MA Russian and Eurasian Studies

Final thesis

Title	"The states that cried bear? An assessment of Russia's deniable intervention as a regional threat"
Author	Drs. Freek Mulder
Student nr.	S1601849
Supervisor	Dr. Max Bader
Date	04-01-2016
Word count	16,778

The states that cried bear?

An assessment of Russia's deniable intervention as a regional threat

"War is never inevitable, though the belief that it is can become one of its causes."

-Joseph S. Nye

Introduction

Russia's involvement in Ukraine has been defined by many observers as hybrid warfare: a type of warfare "widely understood to blend conventional/unconventional, regular/irregular, and information and cyber warfare" (NATO, 2015a).[1] Despite this conceptual opaqueness, hybrid warfare quickly became the threat *du jour*. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, for example, has stated that hybrid warfare is one of the key focuses of NATO and that the organization has to adapt to counter this threat (NATO, 2015b; BBC, 2015). Other European government officials, including Ministers of Foreign Affairs and high ranking military officers, have also made remarks to this extent (Rijksoverheid, 2014; IBTimes UK, 2015; Financial Times, 2015; Newsweek, 2015). Hybrid warfare is especially seen as a threat in the eastern European states in close geographical proximity to Russia. Many of these states are worried that Russia will use hybrid warfare to destabilize their countries as well.

Scholars and pundits have tried to define and conceptualize hybrid warfare (e.g. Bērziņš, 2014; Galeotti, 2014, 2015; Rácz, 2015). Some have argued that its features are too unspecific to give the concept any applicability (e.g. Topychkanov, 2015).[2] I concur in part with such critiques. Calling something 'hybrid' is often lazy academics. It allows one to enumerate all empirical characteristics of a phenomenon without making tough choices about what characteristics warrant emphasis and weight. Yet making those tough choices and providing

[1] With Russia's strategy in Ukraine I refer to Russia's military involvement in Crimea and the Donbas region.
[2] This lack of applicability is illustrated by the fact that Russia, Daesh, and Hezbollah, despite being very dissimilar, have all been described as hybrid threats.

clarity are exactly what scholars are supposed to do.

With this in mind I argue that Russia's approach in Ukraine is best described as a deniable intervention. This deniability is achieved mainly through the use of irregular warfare, such as covert operations and support for local insurgents, but also through the use of biased, pro-Kremlin media. The primary goal of a deniable intervention is to destabilize the target state. I will extend on this in a subsequent chapter.

So far little attention has been given to the question if the prevailing threat perception (as mentioned in the first paragraph) is warranted. The construction or overestimation of external threat is known to be a powerful political motivator – the idea of rallying around the flag – and a key feature of a diversionary foreign policy (Smith, 1996, pp. 133-134). It is of vital importance to the assessment of foreign policy to examine the threat perception that underlies and motivates it. In other words, one should raise the question if the current estimation of the threat of Russia to the security of the region is accurate and legitimate or if the threat is under- or overestimated:

- To what extent do other states neighboring Russia mirror the conditions that made Russia's deniable intervention in Ukraine efficacious?

By answering this question I seek not only to contribute to the debate on (the fallout of) the Ukraine crisis, but also to the academic literature dealing with Russian foreign policy. Furthermore, I seek to contribute to the general body of work on the Eurasian region by analyzing and clarifying what could become a regional phenomenon. Finally, answering this question will in a broader sense increase our knowledge of modern interstate conflict.

To answer the research question, I will employ a three-step approach that allows for a structured analysis of Russia's strategy in Ukraine and what it means for the region:

1. Conceptualizing 'hybrid warfare' as a deniable intervention;
2. Identifying the (pre)conditions that allowed it to be efficacious in Ukraine;
3. Determining whether these (pre)conditions are also present in other cases.

There are four cases that I have selected for the analysis: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, and Kazakhstan. These have been selected in order to keep geographical proximity, which is an essential condition for a deniable intervention, relatively constant. All cases border Russia. Other than that, the cases are quite dissimilar, which I will discuss in more detail below.

This thesis is structured as follows. First, I will discuss and criticize the concept of hybrid warfare by reviewing the literature on Russia's involvement in Ukraine. After that, I will build on this literature by creating a theoretical framework in which I will define Russia's involvement in Ukraine as a deniable intervention as well as outline the conditions central to this analysis. This theoretical framework will then be briefly operationalized. Finally, I will use this theoretical framework to assess whether or not the deniable intervention constitutes a region-wide security threat, by empirically analyzing the selected cases.

Literature review

As mentioned, one of the deficiencies of the concept hybrid warfare is that its catch-all characteristic dilutes its conceptual clearness. The definition mentioned in the introduction illustrates this problem: by stating that it blends all types of warfare ultimately leaves one empty-handed. Furthermore, defining hybrid warfare along the full spectrum of warfare without adding emphasis also means that it is not a new phenomenon (Topychkanov, 2015). Ruslan Pukhov, for example, has stated that hybrid warfare is "simply a modern application of an age-old set of military and political practices" (2015), while others argue that the novelty lies in the intensity and effective coordination of means (e.g. Rácz, 2015, p. 87).

On the offset it is important to understand to what these pundits refer when they write about practices and means. András Rácz (2015), for example, argues that hybrid warfare can be described as "being composed of three main phases, each of which is composed of three sections" (p. 57). In the preparatory phase Russia concentrates on the mapping of weaknesses, for which it draws upon the traditional toolbox of foreign policy. This toolbox consists of gaining economic influence, establishing networks of loyal NGO's and gaining a significant media position (pp. 58-59). This media position is an important aspect. It allows one to influence the public debate, thereby creating a favorable environment for intervening.

Next is the attack phase, in which "open, organized, armed violence starts to occur" (p. 60). An important feature of this violence is that it is carried out by 'local protestors' – although well-armed and exhibiting high tactical skills. Many of the local protestors in Crimea turned out to be Russian Special Forces (tenderly called 'polite men' in Russia) (Kremlin, 2014).

Finally, in the stabilization phase the locals are supposed to hold a referendum on independence/secession that will have lasting instability in the targeted state as result.

Rácz's three phase model can be criticized on several grounds. First, it assumes somewhat of a linear approach, in which means are deployed in a logical sequence.[3] Furthermore, within this linear approach there are three phases, nine sections, thirty 'bullet points' of action; which makes for a bulky framework. One can applaud Rácz's effort to be as thorough as possible, but without differentiating in weight between these 'bullet points' the framework is very much an enumeration with, consequently, limited analytical applicability.

Secondly, gaining economic influence and creating dependencies should not be considered part of 'a new type of warfare'. While economic coercion is not a big part of Rácz's framework, it should not be in there at all. Economic coercion is a different instrument altogether and has been a pervasive aspect of Russian (and Eurasian) foreign policy for decades (Amineh, 2003). Economic coercion has been used in the case of Ukraine as well, but for the sake of analytical clarity I argue that economic coercion happens alongside the deniable intervention central in this thesis. Both serve the same goal, namely destabilization of the targeted state.

Finally, some important elements of Russia's involvement are missing from his extensive framework. The first element that is left out is providing arms to the separatists in the Donbas region. I argue that this is one of the defining features of Russia's strategy. Instead, Rácz limits the role of the regular armed forces (excluding Special Forces) to "presenting an imminent threat" (p. 63) by posing on the border. Yet this threat came effectively into force when these troops started supplying arms and supplies across the border.

Considering the goals Russia wants to attain in Ukraine, it is not surprising that it chose to engage in what is sometimes called a proxy war (e.g. Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984). Idean Salehyan et al (2011) argue that "sponsoring a rebel organization is a tactic that states use to destabilize target governments" (p. 712). Not only is providing support to local insurgents less costly than direct interstate war, it also allows states to "plausibly deny complicity" (ibid., p. 713). The argument that "governments may have an incentive to hide acts of foreign aggression" (ibid.) is well-suited in explaining parts of Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

In addition, transnational kin is an important explanatorum in external state support for local insurgencies (ibid., p. 729). Transnational ethnic linkages ease the process of cooperation, because locals are less likely to fear divergent interests, while the supporting states can exercise

[3] This linear approach does not fare well with hybrid warfare considering the latter is sometimes referred to as non-linear warfare, which is an equally problematic concept: there is no such phenomenon as a linear war.

more control, thereby reducing the risk of agency slack (Salehyan, 2010, p. 509). It is also important to note in this regard that transnational ethnic linkages tend to increase both the likelihood of conflict breaking out (Cederman et al, 2009, p. 432) as the duration of the conflict (Cunninham, 2010, p. 125). As I will argue, media play an important part in fueling these transnational ethnic linkages, especially in the case of Russia and Ukraine.

The second element in Rácz's framework that is not adequately specified is the legal scheme of Russia's involvement. The main feature of this scheme is that Russia claims its actions are democratic and/or in accordance with (international) legislature while the opposite is more accurate. Heidi Reisinger and Aleksandr Golts (2014) talk about "actions with the appearance of legality" (p. 3), such as the Russian State Duma's authorization to use armed forces (while Russia is officially not a party to the conflict) and the Crimean referendum (claiming to represent the will of the people but not meeting international standards). Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Michael Bobick (2014) put it eloquently when they state that "Vladimir Putin satirizes the moral and legal arguments used by Western states to justify their own international intervention" (p. 405). Russia uses concepts such as humanitarian aid to provide arms and self-determination to justify occupying sovereign territory.

Roy Allison (2014) summarizes the appearance of legality as follows: "As the crisis escalated, Russia drew on legal rhetoric to assist the process of 'deniable' intervention. This aimed to blur the legal and illegal, to create justificatory smokescreens, in part by exploiting some areas of uncertainty in international law, while making unfounded assertions of 'facts' (especially ostensible threats to Russians and Russian-speakers). The justifications Russia offered for its actions exploited grey areas and flux in legal and normative development as well as playing back to western states their own liberal discourse" (p. 1259). One paradox in all of this is of course that Russia denies being involved yet argues with legal arguments it is allowed to be involved. I will adopt Allison's concept of deniable intervention.

So far I have discussed hybrid warfare or the deniable intervention in terms of the characteristics several authors have mentioned. The question then becomes what structural conditions provide fertile ground for such a strategy to work. Rácz provides some helpful insights in this regard by mentioning six conditions.

The first is that Russia has to be military superior to the targeted state (p. 74). Without military superiority the irregular forces will be destroyed. The second condition focuses on

logistics: “there either has to be a Russian military presence in the target region, as was the case in Crimea, or the region in question has to have a common border with Russia, with either a weak or non-existent border-guard service, as was the case in Eastern Ukraine” (pp. 82-83). In other words, a deniable intervention is only possible in those states that are in close geographical proximity. The third condition is that there has to be a strong media presence in the targeted state and in the international community (p. 81). This will obscure and confuse the public debate and provide well-chosen narratives that support the political objectives.

The other three conditions focus on the targeted state. The fourth condition is that there has to be weak central power and security structures. According to Rácz, only a “a well-functioning, strong state administration, together with its police and secret services, is able to quickly uncover and suppress [hostile] activities emanating from abroad” (p. 76). This condition seems to be somewhat overlapping with the first one mentioned (military superiority). Others have noted that state capacity is a key variable whether or not a state is ‘contaminated’ by civil war in neighboring states (Braithwaite, 2010, p. 317).

The fifth condition is that there has to be “be a lasting, regionally-concentrated dissatisfaction with the central government, preferably with an inherent ethnic or separatism-related element” (p. 78). Such dissatisfaction can be exploited, especially by appealing to the ethnic linkage mentioned a few paragraphs above. The sixth and final condition also focuses on the transnational linkage: the presence of a Russian-speaking minority (pp. 80-81). Such minorities provide the legitimization of intervening abroad and form a strong basis for a local insurgency.

In sum, many authors have tried to make sense of Russia’s strategy in Ukraine. Some have argued that the concept ‘hybrid warfare’ should be used in this regard, while others have focused on the legal aspects of Russia’s intervention. I have argued that some aspects, such as the support for local insurgents, have been addressed elsewhere in more detail and are suitable to apply on the case of Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. In the next section I will build on this literature review and bring all the different pieces discussed so far together in one theoretical framework.

Conceptualizing Russia's involvement in Ukraine: a deniable intervention

In this section I will outline the theoretical framework that provides the basis for the empirical analysis below. The framework is based upon the discussed literature, especially on Rácz (2014), Allison (2015) and Salehyan et al (2011). First I will conceptualize the deniable intervention. After that I will specify the conditions I think are critical for such an intervention to work.

Deniable intervention

The deniable intervention can be defined as a military intervention by a state using covert forces as well as local insurgents, which have been catechized through pro-Kremlin media, to destabilize an adversary state and allow the intervening state deniability of involvement.

With covert forces I refer to the use of the so-called 'little green men', whom were, according to Mr. Putin, '"self-defence groups" organised by [Crimean] locals who bought all their uniforms and hardware in a shop" (BBC, 2014), but turned out to be Russian Special Forces (Kremlin, 2014). Deniability was achieved through the fact that these forces did not wear any clear insignia or emblems by which they could be identified as Russian forces (which constitutes a clear violation of international law as outlined in the Geneva Conventions, of which Russia is a signatory). Such covert operations have continued in the Donbas region. Russian armed forces are operating alongside the separatists while officials deny their involvement and call these forces 'volunteers': Russian nationals joining the war on their own without any government involvement (Foreign Policy, 2015; New York Times, 2015).

The second component of the deniable intervention is the use of and support for local insurgents. As Salehyan et al. (2011, pp. 712-713) argue, fighting an adversary through insurgents is less costly and allows one to hide foreign aggression. The insurgents in the Donbas region have formed numerous militia groups commonly referred to by the umbrella term United Armed Forces of Novorossiya (NAF) (TASS, 2014).[4] Russia has been supplying the NAF with numerous weapons, including anti-aircraft guns (such as the BUK missile system used to down Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17), battle tanks, and heavy artillery (see ARES, 2014). Without the Russian supplies the insurgents would not have been able to make their stance. The alliance between insurgents and state is thus beneficial to both: the insurgents in the Donbas region

[4] Here I should mention that the NAF is neither as united nor organized as the name would suggest and that the name is to a large degree used to legitimize the separatist regimes.

increase their fighting chance (see also Byman et al, 2001, p. 10), while the intervening state, Russia, is able to deny its involvement in the conflict.

In many cases of external state support for insurgents, the grievances that give rise to an insurgency exist anterior to receiving support. In other words, states play a reactive role by *responding* to an existing situation. In Ukraine, however, the situation is more complex than that. Russia has played an active, perhaps even decisive, role by *creating and fueling* the grievances that underlie the insurgency. It has done so through the use of state-controlled, biased media. According to Peter Pomerantsev (2014b), "Putin's Russia cares very much about ideas, carefully controlling media, education, and parties inside the country and investing hundreds of millions of dollars in international broadcasting, intellectual influencers, and think tanks abroad". Russia understands the critical role information plays before, during, and after conflict.[5]

In Ukraine this meant promoting the narrative that the Euromaidan revolution was run by fascists and that the new government in Kiev also consisted of fascist parties. Other parts of the narrative were that leading protestors of the Euromaidan were involved in the killing of compatriots (for example during the riots in February 2014) and that American tanks were being used to overthrow (what was referred to as) the legitimate government. Such narratives, presented by leading media channels such as RT and spread all over the internet, created anger and grievance over the new post-Euromaidan situation, which proved to be fertile ground for Russia to start its deniable intervention. Once the deniable intervention had begun, Russia imposed an 'information blockade' (Johnston, 2015, p. 2) by isolating the locals from international media. In both Crimea and the Donbas region armed forces quickly captured television transmission stations and replaced all Ukrainian and international stations with biased Russian media. In short, Russian state-controlled media play a decisive role in creating and fueling the grievances, thereby prolonging the conflict.[6]

Conditions critical for the deniable intervention

The deniable intervention thus has three major components: covert operations, support for local insurgents, and dominant, biased media. From these three components the conditions that have

[5] Other states, including Ukraine, also understand this crucial role and are promoting their own narratives. Russia is therefore not the only state active in informational campaigns.

[6] There is also an international part to the media strategy of Russia meant to confuse the international environment. This part draws heavily on the legal rhetoric mentioned by Allison (2014) and Dunn & Bobick (2014).

an effect on the efficaciousness of the deniable intervention can be deducted. These conditions will form the basis for the empirical analysis and can thus be considered the hypotheses that will be tested. I have summarized them in table 1.

It has to be noted first, however, that Russia cannot be bogged down in other major conflicts. Military capacity will probably not be the biggest issue here, considering the relatively small investment the deniable intervention requires. But it will require other resources, most significantly on the political domain. It is extremely difficult to fight multiple wars at once, and the Kremlin will likely do anything to avoid this.[7] This analysis will be built on the hypothetical assumption that Russia is not involved in other major conflicts and will therefore have (political) capacity available for a deniable intervention.

Table 1. Conditions that affect the chances of the deniable intervention[8]

1	Russia has an geopolitical incentive to destabilize the targeted state
2	Weak state capacity in targeted state
3	Russian minorities in targeted state
4	Strong pro-Kremlin media presence in targeted state

The first condition is that Russia has to have an incentive to destabilize the targeted state. In Ukraine, just as in Georgia in 2008, the incentive for Russia was the imminent strengthening of the relationship between these states and Western institutions such as the EU and NATO. Without such an incentive, Russia will not commit to a policy for which it will be vilified by the international community - it has to be worth it. Considering Russia's actions in the past, the most likely incentives involve Russia losing influence in a neighboring state, which reduces Russia's regional power, and/or other actors, such as the EU and NATO, strengthening their relationship

[7] This is already apparent at the time of writing in the case of Ukraine, where Russia has been more willing to cooperate and enforce the Minsk agreement since it increased its presence in Syria. Considering that Russia is thus heavily invested in other conflicts for at least the next six months, another deniable intervention will be very unlikely on the short term. This thesis, however, is not focused on the short term, but on the structural factors that will remain present on the long term.

[8] Another condition is favorable logistics: Russia must be able to transport forces and arms quickly and unnoticed. Shared borders are therefore imperative. Considering my case-selection strategy, in which I have held geographical proximity constant, this condition will not yield any differences between the cases and has therefore been left out of the framework.

with neighboring states.[9]

The second condition is that the targeted state must have weak central power and weak security structures. If a state is strong and has a good functioning military able to conduct missions throughout its territory, it will be able to a) resist and counter the covert operations, and b) secure the border to limit arms supplies to (would-be) insurgents. I will conceptualize this in terms of state capacity, which refers to the "endogenous resources that a state possesses that can be mobilized to deal with emergencies" (Braithwaite, 2010, p. 313). The deniable intervention in Ukraine was to some degree made possible by the tumult Ukraine was facing after the revolution, the ousting of the president, and the restructuring of state institutions. The new leadership proved unable to withstand Russian aggression.

The third condition is the presence in the targeted state of minorities who identify themselves as ethnically Russian.[10] Preferably these minorities are grouped together in the same region. Geographical concentration increases the possibilities for organization and gaining the upper hand. These groups are necessary in order to form an insurgency through which Russia can destabilize the targeted state. Theoretically, the insurgents do not have to be Russian: the main criterion is that they are willing to fight against the central government. But as Salehyan (2010, p. 509) points out, ethnic linkage increases the chances of cooperation between locals and the 'kin-state'. Furthermore, the linkage is necessary in order to use the legal rhetoric of 'protecting our people abroad' which forms the main justification, both on the international and the domestic level, for the deniable intervention.

The fourth condition is that pro-Kremlin media should have a strong position in the targeted state. As mentioned, biased media are important because they catechize the locals and fuel grievances that can lead to an insurgency. Through the use of biased media Russia can exploit dissatisfaction. More generally, biased media also offer a narrative of the world and the region that suits the Kremlin. Having a dominant position in the media landscape gives Russia the ability to drone out any competing narratives from international and independent media.

Two of the conditions mentioned by Rácz I have omitted. Military superiority is left out

[9] The idea that losing grip or influence in another state is one of the most powerful incentives is based on prospect theory, which states that losses loom larger than gains and that loss aversion leads to risk-seeking behavior (Kahnemann, 2011, p. 283).

[10] I have chosen to focus on ethnicity rather than language when discussing the 'Russian minorities'. A shared ethnicity often provides a stronger bond than language alone. Furthermore, by focusing on ethnicity I can exempt myself from the conceptual quagmire that is the first language/second language debate, which could trouble and obfuscate analysis.

of the analysis because it overlaps too much with the condition focused on security structures. Furthermore, regional dissatisfaction is not included because it cannot be sensibly disentangled from the Russian biased media condition.

In this section I have defined Russia's involvement in Ukraine as a deniable intervention, which focuses on covert operations, state support for insurgents, and biased media. Building on this definition, I have identified four conditions with a critical effect on the possibility and efficaciousness of the deniable intervention.

Operationalization

In this section I will briefly outline and clarify the operationalization of the empirical analysis. This operationalization consists of the case selection strategy, the methodology, and the data sources I will rely on for the analysis.

Case selection strategy

The cases I have selected for analysis are: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia and Kazakhstan. As mentioned, close proximity to Russia is one of the criteria on which I have selected the cases. All cases border Russia. This is a necessary condition for logistical reasons and the condition most easily kept constant across cases. Apart from that, the cases can be divided into two camps.

The first camp consists of Estonia and Latvia. These two states are both democracies and possess membership of NATO and the EU. They have thus aligned themselves firmly with the rest of Europe and with the US. Membership of NATO is especially an interesting factor considering Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that "an armed attack against one or more of them [members] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all (…)" (NATO, 2008). While a deniable intervention is of course an armed attack, it is hardly the kind of attack the signatories of the treaty in 1949 had in mind. NATO is meant as deterrence, yet little is known about deterrence against irregular types of warfare and insurgencies. Furthermore, Estonian and Latvian concerns about Russia's involvement in Ukraine have led to an increase of NATO presence in the region. As mentioned above, it is necessary to examine whether their concerns are based on empirical logic.

The second camp consists of Belarus and Kazakhstan. These states have aligned themselves with Russia. They are not members of EU or NATO. Instead, they have opted to

become part of the Russian-led Eurasian Union. Belarus and Kazakhstan also conduct joint military exercises with Russia. Furthermore, they are both not democratic. According to the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Belarus and Kazakhstan are authoritarian regimes of the same category as Russia (EIU, 2014). This second camp is led by Russian-backed presidents known for their disregard for democratic values, which reminisces one of the situation in Ukraine before the Euromaidan revolution.

There are states not included in this analysis that would be interesting for a subsequent project. Armenia and Azerbaijan, for instance, also share a border with Russia. Similar to, for example, Belarus and pre-Euromaidan Ukraine, Armenia is very close to Russia. Other interesting cases would be Moldova and/or Kyrgyzstan, which have to deal with extensive Russian influence. These cases have not been included in this analysis in order to keep this project viable and allow for an in-depth analysis of the cases that are selected.

Methods and data

The method I will use in this analysis is what Alexander George and Andrew Bennett (2005) call a structured, focused comparison. This "method is "structured" in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of the cases possible. The method is "focused" in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined" (p. 67). Applied to this thesis, the analysis is structured by the four conditions outlined above and focused on the aspects dealing with the deniable intervention.

As Jonathan Hopkin (2010) states, "comparison across several cases (usually countries) enables the researcher to assess whether a particular political phenomenon is simply a local issue or a broader trend" (Hopkin in Marsh & Stoker, 2010, p. 285). I apply the same logic, except I am concerned with a hypothesized broader trend, namely the possibility of a deniable intervention in another state. Furthermore, comparisons are often used to test and develop theory. Unfortunately from an academic perspective, there are no other cases of deniable interventions as defined above, which makes theory testing not possible. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is a preliminary exploration of the subject at hand by analyzing whether the conditions that are critical for a deniable intervention are present in the region, or, in other words, whether the

deniable intervention could develop into a wider phenomenon (from n=1 to n>1).

Based on the conditions identified above, the analysis requires data on state capacity, ethnic minorities and Russian media in the selected cases, as well as on the relationship between Russia and the selected cases to determine whether or not there is an incentive to intervene.

Data on state capacity will be drawn first of all from the relative political capacity (RPC) dataset v2.1 (available at Dataverse, 2015). The RPC dataset "can be considered akin to a measure of the relative success of the government in extracting resources. It is calculated as the ratio of the total value of actual extractions to the predicted value of extractions" (Braithwaite, 2010, p. 315). Tax extraction is such a good indicator because "to mobilize and extract financial resources is the core of state capacity and the foundation for the state's ability to realize its other capacities" (Wang and Hu, 2001, p. 27). In other words, the extraction of resources is the prerequisite for other state functions, e.g. the monopoly on violence through military and police. I will use data provided by the second model of the RPC dataset, considering all cases are more or less developed societies.

The RPC dataset is, however, not perfect. Some aspects, such as the loyalty or skill level of officials, are ignored, as is the size of the 'shadow economy', which is a pervasive aspect of post-Soviet economies. I will therefore supplement this dataset with a) data on corruption, derived from organizations such as Transparency International, and b) secondary sources, which provide a more in-depth analysis of the specifics of each single case.

Data on the ethnic minorities will come to some degree from the set build by the Minorities at Risk Project (MAR). MAR "focuses specifically on ethnopolitical groups [and] non-state communal groups that have "political significance" in the contemporary world because of their status and political actions" (MAR, 2014). MAR has extensive data on the ethnic minorities in all the selected cases. I will also use censuses, such as the 2009 census in Belarus (Belstat, 2014), and secondary sources, such as Katja Koort (2014) and Marina Best (2013).

For data on pro-Kremlin media in the cases I will build on work by the European Journalism Centre (EJC), which provides extensive analyses of the media landscapes in the selected cases (EJC, 2015). There has also been some research on Russia's soft power in terms of media presence abroad (e.g. Szostek, 2015; Luhn, 2015), which I will use to supplement the EJC data. A report made for the Center for International Media Assistance by David Satter (2014) on

Russia's control over media in the former Soviet states will especially be used in this regard.[11]

Finally, for the relationship between Russia and the cases I will draw mostly from secondary sources that have analyzed Russian foreign policy. These analyses will provide me with insight on whether there is any incentive for Russia to intervene in the particular case by looking at the international dynamics. Sources I will look at are, for example, Kuchins & Zevelev (2012), Monaghan (2013), Frear (2013), Bieliszczuk (2015), Muižnieks (2006), and Ambrosio (2006).

Empirical section

Belarus

Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko called the annexation of Crimea a "bad precedent" and hosted peace talks between Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France in Minsk in order to solve the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Moscow Times, 2014). Such a constructive approach also forms the basis for Belarus' relation with Russia, which has resulted in a firm position in the Russian sphere of influence. As the subsequent analysis shows, this close relationship is the most alarming factor in terms of a possibility of a deniable intervention. On state capacity, the position of ethnic Russians in Belarus, and the influence of Russian media, Belarus scores relatively well.

Belarus-Russia relations

Of the four cases discussed in this study, Belarus has remained the closest to Russia after the end of the Soviet-Union. In the 1990s, the two states expressed their close relationship through the formation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, another political-economic union intended to fill the gaps left by the dissolution of the Soviet-Union.

According to Steven Eke and Taras Kuzio (2000), this union meant that Belarus continued "to tread a difficult path between rejection of the consequences of independence and sovereignty on the one hand and the paradox of trying to preserve that independent status within a new or renewed (con)federation on the other" (p. 523). For Russia, the Union was one of the first defensive mechanisms devised to counter the influence of the European Union (Ambrosio,

[11] I will focus primarily on traditional media as television and printed. While digital media are gaining prominence and notoriety when it comes to Russian soft power, they are also more diffuse and therefore more difficult to analyze with precision. One example that is valid for all four cases is Sputnik News. While it is often noted that this outlet is one of the key components of Russia's international media strategy, there is no data available on its reach and if users perceive it as trustworthy.

2006, p. 408). The uneasy equilibrium between sovereignty and a very close relation with Russia has remained one of the defining features of Belarus throughout the last two decades.

One of the effects of the close relationship Belarus maintains with Russia is dependency. According to Balász Jarábik (2014), subsidies from Russia make up 10-15 percent of Belarus' GDP. These subsidies consist largely of favorable gas prices, resulting in the lowest gas price in the region – upwards of 50% less compared to the prices in Ukraine and Poland (2013) (Alachnovič, 2015). The same dynamics can be seen when it comes to oil (ibid.). Such subsidies prevent Belarus from reforming and diversifying its energy imports; the price divergence compared to the world markets is simply too big to give serious consideration.

In exchange for the preferential position on the economic domain, Belarus has closely linked itself with Russia when it comes to international politics. It is a member of nearly all the Russian-led regional initiatives, including the most recent Eurasian Economic Union. As Matthew Frear (2013) argues, Belarus has taken a "highly instrumental approach" to these initiatives, in which "the primary goal has not been integration per se, but rather securing beneficial deals from Russia, in particular on the energy front" (p. 119). A result of this instrumental approach is that Belarus has not been afraid to dig its heels in or flirt openly with the European Union in order to accomplish a better deal with Russia.

Russia, on its part, also depends to some degree on Belarus, especially when it comes to developing these regional initiatives and preventing the European Union from knocking on the Russian border. This has led the Kremlin to protect the Belarusian regime from any kind of threat it faces, for example during the period in which the so-called color revolutions were prevalent throughout the Eurasian region (Ambrosio, 2006, p. 424). This strokes with the general notion that Russia supports "incumbent autocrats in cases where pro-Russia politicians dominate" (Way, 2015, p. 691), and further increases Belarus' dependency on Russia.

Russia's support for pro-Russia autocrats means that it will try and prevent the ousting of friendly regimes. Therefore, if democratic and pro-Europe forces gain the upper hand in Belarus and eliminate its regime, similar to what happened in Ukraine in 2014, it is very unlikely that Russia would stand idly by. Instead, it is likely that Russia will at the very least contemplate a deniable intervention in order to a) destabilize and delegitimize the new regime and b) prevent Belarus from aligning itself with the European Union.

This is one of the central arguments throughout this thesis: Those states that have close

relations with Russia run higher risk of falling victim to a deniable intervention in case of regime chance (i.e. Belarus and Kazakhstan) than those states with antagonistic relations with Russia (i.e. the Baltics). This is because the former, while least likely to be lost as a partner, will constitute the highest loss, especially in terms of prestige. Such dynamics can be witnessed in the case of Ukraine, which had aligned itself closely with Russia under Viktor Yanukovych.

At the moment, however, there is no indication that regime chance in Belarus is about to happen. In fact, some commentators have argued that the Lukashenko regime has been strengthened by the crisis in Ukraine (e.g. Bloomberg, 2014a). It has shown the grave consequences of regime change and the crisis the process of democratization can induce, thereby silencing some of the opponents of the regime who have advocated democracy and the ousting of Lukashenko in the past. Lukashenko, on his part, has continued to tread the difficult path between sovereignty and dependence in his reaction to the annexation of Crimea. He criticized Russia for its action, stating that it sets "a bad precedent" and that Ukraine should remain "a single, indivisible, integral, nonbloc state" (Moscow Times, 2014; Bloomberg, 2014a). In the same breath, however, he argued that Ukraine provoked the actions of Russia and that Crimea is now "de facto part of Russia", whether we accept it or not (ibid.).

The close relation between Russia and Belarus thus means that there is currently no geopolitical incentive for Russia to intervene in Belarus. Despite some flirtation with the West, Belarus is firmly placed in the Russian sphere of influence. Future regime change could lead to a deniable intervention: Russia has shown it will fight any potential loss of influence and prestige. At the moment, however, regime change is not very likely.

Belarusian state capacity

As mentioned in the operationalization section, state capacity is measured here by "the ability of governments to appropriate portions of the national output to advance public goals" (TransResearch Consortium, 2013). Belarus scores relatively high in the RPC dataset with a score of 1.287 in 2011. This score is down significantly since 2008 (2.156), presumably because of a chance in taxation legislature. Compared to the other cases in this study, Belarus has the second-highest score, behind Kazakhstan. Several authors have noted that Belarus has one of the strongest state apparatuses in the post-Soviet region (Way, 2005, p. 247; Fortin, 2010, p. 674).

One of the rationales for the high state capacity of Belarus is the authoritarian political

regime. Compared to democracies, like the ones in Estonia and Latvia, the Belarusian regime is less concerned with legitimizing state policies to other political and judicial bodies. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes in general tend to "operate in stable and viable political environments" (Fortin, 2010, p. 678), which increases the capacity to effectively extract resources from the national output. This contrasts with relatively unstable democracies, which have been myriad in the region since the end of the Soviet-Union, most notably in Ukraine in the last decade or so. Finally, an authoritarian regime tends to spend more resources on security in order to be able to repress dissident voices and other threats to the regime. The effect of such prioritization is not only an increase in internal, coercive capacity, but also in capacity to resist external threats.

Another rationale for the high state capacity in Belarus follows the above but concerns itself with the economy. The Belarusian government controls over seventy percent of the national economy (Jarábik, 2014). Unlike other post-Soviet states, like Ukraine and Russia, Belarus did not embark on extensive privatization programs in the 1990s. This has prevented the emergence of a) a strong political opposition and b) a class of oligarchs (see Way, 2005, p. 250). Central authority in the economy therefore remains all but omnipotent, which makes extraction of resources straightforward. This further explains the high state capacity in Belarus.

While the declining score since 2008 indicates that state capacity has been reduced, it is unlikely that there will be a significant drop in the coming years. The Lukashenko regime is firmly in place, as exhibited by recent election results (which are interesting not as an indication of popular support but of political control). Although some have argued that Belarus is opening up its economy and relying more on private businesses (e.g. Jarábik, 2014), its main economic characteristics, namely vast state control, rent-seeking behavior, and an overreliance on Russia, are not up for debate and will remain in place for the foreseeable future. The political and economic dimensions thus indicate that Belarus' high state capacity is likely to abide.

One caveat has to be made in regard to Belarus' state capacity. While Belarus scores high on the ability to extract resources, which is the indicator for state capacity in this study, it "exhibits high levels of corruption, inadequate protection of property rights and almost no infrastructure reform (…) these indicators reveal that Belarus' state is only strong in certain areas, while it is weak in others" (Fortin, 2010, pp. 667-669; also TI, 2014). Corruption diminishes state capacity by reducing the total amount of revenue a state receives, which curtails the ability to perform all necessary state functions. As ever in scientific research, a lot thus

depends on the conceptualization and measurements one chooses to use.

Nevertheless, the analysis and data from the RPC dataset show that Belarus scores 1.287 when it comes to state capacity, which is a relatively high score. As mentioned above, a state with a high capacity will be better able to resist the covert operations used in a deniable intervention and to secure the borders to prevent support for insurgents from flowing in. This means that, in short, Belarus will be better able to resist a deniable intervention than Ukraine did in the last two years.

Ethnic Russians in Belarus

The latest census (2009) shows that there are 785.000 people living in Belarus that identify themselves as ethnic Russian. This constitutes approximately 8.3 percent of the total population of Belarus, making Russians the largest minority, in front of Poles (3 percent) (IHSN, 2014). Belarusians make up around 84 percent of the population (ibid). The relative and absolute size of the Russian minority has decreased since the previous census of 1999, in which 11.4 percent of the population, or 1.1 million people, stated to be ethnic Russian (Belstat, 2014). The decrease in ethnic Russians is larger than the general population decline in Belarus in the same period. It is not clear if the steep decline is due to migration to, for example, Russia, or due to assimilation – which would mean that some ethnic Russians now identify themselves as being Belarusian.

According to data from MAR, Russians living in Belarus are not geographically concentrated. Instead, they are dispersed throughout the country, with Minsk City (184.000) and the region of Vitebsk in the eastern part of Belarus (125.000) having the largest shares (IHSN, 2014). Russians, however, do not form the majority in any of the regions of Belarus.

Furthermore, Russians "continue to be the advantaged minority" in Belarus (MAR, 2015c). Unlike Estonia and Latvia, where the new authorities adopted harsh nationalization policies in the 1990s, Belarus remained entwined with Russia, and many Belarusians still identify themselves closely with Russia (ibid.). Because of this friendly attitude of Belarus towards Russia, Russians are not discriminated against in any way and it is therefore very unlikely that they will rebel or even protest against the Belarusian government.

Instead, it is more likely that other groups in Belarusian society, particularly those that advocate closer relations with Europe, will protest against the government. There have been protests by these pro-Western groups during the last decade (most notably in 2006 and 2011), but

these have not led to any significant change that might have inspired pro-Russia groups to start campaigns of their own and in support of the pro-Russia government. There are no indicators that a large scale protest like the one in Ukraine in 2014 is likely to happen in Belarus.

The Russian minority in Belarus thus exhibits no signs of grievances against the Belarusian state. It continues to have an advantageous position in society. The minority is also geographically dispersed. These factors limit the potential for a deniable intervention if Russia would decide to intervene in Belarus.

Pro-Kremlin media in Belarus

Media is to a large degree controlled by the Belarusian regime (EJC, 2015d). Belarus is ranked 157th of 180 countries investigated in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2015). In the 2015 Freedom of the Press analysis by the Freedom House, Belarus scored an abysmal 93/100 in terms of press freedom (with 100 being the worst possible score) (Freedom House, 2015a). This means that there is little to no independent media present and that the population depends on biased reporting.

Yet the extensive state control also means that the Belarusian regime has the opportunity to prevent and/or counter Russian influence in the media domain. As Szostek (2015) argues: "No media outlet in Belarus can function without an official licence and the state has the power to suspend or terminate the operations of any publisher or broadcaster, essentially at will" (p. 124). This results in the possibility to end any rousing activities before they begin.

The good relationship between Belarus and Russia is also present in the media domain, with politicians on both sides championing a 'single information space' and the exchange of news across borders (e.g. Minsvyaz, 2015). This means that most Russian media have access to the Belarusian public and are present in terms of newspapers, tabloids, and television programmes (see Szostek, 2015, p. 124 for an overview of Russian involvement in Belarus' media landscape; also EJC, 2015d). Most Belarusian television channels depend on content from counterparts controlled by the Russian state.

For Russia, the 'single information space' and the involvement in the Belarusian media domain serve not only to strengthen the relationship between Belarusians and Russians, but also to prevent the Belarusian regime from going astray: "Criticism on Russian television is invariably used as a means of putting pressure on [Lukashenko]" (Satter, 2014, p. 31). Reports

coming from Russian media can be critical of the Belarusian regime, which has led some channels to lose their accreditation in the past and others to be silenced otherwise.

However, the Belarusian regime has learned from such incidents and adopted practices that limit the impact of critical reports, simply by removing them: "All of the Russian programs shown in Belarus are rebroadcast after a one-hour delay, which allows Minsk to censor and replace any material critical of Belarus or its government" (ibid.). In other words, the Belarusian regime is able to manage the Russian media in Belarus, thereby preventing the dispersion of information or stories that could harm the regime. This allows the regime to thwart any attempts to catechize the local Russian minority and fuel grievances.

While Russia and Belarus thus claim to strive to a 'single information space', there is distrust on both sides of the border. The Belarusian regime sees control of the media as vital to its survival. This control allows the authorities to manage what stories apprise the Russian minority in Belarus, and limits the possibility for Russia to instigate and fuel turmoil.

Estonia

Estonia is one of the EU member states most poised to react aggressively towards Russia, stating that Russia's actions in Ukraine are unacceptable and the EU should be "ready for war" (Euractiv, 2015). Estonia is worried that Russia might execute a deniable intervention on its soil as well. However, Estonian membership of the EU and NATO serve as deterrence to any intervention, and Russia would have nothing to gain by such a policy. For Tallinn the most worrisome factor is the dominance of Russian media in informing the large Russian minority in Estonia. The contemporary war rhetoric in Estonian politics benefits these media.

Estonian-Russian relationship

After the successful Singing Revolution at the end of the 1980s, Estonia was determined to become part of the Western and European community in the ensuing years. Such plans were undesirable in the eyes of Moscow; Estonia, as well as the other Baltics, was considered part of Russia's sphere of influence and an essential buffer zone against the military threat of NATO. It therefore became Russia's political objective "to deter Estonia from integrating with the West" (Bieliszczuk, 2015). Using all methods at hand, including military threats, sanctions, and manipulation of the Russian minority in Estonia, Moscow tried to keep Tallinn part of Russia's

ambit, ultimately without any success (ibid.). In 1996, Estonia refused to become part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. A year later, it started talks about accession to the EU (Aalto, 2003, p. 576). At the end of the century, it became apparent to Moscow that Estonia's membership to NATO was inevitable. The objective was changed from deterring Estonia to becoming a member of the West to pushing NATO to reform its military programme (ibid.). Estonia became a full member of the EU and of NATO in 2004, joined the Schengen area in 2007, and became a member of the Eurozone in 2011 (EU, 2015).

However, the realization that the accession of Estonia to the West was inevitable did not mean Russian policymakers simply accepted the loss influence. While some scholars argue that national identity in Russia became 'desecuritized' in the first years of the new century (Morozov, 2004, p. 317), which led to improvements in the relationship between the Baltic states and Russia, increasingly powerful hard-edged realist policymakers, categorized by Andrew Kuchins and Igor Zevelev (2011) as 'great power balancers' (p.153), began to take center stage in Moscow at the same time. These policymakers did not plan to 'desecuritize' the relationships vis-à-vis the Baltics. Instead, they started actively 'testing' the post-enlargement situation by raising concerns about the ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic States. This coincided with increased cooperation between Russia and the EU and the US in the global War on Terror (see Made, 2005, p. 103). One could argue, therefore, that security has always been the leading lens through which the Baltics and Russia look at each other.[12]

Such dynamics were amplified in 2008, when conflict erupted between Russia and Georgia. The Russian-Georgian War of 2008 could be considered, until the intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the pinnacle of the great power balancers in the Kremlin, and marks a new chapter in the relationship between the West and Russia. Concerns raised by Estonia, among others, about the threat of Moscow became more eminent in this relationship. The seriousness of the threat was underlined by the war games Russia conducted in 2009, with scenarios in which terrorists from the Baltics attacked the enclave of Kaliningrad and three NATO-like brigades, including one Estonian, invaded western Russia (Economist, 2009).

Since 2008, the relationship between Estonia and Russia has become increasingly hostile.

[12] Another important issue has been energy. Since gaining independence Estonia and other Baltic States were reliant on Russian oil and gas supplies. In recent years these states have tried to diversify their supply by building liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in order to bypass the gas pipe infrastructure. Estonia has approved plans to build a LNG terminal in the Port of Tallinn (New Europe Investor, 2014). Latvia has similar plans.

Russia has raised concerns about the Russian minority living in Estonia on numerous occasions. Furthermore, a copious amount of cyber-attacks have allegedly been carried out by Russia on Estonia. The Russian air force has continuously violated Estonian air space, with a spike in incidents in 2014 (Bieliszcuk, 2015). These violations are especially worrisome for Estonia considering Tallinn does not possess air combat capabilities and thus relies in NATO partners.

The relationship with Russia hit a new low in 2014 when Russia abducted an Estonian intelligence officer who was posted near the border (Guardian, 2014). The officer was paraded on Russian national television as a spy two days after US president Barack Obama visited Estonia (ibid.). In August 2015, the man was sentenced to 15 years in prison, but a month later an exchange deal was made in which the officer was traded for a convicted Russian spy serving time in Estonia (Guardian, 2015; ERR, 2015).

However, despite all these incidents and the general hostile relationship, Russia does not have a direct incentive to carry out a deniable intervention in Estonia, simply because it will not gain anything by such a policy. Estonia is firmly placed in and committed to Western and European security frameworks. It is unlikely that, apart from the most stubborn hardliners, Russian policymakers still consider Estonia a part of the Russian sphere of influence. As mentioned, the key issue that prompted Russia to intervene in Ukraine was *the transition* it was trying to make from a generally pro-Russia policy to a pro-Europe policy. Estonia made that transition two decades ago. In other words, Russia has already lost Estonia.

Furthermore, Estonia's membership of NATO and the EU is likely to work as deterrence. The alliance has boosted its presence in Eastern Europe to reassure the Baltic States as well as to signal Moscow. While it is unclear if the same principles of collective defense apply when dealing with a deniable intervention (which is not an overt, interstate conflict), NATO shows that it will respond to any kind of violation of sovereignty in the Baltics.

Finally, membership of NATO and the EU also means that the goal of destabilization will not be easily reached. Other member states and Brussels will continue to support Estonia both politically and financially. The difficulty of destabilizing Estonia is amplified by the fact that Estonia is a well-functioning state with strong, national institutions (see section on state capacity below). It differs in this regard from post-Euromaidan Ukraine. In other words, there is not a turbulent situation that can be exploited by Russia.

In conclusion, Estonia has been moving towards the West since gaining independence in

the 1990s. Its relationship with Russia remains hostile, as exemplified by numerous incidents since 2008. There is, however, no direct incentive to intervene in Estonia, considering a) Russia would not gain anything by such a policy, and b) Estonia and its partners would be able to respond firmly.

Estonian state capacity

Of the four cases studied in this thesis, Estonia has the lowest score when it comes to state capacity. In 2011 it scored 0.773 in the RPC dataset. This score is consistent since the beginning of the century. The low score (in comparison to the other cases) does not mean that Estonia is a weak state or that its institutions are ineffective. It does mean that the Estonian state has a lower ability to appropriate funds from the national economy, which is typical of a democracy; civil society and citizens enjoy a stronger position against the state than counterparts in autocracies. To put the score in perspective: Estonia scores higher than both The Netherlands and the US.

For Estonia, building the right state institutions was a prerequisite to joining the EU. Every candidate state has to implement the *acquis communautaire* and bring the "domestic policies in line with EU standards" (Hille and Knill, 2006, p. 531). These EU standards provide for the construction of a strong, capable state that can uphold European law. As such, every EU member state, including Estonia and Latvia, has adequate state capacity. Furthermore, as Jessica Fortin (2012) argues: "effective state capacity seems to be a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for democracy" (p. 904).[13] Reversing this logic means that a well-performing democracy, such as Estonia, cannot but have effective state capacity.

Finally, a crucial characteristic is that, as a member of the EU, Estonia's state capacity is not limited to its national borders. Being part of the community of European states means that Estonia can rely on other member states for support in the event it proves to be unable to extract the necessary resources. Greece after the financial crisis of 2008 is a prime example of this dynamic. Estonia thus has a safety net that reaches beyond its own territory. The flipside of this coin is, of course, that Estonia has to chip in if another member state requires help.

Again, a small caveat on this analysis is in order. While Estonia scores relatively low on the ability to extract resources from the national output, it does score very high on other possible

[13] Fortin (2012) uses a different definition of state capacity, namely one that focuses on the *provision* of public goods (p. 909) rather than the extraction from the national output.

indicators of state capacity. According to Jessica Fortin (2010), Estonia has one of the highest scores in the post-Soviet space when it comes to property rights enforcement and lack of corruption (p. 662 and p. 668; TI, 2014), which are typical and crucial priorities in a liberal democracy with a well-functioning market economy (compare with Belarus).[14]

While Estonia scores lower on state capacity than Belarus, it is still very capable of extracting resources from the national output. Furthermore, it has, as a prerequisite to membership of the EU, strengthened its state institutions prior to accession in 2004. Unlike Ukraine, Estonia is not facing any turmoil that reduces state capacity. In short, Estonia, embedded in European institutions, has the capacity to react and resist in case of a deniable intervention.

Ethnic Russians in Estonia

According to the Statistical Yearbook of Estonia 2015, approximately 25 percent of the Estonian population is of Russian ethnicity (ESA, 2015, p. 60). This means that there are around 330.000 Russians living in Estonia, which makes ethnic Russians the largest minority. In comparison: Estonians make up around 69 percent of the population, and Ukrainians, the second-largest minority, make up around 1.7 percent (ibid.). Similar to other Baltic states, the total population of Estonia has been in decline since 1989. Between 1989 and 2015, the population of Estonia decreased 17 percent. In the same time period the relative size of ethnic Russians in Estonia has declined as well with approximately 5 percent (ibid.). In short, Russians are still the largest minority in Estonia, but their relative and absolute numbers have been decreasing.

The Russian minority is geographically concentrated in two areas of the country: the capital and largest city, Talinn, and the cities of Sillamäe and Narva, both located in the most north-eastern corner of Estonia in the Ida-Viru County (MAR, 2015b). As mentioned, geographical concentration is a potential risk factor, because it increases the possibilities for organization and gaining the upper hand in a specific region. The fact that the region of Ida-Viru County borders Russia increases the risk in the case of Estonia.

In 2011, sociologist Marju Lauristin conducted a study on the Russian minority of

[14] But not the most critical state functions when dealing with a deniable intervention, despite Fortin's assertion that "a state that is sufficiently capable of enforcing property rights is also technically strong enough to confiscate wealth and property" (2010, p. 662). Extraction and protection require vastly different institutions that cannot be changed overnight when facing a security threat.

Estonia and found that "the Russian-speaking population is split into two: approximately half are successfully integrated, the rest much less or almost not at all" (Koort, 2014). The lack of integration is at least partially explained by the legislature that was adopted by the Estonian authorities after regaining independence in the 1990s (see Pettai & Hallik, 2002, p. 513). Many of the Russians living in Estonia do not fulfill the requirements to be considering a citizen. In 2006, approximately "60 percent of the Russian population were non-Estonian citizens (40 percent were stateless and 20 percent were citizens of Russia) [sic]" (MAR, 2015b). Moreover, language requirements have barred many Russians from having the same economic opportunities as Estonians, as well as limiting educational attainment (Lindemann & Saar, 2012). In the last few decades, Russians in Estonia have thus experienced disadvantages and setbacks.

This, however, has not led the ethnic Russians to rebel against the Estonian government. According to MAR, "the likelihood of rebellion is small, [but] the likelihood of protest by the group remains significant" (MAR, 2015b). There have been small protests in March and April 2014 in Tallinn by pro-Russia groups, such as 'Russians in Estonia', but these protests were attended by few people, mostly pensioners (Stratfor, 2014c). Some of the protests were held to show support for Russian involvement in Crimea (ibid.). The marginal role of these protests can be partially explained by the lack of homogeneity in the Russian minority, which impedes the creation of strong political organizations and makes "the possibility of organized ethnic strife unlikely" (MAR, 2015b). In other words, only part of the Russian minority in Estonia is focused on its relationship with Russia, while another part is focused mainly on Estonia itself.

Despite the lack of homogeneity, existing grievances about language and citizenship could be exploited by Russia if it deems it necessary to destabilize Estonia. Moreover, the anti-Russian political current, which came into effect in response to the Ukraine crisis, could lead to further polarization by demonizing the Russians living in Estonia. This could alienate the Russians that until now have focused on being a productive member of Estonian society.

Estonia thus has a large Russian minority that is geographically concentrated in Tallinn and the Ida-Viru County. The minority has existing grievances as a result of harsh citizenship and language laws that were adopted in the 1990s. These grievances could potentially form a source for Russia to exploit. Moreover, the anti-Russian political current in contemporary Estonia could also turn out to be a dividing factor. So far, however, support for pro-Russia campaigns has been limited.

Pro-Kremlin media in Estonia

Estonia has been one of the first states to understand the hazards of Russia's propaganda through the use of biased and often state-controlled media. In recent years, the Estonian government has been working on the creation of a public Russian-language television channel to counter the narratives presented by the biased pro-Kremlin channels (Stratfor, 2014b). Such a public channel has become a necessity given that a big chunk of the Estonian population lives "in a separate reality created by Russian media and NGO's" (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014, p. 24).

Language is one of the key factors in explaining this division. According to the EJC, Estonians prefer to watch domestic programmes in Estonian, whereas the Russian population of Estonia rather watches programmes in Russian, often broadcasted from Russia (EJC, 2015b). There is little to no interchanging between the two, for example through the use of subtitles. A difference is also present when it comes to types of media consumed: "There are significantly fewer readers of newspapers and magazines among the Russian-speaking population compared to Estonian readers" (Pelnēns, 2010, p. 92). Given that they almost exclusively watch Russia's television channels, the information the Russian minority receives is very limited.

. One of the most popular television channels among Russians in Estonia is PBK (Первый Балтийский канал; First Baltic Channel), "a Russian-language television channel that has 4 million viewers in the region and receives low-cost, high-quality Russian programming and news from state Russian TV" (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014, p. 24). For the Russian minority, news coming from Russia, such as on PBK, is also more trustworthy than the Estonian media outlets (Pelnēns, 2010, p. 95). PBK is thus popular and trusted among the Russian population of Estonia.

The link between PBK and the Kremlin is rather obvious. The channel is a scion of Russia's Channel One (Первый канал), the first television channel of Russia and controlled by the Russian state. Channel One is one of the key components of the Kremlin's media strategy.

Apart from offering a different narrative of regional and world events compared to international media, the Russian media in Estonia have also been accused of instigating the mass riots surrounding the relocation of a Soviet memorial statue, the Bronze Soldier, in 2007 (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014, p. 24). Commentators also note that the Russian media in Estonia have very close relations with the Centre Party, which favors close relations with Moscow and is, unsurprisingly, the most popular party among ethnic Russians (Satter, 2014, p. 16; FT, 2015).

As mentioned, Estonia recognizes the effects the Russian media has on a large part of its

population. In October 2015, it therefore launched ETV+, "a new public television station broadcasting in Russian only" (DW, 2015). ETV+ is one of the most prominent initiatives on the continent to regain influence on the Russian-speaking parts of the population and to offer them different narratives as opposed to the ones provided by Russian media.

Estonia is also one of the member states of the EU pushing for more European initiatives to counter what is often called the Russian disinformation campaign. One such initiative is the 'Disinformation Review' by the EU task force StratCom East, "a weekly publication, which collects as many examples of the Russian disinformation attacks as possible (…) [with the objective to] show the European public the high amount of such disinformation attacks that target European audience every single day, to expose the number of countries targeted, and, thus, to explain to the European audience the breadth of this problem" (EEAS, 2015). Countering Russian disinformation is becoming one of the key objectives in EU policy towards Russia.

Estonia thus has a societal division when it comes to media use, with the ethnic Russian population almost exclusively relying on Russian, often state backed, media. These media offer a different narrative in comparison to their Estonian and international counterparts. The Estonian government, however, has recognized this problem, and has been developing counter initiatives on the national and European level.

Latvia

Latvia has been one of the most hawkish states when it comes to countering Russian aggression, for example by requesting the permanent deployment of thousands of NATO troops on its territory (Washington Times, 2015). Latvia scores fairly similar to Estonia, particularly when it comes to international institutions that work as deterrence and the dominant position of Russian media in informing the Russian minority in Latvia. In contrast to Estonia, however, Latvia has not developed any significant, national initiatives to counter these media.

Latvian-Russian relations

Many of the events and issues mentioned in the section dealing with Estonia similarly apply to Latvia. After Latvia regained independence in the 1990s, it decided to align itself firmly with the West. This alignment was finalized in 2004, when Latvia became a member of the EU and of NATO (in the organization's fifth enlargement) – to Russia's discord. According to Rasma Kārklina and Imants Liegìs (2006), this moment was "a true watershed: being part of a larger

alliance meant that power relations between Latvia and the Russian Federation became less asymmetrical, and bilateral relations were de-emphasized in favour of a larger multilateral field of interactions" (p. 148). Apart from the membership of EU and NATO, some of the other dynamics mentioned in the case of Estonia also apply to Latvia: Russia's concerns about the Russian minority in Latvia (see below), energy dependence, and increasingly hostile behavior.

Air space violations are a major expression of hostile behavior against Latvia and the other Baltic States. The European Leadership Network (ELN) has compiled a list of such incidents between March 2014 and March 2015 (see ELN, 2015). Most incidents happen in the Baltic region. In December 2014, for example, six Russian military bombers flew over the Baltic Sea near the maritime border of Latvia (Bloomberg, 2014b). These bombers were intercepted by NATO fighter jets stationed in Latvia. Two months earlier Russia conducted large-scale training exercises in the region that put NATO on high alert (ELN, 2015). But despite these incidents, there has not been any real risk of escalation.

Unsurprisingly, the conclusions for Estonia can be drawn in the case of Latvia as well. There is no real incentive to destabilize Latvia, considering it is firmly placed in Western political and military frameworks, which would also work as deterrence against any intervention. Despite continuous hostile behavior from Russia towards Latvia, ultimately there is no geopolitical gain to accomplish by carrying out a deniable intervention.

Latvian state capacity

According to the RPC dataset, in 2011 Latvia had a score of 1.032 in terms of state capacity. This is slightly lower than the scores of Belarus and Kazakhstan, but significantly higher than the score of Estonia. Since 2006 this score has been steadily declining, presumably because of changes in tax legislature that have been implemented from 2006 onwards. This means that Latvia has been decreasing the state's ability to extract resources from the national output and increasing the position of both civil society and private citizens vis-à-vis the state. Estonia's score is similar to, for example, the scores of France and Iceland.

Again some of the same arguments that applied to Estonia are suitable for Latvia as well. Prior to its membership of the EU it needed to implement the *acquis communautaire*, which in effect builds a suitable state capacity needed to uphold law and be able to function as a democracy. As a member of the EU, Latvia enjoys state capacity beyond its own territory. If it

faces budgetary or other types of problems, it can rely on other member states for help. Ukraine on the other hand did not have such a safety net, meaning that it had to rely on the benevolence of international institutions and private investors to get the necessary loans.

While Latvia scores relatively high on the ability to extract resources from the national output, its' scores on other measures of state capacity are worse. The level of corruption in Latvia is higher than in its northern neighbor (Forlin, 2010, p. 668). According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Latvia is one of the lowest scoring EU member states (low score equals a high level of perceived corruption) (TI, 2014). This score, however, is still significantly better than that of Belarus and Kazakhstan. As mentioned, corruption diminishes state capacity by reducing the total amount of revenue a state receives, which makes it less able to perform all necessary state functions. Latvia also scores relatively low when it comes to enforcing property rights; an issue on which Estonia scores very high.

In conclusion, Latvia exhibits signs of a high state capacity. It is also embedded in the European transnational framework. Furthermore, it does not face any turmoil that would reduce state capacity. In all, Latvian state capacity is not a factor that would negatively affect Latvia's overall ability to react to a deniable intervention.

Ethnic Russians in Latvia

The latest census in Latvia (2011) shows that approximately 27 percent of the Latvian population is of Russian ethnicity (CSP, 2012). This constitutes roughly half a million people. People of Latvian ethnicity make up about 62 percent of the population. This means that Russians are by-far the largest minority in Latvia. In the previous census (2000) Russians made up almost 30 percent of the Latvian population (ibid.). The decline in percentage of ethnic Russians between 2000 and 2011 was larger than the shrinkage of the general population in that period (ibid). Since the census in 2011 this decline has continued (see table 2). Similar to Estonia, Russians thus still form the largest minority in Latvia, yet the relative size of this minority has been in a downfall the last decade and a half.

Table 2. The percentage of ethnic Russians in Latvia (2011-2015)

	%				
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Russians	26.8	26.5	26.2	26.0	25.8

Source: CSP, 2015

According to data from MAR, most of the Russians in Latvia live in large urban areas. The 2011 census shows that in the capital and largest city, Riga, Russians form approximately 37 percent of the population (twelve percentage points smaller than Latvians). Russians form the majority in several large cities, most notably in the second largest city of Latvia, Daugavpils. This city is also the regional capital of the Latgale region in the east of Latvia. This region directly borders Russia.

In the 1990s, the ethnic Russians that stayed in Latvia after it regained its independence were confronted with increasingly hostile legislation as part of the process of reclaiming sovereignty. Michele Commercio (2004) states that Latvia implemented "exceptionally antagonistic nationalization policies" that negatively affected the Russian minority (p. 23). The Citizenship Law, for example, barred many Russians from political participation, including voting and holding state-sector jobs, because they could not obtain citizenship (MAR, 2015a). The Language Law obliged all minority schools to instruct in Latvian at least 60 percent of the time (ibid.). In 2012, a referendum was held with the question if Russian should become the second official language in Latvia. Almost 75 percent voted against such a constitutional reform. However, one could question the validity of such a referendum when a large part of those that would presumably vote in favor – namely the Russian minority – cannot vote because of a lack of citizenship.[15]

According to data from MAR, there is little risk of ethnic Russian rebellion in Latvia, despite "persistent protest and government repression in the form of restrictions on their ability to engage in public demonstrations" (MAR, 2015a). Protests have been held mainly in the Latgale region and there have been reports of pro-Russian activists campaigning for the secession of Latgale from Latvia to join Russia (Stratfor, 2014a). So far, these actions have been small and sporadic, which indicates that most Russians in Latvia are not supportive of such campaigns. This is also exemplified by the creation of the NGO European Russians in Latvia,

[15] The same harsh, nationalization policies were implemented in Estonia. The third Baltic state, Lithuania, however, approached its Russian minority with a more benign policy that allowed it to better integrate into society (see Best, 2013, p. 39).

whose goal is "to counterbalance the most radical members of the Russian minorities in the country and support Latvia's orientation toward the West" (Stratfor, 2014b).

Similar to the case of Estonia, the existing grievances in Latvia could be exploited by Russia if it deems it necessary to destabilize Latvia. The anti-Russian political current in Estonia is also present in Latvia and could lead to further polarization. Some Russians in Latvia state that there is a 'war hysteria' going on in Latvia that diverts attention from more urgent matters and fuels ethnic conflict between the Latvian and Russian populations in Latvia (e.g. VPRO, 2015). It is therefore imperative for the Latvian authorities to distinguish between Russians in Russia and Russians in Latvia, and to appease the latter group by involving them in the political processes of the state and by removing obstacles to full membership of society.

Latvia thus has a large ethnic Russian minority that is mostly located in the western region of Latgale. Since the 1990s, this minority has not been fully incorporated in Latvian society, which has given way to grievances that could be exploited. The anti-Russian political current in contemporary Latvia could also fuel these grievances. So far, however, support for pro-Russia campaigns has been limited.

Pro-Kremlin media in Latvia

In Latvia, the abovementioned PBK, a scion of the Kremlin-controlled Channel One, is the second most-watched television channel in the country (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014, p. 24). This is highly problematic, not in the last place because Russian television channels consistently call Latvians fascists on account of their massive collaboration with the Nazis during World War II (whom were viewed as liberators because of the Soviet occupation; see VPRO, 2015). Ethnic Russians living in Latvia, who rely on Russian media,[16] are thereby pitted against their compatriots. This has prompted the Latvian authorities to temporarily ban Russian television broadcasts in the past, for example in April 2014, for "security reasons" (Stratfor, 2014b).[17]

The prominence of PBK is also problematic due to the perception among ethnic Russians in Latvia that PBK's information is the most objective of all channels available (Pelnēns, 2010, p. 184). This makes it difficult for other media outlets to compete, which is amplified by the

[16] Ethnic Russians in Latvia "watch more television and read fewer printed media than ethnic Latvians, (…) [and] have comparatively less trust in printed media (…) (Pelnēns, 2010, pp. 183-184)

[17] One of the television channels that was banned was state-owned Rossiya RTR (RTR Latvia), which was accused of disseminating 'war propaganda' (Freedom House, 2015c).

advantages PBK has as a subsidiary of Channel One, such as the lack of need for the creation of own content. According to Satter (2014, p. 17), PBK gets seventy percent of its content from its mother company. This frees up financial capacity for other activities, such as marketing.

The most stunning event showing the prominence and influence of PBK was the election of Nils Usakovs, former news director of PBK, as mayor of Riga in 2011. Before joining PBK, Usakovs was head of the Latvian branch of the official Russian news agency, ITAR-TASS (Pelnēns, 2010, p. 186). Satter (2014) argues that "Usakovs was depicted by PBK prior to the elections as the savior of the Russian-speaking community" (p. 17). Usakovs is the leader of the Harmony Center, "the largest party advocating the rights of Latvia's ethnic Russian minority" (New York Times, 2014). The political connection between PBK and Usakovs and the monopoly the channel has when it comes to informing the ethnic Russians in Latvia creates an environment that is not in accordance with Western media standards.

Furthermore, as Pelnēns (2010, p. 186) shows, Usakovs is not the only politician in Latvia with roots in media owned or controlled by the Russian state. Numerous members of Harmony Center have previously worked for Russian television companies, which is all the more worrisome given that some of them occupy positions on committees meant to oversee good broadcasting practices. Unsurprisingly, there have been incidents that raised questions about censorship, such as the controversy in 2007 about the cancellation of a documentary critical of Putin (Baltic Times, 2007; see also Wikileaks, 2007).

Finally, the Kremlin also has a strong position in Latvia when it comes to printed media. The most important Russian language newspapers in Latvia, such as Vesti Segodnja, Chas, and Telegraf, are all owned by Russian oligarchs - who also happen to be senators (Satter, 2014, p. 17; also EJC, 2015c). These oligarchs are thus well-connected with ties to the Russian political power center, which, again, raises questions about media standards. In short, the available media in Russian in Latvia is all but dominated by the Russian state and its political elite.

Latvia is not as advanced as Estonia in offering alternatives to the Russian state backed media. It is, however, championing a European strategy towards the Russian disinformation campaign. In April 2015, a year after Latvia temporarily banned Russian channels, a proposal for a "Russian-language TV service to counter Kremlin propaganda received overarching support" from EU member states during summits in Riga (Al-Jazeera, 2015). Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs, stated earlier that he wanted "to invest jointly in alternative sources of

information — not alternative propaganda sources, but an alternative normal European TV channel, with entertainment, with news, but with very factually accurate news" (Buzzfeed, 2014). Similar to Estonia's national initiatives, the goal seems to be engaging the Russian part of the population, to include them in the Latvian society, as opposed to the current segmentation. So far, however, the European initiative has not produced anything substantial.

In conclusion, Latvia has a societal division when it comes to media use. The Russian state and political elite have a near monopoly on providing news to the Russians in Latvia, and have translated that position, to some degree, into political influence. Latvia has been championing a European approach to this problem, which is still in its early stages.

Kazakhstan

Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev expressed understanding for Russia's actions in Ukraine (Reuters, 2014). Yet it is unlikely that his regime is not at all worried by it. While Kazakhstan and Russia maintain good relationships, the former has been moving slowly towards better relations with China. There is also the issue of the large Russian minority in the north that has expressed grievances in the past and is under influence of Russian media.

Kazakhstan-Russia relations

Kazakhstan is arguably one of Russia's closest allies in Central-Asia. It is a member of most if not all post-Soviet regional organizations constituted to fill the gaps left by the Soviets, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as of Eurasian cooperation initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Unlike Belarus, which has accepted membership of regional organizations primarily to gain economic benignity from Russia, Kazakhstan did not have to be wooed by the Russians. Its president, Nazarbayev, is a proponent of regional cooperation and has "been the most supportive of all the integrationist programs" (Saivetz, 2012, p. 410). As such, Kazakhstan has advocated close relations with Russia since the end of the Soviet-Union.

Whereas Belarus' relation with Russia is to a large degree determined by energy dependency and economic concerns, Kazakhstan, due to its own large energy reserves and its ties to China, has viewed its relation with Russia predominantly from a political-military perspective. Kazakhstan is one of many Central-Asian states that houses Russian military forces on its

territory and it tends to buy Russian missile and artillery technology (Way, 2015, p. 693). Roger McDermott (2012) argues that "legal and doctrinal issues serve to bind Kazakhstan and Russia in this enduring defence partnership" (p. 78). The CSTO has also become more active in recent years through the conduction of numerous military exercises in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as by reviving "military cooperation between Russia and the individual state's military industrial complexes, particularly in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan" (Saivetz, 2012, p. 403). Russia therefore remains the most important strategic partner of Kazakhstan.

However, in recent years Astana has been looking to diversify its international defense cooperation, which is possible because of the unexclusive nature of the partnership with Moscow (McDermott, 2012, p. 78). Similar to other Central-Asian states, Kazakhstan is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace since 1995, although this membership has remained largely symbolic (Spechler & Spechler, 2012, p. 2).Due to its geographical location, Kazakhstan did not play as active a role as other Central-Asian states during and after the War in Afghanistan (2001-2014), although it did allow NATO to transfer some of its non-lethal equipment to Afghanistan by rail (NATO, 2015c). The last few years NATO-Kazakh cooperation has simmered at best.

The relationship between Kazakhstan and China is presumably more worrisome to Russia. For the moment this relationship is, in line with China's general foreign policy, mostly economic in nature. China has shown a great interest in Kazakh natural gas and oil reserves; as of 2012, "China's state-owned National Petroleum Company produces a fifth of all Kazakhstan's oil output" (Spechler & Spechler, 2012, p. 7). While Russian companies still have a dominant position in the Kazakh energy sector, China has become a major competitor. In 2013, for example, it invested almost double the amount of money in the Kazakh economy as Russia. China also offers extensive loans and rebuilds vital infrastructure, the latter presumably with eyes on the 'New Silk Road' project (see Guschin, 2015; Economist, 2015).

Russia's concern over the growing importance of China for Kazakhstan is arguably twofold. First, Russia is concerned that projects such as the 'New Silk Road' will rival Russian integrationist projects, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, or even make them obsolete. Second, the possibility exists that China will extend its support to the political-military domain, thereby rivalling the extensive defense partnership Russia maintains with Kazakhstan at the moment. While Russia intervened in Ukraine because of the growing role of the EU and NATO, an intervention in Kazakhstan is most likely to be suggested by the growing role of China.

Having said that, at the moment Kazakhstan is still firmly in the Russian sphere of influence. Kazakhstan's multifaceted foreign policy and its (limited) approaches to China do not threaten this dominant position. Furthermore, Nazarbayev is considered a close friend of Russia, although he expressed concerns after the Russian invasion in Georgia about the use of military solutions to work out interethnic issues and the effect of these on the fundamental principle of territorial integrity (Spechler & Spechler, 2012, p. 2).

Because of this dominant position and close relationship with the Kazakh regime, there is no geopolitical incentive for Russia to intervene in Kazakhstan. But, in a dynamic similar to the one discussed in the section on Belarus, if Nazarbayev is removed from power and a less pro-Russian regime is established, Russia might not hesitate to preserve its current relationship with Kazakhstan, and make sure that China's role will not grow at the expense of that of Russia.

Kazakh state capacity

According to the RPC dataset, Kazakhstan had a score of 1.357 in 2011, which is the highest score of all four cases researched in this study. This score has slowly but significantly increased since 2008 (0.854), which indicates that the Kazakh state has improved its capability to extract resources from the national output. This is to a large degree due to the relative size of the gas- and oil industries, which make up most of the national output and are under extensive state control. Kazakhstan has therefore often been described as a 'rentier state' (Franke et al, 2009, p. 110). This is further amplified by the low priority tax revenue has for the Kazakh regime; extraction of resources from the national output occurs directly through state control of large portions of the economy, rather than indirectly through taxation (Forlin, 2010, p. 668).

Furthermore, Kazakhstan has an authoritarian political regime, which means that the same arguments mentioned in the case of Belarus – less concerned with legitimizing policies, more resources spend on security – also apply to Kazakhstan. An authoritarian regime is able to increase state capacity at the expense of civil society and citizens without the latter two being able to object to certain policies and/or priorities.

As often is the case with rentier states, Kazakhstan does exhibit high levels of corruption. This decreases state capacity by lowering state income. Kazakhstan exhibits the main features of a neopatrimonial system as put forth by Oleksandr Fisun (2012, p. 91), meaning there is a group of actors around president Nazarbayev seeking rent, which is often a premise for widespread

corruption.[18] Kazakhstan is in the same range of corruption as notoriously corrupt states such as Ukraine and Russia (TI, 2014). It also scores very low when it comes to enforcing private property rights, which, as stated, is not a priority for authoritarian regimes (Fortin, 2010, p. 668). Finally, unlike the previous two cases, Kazakhstan does not have a safety net provided by membership of a multilateral organization such as the EU.

Kazakhstan thus exhibits a high level of state capacity, which it derives primarily from extensive state control in the energy sector. At the moment this state capacity is not being undermined by any political turmoil (although Nazarbayev's succession might prove to be negative factor in the near future). I therefore conclude that Kazakh state capacity is not a factor that would negatively affect Kazakhstan's overall ability to react to a deniable intervention.

Ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan

According to the latest census, held in 2009, there are 3.8 million ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan, which constitutes approximately 23.7 percent of the total population (ASRK, 2011, p. 21). This means that Russians are the largest minority in Kazakhstan, well in front of the Uzbeks (3 percent). Kazakhs themselves make up 63 percent of the population (ibid.). Compared to the previous census in 1999, in which 4.5 million people identified themselves as ethnic Russian, the Russian population has decreased 15 percent, despite a general population increase of 7 percent. Furthermore, the relative size of the Russian minority in the Kazakh population also declined in this time period. In 1999 almost 30 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan was considered ethnic Russian (ibid.). The ethnic Russian minority of Kazakhstan is thus on a downward slope, declining rapidly in both absolute and relative numbers.

Not surprisingly, most ethnic Russians are located in the northern part of Kazakhstan in the regions that directly border Russia. They are thus regionally concentrated and, according to data from MAR, "show high levels of group cohesion" (MAR, 2015d). Many of the Russians in Kazakhstan live in and around the northern cities of Petropavl and Kostanay, as well as in and around north-eastern cities such as Pavlodar (see Washington Post, 2014). The former capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, also harbors a large Russian minority, with about 33 percent of the cities' population of Russian ethnicity (Primeminister.kz, 2015).[19]

[18] The fact that Kazakhstan has a neopatrimonial political system also raises questions about the extent Kazakhstan's state capacity is actually *regime* capacity rather than *state* capacity.
[19] I was unable to find reliable information on the number of ethnic Russians in the capital of Astana.

Similar to other former Soviet states, Kazakhstan embarked on a path of nationalization once it regained independence in the 1990s. Nationalization included "promotion of ethnic Kazakhs in the government bureaucracy and promotion of Kazakh language education" (MAR, 2015d). But nationalization did not just mean increasing Kazakh presence. It also meant lessening the influence and power of the Russians living in Kazakhstan, which was done through "a transmigration of Kazakhs into Slav-dominated territories from other areas, close monitoring of the Russian opposition and tight control over the Russian media" (ibid.). The Russians that did not leave Kazakhstan after it gained independence tried to organize themselves politically in order to counter the nationalization – to various degrees of success (see Peyrouse, 2008, p. 108). Despite this effort, the nationalization policies have decreased the societal opportunities for the Russian minority, excluding them, for example, from the public sector (MAR, 2015d).

While in recent years there have not been any major protests from the Russian minority, "resentment does linger over the loss in status" (ibid.). The lack of protest can at least partially be explained by the restrictions imposed by the authoritarian regime. These restrictions make it difficult to surmise how deep the resentment goes and how common it is felt within the Russian minority. According to data from MAR, some Russians have "demanded autonomy for certain regions" while others have demanded "outright reunification with Russia", most notably at the turn of the century (ibid.). Others, such as those located in the southern regions, do not share these ideas (ibid.). Nevertheless, resentment is still present and could prove to be fertile ground for future conflict. It is therefore imperative for Kazakhstan to include its Russian minority by granting it the same political and civil rights as ethnic Kazakhs.

Kazakhstan thus has a large Russian minority, which is concentrated in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country. Similar to the Baltic cases, Kazakhstan implemented harsh nationalization policies in the 1990s that gave rise to resentment and grievances that still linger today and could be exploited by the Russian authorities. There are no indications that such exploitation is currently taking place.

Pro-Kremlin media in Kazakhstan

Similar to Belarus, the media in Kazakhstan is considered 'not free' by the Freedom House, scoring only slightly better than Belarus: 85/100 (with 100 the lowest possible score) (Freedom House, 2015). This is also apparent in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index, in which

Kazakhstan is ranked 160th of 180 states (RSF, 2015). These low scores are the result of systematic prosecution of critical journalists and lack of a freedom of information law; all meant to bolster the Kazakh regime, which, according to the Freedom House (2015), "dominate[s] the media landscape" and uses the judicial branch to silence critical and independent media.

This dominance, however, has not translated into banning Russian media, despite laws meant to limit foreign-produced programming (see Freedom House, 2015). According to a report published in 2010, "88 percent of the Kazakh audience watches Russian television" (Satter, 2010, p. 25). In Kazakhstan, "Russian state channels like Rossiya, NTV, and First Channel (…) enjoy huge popularity" (Lillis, 2014). This contrasts sharply with Kazakh output, which accounts "for only 6 percent of the media outlets in Kazakhstan" (ibid.).

An important reason why Russian media is so popular in Kazakhstan is that its' output is of higher quality than the output of Kazakh media. Kazakh media cannot compete with the state-backed Russian media, whom can rely on vast amounts of money flowing in from the Kremlin. Furthermore, the tight media control in Kazakhstan has made Kazakh media unattractive. Restrictions limit the content, with most stories about the good performance of president Nazarbayev and little about world events.

The popularity of Russian media is worrying Kazakh officials and pundits, with some even talking about 'informational colonization' (Melnichuk, 2015). While the effect of the popularity of Russian media on public opinion and beliefs seems to be well understood in Kazakhstan, very little is being done to counter it, which is odd given the priority the regime gives to controlling the media landscape. The Kazakh regime is poised to counter this dynamic by supporting Kazakh language media organizations and minimizing the influence of Russian media. So far, however, no meaningful initiatives have been developed. One explanation could be that Kazakhstan does not want to anger Russia by limiting the reach of pro-Kremlin media.

Kazakhstan thus shows a fairly similar picture compared to Belarus, with the regime exercising authority into the media domain, but ultimately unable to resist the content and information flowing from Russia. Both have not been able to develop meaningful alternatives. There is no data, however, that Kazakhstan actively manages Russian media in a manner similar to the Belarusian regime.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have conceptualized what is often called hybrid warfare as a deniable intervention: a military intervention by a state using covert forces as well as local insurgents, which have been catechized through pro-Kremlin media, to destabilize an adversary state and allow the intervening state deniability of involvement. The goal of this thesis was to determine if such a deniable intervention could be replicated by Russia in other states and therefore constitutes a regional threat. Four conditions were identified as having an influence on the efficaciousness of a deniable intervention. Consequently an empirical analysis was made to ascertain the extent to which these conditions are present in four cases: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia and Kazakhstan. Table 3 summarizes the results of this analysis.

Table 3. Summary of analysis

	Belarus	**Estonia**	**Latvia**	**Kazakhstan**
Russia has a direct incentive to destabilize the targeted state	NO, but …	NO	NO	NO, but …
Weak state capacity in targeted state	1.287 (2011), high corruption	0.773 (2011), EU safety net, low corruption	1.032 (2011), EU safety net, low corruption	1.357 (2011), high corruption
Russian minorities in targeted state	8% of population, no grievances, geographically dispersed	25% of population, minor grievances, geographically concentrated	26% of population, minor grievances, geographically concentrated	24% of population, minor grievances, geographically concentrated
Pro-Kremlin media in targeted state	MEDIUM, state controls media, no counter initiatives	HIGH, national and European counter initiatives	HIGH, European counter initiatives	HIGH, state controls media, no counter initiatives

From this summary several inferences can be drawn. First, all four cases enjoy extensive state capacity. Unlike Ukraine, which was faced with political turmoil and the breakdown of central authority, none of these cases are currently experiencing internal disturbances, nor is there any

indication that this might change in the near future (although the succession of Lukashenko in Belarus and Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan might prove to be destabilizing).

Second, while all four cases contain a large Russian minority, there are differences in relative size and other characteristics. This condition is the least alarming for Belarus. Less than ten per cent of the population is Russian, which is geographically dispersed and has not exhibited any grievances. This contrasts with the other three cases. Estonia, Latvia and Kazakhstan all have a large Russian minority that constitutes approximately a fourth of the population. Furthermore, in all three cases this minority is geographically concentrated and has exhibited minor grievances in the past – both risk factors for a deniable intervention.

Third, all four cases are deeply penetrated by Russian media, with large percentages of the population relying solely on Russian content and information coming through Kremlin-approved, and often Kremlin-managed, channels. Russian media in these cases offer a different narrative of events than international channels. They are also known to spread disinformation about and criticize local authorities. This position gives them, and through them the Kremlin, extensive political power. This is well understood in Estonia and Latvia. These states have been developing national and European initiatives to counter the influence of Russian media. Belarus and Kazakhstan, on the other hand, have not, which is somewhat odd given the importance their respective regimes give to controlling the media.

Fourth and finally, Russia does not seem to have an incentive to conduct a deniable intervention in any of the four cases. The goal of the deniable intervention in Ukraine was to destabilize a transitioning state that was opting for closer cooperation and possibly integration with the West. Estonia and Latvia have made that transition in the last two decades and are now firmly embedded in NATO and European institutions, which provide both deterrence and a safety net in case of external aggression.

Belarus and Kazakhstan have not made any meaningful attempt to make such a transition and there are no indications that they will attempt it in the near future. However, the close alignment of these states with Russia puts them at risk if they would decide to alter the alignment, either by opting for closer cooperation with the West (in the case of Belarus) or with China and/or other Asian states (in the case of Kazakhstan). Such a transition would mean a loss of influence for Russia, which is precisely what prompted the deniable intervention in Ukraine. In other words, Belarus and Kazakhstan are more at risk than Estonia and Latvia.

On the whole, however, none of the cases seem to be at particular risk at the moment to having to endure a deniable intervention from Russia. Ukraine provided a unique situation for Russia to deploy such a military strategy and it would likely be difficult to replicate the strategy in other states within the region. The conditions that made the deniable intervention in Ukraine such a success are not present to the same degree in the cases analyzed in this thesis.

This does not mean that states do not have to worry about Russia's recent behavior. The contempt Russia showed for international agreements and principles is a legit concern, not only for those in direct proximity, but for all states that value rule of law and territorial sovereignty.

Likewise, the control the Kremlin exercises over Russian-language media in the region is problematic. Initiatives to counter the worrisome media situation are gaining momentum, but more needs to be done both on the national and European level.

The analysis of the phenomenon of the deniable intervention shows that, while parts of it are conducted through military means, the ground conditions that create the right environment are rooted in politics and media. Without these conditions, any attempt to conduct a deniable intervention will be futile. As such, Europe should seek to answer Russian aggression in Ukraine primarily in these domains. That means that an approach focused on soft power and countering the Russian disinformation campaigns should take precedent over an approach of increasing military presence and muscle-flexing. Aggressive war rhetoric will only lead to alienating the ethnic Russian populations of the EU, thereby creating a condition for Russia to exploit.

References

Aalto, P. (2003). Revisiting the security/identity puzzle in Russo-Estonian relations. *Journal of Peace Research, 40*(5), 573-591.

Alachnovič, A. (2015) 'How Russia's Subsidies Save the Belarusian Economy' *Belarus Digest.* http://belarusdigest.com/story/how-russias-subsidies-save-belarusian-economy-23118 *Accessed on 18-11-2015.*

Allison, R. (2014). Russian 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules. *International Affairs*, *90*(6), 1255-1297.

Al-Jazeera (2015) 'Latvia struggles with restive Russian minority amid regional tensions' http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/13/latvia-resists-russian-soft-power.html *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

Ambrosio, T. (2006). The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations: Insulating Minsk from a Color Revolution. *DEMOKRATIZATSIYA-WASHINGTON-*, *14*(3), 407.

Amineh, M. P. (2003). *Globalisation, Geopolitics and Energy Security in the Eurasian Region*. The Hague: Clingendael International Energy Program

ARES [Armament Research Services] (2014) 'Raising Red Flags: An Examination of Arms & Munitions in the Ongoing Conflict in Ukraine' http://armamentresearch.com/Uploads/Research%20Report%20No.%203%20-%20Raising%20Red%20Flags.pdf *Accessed on 06-10-2015.*

ASRK [Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan] (2011) '"RESULTS OF THE 2009 NATIONAL POPULATION CENSUS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN" Analytical Report' Available at: http://liportal.giz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/oeffentlich/Kasachstan/40_gesellschaft/Kaz2009_Analytical_report.pdf *Accessed on 08-11-2015.*

Baltic Times, the (2007) 'Head of LTV resigns amid censorship furor' http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/19475/ *Accessed on 07-12-2015.*

Bar-Siman-Tov, Y. (1984). The Strategy of War by Proxy. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *19*(4), 263-273.

BBC (2014) '"Little green men" or "Russian invaders"?' http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154 *Consulted on 06/10/2015.*

BBC (2015) 'Nato to counter 'hybrid warfare' from Russia' http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32741688 *Accessed on 20-09-2015*.

Belstat (2014) 'National composition of population of the Republic of Belarus' http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/perepis-naseleniya/perepis-naseleniya-1999-goda/tablichnye-dannye/national-composition-of-population-of-the-republic-of-belarus/

Bērziņš, J. (2014) 'Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy' *National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research. Policy Paper*

No. 2. http://www.naa.mil.lv/~/media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

Best, M. (2013). The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States. *Verges: Germanic & Slavic Studies in Review*, *2*(1).

Bieliszczuk, B. (2015) 'David and Goliath? Estonian-Russian relations' *Visegrad Plus.* http://visegradplus.org/analyse/david-goliath-estonian-russian-relations/ *Acccessed on 22-10-2015.*
Bloomberg (2014a) 'Ukraine's Turmoil Is Helping Belarus Strongman Lukashenko' http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-11-24/ukraines-turmoil-is-helping-belarus-strongman-lukashenko *Accessed on 30-11-2015.*

Braitwaite, A. (2010) 'Resisting infection: How state capacity conditions conflict contagion' *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(3).

Bratersky, M. (2014) 'Transformation of Russia's Foreign Policy', Russian in Global Affairs [online] 7 June. http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Transformation-of-Russias-Foreign-Policy--16706 *Accessed on 22-10-2015.*

Buzzfeed (2014) 'The EU Is Plotting A New TV Channel To Counter Russian Propaganda In Europe' http://www.buzzfeed.com/bensmith/the-eu-is-plotting-a-new-tv-channel-to-counter-russian-propa#.edQwJ9wpm *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

Byman, D., Chalk, P., Hoffman, B., Rosenau, W., & Brannan, D. (2001).*Trends in outside support for insurgent movements*. Rand Corporation.
Cederman, L. E., Girardin, L., & Gleditsch, K. S. (2009). Ethnonationalist triads: Assessing the influence of kin groups on civil wars. *World Politics*, *61*(03), 403-437.

Commercio, M. E. (2011). *Russian minority politics in post-Soviet Latvia and Kyrgyzstan: the transformative power of informal networks*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

CSP [Centrālā statistikas pārvalde] (2012) 'On key provisional results of Population and Housing Census 2011' http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/notikumi/key-provisional-results-population-and-housing-census-2011-33306.html *Accessed on 29-10-2015.*

CSP (2015) 'Population and Social Processes. ISG07. RESIDENT POPULATION BY ETHNICITY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR' http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/en/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__iedz__iedzskaits/?tablelist=true&rxid=a79839fe-11ba-4ecd-8cc3-4035692c5fc8 *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Cunningham, D. E. (2010). Blocking resolution: How external states can prolong civil wars. *Journal of Peace Research*, *47*(2), 115-127.

Dataverse (2015) 'Replication data for: Relative Political Capacity Dataset' https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/16845 *Accessed on 22-10-2015.*

Dunn, E. C., & Bobick, M. S. (2014). The empire strikes back: War without war and occupation without occupation in the Russian sphere of influence. *American Ethnologist*, *41*(3), 405-413.

Economist, the (2009) 'NATO and Russia. War games. Jitters in eastern Europe over Russia's military manoeuvres' http://www.economist.com/node/14776852 *Accessed on 10-11-2015.*

EEAS [European External Action Service] (2015) '"Disinformation Review" - new EU information product (04/11/2015)'
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/press_corner/all_news/news/2015/2016_11_04_1_en.htm *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

EIU [Economist Intelligence Unit] (2014) 'Democracy Index 2014 Democracy and its discontents' Available at: http://www.sudestada.com.uy/Content/Articles/421a313a-d58f-462e-9b24-2504a37f6b56/Democracy-index-2014.pdf *Accessed on 27-10-2015.*

EJC [European Journalism Centre] (2015) 'Media Landscapes. Expert summaries and analyses of the state of media in each European country as well as its neighbouring states.'
http://ejc.net/media_landscapes *Accessed on 22-10-2015.*

EJC (2015b) 'Estonia' http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/estonia *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

EJC (2015c) 'Latvia' http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/latvia *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

EJC (2015d) 'Belarus' http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/belarus *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

Eke, S. M., & Kuzio, T. (2000). Sultanism in Eastern Europe: the socio-political roots of authoritarian populism in Belarus. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *52*(3), 523-547.

ERR [Estonian Public Broadcasting] (2015) 'Kohver released and back in Estonia'
http://news.err.ee/v/politics/5cbe0a4d-b999-4f55-a8d5-375c2f090a19/kohver-free-and-back-in-estonia
Accessed on 10-11-2015.
ES [Eesti Statistika] (2015) 'Eesti statistika aastaraamat. 2015. Statistical Yearbook of Estonia' Available at: http://www.stat.ee/90733 *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

EU (2015) 'Estonia' http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/estonia/index_en.htm
Accessed on 10-11-2015.

Euractiv (2015) 'EPP: EU should tell Russia we are ready to go to war'
http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/epp-eu-should-tell-russia-we-are-ready-go-war-313974
Accessed on 13-12-2015.

Financial Times, the (2015) 'Estonia ready to deal with Russia's 'little green men''
http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/03c5ebde-f95a-11e4-ae65-00144feab7de.html#axzz3lnrj2ZKE *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

Fisun, O. (2012) Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective, *Demokratizatsiya*, 20(2): 87-96.

Foreign Policy (2015) 'Captured Russian Special Forces Soldier Describes His Unit Fighting in Eastern Ukraine' http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/18/captured-russian-special-forces-soldier-describes-his-unit-fighting-in-eastern-ukraine/ *Accessed on 06-10-2015.*

Fortin, J. (2010). A tool to evaluate state capacity in post-communist countries, 1989–2006. *European Journal of Political Research*, *49*(5), 654-686.

Fortin, J. (2012). Is there a necessary condition for democracy? The role of state capacity in postcommunist countries. *Comparative Political Studies*, *45*(7), 903-930.

Franke, A., Gawrich, A., & Alakbarov, G. (2009). Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as post-Soviet rentier states: resource incomes and autocracy as a double 'curse'in post-Soviet regimes. *Europe-Asia Studies*, *61*(1), 109-140.

Frear, M. (2013) 'Belarus: Player and Pawn in the Integration Game', in Dragneva R. & Wolczuk K. (eds) Eurasian Economic Integration: Law, Policy and Politics (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing)

Freedom House, the (2015a) 'Belarus' https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/belarus *Accessed on 13-12-2015.*

Freedom House, the (2015b) 'Kazakhstan' https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/kazakhstan *Accessed on 13-12-2015*.

Freedom House, the (2015c) 'Latvia' https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/latvia *Accessed on 13-12-2015.*

FT [Financial Times] (2015) 'Party with ties to Putin pushes ahead in Estonian polls' http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/1decfbac-be8a-11e4-a341-00144feab7de.html#axzz3tRQxiN8T *Accessed on 05-12-2015.*

Galeotti, M. (2014) 'The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian non-linear war' https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/ *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

Galeotti, M. (2015) ''Hybrid War' and 'Little Green Men': How It Works, and How It Doesn't' ISN ETH Zurich. http://isnblog.ethz.ch/government/hybrid-war-and-little-green-men-how-it-works-and-how-it-doesnt *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

George, A.L., Bennett, A. (2005) *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press

Grigas, A. (2012). *Legacies, coercion and soft power: Russian influence in the Baltic States*. Chatham House.

Guardian, the (2014) 'Russians open new front after Estonian official is captured in 'cross-border raid'' http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/07/russia-parades-detained-estonian-police-officer *Accessed on 10-11-2015.*

Guardian, the (2015) 'Russia jails Estonian intelligence officer Tallinn says was abducted over border' http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/19/russia-jails-estonian-police-officer-allegedly-abducted-border-eston-kohver *Accessed on 10-11-2015.*

Hille, P., & Knill, C. (2006). 'It's the Bureaucracy, Stupid' The Implementation of the Acquis Communautaire in EU Candidate Countries, 1999-2003. *European Union Politics*, *7*(4), 531-552.

Hoffman, F. G. (2007). *Conflict in the 21st century: the rise of hybrid wars* (p. 51). Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

IBTimes UK (2015) 'Vladimir Putin hybrid war in Baltics: Lithuania calls for EU unity amid Russian cyberattacks' http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/vladimir-putin-hybrid-war-baltics-lithuania-calls-eu-unity-amid-russian-cyberattacks-1494820 *Accessed on 15-09-2015.*

IHSN [International Household Survey Network] (2014) 'Belarus - Population Census 2009. Ethnic Composition of the Population of the Republic of Belarus (Volume 3)' http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/4377/related_materials *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Jarábik, B. (2014) 'Revisiting Belarus: The Reality Beyond the Rhetoric' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.* http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/12/03/revisiting-belarus-reality-beyond-rhetoric *Accessed on 17-11-2015.*

Johnston, C. (2015) 'Russia's info-war: theory and practice' EUISS Alert 22. April 2015

Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking, fast and slow.* McMillan

Kārklina, R., Liegìs, I. (2006) 'Latvia and Russia within the Broader International Context' in Muižnieks, N. (2006) 'Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and International Dimensions' *LU Akadēmiskais apgāds*

Kofman, M., Rojansky, M. (2015) 'A Closer look at Russia's "Hybrid War"' Kennan Cable no. 7 April 2015

Koort, K. (2014) 'The Russians of Estonia: Twenty Years After' *World Affairs Journal.* July/August 2014

Kremlin, the (2014) 'Address by President of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin.' http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603 *Accessed on 26-09-2015.*

Kuchins, A. & Zevelev, I. (2012) Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change, The *Washington Quarterly*, 35(1), 147-161.

Lillis, J. (2014) 'Journalists Fret as Russian Media Swamps Kazakhstan' http://www.eurasianet.org/node/70971 *Accessed on 13-12-2015.*

Lindemann, K., & Saar, E. (2012). Ethnic inequalities in education: second-generation Russians in Estonia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *35*(11), 1974-1998.

Luhn, A. (2015) 'Ex-Soviet countries on front line of Russia's media war with the west' http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/06/-sp-ex-soviet-countries-front-line-russia-media-propaganda-war-west *Accessed on 22-10-2015.*

Made, V. (2005). Estonian–Russian Relations in the Context of the International System. *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook*, 93-110.

MAR (2014) 'About MAR' http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/about.asp *Accessed on 20-10-2015*.

MAR (2015a) 'Assessment for Russians in Latvia' http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=36701 *Accessed on 29-10-2015.*

MAR (2015b) 'Assessment for Russians in Estonia' http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=36601 *Accessed on 29-10-2015.*

MAR (2015c) 'Assessment for Russians in Belarus' http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=37001 *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

MAR (2015d) 'Assessment for Russians in Kazakhstan' http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=70501 *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Marsh, D., & Stoker, G. (Eds.). (2010). *Theory and methods in political science*. Palgrave Macmillan.

McDermott, R. N. (2012). *Kazakhstan-Russia: Enduring eurasian defence partners* (No. 2012: 15). DIIS Reports, Danish Institute for International Studies.
Melnichuk, V. (2015) 'Kazakhstan: Public Opinion And Russia's Propaganda In Kazakhstan.' *Puls of Central Asia (1) September 2014.* Available at: http://pulsofcentralasia.org/2014/09/29/kazakhstan-public-opinion-and-russias-propaganda-in-kazakhstan-2/#_edn10

Minsvyaz [Ministry of Telecom and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation] (2015) 'Russia and Belarus Discussed Creation of the Single Information Space' http://minsvyaz.ru/en/events/33888/ *Accessed on 07-12-2015.*

Monaghan, A. (2013) The New Russian Foreign Policy Concept: Evolving Continuity, *Chatham House Programme Paper*, London.

Morozov, V. (2004). Russia in the Baltic Sea Region Desecuritization or Deregionalization?. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 39(3), 317-331.

Moscow Times, the (2014) 'Belarus Says Russia's Annexation of Crimea Sets a 'Bad Precedent'' http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/belarus-says-russias-annexation-of-crimea-sets-a-bad-precedent/496633.html *Accessed on 30-11-2015.*

Muižnieks, N. (ed.) (2006) *Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and international dimensions.* LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

NATO (2008) 'The North Atlantic Treaty. Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949' http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm *Accessed on 13-10-2015.*

NATO (2015a) 'Hybrid war – does it even exist?' http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/index.htm *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

NATO (2015b) 'Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the start of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers' http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_120953.htm?selectedLocale=en *Accessed on 15-09-2015.*

NATO (2015c) 'NATO's relations with Kazakhstan' http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49598.htm# *Accessed on 24-11-2015.*

New Europe Investor (2014) 'Estonia LNG Terminal Gets Approval' http://www.neweuropeinvestor.com/news/estonia-lng-terminal-10424/ *Accessed on 14-11-2015.*

Newsweek (2015) 'Poland Prepares for 'Hybrid War' Amidst Russian Threat' http://europe.newsweek.com/poland-prepares-hybrid-war-amidst-russian-threat-316469 *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

New York Times, the (2014) 'Mayor of Latvian Capital Tries to Bridge Old Divide' http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/13/world/europe/nils-usakovs-mayor-of-riga-aims-to-move-beyond-ethnic-politics.html *Accessed on 07-12-2015.*

New York Times, the (2015) 'Kremlin Says Russian 'Volunteer' Forces Will Fight in Syria' http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/world/europe/nato-russia-warplane-turkey.html *Accessed on 22-09-2015.*

Pelnēns, G. (ed.) (2010) *The "humanitarian dimension" of Russian foreign policy toward Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic States.* Center for East European Policy Studies. ISBN: 978-9984-39-989-8

Pettai, V., & Hallik, K. (2002). Understanding processes of ethnic control: segmentation, dependency and co–optation in post–communist Estonia. *Nations and nationalism*, *8*(4), 505-529.

Peyrouse, S. (2008). The "Imperial Minority": An interpretative framework of the Russians in Kazakhstan in the 1990s. *Nationalities Psapers*, *36*(1), 105-123.

Pomerantsev, P. (2014a) *Nothing is true and everything is possible.* Public Affairs: New York

Pomerantsev, P. (2014b) 'Yes, Russia Matters: Putin's Guerrilla Strategy' *World Affairs.* Sep/Okt 2014. http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/yes-russia-matters-putin%E2%80%99s-guerrilla-strategy *Accessed on 06-10-2015.*

Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money. *New York: Institute of Modern Russia [online]*

Primeminister.kz (2015) 'Almaty' http://www.primeminister.kz/page/article-98?lang=en *Accessed on 08-11-2015.*

Pukhov, R. (2015) 'Nothing 'Hybrid' About Russia's War in Ukraine' http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/nothing-hybrid-about-russia-s-war-in-ukraine/522471.html *Accessed on 26-09-2015.*

Rácz, A. (2015) 'Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist'. *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs* (43).

Reisinger, H., Golts, A. (2014) 'Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defense' *NATO Defense College. Research paper no. 105.*

Reuters (2014) 'Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev tells Putin he 'understands' Moscow's cause in Ukraine' http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-nazarbayev-putin-idUSBREA290XP20140310 *Accessed on 13-12-2015.*

Rijksoverheid (2014) 'Toespraak van minister Koenders bij de vergadering van de Parlementaire Assemblee van de NAVO' https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/toespraken/2014/11/22/speech-koenders-nato-parliamentary-assembly *Accessed on 15-09-2015.*

RSF [Reports sans frontiers] (2015) '2015 World Press Freedom Index' https://index.rsf.org/ *Accessed on 07-12-2015.*

Saivetz, C. R. (2012). The ties that bind? Russia's evolving relations with its neighbors. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *45*(3), 401-412.

Salehyan, I. (2010). The delegation of war to rebel organizations. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

Salehyan, I., Gleditsch, K. S., & Cunningham, D. E. (2011). Explaining external support for insurgent groups. *International Organization*, *65*(04), 709-744.

Satter, D. (2014) 'The Last Gasp of Empire: Russia's Attempts to Control the Media in the Former Soviet Republics' *CIMA Report.*

Smith, A. (1996). Diversionary foreign policy in democratic systems. *International Studies Quarterly*, 133-153.

Spechler, M. C., & Spechler, D. R. (2013). Russia's lost position in Central Eurasia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, *4*(1), 1-7.

Stratfor (2014a) 'Pro-Russian Activity Raises Concerns in Latvia' https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/pro-russian-activity-raises-concerns-latvia *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Stratfor (2014b) 'The Baltic Countries Respond to Russian Minorities' https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/baltic-countries-respond-russian-minorities *Accessed on 05-11-2015*.

Stratfor (2014c) 'Russia Looks at Protests in the Baltics' https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-looks-protests-baltics *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Szostek, J. (2015). Russian influence on news media in Belarus. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*.

TASS (2014) 'Donetsk, Luhansk armies to form armed forces' http://tass.ru/en/world/749812 *Accessed on 06-10-2015*.

TI [Transparency International] (2014) 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: Results' https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results *Accessed on 01-12-2015.*

Topychkanov, P. (2015) '"Hybrid War"—a Scholarly Term or a Propaganda Cliché?' *Carnegie Moscow Center*. http://carnegie.ru/2015/07/17/hybrid-war-scholarly-term-or-propaganda-clich%C3%A9/idyl *Accessed on 26-09-2015.*

VPRO (2015) 'Grensland: de Bunker [at 00:20:00]' Available at: http://www.npo.nl/grensland/18-10-2015/VPWON_1233651 *Accessed on 05-11-2015.*

Wang, S., Hu, A. (2001) *The Chinese Economy in Crisis: State Capacity and Tax Reform*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, referenced in Ottervik, M. (2013) 'CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING STATE CAPACITY: Testing the Validity of Tax Compliance as a Measure of State Capacity' THE QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE WORKING PAPER SERIES 2013:20. Available at: http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1468/1468814_2013_20_ottervik.pdf

Washington Post, the (2014) 'Yes, Kazakhstan should change its name. This map shows why.' https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/02/07/yes-kazakhstan-should-change-its-name-this-map-shows-why/ *Accessed on 08-11-2015.*

Way, L. A. (2005). Authoritarian state building and the sources of regime competitiveness in the fourth wave: the cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. *World Politics*, *57*(02), 231-261.

Way, L. A. (2015). The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the 'near abroad'. *European Journal of Political Research*.

Wikileaks (2007) ‘DECISION ON PUTIN DOCUMENTARY RAISES CENSORSHIP CONCERNS [Canonical ID:07RIGA898_a]’ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07RIGA898_a.html *Accessed on 07-12-2015.*