attempts to broker peace were largely unsuccessful. Nationalistic approach at this time was largely limited to the advocacy of the Russian citizenship to the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2004-2006, economic and diplomatic pressures were becoming less effective, as Georgia increased its reliance on the US. Russia’s diplomatic advances to the new Georgian government were hardly reciprocated. The
nationalistic approach, based on the inclusion of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian citizens in the “Russian world” and Russia’s short military incursions was gradually becoming more prominent in Russian foreign policy discourse, but was sparsely reflected in actual policies. Adhering to largely pragmatic suggestions, Russia avoided over-involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and continued to exert economic and diplomatic pressures on Georgia instead of pursuing more antagonistic policy. In 2007-2008, Russia’s diplomatic engagement with Germany and France succeeded in undermining Georgia’s bid for NATO membership. After diplomatic and economic policies toward Georgia proved ineffective, Russia’s war with Georgia was relatively circumscribed, conducted with calculated constraint and followed by international mediation. It reached its goal, effectively proscribed Georgia’s ambition toward NATO. Such policies reflected suggestions from the pragmatic discourse. Even though there was considerable Russian nationalistic fervor in support of the war, the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and their unification with Russia, it did not incorporate Abkhazia or South Ossetia in the Russian Federation, it did not occupy Georgia proper, nor did it displace the anti-Russian Saakashvili regime.

What factors could be identified as relevant regarding the balance between pragmatism and nationalism in Russo-Georgian policies? As noted earlier, foreign policy is intrinsically linked to ideas, domestic developments, and external conditions. At home, the foreign policy debate presented pragmatic and nationalistic ideas and policy suggestions to Russian foreign policy makers – the President, the inner circle and their policy advisors. Yet there were varying degrees of support to pragmatistic and nationalistic policies regarding Georgia.

By 2008, the outbreak of the war, pragmatism was well established ideational framework with supporters in the highest policy makers circles. By contrast, nationalism had only been
gaining recognition. Its prescriptions to remedy Russia’s international disadvantages – the expansion of the EU and NATO within Russia’s historic territories had proponents among many high standing military officials. Many of them were explicitly associated with Alexander Dugin, the preeminent nationalistic theorist. However, nationalistic ideas in foreign policy were dismissed by the well-established pragmatists who formed the majority of foreign policy decision makers, including Lavrov and the leaders of influential think tanks. Nationalistic ideational framework was not as prominent in the unofficial foreign policy discourse and had limited representation in the official discourse. Furthermore, Georgia was generally less applicable to the nationalistic ideational framework as it was less relevant to Russian identity issues. There were clear connections between Georgia and the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, Russian language, and threats to Russian identity from the intrusion of the West upon Russia’s historic territories. However, many problems associated with Russia’s security arising from Georgia were better suited to pragmatists’ geopolitical, security-oriented approach. Therefore, as the external pressures arising from Georgia’s behavior, particularly related to its search for NATO affiliation and Georgian nationalistic sentiments regarding Russia and separatist territories, mounted, pragmatist approach seemed more appropriate to Russian foreign policy makers, including President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov. In sum, the pragmatism presented was more persuasive regarding Georgia in terms of geopolitical than nationalist-backed identity-related foreign policy problems.

The presence of pragmatism and nationalism explain the patchy development of Russian foreign policy toward Georgia. As analysts of Russian foreign policy have noted, the Kremlin policies have been based on “strategic calculation as well as symbolism” (Suchkov, 2018). Often, Russian activities regarding Georgia were paradoxical and even potentially
counterproductive. Depicting Russia’s policies toward Georgia as singularly nationalistic, neo-imperialistic, or revanchistic cannot adequately explain Russia’s restraint in the use of force or why Russia was withdrawing its military forces from the Caucasus while sporadically engaging in military excursions, lukewarmly supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and extending the Russian ownership of gas pipelines through joint projects (Staun, 2007). Such contradictions can be at least partially explained by the presence of the pragmatic and nationalistic approaches which were reflected in Russian policies regarding Georgia.

The aftermath of the war was a heyday for the Russian foreign policy debate for all ideational affiliations. Many extrapolations from the Russo-Georgian war were extended to Ukraine with the conclusion that should Ukraine pursue pro-Western policies, including NATO membership, there would be military action from Russia. Foreign policy experts reevaluated Russia’s relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and other Near Abroad states. They came up with voluminous recommendations for the future Russian policies. And, as the Kremlin needed working relationship with Georgia, domestic support, a respite from the economic sanctions imposed on Russia, and the restoration of Russia’s international image, these policy suggestions, if not followed, were at least considered (Petrov, 2008).

In sum, the Russo-Georgian war had set an irrevocable precedent for Russia’s international involvement on more assertive terms. “The 2008 five-day war between Russia and Georgia was a warning that the situation was not sustainable; the 2014 Ukraine conflict finally put an end to the Russian-Western partnership (Trenin, 2018). This presented disquieting perspectives for other neighbors of Russia, particularly Ukraine.
### Table A: Russian foreign policy prescriptions for Georgia and their reflection in policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy suggestions from unofficial discourse</th>
<th>Reflected in official discourse?</th>
<th>Reflected in actual policies?</th>
<th>Were they successful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationalism:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active support of separatists</td>
<td>Yes. In Sochi agreements 1992, 2003 and afterwards Russia positioned itself as a patron of separatists.</td>
<td>Yes, sporadic military strikes, economic and military subsidies to Abkhazia and South Ossetia</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Georgian sentiments</td>
<td>Yes. Official rhetoric about the exclusion of Georgian nationals from Russia.</td>
<td>Yes, short-lived immigration policies.</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia</td>
<td>Not until after the war in 2008.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct military actions</td>
<td>Yes. Putin threatened military strikes on Georgia in 2002 for sheltering terrorists; Foreign Ministry’s statements about pushback against Georgia’s aggression and its int’l ambitions, particularly in 2006-2007.</td>
<td>Yes, bombing of Kodori Gorge (2001) and other military actions which culminated in the war of 2008.</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatism:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic pressures against Georgia</td>
<td>Yes, frequently (Ivanov, 2002), increasingly from 2005.</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected accommodations for Georgia,</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, negotiations in 2004-2005 resulted in withdrawal of bases ahead of time</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls for Georgia’s regional integration in Russia-led frameworks to counteract the US/NATO presence in Georgia</td>
<td>Yes, as seen in Foreign Policy Concepts of 2000, 2008.</td>
<td>Yes, the invitations to EEU, CSTO</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls for Georgia to negotiate with separatists</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, the use of the EAEC, and the Joint Control Commission, particularly 2004-2006</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance for military solutions</td>
<td>Yes (Foreign Policy Concept 2008)</td>
<td>Limited military engagements</td>
<td>Minimally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portraying Georgia as nationalistic regime, a supporter of terrorism</td>
<td>Frequently (Foreign Ministry statements)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International mediation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Involvement of the OSCE, the UN, the EU/France</td>
<td>Partially. Cooperation with the US in the early 2000s and peace negotiations in 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V. Ukraine: the Russian Foreign Policy Discourse, Nationalist and Pragmatist Approaches, and Russia’s conflict with Ukraine

Introduction

Since the 1990s, no other neighboring country has been of greater importance to Russia than Ukraine. Ukraine is Russia’s largest neighbor in Europe, and it is the second largest Slavic country in the world. Ukraine is closely bound with Russia through economic ties while constituting a formidable boundary between Russia and the West. Russia and Ukraine share religion, and they are related through their history, language, and a variety of other cultural factors. Therefore, when Ukraine became an independent country in 1991, it was accepted by Russia with reservations. In Russian foreign policy circles, it was hardly doubted that Russia should and would retain a degree of control of Ukraine. However, Ukraine proved to harbor strong nationalistic, largely anti-Russian sentiments and policies which clashed with Russian ambitions and resulted in a military confrontation in 2014. Ukraine’s manifold importance to Russia has been examined in many ways – regarding their economic relations, security considerations, and identity-related aspects. These viewpoints have been incorporated in official communications and policies. They were conditioned by domestic developments in Ukraine and Russia as well as by global events. Furthermore, Russia’s foreign policy toward Ukraine from 2000 to 2014 was also influenced by pragmatic and nationalistic approaches to foreign policy in the Russian discourse. The following chapter provides a brief overview of the events in Ukraine which have shaped subsequent Russo-Ukrainian relations; then, it presents nationalistic and pragmatic interpretations of these events in the unofficial and official Russian foreign policy discourse; and finally, it highlights the subsequent impact of these interpretations on Russian foreign policy activities.
This chapter begins with an outline of Russo-Ukrainian relations, 1991-2014. Examination of Ukraine in the Russian foreign policy discourse follows. The treatment of Ukraine in unofficial and official Russian foreign policy discourse is discussed in separate sections subdivided by nationalistic and pragmatic approaches. Then the chapter examines connections between these policy prescriptions and official foreign policy actions. The conclusion analyzes successes and failures of nationalistic and pragmatic policies.

A. Ukraine and Russo-Ukrainian relations, 1991-2014

A. Overview of internal developments in Ukraine

With the termination of the Soviet Union in 1991, many political observers expected that, in the light of Russian and Ukrainian ties, they would become close allies within the new Commonwealth of Independent States (Mandelbaum, 1998, p. 8). However, it soon became apparent that these newly formed states had distinct and often contradictory interests and visions in regard to their future (Gvosdev and Marsh, p.164). After gaining independence, Ukraine underwent complicated domestic developments which altered its relations with Russia. In spite of Ukraine’s singularly vast economic and international potential due to its natural resources, industrial development, strategic geopolitical position, and its large population, Ukraine, due to its domestic weaknesses, customarily was overshadowed internationally by Russia.


In the 1990s, Ukraine, in its transition to new, post-Soviet economic and political systems, had achieved, at best, a mixed success. While developing its national culture and beginning a democratic political transformation, it had also experienced a number of detrimental economic consequences arising from the new market economy. These setbacks created considerable popular disappointment and social rifts. Political power in Ukraine and,
correspondingly, decision making in its foreign policy had come under the control of a corrupt narrow circle led by President Leonid Kuchma (1995-2004) (Garnett, 1998, p. 72). In his domestic policies, President Kuchma maneuvered between the establishment of a centralized governance, market-based economy and a new Ukrainian national identity. At the same time, he was obligated to cater to the Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine where economic conditions were disastrous and affinity for the new Ukraine was minimal. These goals were contradictory if not outright incompatible. President Kuchma was backed by powerful Ukrainian business elites who had gained spectacularly from the Ukrainian economic reforms and who had little interest in negating the prevailing corruption. These elites often also had close business ties with Russia. President Kuchma’s domestic legitimacy was somewhat boosted by Ukraine’s moderate economic recovery in the early 2000s, but his reputation remained tainted by scandals and malfeasances (Gorchinskaya, 2020; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 171).

The foreign policy President Kuchma pursued was similarly contradictory and self-serving. He developed significant security and financial ties between Ukraine and the West while carefully avoiding binding commitments. Ukraine received extensive loans and other assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United States, and the European Union (Gorchinskaya, 2020). Concurrently, President Kuchma clearly favored close relations with Russia whom he successfully avoided antagonizing by refraining from entering into formal long-term commitments to the West (Garnett, 1998, p. 73). In his foreign policy Kuchma attempted to exploit the Ukraine’s geopolitical position vis-à-vis the West and Russia. As popular sentiment in Ukraine largely favored a pro-Western foreign policy orientation, Kuchma perfunctorily, yet continuously, articulated Ukraine’s commitment to Western values and democratic institutions. In reality, Ukraine’s foreign policy orientation remained broadly pro-
Russian, and its economic and international activity was largely dependent on Russia’s patronage – albeit conditioned by mutually complementary Russian and Ukrainian interests (Garnett, 1998, p.86).

D. After the Orange Revolution, 2004-2014

In 2004, popular dissatisfaction with Ukraine’s political and economic development under President Kuchma’s regime, particularly regarding the wide-spread corruption and infringements on civil liberties, culminated in the outbreak of the “Orange Revolution”. This movement was partially related to a wave of protests in other post-Soviet states, particularly the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in 2003. These protests were brought about by the popular disappointment with the increasingly diminished prospects for democracy and social justice. Mimicking events in Georgia, the Orange Revolution deposed the established regime and brought forth a new, pro-Western government in Ukraine. Following a vehemently contested election, a popular nationalistic politician Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010) became Ukraine’s new president (Gvosdev and Marsh, p. 89, p.171). Yushchenko’s election, lauded by Ukrainian nationalists and by the West, was based on definite expectations of a curtailment of the prevailing corruption and on changes in the existing accommodations to the Russian-speaking regions. In his foreign policy, Yushchenko promised steering Ukraine toward the West by exiting Russia’s geopolitical orbit and by seeking admittance to the European Union and NATO. Indeed, under Yushchenko, Ukraine achieved significantly closer cooperation with both the EU and NATO through cooperative agreements with the EU and participation in NATO’s missions and joint military exercises (Fried, 2005; Kuzio, 2018). However, over the next few years, Yushchenko’s economic reforms, his confrontational stance toward Russia, and his increasing intolerance of domestic political opponents were compounded by antagonism from the Ukrainian
parliament, Russia-connected Ukrainian business elites, and Russian speaking Eastern Ukraine. Declining economic conditions cost Yuschenko his popular support (Ames, 2010).

In 2010, President Yuschenko was succeeded by Viktor Yanukovich (2010-2014), an inveterate pro-Russian politician and a native of Eastern Ukraine. His rule was characterized by a renewal of political corruption. Ukraine re-established closer ties with Russia and made concessions to Russian-speaking regions, with perfunctory nods to Ukrainian nationalism and vague promises regarding Ukraine’s integration with the EU in the future. A number of foreign policy activities under President Yanukovich caused increased domestic rifts and popular disillusionment with his leadership. By 2010 Kharkiv Treaty, President Yanukovich paused Ukraine’s preparations for membership in the EU and affirmed closer relations with Russia by signing a new lease of Sevastopol to Russia while extracting an advantageous energy deal from Russia (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 92). In 2012, he signed a new language law raising the status of the Russian language as an official regional language. Such actions did not fully satisfy the Russian speaking Ukrainian population, and they were opposed by Ukrainian nationalists, thus deepening domestic rifts. Yanukovich disengaged from further cooperation with NATO by announcing that Ukraine would not become part of a NATO-led security framework. However, in spite of his emphatic disassociation with the West, Yanukovich’s relations with Russia were not singularly cordial or loyal. Ukraine’s negotiations with the EU which had been begun under President Yushchenko in 2007, continued at a considerably slower pace, until 2013. Yanukovich, preferring neutrality, also announced that Ukraine would not join a Russian-led security framework (Sakwa, 2017, p. 152-153). Similar to President Kuchma, Yanukovich in his foreign policy conducted opportunistic maneuvering between the West and Russia. When the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was about to be signed in November 2013,
Yanukovich negotiated last-minute favorable concessions from Russia, and he agreed to reverse Ukraine’s plan to join the EU. This action created large-scale protests in Ukraine. The “Revolution of Dignity” or EuroMaidan in Kiev at the end of 2013 resulted in the ousting of Yanukovich and his government in February 2014. Yanukovich’s successors, the interim President Oleksandr Turchynov (2014) and President Petro Poroshenko (2014-2019) affirmed Ukraine’s renewal of pro-Western, democratic, and anti-corruption policies. These presidents were largely regarded as representatives of nationalistic Ukrainian groups with broad popular support. However, Eastern Ukraine and other areas of Russian-speaking population firmly opposed the new government, and their dissatisfaction manifested in a prolonged separatist warfare against Kiev and its nationalistic policies (Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2016).

Map of Ukraine and its Contested Territories
B. Summary of Russo-Ukrainian relations, 1991-2014

Russo-Ukrainian relations throughout the post-Soviet decades were conditioned by Ukraine’s uncertain domestic development and its ambiguous international activities. Ukraine’s actions were of constant concern to Russian foreign policy, thus making Russo-Ukrainian relations complicated and precarious. The following part provides a brief summary of the evolution of the Russo-Ukrainian relations under Russian Presidents Yeltsin (1991-1999), Putin (2000-2008, 2012-2014), and Medvedev (2008-2012).


During Yeltsin’s presidency, Russo-Ukrainian relations remained at an uneasy equilibrium. However, this relative stability was not for the lack of points of contention, but largely due to the complicated domestic political and economic circumstances in Ukraine and Russia. Russia’s precarious economic situation and uncertain political conditions hardly permitted Russia to pursue a strong foreign policy in general or to exact specific concessions from Ukraine. Concurrently, as Ukraine was experiencing similar domestic economic and political fragility under President Kuchma, it acknowledged its limitations vis-à-vis Russia. In their mutual relations, a pattern of periodic crises and compromises evolved. Contentious issues covered a variety of security, energy politics, trade, and identity-based considerations, particularly regarding Eastern Ukraine. While a modicum of balance was found due to inherently close ties and interdependency between Russia and Ukraine, many issues remained unresolved because of the often-incompatible ambitions and attitudes in both countries.

Examples of cooperation between Russia and Ukraine included agreements regarding security and the establishment of close economic ties. In regard to security, the most acute issues for Russia were nuclear weapons and the Black Sea Fleet. The issue of transferring the Soviet
nuclear arsenal from Ukraine to Russia was resolved relatively quickly due to pressure, not only from Russia, but also from the West. According to the popular view, Ukraine drew a hard bargain in the 1994 nuclear agreement between Ukraine, Russia, the US, and the UK. In return for giving up nuclear weapons, Ukraine received assurance of its territorial integrity, a large aid package from the US, and a below-market energy price guarantee from Russia. In addition, Russia provided separate compensation to Ukraine and agreed to dismantle the received weapons (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 171; The US-Russia-Ukraine Trilateral Statement and Annex, 1994).

Russo-Ukrainian negotiations about the Black Sea Fleet were more complicated and continued from 1992 to 1997 (Garnett, p. 86). The “Big Treaty” of 1997 was finalized largely due to Russian Foreign Minister Primakov’s persistence and overcoming personal reservations between Ukrainian President Kuchma and Russian President Yeltsin. The Treaty of Friendship entailed an agreement about the division of the Black Sea Fleet which ensured that Russia retained most of the fleet and the use of its naval base at Sevastopol, Crimea, until 2017. In return, Russia formally recognized the borders of Ukraine and provided a considerable compensation to Ukraine. This treaty faced domestic opposition in both countries: In Russia, the treaty was seen as overly advantageous to Ukraine. However, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, the treaty’s greatest champion, regarded the establishment of a working relationship with Ukraine of utmost importance for Russia. Previously, Primakov’s successor, Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov, had also sought good relations with Ukraine. He had offered various concessions to Ukraine, partially to preempt Ukraine defection to the West, and partially to ensure favorable long-term prospects for Russo-Ukrainian relations but had met with limited success (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 171; Tsygankov, 2013, p. 119). In Ukraine, there were
considerable reservations about Russian military presence in the Crimea and the Black Sea. However, this treaty succeeded in largely normalizing relations between the two countries (Stewart, 1997).

Ukraine was far more reluctant to accommodate Russian attempts to establish a broader regional dominance. Russia’s design to integrate Ukraine in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were seen as incompatible with Ukraine’s sovereignty and economic interests (Garnett, p. 88; Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 164-171; Tsygankov, 2013, p. 121). Even though Ukraine was a founding member of the CIS, it immediately and unmistakably signaled its dissatisfaction with Russia’s dominance in CIS-based organizations. Ukraine did not join the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 1992, nor did it ratify the CIS Charter in 1993; thus it no longer qualified as a full member of the CIS. It also rejected Russia’s projects of the Eurasian Economic Community and Eurasian Customs Union (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 121). In an attempting to curtail Russia’s regional influence, in 1997, Ukraine, along with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova (and later, Uzbekistan) established the GUUAM forum, a pro-Western organization which explicitly sought to minimize Russia’s sphere of influence and to foster regional economic and security cooperation without Russia. However, while being of symbolic significance, this organization showed little efficiency or coherence, and, ultimately, it did not significantly affect Russo-Ukrainian relations (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 170).

Other acute and unresolved issues in Russo-Ukrainian relations during the 1990s, included the question of Crimea, pending problems regarding energy prices and trade, as well as uncertainty about perspectives for Ukraine’s Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine.

Due to its strategic value, Crimea loomed large in Russo-Ukrainian relationship. It was the location of the Sevastopol naval base, the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and as such,
was of great importance to Russia’s security (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p.164). It also was of significant symbolic importance due to its history as part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Crimean population had numerous disagreements with the Ukrainian government. From the onset, Crimea’s Russian-speaking population was concerned about their prospects under the new Ukrainian state. The 1994 Crimean referendum demanded dual citizenship for the Crimeans and greater autonomy for Crimea from Ukraine’s central government. However, these demands were largely glossed over by both the Ukrainian and Russian governments. The Crimea issue seemed to be settled by the 1997 treaty between Russia and Ukraine which affirmed Crimea as a part of Ukraine. Nevertheless, Crimea remained a potential trouble spot in the future.

Perspectives for the Russian-speaking minority in Eastern Ukraine also remained uncertain. The Russian-speakers in Ukraine had been granted Ukrainian citizenship, but they had been hostile to restrictions regarding the official use of the Russian language. President Kuchma establishment of Ukrainian as the only official state language of Ukraine sparked protests in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, but these objections received little formal support from Russia. At the same time, informal cultural ties between Russia and Ukraine remained strong. Russia dominated the Ukrainian informational and cultural spheres, and the Russian language was universally used in informal settings. There was active and large-scale migration between Russia in Ukraine which further reinforced informal and formal ties between Russia and Ukraine. (The visa-free regime between Russia and Ukraine which was established in the 1990s still remains in effect.) In spite of solid cultural and economic ties between Russia and Ukraine, the Ukrainian government was seen as favoring the new, ethnic Ukrainian national identity at the expense of its Russian-speaking minority. As a result, the Crimean and Eastern Ukrainian population had little
affection for Kiev (Sakwa, 2017, p. 155-156). Furthermore, since the 1990s, Ukraine periodically indicated its long-term plans to seek membership in the EU and NATO and to this effect seemed to receive general encouragement from the West (Tsygankov, 2013). These plans were not supported by the population of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

The issue of Russia’s dominance over Ukrainian economy also remained largely unresolved and was handicapped by preposterous and cantankerous attitudes from both parties. In spite of receiving vast amounts of aid and loans from the West, Ukraine’s economy remained dependent on Russia. Ukraine’s daily economic activity hinged on Russia’s supply of oil and gas at low prices. Throughout 1991-2003, Russia was the largest single foreign investor in Ukraine and its largest trading partner (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 180). In 1998, Russia and Ukraine signed a comprehensive Program of Economic Cooperation which outlined broad economic cooperation between Russia and Ukraine for the next decade. The Program sought to diminish trade barriers and to increase cooperation among various industries. While it was far from the deeper economic integration that the Kremlin would have preferred, it was at least a symbolic step toward economic equanimity between Russia and Ukraine (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 121). These unresolved matters in Russo-Ukrainian relations, particularly identity-based issues centering on Russian-speakers in Ukraine, were largely dismissed throughout the 1990s, but continued to gain prominence in the popular discourse in Russia, if not in the official Russian foreign policy.

2. Putin’s first term 2000 - 2004

From 2000, as Russia regained financial stability and underwent political reorganization under its new president Vladimir Putin, it became markedly critical of Ukraine’s domestic policies and Kuchma’s meandering foreign policy. Russia was faced with new dilemmas as well as old festering unresolved issues between Russia and Ukraine.
The split between the two countries regarding relations with NATO became a prolonged problem which precluded meaningful security cooperation between Russia and Ukraine. An exception was a brief period of cooperation between both countries and NATO after 9/11. Russia and Ukraine offered significant help to the US and NATO regarding logistics and personnel; however, this cooperation was short lived. In 2003, Russia was highly critical of the US involvement in the Iraq War where Ukraine provided the largest number of troops among all other non-NATO countries. To Russia’s dismay, after the 2004 NATO expansion in Eastern Europe which incorporated the Baltic States and Poland, prospects of Ukraine becoming the next member of NATO became a distinct possibility. These concerns were not alleviated by President Kuchma’s continuous maneuvering between the West and Russia. Uncertainty regarding Ukraine’s relations with NATO permanently loomed in the background in Russo-Ukrainian relations.

There were other indications that the previously glossed-over issues were becoming more relevant, such as the issue of Russian speakers in Ukraine. In 2002, Russia passed a law easing the Russian citizenship for Russian-speaking minorities abroad. According to this law, the current Ukrainian citizens could keep their Ukrainian citizenship while becoming citizens of Russia. This was met with disapproval by the Ukrainian government thus increasing tensions between Russia and Ukraine and within Ukraine (Underwood, 2019).

At the same time, there were signs of cautious economic cooperation: Ukraine became an observer member of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community in 2000. This was of little practical use, but of great symbolic importance to Russia. While Ukraine declined the membership in other CIS-based frameworks, such as the Eurasian Customs Union, it did not inhibit Russian dominance over the Ukrainian economy. Ukraine’s economy remained reliant on
discounted energy prices from Russia. Russian investments in Ukraine, and Russo-Ukrainian trade continued to grow, even though Ukraine’s economy and living standards stagnated (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, pp. 169-192).

Overall, relations between Russia and Ukraine in the early 2000s remained at a stage of ongoing distrust and pessimistic expectations from both sides. For Russia, these assumptions were confirmed by the Orange Revolution in 2004 which was regarded by Russia as an obvious collaboration between the West and ultra-nationalistic Ukrainian forces to effectively establish an anti-Russian government in Ukraine. The West, particularly the United States, had provided significant aid to Kuchma’s opposition in 2003. Therefore, the Orange Revolution seemed to be a coordinated effort to extract Ukraine from Russia’s control, to overwrite existing Russo-Ukrainian relations, and to marginalize Russia’s influence in Eastern Europe and globally (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 172).

To counteract the Orange Revolution, Russia pursued a largely business-like approach. In the 2004 presidential election, Russia had backed Kuchma’s selected successor Yanukovich. However, after the election of the pro-Western Yushchenko, instead of resorting to a heavy-handed approach, Putin sought to co-opt the new Ukrainian government through soft power, seeking compromise instead of confrontation (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 162). There were issues which Russia regarded as non-negotiable, particularly the safety of its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, and which were deemed of utmost importance to Russia’s security. At the same time, Russia’s response to Orange Revolution was based on various diplomatic and economic measures, not military force.

3. Increasingly volatile relations between Russia and Ukraine, 2004-2014
In 2004, for the first time in decades, statements about reducing ties with Russia and pursuing membership in the EU and NATO coming from a Ukrainian president seemed more than merely lip-service to popular sentiments. Russia felt threatened by the explicitly nationalistic character of President Yushchenko’s government and by its ties with the United States. Therefore, Russia took active counter measures to negate the anti-Russian position of the new government and to decrease the United States’ influence in Ukraine. Russia became more involved in Ukraine’s domestic politics, seeking to undermine President Yushchenko through supporting his political rivals and opposition political parties (Gvosdev and Marsh, p. 178-179).

The election of pro-Russian president Yanukovich in 2010 temporarily alleviated but did not eradicate Russian concerns over Ukraine’s Western ambitions and Western influence in Ukraine.

Russia resorted to a variety of economic pressures to maintain its influence over Ukraine. Russia and Ukraine had had long and acrimonious disputes regarding energy politics. Since the 1990s, Ukraine had received subsidized gas prices from Russia and had clamored for rights to use the gas lines crossing its territory. Also, Ukraine had chronically fallen behind with payments. After 2004, Russia demanded the repayment of old debts and called for market-prices to be paid for its gas from the no-longer-friendly Ukrainian government, while Ukraine vacillated and bargained for better terms. In 2006 and 2009 Russia carried out its long-voiced threats to shut off gas supplies to Ukraine, ostensibly, over old debts. These conflicts were temporarily resolved, but they highlighted the “unsustainable economic co-dependency” between Russia and Ukraine (Gvosdev and Marsh, p. 172). After 2004, Russia accelerated the building of alternative gas and oil supply lines to circumvent Ukraine and to minimize Russia’s dependency on Ukraine for energy transit routes. Begun in 2005 and completed in 2011, the Nord Stream gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea connected Russia and Germany, bypassing Ukraine. To further
exclude Ukraine from its energy transit, Russia planned similar pipelines under the Black Sea (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 158). Russia also enacted more direct economic pressures on Ukraine, including the infamous shutting off its gas supply to Ukraine in 2006 and 2009. As Russia developed closer economic ties with other European countries, such as Germany and France, particularly through energy politics and investments, Russia gained additional leverage against Ukraine (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 89-90). These policies bore fruit in 2007-2008 when Russia sought international support from Germany and France to forestall the US sponsorship of Ukraine’s bid to join NATO (Sakwa, 2017, p. 153). Later, Russia used its economic advantages against Yanukovich to exact concessions when negotiating the Kharkiv Treaty in 2010. In this treaty a compromise was reached, and Russia secured a new lease of the Sevastopol naval base in exchange for long-term gas discounts for Ukraine (Gvosdev and Marsh, p. 192). But much to Russia’s dismay, Ukraine refused to participate in the Eurasian Customs Union which Russia had established in 2010. Economic pressures from Russia reached the culmination in 2013 when Russia offered huge loans to Ukraine in return for not signing the EU association membership agreement. To soften the political implications of this economic intimidation and to preserve an illusion of parity, Russia cited the incompatibility with the existing free trade agreement between Russia and Ukraine and the severe infraction on Russia’s economic interests (Sakwa, 2017, p. 153). However, there were no doubts that this and previous economic pressures were aimed to persuade Ukraine to conform with Russia’s foreign policy.

As a result of its strong economic position, Russia became a welcome partner to other European countries, particularly Germany and France. The NordStream pipeline between Russia and Germany became the embodiment of the mutually profitable relations between the two countries. Also, the Russian and German leaders struck personal accord (Gvosdev and Marsh,
Similarly, Russia forged solid economic relations with France, thus ensuring the French support to Russia in various European institutions. France’s opposition to the increasing influence of the United States in Europe and to the US support of new potential Eastern European member states was complementary to Russia’s foreign policy (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 262). These and other close ties between European countries and Russia ensured that Ukraine’s relations with Europe were hindered to serve Russia’s foreign policy goals.

The importance of Ukraine for Russia’s security perspectives was underscored by global developments. With ongoing upheavals in the Middle East, the Sevastopol naval base in Crimea became the linchpin in ensuring the mobility of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet to reach the Mediterranean and Russia’s naval base in Tartus, Syria. This became particularly important following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, when Syria began seeking closer cooperation with Russia, and with the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 in which Russia took active part. When the Orange Revolution of 2004 put Russia’s future access to Sevastopol in question, Russia suspected the US and NATO in planning to exclude Russia from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, p. 315). As a result, Sevastopol and its security remained in the foreground of Russia’s foreign policy concerns.

Curious connections between Georgia and Ukraine

In addressing Russo-Ukrainian relations in 1991-2014, one should note the close relations between Georgia and Ukraine. It is an important, yet often overlooked dimension of Russo-Ukrainian relations. Already in the 1990s, there were indications of a joint Ukraine-Georgia effort to curtail Russia’s regional dominance. Ukraine’s President Kuchma and Georgia’s President Shevardnadze concertedly tried to undercut Russia’s leadership in the CIS through the establishment of the GUUAM forum. The Georgian-Ukrainian ties became particularly
pronounced after the ‘Color Revolutions’ of 2003-2004 in Georgia and Ukraine. Leaders of both countries established a close personal relationship and became openly antagonistic to Russia (Gvosdev and Marsh, 2013, pp. 171-172). Both countries were allies in their quest for NATO membership, and their pro-Western governments received considerable encouragement and material aid from the United States, the EU, and NATO. In 2008, during the Russo-Georgian War, Ukraine supplied the Georgian government with weapons. In 2013, Georgia’s former president Saakashwili, being under criminal investigation, found refuge in Ukraine where he was granted citizenship and eventually was appointed Governor of the important Odessa region by the new Ukrainian President Poroshenko. These ties did not go unnoticed in Russian foreign policy circles, and undoubtedly served as an additional impetus for Russian foreign policy decisions regarding Russo-Ukrainian policies.

4. The War, 2014

President Yanukovich’s postponement of signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in November 2013 has been alternatively interpreted as a result of opportunistic bargaining or as caving in to Russia. Either way, in Russian foreign policy circles this postponement was regarded as a major, albeit short-term victory. In Ukraine, the postponement of the EU agreement it created popular dissatisfaction and violent clashes which resulted in the overthrow of Yanukovich. The Kremlin had hardly viewed Yanukovich as a loyal ally, regarding him as a useful yet unreliable partner. However, his overthrow was seen by Russia as an illegitimate act, caused Western interference in a sovereign state’s internal affairs. To the Kremlin, the ensuing EuroMaidan protests not only destroyed the domestic stability in Ukraine, but also damaged the existing equilibrium between Russia and Ukraine thus, potentially, threatening the regional stability (Sakwa, 2017, p. 159).
As mass protests and general chaos in Ukraine continued throughout the early 2014, Russia faced a foreign policy dilemma. Among its greatest immediate fears was the loss of control over the Sevastopol naval base under the new Ukrainian government. Without further delving into legal or ethical grounds for Russia’s actions, it should be noted that Russia enacted two major policies: the annexation of Crimea and the support for the Eastern Ukrainian separatists. Against the background of growing disorder in Ukraine, in March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea through a swift military takeover. It was followed by subsequent referendum in which the Crimean population overwhelmingly favored joining Russia (Sakwa, 2017, p. 155).

While Russia’s takeover of Crimea became a fait accompli within a few weeks, Russia’s support of the Eastern Ukrainian protesters was more entangled and, eventually, much less rewarding. Initially, vast areas of Eastern Ukraine seemed pro-Russian and anti-Kiev, thus suggesting easy grounds for Russian interference; however, soon only the eastern-most regions of Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk) remained staunchly separatist and continued to claim their independence while relying on Russia’s military and economic support. A prolonged war between the Ukrainian armed forces and the two separatist territories ensued. Russia covertly provided material support to the separatists; however, Russia officially minimized its associations with the break-away regions. Moreover, Russia advocated for peace negotiations between Ukraine and the separatist governments and requested that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) become an intermediary. Russia, along with Ukraine, the OSCE, and the separatist territories, conducted the negotiations of the Minsk Protocol, which was concluded in September 2014. The Minsk Protocol outlined a ceasefire plan and a transition period under the supervision of the OSCE. This agreement, however, was not observed by either of the fighting parties, and the war in Eastern Ukraine continued throughout 2014. A modified
Minsk II agreement was concluded by February 2015. It offered more detailed provisions for future autonomy of the breakaway regions and was conducted with full participation of Russia, but, similarly, it had a limited immediate effect (Pifer, 2017; Sakwa, 2017).

To sum up Russo-Ukrainian relations in 1991-2014, it is apparent that they emanated from a series of domestic developments in Ukraine as well as from the history of interactions between Russia and Ukraine and other more global developments. However, Russian policy decisions were also profoundly affected by the decades-long discussions concerning Ukraine in the Russian foreign policy circles. The next part of this chapter outlines Russian foreign policy debates on Ukraine and their relevance to subsequent Russian policy. It is the premise of this dissertation that foreign policy debates between the Russian foreign policy schools of pragmatists and nationalists served to influence the official discourse and consecutive policies regarding Ukraine.

Map of Ukraine's Language Divide
Note: From “Ethnolinguistic map of Ukraine”, by Yerevanci, 2011, Wikimedia Commons

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B. Ukraine in the Russian foreign policy discourse

The remaining part of this chapter, firstly, will discuss the pragmatic and nationalistic policy ideas and options suggested by the unofficial discourse of Russian foreign policy – writings and communications which were not clearly associated with the Kremlin or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The next section will analyze their reiteration in official communications originating from Russian foreign policy circles. The last part of this chapter will identify the reflection of these ideas in the actual policy events and present a summary evaluation. This chapter seeks to establish connections between the ideas presented by nationalists and pragmatists regarding Ukraine, the reception of these ideas in official foreign policy circles, and the resulting Russian foreign policy activities regarding Ukraine which led to the conflict of 2014.

The nationalistic policy ideas regarding Ukraine were drawn from the writings of Aleksandr Dugin, Aleksandr Prokhanov, and publications of Izborsk Club, Russkiy Mir and other nationalistic sources. The pragmatic ideas were extracted from the publications of Russia in Global Affairs, Valdai Club, and the Carnegie Moscow Foundation and by such prominent advocates of the pragmatic approach as Sergei Karaganov, Andrei Kortunov, and Fyodor Lukyanov.

A. Ukraine in the unofficial foreign policy discourse

Ukraine presented a multi-faceted and a multi-level problem for Russia. It encompassed many broad and specific, long-term and immediate concerns for Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy experts of all ideational affiliations were in consensus that Ukraine was of
supreme importance to Russia’s security, a key to its dominance in the post-Soviet space, a
necessary component for the Eurasian integration under Russia’s leadership, and a crucial aspect
in shaping Russia’s future relations with the West. For Russian foreign policy, the “winning” of
Ukraine meant Russia was successfully navigating hostile international environment.
Conversely, “losing” the influence over Ukraine for Russia would mean a long-term defeat
which would affirm the inefficiency of its foreign policy, the “failure to create a sustainable post-
Cold War European security order”, and limited international prospects in the future (Kofman,
2014; Sakwa, 2017, p. 152). Ukraine’s Orange Revolution and, a decade later, a military conflict
between Russia and Ukraine, clearly became the two low points for Russian foreign policy not
only in regard to Ukraine but also in regard to Russia’s broader international ambitions. As
Russian foreign policy makers were hard-pressed by their failures in Ukraine, pragmatists and
nationalists offered differing policy suggestions relating to Ukraine.

1. **Nationalistic approach to Ukraine**

As noted in the previous chapters, the nationalistic world view was based on an identity-
based, dualistic approach to global politics. In many ways, Aleksandr Dugin in his *The Fourth
Political Theory* (2009/2012) embodied Russian nationalism regarding Ukraine. His
“civilizational” approach to the world politics was based on inherent, antagonism between the
“civilizations” of the Eurasian Heartland (Russia) and the Atlantic alliance (the West) which set
the scene for Russian foreign policy (Dugin, 2012, pp. 119-120). In this process, Ukraine was
seen as an integral part of Eurasia. In his Eurasianism, Dugin followed the political visions of
Russian political philosophers Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954), Lev Gumilov (1912-1992), and Nikolai
Berdyayev (1874-1948) and their juxta-positioning of Russia’s unique character and moral
values against the West (Snyder, 2018, p. 18-57). These ideas of Eurasianism and Ukraine’s
place in Eurasia, in addition to Dugin, were further developed by Glaziyev, Prokhanov, Starikov, and other Russian nationalists and widely disseminated by *Izborsk Club* (e.g. Dugin, 2016; Fursov, 2014; Khazin, 2019; Prokhanov, 2017) and other nationalist outlets (Snyder, 2018, pp. 88-91).

To most Russian nationalists, an independent Ukraine with its current borders was fundamentally incompatible with the security of Russia and Eurasia. Dugin characterized Ukraine as a large, but meaningless territory of various “borderlands”, paralyzed by conflicts between separatism and centralization and torn between Eurasia and Central Europe. The very existence of independent Ukraine was seen as aggression of the West against Russia, the Heartland, and Eurasia. For these reasons, Dugin (1997) advocated the incorporation of Ukraine as an administrative region (p. 348). He specified that Russia should split up Ukraine in: 1. Clearly Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine which should be in a direct union with Russia; 2. Crimea as a special geopolitical region which might be difficult to annex, but which should not remain within Ukraine; 3. Central Ukraine, including Kiev, which was seen as culturally belonging to Eurasia; 4. Distinctly different Western Ukraine which would require the “redrawing of borders“ and possibly become a new state (pp. 377-381). A decade later, forceful incorporation was reiterated in Dugin’s (2012) *The Fourth Political Theory*: “It cannot be excluded that a battle for Crimea and Eastern Ukraine awaits us. (...) a possibility of a direct military clash no longer appears unrealistic” (Dugin, 2012; Shekhovtsov, 2016). Repeatedly, Dugin stated that, at the very least, the Southeastern Ukraine should be immediately incorporated into Russia (Pelnens, 2009). His views were shared with many other nationalists who also advocated forceful integration of Ukraine or its parts in Russia’s Eurasian empire (Tsygankov, 2006). Further encouraging military involvement, some nationalists commented that
the West would overlook Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and involvement in Eastern Ukraine, similar to the Western response to Russia’s actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 (Sytin, 2015).

In 1997, Dugin in his *Foundations of Geopolitics* noted a military conflict between Russia and Ukraine was highly likely. In the nationalistic Eurasian framework, Russia’s control over Ukraine and the Black Sea region, was a key to Heartland’s stability, related to Russia’s access to the Mediterranean and curtailing the Western-allied Turkey (Dugin, 1997, p. 348-349; Izborsk Club, 2012). Furthermore, Ukraine geographically represented Russia’s bulwark against the Western expansion in Eastern Europe – as it directly bordered the Atlantic alliance and was vulnerable to the attack from the West, it presented a direct threat to Russia’s security (Dugin, 1997). Remarkably, Dugin and Prokhanov had stated that Russia should return its Western-most outpost Kaliningrad to Germany because this former German territory was incompatible with the concept of Eurasia (Oldberg, 2019). Such views signified that nationalists’ vision of Russia’s security was based on Eurasia which was not merely a replica of Soviet Union or an economic association, but a new geopolitical entity. It also suggested that nationalists’ ideas about Russia’s international security could be surprisingly pragmatically grounded.

A slight variation of nationalism regarding Ukraine was offered by *Russkiy Mir* Foundation’s emphasis on the Russian World and the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian language, history, and culture as the basis for Ukraine’s integration with Russia (Galstyan, 2016; Russkiy Mir, 2008; Russkiy Mir, 2009; Russkiy Mir, 2010). In the 1990s, Russkiy Mir remained a broad nationalistic concept with ambiguous, yet highly symbolic significance. Depending on the context, it could refer to the Russian citizens abroad, to ethnic Russians (irrespective of their citizenship), all Russian-language speakers, former Soviet citizens, their descendants, or anyone
displaying a spiritual or emotional affinity with Russia. The number of the compatriots of the Russian World was estimated between 15 and 150 million of which majority lived in Ukraine, thus by default, including Ukraine in the Russian World. *Russkiy Mir* prescribed Russia as the cultural and territorial core of the Russian world, unifying its peripheries by Russia’s history, language and its civilizational values which were commonly juxta-positioned with the Western values. This concept gradually gained support among prominent Russian intellectuals as well as Russian nationalistic politicians (Suslov, 2017). By the mid-2000s, this concept was expanding in the official foreign policy discourse. When the think tank *Russkiy Mir Foundation* was established in 2007, the Russian Foreign Ministry was one of its founding members, thus marking the acceptance of the concept in broader Russian foreign policy framework (Suslov, 2017; Williams, 2020). The fact that a prominent nationalistic think tank was named after the concept of the Russian World, signified the presence of nationalism in Russian foreign policy discourse.

The question of Eastern Ukraine and its Russian-speaking population frequently dominated the nationalistic discourse on Ukraine. In addition to frequent suggestions for direct incorporation of Ukraine or its parts into Russia, some Russian nationalists suggested autonomy for Eastern Ukraine within a federalized, but nominally independent Ukraine. They noted nuances regarding Eastern Ukraine and cautioned that that Russia’s policies should not be overly simplistic. Many Russian speakers in Ukraine had demanded Eastern Ukraine’s unification with Russia due to their close historic and cultural ties, thus justifying a direct take-over by Russia (Vasserman, 2013, pp. 84-90). However, it was also noted that the Russian-speakers’ demands for the Russian language rights in Ukraine did not necessarily mean they sought unification with Russia, but likely were interested in greater autonomy within a federalized Ukraine (Vasserman, 2013, pp. 84-90).
A number of nationalists recommended that the Kremlin support political movements which call for Ukraine’s federalization, advocate for the Russian language as a second state language in Ukraine, and aid the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which was affiliated with Russia (Olszanski, 2012; Tsygankov, 2006). In promoting these policies, Russian think tank Russkiy Mir was particularly active and lobbied the Russian government to grant citizenship to its compatriots abroad (Olszanski, 2012; Tishkov, 2008). In the nationalistic discourse there was consensus that, at least the Eastern Ukraine should be integrated with Russia, even if the exact nature of integration was not always clear, and varied from an outright incorporation of the majority of Ukraine in Russia to more moderate stipulations for an autonomous Eastern Ukraine within a federalized Ukraine. These policy suggestions confirm the overall importance of Eastern Ukraine in the nationalistic discourse.

Most Russian nationalists favored direct military measures to achieve this unification of Russia with Ukraine and other states of the “near abroad” (Dugin, 1997; Starikov, 2012). They also justified Russia’s military involvement by evoking Russia as a guarantor of peace and stability in contrast with the aggressive and unprincipled West. In these views, the Eurasianists, Izborsk Club, and Russkiy Mir were joined by such diverse groups as neo-Communists and the Russian Orthodox Church with its noted representatives Konstantin Malofeyev and Aleksandr Borodai (Keating, 2014). In sum, for nationalists, Ukraine’s importance was determined by Ukraine’s historic and cultural affiliation with Russia’s “civilizational” aspects in combination with practical security considerations, and for these reasons, Russia’s control over Ukraine was non-negotiable.

Nationalists also briefly addressed the economic aspects of Russo-Ukrainian relations. Many nationalists implicitly admitted that the Eurasian Economic Community (of which Ukraine
was an observer member) would be an initial step toward establishing a geo-political, Russian-led universal empire, as described in Prokhanov’s book *The Fifth Empire* (Galstyan, 2016). Nationalists also offered a few specific economic insights, such as interpreting Ukraine’s anti-Russian policies in terms of economic warfare against Eastern Ukraine. Many nationalists noted that, since Ukraine’s economy to a large degree depended on Donbass, Ukraine would not permit autonomy of Eastern Ukraine nor would the nationalistic government in Kiev engage in closer trade relations with Russia which could benefit Donbass. To constrain Ukraine, Russian nationalists advocated the building of alternative gas and oil supply routes and the application of strongest punitive economic sanctions to Ukraine (Tsygankov, 2006; Vasserman, 2013, p. 478-533). But overall, such security and economic considerations in the nationalistic discourse were secondary to security, identity-based, and metaphysical considerations.

An unexpected, but highly symbolic contribution by the nationalist discourse to the Russian political discourse was the concept of Novorossiya – a geographically vague, yet emotionally charged idea with historic and political connotations. This region of South and Southeastern Ukraine, including Crimea, was regarded as part of Russia’s historic heritage beginning from the Russian Empire of the 18th century when it was colonized and developed by Russia. In the Soviet times, the Eastern part of this region became the Soviet industrial center due to its highly developed coal and steel industry. Many of its inhabitants were Russians. Formally, it was part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, but it had few affiliations with ethnic Ukrainians. The nationalistic idea of Novorossiya dovetailed with the general nationalistic view of Southeastern Ukraine as being fundamentally Russian and separate from the rest of Ukraine. This concept was resurrected and disseminated by RISI think tank in 2013 when it delineated the geopolitical extent of Novorossiya from Transdniestria, along Ukraine’s shore of
the Black Sea, to Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine. This territory was designated as unequivocally Russian and, as such, were recommended for direct annexation (Sytin, 2015). The concept of Novorossiya immediately resonated with Russian nationalists. Some have noted that this concept might have even been a “game changer” in the Russian nationalist discourse because it united neo-Communists, Eurasianists, Orthodox Russian nationalists, monarchists, neo-Nazis, and various anti-establishment groups (Laruelle, 2015). The idea of Novorossiya was further propagated by Dugin and Surkov in March 2014, and it was subsequently articulated by Putin (Snyder, 2018, p. 167). This concept was soon dropped by the Kremlin, but it was readily adopted by Eastern Ukrainian separatists who used Novorossiya as the ideational basis for their newly established states (Kolesnikov, 2015).

The presence of nationalism in the unofficial foreign policy discourse steadily increased in the post-2004 decade, largely as a popular pushback against the Color Revolutions and the expansion of NATO. Nationalistic views were widely disseminated by newly established nationalistic think tanks Russkiy Mir and Izborsk Club who became outlets for many popular public intellectuals. Moreover, there was a remarkable ideational transformation of a formerly pragmatic think tank RISI (RISS, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, est. 1992) which, under its new leader, a former intelligence officer Leonid Reshetnikov who had strong anti-Ukrainian views, became a proponent of Russian nationalism, noted for its aggressive policy prescriptions regarding Ukraine. Its policy proposals were based on an amalgamation of Soviet, Tsarist, and Orthodox Christian nostalgia, promotion of Eurasia-based integration, and advocacy of military actions. Moreover, RISI hosted several noted nationalists, such as Igor Girkin, who later gained notoriety in Eastern Ukraine (Sytin, 2015). In 2012-2013, as Russia’s relations with Ukraine deteriorated, Russian nationalists became more welcome in the Kremlin than at any time during
the previous decade, and their think tanks and public figures were solicited to provide recommendations to the Kremlin. Eventually, their advice proved counterproductive and misleading, but in 2013-2014 they had direct communications with official circles. Specifically, RISI think tank was providing a number of nationalistic policy recommendations to the Kremlin. Its reports asserted that Ukraine was legally part of Russia due to the 1654 treaty between Russia and Eastern Ukrainian Cossacks; that the West had marginal influence on Ukrainian society and had influence in only small parts of Western Ukraine; and that most Ukrainians cherished their Soviet history and would welcome reunification with Russia. In 2013, RISI also provided specific recommendations on how to annex the Novorossiya region by planning underground resistance to Kiev and dispatching Russian troops to major cities in Southern Ukraine. Surprisingly unrealistically, these recommendations ignored potential Ukrainian resistance and the subsequent pushback from the West. In early 2014, Girkin allegedly recommended to the Kremlin that “Ukraine be invaded and dismembered”, and his ideas apparently formed the basis of a memorandum which in February 2014 was circulated in the Russian presidential administration (Snyder, 2018, p. 135). While RISI’s propositions regarding Novorossiya were expanding, the Kremlin, by contrast, was becoming more cautious regarding such opportunistic plans (Laruelle, 2015; Sytin, 2015).

In February 2014, a nationalistic publication Save Ukraine! resonated throughout the Russian foreign policy discourse as well as Russian public at large. This memorandum was written by members of Izborsk Club and published by Aleksandr Prokhanov’s weekly Zavtra (Global Research News, 2014). In many ways, it can be considered the epitome of Russian nationalistic ideas regarding Ukraine. This document was created in response to the EuroMaidan uprising in Kiev in December 2013. The timing of its publication was likely coordinated with the
Kremlin, but this memorandum did articulate concerns and suggestions which nationalists had been voicing throughout the past decade. It noted that corrupt Ukrainian elites were in collusion with the EU and USA to destabilize Ukraine and that the Maidan uprising should be considered a civilizational threat against Russia. The memorandum noted that the US and EU were funding the establishment of a new, anti-Russian government in Kiev because they feared Russia’s influence on Ukraine. The long list of Russia’s concerns regarding the situation in Ukraine included predictions that Ukraine’s new regime would oust the Black Sea fleet from Sevastopol; purge pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine; create a flood of refugees from Ukraine to Russia; end Russian military manufacturing facilities in Ukraine; establish NATO bases in Ukraine; forcibly “Ukrainiaze” the Eastern Ukraine; infiltrate terrorists in Russia to organize Maidan-like demonstrations; expel the Russian Orthodox Church; and prosecute Russian energy companies. To avoid these scenarios, the manifesto recommended that Russia denounces Ukrainian government as fascists; encourages popular resistance to Kiev; provides economic and humanitarian help to Southeast Ukraine; supplies cheap gas to Ukrainians (without loans to the Ukrainian government); calls upon the Russian people to organize opposition to Maidan; collects donations for pro-Russian groups; and organizes Russo-Ukrainian cultural events. The manifesto also recommended that Russia, Ukraine, the US, and Great Britain examine the breach of 1994 Budapest Memorandum due to the US involvement in Ukrainian domestic affairs. If either of the parties refused to do so, then Russia should negotiate directly with the USA. Also, Russia should seek international support from China and other BRICS countries to exert economic pressure on Ukraine. This manifesto with its emphasis on cultural aspects and singularly anti-Western views reflected many fundamental principles of Russian nationalism. It had a few pragmatic notes in
regard to international norms and laws and a suggestion that Russia could negotiate bilaterally with the US. However, the overwhelming tone of the document was nationalistic.

From the moment of the publication of *Save Ukraine!*, a week before Russian military involvement in Ukraine, its points became part of the public rhetoric and was repeated by many Russian politicians and diplomats. This manifesto is often regarded as the “ideological basis for Russia’s aggression in Ukraine” (Laurinavicius, 2014), but other suggestions for Russia’s options regarding Ukraine along similar lines, were also published by Izborsk Club and RISI. Such publications built up the nationalistic rhetoric which for several months dominated Russian public discourse and percolated in official statements. When Russia executed its military takeover of Crimea, nationalists greeted the move with unequivocal enthusiasm, calling it the “Russian Spring”. Dugin and other nationalists saw it as the beginning of the expulsion of the Western liberalism from Europe and the rise of Eurasianism (Snyder, 2018, p. 145).

2. **Pragmatic views on Ukraine**

Pragmatic Russian foreign policy experts also engaged in conceptual and specific discussions about Ukraine. Think tanks such as The Valdai Club, RIAC, SVOP, Russia in Global Affairs, the Gorchakov Foundation, and other pragmatist outlets conducted research and organized public events addressing these topics. Most pragmatists agreed that Russia’s international goal was to become a “great power”, although not along the lines of a Eurasian empire, but on exercising sovereignty in Russian domestic affairs and in strategic foreign policy decisions while engaging in cautious cooperation with other major powers to benefit Russia’s security and economy (Trenin, 2011).
Pragmatist discourse devoted much attention to the examination of Russia’s international security concerns in the context of Ukraine. The 2004 events in Ukraine became a watershed for the proponents of the pragmatic school of thought, albeit to a lesser degree than for nationalists. Pragmatists regarded the Orange Revolution as a significant, yet remediable setback to Russian interests. A blandly critical appraisal along the lines of pragmatism regarding the events in Ukraine was offered by Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s Foreign Minister (2005) who noted that the Western interference in Ukraine was a breach of state sovereignty and that establishment of democracy in Ukraine with the Western help would result in domestic chaos. Similar statements would be repeated by Russian officials during the 2013-2014 upheaval in Ukraine. Pragmatic foreign policy experts agreed that the Western support of the Ukrainian opposition in 2004 had severely undermined Russia’s interests. To counteract this situation, Russian pragmatic policy experts were hard-pressed to present new policy suggestions. There was a keen sense of Russian foreign policy failure and few realistic perspectives for Russia to regain its influence in Ukraine any time soon (Moshes, 2006; Trenin, 2005; Zazhigayev, 2005). The Orange Revolution signified that Russian foreign policy regarding Ukraine was based on false assumptions, that Russia’s influence in Ukraine was vastly overestimated, and thus should stimulate more prudent policy from Russia (Kortunov, 2005; Migranyan, 2005). They also noted that, while relations between Moscow and Kiev might have changed, Russia should cooperate with the new Ukrainian government (Bridge, 2005; Zatulin, 2005). Ukraine had retained the existing political and economic frameworks, and Russia should not overestimate the alienation of Ukraine from Russia or regard the effects of the Orange Revolution as long lasting (Dubnov, 2005; Kosachev, 2007).
Over the next few years, as relations between Russia and Ukraine remained uncertain and Russian foreign policy makers seemed to vacillate, pragmatists presented a variety of policy suggestions to regain Russia’s lost influence (Moshes, 2008). Pragmatists conceptualized Ukraine as an internally conflicted former Soviet state which was torn between domestic corruption and Western aspirations. It was unlikely to overcome the internal rifts, to establish democratic institutions, or to achieve economic modernization any time soon, in spite of the Western support. These handicaps were interpreted as opportunities for Russia to influence Ukraine (Medvedev, 2007; Moshes, 2008). Pragmatists noted that the 2008 Russo-Georgian War had efficiently preempted Ukraine from joining NATO, thus additionally brightening prospects for Russia. Indeed, shortly after the war in Georgia, the ruling coalition in Ukraine broke up and was supplanted by a largely pro-Russian government. It was considered a minor victory for Russian foreign policy (Laughland, 2012). But even with generally Russian-friendly President Yanukovich in power from 2010, Ukraine remained a troubled area of Russian foreign policy. As relations between Russia and Ukraine only sporadically improved, the Valdai Club and other pragmatic think tanks continued to criticize Russia’s missed opportunities regarding Ukraine and the EU, particularly regarding energy policies (Rahr, 2012). Regaining influence over Ukraine would be the most coveted prize for Russian foreign policy (Lukyanov, 2012).

As Ukraine repeatedly continued to express interest in joining the EU and NATO, pragmatist political experts devoted considerable attention to these issues. Many pragmatists noted that the EU and NATO, while both being important and mutually linked Western international structures, were of different levels of concern to Russia. While Ukraine’s wishes to join the EU were far from Russia’s best interests, many pragmatists saw it as either unlikely to happen soon and thus not of critical importance, or relatively unthreatening to Russia’s security.
interests. They noted Russia could continuously exercise its economic and political weight with the EU to preempt Ukraine’s membership in the EU (Kosachev, 2007). By contrast, the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe, and, potentially, in Ukraine, would constitute a direct security threat to Russia and was to be avoided at all costs. Prospects of NATO’s presence in Ukraine, thus in direct proximity of the long Russo-Ukrainian land border as well as along the extended Black Sea shoreline, were foreboding. However, ways to prevent it were rather limited and convoluted. Pragmatic foreign policy experts recommended diplomatic isolation of the potential NATO members in combination with economic pressures. In regard to Ukraine, pragmatists noted that Germany and France had been reliable allies in this respect and that Russia should continue to develop close relations with them. Also, economic pressures on Ukraine, while crude, could be effective in short term. Concurrently, pragmatists recommended that Russia continue to participate in the NATO-Russia Council to maintain communications even though they had little confidence that Russia could develop meaningful cooperation with NATO. Instead, pragmatists recommended emphasis on the development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, with or without Ukraine’s participation. The CSTO was seen as an efficient way for Russia to enhance its security and regional influence, thus partially balancing NATO’s presence (Nikitina, 2013). However, for the foreseeable future, they recommended pre-emptive diplomatic and economic activities to prevent Ukraine’s bid for NATO and very judicious interactions with NATO itself.

The question of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet was closely related to other NATO-related security concerns. Pragmatists recognized that Russia’s Black Sea Fleet had become particularly vulnerable in the post-2004 Ukraine. In many publications, pragmatists highlighted the distinct possibility that the Black Sea Fleet could be expelled from Crimea in 2017, if not before. They
noted that an agreement between Russia and Ukraine regarding the Black Sea Fleet was achieved only after many years of complicated negotiations, and it could easily be nullified by Ukraine due to its anti-Russian sentiments and pandering to NATO (Zazhigayev, 2005; Dubinin, 2007). In order to ensure the safety of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, the return of Crimea to the “orbit of Russian policy” was a priority. To achieve it, pragmatists recommended increased Russian cultural, diplomatic, and military presence in Crimea in a “smart, tactful and consistent” manner by gradually increasing Russia’s economic investments, cross-border interactions, and the expansion of the naval facilities. They noted that Yanukovich had become a highly unreliable ally regarding Russia’s interests in Crimea in the past (even though his election was largely due to his support by the Russian-speaking Crimeans and Eastern Ukrainians), and thus Russia could not count on Yanukovich’s support (Zatulin, 2012). In order to enhance the argument of Crimea’s importance to Russia, pragmatists sporadically brought up the legality of Ukraine’s ownership of Crimea, the Crimean population’s Russian affinities, and Russian language issues. However, these aspects were used as merely supplementary to a largely security-oriented argument. In contrast to the nationalist rhetoric, pragmatists carefully avoided tying the Crimea issue with Eastern Ukraine and its Russian-speaking population or with possibility of a direct military takeover. In their suggestions regarding Ukraine, they emphasized security, not identity-related problems, and viewed this issue as solvable in a non-violent way (Medvedev, 2007; Zazhigayev, 2005).

In order to ensure Russia’s security, pragmatists advocated diplomacy, economic policy, and increased involvement in Ukraine’s domestic politics. Russia’s economic engagement could be accomplished through official economic ties, particularly regarding energy and trade, as well as through less formal economic activities, such as individual investments. In a discussion on
preventing NATO expansion, it was noted that the gas and oil might be a more efficient weapon than arms (Valdai Club, 2006). In 2002, Russia’s Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov’s *New Russian Diplomacy* had noted that free trade within Russia-led economic framework would ensure Russia’s geopolitical dominance (p. 86). Pragmatists highly recommended Ukraine’s integration, first, in the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), and, subsequently, in Eurasian Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union (Lukyanov, 2014). Formally, Ukraine had become a member of the EAEC in 2003, but it had serious reservations about it after the Orange Revolution and had largely avoided any commitments since 2004. Pragmatists noted that in its economic policy choices, Ukraine was wavering between the EAEC and the “European choice”, and Europe was becoming a more desirable partner to Ukraine than Russia. To remedy this situation, in 2011, the pragmatic Valdai Club recommended that Russia keep a low profile and exploit Ukraine’s disappointment with the EU policies toward Ukraine. Pragmatists portrayed the EU as evasive, cautious, and increasingly fragmented and noted that the EU would not meet Ukraine’s high expectations regarding its membership application to the EU nor would the EU provide generous unconditional aid to Ukraine. Russia’s patience would enhance the image of Russia as a more reliable foreign policy partner in the eyes of Ukraine. Eventually, such policy would re-new Russia’s influence in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and the EU (Lukyanov, 2012). Alternatively, Russia could ignore Ukraine’s defection and preemptively seek to join European institutional structures, such as the “Common Spaces”. Russia could also seek economic integration with Ukraine by presenting alternatives to the Eurasian Union project, such as a free trade area between Russia, Ukraine, and the EU which was repeatedly proposed by Russia. It was believed to appeal to Ukraine because it would consider Ukraine’s pro-Western tendencies, and it would be seen as less threatening to the West than a directly Russia-controlled Eurasian
project (Rahr, 2011). As added incentives, it might stimulate economic and political modernization within Russia, integrate Russia in Europe on terms beneficial to Russia, and enhance Russia’s international reputation. Pragmatists noted that it might even accelerate Russia’s admission to the World Trade Organization. Russia would not have to worry about “encroachment by alien powers”, and thus Russia would efficiently negate Ukraine’s “European choice” which had created the 2004 crisis for Russian foreign policy. Pragmatists also noted that, if Ukraine became a member of the EAEC, it theoretically could still seek to join the EU. It would indirectly benefit Russia because it would speed up general economic integration between Europe and Eurasia (Valovaya, 2005). If Ukraine preferred limited engagement with the EAEC while actively seeking admission to the EU, Russia could provide some accommodations, but should also pursue discouraging trade policies toward Ukraine. However, Ukraine’s economic integration in the EAEC was far more preferable, and alternatives such as discussed above, were strictly second-best options for pragmatists.

Between 2004 and 2014, Ukraine’s integration in the Eurasian Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union dominated pragmatic discourse. There were emphatic and repeated statements that, without Ukraine, these organizations would be incomplete (Stent, 2012). Many pragmatists noted that the original Eurasian project was seriously impeded by the Orange Revolution and that post-2004 Ukraine’s integration in the Eurasian Union would require particularly skilled foreign policy from Russia (Nikonov, 2011; Rahr, 2011). There were discussions on how Russia’s Eurasian project would interact with the framework of the CIS (of which Ukraine remained a formal member until 2018). Most pragmatists regarded the CIS as a geopolitical atavism from the post-Soviet period. They advocated against Russia’s over-commitment to the CIS, noting that the 2010-2011 tensions between Russia and Ukraine were
partially due to Russia’s self-assigned obligations within the CIS. Since the inception of the CIS, there had been few indications that its members would integrate beyond shallow cooperation. At most, the CIS could have some vague use in the future, but it was of little assistance in Russia’s Ukrainian dilemma (Pogrebinsky, 2011; Stier, 2011). For these reasons, Russia should limit its engagements within the CIS framework and focus on the Eurasia project instead. As the time passed, pragmatists noted that the events of 2013 in Ukraine would broadly duplicate the events of 2004: after Ukraine becomes incapacitated by popular disappointment with the corrupt pro-Russian ruling regime, a new nationalistic government would prove to incapable of dealing with the economic disarray and widespread corruption and could not meet the demands for reforms by the EU. As a result, Russia would have opportunities for negotiations with Ukraine (Lukyanov, 2013).

Pragmatists also advocated expanded diplomacy to ensure Russia’s influence over Ukraine. Many pragmatists advocated close ties with Europe – and with the West, generally – due to Europe’s proximity, economic potential, and history (Ivanov, 2002, p. 35). Pragmatists admitted that Russia’s cooperation with the West might be challenged by Russia’s special interests regarding Ukraine, but most of these problems could, and should, be overcome through diplomacy, economic cooperation, re-enforcement of cultural ties, and by a variety of other discreet tactics. They advocated that Russia establish close bilateral relations with individual major European powers, particularly with Germany. They noted that Russia’s closer involvement with Germany could balance Ukraine’s increased ties with the USA and nix Ukraine’s aspirations for the EU and NATO. Alternatively, since the mid-2000s, pragmatists had proposed the development of an “Alliance of Europe” or Greater Europe – a pan-European, neutral geopolitical community which would not be overly Western or Russian-orientated but
would balance the unilateral power of the US and NATO. However, Greater Europe was seen as a desirable, yet far-off, long-term foreign policy goal because of the current anti-Russian sentiments in Europe and Ukraine (Andreev, 2012; Kortunov, 2005).

Diplomatic solutions also included calls for greater cooperation among major powers, even the establishment of a “New Entente” or a Concert between Russia, the US, and other major powers (Dubinin, 2008; Uglanov, 2010). However, such calls also clearly indicated that Russia did not regard Ukraine as a state equal to major powers and that Russia’s problems with Ukraine would be addressed, in a covert way. The 2008 global economic crisis and Russo-Georgian war had painfully highlighted differences, weaknesses, and common interests between Russia, post-Soviet states, and the West. Many pragmatists recommended addressing these aspects through balanced cooperation with other major powers while largely bypassing smaller adjoining states. They noted that Russia and the US could become partners regarding various international regulations from anti-terrorism to nuclear weapons control (Dubinin, 2008).

Conversely, there were advocates for “giving up” on Europe and the West who noted that Russia had no efficient way of stopping the NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. They saw Ukraine, along with Moldova, Georgia, and, potentially, even Belarus as de facto converted by the West – the EU, the US, and NATO. For this reason, they suggested that it might be more profitable for Russia to turn its attention from Europe to Asia and build efficient economic and political cooperation – a new concert – with the global powerhouses in Asia. Thus, Russia would not be burdened by commitments regarding the West and Eastern Europe (Karaganov, 2005a, 2005b). Other pragmatists noted that, while Russia’s turn to Asia could be advantageous economically, Asia might be unreliable political partner against the West, and that Russia should
seek a “third way” to retain its influence in Europe, possibly seeking Ukraine’s neutrality (Milov, 2006; Trenin, 2014).

Should diplomacy and an economics-based approach fail, and Ukraine remained hesitant or decidedly refused to align itself with Russia, pragmatists recommended applying economic pressures on Ukraine: tariffs on Ukrainian commodities and services and/or exclusion of Ukraine from the trade privileges with Russia (Valovaya, 2005). Many noted Russian pragmatists, such as Sergei Karaganov had extensively criticized Russia’s policy of selling natural gas to Ukraine at discounted prices in return for Kiev’s loyalty. They regarded this policy as subsidization of the corrupt Ukrainian elites resented by the Ukrainian population at large, which, in turn, would be detrimental to Russian interests in the long-term. Instead, Karaganov recommended a “transition to market prices, abandonment of paternalism, and the treatment of Ukraine as a completely sovereign state” (Kropatcheva, 2006, p. 46). Additionally, pragmatists advocated the development of alternative energy supply routes from Russia to Europe, bypassing Ukraine. They lauded the development of Nord Stream and South Stream gas lines which would create “different bargaining relationship between Russia and Ukraine” (Abdelal, 2012). As a more indirect, but potentially equally efficient economic policy against Ukraine, pragmatists recommended the development of closer energy relations with China. As an alternative market to Europe, China would marginalize Ukraine’s importance Russo-European energy politics, thus making Ukraine more amenable to negotiating with Russia. However, it would come with a risk of alienating the EU and forcing Ukraine to become more pro-European (Barabanov, 2012).

Pragmatists also promoted Russian involvement in Ukrainian domestic politics. In particular, they advocated the support of moderate political opposition in Ukraine, first, against President Kuchma, and, after 2004, against President Yuschenko. To this purpose, since the early
2000s they suggested that the Kremlin supports Yulia Timoshenko against President Kuchma and, later, against President Yushchenko. However, Russia’s advocacy of Timoshenko waned when she gained support from Europe as a pro-Western alternative to pro-Russian President Yanukovich after 2010. In a rather roundabout way, they saw Yanukovich’s persecution of Timoshenko and her removal from the political stage as advantageous to the Russian interests because it damaged Ukraine’s reputation in the West, and thus useful for furthering Russia’s influence over Ukraine (Barabanov, 2012; Gomart, 2011). Besides Timoshenko, pragmatists had few suitable opposition candidates which would not be overly pro-Western, pro-Russian, or plainly opportunistic. It should be noted that, while advocating support of domestic opposition in Ukraine, pragmatists were pointedly opposed to supporting Eastern Ukrainian separatists.

Pragmatic political experts observed that while parts of Eastern Ukraine’s population might seek reunification with Russia, their affiliations are far from simplistically pro-Russian. They might be opposed to the corrupt regime in Kiev, but they also could initiate ambivalent socio-economic reforms and wish to participate in Ukrainian politics with their own agenda (Kuznetsova, 2005; Dubnov, 2005). Overall, pragmatists recommended support of moderate politicians with whom Russia could establish working relations without becoming entangled in identity-based issues.

While generally adverse to military solutions in the practice of foreign policy, pragmatic experts noted that the West – the US and NATO – had failed as trustworthy partners to Russia and that Ukraine was an embodiment of this failure. Pragmatists noted that Russia should not make excessive concessions to the West for fear of appearing weak and submissive which might further encourage Western assertiveness. Instead, Russia should be prepared for a strong response regarding Ukraine’s Western aspirations. They observed that since the 1990s, Russia has been in a precarious international position because the West had excluded Russia from global
and regional institutional frameworks, including the EU and NATO (Sakwa, 2018). While pragmatists admitted that some foreign policy problems, including Ukraine, which might necessitate a strong response from Russia, they generally favored the integration of Russia with international environment through cautious economic and diplomatic alliances and the avoidance of open military confrontations (Karaganov, 2007; Sakwa, 2018; Trenin, 2018).

Since the late 2000s, the pragmatic discourse began to incorporate some nationalistic elements. Pragmatists recognized that Ukraine in Russian foreign policy was important for complex reasons which bridged nationalistic and pragmatic considerations. But, while recognizing the identity-based ties associated with the history of Russia’s statehood and Ukraine, pragmatists emphasized traditional security and economic aspects as more important in governing Russo-Ukrainian relations. This nuanced approach can be seen in the pragmatist evaluation of the 2014 Russian policies regarding Ukraine. They regarded chaos in Ukraine as a security threat to Russia, yet in February 2014, at the height of nationalistic fervor, pragmatists cautioned against Russia’s entanglement in Ukraine, noting that it would preclude Russia having a friendly and stable neighbor and would harm Russian interests. Instead, they advocated directing economic help to Ukrainians, bypassing the corrupt bureaucracy of Yanukovich (Ciplyayev, 2014; Zubov and Inozemtsev, 2014). After the annexation of Crimea, pragmatists interpreted it as a strategic move which would prevent a later military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. By contrast, Russia’s involvement in Eastern Ukraine was seen as an “improvisation”, a chaotic and largely ineffective action which should be halted immediately (Lukyankov, 2020).
B. Reflections of nationalistic and pragmatic prescriptions in the official discourse, 2000-2014

The official Russian foreign policy rhetoric considered the “problem of Ukraine” as part of Russia’s broader predicaments as well as addressed it as narrower, Ukraine-specific questions of Russian foreign policy. The following pages discuss nationalistic and pragmatic content of official discourse in regard to general and specific problems related to Ukraine.

1. Nationalistic ideas on Ukraine reflected in the official discourse

Recurring general nationalistic motifs in the official foreign policy discourse included emphasis on Russia as a unique Eurasian civilization, emphatic references to Russia’s history, culture, and language, and unconditional anti-Western sentiments.
Generally, nationalistic ideas in official discourse remained scarce until the early 2000s. In the early 2000s, Russian nationalists lauded any fleeting or indirect references to Russia’s unique geopolitical identity (e.g. Putin, 2000b; Security Concept, 2000). More often, Russian nationalists openly expressed their disappointment with the lack of nationalistic ideas in the official rhetoric and policies. If in 2000, Dugin called Putin “the embodiment of the ‘Eurasian capitalist’ model of statist development”, soon Dugin repeatedly noted his disappointment with Putin’s lack of commitment to Eurasia (Ersen, 2004). The Presidential Address of 2004 only perfunctorily noted that, in spite of its complicated history, Russia had managed to carve out its unique position in the world (Putin, 2004). Ukraine was mentioned similarly briefly and usually implicitly.

Clearer references to recognizable nationalistic concepts began to appear in the official Russian foreign policy discourse from the mid-2000s. Putin’s *Address to the Federal Assembly of Russia* (2005) noted the need to safeguard Russian traditional and unique values which extend beyond Russia’s current political borders. The same document noted the ‘civilizational role of the Russian nation in Eurasia’. It noted that Russia was a guarantor for freedom and a spiritual beacon to the surrounding the region and to Russia’s compatriots, in contrast with the corrupt and mercantile West. As Ukraine had the largest number of Russian speakers abroad, this statement had clear implications regarding Ukraine (Putin, 2005; Tsygankov, 2006). Similar references to Russian spiritual and moral values were voiced in Putin’s subsequent annual addresses to the Federal Assembly (Putin, 2007; Putin 2012; Putin, 2013a) and Russia’s National Security Strategy 2009 (Morales, 2009).

Invocation of common culture, language, religion, and history of Russia and Ukraine as implicit arguments for incorporation of Ukraine or its parts in Russia appeared in a 2008
President Putin’s conversation with the US President George Bush at the NATO meeting in Bucharest, when Putin noted that Ukraine was not, strictly speaking, a state, but an entity whose very existence was dependent on and conditioned by Russia (Marson, 2009). Moreover, in his speech at 2008 NATO summit, Putin noted that Russia’s considerations went beyond “security issues”. He noted that the present Ukraine was a conglomerate formation, indebted to the Soviet Union, that vast areas of Ukraine were associated with Russia and Russians, and that Ukraine was on the brink of collapse (Unian, 2008). The Presidential Address of 2008 noted that Russia’s thousand year-year old civilization benefitted vast territories (implicitly including Ukraine and other adjoining regions) (Medvedev, 2008). In 2009, Putin quoted General Denikin (a White Russian general of the Russian Civil War) on Ukraine, referring to the “Big Russia and Little Russia – Ukraine,” and noting that “no one should be allowed to interfere in relations between us; they have always been the business of Russia itself” (Marson, 2009). The indivisibility of Russia and Ukraine was repeatedly revisited by Putin in 2012 (Putin, 2012a; Putin, 2012b; Snyder, 2018, p. 63).

Since 2012, there was an increased consideration for Ukraine’s specific place in Russia’s led Eurasian framework. When Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov borrowed Samuel Huntington’s concepts in the discussion of civilizational rifts and Ukraine’s place in Europe, he echoed nationalism and Eurasianism. In Lavrov’s notion of Ukraine being split between the Western and Russian civilizational lines, he essentially repeated the Russian nationalist notion that most of Ukraine was an essential part of Russia, while a small part of the Western Ukraine might be more akin to the West. Such affiliation would have precluded Ukraine from becoming a meaningful part of the West (Linde, 2016).
Similar sentiments were reiterated in other official communications throughout 2012 and 2013. Putin emphatically referenced Russia as a “historic state” and the “Greater Russia” (by implication, a unified Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian entity) which had been periodically destroyed yet was able to rise again due to its inherently civilizational characteristics. In the words of Putin, Russia’s civilizational identity was based on the sweeping reach of Russian culture which united various ethnicities, stretching from the Carpathians (Western Ukraine) to Kamchatka (the Pacific Ocean), thus explicitly including Ukraine in the Russian civilizational space (Putin, 2012a). Civilizational references in the official rhetoric grew progressively more numerous and explicit (Putin, 2012b; Putin, 2013a). The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept described Russia as “model of unification” which would preserve and extend the common culture and “civilizational heritage” and would protect its compatriots beyond Russia’s borders, thus implicitly referring to Ukraine as the largest host of Russian diaspora (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013). In the Valdai Speech of 2013 Putin expressed scathing cultural critique of the West, juxta-positioning it with Russian traditional religious values and explicitly endorsed the “new conservatism” ideas while calling for “new strategies to preserve our identity” In Putin’s Valdai Address 2013, Putin explicitly used Dugin’s terms, such as the “Euro-Atlantic powers”, and numerous references to civilizational values and Christianity, thus referring to Russia and Ukraine’s common values and heritage (Putin, 2013b; Sakwa, 2017, p.127).

Also, Putin explicitly referred to Russia and Ukraine’s common history and religious roots as the foundation of a unified Russian state, noting that Vladimir, the Grand Prince of Kiev of the 10th century was the ancestor of the Russian state (Snyder, 2018, p. 63). In his visit to Kiev in 2013 to celebrate the millennial of the Russian Orthodox Christianity, Putin affirmed that
Russia and Ukraine were a single nation due to their shared spirituality and that the heritage of two countries’ spiritual and historical bonds would take precedence over “divisive political decisions” (Kishkovsky, 2013). In his 2013 Valdai Speech Putin referred to Ilyin’s model of a united Russia and Ukraine (Putin, 2013b). Such statements indicated the increasingly pervasive presence of nationalistic aspects in the official Russian rhetoric.

Additionally, there were numerous homages to Russia’s history, particularly its role in the World War II. There was a vivid reference to Russia accomplishing a “civilizational triumph” over fascism in the 2005 Address to the Federal Assembly (Putin, 2005), and, since then, allusions to WW II have appeared in most presidential addresses (Putin 2005; Medvedev, 2008; Medvedev 2010; Putin 2012b). As Ukraine was the locus of some of Russia’s greatest battles and other events of the World War II, such statements were relevant to Ukraine. References to Russian history was present also in The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008. Russia’s historic dimensions were also reiterated throughout other official foreign policy communications, such as the National Security Concept of 2009 which denounced “attempts to revise Russian history”. Russia had frequently voiced such complaints in regard to the interpretation of the World War II by Eastern European countries (and Ukraine). The continuous emphasis on Russia’s history in the official Russian foreign policy discourse culminated in the Presidential Address of 2014 which was saturated with references to Crimea’s historic and religious significance for Russia and Russia’s foreign policy actions in Ukraine were characterized as based on Crimea’s “sacral importance” (Putin, 2014).

The topic of the protection of Russian compatriots abroad and the importance of the Russian language, another mainstay of Russian nationalistic discourse also gained ground in the official discourse and was clearly relevant to Ukraine. Already in 2001, the Presidential Address
to the Federal Assembly noted that Russia’s foreign policy tasks included the protection of Russians who lived abroad due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Putin, 2001). There were specific concerns over the citizenship of Russians who were leaving the former Soviet space to return to Russia (Putin, 2003). As Ukraine was a host to the largest Russian diaspora in the world, such official announcements were of great importance to Russo-Ukrainian relations. After the 2004 expansion of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe, Russia’s concerns over Russian compatriots in the former Soviet spaces increased, as can be seen in the explicit call for the “new members of the EU and NATO… show their respect for…rights of their ethnic minorities” (Putin, 2005). Subsequently, there were regular references to the importance of Russian language and its speakers in the official Russian foreign policy discourse (Putin, 2007). The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 extensively addressed the issue of Russian diaspora. It noted that Russian World concept was a foreign policy instrument for including for expanding and strengthening the space of the Russian language and culture. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 also called for the consolidation of the diaspora organizations, for the protection of Russians in their countries of residence, to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of the Russian diaspora and its links with Russia, and to help those who would like to voluntarily resettle in Russia. In 2012, Putin’s article in Nezavisimaya Gazeta noted that the Russian people were a trans-national community united by its language and its “common cultural code” (Putin, 2012a). Similar ideas were voiced in the 2012 presidential address which stated that the Russian language was the basis for “one people” regardless of ethnicity or borders (Putin, 2012b). In 2014, there were self-congratulatory notes that Russia has proved that it can protect its compatriots and “defend truth and fairness” which obviously referenced Russia’s military conflict with Ukraine (Putin, 2014).
Finally, since the mid-2000s, there were regular references to Russian nationalist philosophers, particularly Ivan Ilyin and Nikolai Berdyaev. In his presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly, Putin quoted Ilyin on the limitations of state and the importance of spirituality, creativity, and moral values (Putin, 2005). In 2006-2012, Putin quoted Ilyin on several occasions regarding the Russian military and the unique character of the Russian state (Putin, 2006; Putin 2012a). In 2012-2013, Putin also referenced Lev Gumilev and Berdyaev about Russian worldviews (Putin, 2012b; Putin, 2013a). In the 2013 Valdai Speech Putin referred to Konstantin Leontyev and his concept of the “Russia’s state-civilization” (Putin, 2013b). Significantly, in the official rhetoric, there were scarce references to more current Russian nationalist intellectuals. One may speculate that, instead of referring to the present-day nationalistic intellectuals, the Kremlin saw it more advantageous to refer to long-passed Ilyin, Berdyaev and Leontyev. But, as the nationalistic ideas, originally proposed by these philosophers, had been extensively incorporated and popularized in the writings of Dugin and other post-Soviet nationalistic figures, it may be likely that the essence of many nationalistic ideas used in the official rhetoric was acquired through these more modern intermediaries.

These references were compounded by general, yet increasingly confrontational anti-Westernism. It has been noted that the Putin’s February 2007 Munich speech indicated Russia’s dissatisfaction with the Western-dominant world order and likely was influenced by popular anti-Western sentiments in Russia (Andreev, 2012). The next year’s presidential address additionally demonstrated Russia’s official anti-US stance (Putin, 2008). Russia explicitly objected to the neo-containment strategy which the West had been exercising toward Russia and the Western interference in the domestic affairs of Russia’s neighbors, including Ukraine (The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008; Jackson, 2013; Putin, 2014). These sentiments dovetailed with official calls for
military assertiveness. The renewal of Russia’s nuclear arsenal as a protection against the West had been long advocated by more militarily inclined nationalists such as Dugin (1997) and Starikov (2012). In 2013, Putin indicated that Russia would strengthen its nuclear arsenal (Putin, 2013). In 2014, official anti-Western rhetoric erupted from the Russian Ministry of Culture which issued an official public statement declaring that Russia was not Europe; it referred to Russia’s civilizational characteristics and lauded the special virtues of Russian citizens. Essentially it mirrored the mainstays of Russian nationalism (Foundations of Russian National Cultural Policy, 2014). The official publication of such document additionally illustrated the pervasive presence of nationalism in official circles which would bear consequences for Russia’s policy toward Ukraine.

In the early 2000s, the nationalist idea of the Russkiy Mir or the Russian World was picked up by President Putin’s administration and Putin’s aide Vladislav Surkov, the author of sovereign democracy concept. This concept gained formal recognition when in 2001, Putin signed the Conception in Support of Compatriots, and the Russian government organized the first congress of Russian compatriots. The Congress opening speech was given by Putin who, while noting Russian diaspora’s importance in economic and cultural terms, also spoke of Russia’s obligation to protect its compatriots abroad. Allegedly, the speech was a last-moment decision, possibly objected to by more pragmatic advisors (Putin, 2001a; Suslov, 2017, p. 21). After 2004, the concept of Russian World became incorporated in the official discourse with increasingly anti-Western and political overtones. Since 2011, the use of Russkiy Mir in the official rhetoric was becoming more political and irredentist, referring to reunification Russian territories, including the Southeastern Ukraine and Crimea. However, there was little mention of Russian world in the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, thus possibly indicating that the concept of
Russian world had temporarily become less relevant to the official Russian foreign policy. However, the concept became ubiquitous by the end of 2013 and throughout 2014 (Suslov, 2017, p. 25-26).

The acknowledgement of Ukraine’s domestic fragmentation sporadically brought forth proposals in official circles to dismantle Ukraine. In 2008, it was allegedly mentioned several times by Putin. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in an interview noted that Putin had repeatedly stated that the present-day Ukraine was torn by “contradictions between the western Ukraine and its eastern and southeastern regions” and that Ukraine’s ambitions regarding NATO “would not facilitate the important task of helping Ukraine maintain its unity” (Socor, 2008). Similarly, Ukraine's former ambassador to the U.S., Yuri Shcherbak noted that Russian official discourse portrayed Ukraine as "failed state." and that Ukraine’s dismemberment was discussed at “various levels of the Russian political, military and secret-service leadership" (Marson, 2009). In 2014, there were additional suggestions to end Ukraine’s existence in its present state. A 2014 February memorandum (based on the work of nationalistic figure Igor Girkin) which circulated in the Kremlin, proposed to dismantle Ukraine by supporting President Yanukovich’s opposition and invading Southern Ukraine. This would force Ukraine to federalize to accommodate Russian speakers and would prevent the West from overtaking Ukraine (Snyder, 2018, p. 136). Also, in 2014, Putin evoked the concept of Novorossiya when referring to distinct separatist regions of Southeast Ukraine (Putin, 2014b). This concept a few years ago had been resurrected by nationalist think tanks and had become a mainstay of unofficial nationalistic rhetoric.

Other signs of nationalism in the official rhetoric could be seen in the growing consideration of military intervention, particularly when regarding Ukraine in the context of
NATO. In 2008, Russian threatened to use military force, including nuclear weapons, on Ukraine. Specifically, when discussing the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO, Putin remarked that, should Ukraine permit the US missile defense system on its territory or join NATO, Ukraine could potentially be targeted by Russian nuclear weapons (Casin, 2011; Ryan, 2008). Since 2012, as Russia underwent lengthy military reforms and increased its weaponry, there was increased emphasis on military aspects. “We are forced (...) to bolster our national aerospace defense system to counter the US and NATO” Putin noted. "One cannot be 'too patriotic' about this issue” Russia’s military response (...) would be “effective and asymmetrical” (Putin 2012d; Weir, 2012). With such statements over the course of several years, Putin indicated his preference for military rebuke over integration, and such attitude had clear and threatening implications for Ukraine (Snyder, 2018, p. 79-81).

The official nationalistic rhetoric regarding Ukraine reached its pinnacle in 2014. Putin’s March 18 speech to the Duma, the Federation Council, the heads of regional government and civil society representatives which addressed the recent referendum in Crimea. This address presented the strongest to-date official emphasis on the Crimea’s historic roots, the Kiev Rus, the birth of the Russian state, the Orthodox faith, and a variety of common values and mission which united Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians. Putin stated that “Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia”. He denounced the Ukrainian nationalistic policies which deprived the Russian speakers of Ukraine of their language, historic memories, and forced to assimilate. Moreover, Putin invoked the Western policy of containment toward Russia and the NATO encirclement of Russia as direct threats to Russia (Putin 2014c). Similar sentiments in 2014 were expressed in other communications from the Kremlin which denounced the anti-Russian policies of Kiev, the harassment of the Russian speakers, and justified Russia’s response. Foreign
Minister Lavrov explicitly noted that Ukrainians were oppressed by the West and needed Russian protection (Putin, 2014b, Snyder, 2018, p. 137).

It may be that nationalist ideas would not have found such fertile ground in the Kremlin discourse without many nationalist intellectuals having official and unofficial ties with numerous Russian officials. Sergei Glazyev, a prominent nationalist and a close associate of Aleksandr Prokhanov and Aleksandr Dugin, as well as a member of Izborsk Club, was Putin’s advisor on Eurasia. In the spring of 2014, Glazyev served as a direct liaison between the Kremlin and the new Crimean government; he also was in personal contact with Ukraine’s breakaway regions planning their rebellion against Kiev, hoping that the Crimean scenario would be repeated in Eastern Ukraine (Snyder, 2018, pp. 139-144). Dmitry Rogozin of Izborsk Club was closely associated with the political party Rodina and was a member of Russian parliament, including parliamentary committees of foreign affairs and military (Laurinavičius, 2014). Rodina also had long associations with other prominent Russian nationalists, particularly Aleksandr Prokhanov. Among Rodina supporters were such high Russian officials as Vladislav Surkov and Igor Sechin, as well as ministers and the military. Members of Rodina introduced several bills in the Russian Duma regarding foreign policy, including a proposal to grant Russian citizenship by birth to all Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians. Rodina’s proposals largely conformed with the Kremlin agenda. During the ‘gas war’ with Ukraine Rogozin proposed to resurrect Russia’s claims to Sevastopol in order to put pressure on the Ukrainian authorities (Titkov, 2006). Aleksandr Dugin had prolonged, yet largely informal ties with the Kremlin and Putin personally. Dugin’s “Eurasian Movement” which extended to Ukraine, comprised Russian ministers, parliament members, members of the diplomatic community and the military (Umland, 2007).
In sum, there are clear indications, that between 2010 and 2014 Russian foreign policy discourse was becoming more nationally inclined and that nationalistic ideas which could be expanded to Ukraine had caught the ear of Russian foreign policy makers. If, in the early 2000s, there were few indications of nationalistic rhetoric, then, after the 2004, the presence of nationalistic rhetoric steadily increased, reaching a peak in 2014. From 2011-2012, even many broadly pragmatic policy propositions increasingly incorporated nationalistic elements (Putin, 2011; Putin, 2012c; Putin, 2013b). The increased presence of nationalism regarding Ukraine in the official discourse was not entirely unexpected. It may have been spurred by the 2004 events in Ukraine, but its presence in 2010-2013 grew while Russia had no particularly pressing external threats or particularly hostile Ukrainian government. However, the inclusion of nationalism in the official discourse may have been stimulated by the domestic opposition to Putin in 2011-2012. Finally, another explanation which also complements the previous accounts, would be that the unofficial nationalistic discourse had become pervasive and provided ready vocabulary and suggestions for the official circles which were used when in 2013, relations between Russia and Ukraine suddenly deteriorated. It is likely that nationalistic motifs in the official discourse would not have been possible without first gaining popularity in the unofficial discourse.

2. Pragmatist approach to Ukraine in the official discourse

The official discourse was punctuated with the pragmatic mainstays of multipolarity (which implicitly excluded Ukraine from international decision-making), spheres of influence (which explicitly included Ukraine), the protection of Russia’s sovereignty through international alliances and domestic modernization (which had varying effects regarding Ukraine), and advocacy of diplomatic and economic cooperation. These principles as the basis for foreign
policy were frequently reflected in the highest circles by President Vladimir Putin, and Russia’s Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Igor Ivanov, as well as in *Concepts of National Security* and *Foreign Policy*. Until the late 2000s, the official Russian foreign policy rhetoric toward Ukraine predominantly reflected these essential broad principles of the pragmatic approach. This can be seen in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation which explicitly mentioned Ukraine in the context of the threatening NATO expansion, but also emphasized economic and diplomatic cooperation and equal partnership along the CIS and the Euro-Atlantic regions. Similarly, Putin’s interview in 2008 about Ukraine extensively referred to the “unchanging principles of good neighborly relations, pragmatism and mutually beneficial cooperation (…) regarding trade, energy, transportation, border region cooperation, and the Black Sea fleet” (Putin, 2008). Such official communications indicated pragmatic-dominated approach to Russo-Ukrainian perspectives.

As noted earlier, many Russian foreign policy makers, including the Foreign Minister Lavrov were self-described “pragmatists” in the general, colloquial meaning of the word. In a similar vein, the official Russian foreign policy discourse frequently noted that Russian foreign policy was a “pragmatic” foreign policy. Already in the 2000 *Address to Federal Assembly*, President Putin had noted that Russian foreign policy was pragmatic. Such statements were also found in other presidential addresses to Russian Federal Assembly (e. g. 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, and 2009). President Putin stated that Russian foreign policy should be based on expediency, predictability, and the supremacy of the international law (Putin, 2006). This seemed to suggest that Russia’s policies toward Ukraine would be guided by similar principles.

Multipolarity and Russia’s rights to spheres of influence were a frequently mentioned in the official Russian foreign policy discourse. Putin in his Munich Speech of 2007 famously
denounced the current unipolar world order under the domination of the West. Subsequent official documents additionally referenced pragmatic preoccupation with multipolar word order (Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2008; National Security Strategy, 2009; Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2012). Most explicitly, in his Valdai Speech of 2013 Putin emphasized the need to have a concert-like system for international decision which should be conducted on “collective basis”. Relatedly, he also noted that Russia had special rights and responsibilities in its spheres of influence (Putin, 2013b). Such international system would minimize the Western interference in the adjoining geopolitical areas, including Ukraine, which Russia had long regarded as its essential privileged areas. Such advocacy of multipolarity and spheres of influence had clear implications that Ukraine was not regarded as an important international entity and that Russia regarded Ukraine’s international role as secondary to Russia.

Frequent invocation of international law was another important motif in the official Russian foreign policy discourse which echoed pragmatic principles. The symbolic importance of international law for Russian foreign policy makers was unmistakable, even if the sincerity of this sentiment may be debatable, and it turned out to be irrelevant in Russia’s policies regarding Ukraine. However, the importance of international law and the role of the UN Security Council were repeatedly confirmed in official discourse as the ultimate authorities for international interactions (Putin 2001; Putin, 2003; Medvedev, 2008). Several official communications in 2013, including Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly and the otherwise confrontational Valdai Speech, ironically, presented shortly before the deterioration of Russia’s relations with Ukraine, also noted that Russia aimed to defend international law (Putin, 2013b).

In line with the pragmatic foreign policy principles which saw domestic modernization as essential for Russia’s national interests, emphasis on Russia’s domestic development was a
mainstay of presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly from 2000 to 2013. Sometimes, there were slight variations, as when internal economic development was explicitly linked to Russia’s international security. In the 2007 presidential Address, the development of internal shipping routes was noted to be important for ensuring Russia’s access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean (Putin, 2007). As Russia and Ukraine shared access to the Black Sea, such plans by Russia would have direct implications for Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine. Putin’s 2009 Presidential Address stated that Russia’s economic diversification would enhance its international standing and would permit to end its reliance on energy resources when conducting international affairs. In relation to domestic modernization, the official foreign policy discourse also noted a necessity for a modern army (Putin, 2003; Putin, 2004; Putin 2009; Putin 2010; Putin 2013). Should Russia be provoked by a foreign power, a measured military response was justified (Medvedev, 2008; National Security Strategy, 2009). Such vague statements left leeway for Russia’s potential military involvement abroad with worrisome perspectives for Russia’s neighbors. However, official discourse also cautioned against the “militarization” of international relations (Putin, 2006; Medvedev, 2008). While Russian foreign policy rhetoric grew sharper in its antagonism to NATO and the military aspects gained prominence, particularly after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, the foundation for Russia’s security was seen as grounded not only in its military, but also in collective security and economic integration (Putin, 2013b).

The official Russian foreign policy discourse extensively advocated economic and security-based cooperation along the lines of the Commonwealth of Independent States-based structural framework. As Ukraine formally remained an associate member of the CIS, such advocacy had direct implications for Ukraine. Russian presidential addresses from 2001 through 2006 emphatically noted the CIS-based integration. It was seen as the most practical way to
ensure Russia’s dominance in its spheres of influence and to ensure regional stability. The CIS was lauded as an ideal foundational framework for other Russia-led regional organizations, such as the Common Economic Space, the Eurasian Economic Community, the Eurasian Customs Union, Eurasian Economic Union, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Putin, 2001; Putin, 2002; Putin 2003; Putin 2004; Putin 2011). Ukraine’s economic integration in these frameworks was of utmost importance to Russia; Ukraine’s participation was often characterized as essential for these organizations. In the long term, Russia hoped to extend its Eurasian economic project to a unified economic space from “Lisbon to Vladivostok” and, possibly, even a common a Euro-Atlantic security space from “Vancouver to Vladivostok”. However, Ukraine refused to participate in these developments in spite of Russia’s economic inducements and pressures (Rahr, 2011).

With Ukraine’s refusal to participate in Russia-led economic frameworks, the official Russian foreign policy discourse suggested a variety of coercive or enticing policy propositions, a “carrot and stick” policy regarding Ukraine. The coercive measures included threats of trade wars with damaging consequences for Ukraine’s fragile and chaotic economy which largely depended on Russian imports. In 2013, while negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on the Black Sea Fleet had been continuing for a year without success, and Ukraine continued to waver between the EU and Russia, Russian official rhetoric became more assertive and suggested preparation for economic pressures (Moshes, 2013; Varfolomeyev, 2013). In August 2013, Putin’s economic advisor, Sergei Glazyev stated that Russia was “preparing to tighten customs procedures if Ukraine makes the suicidal step to sign the association agreement with the EU” (Anders, 2013). In mid-September 2013, Putin warned Ukraine that Russia would retaliate with protectionist measures if Ukraine signed the trade deal with the EU, a deal which would hurt...
Russia’s exports to Ukraine. Instead, Putin suggested that Kiev join the Eurasian Customs Union (Anischuk, 2013). The “carrot” aspect which was suggested in the official Russian foreign policy discourse throughout October and November of 2013 involved extensive loans and discounted natural gas should Ukraine postpone its agreement with the European Union. This course of negotiations exemplified pragmatic reliance on economic and diplomatic means regarding Ukraine.

International cooperation which was advocated in the official discourse and which was relevant to Russia’s foreign policy regarding Ukraine was not limited to the CIS only. Russia’s National Security Strategy (2009) listed a variety of partnerships including the United Nations Security Council, the G-8, the G-20, the RIC/BRIC (Russia, India, China + Brazil), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As these organizations did not include Ukraine, their potential for furthering equitable Russo-Ukrainian interactions was limited. However, they significantly expanded Russia’s international connections should Russia need to have international allies against Ukraine’s international ambitions.

Significantly, the official Russian foreign policy rhetoric, along the lines of pragmatism, often advocated Russia’s selective cooperation with the West, usually along common interests to address international threats, such as terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction (Putin, 2000; Putin, 2003; Putin 2003; Putin, 2005; Putin, 2006). Also, the official Russian foreign policy discourse frequently referred to the concept of the Greater Europe of which Russia considered to be an essential member and which implicitly included Ukraine (Putin, 2003; Putin 2005). Relatedly, in 2010, the Presidential Address noted that Russia would seek closer cooperation with Germany and France and planned to increase bilateral cooperation with other countries in Europe, including Ukraine (Medvedev, 2010). Overall, from 2000 to 2014, some temporary
setbacks notwithstanding, Russian foreign policy rhetoric remained at least partially open to establishing working relations with international frameworks and the West. Such indications had ambivalent possibilities for Russo-Ukrainian relations. It suggested that Russia could employ a variety of direct and indirect ways to influence Ukraine. At the same time, it also indicated that Russia was moderately willing to accept Ukraine’s participation in some European international structures. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 indicated that, should Ukraine wish to continue to negotiate with the EU, the Russia should be serving as an intermediary (The Foreign Policy Concept, 2013; Snyder, 2018, p. 99).

At the same time, official Russian communications also voiced reservations regarding perspectives of cooperation with Europe. The NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and the growing US presence in Russia’s spheres of influence, including Ukraine, were seen as the most serious obstacles to perspective cooperation with the West. Already in 2001, Putin noted that the West should be more equanimous toward Russia’s interests when expanding NATO (Putin, 2001). Since the mid-2000s, Russian foreign policy rhetoric declared that the US military presence in Eastern Europe was a threat to Russia’s security. However, the Russian National Security Concept of 2009 was more moderate than the Security Concept of 2000 in its treatment of the NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. This was likely due to Russia’s victory over Georgia which somewhat curbed NATO (Morales, 2009). While the Russian rhetoric regarding NATO, the US, and the West soon sharpened again, Russian foreign policy makers still suggested a few diplomatic solutions involving Russia-NATO Council and the OSCE (National Security Strategy, 2009; Putin, 2007; Putin, 2009). In a 2008 meeting with German representatives, Medvedev suggested an alternative security framework which would incorporate Russia: a “unified Euro-Atlantic space from Vancouver to Vladivostok”. In 2010 NATO-Russia Summit in
Lisbon, Medvedev repeated hopes for cautious cooperation (Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2010). In such advocacy of diplomacy to mitigate Russia-NATO antagonism, the official discourse echoed the pragmatic approach. In regard to Ukraine, such statements suggested that Russia would hardly tolerate Ukraine’s plans to seek membership in the EU or NATO or to pursue independent foreign policy outside Russia’s dominated framework.

At the same time, particularly after 2007, Russian foreign policy rhetoric began focusing on potential alliances with China and other countries in Asia. Russia’s participation in the Shanghai Treaty or establishment of a bi-lateral cooperation with China was seen as a potential alternative should Russia’s relations with the West become irreparably damaged (Medvedev, 2007; Putin, 2013; Putin, 2013). In 2014, during the confrontation with Ukraine, the presidential address noted that Russia needed equal partners in the West and the East (Putin, 2104). This signified, that, along the lines of the pragmatic approach of flexible alliances, the official Russian foreign policy was open to establishing tie with new allies. However, for Ukraine, it offered a scant encouragement; if anything, it became obvious that Russia could use its international leverage in various roundabout ways to influence Ukraine.

In sum, the official Russian foreign policy rhetoric consistently reflected many principles of the pragmatic approach. Whenever Russian foreign policy communications addressed multipolarity, Russia’s spheres of interests, cautious alliances, or economic integration, they echoed pragmatic policy ideas. However, the emphasis on pragmatism in the official discourse regarding Ukraine lessened after 2010. In the 2013 Valdai speech, Putin explicitly stated that identity issues in Russian foreign policy also mattered. He noted that that Russian national identity had been repeatedly shattered by the collapse of the Russian state (Putin, 2013b). Increasingly, there was a temporary convergence of pragmatism and nationalism due to the
considerable overlap of security and identity issues regarding Ukraine. But in spite of a marked increase of nationalism in the official rhetoric, the elements of pragmatism remained strong. Even at the height of nationalistic sentiments in the official rhetoric in 2013-2014, there were nods to the principles of pragmatism. Russia’s Foreign Minister Lavrov, referencing the civilizational split of Ukraine, essentially advocated Ukraine to become a neutral state without being overly affiliated with the West or Russia: “If one examines the history of independent Ukraine, it becomes clear that all attempts to swiftly and ‘in one fell swoop’ determine the vector of the country’s foreign relations – to the West or to the East – invariably have ended in failure” (Linde, 2016). Even Putin’s overwhelmingly nationalistic address about the Crimean referendum in March 2014 invoked international law, and Putin thought it necessary to note the Kosovo independence and Germany’s reunification as legal precedents for the annexation of Crimea. He also noted the singularly strategic importance of Sevastopol’s naval base for Russia’s security and expressed gratitude to China and India for their neutrality and moderate support (Putin, 2014a). In other communications, he elaborated that events in Ukraine were created by unreasonable and provocative Kiev’s policies which caused Russia’s intervention over concerns of the security of Russian-speaking population and Russia’s strategic interests. Finally, to mitigate the fallout of Russia’s military involvement, Putin called for diplomatic negotiations and cooperation with Ukraine and international organizations (Putin, 2014b). Such an approach to Ukraine indicated the importance of pragmatism at the height of nationalistic fervor in the official discourse.

C. Reflection of these ideas in Russia’s activities and policies toward Ukraine, 2000-2014
If pragmatic and nationalistic ideas were echoed in the official Russian foreign policy discourse, how were they reflected in foreign policy activities? The following section gives a chronological overview of Russian foreign policy events which reflected nationalism and pragmatism approaches. While the precise identification is probably impossible and of limited use, this overview should highlight a few prominent pragmatic and nationalistic ideas which can be identified in Russian foreign policy activities.

1. Events associated with nationalism

2000-2003

In this period, there were relatively few foreign policy events which could be explicitly associated with nationalism. However, the Conception in Support of Compatriots, the first Congress of Compatriots in 2001 and Putin’s reference to the protection of Russian diaspora indicated a few fledging nationalistic overtones in Russian foreign policy (Suslov, 2017; Williams, 2020). Another notable Russo-Ukrainian activity which could be clearly identified with nationalism was the 2001 meeting between presidents Putin and Kuchma in Crimea at the consecration of the cathedral of St. Vladimir. This highly symbolic event noted the common roots of Ukraine and Russia, as well as signified the importance of Crimea along nationalistic lines (Kremlin, 2001). Also, there was sporadic focus on Russian-speakers in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Russian nationalists had demanded Kremlin’s intervention on behalf of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea in the 1990s but received no support from the Russian government (Tuminez 2000, pp. 239–240; Rivera 2003, p. 89). In the early 2000s, a few Russian public figures (later associated with Russkiy Mir) publicly protested Ukrainian language laws and lobbied the Russian Duma and the Ukrainian Rada to change the language laws, but with little
success in either country (Olszanski, 2012; Tishkov, 2008). However, such nationalistic foreign policy events were more an exception than a rule.

2004-2009

By contrast, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine brought a new momentum for Russian nationalists. There was a steady increase of foreign policy-related events which reflected nationalistic premises. In 2004, to rally national sentiments in Russia and as a response to events in Ukraine, Putin established a national holiday, “National Unity Day”, to contribute to national cohesion (Kremlin, 2004b). Increasingly, Russian government began to publicly commemorate events of World War II in Russia and abroad, building memorials, establishing grounds for parades, granting honorary titles to Russian cities, and acknowledging its veterans (Kremlin, 2005a; Kremlin, 2008; Kremlin, 2009). As Ukraine had played an important role in the World War II, such actions echoed in Russo-Ukrainian relations. In 2007, the Russian government established the Russkiy Mir Foundation with the explicit purpose to propagate the Russian language and culture beyond Russian borders (Ruskiy Mir, 2007). In 2008, Putin appointed several well-known nationalists to high government positions. Among them was Sergei Naryshkin, the head of presidential administration, also in charge of the Historical Truth Commission (established to counter objectionable interpretation of Russian history), and, a few years later, the head of Russian foreign intelligence service (Kremlin 2008b; Harding, 2007).

During this period, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, in addition to stimulating anti-Georgian sentiments, also increased anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Russia. In order to boost Russo-Ukrainian relations, in 2008-2009, the Russian government granted medals and prizes to many well-known Ukrainian public figures for their contribution to Russo-Ukrainian ties. Among them was a high official of Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the Metropolitan of
Odessa, who received a medal for his role in the development of spiritual ties and friendship between Ukraine and Russia (Kremlin 2009b).

In 2010, Medvedev signed changes in the law on Russian compatriots. It confirmed a broad definition of compatriots which included the citizens of the former Soviet Union and their descendants. Also, residents of former Soviet states, including Ukraine, could be regarded as compatriots regardless of their current citizenship. Compatriots were defined by their active participation in the preservation of Russian language, history, and culture. Among other prescribed responsibilities of compatriots was the “strengthening the relations between host countries and Russia”. The law also stated that Russia was obligated to protect the compatriots’ various rights and freedoms abroad (Kremlin, 2010; Williams, 2020). With this law, Russian compatriots abroad and, implicitly, the Russian World, were assigned a formal role in Russian foreign policy.

A few Russian political figures went to Ukraine to advance Russian foreign policy. When the Eastern Ukraine demanded greater autonomy from the new government in Kiev in 2004, Russian nationalist members of the Duma and the Mayor of Moscow visited Ukraine to express their support (Tsygankov, 2006). In 2005-2007, Aleksandr Dugin’s political organization, the International Eurasianist Movement established branches in major Ukrainian cities. It cooperated with Ukraine’s neo-Communistic and far-right political parties and assisted pro-Russian organizations in Eastern Ukraine. The Eurasianist Movement’s activities were generally aimed at undermining Ukrainian government’s pro-Western policies and organizing anti-NATO protests in Ukraine. They were explicit about their geopolitical goals: “Our foremost priority is to focus on the creation of the empire; the first goal is to break Crimea away from Ukraine. To
join it to the empire…” (Shekhovtsov, 2016). Eventually, the Eurasianist Movement was outlawed in Ukraine, and many of its members, including Dugin, were banned from Ukraine.

### 2010-2014

In 2010, Russia established new national holidays: the day of baptism of Russia under Prince Vladimir in the 10th century and a memorial day for Russians who “served abroad” (Kremlin, 2010b; Kremlin, 2010c). While seemingly innocuous, both holidays had indirect implications for Russo-Ukrainian relations. The celebration of baptism of Russia which took place during the Kiev Rus in Crimea, clearly emphasized the importance of Russia and Ukraine’s common history and cultural heritage. The commemoration of Russians who “served abroad” honored Russia’s military involvement abroad. It also could be interpreted in the Ukrainian context as hints of possible military threats. Throughout 2010 Russian government passed several laws governing the leadership of Russian Cossack military forces (Kremlin, 2011). They were relevant to Russian nationalism because the Russian Cossacks were closely affiliated with the nationalistic narrative of Russia’s history, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Russia’s military exploits, including the Russo-Georgian war. These laws related to Ukraine’s complicated Cossack heritage, and thus reverberated in Russo-Ukrainian relations. A few years later, Russian Cossacks participated in the war against Kiev in the Eastern Ukraine’s separatist territories.

In 2012, as Ukraine initiated its negotiations with the EU over the association agreement, anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Russia grew. The conspicuously anti-Ukrainian Sergei Glaziyev was appointed as President Putin’s aide. Also, a new holiday was established to commemorate the victory of Russian Fleet over the Ottoman Empire in the Black Sea (Kremlin, 2012). In view of Russia’s volatile relations with Ukraine regarding the Black Sea Fleet and Crimea, this
holiday had deep undertones. These events, while seemingly unrelated to foreign policy, indicated Kremlin’s emphasis on nationalistic sentiments and a growing official hostility toward Ukraine. However, throughout 2013, Russian foreign policy actions did not directly reflect the nationalistic suggestions, such as calls for direct military involvement. Russian policies changed when the popular uprising ousted Yanukovich in the early 2014. This was seen as a direct threat to Russia and thus called for immediate response.

In 2014, Russian foreign policy activities reflected the culmination of nationalistic sentiments at home. In the early 2014, there was a remarkable convergence of the unofficial nationalistic discourse, the official rhetoric, and official and unofficial foreign policy activities. Before the onset of Russia’s actual military activities in Ukraine, noted nationalistic figures Igor Girkin and other writers from Aleksandr Prokhanov’s media circle had visited Crimea in early 2014 and, allegedly, prepared the ground for a possible military expedition. As Russia’s special forces and later, regular military units, took over the Crimea in February 2014, Russian nationalists supported these actions by words and deeds. They regarded Russia’s military involvement in Ukraine as the ultimate confirmation of their world view, calling it the “Russian Spring” (which, incidentally, was also the code name for the Russian military operation against Ukraine) (Global Security, 2014). Igor Girkin was part of the Russian military occupation of Crimea, in charge of seizing the Simferopol airport, and later, leading the separatist troops, including Russian volunteers, in Donbass. Sergei Glaziyev, Putin’s advisor on Eurasia was in charge of coordinating the new government in Crimea (Snyder, 2018, p. 139). A number of other prominent Russian nationalists also travelled to Eastern Ukraine, met with the separatist leaders, and helped to organize volunteer troops from Russia and other countries (Snyder, 2018 p. 149). From the late 2010 to 2014, Russkiy Mir and Izborsk Club had been organizing conferences and
other activities in Ukraine to promote their foreign policy ideas. Many observers noted that in 2014 they seemed closely coordinated with the Kremlin. In February 2014, a month before Russia’s annexation of Crimea, *Russkiy Mir* organized a seminar *Cultural Memory in Sevastopol – Ukraine’s City of Russian Glory* at Oxford University (Smagliy, 2018). Such activities made the presence of nationalistic rhetoric in the unofficial Russian foreign policy discourse particularly conspicuous.

When Putin visited Crimea on the highly symbolic May 9, the day of Soviet Union’s victory in the World War II, Russia’s takeover of Crimea was confirmed with highly historic connotations. Throughout 2014, many Russian nationalist ideologues served as informal ambassadors and apologists of Russian activities in Ukraine and abroad to drum up support for Russia. In August 2014 in Yalta, Crimea, Russian nationalists organized an international conference with guests from European right-wing political circles (Snyder, 2018, p.187). Less inflammatory Russian foreign policy activities which related to nationalistic tendencies, included the establishment of the Russian Language Council at the president’s office in June 2014 (Kremlin, 2014). This council was created to deal with Russian language issues abroad, thus being directly related with Russo-Ukrainian policies. Throughout 2014, hostilities in Eastern Ukraine continued. In April, Donetsk and Lugansk established de facto independence from Kiev. Russia extended covert support to the Eastern Ukraine separatists through supplies of weapons, military advisors, and, later, actual sent in regular military units. Also, Russia implicitly supported Russian volunteers who were joining the separatist forces. These foreign policy activities permitted for separatists to secure their ground and explicitly echoed Russian nationalistic suggestions, but, perhaps, to a lesser degree than they nationalists wished (Kofman et al.2017).
2. Events associated with pragmatism

2000-2004

In 2000-2004, there were numerous Russian foreign policy activities, mostly economics orientated, which indicated adherence to pragmatic principles. Russia initiated a free trade zone with Ukraine by negotiating several significant agreements on monopolies, common licensing, customs controls, and technical barriers. Also, Russia continued negotiations regarding Ukraine’s debts and the imbalance of trade (Ivanov, 2002, p. 86). Negotiations were ongoing about various aspects of the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Putin, 2003; Putin, 2004). It was expected that Ukraine would join these organizations, as Russia’s economic and international status during these years was rapidly improving. In 2003, the Common Economic Space treaty between Russia Belorussia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine was signed in Yalta, Crimea (Kremlin, 2004a). This agreement outlined long-term plans for gradual economic integration through free trade, common economic standards and standardized rules and laws (Anders, 2013). However, the Orange Revolution put a halt to it.

2004-2010

Events of this period were conditioned by the change of regime in Ukraine in 2004 and the new, pro-Western government in Kiev. Before the regime change in Kiev in 2004, Putin had almost monthly meetings with President Kuchma. Such frequent sessions indicated that Russia was determined to maximize diplomatic relations between Russia and Ukraine (Anders, 2013). While Russia initially disputed the legality of Kuchma’s successor, President Yushchenko, Russia soon resumed largely pragmatic relations with Ukraine. The public sentiment in Russia as well as many in the Russian government favored pro-Russian Yanukovich instead of the elected
new president Yushchenko. However, Putin chose to work with Yushchenko, acknowledged the
legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government and demonstrated his willingness to cooperate with
Ukraine to the extent of suggesting that Russia would have no objections to Ukraine joining the
EU. However, Russia repeatedly stated that its priority was the integration of the Common
Economic Space and, later, the Eurasian Economic Community. After 2004, Russia continued to
seek Ukraine’s integration in its Eurasian framework through prolonged diplomatic negotiations
with Ukraine; however, Ukraine’s participation was becoming more unlikely (Putin 2004; Putin,
2005; Putin, 2006). Russia also hoped to entice Ukraine to participate in other agreements
regarding security cooperation and joint military operations which Russia concluded with
Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan in 2005, but without results (Kremlin, 2005b). In 2008, the Russo-
Ukrainian Commission achieved an agreement on the Russia-Ukraine Work Program for 2008-
2009, which set out the key vectors for Russo-Ukrainian cooperation in several areas (Putin,
2008). This gave some ground for limited optimism to reach eventually a more comprehensive
agreement with Ukraine.

In 2005, Russia also signed additional agreements regarding NATO’s Partnership for
Peace of which Russia and Ukraine had been members since the 1990s. These were relatively
minor documents, yet this action showed that Russia was concerned over legal aspects in its
international interactions and was interested in retaining a cooperation framework with the West
(Kremlin, 2005c). In 2007, due to Russia’s dissatisfaction with NATO’s increased presence in
Europe and the restrictions of Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, Putin declared a
moratorium on the Treaty. However, Russia ratified the Partnership for Peace Status of Forces
Agreement, thus continuing indirect cooperation with Ukraine under this umbrella organization.
Russia participated in NATO’s peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, while Ukraine participated in
other NATO actions (Smigielski, 2011). These activities signified Russia’s commitment to selective international cooperation through organizations and legal frameworks.

In order to increase its influence in Ukraine, Russian government increasingly engaged in Ukraine’s domestic politics. The Russian government recommended that Ukraine’s hostile political parties whose animosity often incapacitated Ukraine’s decision making should seek compromise (Tsygankov, 2006). Furthermore, the Russian government voiced broad support to Yulia Timoshenko against President Yuschenko, and, eventually, Russian President Medvedev and Ukraine’s Prime Minister Timoshenko established a pragmatic working relationship. In 2008, Russia negotiated with the Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko on gradual increase of gas prices, agreeing to reach free-market prices within three years which was considered a diplomatic victory for Russia but criticized in Ukraine (AP, 2008; Lowe, 2008). A few years later, Russian Foreign Ministry criticized Timoshenko’s prosecution and noted that her persecution was due to her political position and anti-Russian sentiments of the Ukrainian government (Barry, 2011). Again, this largely reflected the pragmatist-advocated approach to resolve foreign policy problems through discreet and non-violent means.

In April 2008, Putin participated in the NATO Summit in Bucharest. Among Russia’s priorities was the nullification of Ukraine and Georgia’s bid for NATO membership, the removal of the NATO missile defense system from Eastern Europe and the problem of newly independent Kosovo. Due to objections from Germany, France, and the UK, and in spite of the US and Poland’s support, Ukraine’s plan for NATO membership was postponed until December 2008 when it was further brushed aside. Russia regarded it as a diplomatic victory and attributed it to close economic and diplomatic ties with these countries. Russia also reached an agreement with NATO regarding NATO’s transportation route across Russia to Afghanistan. However, Russia
did not reach the desired result regarding Kosovo or the missile placement in Eastern Europe (BIRN, 2008). In August 2008, largely due to Georgia’s provocation in South Ossetia, Russia engaged in a brief war with Georgia. It temporarily damaged Russia’s international standing, including Russia’s relations with Ukraine, but soon Russia resumed diplomatic activities along largely pragmatic lines. In a grand diplomatic gesture, Russia announced that it was ready to overlook Ukraine’s support of Georgia during the Russo-Georgian war. Russia assuaged Ukraine that there were no hard feelings between Russia and Ukraine, even though Ukraine had supplied arms to Georgia (DW, 2008). There were indications that Russia intended to continue international involvement along multiple vectors. Before the end of the year, Russia had outlined its participation in the Council of Europe for 2008-2010, ratified several modifications to Shanghai Cooperation Treaty, concluded an agreement with Italy regarding the elimination of chemical weapons in Russia, and confirmed modifications in the Eurasian Economic Union establishment treaty (Kremlin, 2008c; Kremlin 2008d; Kremlin, 2009c; Kremlin, 2009d). If in 2009 Russia forbade selling military and dual-use technologies to Georgia, it also ratified the European Chart of Social Justice (Kremlin, 2009e; Kremlin, 2009f). Such activities signified that Russia was ready to engage in international affairs along flexible, but largely pragmatic lines.

At the same time, there were indications that Russia would not hesitate to resort to a more assertive foreign policy stance regarding Ukraine. When the desired agreement with Ukraine regarding the price and the amount of gas could not be reached, Russia cut its gas deliveries to Ukraine (and with it, to a large part of Europe) in January 2006 and January 2009 (Anders, 2013). In 2009, Russia demonstrated its antagonism toward NATO in regard to the placement of the strategic missile defense system in Eastern Europe by threats to jam it from Kaliningrad and to place missiles in Kaliningrad (Putin, 2008). In order to compensate disagreements with NATO
and the diminishing perspectives in cooperating with the West, Russia also announced accelerated negotiations regarding the EAEC and the CSTO (Putin, 2008). In 2009, Russia concluded several treaties with Central Asian states regarding CSTO (Kremlin, 2009g).

2010-2014

In 2010, the pro-Russian President Yanukovich was elected in Ukraine. This change of regime briefly alleviated Russia’s concerns about Ukraine in terms of its pro-Western ambitions. Russia launched the Eurasian Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan without the hoped-for participation of Ukraine (Snyder, 2018, p. 81). For months, Russia conducted diplomatic negotiations with Ukraine, seeking to reach a comprehensive agreement. After many meetings between Medvedev and Yanukovich, Russia and Ukraine concluded the Kharkiv Treaty which comprised several agreements regarding Russo-Ukrainian cooperation in various industries, trade, and government agencies. For a large reduction of the gas prices, Yanukovych agreed to prolong the Russian lease of the naval base of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol until 2047 (Anders, 2013; UNIAN, 2010). This created cautious expectations for Russo-Ukrainian cooperation in the future. However, Russia’s further advances were rebuked by Kiev, and Putin’s hope to integrate Ukraine in the Customs Union did not materialize (Fenenko, 2012). There were indications that Russia increasingly would resort to economic and soft power in its international interactions regarding other states, too. In 2010 Russia established the Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy (Kremlin, 2010d). Among other diplomatic accomplishments of the year was an agreement with the EU on border cooperation with Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Poland (Kremlin, 2011b).

In 2011, there were additional indications that Russia wished to pursue a multi-vector cooperation with the CIS, the West, and Ukraine. Russia continued its integration of the Eurasian
space. The Eurasian Customs Union took full effect, thus creating a free trade zone within the CIS (Medvedev, 2011). In 2011, presidents Medvedev and Yanukovich met numerous times regarding Ukraine’s participation in the Customs Union, but without results. Russia’s success was limited to reaching a relatively unimportant agreement with Ukraine on protecting safety of space technologies (Kremlin, 2011c). However, Russia achieved a diplomatic victory when due to Russia’s lobbying, the EU’s Eastern Partnership dismissed Ukraine’s immediate bid for membership in the EU. It was achieved partially through the exploitation of the international opprobrium regarding Ukraine’s persecution of its former prime minister Yulia Timoshenko, a one-time Russia’s protege (Barabanov, 2012). Russia engaged in moderate cooperation with the West, reaching agreements with the US on transit of military cargo to Afghanistan through Russia and on disposal of plutonium (Kremlin, 2011d). In October 2011, eight CIS countries (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Tajikistan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) signed and subsequently ratified a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

However, NATO military exercises in the former Soviet states, particularly in Ukraine, created alarm in Russia, and Russian Foreign Ministry issued strongly worded statements regarding the 2011 Sea Breeze exercise which involved NATO and Ukraine (Smigielski, 2011). As an alternative, Russia suggested the establishment of a new common security organization with Europe to render the existing NATO-based framework as obsolete (Putin, 2011).

Throughout 2012, Russia conducted consultations with Ukraine regarding its potential cooperation with the Customs Union (Fenenko, 2012). In June, Russia organized a conference on Eurasian integration with the participation of experts from Russia, Europe and the CIS countries, including Ukraine (Summary, 2012). However, in spite of all these activities and many personal meetings between Putin and Yanukovich, there was little progress regarding Ukraine’s
participation in the Customs Union, or, potentially, in the Eurasian Economic Union. At a October 2012 Valdai conference Putin avoided answering a question whether Eurasian Union could be viable without Ukraine who, apparently preferred the EU to Eurasian Union (Putin, 2012e). Russia’s plans for the Eurasian Economic Union continued without Ukraine (Putin, 2012). Russia was more successful in its other pursuits of cooperation. In 2012, Russia became a member of the WTO and participated in the congress of regions and municipalities at the Council of Europe. Ukraine also was a member of these organizations, therefore Russia gained ground for interactions with Ukraine within international structures. Russia developed closer involvement with the G-8 and the forum of oil exporting countries (Kremlin, 2012b), thus gaining additional options for indirect influence on Ukraine. Russia was moderately successful regarding Ukraine in security-related foreign policy activities. Throughout 2012, Russia successfully managed to maintain formal cooperation with NATO while deepening its ties with the CSTO (Kremlin, 2012c; Kremlin, 2012d; Kremlin, 2013). Through all these activities, Russia was gaining potential leverage regarding Ukraine.

In 2013 Russia exerted intensive diplomatic and economic pressures on Ukraine as Ukraine was negotiating for an Association Agreement with the EU. In 2013, Putin had many personal meetings with Yanukovich. In May 2013, Ukraine signed an agreement with the Customs Union to become an observer member. However, this step lacked legal significance and was highly unpopular in Ukraine (Anders, 2013). Russia exerted direct economic pressure on Ukraine, when Putin quietly escalated a full-fledged unofficial trade war, first, blocking imports of Ukrainian steel pipes, chocolates and various agricultural products and soon, increasing it to a nearly total boycott of Ukrainian imports. As that Russia was Ukraine’s largest trading partner, this was a significant set-back for Ukraine (Anders, 2013). Concurrently with
this trade war, Russia applied inducements of buying $15 billion worth of Ukrainian government bonds and of cutting the price of natural gas for Ukraine. As a result, in December 2013, Russia and Ukraine signed a dozen agreements regarding trade and cooperation for transport and various industries. As a concession to Ukraine, Putin stated that he would not discuss the prospect of Ukraine joining the Customs Union. In return, Yanukovich postponed Ukraine’s negotiations with the EU (Isachenkov and Danilova, 2013). This began popular uprising in Ukraine which escalated further in the early 2014. While undergoing negotiations with Ukraine, Russia continued its preparation for launching the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014 (Putin, 2013a). Russia had moderate success in its other international activities, particularly regarding Syrian and Iran, but they had little effect on Russia gaining greater leverage with the West or Ukraine. By 2014, Russia’s foreign policy was overwhelmingly preoccupied by events in Ukraine.

As the popular unrest in Ukraine became more wide-spread and uncontrollable, Russia’s concerns about Ukraine heightened. On February 19, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an unusually strong statement condemning the situation in Ukraine and expressing outrage by the Western dismissal of violence and Nazism in Ukraine (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014a). By then, clashes among civilians, police forces, political organizations, government security services, and various ad hoc organizations had been continuing for months and Yanukovich had been deposed. In the absence of a government which Russia would consider legitimate, the Kremlin leaned toward direct military involvement in Ukraine. On February 25, a Russian parliamentary delegation visited the Crimea and welcomed its potential independence (Kozlowska, 2014). Shortly afterwards, the Russian special forces invaded Crimea and took over its strategic institutions. Commenting the events, Russian Foreign Ministry rather blandly
noted that these activities were in accordance with laws governing the military activities of the Black Sea Fleet personnel and equipment in Crimea (Ukrainskaya Pravda, 2014b). On March 1, the Russian parliament authorized Putin to use regular military force in Crimea as requested by the interim Crimean leaders, and, by March 2, the Crimea was under full Russian military control. After a quick change of local government, on March 16, the new Crimean government organized a referendum on independence and declared its intention to join Russia. On March 18, Russia formally granted Crimea’s request for reunification with Russia (Kremlin 2014a). The inclusion of Crimea in the Russian Federation proceeded swiftly and methodically, following Russian legal procedures, with the Russian government passing laws which integrated Crimea in the Russian administrative, legal, economic, and education systems. Putin’s representative in Crimea became a member of Russia’s Security Council (Kremlin 2014b). The commander of the Black Sea Fleet was appointed the governor of Crimea (Kremlin 2014c). On April 1, Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a defense of Russia’s takeover of Crimea from legalistic aspects. It pointed out that Russia had observed the Budapest memorandum even though the memorandum had no binding force in the particular situation. According to the Ministry, the events of 2014 fell beyond the scope of the memorandum. The Russian Foreign Ministry denounced the West for its ignoring the chaotic and violent conditions in Ukraine and noted that Ukraine lost Crimea because of the referendum and Ukrainian chauvinism (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2014). On April 2 Russia renounced its long-coveted, but no longer relevant Kharkiv Treaty with Ukraine, thus changing the existing legal basis for relations with Ukraine. By June 24, 2014 when Putin proposed to the Federation Council to withdraw Russian troops from Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea was a fait accompli (Kremlin, 2014d). However, events in Eastern Ukraine were developing along more complicated lines.
The military conflict between Russian-supported separatist territories of Donetsk and Lugansk continued, but Russia continued diplomatic negotiations with Ukraine, the OSCE, Germany, and France. Russia’s official policies regarding the separatist territories were evasive and cautious. Putin refused to recognize the referendums in Donetsk and Lugansk on their incorporation in Russia. He directly orchestrated the change of government from the leadership of Russian nationalists, including Girkin and Borodai to local Donbass leaders. Overall, Russia’s military support to the separatists was always less than they called for, except when they were at the verge of defeat by Ukraine (Sakwa, 2018, p.158).

Russia sought to end the military conflict between Kiev and the separatists through prolonged diplomatic negotiations which began in May 2014 with a meeting between representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE. Upon Russia’s insistence, the separatist representatives were included in the negotiations. This group negotiated throughout June with limited success. In July, the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France convened several times to urge the participants to go on with negotiations (Joint Declaration by the Foreign Ministers of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany, 2014). Throughout August, the representatives of Ukraine, Russia, the OSCE, and the separatists were negotiating in Minsk. However, the agreement was achieved only after a meeting between Putin and the new Ukrainian president Poroshenko and the Minsk Protocol was signed on September 5 (OSCE, 2014a; OSCE, 2014b) with supplementary details added on September 19 (OSCE, 2014c). The Minsk Protocol called for immediate ceasefire, the presence of the OSCE observers, greater autonomy for the separatist regions, amnesty to the separatists, and the withdrawal of armed groups. In spite of the peace treaty, the fighting in Eastern Ukraine continued with little indications of Ukraine or the separatists to reach a compromise (Interfax, 2014). Russia was the initiator of the negotiations.
and had ensured that the separatists’ interests were represented, but its position not singularly advantageous. While Russia was interested in gaining leverage over Ukraine through supporting the separatists, the Eastern Ukrainian separatists had their own agenda, and Russia’s control over them in reality was less than Russia desired. This limited Russia’s options for negotiating with Ukraine (Sakwa, 2018).

While official negotiations were stagnating, an unofficial meeting of foreign policy experts took place in Boisto, Finland, in August 2014. Its participants included noted Russian foreign policy experts which were explicitly associated with the pragmatic approach and prominent foreign policy experts from the US. There were no Ukrainian representatives. The Boisto meeting produced a 24-step peace proposal. Its main points called for the removal of Ukrainian National Guard units from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the withdrawal of regular Russian and Ukrainian army units; ceasefire under the UN and the OSCE supervision; return of refugees and investigation of war crimes; the preservation of Russian-Ukrainian economic relations; the protection of Russian language rights; establishing a non-bloc status of Ukraine; and a discussion of Crimea’s legal status. In many ways, this document embodied the principles of pragmatist approach to foreign policy: in addition to the practice of discreet and informal diplomacy in producing the document, it placed emphasis on economic cooperation; it showed inclination to a mutually advantageous compromise; it sought to avoid military involvement; it invoked international law; and it minimized the participation of minor powers from the decision at the expense of major powers. The issue of Russian speakers was mentioned at the end of other, apparently more important considerations. While the meeting noted that it was not an official meeting, clearly, it was part of back-channel activities which the Kremlin conducted in order to solve the festering situation (Friedman, 2014; Kommersant, 2014;
Smagly, 2018). A few days later, similar ideas were echoed in Putin’s 7-point proposal presented on September 3, 2014 which called for ending the violence, the withdrawal of Ukrainian armed forces, international monitoring, and addressing the humanitarian concerns. It had more emphasis on protecting the separatists’ interests, but it also indicated Russia’s interest to reach settlement over the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Kremlin, 2014d). The Minsk Protocol agreement was achieved two days later, thus minimizing the impact of these plans; however, the presence of these alternative peace plans clearly indicated that Russian foreign policy was being conducted following pragmatic principles of diverse diplomatic activities.

These peace-making efforts were not supported by the Eastern Ukrainian separatists, and thus military hostilities continued throughout 2014 and beyond. While the hostilities in Eastern Ukraine raged on, in October 2014 Russia ratified The Eurasian Union Treaty. This additionally signified Russia’s commitment to flexible diplomacy. However, by this time it was clear that Russia would no longer concern itself with coercing Ukraine to become a member of the Eurasian Union and its free trade regime. Ironically, Russia had to be content with granting free trade economic zone to Crimea (Kremlin, 2014f).

The period from 2010 to 2014 in Russian foreign policy reflected a complicated amalgamation of pragmatism and nationalism. There was marked increase and temporary dominance of nationalism in 2013-2014, yet pragmatism in Russian foreign policy remained evident. Outwardly, Russia’s takeover of Crimea seemed opportunistic and driven by the surge of nationalistic sentiments. In reality, it often followed the pragmatic principles of conducting foreign policy providently, with minimal military confrontation. One may think that fervent nationalistic rhetoric surrounding the annexation of Crimea was merely a propagandistic veneer by the Russian government. However, the Crimean takeover was largely facilitated by the
prevalence of Russian nationalistic sentiments in the Crimean population and in Russia. Also, the invocation of nationalistic principles to justify the Crimean annexation indicated that the Russian government realized how strongly nationalistic sentiments resonated with the Russian public. Furthermore, if these sentiments echoed in the Russian public and the Crimean population, Russian government figures likely were not immune from them either. This suggests that Russia’s decision to annex Crimea was based on identity-based nationalistic aspirations beyond pragmatic considerations. Similarly, Russia’s involvement in Eastern Ukraine also was based on interactions between nationalism and pragmatism. It is likely that Russia orchestrated a secession movement in the Eastern Ukraine as leverage to weaken the new Ukrainian government and to force Ukraine into accepting federalization. A federalized Ukraine would be less likely to enact pro-Western policies or to seek membership in the EU and NATO (Kofman et al 2017). However, pressures of nationalism forced Russian government to extend its involvement in Eastern Ukraine beyond its original intentions. As Ukrainian nationalism in Ukraine grew, a mutually reinforcing relationship developed between Russian nationalism and Ukrainian nationalism, thus adding to the possibility of confrontation. Russian nationalistic discourse for years had advocated such concepts as the Russian world and Ukraine’s belonging to Eurasia. When these concepts were assailed by Ukrainian policies, it created a powerful Russian nationalistic pushback in Russia as well as in Eastern Ukraine, thus forcing Russia to enact foreign policies which went beyond the principles of pragmatism.

Conclusion

A cliché regarding Russian nationalism claims that Russian nationalists had provided the ideological basis for Russian politicians and diplomats to justify Russia’s aggression in Ukraine (Laurinavicius, 2014). Indeed, many Russian nationalists had advocated a direct military action
against Ukraine in support of the Russian speaking population and the incorporation of Ukraine with Russia. However, the road to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2014 was not paved by Russian nationalistic prescriptions alone. It was contingent on external events, domestic developments, and it was also conditioned by the pragmatic input. The 2004 Orange Revolution and the looming presence of NATO had marked a turning point in Russian foreign policy discourse. Most public figures and politicians in Russia regarded these events as threat to Russia’s international security and, indirectly, to Russian domestic stability. The 2004 events in Ukraine unified hitherto fragmented Russian nationalists both ideationally and institutionally. This consolidation was exemplified by the 2004 convergence of political party Rodina, well-known Russian nationalistic figures, and a popular nationalistic publication Zavtra (Titkov, 2006). In 2007 and 2012, the establishment of the Russkiy Mir foundation and Izborsk Club provided outlets for publishing anti-Ukrainian policy suggestions. These developments facilitated the growth of nationalism in the Russian foreign policy discourse. Also, a contested presidential election in Russia in 2011, contributed to the rise of nationalism, as the Kremlin increasingly relied on nationalist support for its domestic legitimacy.

The pragmatist school of thought also underwent organizational consolidation with the establishment of new think tanks such as Valdai Discussion Club (2004) and continuously presented their own solutions for the post-2004 period of Russian foreign policy, focusing on Ukraine’s integration in the Russian-led Eurasian Union framework. In 2004-2009 Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine was still focusing on cooperation, albeit with reservations. However, there was increased support of more assertive policy, likely reflecting the exhaustion of pragmatic non-coercive suggestions, pressures of nationalism and domestic and external tensions.
It is apparent that in Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine, some nationalistic and pragmatist ideas found more fertile ground than other ideas. A brief overview of successful and failed Russian foreign policies follows.

In 2004-2014 many pragmatism suggestions for diplomatic negotiations, economic, and increasing Russia’s influence in Ukraine’s domestic politics were broadly successful. Among Russia’s diplomatic successes were 2010 Kharkov Treaty, 2011 diplomatic activities regarding the EU, and 2013 negotiations with Yanukovich. The Kharkov Treaty was an example of efficient amalgamation of diplomacy with economic pressures. Russia gained security for its Black Sea Fleet, and Ukraine in exchange for discounted gas. Russian foreign policy makers were explicit about the *quid pro quo* character of this treaty (Den, 2014). In 2011, Russia succeeded in isolating Ukraine in its bid for the EU partnership through back-door diplomatic channels. Prolonged, but ultimately successful negotiations with Yanukovich in 2012-2013 were made irrelevant by the EuroMaidan. However, Russia continued to diplomatic activities which resulted in the Minsk and Minsk II agreements between the separatists, Ukraine, and Russia (Pifer, 2017; Wheatley, 2015).

Relatively, Russia had success in bilateral diplomatic activities. Putin had established close ties with many prominent European political figures, including leaders and former leaders of Germany, Italy, and Czechia who also had ties with Russia’s energy companies. Russia also expanded its informal and cultural presence in the UK, France, Hungary, Poland, and the US (Snyder, 2018, p. 100). This helped to Russia to conduct diplomatic campaigns to undermine Ukraine internationally as well as to gain foothold in these countries’ domestic politics. In 2014, Russia was conducting extensive diplomatic interactions with Germany and France, to reach a settlement with Ukraine. After the failure of the first Minsk Protocol, Russia organized the
Normandy Quartet, consisting of Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany, which continued negotiations over Eastern Ukraine. Also, in conducting Ukrainian policies, Russia relied on selected international organizations, particularly the OSCE. However, Russia’s bilateral activities regarding Ukraine consistently excluded the US which Russia regarded as openly pro-Ukrainian (Wheatley, 2015).

Regarding Russia’s presence in Ukraine’s domestic politics, Russia’s support to President Yanukovich and Prime Minister Timoshenko were particularly notable. When, in spite of Russia’s support, Yanukovich lost the election in 2004, Russia established working relationship with pro-Western President Yushchenko; at the same time Russia also backed his political opposition including Yanukovich and Timoshenko. Russia granted Timoshenko a few economic concessions, and, after Yanukovich became president, Timoshenko was regarded as a useful ally to pressure Yanukovich, as was seen in events related to Timoshenko arrest (Barabanov, 2012; Dubnov, 2005).

While Russia’s diplomatic activities were moderately successful, many of them turned out to be short-term success. Russian diplomatic victories, such as 2010 Kharkiv Treaty, were largely unpopular in Ukraine. Also, Russia’s energy-based pressures, such as the gas wars in 2006 and 2009, while effective in short-term, created long-term negative consequences, encouraging Ukraine to seek closer ties with the West and find alternative energy supplies. The short-lived effects of Russia’s diplomacy and economic pressures were ironic, considering that, in theory, pragmatists advocated temporary alliances as the foundation of foreign policy. This was not lost on many pragmatic foreign policy experts which noted that Russia was fighting a losing battle regarding Ukraine and should turn attention to the East.
Regarding Russia’s military involvement in Ukraine, pragmatists noted that it achieved the immediate goal of preventing Ukraine joining NATO in the foreseeable future. However, it also restricted Russia’s diplomatic options, it did not curtail Ukraine’s ties with the EU and the US, and it eliminated hopes that Ukraine would ever be integrated in the Eurasian Union or would be amenable to cooperating with Russia in the future. Russia’s takeover of Crimea, while not advocated, was generally accepted by pragmatists as a strategic gain with relatively small costs. However, pragmatists were opposed to Russia’s involvement in Eastern Ukraine which they regarded as a foreign policy disaster.

In 2010-2014, many nationalist ideas took hold in Russian foreign policy. Among most prominent ideas rooted in nationalism was the emphasis on military solutions to solve foreign policy problems. Its epitome was seen in Russia’s military engagement in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea seemed to be clearly related to ideas advocated by Dugin and other nationalists (Dugin, 1997) who had repeatedly called for outright occupation of Crimea. As currently there has been no discussion of return of Crimea to Ukraine from Russia, it indicates that Crimea might be permanently incorporated in Russia. Thus, it probably was the most successful to-date manifestation of nationalistic foreign policy ideas.

The increasing focus on Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine’s separatist regions was also likely due to the influence of nationalistic ideas. Explicit official support of their demands for linguistic and political autonomy was included in Russian citizenship laws and in policies which were largely pragmatic, such as the Minsk Protocol in 2014. Concerns over the Eastern Ukrainian refugees was incorporated in Russia’s negotiations with Ukraine in 2014 likely due to the nationalistic ideas which resonated with Russian public. Nationalist ideas also successfully rallied Russian volunteer troops in Eastern Ukraine. While Russian government avoided explicit
association with these volunteers, they were organized by the Russian Orthodox Church which was closely associated with the state and which publicly blessed the volunteer troops and the Cossack regiments departing for Eastern Ukraine (Arnold, 2020; Kofman et al 2017; Reuters, 2015; EU Today, 2018). Also, nationalistic ideas regarding Russo-Ukrainian common cultural affiliations, particularly the Kiev Rus, the Orthodox Christianity, the Soviet Union, and the World War II, became mainstays of the official discourse and were often invoked in Russian foreign policy activities. Even if these references were merely lip-service to popular sentiments, they indicated that Russian foreign policy makers saw them as important enough to reference them in policies.

At the same time, there were prominent nationalistic ideas which failed to gain footing in policy. The most prominent failure was the concept of Novorossiya. It was temporarily adopted in 2014 but abandoned within months by Russian foreign policy makers. Putin mentioned Novorossiya in great detail in his speech on April 17, 2014 (Putin, 2014). The concept of Novorossiya soon disappeared from the official discourse because Russia found the concept of Novorossiya incompatible with reintegration of the Donbass region with Ukraine along the lines of the Minsk agreement (Kofman et al 2017; Kolesnikov, 2015; Laruelle, 2015). However, the term Novorossiya remained widely used in Eastern Ukraine. Self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk republics formed the confederation of Novorossiya and the United Armed Forces of Novorossiya (Kolesnikov, 2015; Snyder, 2018, p.187). In addition to failing in Russian foreign policy, this concept also did not resonate with the population beyond the separatist regions. As it turned out, large swaths of Southeastern Ukraine preferred autonomy within Ukraine instead of being included in Novorossiya (Sakwa, 2017, p. 157-159).
Russian foreign policy officials avoided association with particularly odious nationalist ideologues such as Igor Girkin. After the Kremlin had announced its preference for diplomatic negotiations with Ukraine and had ousted Girkin from the leadership of Donetsk, Girkin officially declared his opposition to Putin’s whose foreign policies he regarded as insufficiently anti-Western. Experts noted that in this and other disassociations from nationalists, Putin sought to return Russian foreign policy to a more pragmatic course (Kofman et al, 2017; Waller, 2016).

What factors could be identified as relevant in affecting the balance between pragmatism and nationalism in Russo-Ukrainian policies? The Russian foreign policy discourse had presented various pragmatic and nationalistic ideas and policy suggestions to Russian foreign policy makers. Yet the degree of official support to pragmatistic and nationalistic ideas regarding Ukraine was linked to domestic and international developments. The authority of pragmatism was compromised by its lack of success countering Ukraine’s pro-Western ambitions. Prolonged diplomatic negotiations between Russia and Ukraine had brought negligible results in the long run. On the other hand, nationalism resonated with the public and policy makers, particularly regarding Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. As the Kremlin needed popular support, nationalistic foreign policy ideas became particularly alluring. Finally, problems associated with Ukraine simultaneously encompassed many identity and geopolitical aspects, thus easily accommodating both nationalism and pragmatism. Therefore, as the external pressures on Russia mounted due to the 2013-2014 upheavals in Ukraine, a military confrontation could be justified by both nationalists and pragmatists. Such convergence was temporary, as both approaches differentiated Russia’s involvement in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and had divergent visions for Ukraine, but in the early 2014 it created a powerful ideational incentive for confrontation with Ukraine.
Nationalists had actively advocated direct military actions toward Ukraine, and thus Russia’s takeover of Crimea often is interpreted as based on nationalistic principles. At the same time, by the end of 2013, Russian foreign policy makers had largely exhausted the diplomatic means. As a result, a decisive military action supported by both pragmatists and nationalists. For nationalists, the military confrontation was inherently preferable, in accordance with their views of Russia’s foreign policy. For pragmatists, it was an action which did not reflect their general preference, but was deemed efficacious at the time. Therefore, both approaches approved the Crimean annexation. However, the importance and the entrenchment of nationalism was illustrated by the aftermath of the Crimean annexation. When Russian foreign policy makers sought to return to more pragmatic policies, they were contravened by the rising Russian nationalistic sentiments both in Eastern Ukraine and in Russia. Thus, Russia’s prolonged involvement in Eastern Ukraine catered to the nationalistic ideas which had gained foothold in the Russian foreign policy discourse. These dynamics indicate that both pragmatism and nationalism both played a role in Russia’s conflict with Ukraine.

In sum, from 2000 through 2014, Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine reflected a combination of pragmatic and nationalistic approaches, with a distinct dominance of nationalism in 2013-2014.
### Nationalism:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy suggestions from unofficial discourse</th>
<th>Reflected in official discourse?</th>
<th>Reflected in actual policies?</th>
<th>Were they successful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eurasia should incorporate Ukraine or its parts</td>
<td>Sporadically, mostly implicitly (Foreign Policy Concept 2013)</td>
<td>Mostly implicitly, except for the annexation of Crimea</td>
<td>Minimally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex parts of Ukraine or to various degrees federalize Ukraine</td>
<td>Frequently, particularly post-2008 (Putin’s references to Ukraine as not a state, Valdai Speech 2013 Sporadically)</td>
<td>Yes, post-2013, also support of autonomy for Eastern Ukraine in Minsk Protocol</td>
<td>Partially; annexation of Crimea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on common cultural values with Ukraine/Russian World</td>
<td>Yes, frequently (Presidential Addresses, 2005-2014; Foreign Policy Concept 2008, 2013, Valdai Speech 2013; the Compatriot Law 2010)</td>
<td>Yes, mentioned in Minsk Protocol</td>
<td>Partially (not the way it was planned)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pragmatism:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy suggestions from unofficial discourse</th>
<th>Reflected in official discourse?</th>
<th>Reflected in actual policies?</th>
<th>Were they successful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic integration in Eurasian organizations or free trade area</td>
<td>Frequently (Presidential Addresses, 2002-2014)</td>
<td>Yes, continuous negotiations, Ukraine’s formal participation</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomacy, cooperation with major powers and int’l org.: the UN, the OSCE, BRIC to isolate Ukraine</td>
<td>Frequently (Munich Speech, 2007; National Security Concept 2009; Presidential Addresses 2008-2014; Valdai Speech 2013) Frequent ly, but much less since 2007 (Presidential Addresses 2001-2014)</td>
<td>Partially, ally ing with Germany, France, stopping Ukraine’s bid for the EU and NATO in 2008, 2011, inclusion of the OSCE</td>
<td>Partially, temporarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious cooperation with Europe/the West</td>
<td>Frequently (Presidential Addresses 2001-2013; Valdai Speech 2013) Yes (more important post- 2010)</td>
<td>Partially, maintaining relations with the EU, NATO</td>
<td>Minimally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of international law</td>
<td>Yes, post-2008 (Presidential Addresses 2008-2013)</td>
<td>Selected application (Kosovo precedent for Crimea)</td>
<td>No (no credibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian speakers/Eastern Ukraine as auxiliary argument</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (Minsk Protocol)</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military involvement as secondary means</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, ongoing diplomacy, limited military support to separatists</td>
<td>Partially</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A SUMMARY TABLE: Russian foreign policy ideas regarding Ukraine and their reflection in policies
CHAPTER VI. Conclusion

An inquiry into the ideational motivation present in current Russian foreign policy, this dissertation demonstrated the influence of nationalistic and pragmatic ideas in Russia’s military confrontations with Georgia and Ukraine. This examination of the two ideational frameworks developed new insights on Russia’s international activities and explained their oscillation between concert and confrontation. This chapter, first, summarizes the role of ideas which have shaped Russian foreign policy. Then, it reviews the contribution of nationalism and pragmatism regarding Russia’s policy toward Georgia and Ukraine and evaluates the role of these ideational frameworks in the policy shift from concert to confrontation. This chapter concludes with implications of this research for the theory of foreign policy and international relations, the future research and policy.

1. Ideas and foreign policy, revisited

Foreign policy ideas, while fundamentally important to foreign policy decisions, inherently exist in conjunction with other factors. Broad ideational frameworks condition the worldviews of the participants of foreign policy making and influence the formation of foreign policy. Domestic political, economic, and social developments affect the rise or demise of certain foreign policy plans. Internal power distribution within a state and the specific interests of policy makers can decide what foreign policy ideas gain official approval. A state’s economic condition restricts its capacity for enacting foreign policy thus moderating its foreign policy proposals. Social changes and other identity-based factors also shape foreign policy ideas. And, most importantly, foreign policy ideas are influenced by changes in the international environment: international crises, threats to national security, and other external pressures. These factors interact in complicated and often covert ways; their relative weight is difficult to establish, but,
summarily, they are always present when ideas transform into policy. As these elements cannot be clearly separated from the intellectual foundation which frames thinking about foreign policy, the examination of the role of ideas in foreign policy may become circular and overly introspective. However, foreign policy invariably reflects changes in the understanding and interpretation of foreign policy problems.

Interaction between broad ideational frameworks, domestic conditions, and external pressures is evident in the Russian foreign policy ideas as they appear in the foreign policy discourse. Two conceptual approaches – nationalism and pragmatism – define the intellectual background of Russian foreign policy and shape the development of distinct, often incompatible, foreign policy ideas. Domestic developments – the centralization of power under Putin, Russia’s economic recovery, new institutions, social changes, and Russian national identity issues – have contributed to the formation of foreign policy ideas. An inhospitable international environment has also modified the focus of Russian foreign policy. Russia’s decades-long tension with the West and a perception of marginalization and exclusion, as exemplified by the expansion of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe, created a chronic foreign policy crisis which conditioned the development of foreign policy ideas. The urgency of international pressures was an important factor in the shaping of Russian foreign policy ideas. But, fundamentally, the shift from a concert to a confrontation-based approach in the post-2000 Russian foreign policy originated in the changes to Russia’s understanding of the existing world order and by varying interpretations of international events, not merely from changes in international realities or Russia’s materialistic capabilities (Sakwa, 2017, p. 320). Therefore, this dissertation has focused on the presence of various foreign policy ideas in the discourse and their further reflection in Russian foreign policy.
The question about the real-life effects of ideas on foreign policy remains. One cannot say with full certainty that President Putin and his narrow circle of associates have been decisively swayed by their adherence to a particular worldview or ideational framework in their foreign policy decisions. Putin’s advisors at various times have included nationalists and pragmatists. Within the Kremlin, some groups have been identified with distinct ideational affiliations, such as the military with nationalism and the foreign ministry, including the Foreign Minister Lavrov, with pragmatism; however, there is little certainty about definite connections. Nevertheless, as Russia’s President and his associates rely on formal and informal advisors whose foreign policy ideas have been voiced in the discourse, the opinions of these advisors likely have contributed toward specific policies. Also, seeking popular support under growing domestic opposition, Putin has increasingly associated himself with the nationalistic platform by referencing history, religion, Russian identity, and other mainstays of nationalistic rhetoric. It became increasingly reflected in his foreign policy decisions and culminated in Russia’s conflict with Ukraine in 2014.

Even though the Russian President and, to a lesser degree, a few other high-standing policy makers are the most important Russian foreign policy actors, this research focused mostly on less perceptible changes in the milieu and in the discourse of foreign policy – the rise of new foreign policy participants and their contribution to the development and presentation of foreign policy ideas to the official discourse. Most high-level foreign policy advisors, including advisors to the President, have been closely associated with think tanks where their policy ideas were developed and published. As think tanks have provided an institutional framework for the articulation and dissemination of foreign policy suggestions, they are intriguing yet undervalued structures in the milieu of foreign policy. Most Russian think tanks are clearly affiliated with
pragmatic and nationalistic conceptual frameworks. While Russian think tanks are often thought to generate ideas convenient to Putin and his inner circle, they, in fact, have harshly criticized his foreign policy and have contributed to Russian foreign policy discourse in some rather unexpected ways (Zakem et al, 2018). The Russian World Foundation has drawn public attention to the Russian diaspora and related identity issues; the Valdai Discussion Club has contributed to the concept of Russia’s Eurasian economic integration. Furthermore, think tanks have helped to delineate and define both nationalistic and pragmatic approaches to foreign policy. The findings of this research suggest that think tanks and their participants have served as an important source of policy suggestions and ensured the delivery of these ideas to official circles where they were further translated into foreign policy.

In this convergence of domestic and international developments which have conditioned the development of Russian foreign policy ideas, the Russian ideational frameworks of nationalism and pragmatism deserve closer attention.

2. The value of nationalism and pragmatism

This dissertation is built on the premise that nationalism and pragmatism are two significant ideational frameworks at the core of Russian foreign policy. As was noted in the first chapters, the strict juxta positioning of these two ideational frameworks, pragmatism and nationalism may be somewhat arbitrary. However, this binary view helps to conceptualize the range, commonalities, and divergence of ideas which are found in Russian foreign policy discourse and which have influenced subsequent policy development. Policy experts and adherents of both frameworks have noted that these two approaches are sufficiently separate and are often openly oppositional. For example, the Russian nationalist Alexander Dugin has criticized the elitist character of the pragmatist foreign policy. In return, many noted pragmatists
have continuously dismissed nationalist foreign policy suggestions as arcane or inappropriate (Saprykin, 2019). More importantly, both approaches have expressed different interpretations of Russia’s international role, its obstacles, and desired goals. Therefore, the conceptual division between nationalism and pragmatism grants an opportunity to appraise at Russian foreign policy from lesser-examined aspects and to augment our understanding of Russian foreign policy.

If, as the famous saying goes, “Wars begin in minds of men”, then the seeds of war were sown decades before the actual military confrontations with Georgia and Ukraine. As popular dissatisfaction with Russia’s international marginalization grew, nationalists asserted that conflicts along former Soviet borders, particularly involving Ukraine, due to the growing Western threats, would be inevitable. To them, the preferred answer these threats was a military response. Pragmatists, while similarly dissatisfied with Russia’s position in the post-Cold War world order, noted that such conflicts, while plausible, could be avoided through a concert-like cooperation among the major powers which would allocate to Russia its former spheres of influence. Economic and diplomatic activity was the pragmatists’ preferred policy to counter international pressures. To compensate for Russia’s lack of success regarding the West, Georgia, and Ukraine, pragmatists contemplated various concert-based approaches. These ideas were often handicapped by domestic and international developments. Before Russia entered its military confrontation with Georgia and Ukraine, there had been prolonged diplomatic and economic negotiations, interspersed by some nationalistic tendencies, which showed that in both cases, war was not necessarily the preferred foreign policy instrument for Russia. Rather, both military confrontations were brought about by a combination of domestic upheavals in Georgia and Ukraine and the associated Western involvement. However, the interpretation of these events
by Russia through the differing lenses of nationalism and pragmatism influenced the course and the aftermath of the initial confrontation.

3. A summary comparison of the two wars in the context of nationalism and pragmatism

Russia’s conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine present two examples of the influence of nationalism and pragmatism under pressing circumstances. Both conflicts arose in a situation where Russia’s military action was easily induced and, in both cases, could have escalated into a prolonged confrontation; however, in Georgia, the military conflict was brief and limited, but in Ukraine, the conflict became extended. This dissertation asserts that these differences may be at least partially explained in terms of nationalism and pragmatism. During the Russo-Georgian war, Russian nationalistic foreign policy ideas had not been as consolidated or prevalent. The pragmatism principles were the officially accepted foreign policy guidelines, and the idea of a concert-based solution to the problem of Georgia was viable. Georgia was of relatively moderate importance to Russia regarding both its strategic value and identity-based factors. However, in the six years between the Russo-Georgian war and Russia’s conflict with Ukraine, there were changes in the foreign policy discourse. Due to domestic and international developments, nationalism had become consolidated and gained popularity. Various problems associated with Ukraine gained importance in Russian foreign policy agenda due to their significance to Russian identity and strategic considerations. For several years, many pragmatic foreign policies regarding Ukraine had failed. When threats to Russia’s security and Russian speakers arising from the 2014 change of regime in Ukraine appeared imminent, the confrontation was resolutely advocated by Russian nationalists who championed the further escalation of war which, fueled by its popular support in Russia, intensified the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine in spite of objections from the pragmatists.
These developments of policy ideas were not isolated, and various international and domestic interactions played an important part in shaping Russian foreign policy ideas. Nationalistic sentiments in Georgia and Ukraine prescribed many anti-Russian policies, and these countries often assumed a deliberately confrontational stance toward Russia. The expansion of the EU and NATO in Eastern Europe and the ambitions of Georgia and Ukraine to join them placed Russia under considerable pressure. However, Russian nationalistic and pragmatic perception of these problems differed and generated disparate policy suggestions. By 2008, Russia had regained considerable international influence. Even if Russia had become vocal in its dissatisfaction with the encroachment of the West, Russia had generally promising international perspectives. Thus, pragmatic suggestions to halt Georgia’s ambitions regarding pro-Russian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to prevent Georgia from joining NATO through economic and diplomatic actions were feasible. By 2013-2014, the domestic and international context had become less favorable to Putin and Russia. It had become clear that Russia had little influence over Ukraine’s pro-Western ambitions which were strongly supported by the EU, NATO, and the US. By 2013, President Putin had also experienced significant domestic opposition to his power in the preceding years and sought to consolidate his domestic legitimacy by adopting more nationalistic policies. Ukraine had become of greater significance to Russia in terms of national identity and strategic consideration, in comparison to Georgia a few years earlier. These converging contextual aspects largely determined the differing character of the two wars and contributed to the growing dominance of the nationalistic approach in Russian foreign policy.

In the case of Georgia, the pragmatic approach prevailed in the preceding years, during, and after the war. Russian nationalists previously advocated strong military measures against
Georgia, but their voices had been largely dismissed in the official discourse. The onset of the war was unexpected and probably unavoidable due to Georgia’s provocative actions. But even though Russia’s counteroffensive in response to Georgia’s military incursion in the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia seemed to many like a clearly nationalist action, it was not followed by prolonged involvement or territorial annexation which was called for by nationalist foreign policy factions. The war also highlighted some deficiencies in the Russian military response, thus further weakening the nationalists’ argument for an extended confrontation. The war was waged largely along pragmatic principles and, after Georgia was ousted from the secessionist territories, Russia sought a cease-fire and international mediation. Pragmatists viewed Russia’s involvement in the disputed territories as an overly costly liability, dismissed the identity-based associations which were invoked by nationalists, and successfully opposed their incorporation within the Russian Federation. Pragmatists had more concern about Georgia’s pro-NATO plans which they largely resolved through diplomatic means and generally regarded Georgia as a limited threat to Russia. Once Georgia’s threats to secessionist territories had been nullified and Georgia’s plans for re-incorporation of the secessionist territories voided, the Russo-Georgian peace was concluded and, apart from a few minor border clashes, there has been no further military involvement. It may have also been that pragmatic policy makers were alarmed by the presence of nationalistic sentiments in Russian foreign policy discourse and sought to solve the problem of Georgia through an internationally acceptable compromise to lessen the growing influence of the nationalists. Overall, there are few indications that Putin was influenced by nationalistic ideas regarding Georgia, but there are significant signs that his policy followed pragmatic suggestions.
Regarding Ukraine, the pragmatic approach largely dominated Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine for almost a decade after the Orange revolution of 2004. Nevertheless, the nationalistic approach became increasingly influential over time, and its calls for a more assertive policy toward Ukraine resonated with the public. By 2013-2014, nationalism became dominant in the official discourse, as the pragmatist-advocated diplomatic negotiations had largely failed. At this time, the political upheaval in Ukraine had raised urgent concerns for Russian foreign policy makers regarding the safety of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, Ukraine’s plans to join NATO, and associated threats to Russia’s security at large, as well as growing unease regarding prospects for the Russian-speakers of Eastern Ukraine and Ukraine’s anti-Russian sentiments. As these issues were important for Russian nationalist and pragmatist thinkers, the public-at-large, and the Russian legislature, the Putin government’s official decision in favor of military involvement was a veritable certainty. The convergence of nationalism and pragmatism was short-lived. Even though Russia’s annexation of Crimea was largely supported by both pragmatists and nationalists, they parted ways on Crimea’s further geopolitical role, the importance of its ethno-historic associations, and its effects on Russia’s future foreign policy. Subsequently, while being moderately supportive of the annexation of Crimea, pragmatists vocally opposed Russia’s further involvement in Eastern Ukraine. Overall, Russia’s policy in Ukraine in 2014 signified the importance of nationalism in Russian foreign policy thinking, and pragmatic suggestions for Ukraine were largely dismissed by Putin.

Contradictions and paradoxes abound when one compares Russia’s involvement in Georgia and Ukraine in terms of nationalism and pragmatism. Regarding Georgia, in spite of Russian nationalistic sentiments which had advocated Russia’s military involvement in Georgia, the war was conducted along pragmatic lines. By contrast, in Ukraine, in spite of the prolonged
prevalence of pragmatism, nationalistic policy quickly spiraled out of control. Paradoxically, the former corrupt regimes in Georgia and Ukraine were more receptive to Russian pragmatic policies in comparison to the new, more democratic domestic regimes in Georgia and Ukraine which handicapped Russia’s pragmatist policies. Ironically, the rise of nationalism in Georgia and Ukraine stimulated the rise of nationalism in Russia. It is likely that without a resurgence of nationalism in Georgia and Ukraine, Russian nationalistic ideas would have had less support at home and would not have resonated so readily with Russian society and its policy makers. In 2014, when Russian policy makers sought to moderate the nationalistic-inspired policy and to return to a more pragmatic approach toward Ukraine, they were impeded by nationalism at home and in Eastern Ukraine as separatist Russian-speakers showed little inclination to follow the Kremlin unequivocally (ICG, 2019; Reuters, 2020). Ironically, pragmatists who had opposed the incorporation of Georgian breakaway territories on account of anticipated costs, ended supporting the annexation of Crimea which created a considerable financial burden for Russia.

In addition, the authority of pragmatism was eroded by its arbitrary application of international law and the interpretation of state sovereignty. Invocation of international law and state sovereignty had hitherto been a mainstay of pragmatic principles, but their inherent inconsistencies were highlighted by Russia’s involvement in Ukraine. This provided greater credibility for identity-based arguments of nationalists who noted the pragmatists’ equivocation. If the 1990s referenda in the Crimea in favor of reunification with Russia had been dismissed by pragmatists at the time, the Crimean referendum of 2014 was invoked as a legal argument by pragmatists. Pragmatists’ previously castigated Kosovo breakaway from Serbia became retrofitted in their legalistic support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By contrast, nationalists had
been more consistent in their support of Russian speakers in Ukraine and the break-away territories of Georgia.

By 2014, nationalism had become preeminent in Russian foreign policy discourse and in policy. Its dominance was due to a convergence of several factors. Over the previous decade, Russian nationalism had become more consolidated as an intellectual framework and had gradually gained the approval of the Russian public and official circles. The official, pragmatism-based policies in Ukraine had ignominiously failed while the importance of Ukraine in terms of Russian national identity, security, and economy had become heightened. The nationalistic worldview of Russia and Russians being threatened by a Western take-over of Ukraine struck a popular chord in Russia and was partly supported by pragmatists. If nationalistic suggestions for Georgia could be dismissed by pragmatists as unrealistic and disproportionate, the 2013-2014 developments in Ukraine were seen by both nationalists and pragmatists as a threat to Russia which warranted an immediate response.

In sum, the Russian foreign policy shift in terms of Georgia and Ukraine illustrates a transformation from pragmatist-based concert-based approach to nationalistic-inspired confrontation. Both wars had differing underlying ideational frameworks which affected the character of the war. They were also conditioned by the domestic developments and changing international context. Nevertheless, even though nationalism had become dominant in the foreign policy discourse due to a number of conditions, Russia’s extended involvement in Ukraine might not have happened without the existing nationalistic ideational framework which was essential for the policy transformation from concert to confrontation.

4. Final insights and implications for further research
This dissertation contributes to the research of the role of ideas in foreign policy and international relations. There have been calls for a closer examination of Russian identity-based factors to understand the tension within Russian foreign policy and the “newly (re)constructed threat images” (Kratochvil, 2004, p. 14). Nevertheless, in the past decade, there has been sparse research regarding the complex and vibrant ideational milieu of Russian foreign policy and how its contributions have been translated into foreign policy or have contributed to changes in the state identity. The examination of these ideas contributes to a more complete understanding of the identity-based factors in Russian foreign policy. This dissertation, through the examination of nationalistic and pragmatist ideational frameworks and their presence in the foreign policy discourse and policies, fills some gaps in this respect.

Even though the examination of the ideational motivations in Russia’s conflicts with Georgia uncovered many interesting and unexpected insights in Russian foreign policy, it is difficult to draw a definite conclusion about the decisive role of ideas in Russian foreign policy. This research highlighted many relevant ideas which were clearly associated with policy. Yet it is difficult to generalize about their relative weight or their permanence. Their influence depends on contextual factors, and the examination of ideas, external conditions, and actions often is handicapped by circular logic. Nevertheless, this research found that nationalism and pragmatism, fueled by domestic and international developments, likely did play a role in Russia’s foreign policy decisions, including its military involvement; these ideas also likely affected the intensity and the duration of confrontation. However, further analysis of the dynamics among the policy makers in the Kremlin and their ideational affiliations should clarify why some foreign policy ideas were favored while others remained marginalized.
This research has demonstrated that the influence of an ideational framework can be transitory, as when the prolonged dominance of pragmatism was supplanted by nationalism. These broad frameworks can also modify their focus or mainstays. In the 1990s, Westernism was partially absorbed by pragmatism. Currently, some elements of Eurasianism have been incorporated into pragmatism, which has increasingly focused on the economic aspects of Russia’s influence over Greater Eurasia and increased cooperation with China. Thus, Eurasianism as a foreign policy concept might become either more closely affiliated with pragmatism or develop as a separate approach, disassociating itself from its original nationalism and focusing on more supra-nationalistic aspects. There are indications that pragmatism would incorporate China in the concept Greater Eurasia in the light of Russia’s failures in Eastern Europe and the lack of perspectives regarding cooperation with the West (Sakwa, 2017, p. 321).

This research has also highlighted the possibility for future research regarding the role of think tanks and their contribution to foreign policy ideas. As noted earlier, think tanks’ importance in foreign policy discourse has noticeably increased yet the contribution of their ideas to foreign policy seldom has been examined, even though they are in a particularly privileged position to generate and disseminate foreign policy suggestions. As their ideas are likely to reach official agenda and become translated into policy, they deserve greater attention.

Pragmatism and nationalism are likely to have implications for Russia’s future foreign policy toward Georgia and Ukraine. While the regional geopolitical importance of Georgia and Ukraine is likely to increase, Russia’s relations with Georgia and Ukraine currently have few perspectives. Pragmatic policy ideas may assist in negating at least a few differences between Russia and its two adversaries. As noted pragmatist Dmitri Trenin observed, Russia could propose security compromises based on mutual restraint (Trenin, 2018). There are indications
that, in Ukraine, Russia is seeking a return to the pragmatic policies, such as the renewal of the 2015 Minsk Protocol. At the same time, domestic developments in Russia suggest that the official support for a more nationalistic worldview is increasing. Russian nationalist Dugin has been explicit about Russia’s need to maintain a confrontational stance toward Georgia and Ukraine for the foreseeable future (Dugin, 2009; Dugin, 2018).

It is apparent that nationalism and pragmatism are likely to retain their importance in the Russian foreign policy discourse in the future. Russian foreign policy shift from a pragmatic concert to nationalistic confrontation or *vice versa* is not likely to remain limited to the events in Georgia and Ukraine. Thus, this dissertation, with its focus on the role of the two ideational approaches provides but a starting point for further examination of the role of ideas in foreign policy.
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