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Russian Foreign Policy: a demonstration of organized hypocrisy?

An analysis of Russian foreign policy discourse during the Crimean crisis

Master's thesis

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INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of sovereignty is one of the pillars of the international system since 1648, scholars, jurists and practitioners alike have failed to produce an incontrovertible and enduring definition. After having overcome innumerable transformations in its theoretical assumption as well as in its practical interpretations, some have come to contend that novelties of the modern era might shake even the basic assumptions of this principle. Others, instead, are confident that this concept will adapt to recent challenges and thus remain a bulwark of the international system. However, most scholars agree that there are some issues that require a concerted effort from the international community, in order to reach a common framework that will enable it to be effectively operationalized.

One of the more controversial arguments in the contemporary discussion about sovereignty regards the concept of intervention. In theory, intervention in a foreign country is forbidden by international law; it is only allowed in case of impossibility of a state government to guarantee the safety of its citizens. In practice, the United Nations cannot agree on an impartial and uncontestable interpretation of this principle. Instead, powerful states are often accused of appealing to people's rights only to pursue their own foreign policy interests. History presents many cases in which States intervened in foreign countries even if the conditions were not met; or, on the contrary, some situations which required support from external actors collided against a stall of the international community. This has led many to argue that power politics often outplays humanitarian considerations, and to recognize a hypocritical element either in the behavior of States, or in the system itself.

In particular, a case that showed to the world serious shortcomings in the international legal framework regarding intervention is the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. A mixture of disinformation, propaganda and biased interpretations of the law allowed the Russian government to achieve an important objective of their assertive foreign policy. Although it was a very controversial action, the international community failed to react promptly and effectively due to lack of consolidated normative foundations. It was at this moment that the international community became aware of the dangers of leaving such gray areas in the international legal framework.

At the moment, however, the discussion about the legitimacy (or lack of) of Russian behavior in Crimea in 2014 has not yet found anything resembling a satisfactory solution, due to continuous disagreements amongst the members of the United Nations. However, in western media only Western powers' view on the fact is taken in consideration. Similarly, Russian media appear to be biased towards its government's perspective on the matter. However, the literature has not presented a satisfactory amount of research on those phenomena that have been named "information warfare" (Kalinina, 2016). In this context, to analyse the language that Great Powers use in order to justify their foreign policy actions appears to be paramount in order to fully comprehend their true ambitions.

For this reason, this thesis will attempt to fill a crucial gap in the academic literature by analyzing Russian foreign policy discourse regarding the Crimean crisis; and by relating the findings to its official standing towards the concepts of sovereignty and intervention. In particular, this thesis will set out to answer the following research question: *what does the Russian use of discourse during the Crimean crisis reveal about Russian views on sovereignty*?

In order to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive answer to this question, this thesis will adopt a theoretical framework centred on the concept of sovereignty, particularly based on Stephen Krasner's critique of the international system as inherently hypocritical. In this framework it will be highlighted the instrumentality intrinsic in the concept of sovereignty, which can often be reinforced by its supposed universality. With this in mind, a discourse analysis of the Russian government's official statements about the Ukrainian crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea will be undertaken. Statements, speeches, press releases, comments, remarks of the Russian president Putin and high-level government officials will be analysed, combining the techniques of both descriptive and critical discourse analysis. The objective of the analysis will be to understand how the subject, in this case the Russian government, is using language in order to justify controversial actions. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods seems to be ideal to gain a deeper understanding of Russian narratives regarding sovereignty and intervention.

In the first chapter, the concept of sovereignty will be introduced with a particular focus to its external dimension. After that, it will be presented the debate on the contemporary role of sovereignty in modern society, and subsequently how the concept of intervention might challenge or reinforce this role. Finally, the last section of this chapter will introduce the theory of Stephen Krasner, which will serve as theoretical framework throughout this

research project. For a more detailed clarification on the interpretation of sovereignty that will be adopted throughout this thesis, see Appendix A, in which the concept of sovereignty is outlined with an historical approach.

In the second chapter, this thesis will analyse Russian foreign policy, particularly focusing on its perspective of the international system, its attitude towards international law and its preferred methods. The third chapter will investigate the crisis that commenced in Crimea in 2014, with particular attention to Russian behaviour and justifications in front of the international community. The last chapter will present the products of the discourse analysis, and relate them to Russian foreign policy. The findings of the analysis will be applied to the theoretical framework in an attempt to understand how the Crimean case conforms to the official interpretation of Russian government regarding the concept of sovereignty. Finally, the concluding remarks will wrap up the arguments presented throughout this thesis and suggest scope for further research.

CHAPTER 1

Sovereignty and intervention: an introduction

1.1. Sovereignty: definition

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 is commonly regarded as a milestone in the study of international relations. According to most political scientists, in fact, the State as we know it has its origins from this historical moment. From the new political system that emerged one concept was created: Sovereignty.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sovereignty as "supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme dominion, authority, or rule." ("Sovereignty," 2019). In political science, this concept is closely linked to that of State, of which is an essential and distinctive element. Sovereignty refers to the right of every State to rule over its territory and population, governed through a chosen political system and free from outside influence. In particular, the elements that are generally required for a political entity to be considered sovereign are "a territory, a population, an effective domestic hierarchy of control, *de jure* constitutional independence, the *de facto* absence of external authority, international recognition, and the ability to regulate transborder flows." (Krasner, 2001a).

In the discipline of international relations, researchers are mostly concerned with comprehending and defining the external characteristics of sovereignty. "External sovereignty means that a State is not subject to the legal power of another State or of any other higher authority, and stands in principle on an equal footing with other States." (Schrijver, 2000). According to the interpretation of Westphalian sovereignty suggested by Emer de Vattel, the main elements of the external dimension of a sovereign state are its territorial control, the ability to exclude any external source of power, and the right to represent its population when confronting with other nations through diplomatic practices (Beaulac, 2003). In his view,

states are presented as moral entities which seek to defend and invigorate their authority, which is based on territorial unity (Mueser, 2018). Another fundamental character is the principle of international recognition, which was introduced by the Concert of Nations, and that, after further developments over the years, was finally to be formally framed in the 20th century by international law. It entails that every State that is recognized as such has the right to defend their independence, and is bound to recognize other states' status in formal and informal aspects by the principle of reciprocity (Fowler & Bunck, 1995). The evolution of the idea of nation-state contributed to the formation of the contemporary international system (Bartelson, 1995), regulated by international law and embodied by international organizations.

1.2. Contemporary era: an outdated concept?

Since its appearance, the concept of sovereignty has been a debated one, and has divided the academic and political world with regard to its nature, characteristics and appropriateness. Especially in the modern era, this "bothersome concept" (Waltz, 2010) has been criticized in both its theoretical assumptions and its practical consequences. It would be safe to affirm that "the meaning of the term has never been settled" (Barkan, 2015); however, this term is constantly employed in the most diverse realms. On one hand, in fact, theorists generally regard it as "the constitutive principle of interstate relations" (James, 1999), which makes it the conceptual core of most International Relations theories and the driving principle of international law. On the other hand, politicians adopt it constantly to justify foreign policy in the name of national security and to fuel patriotic sentiments in domestic politics (Abulof, 2018).

However, some authors criticize these common employs of the term sovereignty as confusing (Rittberger, 1997), problematic (Shinko, 2017), deceptive (Levi, 1976), hypocritical (Krasner, 1999), outdated (Shinoda, 2000). Bartelson highlights the paradoxical nature of a concept that is central in the theory of the State, but nonetheless remains somewhat ambiguous: "being essentially uncontested as the foundation of modern political discourse, it is essentially contested as to its meaning within the same discourse." (Bartelson, 1995). Helle Malmvig, for instance, presents sovereignty as a discursive practice, rather than an objective reality. Building on post-structuralist approaches which deconstruct (Bartelson, 1995; R. B. J. Walker, 1990) and re-construct (Bartelson, 1995; Weber, 1994) the concept of sovereignty, he argues that both academics and practitioners have not questioned the epistemological constitution of the term but nonetheless sustained it, thus reinforcing its relevance, through practices of legitimizations that oppose intervention and non-intervention (Malmvig, 2006).

In fact, the idea of sovereignty has undoubtedly undergone both conceptual and functional transformations since the treaty of Westphalia (Schrijver, 2000). It is thanks to the ability of theorists to adapt its meaning to the contemporary situation that it has been able to survive through the centuries and emerge strengthened from the theoretical debates (Boer, 1997; Jackson, 2007). In the last decades, however, new elements have brought scholars to question its function in the contemporary and, possibly, future world.

Primarily, globalization is seen by many theorists of sovereignty as a force potent enough to eventually compel the current international system based on nation-states to collapse (Baker, 2000). Undoubtedly, it is slowly eroding the importance of national boundaries by processes known as internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization (Scholte, 2008). The existence of multinational corporations, the facilitation of international communications thanks to technological developments, the general increases of any kind of transnational activities – including illegal ones – favored by the ease the traffic of good, capital, people, diseases, etc. (Cohen, 2008). Consequently, states' ability to control their borders will diminish (Krasner, 2001b), and a stronger global governance will be the only way to regulate those issues that elude national jurisdiction (Cohen, 2012).

Indeed, nation states have long accepted to be bound to each other not only by economic interdependence but also by regional and international governance. In fact, although most organizations concern economic and financial matters (WTO, IMF), some include political aspects (UN, ASEAN). In particular, the establishment of this kind of international organizations and institutions can sometimes result in a loss of sovereignty. By participating in transnational projects, in fact, states agree in renouncing to a part of their independence on the condition that all the participants do the same. Moreover, many of these organizations have supranational elements, that is they can take legally binding measures with majority-voting decisions (for example in the UN Security Council) or unilateral rulings (for example in the International Court of Justice). Furthermore, organizations like the UN and the EU challenge the role of the state as ultimate depositary of power, and therefore weakens the idea of sovereignty (Baker, 2000). However, over the last decades some countries (and especially China) have increased their participation in the international society (for instance through an increased participation in peacekeeping operations), whilst at the same time advocating the inviolability of their national sovereignty (Genevaz, 2015).

1.3. Intervention

In its full acceptation, sovereignty includes the principles of non-intervention and non-interference. Directly derived from the predominant understanding of the modern state and sovereignty are the ways in which these fundamental principles can be violated. In particular, international law regulates the conditions and the modalities under which the international community can interfere with the domestic affairs of any sovereign State, and ultimately if and on what grounds an intervention may take place. Section VII of the UN Charter[1], in fact, declares that the UN Security Council has the right to intervene in case of potential disruptions of "international peace and security" (Art.39). It should do so firstly through all available peaceful means such as recommendations or economic measures (also known as negative intervention), but the Charter includes – in extreme cases – the use of force by a military contingent provided by a coalition of Member States. Any attempt to use force to influence a sovereign state without the explicit authorization of the UN Security Council is condemned by International law and thus should be considerate as illegitimate (Lieblich, 2013). International law, in fact, prohibits the use or threat of use of force,[2] with only exceptions being legitimate self-defense and authorized UNSC mission (O'Connell). Geoff Larson argues that not any single state – or group of states – but only "the international community has a right to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign state given evidence of human rights violations" (Larson, 2001).

In the academic literature on the subjects, intervention and sovereignty are largely regarded as conceptual opposites (Weber, 1994), although there is no consensus on whether to consider intervention as an exception to the general rule (Steinberg, 2013), or a measure necessary in order to guarantee protection to popular sovereignty on a global scale (Lieblich, 2013). A closer analytical investigation, however, of the two concepts reveals how much they depend on each other: "sovereignty and intervention do not only function as conceptual opposites; they are also mutually constitutive" (Malmvig, 2006). If on one hand, some theorists of intervention presuppose the existence of a commonly accepted definition of

[1] https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/

[2] This principle is present in the international society since The Hague Convention for the Pacific Settlement of Disputes in 1899, and has been reiterated and approved by most states as part of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter (Benjamin, 1992).

sovereignty, on the other hand the theories on intervention work as "alibi" for the very existence of sovereignty (Weber, 1994).

Since the drafting of the UN Charter in 1945, international law has developed around the concept of sovereignty, and the right – and duty – of the UN to militarily invade a country, also without invitation, has been used little but with much controversy. UN intervention has historically happened in order to protect the population of a country in case of conflict, whether in the form of civil war, state-led violence or inter-state conflict. It is usually employed when there exist evident and documented cases of ethnic cleansing, human rights violations, war crimes, genocide; but also if there appear to be substantial negative spillover effects (Binder, 2017). However, the concept of international intervention can assume negative consequences. Russia and China do not find acceptable the concept of humanitarian intervention, which they appraise as an attempt of Western powers to influence other states' policies to their advantage (Gill & Reilly, 2000). In 2001, a new principle emerged, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which was rapidly developed in a normative framework that should guarantee effective protection (Lieblich, 2013) to populations in case of need in respect for sovereignty (UN, n.d.; Weiss, 2005). However, its practical usefulness has been criticized as, notwithstanding its strong moral and legal foundation, it presents an inherently low operability (Gray, 2013).

History provides a plethora of cases in which the above-mentioned principles have not been followed, but rather instrumental or balance-of-power considerations have prevailed. First of all, in some circumstances intervention did not happen even if there existed indisputable and objective evidence of significant human right violations. For example, in the 1990s in Chechnya there appeared to be sufficient elements to intervene in support of the rebel population. However, international intervention did not occur, primarily because of the powerful position of Russia in the international community (Larson, 2001). In other occasions, such as in Rwanda, international action was belated and ineffectual, as international organizations were paralyzed by sterile discussions amid internal controversies (Adebajo, 2016). Finally, there are other situations in which states have unilaterally influenced or invaded other countries; offering more or less reasonable justifications to the rest of the international community with little respect for the principles of non-interference and non-intervention (Krasner, 1999).

During the Cold War, for example, both the USA and the Soviet Union repeatedly tried to secure and expand their respective spheres of influence by meddling in foreign countries politics, with the most diverse range of objectives: from regime change to policy adjustment, from electoral outcomes to security optimization (Allison, 2013a; Levin, 2016). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA found itself less restrained and tried to secure its hegemonic interests by increasing its presence globally. Their tendency to interfere with other countries' policies in order to provide national security contributed to a negative perception of their behavior, and they came to be "widely seen to be acting like an outlaw in much of the world, practicing self-interested *selective* rather than *collective* security" (Adebayo, 2016). Exemplification of this are the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1998 (Gray, 2013) and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by an American-led coalition. (Williams & Shiner, 2008). In fact, they were unilateral acts of aggression not explicitly authorized by the UN Security Council, vaguely justified from a legal standpoint by reasons of humanitarian criticality and international peace (Lieblich, 2013).

When a government one-sidedly decides to interfere with the internal policy of a different state, intervention is termed unilateral – as opposed to consensual, which is with the approval of the international community. Unilateral intervention can include or not the use of force, but it is usually aimed at influencing another sovereign state's political behavior. Forcible intervention "directly interferes with the capacity of a domestic authority to operate on its own territory" (Chandler, 2004), and it usually takes place with an armed attack directed towards the coercion of the state involved (Lieblich, 2013). Although they are usually easily identifiable, most of the times are difficult to condemn and to enforce for political or legal reasons.

Even more difficult to legally challenge are non-forcible unilateral interventions, as they usually assume the form of more subtle political or economic influence and raise the question of attribution and responsibility. It exists, for instance, a debate whether actions in the cyber realm constitute examples of unlawful intervention, covert attacks or direct expressions of hostility (Ohlin, 2017; Stevens, 2012). The emergence of new tactical and strategic instruments, difficult to identify and to ascribe, has brought to the development of new terms such as sharp power (C. Walker & Ludwig, 2017). The term indicates a kind of interference in foreign countries' affairs that does not necessarily entails the use of force but rather employs covert actions such as intelligence and cyber operations, disinformation

campaigns, economic pressure. Moreover, in some notable cases such as arms transfer, media manipulation, or indirect support in general, it is controversial whether they should be regarded as forcible intervention or not (Lieblich, 2013); and how should they be regulated in either interpretation (Marsh, 2002; Yihdego, 2007). Especially when they are framed as humanitarian intervention, and substantiated as necessary to the maintenance of national security or international peace, or to protect specific sections of the population, such acts – which go against the principle of sovereignty – are difficult to objectively estimate and assess.

Some authors explain behaviors not in compliance with the general frameworks of international law as exceptional and illegitimate acts, which should be condemned legally and politically (Lubell, 2010). Others have reached the conclusion that there are structural flaws in the current international system, and that ethical principles cannot find their place in an order made of sovereign states (Fowler & Bunck, 1995). Some scholars in this category believe that power considerations constitute the main driver of international politics, and that states will always favor their interests to the common good. In particular, Stephen Krasner believe that the ultimate depositaries of power are domestic elites, who in an attempt to increase their privileges engage in foreign policies that highlight the hypocritical nature of their supposedly morally-impregnated narratives: his theory will be illustrated in the next section.

1.4. Sovereignty as organized hypocrisy

Stephen Krasner criticizes the structure of the international system itself by portraying sovereignty as an idea artificially constructed. Rather than an immutable set of rules, he presents sovereignty as an "ever-changing description of the essential authorities of states, intended to serve rather than control them in a world that states dominate." (Heller & Sofaer, 2000). However, it is still so central in international politics exactly because of its vaguely defined nature, which allows political elites to appeal, from time to time, to the most suitable set of principles.

"At times rulers adhere to conventional norms or rules because it provides them with resources and support (both material and ideational). At other times, rulers have violated the norms, and for the same reasons. If rulers want to stay in power and to promote the security, material, and ideational interests of their constituents, following the conventional practices of Westphalian and international legal sovereignty might or might not be an optimal policy" (Krasner, 1999).

He argues that the classical conception of sovereignty is based on wrong presumptions. Historically, states have always interfered one another by means of war, diplomacy, economy, culture, and much else; and there is no proof that the order claimed to be brought to life since Westphalia has really existed. Rather, the principles that supposedly arose from the Westphalian model of sovereignty have been constantly violated by those same actors who upheld them as the basis of the international system. Scholars have contributed to the continuous ambiguity of the term even after the innumerable attempts to define and circumscribe it. For this reason, students of sovereignty are still uncertain whether to consider it "as an analytic assumption", "as a description of the practice of actors" or rather as a pure "generative grammar". (*ibid*.). This ambiguity is the basis of the controversy over the meaning, which generates so many critiques and so many defendants. In fact, Krasner argues, scholars refer to the concept of sovereignty in four different, although interrelated, ways: International legal sovereignty, domestic sovereignty, Westphalian/Vattelian sovereignty, interdependent sovereignty (*ibid*.).

Domestic sovereignty means supremacy of the political structures over its territory and its people. The State should autonomously decide which type of governance shall prevail internally, and on the preferred ways to exert control and exercise power. The principle according to which a State should be free from any external interference is what Krasner calls **Westphalian** or, better, **Vattelian sovereignty**. In fact, Krasner argues that this conception of sovereignty has little to do with the treaties of Westphalia in themselves, but rather derives from the interpretation developed by the sixteenth-century jurist Emer de Vattel (Krasner, 2013). When relating to the mechanisms of recognition, according to which any entity must be juridically recognized by the international community in order to be sovereign, scholars invoke what can be called **international legal sovereignty**. Finally, "the ability of a government to regulate the movement of goods, capital, people, and ideas across its borders" (Krasner, 2001a) can be referred to as **interdependent sovereignty**.

Globalization and technological development have eroded in particular the aspect of sovereignty that Krasner defines as interdependent: that is, it is increasingly difficult to exert control within a state's borders. However, this does not mean that sovereignty of a state is decreasing: it has virtually no connection with the other three aspects of sovereignty individuated by Krasner. States are never completely able to transform their *de jure* autonomy from any external authority in a *de facto* independence, as the Westphalian sovereignty would suggest. A government will always be affected by the international environment, and since the 17th century in particular the concrete ways in which this can happen are incredibly diverse: international financial institutions, increasingly interconnected markets, multinational corporations, environmental issues (Krasner, 2001a). However, even if a country might – even temporarily – lose its Westphalian/Vattelian sovereignty, it does not automatically cease to be part of the international community, as it is the case of weak or failed state. Instead, it is with all probability still enjoying international recognition.

In order to be formally considered a state, any entity must typically possess a territory, over which it exerts authority, and a formal juridical autonomy (Krasner, 1999). The advantages of a formal recognition are multiple, as it guarantees the access to diplomatic privileges, international financial institutions and formal safeguard from foreign invasion.[3] And theoretically it entails and equal status as every other nation state. However, formal recognition is not at all times necessary in order to benefit from the international community,

[3] For a recognized state there is practically no chance to be conquered, as in the modern times it has never happened (Fazal, 2007).

as the cases of Taiwan and Kosovo, among others, demonstrate. Similarly, being recognized as a legitimate sovereign state does not guarantee effective domestic sovereignty nor protection from foreign interference. In total, "a quarter to a third of the states that are now generally recognized lack effective domestic sovereignty or Westphalian/Vattelian sovereignty." (Krasner, 2013).

Violations of sovereignty happen not because of exceptional events – as the defendants of the concept want us to believe – but because of the very nature of the concept. In fact, these violations have taken place by not only through coercion and imposition, but even more often voluntarily (although sometimes supported by some kind of leverage, such as economic or moral conditionality). The repetitiveness with which these norms, which are supposedly the basis of international law, are infringed is due to a decoupling of logics of appropriateness and logics of consequences. The latter being directed to maximizing utility while the former deriving from rules, roles and identity (March & Olsen, 1998), it appears evident how in practice norms and principles are often trumped by powerful interests and power considerations (Krasner, 2001b).

The extent to which norms of international law, especially those concerning sovereignty, have not been respected, has led Krasner to denounce what he considers *Organized Hypocrisy*. In fact, states strive to maintain this order, but political elites do not intend to comply with it unless it favors them. A utilitarian interpretation of sovereignty is facilitated by the three inescapable attributes of the international society: its complexity (1) results in non-unitary frameworks of norms and principles, in some cases conflicting (2), from which state leaders can instrumentally pick those who best fit their interests (3). The prevailing structures of authority and legitimacy, thus, are those which are more likely to favour political leaders in the long run (Krasner, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

Russian foreign policy

Since the end of the Cold War, Russian foreign policy suffered from both internal structural problems – which resulted in major economic difficulties – and a reduction of the role of the country in the international system. At first, the country seemed to be slowly adjusting to the post-Cold War international order, for instance by displaying a liberal foreign policy orientation (Tsygankov, 2016). Since 2000 – following Putin's ascension to power – a nationalistic discourse has surfaced in Russian politics, especially with regard to its international relations (Wallander, 2007). Above all, scholars noticed the "emergence of a 'mixed' foreign policy discourse combining the balancing perspective, Eurasianism and a reassessment of Russia's Asian policy" (Koldunova, 2015). Furthermore, Putin manifested its intention to defend Russian historical tradition of a centralized strong state and to enhance it with a dynamic foreign-oriented attitude.

Notably, with the "Foreign Policy Concept" published in 2000[4] and updated in 2008[5], Russian government made it clear that it intended to pursue the interests of the Russian Federation by enhancing its role of Great Power in both the European and the Asian continent (Koldunova, 2015). In particular, it highlighted the importance of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and of maintaining close economic, military and political cooperation with the Eastern European States by strengthening the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Trenin, 2009). Moreover, it appeared evident that it would proceed with its own project of economic development by following an approach closer to Russian tradition rather than a Western model of development, and would consider negatively any effort of international actors to force them in that direction (Tsygankov, 2016).

Increased animosity between Russia and Western powers, especially the USA, grew especially in fields in which Russian territorial integrity and autonomy were (potentially) at

[4] http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/589768
[5] http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116

stake. In addition, different cultural identity and core values have been used by both governments and media to foster a vision of the other as an opponent (Tsygankov, 2019). In particular, concepts such as sovereignty and national interest have been crucial in strengthening the perception of Russia internationally. They have been presented as in contrast with American promotion of principles of democracy and human rights (Tsygankov, 2019), which have broadly been considered, by the Russian defense ministry, as attempts to extend its influence in the former Soviet space and ultimately to dominate the structure of the international system (Caldwell, 2007). In fact, some actions of Western powers[6] have been perceived negatively in terms of Russian security; and have shown how contrasting Russian pragmatism and American strive for hegemony can be. In some circumstances, indeed, this attitude created friction which resonated in every sphere of the relation, especially in the diplomatic and the economic area. In particular, David Cadier notices how both Russia and the EU missed the opportunity to establish a long-lasting institutional framework of cooperation by transforming the participation in regional projects such as the EU or the EEU in a geopolitical competition (Cadier, 2014).

Hybrid warfare, sharp power

This climate of tense and conflictual relations has brought many to talk of a "new cold war" (Charap & Shapiro, 2015; Foxall, 2009; Hassner, 2008), narrative which was strengthened after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. Russia has reacted to the perceived hostility of the US, the EU and NATO with assertiveness. Ideas such as the one of Eurasianism introduced by Aleksander Dugin imply the extension of influence in the Russian World (Russkiy Mir) as paramount in protecting Russian people, wherever they are, and in permitting to the Russian nation to prosper and thrive (Barbashin & Thoburn, 2014). To this end, since the dawn of the third millennium Russia has actively promoted the bolstering and modernizing of its military capabilities (Caldwell, 2007). In particular, since it finds itself of a relatively weaker strength if compared with the American or NATO military capability, it has

[6] Namely NATO's enlargement in Eastern Europe, NATO intervention in the Balkans and the American invasion of Iraq (Tsygankov, 2016).

to rely on non-traditional military means in order to obtain its goals, as a correct interpretation of the so-called "Gerasimov doctrine" would suggest (Galeotti, 2018).

Consequently, Russian strategy has developed an approach that is widely defined as *hybrid*, and that many consider as a novelty in the field of international security. Its particularity consists in the simultaneous use of conventional and traditional means "with the objective of achieving political influence, even dominance, over a country in support of an overall strategy." (EEAS, 2015). Actions that figure in this new concept of hybrid warfare usually imply the use of cyber operations, propaganda, disinformation and misinformation campaigns, together with covert or irregular military means. In general, a hybrid military action retains the characteristics of ambiguity and plausible deniability – since neither the actor nor its ultimate aims are clearly identifiable – which make it difficult to respond (Cusumano & Corbe, 2018). However, many criticize this concept for failing to describe any real strategic characteristic and for not conveying any useful nor practical insight. Moreover, it can be argued that, while the term is extensively used by American and European strategists to refer to Russian strategy, this "concept is entirely alien to Russian military science" and only used in reference to foreign strategies (Theriault, 2016).

Similar critiques have been moved to the new concept of sharp power: "a combination of hard and soft resources into effective strategy" (Nye, 2011) that "pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries." (C. Walker & Ludwig, 2017). It is a type of power typically utilized by authoritarian regimes towards democratic societies, and its objective is to influence the media and the public opinion through manipulation and subversion (C. Walker, 2018).

According to the defendants of these new terms, Russia is extensively making use of these unorthodox means to increase its relative power. For example, some affirm that by conducting what can been defined as an "information warfare", Russia is trying to improve its military capability and relative strength (Kalinina, 2016). It would appear that Russia has developed an assertive foreign policy approach which envisages covert means to gain political influence on other states, especially in the "near abroad" region, at the same time not excluding military action if needed. Over the last two decades, Russia has made use of this particular way of intervention several times. Although it is difficult to demonstrate, for the ambiguous nature of the instruments employed, there is a broad consensus on the presence of Russia behind a number of military and non-military foreign interventions.

First of all, the war in Georgia in 2008 is the perfect example to illustrate the use of hybrid warfare. A long-standing tension regarding the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted in a war for the independence of these territories. The Russian intervention – based on the principle of self-defense and framed as a humanitarian one, in protection of the self-determination of the Russian minorities in Georgia (Mastroianni, 2015) – lasted five days and resulted in the creation of two unrecognized republics[7] controlled by Russian-backed governments (Matsuzato, 2009). The Russian Army engaged in a series of cyber operations which paralyzed the Georgian government (Deibert, Rohozinski, & Crete-Nishihata, 2012) before the proper military operations. The war generated widespread bewilderment mostly because no one expected a territorial war at this time in Europe; but also because of the "intensive information war [that took place] before, during, and after the fighting raged, in order to define for their own peoples, their opponents, and the international community not only who won and who lost but, more to the point, who was the aggressor, and thus deserves blame, and who was the victim, and thus thereby earns sympathy" (Goble, 2009).

Secondly, the Russian government was suspected to be behind the cyber-attacks in Estonia in 2007. Following a dispute on the collocation of a statue with to Russian nationals in the country, government services, banks, media organizations, were targeted by a series of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks[8] by presumably Russian users (Herzog, 2011). Although the Russian government negated any involvement in the incident and blamed individual citizens, the scale and sophistication of the organized attacks have led many to believe otherwise (Deibert et al., 2012).

Moreover, Russia has been accused of meddling in foreign countries' elections, by financing political parties, associations and groups of citizens; by publishing compromising private or classified documents; and by spreading 'fake news' on social media (Richey, 2018). Emblematic of this is the almost certain Russian involvement in the Brexit referendum in the UK and the 2016 USA presidential elections; and the financing of the Italian, French and Austrian far-right political parties (Klasa, Hopkins, Chazan, Foy, & Johnson, 2019).

[7] Currently, the republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia are only recognized by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Syria (Pugsley & Wesslau, 2016).

[8] A Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack is a cyber-operation in which a network is overloaded with superfluous requests by a great number of users in order to fluster and ultimately paralyze its functionality (Shakarian, Shakarian, & Ruef, 2013).

Domestic and international audience

Facing worldwide accusations and complaints, oftentimes the Russian governments has found itself in delicate situations in front of the international community. However, because of the importance it recognizes in the international law and in the power of international recognition, it has always justified its actions on legal ground and dismissed suspicions by officially denying any involvement in illegitimate operations (Mastroianni, 2015). It is crucial in fact for Russian economic development to avoid further isolation from the global economy. For this reason, the Russian government has maintained an official discourse centered on national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and referred to its foreign interventions as prompted by humanitarian emergencies concerning Russian nationals living abroad (Allison, 2013a).

In particular, as permanent member in the UN Security Council it enjoys a prominent position from where to assert its argumentations. With regard to the Syrian civil war, for instance, Russia opposed an international intervention on the ground of the need, for the international community, to respect the sovereignty of the legitimate state of Syria governed by Bashar al Assad. However, it is common belief that the Russian support for the Syrian government is rather a means to protect their common interests than a disinterested struggle to defend morality and international law (Allison, 2013b; Charap, 2016). Moreover, the endorsement of sovereignty and national integrity of the Russian government in face of the international community has been criticized as hypocritical and instrumental to pragmatic political interests after the Georgian and Ukrainian unilateral interventions by Russia. Their presentation as humanitarian emergencies in which the principle of R2P had to be triggered did not sound as coherent to many (Averre & Davies, 2015).

Although less obvious, the Russian government needs to bolster internal support as well. Although it is generally not regarded as a fully democratic system, President Putin needs to worry about its regime and leadership security by securing an adequate economic stability to the Russian population (Greene & Robertson, 2019; Rose, Mishler, & Munro, 2006). Foreign policy plays an important role in this regard. In fact, an assertive foreign policy is often portrayed as a means to improve economic developments domestically, as the Russian

government has expressed more than once.[9] Moreover, the extent to which Putin is able to convince its population of the success of its adventures abroad is crucial in determining its popularity (Rose et al., 2006). Finally, it needs to justify the cost in public money and human lives of Russian international engagements (Greene & Robertson, 2019). Declaring the complete defeat of ISIS in Syria in April 2018 (RT Editors, 2018), for example, was fundamental for president Putin in order to demonstrate to its citizens that the success of the Russian engagement had brought positive consequences to the nation. In fact, conveying a positive image of the Russian nation and Putin abroad and domestically appears to be all the more necessary at a time in which economic difficulties, international isolation and corruption are endangering Putin leadership's popular support (Anonymous, 2018).

[9] In November 2009, "Medvedev proposed to judge the effectiveness of foreign policy 'by a simple criterion: does it improve living standards in our country?'" (Tsygankov, 2016).

CHAPTER 3

Case study: the Crimean crisis

3.1. The role of Ukraine and Crimea in Russian foreign policy

During the years immediately subsequent to the end of the Cold War, Russia and Ukraine shared such interdependent economies and common historical and cultural background, that they were forcefully bound by intense relations. However, in the soaring of renewed Russo-American tensions Ukraine found itself trapped in an unpleasant role. In fact, as Brzezinski (1997) comprehended already at the end of the 20th century, Ukraine holds a geopolitically crucial position. On the one hand, in fact, Western policy makers traditionally considered "Ukraine as a geopolitical pivot for Russia's containment and an insurance policy against an eventual resurgence of Russian influence" (Plekhanov, 2016). On the other hand, Ukraine's significance for Russian economy, as well as for its strategic developments, was considerable: Russia deemed crucial that its Western neighbor, and especially Crimea, would not fall under the influence of NATO and the EU. As it appeared, Russian government was ready to do what it was necessary to protect its "national interest: defending national security, enhancing Russia's independence from Western control, […] and consolidating Russian society on the basis of patriotism." (Plekhanov, 2016). The Ukrainian government tried to take advantage of this central position by reasserting its neutral status and by cooperating with both Russia and Western powers. In fact, it was able to attract both EU and Russian investments and obtain loans and discounts on natural resources and industrial expenditures (*ibid*.).

In this complex situation, Crimea played a crucial role. Part of the Russian Empire since the 18th century, it endured a russification process by means of forced resettlements of colons and deportations (Shapovalova, 2014). After the end of the Cold War, the Soviet

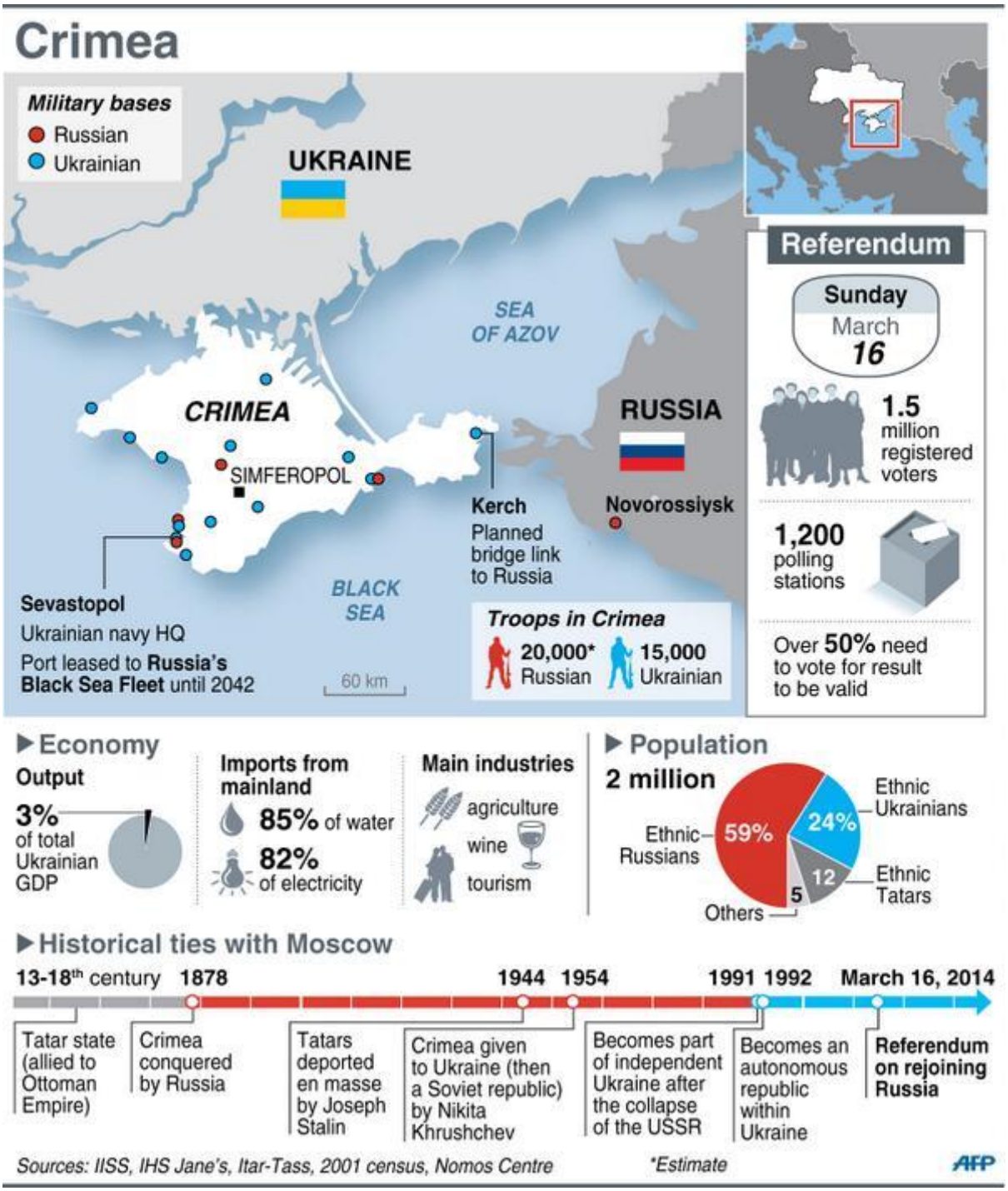
Union was divided among the existing administrative boundaries and Crimea found itself attached to Ukraine. Not to mention a brief period of independence – never recognized by the central government – between 1992 and 1995, Crimea was continuously part of Ukraine until 2014 (Bebler, 2015). Russia can thus assert largely credible historical claims on the Crimean Peninsula, and count on a majority of ethnic Russians amongst its population, also composed of Tatars and Ukrainians. Furthermore, the Crimean peninsula holds a considerable strategic importance for Russia, especially Sevastopol, home of the Black Sea Fleet since the Soviet times. Finally, it is economically significant because of the presence of natural resources – including 80% of Ukraine's oil and gas deposits (Biersack & O'Lear, 2014) –, "three percent of [Ukraine's] state territory, about five percent of its population and about 3.6 percent of its GNP" (Bebler, 2015).

3.2. The crisis

Caught up in increasing competition between Western powers and Russia, the weak Ukrainian government – plagued by political issues such as lack of transparency, corruption, the absence of a compact and informed civil society, low institutionalization – has not been able to foster economic growth nor to establish an inclusive and free democratic process. Moreover, it was incapable of finding a balance between the traditional tendency to rely on Russian support and the division between pro-Western and pro-Russian perspectives amongst the population (Plekhanov, 2016). General popular dissatisfaction gave rise, in 2004, to a series of demonstrations against the government organized by a popular movement of civil resistance, which became known as the Orange Revolution (Wapiński, 2014). Popular contestations accused the government of corruption, collusion with Russia and ineptitude. In November 2013, they took a violent turn and gave rise to a national uprising also known as Euromaidan (Lyubashenko, 2014). One of the major causes of dissent among the Ukrainian population was the decision of President Yanukovych to refuse to sign a long-planned-for Association Agreement with the EU. Be it for economic, political or personal reasons (Cadier, 2014), this decision was not appreciated by a large portion of the population, which saw in a closer connection with the EU an opportunity of economic development.

Following a particularly acute rise in violence (that resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded or imprisoned), on the 22nd of February 2014 the Ukrainian president Yanukovych fled the country. Although he complained threats to personal safety and denounced a political coup, the Ukrainian Parliament considered him unable to perform his duties and nominated an interim government (Bebler, 2015). From this moment on, events unfolded in a rapid succession. The Crimean Parliament and the Supreme Council in Simferopol were first seized and locked up by masked and unidentifiable armed men; they soon issued a decision to hold a referendum to declare independence from Ukraine and to join the Russian Federation (Shapovalova, 2014). Within a week, neutral observers noticed the presence of "Russian troops [which] appear to be in control of Crimea" (Black & Plekhanov, 2016). On the 16th of March was held the referendum, which resulted in a landslide victory of the supporters of the secession from Ukraine and annexation to the Russian Federation, officially formalized two days later. In less than a month, a change with no precedents

destined to shape international security on the Eurasian continent took place, leaving the rest of European countries in awe.



Infographic: Crimea. Source: AFP news agency

Russian involvement

Scholars generally agree on the fact that Russian strategist were clearly well-prepared for this annexation. Some argue that it could have taken place "any time in the last 25 years" (Hopf, 2016), as there must have been some regularly updated contingency plans to capture it in case it fell into the American sphere of interest (Bebler, 2015). However, the Russian Foreign Ministry was well aware that a direct annexation would not have been accepted from the international community, but rather it would have triggered a direct and confrontational response (Caracciolo, 2015). Russian deniability in its intervention was carefully prepared, and achieved by the prevalent use of non-military means. First of all, since the 1990s there had been direct and indirect efforts to foster pro-Russian sentiments among the Crimean population. They did so by a substantial use of propaganda means and by providing assistance to Russian nationalist in Ukraine, particularly in Crimea and in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. Some Russian nationalists in Crimea, for example, received Russian Passports (Allison, 2014), while the Russian government openly supported the use of the Russian language in Crimea.

When, during the annexation process, military personnel was employed, they were disguised in anonymous combat fatigues, wearing no rank nor insignia. As of today, it would be nearly impossible to prove their affinity with the Russian Army. However, some independent sources – such as the open-source investigative website Bellingcat – were able to find evidence that indicated the presence of GRU officers in Ukraine during spring 2014. Russian collaborators were able to gain control of all military installations, weapons and naval equipment. However, they did not militarily occupy the peninsula, but they simply removed or imprisoned all Ukrainian troops and facilitated the access of Russian nationalists to local institutions, encountering little to no resistance (Bebler, 2015).

Bebler (2015) remarks three factors that played a crucial role in ensuring such a painless success in Russian operations. First of all, Russian military personnel was already present in Crimea thanks to a lease agreement that granted to the Russian Army the use of the Crimean naval bases (Plekhanov, 2016). This geographical proximity facilitated previous intelligence gathering, reconnaissance and contacts with local independentist groups. Finally, the local sections of the Ukrainian army mostly did not reacted against the "little green men", be it for the presence of locals among them (Theriault, 2016) or for orders given by Ukrainian headquarters to not aggravate the situation by using force (Bebler, 2015).

In any case, Russian involvement in both the Crimean secession and in its annexation to the Russian Federation has been largely proven. If at first the Russian government openly rejected any allegation of direct responsibility for what was happening, it soon became clear that an open denialism position was not bearable and cautiously admitted a partial connection with the Crimean facts (Allison, 2014).

Justifications

Confronted with factual evidence, the Russian Federation has presented its interference as legally justified on humanitarian and civil grounds (Marxsen, 2014). First of all, Russian officials stated their duty to protect ethnic Russians in foreign countries, especially neighboring country (Allison, 2014), as asserted on several occasions by the Russian Foreign Ministry as part of the *Privileged Interest Doctrine* (Mastroianni, 2015). According to this precept, the Russian Federation holds the right to unilaterally intervene in "fraternal countries" so to restore order in case of political turmoil, or to protect Russian nationals for humanitarian reasons (J. A. Green, 2014).

Moreover, Russian authorities claim that their intervention was triggered by a principle included in the UN Charter, which is the principle of *intervention by invitation*. In fact, they claim that President Yanukovych formally requested Russian assistance after being forced to flee the country (Marxsen, 2014). In fact, being its removal from office decided without the conditions established in the Ukrainian Constitution, he was to consider still in office; and therefore upon his request Russia would have been compelled to intervene (Bebler, 2015).

Moreover, there are some tacit arguments that, although not necessarily explicitly expressed, should be taken into account. The continuous references to the Kosovo intervention by a NATO coalition in 2012, for example, is intended to trigger concepts such as Responsibility to Protect in cases of humanitarian emergency (Bilkova, 2015). While referring to the referendum of independence, furthermore, Russian officials hint (more or less implicitly) at the principle of self-determination of the Crimean population regarding their national identity (Burke-White, 2014).

In general, in justifying its actions regarding the Crimean case, Russian officials have picked "a card straight from America's play-book" (*ibid.*), and played back Western discourse taking advantage of problematic areas of the international normative frameworks (Allison, 2014).

Actual causes

Although it is hard to pinpoint any singular reason which triggered Russia's actions in 2014, scholars have identified various structural conditions and contingent events which had an impact on Russian officials' decisions. The annexation has encountered a number of different interpretations by the academic literature. However, it is generally accepted the presence, at the bottom, of incompatibilities between Russian and Western strategic thinking. The Maidan protests, for instance, which were considered as legitimate popular demand for civil and political rights by Western countries, were regarded by Russian security advisors as Western attempts to destabilize the Russian sphere of influence (Manoli, 2015).

As for the Crimean crisis, some see it as a reaction to NATO's effort to bolster their presence in Eastern Europe, to the expansion of the EU, and to the promotion of democratic values by Western actors (Mearsheimer & Information, 2014). Other argue that security implications had a major role, since control of Crimea grants access to Black Sea resources and facilities, and to the command of the Russian Black Sea Fleet based in Crimea (Biersack & O'Lear, 2014). Given the conception of Foreign Policy as instrumental to a population's well-being, it is not to be excluded is the domestic factor. reference to the vague concept of Russian national identity has been crucial in this regard, as Allison points out: "Claims by the Russian leadership about ethnic Russians, Russian citizens, Russian compatriots, Russian-speakers or historic Russian justice have been aimed at sustaining a broad domestic support base among political and security elites, bolstered by popular approval." (Allison, 2014:1282)

International reactions

The utterly unexpected events of spring 2014 aroused very diverse reactions. The US, the EU and some international organizations have imposed economic sanctions on Russia,

mostly targeting government officials, military equipment and large-scale businesses (Correspondent, 2014). Generally, Western media endorse a negative vision of Russia, which is portrayed as "the bad guy" who refuses to adhere to liberal ethical standards (Tsygankov, 2019). However, this reflects a general propensity in the media to be biased towards a specific interpretation of the crisis. It would appear, in fact, that the media in each country involved tend to support their government's view, encouraging the unfolding of a blame game in a mixture of disinformation and growing national (Black, 2016). However, Russian behavior has been criticized also by academics and jurists.

Referring to the principle of "preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of all UN Member States" (UN News, 2014), UN General Assembly condemned Russian annexation. Furthermore, it demanded to its members to adhere to a policy of non-recognition (Marxsen, 2014) and to Russia to reverse the annexation process and stop the militarization of the peninsula (UN News, 2018). In fact, the legality and legitimacy of the Crimean secession and annexation to Russia are largely disputed. First of all, according to Ukrainian law the Crimean secession was not conducted on grounds of legality: therefore, Crimea did not have the power neither to "invite" a Russian intervention nor to sign the treaty of accession with Russia (Marxsen, 2014). Consequently, the use of force and other military actions by Russia – such as the infiltration of Ukrainian secret services (Theriault, 2016) – do not comply with a correct interpretations of the right to intervene by invitation (Yue, 2016). Moreover, scholars note that Yanukovych did not have the right to take such a decision on his own, without any prior Parliamentary or government consultation (Bilkova, 2015); and furthermore that the situation in Ukraine did not present the antecedent conditions of "continuous, large-scale violence" that can trigger this kind of intervention (Yue, 2016). The intervention, thus, would not seem to satisfy the conditions of necessity and proportionality (Allison, 2014).

Moreover, hesitations on the validity of the referendum have being presented, for irregularities as the absence of OSCE observers (Yue, 2016). However, there seem to be little doubt on the fact that, if repeated under conditions of lawfulness, a second referendum would produce roughly the same results (Bebler, 2015). In substance, although the many doubts on the legality of Russian intervention in Crimea, the international community has not been able to produce unbiased and convincing arguments to issues strong punitive measures against the Russian Federation. Instead, references to controversial aspects of international law have

highlighted the necessity to solve once and for all the many contradictions present in certain international legal frameworks.

Towards a solution?

All attempts of both Ukraine and Russia to resolve Crimea's crisis seem for now to remain largely unproductive. This depends mainly on the unwillingness of each party to accept the other side's position and to compromise on fundamental questions. On one side, in fact, the Russian Federation has officially incorporated the Crimean Peninsula into its territory and is well into administrative and legislative integration. On the other side, the Ukrainian government does not recognize Russian territorial claims and openly accused Russia of "consciously manipulating the facts and ignoring the evidence" (Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations, 2018) of what it considers an illegitimate occupation. Furthermore, it has taken non-military measures to contrast this occupation, such as the ban for Russian men aged 16-60 to enter the country ("Ukraine bans entry to Russian adult men: border service chief," 2018) or the closing of the North Crimean Canal ("Russia fears Crimea water shortage as supply drops," 2014). Similarly, Russia has constantly accused Kiev's government of provoking disorders aimed at undermining Russian authority on Crimea, like the blackout in 2015 (Sopova & MacFarquhar, 2015) and the attempted terrorist attack in 2016 (RT Editors, 2016). In response, it has proceeded with the construction of a high-security fence along the newly created and mostly unrecognized national border ("Ukraine conflict: Russia completes Crimea security fence," 2018).

In November 2018, Russo-Ukrainian relationship reached a new low after an incident in the Kerch Strait, which for the first time since the beginning of the crisis has seen an open confrontation between official military forces ("The Kerch Strait incident," 2018). Being the only geographical feature that separates mainland Russia from the Crimean Peninsula, this channel holds key economic and strategic significance for both Russia[10] and Ukraine[11]. Its

[10] Indeed, amid widespread remonstrations, in 2018 Russia built a bridge in order to overcome Crimean isolation from the mainland (Bredekamp et al., 1999).

[11] This Strait, in fact, is the only maritime passage that connects the Sea of Azov – and thus important industrial locations in Ukrainian mainland such as Mariupol, Ukraine's third largest port – with the Black Sea (and consequently with the Mediterranean Sea and Southern Europe). Although the volume of trade that passes through the strait accounts only to 2% of Ukraine's GDP, its poor infrastructural system would not allow for a

control is in fact crucial to connect companies from the business and energy sectors, but also for military matters. For these reasons, failure to reach a peaceful settlement of disputes regarding land and maritime boundaries will continue to be an obstacle to normalization of the relation between the two countries, and could potentially lead to more conflictual episodes (Katuoka & Klumbytė, 2019).

quick redirection of transportations causing significant damage especially to the local economy ("Russia's motives in Ukraine," 2014).

CHAPTER 4

Russian discourse on the Crimean crisis

4.1. Methodology

Although there exist several different definitions of discourse, linguistics generally agree in explaining it as the way people use language as to be understood by everyone in the same community (Johnstone, 2002). Discourse analysis is a useful methodological tool which allows to unmask different layers of communication hidden in the form of language. It is mostly used to understand how the language is used to convey ideas, to strengthen beliefs or to foster ideological assumptions. In short, discourse analysis studies what is said in order to reveal what is not said (*ibid*.). The ways in which this can be done are multiple: by emphasizing the sense of community; by stressing the importance of principles like identity, common interest, shared values; by portraying behaviors and ideologies as natural (C. Green, 2007). Since discourse can create and reinforce power dynamics (van Dijk, 1993), it is important for political scientists to understand the particular linguistic choices of political leaders, as they underpin specific messages. As Jacobs argues while observing diplomatic negotiations within the European Union, the particular discourse of diplomacy – in which pragmatic intentions must be framed in legal formal language – presents peculiar traits and power relations. However, it is particularly difficult to analyze for the presence of several layers of discourse cloaked under a mantle of conventionality (Jacobs, 2016).

Especially in the Crimean crisis, where it is possible to identify divergent interpretations of controversial actions from legal, political and diplomatic standpoints, discourse analysis may be able to understand covert motivations. Every side has different version and are backed by different values and different norms, but ultimately States are driven by strategic considerations. In particular, within the Russian discourse are present

many elements that suggest competition against Western States, in particular the US, NATO and to some extent the EU. The objective of this analysis will be to unmask distorted perception of discourse, misleading narratives (from both sides) and instrumental uses of language in order to reveal hidden meanings. Subsequently, they will be compared to the events of the Crimean crisis through the lens of Krasner's interpretation of Sovereignty, in order to understand how nationalist discourse has been used by the Russian authorities, and what this conceals. Finally, this will be able to illustrate an unbiased perspective on the Crimean crisis and relate it to the contemporary Russian foreign policy.

For the purpose of this particular project, the discourse analysis will follow what Woods (2006) defines as a top-down approach. The reason for this is that, because of the choice to use only officially translated speeches, the number of documents available is not sufficient to provide statistical validation. It is, however, adequate to produce factual evidence when examined with a qualitative focus. The analysis, in fact, will be applied to the conceptual framework created by engaging Krasner's concept of Sovereignty with the Crimean case, to understand how it fits in the overall foreign policy of the Russian Federation. In order to facilitate the comprehension of the analytical process, the analysis will be illustrated in two subsequent steps:

1. A micro-level content analysis, which will be conducted with the support of a text-mining programme (AntConc[12]) and two corpus-based software (VoyantTools[13] and TextSTAT[14]). Some key words will be identified, with a focus on their frequency, collocation and internal cohesion, with the objective to separate individual components of discourse to identify what is actually being communicated. After assessing the relative frequency of those particular words, it will appear whether the speaker has made use of rhetorical devices to refer to concepts such as identity, in-group versus out-group status, solidarity.

2. The analysis of the context, which will be based on the specificity of the Crimean case as described in Chapter 2. The findings of the previous step will be contextualized by reference to the particular setting, the actors involved, the audience engaged.

[12] https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/
[13] https://voyant-tools.org/
[14] http://neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/en/textstat/

The sources of the speeches, declarations and conference presses are publicly accessible from the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,[15] the Kremlin official website,[16] and the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation Delegation to the UN.[17] A list of all the documents used is available in Appendix B. The documents analyzed will thus be mostly directed to international audiences, in highly institutional contexts. The time period taken into consideration will be from the beginning of the Crimean crisis, in February 2014, to March 2019. The ending date was chosen as being sufficiently distant from the current events to be academically significant in a crisis which has yet failed to find a definitive solution.

The main critiques generally contested to analytical approaches to discourse are (1) its tendency to focus on linguistics details rather than the whole, which makes it easy to overlook some important contextual elements of discourse; (2) the inevitable loss of meaning, especially in nuances and cultural references, when analyzing translated documents; and finally (3) the problematic semantic alteration which takes places when transforming oral speech in written discourse. This thesis will attempt to engage with the first critique by relying solely on official documents, which are either originally composed in the English language or translated by designed interpreters. Regarding the former two critical aspects of Discourse Analysis, they will be tackled first of all by adopting a dual approach that includes both content and contextual approaches, but also by integrating quantitative considerations with qualitative methods.

[15] http://www.mid.ru/en/main_en
[16] http://en.kremlin.ru/
[17] http://russiaun.ru/en

4.2. Discourse Analysis

a. Content analysis

This content analysis will begin with a preliminary investigation aimed at determining the general orientation of the corpus, so to provide the reader with an exploratory overview of the discursive practices that have been employed. In particular, the first phase will be concerned with assessing the relative frequencies and collocation of relevant words and expressions. Drawing from the findings of the first stage, this section will derive some working hypothesis that will serve as guidelines for the rest of the analyses. After that, the content analysis will proceed by looking for specific linguistic features so to substantiate or confute the preliminary conjectures.

Relative frequency

Table 1[18] delineates a language generally coherent with an official diplomatic setting. However, there are some specificities that are worth noting and that will direct the forthcoming considerations.

First of all, from the table it is possible to observe that terms referring to concepts such as "state/states" and "nations" are employed with a significant regularity through the entire corpus. However, the most prominent terms in the corpus are "Ukraine/Ukrainian" and "Russia/Russian", which appear respectively 443 and 355 times. Their relative frequency is substantial and constant throughout the documents. This manifests the choice to adopt a State-centric approach that particularly counterpose Ukrainian and Russian identity.

Moreover, this hypothesis is fostered by the recurrent utilization of words referring to concepts, like "people" and "population", that indicate a collective identity. In addition, it is also possible to observe that terms referring to concepts related to a state's prerogatives, such as "territory" and "sovereignty" are surprising under-employed. Finally, it is worth to

[18] For the purposes of this discourse analyses the list have been cleaned of all the terms that would interfere with this kind of examination such as articles, adverbs, conjunctions, verbs and other not relevant grammatical features.

highlight the comparatively infrequent references to concepts related to war and peace, which might be regarded as an attempt to transmit a particular perspective on the Crimean crisis.

Term	Count	Relative frequency
ukraine	289	0.0071940655
russia	183	0.0045554116
russian	172	0.0042815893
ukrainian	154	0.0038335158
crimea	146	0.0036343723
security	114	0.0028377974
people	113	0.0028129045
kiev	102	0.002539082
situation	98	0.00243951
international	74	0.0018420791
rights	67	0.0016678283
agreements	65	0.0016180425
state	54	0.0013442199
military	53	0.0013193269
right	53	0.0013193269
treaty	53	0.0013193269
nations	52	0.001294434
human	51	0.001269541
political	50	0.001244648
law	45	0.0011201833
country	44	0.0010952903
countries	43	0.0010703973
western	39	0.00097082544
new	38	0.00094593246
power	37	0.00092103955
support	37	0.00092103955
resolution	36	0.0008961466
conflict	34	0.00084636064
elections	34	0.00084636064
measures	34	0.00084636064
weapons	34	0.00084636064
fact	33	0.00082146766
forces	33	0.00082146766
population	32	0.00079657475
territory	32	0.00079657475
ukrainians	31	0.0007716818
crimean	30	0.0007467888
armed	28	0.00069700286
border	28	0.00069700286
information	28	0.00069700286
life	28	0.00069700286
nato	28	0.00069700286
region	28	0.00069700286
language	27	0.00067210995

media	27	0.00067210995
citizens	26	0.000647217
crisis	26	0.000647217
news	26	0.000647217
peninsula	26	0.000647217
permanent	25	0.000622324
principles	25	0.000622324
problems	25	0.000622324
russia's	25	0.000622324
war	25	0.000622324
actions	24	0.00059743103
crimeans	24	0.00059743103
dialogue	24	0.00059743103
world	24	0.00059743103
violation	23	0.00057253806
european	22	0.00054764515
peace	22	0.00054764515
national	20	0.0004978592
sovereignty	11	0.00027382257
sovereign	9	0.00022403664

Table 1: relevant terms and relative frequency. Software used: AntConc

Collocation

To study the collocation of a word is particularly relevant in this study, since frequent correlations between two concepts not explicitly interconnected might unmask implicit conceptualizations. As Conoscenti realized when analyzing NATO's official discourse during the Kosovo war, the words "humanitarian" and "intervention" are never to be found together; however their conceptual concurrence – highlighted by a collocates' observation – led the media to frame every NATO's action as inherently humanitarian (Conoscenti, 2004).

In the corpus, the term "Crimea" appears within five words from the word "Russia/Russian" a combined 44 times, while next to the word "Ukraine/Ukrainian" only 13 times. Moreover, it is notable that two of the most frequent terms to appear collocated next to the word "Crimea" are the terms "people" and "reunification", whilst the reference to the Tatar minority is also significant. Moreover, the words Russia/Russian are mostly employed in conjunction with expressions that recalls national unity, while the words related to Ukraine can be found mostly in the same phrases as terms with a negative acceptation such as "crisis",

"situation" or "conflict". Also worth nothing is the fact that the term "sovereignty" mostly collocates next to "Russia", "integrity" and "interference" but only once as related to Ukraine.

Collocation		
Term	Collocate	Count
Russian	Federation	28
Russia	Ukraine	23
Ukraine	situation	20
Crimea	people	18
people	Crimea	18
security	meeting	13
Russian	language	12
Crimea	Russia	12
Russia	Crimea	11
Russian	United	11
Russian	nations	11
Russian	border	11
security	peace	11
Crimea	Ukraine	9
Russian	Crimea	8
Crimea	Ukrainians	8

Table 2: collocation of relevant terms. Software used: AntConc

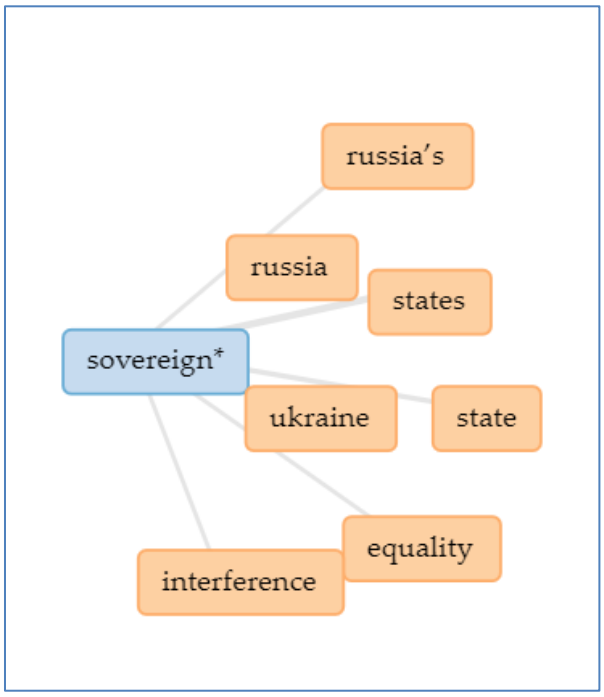


Table 3: collocates of sovereign/sovereignty. Software used: Voyant tools

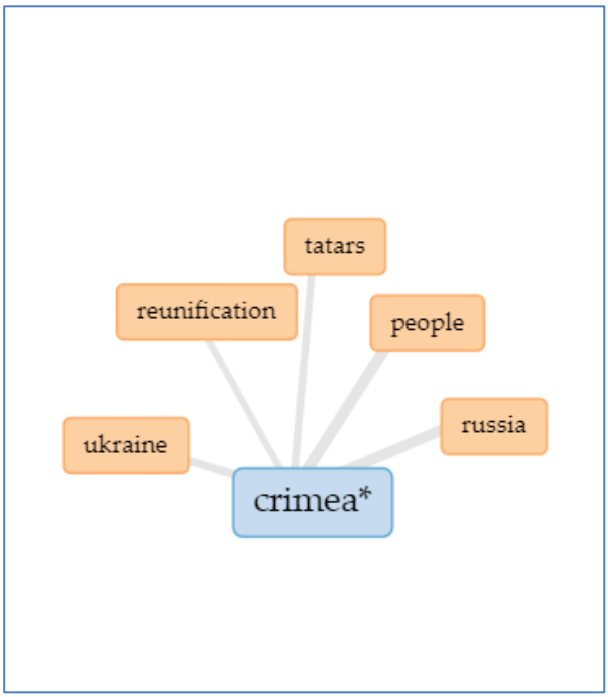


Table 4: collocates of Crimea/Crimean. Software used: Voyant tools

Linguistic features

From the preliminary inquiry, it has emerged a nationalistic discourse based on concepts that tend to reinforce the separation between different countries by leveraging on patriotic feelings. Thus, to validate this hypothesis this analysis will proceed by observing the presence or absence of those elements that (C. Green, 2007) regards as usually present in patriotic political discourse. In particular, the ensuing section of the analysis will investigate the presence of linguistic markers to determine the presence of the following features: identity, in-group versus out-group, stance and engagement.

Identity and group exclusivity

Some common linguistic features that are often employed in political discourse are those that evoke patriotic sentiments, by referring to a shared set of values in which a specific discourse community can identify (Íñigo-Mora, 2004). Careful selection of lexicon, together with an attentive use of personal pronouns can arouse *pathos* and evoke feelings leading to a collective identity (C. Green, 2007). Personal pronouns are present in the corpus regularly in the documents analysed. In particular, the term "we" appears 419 times, and the term "us" 50 times, which are quite unusual results for a corpus based on formal public statements. Especially in a discourse in which identity indicators are present, it is crucial to comprehend whether this presents characteristics of group exclusivity (Oktar, 2001). Concepts that relate to the "other" appear significantly less than identity markers: for example, the word "they" shows 179 hits, while "them" 81. However, they are still emblematic of a tendency to represent a contrast between the Russian people and the Ukrainian government: this will be further investigated in the next section of this analysis. In particular, those findings – in relation with the relative frequency of terms referring to both Ukrainian and Russian – might lead to believe that it has been exerted a leverage on a sense of community, probably in order to present Russian position in front of the international community as a united and consensual one.

Stance and engagement

Throughout the corpus there are very few indicators of displays of authority, usually in the form of obligations, assumptions or personal points of view (C. Green, 2007). On the other hand, the speakers often engage with their audiences, not only when deemed necessary in order to respect the format of the meeting (as in the case of press conferences), but also in speeches intended for wider audiences. The absence of hedges, boosters and self-mention demonstrate that the speakers do not attempt to impose their standpoint by disguising authoritative attitudes, personal commitments or exclusive involvement, how it is sometimes the case in political discourse (Sayah & Hashemi, 2014). However, direct engagement with the audience – identifiable by the presence of questions, direct pronouns and reference to shared knowledge – might suggest a conscious inter-personal alignment aimed at stimulating the maturation of "guided interpretations" (Hyland, 2005).

b. Context analysis

This section of the analyses will occur in two successive steps. First, it will examine some specific sections of the documents with a qualitative approach. It will investigate the use of linguistic features that are identifiable with a corpus-based software and require a critical focus. In particular, it will concentrate on the context of some less frequent locutions and concepts. Subsequently, it will observe the presence of rhetorical figures meant to trigger unconscious mechanisms through the use of symbolism, suggestive imagery and metaphorical language with political implications.

In the previous section, there have been identified some indicators of the employment of a nationalist discourse directed at constructing a collective identity as opposed to the "other", in this case Ukraine. Thus the contextual analysis will start by analyzing those features with a qualitative approach. First of all, the locution "territorial integrity" appears four times in the Corpus, always next to the verbs "respect", "recognize" and "protect". Half of the times refers to the principle as proclaimed in the UN Charter and the other half to the Ukrainian territory; never in direct concordance with Crimea. Instead, the peninsula is always named when there is a reference to the right of "self-determination" – which is mentioned

nine times in the corpus. This principle is always located next to collective concepts such as nations or people, and often – in five cases – used as subject in the sentence. In fact, Russian officials tend to portray this principle as an "actor" in the Crimean events.

Table 5: collocates of territory/territorial. Software used: Voyant tools

As underlined in Chapter 3, the Russian use of force has been framed as an intervention justifiable with both legal and humanitarian motives. However, in the corpus there are absolutely no references to the concepts of "intervention by invitation" or "humanitarian intervention". The term "intervention", in fact, appears 4 times but only twice in a relevant context, and always as a reference to the principle of non-interference. In both cases,[19] Russian officials denounce American and Ukrainian failure to comply with the right of the Crimean people to decide on their sovereign status. The word "invitation", on the other hand, can only be found once, and specifically in a UN Security Council meeting in June 2014. The fact that in the following years this justification was not stressed upon, suggest that Russian officials do not consider it as a sufficiently convincing argument.

Moreover, it is crucial to note that the analogy with Kosovo appears with a certain frequency throughout the corpus. In fact, it is mentioned 14 times, mostly following specific requests of clarifications from the audience. In all cases, the reference to the events in Kosovo

[19] Appendix B, Documents 6 and 21

(both the partition and the military invasion) is adopted as a comparison with a similar circumstance in which the international community reacted quite differently.

Finally, the word "reunification", which occurs seven times in the corpus, is always related to the concepts of "Crimea/Crimean" or "Russia/Russian". On the contrary, the word "annexation" only appears two times and only with a negative function: it is only employed when citing or referring to journalists' words and to rebut critical views. From a study of the context of the use of this ontologically similar but conceptually opposite concepts it emerges a discourse centered on the role of a "Russian identity" as foundation of the Russian nation and State. This discourse – which has been present altogether in Russian political discourse throughout Putin's stay in power – found its apex during the Crimean crisis. In fact, Russian official discourse highlighting the cultural affinity of the Crimean population was aimed at portraying the annexation as not only advantageous, but also necessary for both Crimea and Russia. Russian language recalled the idea of a reunification of two territories separated by bureaucratic mistakes of past administrations.

Solidarity and antagonism

Inherently interconnected with the linguistic features examined in the previous section are those that can reveal if unity of vision or discordance in the speaker's attitude towards its audience. The use of the second-person singular, for example, is usually regarded as an attempt to express either solidarity or antagonism with the audience (Kuo, 2002). In the text, the use of the pronoun "you" has been recorded 217 times. However, as demonstrated by the selection of relevant results in Table 6, this is used mostly in a negative connotation.

In the corpus analyzed, in fact, the speakers mostly appear to adopt a strictly formal language to distantiate themselves from the audience – although, as it has made clear in the previous section, still openly engaging with it. This distance, however, tends to be reduced when addressing challenging questions or statements, especially in the more confrontational environments such as the press conferences. In particular, there is a noticeable difference between the use of engagement techniques in the first half of the corpus, and the second half. This tendency is evidence of the fact that the discourse strategy of Russian government has

been modified over the years, probably to adopt a closer and more personal engagement with the international audience.

File	Quotation
Document 18	I believe you have no idea how wrong you are. Please, come and visit it, we invite you.
Document 18	You do not want to listen to and hear what you are being told
Document 18	Why do you go on treating us to your worn out hackneyed statements that Russia should this, should that and should that?
Document 20	I hope that after this brush up you will ultimately dispel any doubts that Kiev openly juggles the information in order to mislead you. This misconception prevents you from making a correct diagnosis for Ukraine's conflict.
Document 22	Then let me ask a question: what is the basis for your judgement about the life in a place you have not been to, of which you basically know nothing and do not want to learn a thing?
Document 24	… if you want me to put it like this. These people were threatened, they were threatened directly.
Document 24	Russia is a nice scapegoat for the West. If nothing comes out of what you are doing, just blame it on Russia

Table 6: contextualization of you/your. Software used: TextStat

Rhetorical language

In political speech the use of rhetorical figures, especially metaphors and similes, is often a symptom of an attempt to exert influence. According to Musolff (2012), they are a way to manipulate one's understanding of a complex issue by transposing "conceptual structures from a relatively familiar, experientially grounded 'source domain' onto a more abstract or less well-known 'target domain'". Controversial arguments regarding intricate political and juridical matters, such as the theory and application of international and humanitarian law, can be simplified so to be comprehended by a popular audience. Moreover, by the referral to familiar concept such as home, family and work, the statements can produce in the listener a sense of solidarity with the cause. International affairs are thus given shape of business or family issues in order to shape the cognitive account of popular representation of political behaviors.

This illustration[20] is an example of this. First Deputy Dmitry Polyanskiy starts its speech in front of UN Security Council with a comparison with Alice in Wonderland, equating the Ukrainian situation with a terrible nightmare. Subsequently, he maintains a highly figurative language by employing the metaphor: "We rescued people from a sinking ship and gave them a new old home". Here, Polyanskiy represents the situation of Crimea in 2014 as one of immediate and serious danger, and create a positive image of Russia as ready to do whatever it takes for the well-being of its people, wherever they are.

[20] Appendix B, document 22

4.3. Russian foreign policy: a demonstration of organized hypocrisy?

From the discourse analysis we can draw some conclusion regarding the Crimean crisis. As hypothesized, a number of linguistic features have been adopted in Russian officials' speeches when referring to the Crimean secession and annexation. In particular, there are some evident markers that indicate continuous references to a collective identity of the Russian people, based on common history and shared cultural bonds.

By referring to concepts such as the protection of Russians abroad and the right to guarantee order and stability in the near-abroad expressed with the *Privileged Interest Doctrine,* the Russian government is openly making use of a patriotic narrative with an instrumental dimension. Biersack and O'Lear (2014) define this as Russia's neo-Eurasianist nationalism, and claims it has been a prominent discursive practice to justify Russian foreign policy in the latest years. Although it is not straightforward to individuate the ultimate objective of this policy, it would be safe to affirm that it is partially aimed at fostering the support of its citizens. However, the construction of a nationalistic discourse might be intended also to represent Russian unity in front of the international community (Hopf, 2016), as with rising nationalism in European countries such a discourse is likely to receive popular appreciation from foreign populations as well.

To this respect, Russian foreign policy might appear as calculated actions which act upon some grey areas of international law in order to appeal to the international community as an impartial and righteous actor. This is because of the importance of the principle of recognition in the international system (Krasner, 2013). Especially in a highly interdependent world, this principle results fundamental even for a Great Power, such as Russia. Drawing from Krasner's considerations, Russian governing elites would thus not openly violate international law, as that would ostracize them from the international community. Instead, they would provide ample legal justification to demonstrate their legitimate belonging to this very community.

From what it has been possible to observe throughout the analysis, in fact, by its official discourse the Russian governments has attempted to portray themselves as defenders of a cause. In particular, since its dissatisfaction with some interpretations of the international legal framework regarding sovereignty, the Russian government has been attempting to

reshape global order and to create a legal precedent by its actions in Crimea (Bebler, 2015; Steinberg, 2013). For instance, the Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy, during a press conference following a UN Security Council session,[21] portrays the international community and the needs and well-being of ordinary people as two opposed and incompatible things. By challenging principles that are regarded by some as inherent in the international society of States, Russia is attempting to reconstruct its fundamental structure in order to reinforce their status of Russia as Great Power. From the analysis of the Russian foreign policy discourse regarding Crimea, some aspects of this are particularly evident.

The dichotomy Russia/West, although present in some parts of the corpus, is not given as much prominence as the Russia/Ukraine divide. This plays a particularly relevant role in the construction of the Russian nationalistic identity as opposed to the out-group, which is perceived as a competitor with regards to Crimea. In fact, the events that took place in Crimea since 2014 are portrayed from the official Russian voices as direct consequences of the failure of the Ukrainian government to take care of its people. Russian acts seem to take place as inevitable reactions, rather than deliberate actions with a precise political and strategic objective. More precisely, principles of international law such as the right to self-determination are impersonated as the main drivers of Russian efforts.

However, this line of argument encounters some inevitably conflicting positions. In fact, there appears to emerge a double standard towards certain practices, which are criticized when employed by others and upheld as legitimate in Russian behavior. For example, it is worth noting the substantial contradiction that Russian officials have encountered when referring to the Kosovo invasion and partition by NATO. Alert critical voices have observed, in fact, that to refer to a unilateral suspension of international law such as the intervention in Kosovo – which was defined as a "particular danger to international peace, law and order" by the Russian government (Bilkova, 2015) – as a precedent to justify Russia's actions, sounds particularly hypocritical.

Moreover, by looking at Russian actions and comparing them with their public discourse, it can be noticed a considerable discrepancy, in particular towards principles of international law and their application. In fact, the same principles are sometimes upheld as the overarching ethical standards of Russian Foreign policy, and sometimes disregarded as

[21] Appendix B, document 24

unimportant and not relevant. In particular, this thesis will highlight three major area in which the decoupling between facts and discourse is particularly evident: human rights, minorities' rights and the conception of sovereignty.

Russia has repeatedly accused the Ukrainian government of failure to comply with international regulations of human rights. In particular, they have accused them of suppression of dissent voices, in particular through intimidation and imprisonment of independent journalists, civil activists and political representatives that did not display loyalty the Ukrainian government.[22] Furthermore, they have lamented an assertive use of censorship and a manipulative control of the media. To any reader familiar with Russian political environment, these accusations might sound anachronistic. Human Rights Watch ("Russia," 2019a) has reported the threat and use of violence on political activists who attempt to criticize Putin and the Russian government, and significant restriction on freedom of expression and assembly. Freedom House ("Russia," 2019b) rates the country as 'not free' due to its suppression of political dissent, and Amnesty International ("Russian Federation 2017/2018," 2018) reports the arrest of human rights defenders as a periodic occurrence. Therefore, it comes natural to doubt Russian government's true interest in the protection of values such as the protection of human rights; they appear to be merely tools of a pragmatic foreign policy rather than deeply entrenched principle of the Russian political culture.

Secondly, it is common in Russian arguments on Crimea to refer to the unacceptable conduct of the Ukrainian government towards the protection of minorities, with a particular attention to the Russian minorities. Again, this argument encounters deep skepticism in critical observers. Notwithstanding its multicultural and cosmopolitan nature, the Russian Federation is not a model of conduct with regards to minorities' rights: OSCE and the Council of Europe have observed that minorities are by no means reserved fair treatment according to the standards delineated by international treaties and conventions. In particular in the latest years, these organizations have registered a swift increase in discriminative behaviors towards those speaking different languages or belonging to different ethnicities (COE, 2018; OSCE, 2019). In Crimea, in particular, there have been denounced discrimination, intolerance and even political violence towards minorities, activists and political opponents (Gorbunova, 2014), especially against Ukrainian minorities (Prokopchuk, 2019). The Council of Europe established that, although in the Ukrainian legal system there exists no definite framework on

[22] Appendix B, document 19

the protection of national minorities, conditions have not improved for such minorities under Russian governance. In fact, now people are compelled to take side with the State even if they do not feel as belonging to a particular ethnic or national status, or if they declare a multicultural identity. This has been connected with the emergence of a nationalistic discourse aimed at fueling sentiments of patriotic solidarity towards ethnic Russians (Biersack & O'Lear, 2014). However, "the identity tags used seem to be attached to an exercise of structural power by Russia to enforce territorial adjustments rather than to reflect a reality manifested in responsive policy decisions" (Allison, 2014).

Finally, the aspect in which a double standard is more evident regards Russian conception of sovereignty (Kokoshin, 2015). Throughout this thesis it has been possible to comprehend how the Russian actions in Crimea have been coherent with its recent foreign policy. In fact as they have carried on a pragmatic vision of Russia as influencing entity in the world. The use of hybrid methods such as misinformation and propaganda is a strong indicator of Russian need to comply with international norms and values (Bebler, 2015). The deniability of their military actions gives Russian strategists that edge that allows them to pursue pragmatic interests while showing adherence with the main legal frameworks. Moreover, the findings of this analysis indicate a perception of the international system as a competitive arena in which power and interests are to be pursued in a zero-sum game. By starting from this presupposition it is possible to understand the Russian vision of the Crimean crisis as a series of inevitable events caused by the clash of contrasting interests in a region so ripe with economic, ethnic, political and social tensions.

However, this indicates a decoupling of discursive strategies from actions. By transposing Krasner's thoughts on the functioning of the international legal framework, States must refer to common values and shared norms in order to justify their violations, so to represent them as negligible acts. Thus, Russian officials' questionable references to such principles would correspond to a way to "save the face" by demonstrating compliance to those same principles that they are breaching. In fact, involvement in foreign countries is apparently rejected by the Russian government. This theoretical line of conduct, however, does not appear to be respected in practice. Russian actions would thus not comply with the orthodox conception of sovereignty that the Russian government struggle to attribute upon

themselves. As the case of Crimea demonstrates, the Russian government conception of sovereignty resembles very closely Krasner's interpretation of it, as outlined in Chapter 1.

Allusions to principles such as the intervention upon invitation or following humanitarian emergencies are so sporadic in the corpus to suggest that their purpose does not lie in a genuine interest in formal procedural applications or in necessitous people. At the same time, the numerous mentions of Ukraine's inadequate democratic governance, political freedom and minorities' rights underscore a will to instrumentally adopt such principles only when necessary to fulfill strategic objectives. These considerations highlight a hypocritical vision of sovereignty. The decoupling of logics of appropriateness from logics of consequences is evident in the documents analysed in this chapter. Indeed, the use of principles of international law seem to be dependent upon the short-term objectives of Russia's governing elites. In particular, this analysis has highlighted the employment of a nationalistic discourse even in an international environment, presumably to exhibit a unity of intents necessary to reinforce this position. However, representation of such a national unity is quite unrealistic. Russian government, in fact, must recognize the importance of clans and interest groups which act on grey economy and non-transparent power structures, which oftentimes have an impact on political and social dynamics (Obydenkova & Libman, 2015). Indeed, Russian governing elites are likely to be reassured by an assertive foreign policy, and would thus continue to support Putin's leadership in the future.

CONCLUSION

At the time of this writing, most scholars question the legality and legitimacy of Russian annexation of Crimea. However, controversies regarding the next step to be taken continue to divide the international community, which cannot agree on a common interpretation of the international framework. The Russian Federation is undoubtedly correct in some of their affirmations regarding, for example, the state of minorities and the respect of human rights in Ukraine, as demonstrated by international observation missions. The fragile and corrupted government of Ukraine, moreover, still lacks the capability of creating strong institutional frameworks and establish and implement clear and coherent legal structures regarding human rights, minorities' protection and social justice. However, it appears clear that the Russian government is in no position to denounce a foreign government over such issues. Whether minorities, political opponents and the more vulnerable strata of society in general are more secure under Russian governance is highly debatable.

From an accurate analysis of the facts in Crimea and of the official Russian speeches, it emerges an instrumental utilization of principles of international law. Actions in Crimea appear to be coherent with Russian foreign policy, as they seem to be directed towards assuring a greater role of Russia in the international community. However, they would seem to contradict Russian strong position regarding the importance of sovereignty, and the responsibility of all members of the international community to support each other in safeguarding their territorial integrity.

The concept of territorial integrity, in particular, seem to be relevant only when justifying Russian actions, but is promptly dismissed when unnecessary, as regarding the Ukrainian situation. In short, it is possible to argue that the hypocritical use of such concepts is aimed at fostering internal support while providing credible justifications in front of the international community. The Russian government expresses concerns that are not genuine, but are aimed at achieving some concrete advantages. To this regard, it is possible to identify a double function. In fact, it is undoubtful that the Russian Federation will, in the long term, earn major economic, political and strategic benefits from the annexation of Crimea. In the short term, however, there might exist additional interests. The costs of the administrative, economic and social integration of the Crimean peninsula, in fact, seem for the moment to

overcome its strict financial benefits (Bebler, 2015). Moreover, considering the financial loss caused by the sanctions, it could be argued that Russia has gained very little economic power. Politically, Russia has encountered widespread opposition and has had to deal with international isolation since 2014.

Thus, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that there might exist more motivations for Russian annexation of Crimea. By applying Krasner's conception of the international system, regime support would appear to be a strong motivation for this annexation. As the propaganda means constantly utilised appear to demonstrate, the Russian government is striving in creating nationalistic sentiments and in fostering a sense of patriotic solidarity centered on the Russian ethnicity (Tsygankov, 2019). The annexation of Crimea has enabled the Russian government to obtain public support because of their ability to compensate for a major historical injustice, as well as obtain a strategic victory. Russian political elites, thus, would be able to regain popularity and the support of interest groups essential for their survival and prosperity. To conclude, Russian actions in Crimea appear to be coherent with Krasner's vision of the international society, in which concepts such as sovereignty are used hypocritically in order to achieve political elites' objectives.

This thesis hopes to fill a crucial gap on a subject that has been studied from every imaginable perspective. However, its main findings suggest that it is still crucial to research issues regarding Great Powers' foreign policies, especially in a time in which the emergence of hybrid challenges seem to pose a serious threat to the world's democratic values. Academic research could contribute to halt and reverse processes, such as the rise of nationalism, that contribute to a widespread weakness of democracy worldwide.

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APPENDIX A

Sovereignty: an historical overview

Some scholars such as Bartelson argue that Sovereignty exists as a principle since the Renaissance, when the city-states in Italy overcame the Christian conception of society as a harmonious order determined from above. In this period, in fact, theory of state develops thanks to authors such as Machiavelli, who justified the action of the Monarch, or *souverain*, with the preservation of the common good. In particular, "with the rise of diplomatic communications and the scientification and monopolization of warfare as its chief manifestations" (Bartelson, 1995), the basis of the idea of State and of the modern international system started to develop. However, it is only with "the peace treaties of Westphalia [that] the universalistic, hierarchical order of states [was replaced] with a system composed of independent 'sovereign' states" (Piirimäe, 2010). Those states were recognized full supremacy within their own territory, especially on all kind of religious and political issues, and each state recognized the other states as equals (Gross, 1948).

First of all, this means that each state has the supremacy within its borders, which in practice translates with elements such as the monopoly on the use of force or the right to choose the political system to be governed with (Grimm, 2015). Whether it resided in a monarch, a constitution, a people or any other sort of juridical or political entity, its main characters have remained constant (Fowler & Bunck, 1995). In particular, there can be identified two distinct aspects of the sovereign state: "first that the state possesses and exercises a power that is its own […]; secondly, that this power is unlimited." (Troper, 2012). In different historical periods and geographical settings the ultimate depositary of sovereignty has been identified with different entities. Since originally the term sovereignty was used principally to refer to a monarchical rule, it was associated with the notion of absolute power. The French jurist Jean Bodin, for instance, used the term to justify the concentration of power in the hands of the French king. At later times, this interpretation was shared by theorists such as Hobbes and Schmitt, which highlighted the absolute dominance of the monarch as the indisputable holder of sovereignty (Bredekamp, Hause, & Bond, 1999). However, Bodin himself also introduced the idea that sovereignty can "only be provided if the body politic were regarded as being composed of both rulers and ruled, […] and if the governing power

respected legal and moral rules." (Hinsley, 1986). This consideration was picked up from the jusnaturalist schools of thought, in particular from authors such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. According to them, the state is constituted as a result of a social contract, and thus sovereignty was legitimately granted to the government by the people. This idea was destined to play a key role in the transformation of the concept which took place with the advent of the modern age.

After the French and the American Revolutions, in fact, the introduction of idea of democracy suggested the possibility of a different organization of the state. In democratic systems, however, it is controversial in which body does the sovereignty resides. For example, the proponents of the theory of pluralistic sovereignty (Dahl, 1967; Polsby, 1960; Truman, 1951) believe that "sovereignty in each society does not reside in any particular place but shifts constantly from one group (or alliance of groups) to another" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). Some other jurists and scholars regard a nation's parliament as the ultimate depository of sovereign rule (Austin, 1995; Wade, 1955), while in the USA the judgement expressed by the Supreme Court in Marbury v. Madison (1803) portrays the Constitution in this role (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). Some authors prefer to adopt abstract concepts such as the nation or the people (Troper, 2012), while some other criticize this view by arguing that in most states the power resides within a small circle of people (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011).

A qualified attempt to synthetize the academic debate on the topicality of sovereignty is presented by Fowler and Bunck (1995), who make use of the "chunk and basket" metaphor to represent the division between absolutists and relativists. In fact, in the academic literature some believe states have all equal access to sovereignty, which is to them like a chunk of stone (an immutable block), other think sovereignty changes for each state, different rights and duties, like a basket of variable dimensions. The latter group comprises those who believe that since the seventeenth century the concept has adapted to an inconstant international system and political leaders have made sure to reinforce it (Schrijver, 2000). Relativists, on the other hand, tend to assume that power differences between states prevent an unitary conception of *de facto* sovereignty, and regard the inequality of the international system as a systemic challenge to the normative conception of sovereignty (Kingsbury, 2019). Moreover, they generally agree that what is widely presented as a single term conceals instead different concepts (Krasner, 1999).

APPENDIX B

Primary sources

	DATE	TITLE
1	**2014.03.06**	Informal comments to the media by H.E. Mr. Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, on the situation in Ukraine.
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_ukrn
2	**2014.04.07**	Sergei Lavrov – It's not Russia that is destabilising Ukraine
	Direct link:	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/07/sergei-lavrov-russia-stabilise-ukraine-west
3	**2014.05.21**	Informal comments to the media by H.E. Mr. Vitaly I. Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations on situation in Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/so_ukr2105
4	**2014.06.24**	Statement by H.E. Ambassador Vitaly I. Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, during the Security Council Meeting on the situation in Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_ukr2406
5	**2015.09.28**	Statement by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York (*partial*)
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/vladimirputin70thsession
6	**2016.02.15**	Statement by Mr. Peter Iliichev, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations at the Security Council meeting on maintenance of international peace and security
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_ppc1502
7	**2016.04.20**	Comment by the MFA of Russia on the US Department of State's report on adherence to and compliance with arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament agreements and commitments (*partial*)
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/mfa_comment15042016
8	**2016.04.28**	Statement by Ambassador Vitaly I. Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, during the Security Council meeting on the situation in Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_ukr280416
9	**2016.08.10**	Joint news conference with President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan (*partial*)

	Direct link:	http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52684#sel=47:1:YS,47:2:SY
10	**2016.08.11**	Remarks to the press by Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, following the UN Security Council consultations on the situation in Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/cm_ukr1108
11	**2016.08.11**	Statement by the foreign ministry of Russia
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2388555
12	**2017.04.18**	Statement by Mr. Evgeniy Zagaynov, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the Security Council on maintenance of international peace and security: human rights and prevention of armed conflict
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_achr
13	**2018.03.08**	Statement by Ambassador Vassily A. Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the Security Council on the Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/osce080318
14	**2018.10.31**	Statement by Mr. Andrey Belousov, Deputy head of the delegation of the Russian Federation to the First Committee of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly on "Regional disarmament and security" cluster (*partial*)
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/reg_disarm1com
15	**2018.11.26**	Right of reply by Mr.Dmitry Polyanskiy, First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the Security Council meeting on the violation of the Russian State Border in the Strait of Kerch by the Ukrainian Armed Forces
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_azov_2_2611
16	**2018.12.14**	Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Dmitry Chumakov, main part of the 73rd GA Fifth Committee session on the UN Programme and Budget implications arising from the draft resolution of the GA Third Committee (A/C.3/73/L.48) "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine" (A/C.5/73/14)
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/5thcom1418
17	**2019.01.25**	Remarks by Russia's Permanent Representative to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on the

		violation of linguistic rights in Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3482951
18	**2019.02.12**	Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at the UN Security Council Briefing on Ukraine
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/ukraine1120219
19	**2019.02.19**	Comment by the Information and Press Department on the 5th anniversary of the state coup in Ukraine and its consequences
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3529002
20	**2019.02.20**	Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at the plenary meeting of 73rd session of the General Assembly on agenda item 67
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/ga_ukraine2002
21	**2019.03.12**	Comment by the Information and Press Department on the expiry of the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty of 1997
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3565600
22	**2019.03.15**	Statement by First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy at the Security Council Arria-Formula meeting on Crimea regarding "Fifth anniversary of the beginning of Russia's occupation of Crimea: A blatant violation of international law"
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/crimea150319
23	**2019.03.16**	Comment by the Information and Press Department regarding individual restrictive measures adopted by the EU Council over "escalation" in the Kerch Strait
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3574796
24	**2019.03.18**	Press-Conference by First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy on the 5th anniversary of Crimea's Reunification with Russia
	Direct link:	http://russiaun.ru/en/news/pccri18032019
25	**2019.03.25**	Comment by the Information and Press Department on the refusal to accredit the OSCE's Russian observers at the Ukrainian presidential election
	Direct link:	http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3583685