

A successful failure: Russia after Crime(a)

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A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE:
RUSSIA AFTER CRIME(A)

Edited by
Olga Irisova, Anton Barbashin,
Fabian Burkhardt, Ernest Wyciskiewicz

The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

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INTRODUCTION

Russia has become a very different country since it annexed Crimea three years ago. By breaching international law, its relations with the West are now fraught with tension, even in areas where there was once hope of cooperation. In a bid to reduce its dependence on Europe, Russia has touted its pivot to Asia and its Eurasian Economic Union, but those wheels have been slow to turn. Inside the country, three years of economic stagnation have followed that historic takeover of 2014. Sanctions are biting, and so are low global oil prices. Within the government bureaucracy itself, power struggles are underway: new ideologies and new faces are jostling for prominence.

The aim of this book is to provide an analysis of these trends providing a road map for anyone seeking to understand the workings of “post-Crimean” Russia. It includes studies of Russia–West relations, the role of sanctions, Western policy towards Ukraine, anti-Americanism, Russia’s military doctrine, the fate of its army’s modernization plans, migration, the increasing “weaponization” of history, and the government’s attempts to build a new “Crimean consensus” with Russian society, a reworked social contract emphasizing traditional values and a vastly different understanding of human rights to that in the West.

The authors of the book are experts from Germany, Poland, Russia and United Kingdom. Ulrich Speck, James Sherr, Ernest Wyciszekiewicz, Petr Bologov, Bartłomiej Gajos, Pavel Luzin, Tatiana Stanovaya, Ben Noble, Fabian Burkhardt, Vladislav Inozemtsev, Olga Gulina, Olesya Zakharova, Stepan Goncharov, Olga Irisova, Denis Volkov and Anton Barbashin are among the regular and *ad hoc* contributors to *Intersection: Russia/Europe/World*, an online publication on Russian foreign and domestic affairs.

The *Intersection* is a new-generation online magazine that combines features of a think-tank, regional studies journal and an

online commentary outlet. Its goal is to provide in-depth analysis of political, economic, legal and social developments in Russia, and their regional, European and global ramifications. Launched in May 2015, *Intersection* has featured more than 350 articles published in Russian and English, it has given voice to over a 100 experts, both established scholars as well as many aspiring voices from Russia, Ukraine, Europe and beyond. Founded and conceived by a team of Russian researchers, established and funded by the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, *Intersection* is run by an international team from Russia, Poland, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. This publication is the first printed book edited and co-authored by the *Intersection* team.

The *Intersection* Editorial Team

ULRICH SPECK

RUSSIA'S CHALLENGE
TO THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Russia “is back” on the international scene. But not as a “responsible stakeholder” of the existing international system, as the West had hoped for years. Instead, Russia has become an increasingly aggressive power, using military force in Ukraine and Syria to advance its goals. By confronting the West in both these countries, Russia has boxed itself back into the global super league of powers.

A few years ago, there was a consensus among observers that the U.S. and China have become the two most powerful countries; experts talked about a world run by the “G2.” Today many see the world more in terms of a G3. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a leading American strategic thinker, talks about the United States, China and Russia as “the three principal shareholders of global power.”¹

Surprisingly, Russia’s rise into the top league of powers happened at a time when Russia was in economic decline. Today Russia is only the 12th biggest economy in the world, featuring between Korea and Australia. Its GDP for 2016 is projected at \$1,267 billion. For the U.S., it’s 18,561 billion; for China, 11,391; Germany, 3,494.² The Russian economy has not diversified; it

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski’s interview to *Huffington Post* on 23 December 2016, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/zbigniew-brzezinski-america-influence-china_us_585d8545e4b0d9a594584a37.

² Nominal GDP, cf. <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/countries-by-projected-gdp.php>, referring to World Economic Outlook Database, October 2016.

remains overwhelmingly dependent on the extraction of natural resources, with the help of Western technology.

How can this disjunction between economic means and foreign policy ambitions be explained? Why is Russia so keen to play in a league with two countries whose economy is many times bigger; why is it not trying to find its place among mid-sized powers such as France, Britain, Japan and Germany? In other words, what is driving Russian foreign policy?

THE “REALIST” INTERPRETATION OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A standard explanation is “wounded pride.” According to this view, Russia is first and foremost a “proud” country that has been hit hard by the loss of empire and influence since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is craving for status and recognition. But the West has not accommodated those needs and aspirations. Instead it has enlarged NATO and constantly “humiliated” Russia. U.S. president Barack Obama’s remark about Russia as a “regional power” is often cited as proof for the alleged disrespectful treatment. This interpretation of Russian foreign policy cites the speeches of Russian president Vladimir Putin, who is regularly attacking America as the power that dominates the world and denies other powers their proper status.

An important proponent of this view is one of the leading thinkers of the “realist” school in foreign policy, the academic John J. Mearsheimer. According to him, Russia is just behaving the way great powers do: “Putin’s pushback [in Ukraine] should have come as no surprise. After all, the West has been moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly.”³ For many foreign policy “realists,” it is obvious what Russia wants: being recognized as a “great power,” with a “sphere of influence”—or “backyard”—and a seat on table when it comes to major global decisions.

³ J.J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs*, 18 August 2014, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault.

It often follows from this analysis, implicitly or explicitly, that the way forward is to give Russia what it wants. As a “satisfied” power, Russia would not anymore challenge the status quo; instead it would contribute to the greater common good and partner with other countries where their interests converge. A Russia that is globally respected, and can freely dominate its “backyard,” would be a constructive partner for America and share with it the burden of global governance—such as non-proliferation—and the stabilization of unruly regions such as the Middle East.

While the “realist” interpretation of Russian behavior is consistent in itself, and consistent with the theory of realism, it fails to properly identify the drivers of Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy comes wrapped into the language of “realism.” But the way Russia is acting is not consistent with classical great power politics.

If Russia’s aim would be to become a truly great power, the Russian regime would focus on building the domestic and international foundations for such a role—the way China does. It would first and foremost seek to reform its economy, in order to have the material resources for the projection of power, in a world where economic power is at least as crucial as military power.

Secondly, Russia would try to build a system of friendships and alliances. The history of the state system in Europe until the World War II is first and foremost a history of treaties and alliances. Today Russia is isolated in Europe and no longer a member of the G7. China is not treating Russia as a true ally; it looks down on Russia as a second-rate power. Neither the Shanghai Treaty Organization nor the BRICS have turned into true alliances. In its “near abroad,” in the post-Soviet space, Russia has alienated many potential allies. And its closest partners—mainly Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia—regularly demonstrate deep unease with Russia’s aggressive foreign policy.

The only relevant power resource Russia has, in order to back up its huge international ambition, is military power, especially nuclear power. When it comes to the number of nuclear warheads, Russia is on eye level with the United States. It is therefore not surprising that Moscow is keen to use this power resource to advance its goal. Nuclear intimidation has been at the center of

Russia's strategy in its confrontation with the West over the last few years. Fear of an accidental escalation has grown in Europe; and under Obama America has been keen not to be drawn into a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine and Syria.

ACCOMMODATING RUSSIA IS NOT GOING TO WORK

The "realist" view of Russia as a "great power" is not only analytically unconvincing. It is also leading to problematic policy recommendations. For "realists," accepting a Russian sphere of influence is the way ahead. The West should make clear to Russia that NATO and EU are not going to be enlarged further east. It should accommodate Russia by accepting that the post-Soviet space (minus the Baltic countries) is the sphere of Russian influence, and not challenge Russia there.

Such an approach however is not just inconsistent with the UN system based on state sovereignty. It is also not going to lead to better Western relations with Russia for a number of reasons.

First, it has not worked in the past. Accommodation of Russia has been, de facto, the policy the West has pursued from the break-up of the Soviet Union 1991 until 2014 when the West reacted to Russian aggression against Ukraine with sanctions.⁴ Out of all the successor states of the Soviet Union, only Russia got the West's real attention. Russia's claim to inherit the UN Security Council Seat from the Soviet Union and its nuclear weapons has been supported by the West. America and Europe have put their hopes on a strong Russia that would transform into a liberal democracy and a market economy over time. The West has not objected to Russia's use of military force in the post-Soviet space as a tool to keep other countries unstable and dependent on Moscow (especially Moldova and Georgia). American and European leaders have seen Russia as

⁴ On the Ukraine conflict see: U. Speck, *The West's Response to the Ukraine Conflict: A Transatlantic Success Story*, Transatlantic Academy, April 2016, www.transatlanticacademy.org/publications/west%E2%80%99s-response-ukraine-conflict-transatlantic-success-story.

the key partner and interlocutor, accepting Moscow's view of the "near abroad" as a sphere of influence, or better, sphere of control.

This approach has failed, not because of Western meddling but because of Russia's inability to produce a stable environment. The way Russia has exerted influence in the post-Soviet space—through intimidation, use of military power, support for corrupt leaders—has provoked resistance. Russian influence has been, in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, a major obstacle to economic and political modernization. Reformers in these countries turned to the West for help: to counterbalance Russian influence and to support their reform agendas.

In other words, the conflicts between Russia and post-Soviet countries are homegrown. They are not going to disappear if the West decides to abandon the approach of limited engagement it has pursued with reform-minded countries in the post-Soviet space. If the West cuts those relationships in order to accommodate Russia, the result is likely to be more conflict and desperation in those countries, leading either to more war or emigration; certainly not to stability.

The second reason why accommodation is not going to work is that it would probably not lead to satisfaction but to even more hunger. Instead of becoming a reliable, constructive partner, Russia would likely double down on its attempts to gain more influence abroad using coercion and subversion, pushing back against Western influence. If the West accepts the claim of an overall very weak Russia to global pre-eminence, it strengthens those forces in Russia who want to reverse history and restore further imperial glory.

Russia is a former empire that is looking for a role. If the only role it can conceive of is an imperial one, then it is a revisionist threat to its neighbors. Empires don't have borders, unlike nation states. But for European stability, it is key that Russia starts to accept the reality of borders in the post-Soviet space: the fact that Russia is only one of 15 successor states of the Soviet Union, and that the other 14 are equally sovereign and should be treated as such.

Stability in the post-Soviet space is only going to be available if Russia buries its former imperial self, accepts the current borders

and starts treating neighbors as equals. Russia is not the first country that went through such a painful transformation from imperial grandeur to the identity of a nation-state, indeed many European countries did: Turkey, Austria, France, Spain and Britain did, among others.

The third reason why accommodation is not going to work is that Russia can only project the image of a leading global power as long as it acts as a spoiler. Without a solid economic background, without much soft power and without real friends and allies, Russia is not in a position to play a constructive role, to build and shape order. It lacks the economic tools of statecraft, and it remains very vulnerable itself to economic pressure. Only as an aggressive, confrontational player that is disrupting the designs of others, Russia can stay on the top of the international game.

But the fourth reason is by far the most important one: Russia's great power ambition is just the ideological surface of the operation. What is really driving Russian foreign policy is the fight of the regime for survival. It is this fight that is pushing Russia towards an endless conflict with the West. The dangerous enemy against which the Kremlin is fighting is democratic contagion.

WHAT IS THE RUSSIAN STRATEGY?

Russian foreign policy is the external dimension of a broader regime survival strategy. The goal is to keep the current elites in power, with Putin on the top. And the main threat is the democratization of Russia.

It is a fear that is not unfounded. Putin has seen many autocratic regimes fall: in Central Europe, in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East. He was in Dresden as a KGB agent when the East-German regime broke down. And with the "Colored Revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, the threat of democratic revolution came closer to Russia. With the anti-Putin protest in Moscow in December 2011, the wave reached Russia itself.

There are several dimensions to the Kremlin's strategy of regime preservation. At a basic level, it tries to protect Russia from

democratic “contagion,” through the control of the political system and of the flows of information. As a country that depends on economic and technological exchange with the West, and whose elites like to move in and out of the country, Russia however cannot simply close the borders. Unlike in Soviet times, control cannot be done in this sort of totalitarian manner. That is why Putin has put in place a more sophisticated system, keeping up the impression of a certain amount of openness.

On a second level, the strategy of regime preservation is about building a “cordon sanitaire.” If a major post-Soviet state becomes a successful liberal democracy, then the risk of contagion would be high. In the Kremlin’s view, Russia’s neighbors must remain part of the autocratic sphere. Only decisive Russian influence can guarantee that.

Thirdly, the strategy is about weakening the West. Putin appears to see the spread of democracy not as a bottom-up movement but as a sophisticated Western, primarily American, operation to undermine his rule. He has regularly made clear that he sees Western NGOs and politicians as the main driving forces behind democratic uprisings in the post-Soviet space. A weak, divided West that is unwilling and unable to stand in the way of Russian foreign policy designs is one of the Kremlin’s goals. The way to get there is a) to strengthen pro-Kremlin politicians in the West; b) to weaken transatlantic cooperation; and c) to undermine the EU’s attempts to build a joint foreign policy.

The fourth dimension of this strategy is to reverse the global trend towards democracy, or “to make the world safe” for autocracy. By keeping the Syrian dictator Assad in office, after U.S. president Obama said he “must go” Putin wanted to demonstrate that Western democracy promotion is no longer working, and that Russia is a reliable patron for autocrats that want to stay in power. The new world order Russia would like to see is one in which autocracy is a legitimate, unchallenged form of governance.

HOW TO DEAL WITH PUTIN'S RUSSIA

The assumption of the “realist” approach is that by granting Russia the status of a great power and accepting its claim to a sphere of influence, Russia can be turned into a partner of the West, a “responsible” stakeholder in the liberal international order, regardless of the nature of its regime. The argument made here is that the nature of the regime is crucial to its foreign policy: it is the insecurity of the ruling elites that is forcing Putin to pursue an aggressive foreign policy aimed at keeping the threat of democratic change at bay.

If regime survival is indeed the driving force, and if the fight against democracy is the key rationale behind Russian foreign policy, then it is impossible to appease, accommodate or satisfy the Kremlin by accepting a Russian sphere of influence and treating the country as a global power. The fight against democratic change is a much bigger operation which puts Russia at odds with the West not for what the West does, but for what it is.

For the Russian regime, the West remains toxic, as Europe and America continue, through their very existence, to demonstrate the superiority of liberal democracy and a market economy over autocracy and a state-controlled economy. Undermining and weakening Western strength and its ability to push back on Russian aggression—this is what will remain at the center of Russian foreign policy. And given the fact that the only true power resource Russia has is military power, including nuclear power, the relationship is going to remain tense and difficult. A “cold peace,” peaceful co-existence, with Russia seems to be the best option available.⁵

In other words, Europe and the U.S. must play the long game. Their best bet is to be firm and united, and to send clear messages to Moscow about the West’s red lines: credible security guarantees for NATO partners, and the threat of further sanctions in case Russia decides to further move into the territory of Ukraine and Georgia. Europe and the U.S. should continue to make the case for

⁵ U. Speck, *A Cold Peace with Russia*, Carnegie Europe, December 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/12/09/eu-must-prepare-for-cold-peace-with-russia-pub-57443>.

the liberal international order and reject the principle of spheres of influence. And they should keep the door open for EU and NATO membership in principle. Officially denying such a perspective would be tantamount to denying them full sovereignty, something they have according to the UN charter. At the same time they should signal to Moscow that the West is ready to cooperate in a transactional manner, case-to-case, and signal to the Russian people that the West is not anti-Russian.

In other words, the West's response to Russian aggression against Ukraine is a good template. The main challenge remains to stay the course: to work in a united manner, to stay firm and calm, and to set clear conditions for the Russian side. Russia needs the West more than the other way around. If there is no European and transatlantic unity and determination, however, the Kremlin can advance an agenda that is not producing stability but undermining the liberal order.

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JAMES SHERR

A DUBIOUS SUCCESS: THE WEST'S POLICY
TOWARDS UKRAINE AFTER CRIMEA

In March 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea provoked a comprehensive and far-reaching reorientation of Western policy. From the end of the Cold War until that point, policy towards Russia had been governed by a paradigm of "partnership" that came increasingly under strain. In some domains, notably defence, intelligence and counter-intelligence, a paradigm shift had begun unobtrusively years before "polite little people" appeared in Simferopol. But upon Crimea's annexation, the shift became official.

Then and since, it often has appeared that Western policy towards Ukraine is more influenced by Russia than by Ukraine itself. This is because, in the words of France's Permanent Representative to the UN following Crimea's annexation, Russia by its actions had "vetoed the Charter of the United Nations."¹ Even in the days when Russia's war in Ukraine was mainly a war of stealth, the West grasped what it failed to perceive after Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008: that by attacking its neighbour, Russia was attacking the security order of Europe as a whole.² Since 1991 Russia had served as an enabler of—and impediment to—the West's Ukraine policy.

¹ 15 March 2014—Security Council—Ukraine—Statement by Mr. Gérard Araud, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, www.franceonu.org/15-March-2014-Security-Council.

² In the words of the Wales Summit Declaration of NATO, "Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace," 5 September 2014, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

Paradoxically, after Ukraine's "Revolution of Dignity," the Russian factor became even more important than it was before.

Although the West's focus on Russia has corralled more unity with regard to Ukraine than might otherwise have been the case, it is an infirm foundation for Ukraine's own security, not to say its long expressed aspiration to be "a full member of the European family of civilised nations."³ For one thing, it compensates but cannot substitute for Western confidence in Ukraine's determination to confront its own serious problems. For another, it leaves Western support perilously hostage to Russia's policy and the West's own image of it. Three years after Russia launched its so-called hybrid war in Crimea and Donbas, these events are no longer a horrifying novelty. They are a wearisome and deceptively stable set of facts that can be cast into the shadows by others, scarcely foreseen several years ago: ISIS, refugee crises, the disunity of Europe and the advent of Donald Trump.

These concerns do not diminish the fact that in 2014, the West displayed a quality that for much of the post-Cold War era it lacked: clarity. As Angela Merkel declared in especially resolute form:

Old thinking in spheres of influence [and] the trampling of international law will not succeed ... [Such a policy will be opposed] no matter how long it will take, however difficult this might be and however many setbacks it might bring.⁴

Nevertheless, clarity and resolution have yet to triumph. Whilst Western policy has been more cohesive than many expected, it has neither been coercive nor compelling. Political rivalry, financial interest, disillusionment and fatigue can dissipate the forces mobilised by geopolitical threats. But nothing is more harmful to a battle plan than misjudgement of the opponent. Fortitude and timidity, wisdom and misjudgement can be seen across every dimension of Western policy: diplomacy, sanctions, economic support and military assistance.

³ V. Horbulin, "Ukraine's Place in Today's Europe," *Politics and the Times*, October–December 1995, p. 15.

⁴ Comments following the November 2014 G20 summit.

POLICY

The events of 2014 forced the West to confront what it knew and long pretended not to know. Over many years, Russia had come to define its interests in opposition to the post-Cold War security order and the Helsinki principles underpinning it. Since the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, neither Russian revisionism nor its ability to seize the initiative should have been in doubt. Then and since the key questions have been: what influence can the West exert on a Russian state oblivious of Western disapproval, determined to advance its own interests and willing to pay a high price for doing so? What leverage does the West possess in a zone of perceived advantage to Russia?

Before 2014, these questions were largely sidestepped. The Obama “reset” proceeded as if worthy agreements of importance to the United States would diminish Russia’s grievances and the threat they posed. The EU’s Eastern Partnership offered opportunities to countries vulnerable to Russia, whilst ignoring Russia. Warnings that the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius is “likely to resemble the [NATO] Bucharest summit of 2008” in its consequences had little impact.⁵

Since 2014, these questions have been addressed, but with insufficient realism and rigour. The West’s initial aims were bold and unequivocal. The first was to bring Russia back into compliance with international law and restore Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The second was to protect NATO’s eastern allies from the “hybrid” threats that had befallen Ukraine. But the means to these ends have fallen short of the challenge: sanctions (introduced in March 2014 and progressively strengthened) and enhanced “assurance” and “adaptation measures” codified in NATO’s Newport summit of September 2014.

For a time, the hope that these means would prove effective was understandable. Whilst not dire in themselves, sanctions were bad news for an economy with chronic and unaddressed

⁵ J. Sherr, *Ukraine and Europe: Final Decision?*, Russia and Eurasia 2013/05, Chatham House, July 2013, p. 12.

structural problems and precariously dependent on falling oil prices (\$59 a barrel end 2014, \$40 a barrel end 2015).⁶ Moreover, Ukraine had displayed an astonishing resilience. By 1 July, its newly formed and largely volunteer “anti-terrorist” units regained control of 23 out of 36 districts seized by the insurgents. But in late summer 2014, perceptions dramatically shifted, as did the baseline of Western policy.

DIPLOMACY

Until Russia threw its conventional forces into the scales in August 2014, Western diplomacy was in the background, though far from idle. Its aims were to assist in the formation of a unified Western response and impress upon Russia the West’s resolve and seriousness. Whilst the charges of “isolating Russia” and “abandoning dialogue” were belied by the high level discussions that did take place, their purpose was to discern, clarify and warn, not to negotiate or compromise. This abruptly changed after the Russian military offensives of August 2014 and January 2015, the immediate consequences of which were, respectively, the Protocol on the Results of Consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group (Minsk-I, 5 September) and the Package of Measures for Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk-II, 15 February), both negotiated under the auspices of the OSCE. From that point onwards, diplomacy moved into the foreground, and there it has remained.

The Minsk accords were the product of military coercion and information war. The January offensive, accompanied by threats of still greater escalation was a shock to the metabolism of those in Berlin adamant that there could be no “military solution” to the conflict. Minsk-II was negotiated without proper consultation with allies, without military input (on the Western side) and with precipitate haste. It was a bad agreement, ridden with provisions

⁶ For a comprehensive and measured assessment of the state of Russia’s economy under sanctions, see P. Hanson, “An Enfeebled Economy,” in: *The Russian Challenge*, Chatham House Report, June 2015, pp. 14–22.

that were ambiguous, abstruse and, on the basis of the sole official Russian text, exploited to advance Russia's vision of how the conflict should be solved.

Minsk-II in particular committed the parties to a settlement that would compromise Ukraine's prerogatives as a sovereign state. A Russian installed leadership, backed by what the first defence minister of the "Donetsk People's Republic" described as "brigades of gangsters" had been placed on a par with Ukraine's state authorities.⁷ Ukraine was now obliged to devise provisions for local elections and "special status" in coordination/accord [*soglasovanie*] with the representatives of the "separate districts" [*otdelnyye rayony*] of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts [hereafter ORDLO], who control 4% of Ukraine's territory.⁸ The special status provisions are to be based on Ukraine's Law on Interim Self-Government (Point 4), but also must accord with the provisions of Point 11, Footnote 1, including far-reaching autonomy, along with the right to independent relations with contiguous Russian regions.⁹ Instead of the "de-centralisation" put forward by Kyiv, the republics demand, under the guise of "federalisation," a veto over Ukraine's foreign policy.¹⁰

From the time the Western Normandy partners (France and Germany) signed the accord and the USA endorsed it, the aim of Western policy ceased to be restoration of the *status quo ante*. It became the implementation of Minsk. Even from this new baseline, the West's negotiating record has fallen short of the challenge confronting it.

Whereas Russia has been determined to impose its own interpretation of the Minsk provisions, the West has not pressed its advantage where it exists. Minsk calls for a process of accord

⁷ I. Strelkov, "Eto vse, na chto vy sposobny?," *Vzglyad*, 18 May 2014, www.vz.ru/world/2014/5/18/687251.html and www.youtube.com/watch?v=-T68YLCV0HA.

⁸ Most English translations of the accord (none of which have official status) dubiously translate *soglasovanie* as "agreement," but unlike *soglashenie* (the more traditional term) *soglasovanie* implies a joint process, not just a result.

⁹ The Minsk accords accurately refer to the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as "Separate [or 'certain'] Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts" [*Otdelnyye rayony Donetskoy i Luhanskoy oblastey*].

¹⁰ K. Sazonov, *Boyeviki ozvuchili trebovania. Na Minske mozžno postaviti tochku*, 28 January 2016, <http://glavcom.ua/articles/37520.html>.

with the republics but does not require Kyiv to accept their *diktat*. It is silent about what should occur if there is no accord. “Federalisation” is not mentioned in the text. Minsk allows properly elected leaders in the ORDLO to maintain “militia” [*militia*], the Russian term for normal police, but it does not license the current unelected authorities to maintain *opolchenie*, the militarised “militias” presently waging war on Ukraine. The Ukrainians do not violate the accord by standing firm on these points or any demand beyond the Minsk provisions. Instead of standing firm with them, the West meekly calls for progress from “both sides.”

The West has not extracted advantage from those aspects of Minsk that brook no ambiguity in interpretation: complete cease-fire, unrestricted access of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and (following OSCE supervised elections) “reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine” (Point 9). When Putin’s representative, Vladislav Surkov, informed U.S. Under-Secretary of State Victoria Nuland in January 2016 that Russia would countenance only a cosmetic implementation of the Minsk border provisions, the U.S. had every reason to issue a formal *démarche*. Instead, Nuland was obliged to pursue further discussions and advertise the determination of the White House to see elections held in the ORDLO before President Obama left office.¹¹

More than once, the West has drawn lines and moved them. After Ukraine passed the first reading of its constitutional reform in July 2015, Nuland stated that Ukraine had “done its job” and assured Kyiv “there would be no excuses on the other side for renewed violence.”¹² When Russia sharply escalated attacks in November 2015 one month after re-committing itself to a full cease-fire, the Western powers protested, but discussions then resumed in the Normandy format as if nothing had happened.¹³

¹¹ V. Socor, “Surkov-Nuland Talks on Ukraine: A Non-Transparent Channel,” Parts 1 and 2, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13, no. 103, 26 May 2016.

¹² Kyiv Press Conference, 16 July 2015, <http://ukraine.usembassy.gov/statements/nuland-07162015.html>.

¹³ “Parizhskie Soglasheniya. O chem dogovorilis’ Poroshenko i Putin,” *LigaNovosti*, 3 October 2015, http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/6785404-parizhskie_soglasheniya_o_chem_dogovorilis_poroshenko_i_putin.htm.

Over the past two years, Washington, Paris and Berlin have embraced as their own the Minsk process that Russia forced upon them. "Implementation of Minsk" has become a piety that no one dare question irrespective of its evident flaws. Most Western governments are aware that Moscow does not view autonomy for the ORDLO as an end in itself, but as a means of pressure on Ukraine. Yet they incongruously act as if Russia will respect Ukraine's (residual) sovereignty once such autonomy is conceded. It is indeed possible that if the Minsk process collapsed, the risk of a wider conflict would be greater than it is today. Demonstrations of risk-aversion and restlessness do not diminish this risk, which arises not because of the merits of Minsk but the limitations that the West has placed upon itself.

SANCTIONS

It is scarcely the fault of the U.S. Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, Daniel Freed, his team of State and Treasury Department experts and their counterparts in the European Commission that sanctions form the only coercive component of Western policy. In the current conflict as in the wider scheme of things, four factors determine the effectiveness of sanctions: the adequacy of their design, the unity of action underpinning them, their duration and their integration with other instruments of policy.

The West's sanctions are both considered and coherent. Neither templated nor generic, they have been crafted by those who understand the particularities of Russia's political system and its economy. It is understood that sanctions place further burdens on the dysfunctionalities of this economy rather than take precedence over the ills that Russia has imposed upon itself. In the enhanced format adopted in September 2014 (Tier 3), the sanctions encompass "restrictive measures" (asset freezes and travel bans) as well as "economic" measures (restrictions on access to capital markets and dual-use technology transfer).¹⁴ The separate package of sanctions on Crimea, which can be ramped up at a time of the

¹⁴ *Europa*, https://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/eu_sanctions_en.

West's choosing, also encompasses asset freezes, travel bans, as well as prohibitions on investment, travel and contact. According to some experts, as many as 800 Russian weapons systems depend to some degree on Western components, a number of which are now subject to restriction. Energy projects reliant on advanced Western technology are now off the table. Circumvention of these sanctions by means of import substitution (well in evidence) does not in itself nullify the potency of the sanctions if they impose diseconomies on Russia. Russia's counter-sanctions (e.g. on Western food exports) add to Russia's losses, even if political benefit is derived from persuading Russian consumers that these are Western sanctions rather than Russian own goals. Although sanctions appear to have stimulated necessary economic reforms in limited areas, their overall impact is damaging even if, for a finite period of time, bearable.

The biggest threat to Western unity (which has survived repeated forecasts of its demise) would be the defection of one or more significant parties from the sanctions regime. A unified response is reinforced *de facto* by collateral effects, notably the assessment by international investors that Russia constitutes an investment risk, even outside currently restricted domains. But unity also can be threatened in insidious ways. Whereas many international companies refrained from attending investment conferences in Russia in 2015, an upturn occurred in 2016, including an ill-judged appearance by then UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Several companies have been inventively circumventing the Crimea sanctions package and have done so with some degree of success. For all this, it is political changes in the EU and USA that constitute the biggest risk to the unity of the sanctions regime. Dire forecasts, not to say certainties on this point are premature.

Inseparable from the issue of unity is the issue of duration. The impact of sanctions is necessarily cumulative, and this certainly is true of those that neither strangle nor decapitate. Yet Western "common sense" continues to prevail over experience about the tenacity of Putin's Russia, its willingness to shrug off Western opprobrium, tolerate penalties and raise the stakes in the face of warnings and risk. Scheduled reviews of the sanctions package at six-monthly intervals inform Russia that the West's patience is

short compared to Russia's own. Without a long game against this opponent, there is no game that can be won.

Yet the greatest handicap to sanctions is the expectation that they should carry the burden alone. That they are an asymmetrical response to Russia's use of force is no demerit in itself. After all, the asymmetrical response is Russia's method of choice, and it has been used to telling effect. Nevertheless, one cannot combat an armed assailant by robbing his bank account, not least when he has put his arms to use and is poised to use them again.

ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Economic support of Ukraine is not a response to Russian aggression. It has been a mainstay of Western policy from the time Ukraine joined the IMF in September 1992.¹⁵ Its enhancement since 2014 has not been stimulated by Russia for the most part but by the change of power in Ukraine and the expectations aroused by the Revolution of Dignity in the West.

Much as Ukrainians are loath to hear it, this is as it should be. Whatever the threat to Ukraine, money has to be spent where it will deliver results. An unreformed and unreformable state will not do so. Money wasted earns no friends in Western capitals and does no good to those Ukrainians who do the fighting and have to live with its consequences. The exception to this maxim proves the rule. Ukraine has received and properly utilised IMF assistance to shore up macro-economic stability, and it is precisely in this sphere that Ukraine has performed competently and to the benefit of the country. The IMF has been right to withhold disbursements of the current Extended Fund Facility (EFF) in other spheres where Ukraine has promised but not delivered.

At the same time, the IMF and other Western donors, in short the EU and USA, need to broaden their perspective. First, they need to remind themselves that the principles the West is defending are not

¹⁵ A "systemic transformation facility" was established in October 1994 and the IMF's first three-year Extended Fund Facility in September 1998, www.imf.org/external/country/UKR/index.htm?pn=0.

contingent on maintaining Euro-Atlantic standards of governance. Neither the UN Charter, the Paris Charter of 1990, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 nor the other agreements that concluded the Cold War hold the rights of sovereignty, territorial integrity and freedom of choice to this standard. They are rights deemed inherent by virtue of UN and OSCE membership. By comparison with other OSCE member states in the former USSR, Ukraine is more Euro-Atlantic in its ethos and performance than most.

Second, they need to absorb a dosage of self-criticism and humility. Very few outside experts, let alone entities, have produced a practical programme for reforming, i.e. transforming Ukraine. Most reform programmes present a picture of what Ukraine should look like after systematic reform takes place. The reality is that, whatever President Poroshenko's shortcomings, he is a weak monarch in a feudal system whose real authorities are business oligarchs. Even if he were a disciple of Christine Lagarde and not the product of this deformed system, he would lack the authority and instruments required to meet all of the IMF's expectations. Even Vladimir Putin, the strong monarch in a stronger feudal system, would not have the power to do so. The issue is not what *should* be done in Ukraine, but *how* it is to be done given the powers, the people and the mindsets that actually exist. Such a programme needs to be produced, and it will be a sobering and humbling task if it is done.

Moreover, the West should not forget that Ukraine is fighting a vicious war against a nuclear power. Despite this, it has undertaken several praiseworthy reforms, albeit few that lessen the idiocies and iniquities that beset ordinary people dependent on the state or determined to be free of it. The strength of Ukraine lies in its alternative state, its so-called civil society, whose *motif* is "we rely only upon ourselves." It is in this domain that Russia is weak. In Ukraine, it is the state that is weak, but as three years of war have shown, the country is strong, and it deserves the West's support.

MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Since the fall of Viktor Yanukovich, force and the threat of force have been Russia's principal means of imposing its will on Ukraine and its Western supporters. The Russians are fighting not because they love fighting but in order to achieve specific political ends: to undermine Ukraine, to undermine confidence in Ukraine and to secure a formal agreement that would neutralise Ukraine, fragment it and subordinate it to Russia. If force is Russia's most effective tool, then the tool has to be devalued and ultimately neutralised.

As we have already argued, sanctions are neither a sufficient nor a timely answer to this problem. The strengthening of deterrence on Ukraine's Eastern border is an answer to a different problem. Russia's military instrument will remain both dangerous and credible until a system of containment and deterrence is constructed inside Ukraine. The aims of such a system should be: to constrain rather than defeat Russia and its separatist allies, to reinforce Ukraine's capacity for self-defence, to diminish incentives for military action, to underscore the unviability of the separatist enclaves and to increase incentives for diplomacy on terms consistent with Ukrainian interests. In operational terms, Ukraine's forces must be able to slow down the battlefield and impose risks and costs on the attacker inconsistent with his political objectives.

This goal is eminently realisable, and already is on the way to being realised. The Russian battle groups that intervened decisively in August 2014 and January 2015 possess formidable capability. But they also are designed for specific purposes. They are not occupation forces. They strike and withdraw. They lack the numbers and infrastructure to invade and hold most of the country. Even the establishment of a land bridge to Crimea is problematic. Since the devastating offensive of January 2015, Ukraine's armed forces and National Guard units have acquired considerable proficiency and hard capability. In the recent six-day engagement surrounding Avdeyevka, Ukraine outmanoeuvred and defeated a Russian-commanded separatist force despite the latter's considerable advantage in artillery. It is likely that a replay of the January 2015 scenario would prove more difficult for Russia and its allies today. Nevertheless, they would still prevail.

If it is to be effective, Western assistance must aim to reinforce Ukrainian strengths and remedy weaknesses. There are no “silver bullets” in this exercise. It must be an evolving and cumulative process, emphasising the skill sets of institutions, as well as units and commanders. Whereas at the tactical and sub-tactical levels (regiment, battalion and below), the competence and experience of Ukraine’s military commanders is on a par with and arguably superior to the Western teams advising them, Ukraine’s deficiencies lie at the operational level: high intensity, manoeuvre warfare between large combined arms formations. This is Russia’s strength. The advisory task is complicated by the fact that it is no longer a NATO strength. With the exception of Russia itself, Ukraine’s experience of hybrid (but full spectrum) war is unique in Europe. That experience is producing a new generation of operational commanders. NATO firmness is needed in pressing Ukraine’s ultra conservative military leadership to give these commanders responsibility commensurate with their battle experience. In other respects, the advisory relationship must be a collaborative enterprise, not a pupil-teacher relationship.

Transfer of military hardware must be approached with care but without taboos. Ukraine’s defence-industrial complex (OPK) has the means to supply its forces with the vast majority of hardware they require. What Ukraine lacks most of all is adequate intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capability against Russia’s electronic warfare and reconnaissance-strike complexes. These are neither “lethal” weapons nor politically toxic. Yet in their absence, even a well trained and highly motivated force risks evisceration on the battlefield.

An augmentation of Western military assistance to Ukraine is not without risk. It is politically symbolic assistance of limited military that is likely to “provoke” Russia rather than measures that actually strengthens Ukraine’s capability. It is the deficiency of such capability that leaves Ukraine vulnerable to an opponent who has shown no respect for the restraint of others.

IN CONCLUSION

Since the annexation of Crimea, a number of Western commentators have claimed that Russia holds all the cards. Had this been so, the Ukrainian state would have collapsed by summer 2014. Russia has been constrained by the nature of its objectives (which have transformed friends into enemies), by its misjudgement of Ukraine (where national consolidation is stronger than contempt for the country's leadership) and by limits on its own national power and capability (which is in decline). Russia's aim is not to preserve a "frozen conflict" in Ukraine. This most fluid and volatile conflict has been from the start a means to securing Ukraine's subservience. Once that objective is no longer achievable, the ORDLO loses its utility to Russia.

Russia's principal assets in this conflict are tenacity, the acumen and ruthlessness of its authorities, the professionalism of its military and diplomatic establishments, and its willingness to assume risks and pay a high price in defence of its perceived interests.

The greatest liability in this conflict is the West's fear of playing the cards at its disposal. Risk is inherent in a dangerous situation. The danger is created by Russia's aims and its febrile and conspiratorial view of the world. Fear of "provoking" Russia enhances risk. Although we do not know how Russia will respond to a more resolute defence of Western interests in Ukraine, we do know how it responds to weakness. It is time we also learnt that Russia has no respect for opponents who are stronger but unwilling to use their strength.

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ERNEST WYCISZKIEWICZ

CRIME BRINGS PUNISHMENT:
THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIONING RUSSIA

This is not another piece seeking to answer questions like “are sanctions effective?” or “how much damage have they done to the economy of Russia or the EU?” These common-sense inquiries are a bit misleading. The first one is too general, and actually unsolvable, since there are simply no convincing benchmarks to precisely quantify the effectiveness of sanctions. The second question narrows the whole problem down to a purely economic dimension, sidestepping the fact that sanctions are a political tool dressed in an economic costume.

This essay focuses on the functions of sanctions that go beyond economic “pain-gain” logic. After all, sanctions are not just about directly seeking policy reversals through economic coercion; their success lies in constraining future possibilities and signaling political willpower.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG PERSPECTIVES ON SANCTIONS

Generally, the effectiveness of sanctions is measured crudely: has the target of sanctions moderated or reversed their policies? This logic applied to the current situation reads: Western efforts to put an end to Russia’s proxy war in eastern Ukraine and to reverse the annexation of Crimea have brought no tangible results so far, thus they should be lifted.

What is problematic with such an approach? Actually, if applied, it would automatically make any sanctions against any actor dead on arrival. The optimal tactic for the wrongdoer would be then just to wait and see and do nothing for a while. Yet, any 101 on sanctions starts with an obvious claim that they are a long-run endeavor and require patience and perseverance. To expect an instant effect is to misunderstand (or purposefully distort) the meaning of sanctions as well as their function. Sanctions are not an economic equivalent of Blitzkrieg. They contribute to a gradual rise of economic and political costs for the target, and the necessary extent, intensity and duration of sanctions has to vary case by case.¹

Put it this way. Success—understood as policy change—in the short-term is rare, in particular when sanctions are used against a state that has accumulated significant resources and has consolidated a developed system of power capable of absorbing significant external shocks. Were sanctions really imposed just to change the behavior of an autocrat ruling over a huge country with significant financial reserves, relatively low state debt, enormous natural resources and political ambitions? If so, then those standing behind such an understanding of sanctions must have been very naïve.

Some other observers are preoccupied with the exact costs of restrictions. There is nothing wrong with such an approach as long as it is based on serious examination of data, and not on hasty generalizations drawn from problematic assumptions. There are studies that incorrectly identify a decrease in EU-Russia trade as a direct effect of sanctions.² They significantly overestimate the impact of trade restrictions, which creates an impression that they are self-serving and more focused on advocacy than sound research. It becomes visible in comparison to less reductionist and

¹ For in-depth analysis of sanctions, their evolution, functions and effectiveness, see: M. Eriksson, *Targeting Peace. Understanding UN and EU Targeted Sanctions*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010.

² E. Christensen, O. Fritz, G. Streicher, *Effects of the EU-Russia Economic Sanctions on Value Added and Employment in the European Union and Switzerland*, WIFO Study, Austrian Institute of Economic Research, Vienna, July 2015; M. Crozet, J. Hinz, "Collateral Damage: The Impact of the Russia Sanctions on Sanctioning Countries' Exports," *Working Paper CEPII*, June 2016, www.cepii.fr/PDF_PUB/wp/2016/wp2016-16.pdf.

more comprehensive studies that revealed rather insignificant costs of sanctions for EU economy.³

Obviously, economic sanctions are meant to attach a price tag to a target's behavior, but their actual impact is always very complex and context-dependent. Sanctions never operate in a vacuum. Lots of other factors carry weight such as the general economic situation of the target, the nature of its political system, the scope and intensity of mutual cooperation, as well as the availability and introduction of other coercive measures.⁴ Identical measures used at another time, against different target and under different circumstances would bring diverse consequences. Any effort to disentangle sanctions from other intervening factors—be it oil price movements, currency devaluation, halted structural reforms or changing moods of investors—would prove futile.

Both cases—be it preoccupation with visible and rapid policy change or dollar-denominated impact—illustrate the tip of the iceberg perspective, when people try to reduce complex phenomenon to a one-dimensional issue. In some cases it is just an error, in others it is quite a useful self-serving tactic.

What really matters is the political function of restrictions for the EU and its members. A simple truth is that sanctions are very often more about the sender than the target. In particular, when the sender is a collective body that needs to reach unanimity and consensus.

Interestingly, the same political explanation can be offered when it comes to Russian countermeasures introduced in response to Western actions. What initially might have been thought simply as retaliatory means quickly transformed into a more sophisticated

³ D. Gros, F. Mustilli, *The EU's Economic Impact of Sanctions against Russia: Much Ado about Little*, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), November 2015; *The Effects of Sanctions and Counter-Sanctions on EU-Russian Trade Flows*, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), July 2016; R. Giucci, W. Walter, *The Economic Impact of EU-Russian Sanctions on the EU Plausibility Check of Existing Studies Using a Simple Estimation*, Berlin Economics, February 2017, http://berlin-economics.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/BE_Economic-impact-of-EU-RUS-sanctions-on-EU_17-Feb-2017.

⁴ More on efficiency of sanctions, see G.C. Hufbauer et al., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd Edition, Washington: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007.

tool. True, a ban on agricultural imports was supposed to hit influential interest groups across the EU to make them allies in a battle for lifting sanctions. However, the direct economic effect of these restrictions turned out to be negligible. Instead of social unrest it rather triggered the only rational response from those dependent on the Russian market: namely, a drive for diversification.

Russian counter-sanctions should be seen from the very beginning as a tool to reinforce a rally around the leader effect. Most of all by proper burden sharing, i.e. nation-wide redistribution of costs among various social groups. In other words, the authorities nationalized risks associated with sanctions to feed anti-Western feelings and divert public attention from regime's failures, as well as to protect a circle of cronies from excessive losses.

RATIONALE FOR EU SANCTIONS

How can we apply this broader perspective to the actions of the European Union? Sanctions are defined in EU documents as follows: "not punitive, but designed to bring about a change in policy or activity by the target country, entities or individuals." Sadly, no time horizon of this desirable change is given, which makes rigorous appraisal of success or failure impossible by definition at such an early stage. Yet, at the same time "sanctions are one of the EU's tools to promote the objectives of (its) Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): peace, democracy and the respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law."⁵ To clarify, EU sanctions indeed are supposed to lead to the policy change of the targeted nation or company, but at the same time they are designed to defend fundamental norms and values. The EU wants to deter third parties from doing damage to these values, as well as to reassure its members that it would strongly resist such behavior. Purposefully ambiguous Brussels language is not helpful, of course, but at least it shows that sanctions are not just about

⁵ *EU Restrictive measures. Factsheet*, Brussels, 29 April 2014, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2014/04/pdf/factsheet-eu-restrictive-measures.

goods and services but actually about defending values that make up EU interests.

Restrictions against Russia were gradually imposed from March 2014 as a consequence of the EU's non-recognition policy of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and in response to deliberate Russia-sponsored destabilization of Eastern Ukraine. First rounds of sanctions (asset freezes, visa bans, limited economic restrictions) were specifically targeted at people and entities directly involved in acts of undermining Ukrainian territorial integrity. They were followed by broader sectoral economic sanctions as a response to Russian meddling in the Donbass. These measures later on were linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreement, which so far has not happened and led to subsequent prolongations of the regime (the latest one in December 2016).

The rationale for introducing a sanctions regime was reinforced in the Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Crimea⁶ of March 2015 "one year on from the holding of the illegal and illegitimate 'referendum' and the subsequent illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, the European Union remains firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The European Union does not recognize and continues to condemn this act of violation of international law. The illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation is also a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all states. The European Union will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures."

So, restrictions were introduced to pave the way for the conflict resolution built upon preservation of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Desirable modification of Russian behavior should be thus in line with above principles.

Sanctions were imposed to signal unequivocal disapproval for blatant violation of basic norms of international law and order. It means actually that they might be open-ended, assuming the

⁶ See www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/16-declaration-high-representative-crimea.

current unwillingness of Russian government for any concessions. And at least when it comes to measures related directly to Crimea there is no way out of current situation apart from an annulment of annexation (illegal by definition) and laying legally sound and politically acceptable solutions on the table.

Linking the removal of sectoral sanctions to the Minsk agreement was supposed to provide stakeholders with credible way out of the stalemate. Yet, it quickly turned out that the agreement is not to be implemented any time soon due to its inherent flaws and thus this delusional face-saving option for each stakeholder is dead and buried.

SANCTIONS AND DETERRENCE

True, sanctions might not have generated sufficient costs to make the Kremlin fully reverse its policy. However, it does not mean they had no impact at all on Russian military plans in Ukraine. One should not dismiss the “what if” question. What if sanctions had not been imposed? What would Russia’s offensive in Ukraine have looked like? Would Russian troops have gone further? What if sanctions were lifted or eased without any concessions? Obviously counterfactual arguments cannot be verified (as well as falsified) but certainly they should not be ignored just because of a lack of access to a nontransparent Russian decision-making system. It is impossible to prove beyond any doubt how exactly the expected costs of sanctions impacted the situation on the ground—or how much impact came from a recurring threat of strengthening them (such as rumors on removing Russia from SWIFT system in 2014 that emerged during Russia’s offensive in Ukraine). A lack of direct information sources requires using indirect ones, such as Russian narratives built around sanctions as well as official reactions. If restrictions meant nothing, then they should not have come up in discussions so often. Indeed, Russia’s propaganda machine made an effort to dismiss Western policy as useless. Superficial messages are supported by allegedly professional and comprehensive studies to undermine the whole concept of sanctions and in particular their effectiveness when it comes to Russia. The latest study by the Russian

International Affairs Council⁷ is illustrative. It gives the reader a lot of objective information on sanctions, their legal basis, types etc., but the final message is as follows: “sanctions often fail to bring the intended result and sometimes generate opposite outcomes, i.e. triggering more objectionable actions of the sanctioned entity” or “the biggest effect comes from sectoral and comprehensive sanctions that harm the population of the sanctioned country.” The problem is that issues discussed by researchers and contested by many are presented as self-evident truths and broader functions of restrictions are totally ignored. This and other recurring efforts to question effectiveness of sanctions in this specific context reveal indirectly that Western measures restricted Russian room for maneuver and might have prevented Russia from even more aggressive actions.

Sanctions in Russia’s case turned out to be quite painful, but not just because of their design or scope, but due to them hitting at the same time as Russia was in need of restructuring its oil and gas dependent economy, a flaw since 2011, which left the country exposed to a fall in global oil prices. Political and military adventurism under such circumstances did not pay off economically, leading to a currency crisis, dwindling reserves, rising inflation, a three-year long recession, and a decrease in production, trade and investments. However, Russia might have had more opportunities to mitigate the harmful effects of its own policy, had there been no sanctions that denied access to necessary capital. It is not risky to say that those constraints might have put on hold some political or military plans. Yet, it is true that the longer the sanctions regime exists, the less economic impact it has due to the adaptation of all actors involved in a “new normal.” The longer restrictions operate the more significant political signaling becomes.

The continued determination and intensity of Russian efforts to make the West lift sanctions can serve as a valid though indirect confirmation that their costs are significant. But it also might show the Kremlin’s awareness of a broader meaning to restrictions. The strategy is not only to get economic relief, and access to Western capital, but—more importantly—to regain room for maneuver in

⁷ One of the latest effort of that kind was done by Russian International Affairs Council, see: V. Morozov, *Sanctions: Everything you want to know about how sanctions work*, RIAC, 2017, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/sanctions>.

Ukraine and to undercut an intra-EU and EU/U.S. consensus about policy towards Russia.

It seems rather unlikely that sanctions alone could force Russia to redefine its policy, but each and every government has certain capability to endure hardship. The West, if indeed interested in defending the rules of the game in the face of offenders, should just wait, identify loopholes and eliminate them. Sanctions should stay untouched, unless real not fake concessions are made. A clear signal of "strategic patience" when it comes to sanctions should have been another deterrent. Recurring correlation between debates on lifting sanctions and increased tensions due to the activities of quasi-separatists shows indirectly what might happen if restrictions are eliminated too soon and without Russian withdrawal from Ukraine. Sanctions still protect Ukraine and Europe from further escalation as they make it potentially much more expensive both economically and politically. Russia hides this behind a narrative that sanctions are an obstacle to normalization; as a matter of fact, they are an obstacle to deterioration.

SANCTIONS AND REASSURANCE

Restrictions are important not only as a deterrent, but also as a symbol and practical expression of Western unity, resolve and consolidation that managed to overcome deep internal divisions; they represent a remarkable consensus on several rounds of economic restrictions against the EU's neighbor to the east. Many observers were taken by surprise when the EU managed to escape from a convenient trap of empty expressions like "grave concerns," when it overcame internal divisions and found common ground with the U.S.

It might not have ended up like this, had Russia not overplayed its hand by continuous escalation in order to test the West to the limit. It has been almost forgotten that in the period between the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Donbass, many in the West were ready to accept it as a *fait accompli*. Had Putin stopped then and there, probably neither the EU nor U.S. would have been interested in reaching for harsher measures than those

already imposed, which at the time were lighter measures like visa bans or asset freezes—perfect as a face saver for political inaction.

Russia, though, wanted to seize the day and get the full prize: total subjugation of Ukraine through instigating conflict in Donbass and other regions. Political costs of inaction were rising for Western governments and reached critical mass on July 17 when Russia-sponsored mercenaries, possibly with participation of Russian officers, shot down the civilian aircraft MH17 with almost three hundred people on board. This crime paved the way for economic sanctions: it turned the Russia-Ukraine war from a relatively distant and abstract issue (at least for Western societies) into a wake-up call for EU governments to do something so as not to pay the political price.

Up to this point, many observers considered the divergent levels of exposure to Russia would mean that reaching a common position on sanctions would be unlikely. Restrictions jointly supported by the U.S. and EU should not be taken too lightly even if they seem not optimal and did not meet high expectations. They should not be belittled in particular given the naïve but deep faith in many EU capitals in a brand new world of economic and energy interdependence with Russia as a mutual guarantee of security and welfare. Overcoming a diverse sensitivity and vulnerability of EU economies associated with the scope of their interconnectedness with Russia was a meaningful achievement. It was not easy to put aside political illusions and economic self-interest in exchange for mutual consent to pay a certain price for a long-awaited but rare solidarity.

Sanctions, therefore, constitute the most important material confirmation of common political and legal assessment of annexation of Crimea and ongoing violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Logical conclusion should therefore be that sanctions could be lifted only after return to *status quo ante*, no matter how improbable this return might seem.

Taking a broad view, the West faces following dilemma: either to give up, lift sanctions and let Russia go with Crimea, Donbass, Ukraine's surrender and Putin's regime consolidation under anti-Western rhetoric or to realize finally that the conflict is

not only about Ukraine but about the whole concept of the West as a community able and willing to defend its constitutive values.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Targeted sanctions were chosen correctly, given the nature of the Russian regime entrenched in personal loyalties and informal redistribution of privileges. The system responded in a very peculiar way. It imposed a ban on agricultural imports from the EU and other countries, which officially was supposed to be an act of reprisal to inflict similar damages on adversaries. Yet, as a matter of fact the regime sanctioned its own society in order to achieve rally around the leader effect. That mission has been accomplished. Elites nationalized the risks associated with their policies, charged their own citizens and successfully put the blame on the West.

Interestingly, critics of sanctions use this Kremlin-crafted anti-Western mobilization as a proof of failure of Western policy and an argument for doing away with restrictions. But it only proves that the Russian government quickly found a way to neutralize the West's intention not to hit Russia's society too hard. Targeted and sectoral sanctions were invented some time ago to replace all-out economic measures that usually made the people suffer more than their kleptocratic elites and thus led to political mobilization around them. Russian elites realized risks associated with such an approach and decided to increase the public costs of sanctions. Results of countermeasures—that partially led to an increase in inflation and had influence on daily life (access to products, decrease in quality etc.)—were instrumental for the mobilization of citizens around the slogan that it was the West to be blamed for any worsening of their well-being. Their response may have an impact on future handbooks on sanctions, but it should not be used as an argument for changing Western policy. It would be a clear advice for any other would-be EU adversary on how to get sanctions lifted cheap and fast.

So, it was the West which hesitated to impose costs on ordinary Russians, regardless of their general approval of Putin's actions. Restrictions were designed to reduce pain for the society

while increasing costs for the elites. The EU's mantra that sanctions are not a punitive measure turned out to be at least partially true. The Russian government recognized such a tactic as dangerous, so it decided to punish its compatriots with inflation, limited access to certain products and a general decrease in the standard of living. So, those who repeat constantly that sanctions should be lifted to lend a helping hand to Russian citizens and diffuse anti-Western rhetoric simply rely on misleading cause and effect link.

Last but not least, sanctions are the consequence of an aggressive, reprehensible Russian policy towards Ukraine and the European order—not the cause of deterioration in Russia-West relations. The general support of Russian society for Kremlin's aggressive policy has turned it into an accomplice, and so must take partial responsibility and pay associated costs. Addressing the punishment instead of the crime as a way of returning to "business as usual" would only deliver a blow to sanctions as policy tool. It would not lead to conflict resolution.

PATIENCE REQUIRED

As time went by, Russia's government and Russian companies invented various ways of escaping from restrictions, for example by asset transfers from sanctioned banks and firms to other entities. Plenty of other measures were used to circumvent sanctions or exploit loopholes, often with a helping hand given by some Western consulting companies. Some allude to these practices to mock sanctions, but it is a too hasty conclusion. Even if punished Russian companies managed to survive and develop, it required a lot of effort from them and significantly increased their transactional costs.

Time is of the essence. Russia's vulnerability to the EU's economic pressure is of a medium-term to long-term nature, although structural weaknesses are being revealed on daily basis. Within Russia's elite, the most valuable currency is loyalty—guaranteed either by proper redistribution of resources within the elite or by intimidation when necessary, or both. It is hard to identify weak points in Russia's body politics, namely those who win and those who lose. But it is evident that competition for more and more

limited resources to be allocated among cronies has already started. The number of surprising comings and goings in 2016 can serve as indirect proof of a highly competitive environment around and within the Kremlin, and a manifestation of ongoing power struggles. The current Russian leadership went so far in its information war that coming back to business-as-usual is highly unlikely anytime soon. Putin and his inner circle have effectively become hostages of their own propaganda. Their domestic credibility relies now on an antagonistic attitude towards the West, in particular the U.S. Russia's leadership has managed to plant in their compatriots' minds the idea of a pre-planned conspiracy having been executed by the West to dismember the Russian Federation.⁸

It is unlikely that a potentially more Russia-friendly new U.S. administration under Donald Trump (which still needs to be confirmed by deeds not just fond words) can change this. When it comes to Crimea-related sanctions the situation seems clear. According to the U.S. State Department announcement of 16 March 2017: "Crimea is a part of Ukraine. The United States again condemns the Russian occupation of Crimea and calls for its immediate end. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine."⁹ President Trump's position is less clear but domestic constraints¹⁰ and a lack of any convenient pretext—at the time of writing (March 2017)—made lifting sanctions difficult despite such signals having been disseminated. So there should be no illusions about the prospects for real change in America's policy towards Russia under the current administration. Putin—after the annexation of Crimea—needs an

⁸ See December speech of President Putin in which he said that "even if Maidan had not happened the West would have come up with sanctions" or interviews of Nikolay Patrushev, Head of Security Council, to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in which he deciphered the whole U.S.-led conspiracy aimed at destroying Russia and taking over its resources. I. Yegorov, "Vtoraya Kholodnaya," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 October 2014, www.rg.ru/2014/10/15/patrushev.html; I. Yegorov, "Patrushev: Tsel' SShA—oslabit' Rossiyu," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 10 February 2015, www.rg.ru/2015/02/10/patrushev-interviu-site.html (both in Russian).

⁹ See www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268482.htm

¹⁰ See *The Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017—bipartisan effort to codify into law large portions of U.S. sanctions regime on Russia and provide for congressional review of any proposed sanctions relief by the President*, www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1059.

anti-Western and anti-U.S. posture as a source of legitimization to stabilize his fractured political system.

What the West needs right now is patience and far better management of expectations rather than self-serving or naïve claims about their alleged total uselessness. The fate of economic sanctions against Russia will tell us more about the West than the targeted state in question. And these sanctions should be analyzed beyond naïve “pain-gain” logic. They are about Western readiness, responsibility and capability to act jointly in defense of fundamental values and interests. First and foremost they are to signal unity and resolve, to deter and reassure, and only then to punish and stigmatize. To increase chances of success, the unimpressive “wait-and-see” approach should become the lowest common EU denominator. Further aggression should elicit further sanctions.

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PETR BOLOGOV

RUSSIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS AFTER CRIMEA

On 19 December 2016, a vote at the UN General Assembly served as a useful indicator for how countries around the world, particularly Russia's neighbors, are responding to the annexation of Crimea. A majority voted for and adopted a resolution¹ on human rights violations in Crimea, urging Russia to allow the presence of international observers on the peninsula. Drafted and proposed by Ukraine, 70 countries backed it, 26 voted against it² and 77 abstained. Despite the outcome of the vote being in Ukraine's favor, it means that three years after the peninsula's annexation, the majority of UN member-countries refused to take action against Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea, or at least preferred to remain silent.

In March 2014, only ten countries³ refused to classify the Crimean referendum as illegal (with only 58 UN members abstaining), and about a hundred countries opposed the Kremlin. Two-and-a-half years later, the countries that sided with Russia in the Crimean conflict were followed by India, China, South Africa and Iran. Four CIS countries also now support the Kremlin, particularly in its Crimean policy: two key post-Soviet Central Asian

¹ United Nations, Seventy-first session, Human Rights Promotion and Defence: Reports from Special Rapporteurs and Representatives on the Human Rights Situation, 31 October 2016.

² Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Burundi, Cambodia, China, the Comoro Islands, Cuba, North Korea, Eritrea, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Nicaragua, Philippines, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

³ UN News Centre, Backing Ukraine's territorial integrity, UN Assembly declares Crimea referendum invalid, 27 March 2014.

republics—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—have joined Armenia and Belarus in voicing their backing. Does this indicate that the Kremlin’s influence has been growing in the post-Soviet space over the last three years?

Not necessarily. It is hard to compare the political weight of the two resolutions. In 2014, it concerned open aggression and the seizure of another country’s land. 2016’s resolution was about protecting minorities for the most part. Secondly, India, China, South Africa, Iran, and the post-Soviet countries now supporting Russia number among the world’s leading human rights violators themselves, so they were not likely to condemn practices that they in turn could be accused of; besides, their consolidated voting may be based on corporate interests.

Nevertheless, the question arises as to how relations between the CIS countries and Moscow have changed since the annexation of Crimea, and to what extent these changes have been affected by the Russian authorities themselves and their actions in Ukraine.

The referendum in Crimea triggered a chain of events which directly influenced Russia’s relations with its neighbors. The war in Donbas has generated fears in Belarus and Kazakhstan—Russia’s closest allies—of a repeat of the “Ukraine scenario” on their territory. Equally, the economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by Western countries sent tremors through the neighborhood on the eve of another Kremlin-initiated integration process—the Eurasian Economic Union. The acute escalation of tensions between Moscow and Washington has also made some post-Soviet republics rethink their future development prospects; a number of countries are still dithering between the EU’s Eastern Partnership, Russia’s EEU, or closer ties to China through its “New Silk Road.”

Crimea and its aftermath are just a regional component of the processes taking place in the post-Soviet region over the past three years. The war in Syria, the Russian-Turkish conflict which finally resulted in rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara, the EU’s internal problems, the U.S. presidential elections, falling energy prices, and the growing Islamist threat—all these factors affected those processes no less than the “Ukrainian crisis.” Finally, the ex-Soviet republics themselves witnessed a range of events absolutely unconnected with Kremlin or White House policies,

but which could potentially tip the balance of power of certain regions towards one of the leading political players. In turn, China has joined Russia and the U.S. as a leading political power with its fast-growing influence on the post-Soviet political space, especially in Central Asia.

Therefore, even if Moscow has clearly strengthened its position within the CIS in the last three years, it did so through political manoeuvring and speculation performed mostly outside the post-Soviet territory. This makes the Kremlin's nascent *diktat* highly unstable, since it only rarely has something feasible to propose to its neighbors, if one counts cooperation within the EEU as such, for example.

CLOSEST ALLIES

Even before Crimea fell *de facto* under Russian control, there was intense talk that the next region where "green men" might pop up could be in Northern areas of Kazakhstan, where small Russian-speaking communities still reside. However, although a threat of separatism did exist⁴ in the republic after the collapse of the USSR, it has almost vanished in the last quarter of a century, and exists more in the heads of political scientists and journalists than in reality. So it makes little sense to draw parallels between Ukraine and Kazakhstan, at least while Nursultan Nazarbayev is in power.

Astana's official position regarding Crimea was expressed by the Kazakh MFA, which issued a statement that "Kazakhstan, once again, accentuates its commitment to the fundamental principles of international law, according to the United Nations Charter," but "understands the Russian Federation's decision under the current circumstances." Astana viewed the Crimean referendum itself as "a free expression of will"—to quote the wording of the Kazakh MFA's official statement⁵ on this issue.

⁴ *Three Threats to Nazarbayev: How Stable Is Kazakhstan*, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 25 August 2016.

⁵ "MFA: Kazakhstan views the referendum held in Crimea 'as a free expression of will of the Autonomous Republic's population'," *Zakon.kz*, 18 March 2014.

This point of view has seen few significant changes since then. At some point Nursultan Nazarbayev attempted⁶ to act as an intermediary in settling the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but later, probably after realizing the futility of this process, preferred to concentrate on resolving the main problems in Kazakhstan, such as falling hydrocarbon prices which provoked a devaluation of the local currency, and the threat of religious extremism. At the same time, after the Crimean crisis and the start of the war in Donbas—where abolishing the law⁷ protecting the rights of linguistic minorities was used as pretext to take up arms—certain minor concessions to the Russian-speaking population were introduced in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev himself later spoke⁸ in defense of the Russian language and called for Kazakhstan to remain an officially bilingual country.

In the summer of 2016, when Kazakhstan was rocked by a series of terrorist attacks, it became obvious that, even without “green men,” Astana now had a fight within its borders. Although the standard of living in Kazakhstan is higher than in Ukraine, this does not imply that people would not become actively involved should attempts be made to fuel a conflict, for example, on religious grounds. Moreover, we also need to consider that a change of power is likely to happen in the near future (Nazarbayev will turn 77 in 2017), which could trigger a conflict between groups of influence close to the president and would instantly affect society. This also happened in Kazakhstan back in the Soviet times.

Still, despite the potential threat of Russian intervention in the republic’s internal affairs after Nazarbayev’s departure from the political stage, Kazakhstan currently remains Russia’s most consistent ally in the post-Soviet space. Up until recently, Belarus could also have been considered similar, but Moscow’s foreign policy shift in priorities from West to East, towards India and China, and a basic freeze in its relations with the European Union, plus

⁶ “Nazarbayev is ready to be an independent mediator in resolving the crisis in Eastern Ukraine,” *Radio Ozodi*, 22 December 2014.

⁷ The Ukrainian law “On the principles of the state language policy,” 2 July 2012.

⁸ “Nazarbayev: officials have no right to ‘forget’ the Russian language,” *Rosbalt*, 16 February 2016.

endless trade wars, have led to a situation where Russia's erstwhile "most-brotherly" country has wound up on the periphery of the Kremlin's interests. The Belarusian economy has been experiencing a prolonged crisis⁹ since 2011 (despite a relative stabilization, a decline in all the main economic indicators was recorded¹⁰ in 2016—GDP, volume of foreign trade, industrial output, and housing construction). Yet Kazakhstan—with its gigantic oil, gas and uranium deposits—is a much more attractive partner for Russia right now, the infamous "Slavonic brotherhood" notwithstanding.

The start of the Ukrainian crisis seemed to offer golden opportunities for Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko when, at the end of 2014, he shot to fame as Europe's main peacemaker by mediating negotiations between the Donetsk separatist leaders and Kyiv. It should be noted that the Belarusian leader is highly experienced in manipulation regarding the status of other pro-Russian enclaves in post-Soviet territory—Abkhazia and South Ossetia—which he has yet to recognize, despite encouraging benefits received from the Kremlin. This is why Lukashenko decided to support Russia in the Crimean issue by agreeing¹¹ that the peninsula is a *de facto* part of Russia (apart from him, only the Kyrgyz MFA has called the Crimean referendum and its consequences an "objective reality"¹²). In a remarkable twist, Lukashenko also stated that Ukraine "should remain united, whole and undivided." Minsk still adheres to this position, although Lukashenko's comments on Crimea and the Eastern Ukrainian situation have varied significantly over the last three years—ranging from all but justifying the Russian aggression, to promising to fight¹³ Putin should he "encroach on Belarusian soil."

⁹ Ye. Pozhidayev, "Belarusian Crisis: Devaluation of Lukashenko," *EADaily*, 29 December 2016, <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2016/12/29/belarusian-crisis-devaluation-of-lukashenko>.

¹⁰ National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, *Main socio-economic indicators of the Republic of Belarus in January 2017*.

¹¹ "Lukashenko stated that Crimea is now a *de facto* part of Russia," *BBC News Russian Service*, 23 March 2014.

¹² "Kyrgyz MFA recognised the results of the Crimean referendum," *Forbes-Kazakhstan*, 20 March 2014.

¹³ "Aleksandr Lukashenko to Ksenia Sobchak: I will fight whoever encroaches on Belarusian soil. Even if it is Putin," *Dozhd TV channel*, 21 May 2014.

This latter intention is also indirectly reflected in the new Belarusian military doctrine adopted in summer 2016. It mentions both “hybrid war” and “neutralizing an internal armed conflict” which could be provoked from the outside.

While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict itself has only affected Moscow’s relations with its closest partners indirectly, the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the West and the retaliatory food-import ban turned out to be quite painful for Belarus and Kazakhstan, effectively phasing out all agreements that had been reached hitherto inside the Customs Union. After all, neither Astana nor Minsk are subject to Western sanctions (largely due to their cautious rhetoric concerning Crimea) and, therefore, had no reason to toughen their own economic policies towards Western countries. This automatically led to the re-establishment of internal limitations on the movement of goods within the Customs Union, thus rendering the union pointless.

After refusing to show solidarity with Moscow in its economic confrontation with the West, Belarus continued to supply banned, imported EU products to Russia by replacing their labels. As a result, in recent years Russian customs have regularly rejected large shipments of food products from Belarus, invariably invoking outraged criticism from Lukashenko. To a lesser extent, a flow of banned products is also entering Russia from Kazakhstan, but goods transit is not as significant for Astana as it is for Minsk, so such issues have never reached an inter-state level.

At the end of 2014, the situation was aggravated further by the sharp devaluation of the Russian rouble, making Belarusian and Kazakh goods less profitable than Russian produce. As a result, the members of the EEU, founded at the start of 2015, have been engaged in a slowly progressing trade war with one another ever since.

The Eurasian Economic Union’s project itself, whose main parameters were proposed by Russia, has been seriously modified following pressure from Kazakhstan. Provisions relating to the sovereignty of member countries (which went beyond economic integration) have now been excluded: articles concerning common citizenship, foreign policy, inter-parliamentary cooperation, passport and visa systems. So far, the EAEU’s economic component

is not very impressive either. “It doesn’t matter how our union evolves—first it was a Customs Union, then a United Economic Space, now it’s the EEU—the amount of trade restrictions has not changed and has remained level at 600. What’s more, after signing the agreement, our internal trade is only falling,” said Lukashenko in May 2016. In fact, foreign trade is also in decline¹⁴—the volume of EAEU trade with other countries dropped 17.2% during the first nine months of 2016, compared to the same period in the previous year, reaching \$361.7 billion.

Table 1. Reciprocal trade between EAEU countries during the first year of the EAEU’s existence

Internal bilateral trade	Dynamics	Share in the total trade turnover	-25%
Armenia–Kyrgyzstan	108.1	0.00	
Armenia–Russia	91.2	2.82	
Armenia–Belarus	86.9	0.07	
Kyrgyzstan–Russia	78.3	3.20	
Armenia–Kazakhstan	75.8	0.01	
Belarus–Russia	73.8	57.14	
Belarus–Kyrgyzstan	72.4	0.15	
Kazakhstan–Russia	74.0	33.45	
Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan	71.2	1.90	
Belarus–Kazakhstan	60.8	1.26	

Source: “Eurasian Economic Union. What is happening in the wings of Putin’s project,” *Ukrainian Realities information agency*, 2 March 2016.

Amid constant wrangling between Minsk and Moscow over trade restrictions, rumors again began to circulate about Lukashenko’s alleged plans to turn towards the West. This may be based on the partial lifting of sanctions against the Belarusian authorities. However, such rapprochement is out of the question without real reforms inside that country; its political system is tailored to one person. Lukashenko has yet to show any desire to bring Belarusian legislation closer to European standards. So no

¹⁴ “Foreign trade turnover of the EAEU countries is falling for the second year in a row,” *EurasiaNet.org*, 4 January 2017.

matter what steps Minsk makes towards rapprochement with the EU and USA, they could be eradicated at any moment by another loan or gas discount from Russia, which is exactly what Lukashenko is striving for. This is a decades-old tradition already, so it would be extremely naïve to expect any changes on that front.

Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, which joined the EEU in January 2015, have felt the least impact of the Ukrainian events. Their integration into the Russian sphere of influence is purely pragmatic. Similarly to other members of the union, Bishkek is interested in lifting the existing trade restrictions (above all on the border with Kazakhstan) and attracting Russian and Kazakh investment (Gazprom has already taken control of the republic's gas-transportation system). For Armenia, which seems to have forgotten about its European prospects altogether, the priority issue is security, so it will join any union which would guarantee its protection from external aggression.

However, the deterioration of the Nagorno-Karabakh situation in April 2016 demonstrated that none of the EEU countries are prepared to stand up openly for Yerevan. This sad fact led the Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan to make a statement¹⁵ at the union's last summit: "Either our partners will consider the Eurasian Economic Union as a territory for economic development, stability and security, in which investments can be made and long-term plans envisaged, or everyone will become accustomed to it being a permanent hotbed of tension and discord." Russia responded to this statement by sending Iskander missile systems to Armenia which, as Yerevan experts are convinced, will somewhat restrain Azerbaijan's military zeal.

POTENTIAL FRIENDS

Straight after the Crimean referendum in 2014, the authorities in Uzbekistan, where Islam Karimov was still in power, refused to comment directly on the situation on the peninsula and urged the

¹⁵ "Armenian president: escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is a serious challenge for the EAEU's security," *EADaily*, 31 May 2016.

conflicting sides—Russia and Ukraine—to come to the negotiating table. At the same time, Uzbekistan abstained from voting on the UN resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea. Three years later, in the vote on Human Rights violations on the peninsula, Uzbekistan supported Russia. Above all, this is connected to the fact that the head of state was not Karimov, who was always extremely careful in making foreign-policy decisions, but Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a man with much less diplomatic experience than his late predecessor, but who is potentially inclined to a Russian style of governance—*i.e.* restricting civil liberties, strict control over the economy, and dialog with neighbors based on his own military and technical superiority.

Karimov, who headed probably the most difficult of all the post-Soviet republics, in terms of ethnic and religious conflicts, managed to balance skillfully between Russia and the West for a quarter of a century without letting either side impose its will on Tashkent. The former president's decisions were the pinnacle of his diplomatic talent: he easily joined military unions (CSTO) initiated by Moscow, only to leave them equally easily later; then he let NATO establish military bases on Uzbek territory, only to evict them¹⁶ at the first sign of interference in the country's internal affairs (criticism of Karimov's actions to suppress an uprising in Andijan).

His successor has already demonstrated that Uzbekistan's foreign policy will not become more open and direct under his rule. Mirziyoyev curtailed local conflicts with immediate neighbors—Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—and, on 29 November 2016, Russian minister of defense Sergey Shoygu, together with his Uzbek counterpart Qobul Berdiyev, signed¹⁷ an agreement on developing technical and military cooperation and plans for bilateral collaboration between the two ministries in 2017. As part of that agreement, Uzbekistan might receive weapons from Russia, which is what the late Karimov was previously hoping for from the USA. Mirziyoyev is refraining from any categorical assessments

¹⁶ R. Wright, A. Scott Tyson, "U.S. evicted from air base in Uzbekistan," *The Washington Post*, 30 July 2005, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/29/AR2005072902038.html.

¹⁷ "Russia and Uzbekistan have signed a military and technical cooperation agreement," *Sputnik*, 29 November 2016.

of Eurasian integration—unlike his predecessor, who felt that Uzbekistan had no place in the EEU. This in itself makes a dialog on this issue possible.

We can assume that Uzbekistan, which had distanced itself from Russia in the “noughties,” will continue to move closer to the Kremlin under Mirziyoyev’s rule. A similar course was sometimes plotted so carefully by Karimov that it was hard to understand which side Tashkent was on—that of Moscow, Washington, or maybe Beijing. Russia’s policy regarding Ukraine does not bother the Uzbek authorities, as they have no borders with Russia. The same goes for Human Rights violations in Crimea—since Uzbekistan itself has some of the lowest civil-liberties ratings in the world. Another matter is that Tashkent’s ambitions could hinder its rapprochement with Moscow, since it has always positioned itself as a regional leader on an equal footing with Astana.

It was expected that Tajikistan would apply to join the EEU by the end of this year. Its president, Emomali Rahmon—who was declared the “leader of the nation” and the “founder of peace and national unity” in his home country—guaranteed himself lifetime rule in May 2016. The republic is considered one of the poorest in the CIS, but it also houses the largest Russian military base (No. 201) and a significant part of its active population are migrant workers in Russia. Nevertheless, Rahmon is in no hurry to join the EEU so far.

Most probably, having close economic ties and a sizeable trade turnover with Beijing, which is also the biggest investor in country’s economy, Tajikistan will use its position to balance between Moscow’s and Beijing’s interests. This could potentially bring similar benefits, as it used to for Tashkent, when it used to alternate between a pro-Russian and a pro-American line.

In addition, Dushanbe is evidently concerned about the EAEU’s common customs tariffs. The example of Kyrgyzstan (which raised its tariffs after joining the union) showed that importing cheap, mass-produced Chinese goods—which is what the local population mainly consumes—became too expensive and unprofitable. However, irrespective of whether Tajikistan joins the EEU, it is currently doomed to remain in Russia’s sphere of influence, since to a large extent the Russian army will guarantee the country’s stability should the situation in neighboring Afghanistan deteriorate.

Figure 1. Tajikistan's main trading partners (in January–September 2016)

900	\$764 mln	\$700 mln	\$458 mln	\$224 mln	\$104 mln
800					
700					
600					
500					
400					
300					
200					
100					
0					
	Russia	China	Kazakhstan	Turkey	Switzerland

Source: "Tajikistan's external trade turnover has decreased by over \$1.4 billion in two years," *ASIA-Plus*, 17 October 2016.

The reasons for a possible rapprochement between Russia and Turkmenistan are somewhat different, although the Afghan factor is also present. Having sold the major part of its natural gas to China for several years in advance, Ashgabat found itself gripped by a hard-currency deficit, since Turkmenistan only receives about a third of China's gas payments in "real" money. The rest goes towards repaying loans from China. The instability of the hydrocarbon market, on which the local economy is founded, has forced the Turkmen government to abandon its former self-isolation and neutrality policies and forge links with the Kremlin. Their aims are still unclear, but it could be military cooperation in securing the Afghan-Turkmen border or joint gas-related projects, even possibly letting Gazprom take control of the country's gas-transport system.

NEUTRAL COUNTRIES

Azerbaijan, which is located on the opposite side of the Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan, took Russia's annexation of Crimea pretty badly, due to its own territorial conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The republic's president, Ilham Aliyev, has not changed his position in the last three years. Nonetheless neither this, nor dispatching Iskander missiles to Armenia have stopped Baku from maintaining the *status quo* in its relations with Moscow: the trade turnover

between the two countries is growing, and both countries' leaders pay each other regular visits. If the Kremlin had opted to escalate the conflict with Ankara after the Turkish military shot down a Russian fighter-plane, it would have probably affected the Azeri stance. But now that Russia and Turkey are allies again, Baku cannot fail to take this into account, although the Azeri authorities prefer Pakistan and Israel to Russia for technical and military cooperation.

Georgia, having experienced its own "Ukrainian scenario," has not altered its course of careful rapprochement with Russia following the annexation of Crimea. This was adopted after the coalition led by businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili won the 2012 parliamentary elections. Even though the two countries have not restored diplomatic ties, Russia is still Georgia's third-largest trading partner, and tourists from the Russian Federation already account for a third of visitors to the country. Nevertheless, the republic's future is connected to the EU, and relations with Russia will always be dimmed by the problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which, like in the case of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, take priority over any events in Ukraine.

Up until recently, relations between Russia and Moldova have been developing in a similar pattern, making even a theoretical union between the countries impossible due to the unresolved conflict in Transnistria. On the other hand, forecasts that Moscow would try to connect Donbas to Transnistria by capturing southern parts of Ukraine, thus creating a single anti-Ukrainian front, have—fortunately—not come true. They also failed to frighten the Moldovan population, half of whom (according to numerous surveys) see their country's future as linked to Russia, a traditional market for local agricultural produce.

The authorities in Chisinau, who supported European integration, have lived through numerous political scandals and battles in recent years. These overshadowed the events in Ukraine and led to the Socialist party leader, Igor Dodon, winning the presidential elections in November 2016. The new head of state, a known espouser of pro-Russian rhetoric, did not hesitate to

promise¹⁸ he would hold a referendum on the already signed EU association agreement and the possibility of joining the EEU. The outcome of such a plebiscite would primarily depend on events in the European Union itself, as well as Brussels' ability to successfully counteract the centrifugal forces inside the EU.

ENEMIES

Taking all the above into account, we must admit that, although the "Crimean issue" did cause growing tension and mutual mistrust between some former USSR republics, on the whole it did not lead to Russia being isolated—or even reduce its influence on its nearest neighbors. Even the economic sanctions imposed by the West did not deter Moscow's traditional allies, although the EEU's future is uncertain (while the existing imbalance remains, expect decreased cooperation between Russia and the EU, and increased contacts between Brussels and other EEU countries).

The "Ukrainian crisis" practically annihilated the economic, social and cultural ties between Kyiv and Moscow. Trade turnover between the two countries had reached¹⁹ almost \$45 billion in 2014; it had fallen to just 4.7 billion²⁰ in the first half of 2016. This demonstrated that the Kremlin has not only maintained its influence over CIS countries despite the economic crisis but is also prepared to use force to reaffirm such influence. Maybe, to some degree, even thanks to the economic crisis, because Russia turned out to be better prepared for an environment of inflation than the economies of countries which depend directly on it—e.g. Belarus.

Of course, Moscow was helped by the disarray and dithering inside the EU, which led to Brexit and the rising popularity across the continent of local nationalist parties which, as a rule, seem to revere the Kremlin's policies. The outcome of the presidential

¹⁸ "Media: Igor Dodon intends to hold a referendum on the abolition of the Association Agreement with the EU," *TASS*, 14 November 2016.

¹⁹ Ukrainian MFA. Trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and Russia.

²⁰ "Trade turnover between Russia and Ukraine declined by 57.8% in the first half of the year," *Vedomosti*, 12 August 2016.

elections in America—which traditionally retains its influence not only in Ukraine, but also the Caucasus and Central Asia—could also potentially contribute to a growing Russian presence in neighboring countries. Especially if Brussels’ and Washington’s formerly consolidated position on sanctions against Russia falls apart due to the actions of Donald Trump’s Administration, and a fading American interest in the post-Soviet space. Any steps forward regarding the status of Crimea, or even the White House’s readiness to discuss the issue, would only strengthen Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space—a boost for Vladimir Putin’s aspiration to reverse the effects of the “major geopolitical disaster of the 20th century,” as the Russian leader once called²¹ the collapse of the USSR. But a reversal done in the spirit of Moscow’s interests, of course.

Translation: Alexandra Godina

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²¹ Vladimir Putin: “The collapse of the USSR is a major geopolitical disaster of the century,” *Regnum.ru*, 25 April 2005.

BARTŁOMIEJ GAJOS

HISTORY AS A WEAPON

History has often been used and misused for political purposes. Over the last few years, the Kremlin has turned to history as an “information weapon” to outflank opposition to its annexation of Crimea. Its instrumentalization of the past has succeeded so far in mobilizing domestic support for the regime; on the peninsula itself, it has helped create a degree of acceptance for Russia’s *de facto* rule.

However, its effect has been much more limited elsewhere. The Kremlin’s politics of memory¹ has not led to the international recognition of Crimea that Russia might have hoped for; neither has it convinced the Crimean Tatar minority, politicians in Kyiv, most of the Ukrainian public, or policy makers in the West.²

HISTORY AND INFORMATION SECURITY

No doubt, the Kremlin has intensified its use of history as a form of propaganda since the beginning of the Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014. It increased further after the Winter Olympics finished in Sochi, and Russia embarked on its annexation of Crimea.

¹ The term “politics of memory,” used in the article, is understood as conscious promotion of historical interpretations and statements by politicians aiming at reaching political goals. Propaganda does not need to be, but might be a part of politics of memory.

² While some anti-establishment nationalist politicians across Europe have embraced Russia’s historical interpretations, those in the political mainstream are still largely skeptical.

However, only the intensity is new. The regime of Vladimir Putin has long paid special attention to the past and has usually looked at it through a military lens. The Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation was adopted as early as September, 2000. It described “historical traditions” as a part of the country’s “spiritual life,” which can be harnessed for the purpose of defending the Russian Federation.³

Continuity in that respect was preserved in several other documents on security issues, mostly those dealing with information warfare and youth education programmes.⁴ Every attempt to promote a vision of history that deviates from the Kremlin line has long been treated as a danger to Russian security. That emphasis has remained largely the same. The latest Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, adopted on 5 December 2016, defines how, in what is termed “the information sphere,” the protection of “historical and moral values” in Russia is part of the national interest. The document describes the influence of information from the West in general terms, but with a defensive tone: “There is a growing information pressure on the population of Russia, primarily on the Russian youth, with the aim to erode Russian traditional spiritual and moral values.”⁵

Russia’s main goal in this regard, the document contends, is a neutralization of information, especially any that could undermine historical and patriotic traditions. This document claims to be purely defensive, above all with the collective memory of its own citizens in mind. Yet it does not rule out the use of its politics of memory for power projection beyond Russia’s borders. Indeed, the Russian government refers to the past frequently as a means of convincing the international community that its actions in Central

³ Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation adopted in September 2000, www.pravo.gov.ru.

⁴ National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 adopted in May 2009, www.pravo.gov.ru; National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation adopted in December 2015, www.pravo.gov.ru; The State Programme “Patriotic Education of the Russian Federation’s citizens” 2016–2020, <http://government.ru/media/files/8qqYUwwzHUxzVkh1jsKAErrx2dE4q0ws.pdf>.

⁵ Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation adopted in December 2016, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/2563163.

and Eastern Europe can be justified. Appeals to international law, in the Kremlin's statutory interpretation, appear secondary to Russian officials; arguments based on historical rights are given precedence. Historically, of course, the Kremlin's control over the region spanned far beyond Russia's borders with an ease that international law today explicitly rules out.

CYBER TACTICS AND "FASCIST" LABELS

On a number of occasions, the Kremlin has shown a willingness and ability to use political and technological measures, including cyberattacks, to uphold a Soviet interpretation of the World War II. The importance of this interpretation is that it paints Russia as a liberator in Central and Eastern Europe, rather than an occupier and oppressor. When this is questioned by other governments, the Kremlin has kicked back fiercely. For instance, the Estonian government in 2007 decided to relocate the Bronze Soldier Monument and bodies of Red Army Soldiers. Russia condemned this move. Shortly after, a cyberattack against Estonia's government servers was launched. Though never proven, the Kremlin was widely suspected of being behind the attack.

Another conflict flared up when the European Parliament debated the responsibility of the USSR for the outbreak of World War II, condemning crimes committed by the Soviet regime. In 2008, Parliament established the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism to be commemorated on 23 August, when the Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty was signed. Then in July 2009 the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution "Divided Europe Reunited," saying that both Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Nazi Germany are responsible for various crimes, including genocide.⁶

⁶ "Resolution on divided Europe Reunited: promoting human rights and civil liberties in the OSCE region in the 21st century," in: *OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Resolutions Adopted at the Eighteenth Annual Session. Vilnius, 29 June to 3 July 2009*, pp. 48–49.

The moves by European institutions clashed with Russia's view, which was far more sympathetic towards the Soviet Union's actions. By and large, the Kremlin contends that the Soviet Union forced into signing a treaty with Germany because of the duplicitous appeasement policies of France and Great Britain. So the Kremlin established a special Commission designed to dispute the OSCE and the European Parliament, which was called "the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests," and which was dissolved over three years later, in 2012. The State Duma and the Federation Council both also issued an official protest against the OSCE resolution.⁷

PUTIN SETS THE STAGE

All arguments spread by Russia during its conflict with Ukraine are based on its conviction that the latter is an "artificial state," as stated by Putin in 2008. Thus, Kyiv should not be allowed to pursue its foreign policy independently and all other states should accept Ukraine as Russia's sphere of influence. History served as a platform to advance such arguments. Once the protests in Kyiv broke out in November 2013, Moscow started to wage a high-intensity information assault with arguments based on the past.

Kremlin-controlled media depicted the Maidan as a fascist movement, inspired or even organized by the West, so as to frighten Russian-language speakers living in the eastern parts of Ukraine who still held strong ties to Russian news and culture. Maidan supporters were presented as heirs to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—responsible for collaboration with Nazi-Germany during the World War II—and in the same vein as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which committed many war crimes, including genocide against the Poles. It showed one side of the

⁷ *Zayavlene Soveta Palaty Soveta Federacii Federal'nogo Sobraniya Rossiyskoy Federacii i Soveta Gosudarstvennoy Dumy Federal'nogo Sobraniya Rossiyskoy Federacii v svyazi s prinyatiem Parlamentskoy assambleey OBSE rezolyucii "Vossoedineniye razdelennoy Evropy: pooshchrenie prav cheloveka i grazhdanskikh svobod v regyone OBSE v XXI veke,"* www.duma.gov.ru/news/273/58991.

truth, but deliberately omitted the other—that both organizations are also perceived by many Ukrainians as a force fighting for the independence of Ukraine, defenders against enforced Sovietization.⁸

The essence of historical propaganda spread by Kremlin during the Maidan and after the annexation of Crimea is encapsulated in Putin's speech of 18 March 2014.⁹ Although his speech was directed first of all to Russian citizens as a way of generating domestic support, messages based on history that are addressed to foreign countries are also easily noticeable.

Russia's president focused on two periods: the medieval Ruthenia (Rus') and the epoch of the Soviet Union. His speech reflected two general convictions which are widespread in Russia. According to the first one, the medieval Ruthenia (Rus') was an exclusively Russian state.¹⁰ The second belief says that Ukrainians and Russians are *de facto* the same people.

He stated in the speech that Vladimir/Volodymyr the Great, having baptized himself in Chersonesus in the 10th century, had established a civilizational basis, which links Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. But this ideological conception of the all-Russian nation appeared only in the 17th century, and only became a firmly established idea and ideological concept of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. According to it, the pan-Russian nation consists of three "tribes:" Great Russians (Muscovites, later Russians), Little Russians (Ruthenians, later Ukrainians) and White Russians (White Ruthenians, later Belarusians). Although Lenin and his comrades in the first years of the Bolshevik regime rejected it as a bourgeois and a "product" of Tsarist imperialism, in the Stalin-era the "three tribes" theory was revived in a modified form as a concept of "three fraternal nations."

Further, the president of Russia referred to the Soviet times, presenting himself as a man who brings back historical justice. His negative statement concerning Bolsheviks' national policy could be

⁸ *Stavlennya do vyznannya OUN-UPA, zhovten' 2015*, http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_upa_ua_102015.pdf.

⁹ *Address by President of the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁰ The Russian language, in comparison to English, Polish and Ukrainian, does not distinct between terms "relating to Ruthenia" and "relating to Russia."

treated as an announcement of the upcoming Russian intervention in Eastern Ukraine. In other words, not only does the Kremlin use history to justify its actions retrospectively, but also in advance of its next ones. A form of preparing the ground.

Putin expressed his profound disappointment that the Bolsheviks after the Revolution incorporated “the sizable territories of historical Southern Russia.”¹¹ By that he meant several Ukrainian oblasts: Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro), Zaporizhzhya, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Odessa. In April 2014 those lands became a main goal of the operation “Russian Spring” launched by the Kremlin, which aimed at the dismemberment of the Ukrainian state, or, as a minimal goal, making the Ukraine dysfunctional. One month later Putin used a historical term “Novorossiia,” a term coined in the 18th century, as a way of describing South Eastern Ukraine.¹²

Thereafter, the president of Russia exploited the Soviet period in order to boost his popularity and present himself as a man who repairs historical failures by conducting a “referendum” on the peninsula. He condemned the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev for having made Crimea a part of the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. This was, in Putin’s view, a betrayal of local inhabitants, who had supposedly not been consulted. Putin omitted any mention that the majority of Crimea’s inhabitants voted in 1991 in a referendum for Ukraine’s independence.

The Kremlin has actively sought to dampen any revolutionary idealism emanating from Kyiv’s Maidan movement, the subsequent ousting of President Yanukovich, or from the reforms that have followed. History once again has been useful. Equating the history of the “Great Patriotic War” with the current situation engages Russian citizens and draws in Russian volunteers, who join the self-declared “Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.” Such analogies constitute emotional bond between Russians and their government, which can present itself as a guard of national memory. Meanwhile, accusing the Ukrainian government of “fascism” has been damaging. Firstly, it aimed at delegitimizing

¹¹ *Address by the President of the Russian Federation...*, op.cit.

¹² *Ibidem*.

the new Ukrainian government in the eyes of European public opinion. Secondly, similar to the case of Russian citizens, appeals to the history of the World War II provide one of many ideological motivations for foreign mercenaries from Serbia, Italy, France, Spain, who joined the side of Russia-backed separatist republics in the Eastern Ukraine.

In order to strengthen the credibility of this argument on 3 April 2014, the Russian Ministry of Defense published selected declassified reports from the World War II: those concerning the collaboration of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) with Germany.¹³ The supposed threat of Ukrainian fascism has been heralded by the Kremlin, regardless of the results of the last parliamentary elections in Ukraine in October 2014, where the far-right party Svoboda won just 4.7%, and the similarly nationalist Right Sector got only 1.8%.

Putin's statements have been repeated throughout the conflict. The one historical argument that fell into disuse almost immediately was a parallel between the "reunification" of Crimea and the unification of West and East Germany in 1989.

A public opinion poll, conducted in Russia shortly after the annexation of Crimea and Putin's speech, showed this strategy worked well in terms of mobilizing support of the society for the regime. Putin's tactic of positioning himself as a true defender of national history, who brings historical justice, earned him gains in approval ratings. His approval increased by 25% compared to January 2014, reaching a level of 80%.¹⁴ A poll, conducted in February 2017, showed that almost every second Russian citizen is proud of the "return" of Crimea (43%).¹⁵ Furthermore, the vast majority of Russian citizens (97%) agree with a statement that Crimea is as a part of Russia, with 78% claiming that its "accession"

¹³ *Deyatel'nost' organizacij ukrainskikh nacionalistov v gody otechestvennoy voyny*, <http://mil.ru/files/morf/una.pdf>.

¹⁴ "Martovskie reytingi odobreniya i doveriya," *Levada.ru*, 26 March 2014, www.levada.ru/2014/03/26/martovskie-rejtingi-odobreniya-i-doveriya-2.

¹⁵ "Gordost' i styd," *Levada.ru*, 1 March 2017, www.levada.ru/2017/03/01/gordost-i-styd.

brought a benefit for Russia.¹⁶ This success in terms of mobilizing the public by means of referring to history contains an emotional dimension. For 79% of respondents, the annexation of Crimea demonstrates a “return to the traditional role of Russia,” namely a great power.¹⁷ 41% (the highest number in last 10 years) of Russian citizens believe that Russia is among the most influential countries.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Kremlin’s politics of memory concerning the peninsula was far less successful at the international level and did not prevent an imposition of sanctions by the West. The international community has not recognized Crimea as a part of Russia.

NEW CIRCUMSTANCES AND CHANGE OF PRIORITIES

The intensity of Kremlin anti-Ukrainian historical propaganda decreased after signing the second round of ceasefire agreements brokered in Minsk, known as Minsk II. The intensity diminished as it became less likely that Russia would be able to impose its vision of a “federalized” Ukraine. In Putin’s annual addresses to the Russian Federal Assembly in 2015 and 2016 there were scarcely any mentions of Ukraine. Overall, it seems that the political project “Novorossiia” has been put on ice, if not abandoned completely. Moreover, hardly any new narrative concerning Ukraine has been developed by Russia up to this point. After Minsk-II, other events at the international level took Russian attention away from Ukraine. In September 2015, Russia officially intervened in the Syrian civil war.

¹⁶ The methodology of this survey is questionable. The question “Do you agree with a statement that Crimea is Russia?” is biased and suggests affirmative answer. “Krym i Sevastopol’: tri goda s Rossiei,” *VTSIOM*, 16 March 2017, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116112>. However, a public opinion poll, conducted by the Levada Centre in April 2016, showed similar result: 87% of Russians think that Crimea ought to be a part of Russia. “Krym dva goda spust’ya: vnimanie, ocenki, sankcyi,” *Levada.ru*, 7 April 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/04/07/krym-dva-goda-spustya-vnimanie-otsenki-sanktsii; “Krym i Sevastopol’: tri goda s Rossiei,” op.cit.

¹⁷ “Krym dva goda spust’ya...,” op.cit.

¹⁸ “Sankcii ne strashny,” *Levada.ru*, 31 January 2017, www.levada.ru/2017/01/31/sanktsii-ne-strashny.

Although Moscow's main goal is still active—it aims at changing Ukraine into a Russian protectorate—is priorities have changed. Russia is trying to lift Western sanctions, shift the axioms of world order and bring about desirable, from its own point of view, leadership change in the most influential states.

The general downgrading of Ukraine historical themes was clearly visible in a TV interview “Direct Line” with Putin in April 2015. Having said that Ukrainians and Russians were “one people,” he criticized Kyiv for changing when it celebrated Victory Day—May 8 instead of Russia's (and the USSR's) May 9. Further, Putin remarked that this was another attempt aiming at depriving “those who treasure historical memory of our common victory.”¹⁹

The commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of the World War II demonstrated even more vividly this shift in Moscow's priorities. Putin did not refer to Ukraine, but pointed out the spirit of cooperation between the U.S., the USSR, France and Great Britain, which had led to the defeat of the Third Reich. This claim served as a platform to advance a political proposal, namely “a creation of a system of equal security.”²⁰ In other words, Putin projected a vision of a new Yalta, which would anew recognize and re-establish sphere of influences.

The article on Russian foreign policy published by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov on 3 March 2016 unpacked those claims extensively.²¹ The text was addressed to Western leaders. A vision of global affairs and prospective role for Russia, presented by Lavrov, is based on historical determinism: each country is doomed to play a role which stems from its history. The most important message for Western politicians: any attempt to exclude Russia from the top table are doomed to failure, and would only prompt destabilization. To back this up, Lavrov pointed

¹⁹ *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin on 16 April 2015*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261>.

²⁰ *Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossii na parade, posvyashchyonom 70-letiyu Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne*, 9 May 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49438>.

²¹ S. Lavrov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 3 March 2016, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391.

to the lessons of the past, which showed Russia had been playing a positive stabilizing and peacekeeping role since the 10th century. In that context only Russia was mentioned by Lavrov as a successor of Kyivan Rus'. Therefore, one may assume that no other country has a right to consider Kyivan Rus' as a part of its own history and national heritage. Every time when the stability of Europe was in danger Moscow was a stabilizing and peacekeeping factor. The Vienna Congress 1815 was the most vivid example of it, according to the Russian MFA.

Lavrov devoted special attention to the USSR. He stressed its positive role by securing victory over the Nazis in the World War II and its impact on the Western project of welfare state, which was developed because of socialist ideas emanating from the Soviet Union. The subjugation of the Eastern and Central European countries by Moscow after the year 1945 was not mentioned.

Instead, Lavrov stated that any description of the World War II as "the clash of two totalitarianisms" is "groundless and immoral." He noted, as an aside, that the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution 1917 might be used by "many" to wage "information attacks on Russia."

Russia, in Lavrov's vision of history, repaired mistakes made by other countries. Having underscored the essential cultural difference of Russia, he called for "the partnership of civilizations." One of the obstacles to overcome on the way to such a partnership, according to Lavrov, was "the Ukraine crisis caused by the coup in Kyiv."

On the basis of Lavrov's vision, one may assume that Central and Eastern European countries are treated by Russia rather as an object of international relations, not with their own independent ability to act. The Kremlin believes that the "liberation" of those countries by the Red Army in 1944–1945 gave Russia "a special title" and Russia has a right to protect its "legitimate interests" in these states, *de facto*—hence depriving them of a part of their national sovereignty.

RUSSIAN MONUMENTAL DIPLOMACY

In this battle over historical frameworks in Central and Eastern Europe, monuments still play a key part. A good illustration of Russian claims might be the Polish-Russian debate over the so-called monuments of gratitude to Soviet soldiers. These objects were erected by Poland's communist regime soon after the end of the World War II, and have been slowly dismantled after 1989. Russia's actions in Ukraine damaged Russia in the eyes of Polish public opinion, and some communities decided to remove various monuments from their neighborhoods, perceived as symbol of the Polish submission to the Soviet Union. Russia reacted swiftly. In September 2015, shortly after one of these decisions, Russia's Ambassador to Poland, Sergey Andreev, claimed that Poland had been partly responsible for being invaded in 1939. He also criticized a taking down of the monument to General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, who most Polish historians hold largely responsible, along with General Ivan Serov, for the repression of the Polish underground national forces—a part of allied armed forces—in 1944.²² Later, a spokesman for the Russian MFA, Maria Zakharova, equated the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Poland to acts of terrorism in the Middle East. Then, on December 18, the Russian Duma adopted a special resolution with similar analogies.²³

The case of monuments in Poland is also specific because of a treaty which regulates this issue. Its official texts drawn up differs significantly in each language. The Russian version is imprecise, and can be interpreted as providing protection to “monuments of gratitude,” whereas the Polish version refers unambiguously only to graveyards.²⁴

²² *Interv'yu Posla Rossii v Pol'she S.V.Andreyeva korrespondentu pol'skogo telekanala TVN 24 Brygide Grysyak 23.09.2015*, available on the website of the Russian Embassy to Poland: http://poland.mid.ru/ru_RU.

²³ *O nedopustimosti oskverneniya i razrusheniya mest pamyati i zakhoroneniya sovetskikh voynov v Respublike Pol'sha*, Gosudarstvennaya Duma, 16 December 2015, [http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/\(ViewDoc\)?OpenAgent&arhiv/a_dp.nsf/ByID&1380269032D6418A43257F250050C29B](http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(ViewDoc)?OpenAgent&arhiv/a_dp.nsf/ByID&1380269032D6418A43257F250050C29B).

²⁴ More, see Ł. Adamski, “Russia's “Monumental” Anti-diplomacy,” *Intersection*, 20 December 2015, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-europe/russias-monumental-anti-diplomacy>.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS A SPECIAL ACTOR

Although Russian Orthodox Church policy of memory in certain spheres differs from the Russian government, as for instance in the case of remembering Stalin, its vision of Ukrainian history is by and large compatible with Kremlin views. It is a true believer of the All-Russian nation conception and propagates the idea of a Russian World (*Russkiy Mir*). The first ever meeting between the head of the Catholic Church and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church on 12 February 2016, is a good indication of how the Church could be used as a herald of an historical narrative that undermines Ukraine.

The declaration accepted by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kyrill supports the Russian interpretation of the history of Eastern Europe, and the disavowal of Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian ones. The translation of the title of Kirill, “the Patriarch of All Rus’” into English as “of all Russia” demonstrates acceptance, perhaps in an unconscious way, of the Russian tradition to identify Rus’ with Russia.²⁵ It promotes indirectly a vision of history, according to which Belarusians and Ukrainians emerged as *de facto* “separatists”—a community broken away from the naturally united people of Rus’—Russia.

Further, the situation in Ukraine was described in “Aesopic language.” In the declaration hardly any mention about Russia’s role in the war can be found (see paragraph 26). The lack of such a claim reinforces the leitmotif of Russian propaganda that a civil war is raging in Ukraine.

The speeches held by Kyrill during an unveiling of the monument to the Vladimir/Volodymyr the Great in Moscow on 4 November 2016 demonstrate more vividly that the idea of an All-Russian nation, presented in the Joint Declaration, is still strongly supported by the Orthodox Church. Having said that the continuity of the Russian statehood from medieval Ruthenia (*Rus’*) to the Russian Federation exists, the Patriarch Kirill emphasized that the grand Prince of Kyiv is a symbol of unity of all peoples

²⁵ “Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill,” Vatican Radio, 12 February 2016, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/02/12/joint_declaration_of_pope_francis_and_patriarch_kirill/1208117.

of historic Ruthenia (*Rus'*). Interestingly, he did not mention the USSR at all. A comfortable accompaniment to Putin's parallel between Vladimir's/Volodymyr's state and the Russian Federation, where Putin claimed that the ruler of the Kyivan *Rus'* back in the 10th century had centralized his state and united Russian (*russkiye*) lands.²⁶

HISTORY MATTERS

The Kremlin has not succeeded in its attempts to isolate and exhaust Ukraine. Moscow also has not convinced Western countries that their policy of sanctions is useless and stabilization might be reached only if Moscow's proposals are accepted. On the other hand, the Kremlin's stated aim, defined as a preservation of the stability of the regime, has been achieved.

The year 2017 will mark three very important anniversaries in Russia: the centennial of the February and October revolutions and the 80th anniversary of the Great Purges. Together with the elections that are to be held in EU countries (Germany, France, UK) and the ongoing presidency of Donald Trump in the U.S. the year 2017 bring a new chapter in international relations.

The Kremlin has several times shown that it misuses history and treats it as a means to destabilize and undermine the sovereignty of other countries. Since Russian officials believe that Russian interests, including claims based on history, ought to be superior than the confines of international law, one can hardly hope that Moscow will cease to use history as an "information weapon."

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²⁶ *Monument to Vladimir the Great opened in Moscow on Unity Day, 4 November 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211>.*

PAVEL LUZIN

2014–2016: A NEW RUSSIAN ARMY GOES TO WAR

Several factors explain the current state of the Russian armed forces and their various deployments over the last few years. First of all, Russia's ruling elite strives to maintain power in the country and strengthen its world stage presence at all costs. Secondly, Russia's military-industrial complex depends on increased state spending. Thirdly, the experience of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War has played an important role, in much the same way as lessons were learned from the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq carried out by the U.S. and its allies.

Russia's military engagements since 2014 show increased quality and quantity. Clearly, Russia's military now has greater potential to project force. However, these conflicts have also revealed that the Kremlin's options are somewhat limited.

LESSONS FROM GEORGIA: REFORM AND REARMAMENT

Russia's war with Georgia in August 2008 made it clear to Kremlin officials that the Russian army was ill-prepared for modern warfare. The victory over the Georgian army came at a heavy cost. This military unpreparedness was accompanied by a total lack of efficiency. Russia's growth model, already under strain, struggled with the inclusion of poorly coordinated military spending and planning. Against the backdrop of ever more confrontational relations with the West, a question arose: How was the ruling elite going to maintain Russia's foreign-policy status? After all, it was precisely the status of the "great superpower" which afforded

representatives of this very class the chance to maintain their power, wealth, immunity against potential criminal prosecutions and to count on integration with the European establishment.

Reform of the armed forces, enacted shortly after the conflict in Georgia, proved to be an effective corrective. This has led the Kremlin to rely on its military force increasingly ever since in terms of developing policy aimed at system and power preservation.

Underlying these reforms was a clear objective: to build a modern, combat-capable army characterized by high mobility and equipped for victory in the event of a short-term local conflict beyond Russia's borders. This has led to brigades becoming the main component of ground forces, and their rearmament has become one of the key tenets of these reforms. Another keynote of these reforms were a focus on speeding up deployment and boosting the capacity of communication and intelligence systems.

The number of combat-ready troops the Kremlin hopes to have at its disposal is somewhere between 120–150 thousand personnel until 2020, though it does not have a time frame for exactly when this will be a reality. There are approximately 80 thousand combat ready troops today and less than 30 thousand prior to the reform.¹ Among other things, the 120–150 thousand target has come from heeding the experience gained by the U.S. and other NATO countries during the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, where 150–160 thousand boots were on the ground at any given time. There is also a technical aspect to the reform: changes designed to fit with contemporary communication and intelligence systems, effective in providing troops with information and operation management.

At the same time, the reform was not meant to pose a threat to the Russian political regime as such. On the contrary, regardless of all these changes, it was devised to maintain power relations associated with a vast army and to exclude even the faintest possibility of politicizing the most combat-ready units. Although the term of compulsory military service has been reduced to 1 year, the conscription program very much remains in force (nearly 130–150 thousand men aged 18–27 are conscripted twice a year).

¹ "Kolichestvo batal'onnykh takticheskikh grupp v rossiyskoy armii vozrastet pochti dvoye," TASS, 14 September 2016, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/3620165>.

Russian authorities are resistant to changing the military education system.

One of the most significant milestones in the preparation of the Russian army for 21st century warfare came in the form of attempts to purchase European arms and establish military industrial relationships with European arms manufacturers. Relations with France (Mistral helicopter carriers), Germany (a contract with the Rheinmetal company to equip a military training center in Mulino) and Italy (Iveco armored vehicles and Centauro wheeled tanks) were the most notable examples. Cooperation with European countries enabled the procurement of a wide range of equipment (from radio stations for tanks to industrial machines) and even paved the way for the development of Russia's military space program.

There was no contradiction between the anti-Western vector in Russian politics and cooperation with individual EU member states. After all, Moscow has a history of forging "special relations" with individual countries. The notions of North-Atlantic or EU unity are alien to Russia in this regard.

Attempts to equip Russian forces with arms manufactured partly in Europe have resulted in an acute conflict between the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Russian military industry represented, by and large, by the Rostec state-owned corporation. The conflict was further aggravated (and lasted until Minister Anatoly Serdyukov was replaced by Sergey Shoygu in 2012) when the 20 trillion ruble State Armaments Program for 2011–2020 (SAP 2020) was adopted in early 2011.

Moreover, as little as 15% was allocated for the rearmament of ground forces as part of the SAP while a further 14% was allocated specifically for military communications, intelligence and management systems. 24% was to be spent on the purchase of new aircraft and helicopters, and another 17% on air and missile defense, radars and military satellites. Nearly a quarter of the program's budget was earmarked for the navy. The rearmament of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces included new intercontinental ballistic missiles, which accounted for 5% of all of planned spending.²

² *Gosudarstvennyye programmy vooruzheniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii: problemy ispolneniya i potentsial optimizatsii*, Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2015, p. 23.

As little as 2.5 trillion rubles had been spent under the SAP 2020 by 2014 and the authorities planned expenditure for the first year of the war against Ukraine totaled 1.4 trillion rubles.³ However, the results of changes and increased military spending have been reflected in the invasion of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in the Donbas.

Military capability was overtly lagging far behind schedule by this time. On the plus side, the Russian authorities came to realize that the West did not speak with one voice when it came to defending principles. This realization came about as a result of the diplomatic game which commenced in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War, the events of the Arab Spring, and the Syrian civil war.

First of all, Moscow noted in August 2008 that unlike the U.S., the “old” EU member states were willing to turn a blind eye to Russia’s ambitions of establishing a sphere of “special interest” in the post-Soviet space. Secondly, the West demonstrated indecisiveness when it came to Middle Eastern affairs for the first time in centuries during the 2011 Arab Spring. Thirdly, the level of apprehension reached its zenith with the “chemical weapons deal” concluded in Syria in September 2013—the U.S. eagerly agreed to it, having abandoned any intention of using force, which was interpreted by the Kremlin solely as a sign of weakness.

As a result, Russian policy makers aimed at fostering the deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Europe. The idea was to create special conditions for Russia’s existence against the backdrop of the country’s inability to adapt to contemporary global norms. Yet this was inevitably fraught with potential for conflict.

Admittedly, the Kremlin was growing less wary of this prospect and hence it resorted to the use of force without a second’s thought in response to the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine. The Kremlin perceived that through this revolution, the system of distribution of power and ownership was under threat.

³ P. Luzin, “The degree of militarism,” *Intersection*, 12 December 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/articles/security/degree-militarism>.

CRIMEA AND THE DONBAS: NON-LINEAR ENGAGEMENTS

“Hybrid warfare”—that is, non-linear war—is often described as strikingly novel but is actually nothing of the sort.⁴ This classic tactic was introduced back in Tsarist Russia and was ultimately mastered by the Bolsheviks. At the core of this ploy is the requirement for troops to engage under the guise of supposedly local and independent political forces, rebelling against the incumbent authorities and/or coming to the rescue of such forces. In reality, the political leaders of these rebels have been under Russia’s control from the very outset and these troops have often been on standby should the need for them to be called in arise. The Bolsheviks themselves seized power in Russia in 1917 under the pretext of an alleged national uprising and had the backing of the organized military force of the Petrograd Garrison.

The annexing of Crimea and the onset of hostilities in the Donbas followed a similar scenario which it is not necessary to revisit here as it is rather more pertinent to focus on key military-and-political aspects of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

The very fact of the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent “Novorossiia” project meant that the Kremlin was certain: it would be able to dismantle Ukrainian statehood as such. It is noteworthy that given the number of combat-ready units, military occupation of all regions of Ukraine and protracted warfare were out of the question. According to the Russian plan, activists loyal to Moscow along with militants and instructors were to paralyze authorities in large industrial Ukrainian cities and establish control over them. Encouragement could be taken from the fact that following the 2009 terrorist attack in Mumbai, it had become clear that a well-organized group can be capable of immobilizing an entire metropolis.

In this situation, Russian troops should have, at the very least, operated within the framework of humanitarian aid and/or peacekeeping missions launched from the territory of Russia and

⁴ However there are different interpretations of the Russia’s non-linear warfare, for example: M. Galeotti, “Hybrid War or Gibrinaya Voina? Getting Russia’s non-linear military challenge right,” *Mayak Intelligence*, 2016.

Crimea. The goals would have included: extinguishing outbursts of organized resistance of the Ukrainian army; the taking of key infrastructure and the demoralization of Ukraine's leaders and the entire elite as such. Officially, they would have only been interested in the disengagement of the warring parties in the civil conflict and Moscow would have held all the diplomatic cards under such circumstances.

However, this was a miscalculation. Deeply underestimated was the role of Ukrainian civil solidarity. Overestimated was the will of local residents in large Ukrainian cities (except for Donetsk and Luhansk) that would be loyal to Russia. On the battlefields, the unexpectedly robust resistance put up by the Ukrainian army was also a stumbling block for Russia.

So how could Russia implement its initial plan, maintain potential for a diplomatic maneuver and avoid becoming engaged in a protracted, conventional war? Moscow was forced to address this question in the context of the West demonstrating an unexpectedly high level of solidarity when assessing these developments.

The Russian army, continually rearming and increasing the number of combat-ready units, faced a difficult task. The army had to act as a deterrent to the Ukraine's military by constantly maintaining a threat originating from Russian territory. It was tasked with supplying militant units operating on behalf of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)/ Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and engaging on the battlefield with composite groups—formed by soldiers from various units—independent of any air support and under the guise of “militant-volunteers.”

The Kremlin discarded the idea of a fully-fledged “humanitarian” invasion of Ukraine as early as in August 2014 in the aftermath of the downing of the MH17 flight with the use of a Russian Buk-M1 air defense system and the serious losses suffered in the battle of Ilovaisk. However, in the absence of such a prospect, the objectives behind all the planned changes including the rearmament program had to be readdressed.

Consequently, the Russian army could not act alone in pursuit of Moscow's political goals. It became necessary to impose such conditions on Ukraine in order to retain the territory of the DNR/

LNR and exert further military and political pressure on Ukraine in the hope of prompting a new *casus belli*.

As a result, these ploys, designed to entrap Ukraine, continued, spanning the stillborn Minsk-1 ceasefire agreement and the developments of January-February 2015 when the Ukrainian army was defeated in a skirmish with militant groups and Russian troops in the battle of Donetsk airport and in the city of Debaltseve. The Minsk-2 ceasefire agreement was concluded and accordingly, Russia became empowered to consolidate the *status quo* indefinitely, to feel safe in the knowledge it had leverage to exert diplomatic pressure on Kyiv and, at the same time, leave room for maneuver in negotiations with the West.

The Kremlin focused on the expansion and strengthening of deployed armed forces in the following three locations against the backdrop of the ensuing confrontation with the West: 1) an area around Moscow and to the south of it, towards the Ukrainian border; 2) the Kaliningrad Oblast; and 3) occupied Crimea. Joint-forces troops have been bolstered and enhanced in all three locations.

Thus, the Kaliningrad Oblast and Crimea are, in fact, turning into relative strongholds. These strongholds serve to ensure that NATO is at risk of incremental escalation of the conflict including nuclear confrontation in the case of any, even hypothetical, attempt to suppress the deployed Russian troops with the use of force. It should be made clear that the Russian authorities have their own interpretation of the causes and results of the overthrows of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi when implementing policy.

Alongside the fortification of Kaliningrad and Crimea, the headquarters of the 20th army were re-deployed to the Voronezh Oblast from Nizhny Novgorod, closer to the border with Ukraine. The first Guards Tank Army was formed near Moscow which attests to the offensive nature of these units.

It is also noteworthy that the Russian National Guards, created in 2016 on the basis of up to 400 thousand Interior Ministry troops, can officially be used outside Russia, for example, in anti-guerrilla (formally called anti-terrorist) operations. In other words, National Guard troops can take over the task of establishing and maintaining

the occupational regime in territories where the Russian army has carried out a successful offensive.

However, it should be emphasized that successful anti-guerrilla operations are only possible in situations where the majority of locals are either loyal or indifferent towards the incumbent authorities. In other words, the large-scale use of the Russia's National Guards abroad is largely confined to the post-Soviet space.

It turns out that the Kremlin began to develop the Russian armed forces in three ways simultaneously based on the experience of the war with Ukraine. Initially, the policy of creating a mobile and combat-ready contingent of up to 150 thousand, equipped with efficient communications and intelligence systems was continued. These troops should be prepared for a modern blitzkrieg with regular armies outside of Russia (even including the use of tactical nuclear weapons).

Secondly, the Russian regime was to be afforded sufficient military guarantees in the case of an attempt by some kind of Western or even NATO coalition to defeat it as a response to its continued aggressive foreign policy.

Thirdly, Moscow was to ensure that it was capable not only of defeating a regular enemy army on its territory but also of establishing a loyal political regime further afield by taking advantage of the loyal or indifferent local population. Clearly, there are only a few countries in which Moscow would be willing to fight for the establishment of a loyal regime yet it is highly likely that Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan are among them.

For a variety of reasons, the army has become the main tool for Kremlin self-preservation in the global arena since 2014. Moreover, a departure from this vector will only be possible in the event of a radical political and economic change to the Russian regime.

RUSSIA IN SYRIA: LIMITED POWER

Unlike in the case of the war with Ukraine, major operations of the 2015–2016 Syrian campaign were performed by the air force and navy. Russia tried to avoid putting boots on the ground as far as possible (if we put Russian mercenaries aside)—mainly special operations forces were engaged there. Military police units were deployed in Aleppo after the city was taken in late 2016. The units were largely made up of natives of Chechnya whose faith was closest to the religion practiced by remaining local residents.

The key long-term objective behind Russia's actions in Syria remained unchanged: to maintain its status as a great superpower which would guarantee that the ruling class retains both its power and control of assets. There are several aspects to achieving this goal in the Middle East.

Russia is trying to forge an alliance with the West (with the United States in the first place) against the Islamic State as it plans to exploit this later when bargaining over issues vital to the Kremlin. Moreover, Russia is trying to occupy political positions so as to become a key player in the region without the presence of whom no important quandaries can be addressed.

In addition, fighting on the side of Bashar al-Assad, the Kremlin is trying to introduce its own global rules and its own interpretation of the notion of state sovereignty. There is no room for the social contract theory, the concept of human rights or any other values other than power as such.

However, limitations as regards the Kremlin's military capability have been highlighted over the course of this campaign. These hurdles will prove insurmountable in the foreseeable future. Thus, for example, it became clear in Syria that Russia had after all failed to obtain effective precision weapons and was therefore forced to conquer cities the way it was done back in the days of the World War II—i.e. by completely obliterating them regardless of the potential for civilian casualties. The use of Kalibr-NK long-range cruise missiles serves as evidence that the Russian military industry is incapable of mass producing advanced weaponry and that the reliability of these missiles is relatively low.

Apart from strategic submarine cruisers, the Russian navy is capable of performing only auxiliary functions. The chances of conducting fully-fledged overseas operations remain rather slim. It is noteworthy that the famous “Syrian Express”—used for transporting cargo from Novorossiysk to Syria—functions thanks to large landing ships and second-hand bulk carriers purchased from Turkey.

Russia is short of missile cruisers, which it needs to maintain the Mediterranean squadron of the Russian navy formed back in 2013 in connection with the situation in Syria. The crux of the matter is that the squadron mainly provides cover for the Syrian coast as well as Russian units deployed across the country and, *de facto*, for Bashar al-Assad and his entourage. This cover provides protection against potential air strikes given confrontation with the West and Moscow’s unsuccessful attempts to force the international coalition, headed by the U.S., to establish an alliance with it.

Only 5 Russian missile cruisers and 1 aircraft carrier armed with S-300 air defense systems are currently deployed as flagships in the Mediterranean squadron. The “Moskva” and “Varyag” missile cruisers will undergo maintenance work in 2017 after the “Marshal Ustinov” guided missile cruiser has left the repair dock. The “Admiral Nakhimov” nuclear-powered battle cruiser is currently undergoing long-term revamping which won’t be completed until 2018. After that, the “Pyotr Velikiy” nuclear-powered battle cruiser will likely be modernized. Therefore, only 2 or 3 out of 5 ships will be available to take part in squadron rotation over the coming years.

Although the deployment of the only Russian aircraft carrier, the “Admiral Kuznetsov,” on the Syrian coast in the fall of 2016 caused a stir, it very quickly led to a non-combat loss of two carrier-based aircraft. The remaining deck-based fighters capable of missile-and-bomb strikes against Assad’s enemies actually operate from the Russian Latakia air base. When the political opportunity appeared at the beginning of 2017, the “Admiral Kuznetsov” was withdrawn from Syria. She will also undergo repair.

Of course, the deployment of an aircraft carrier in Syria was meant to boost the Kremlin’s diplomatic potential. The logic behind it was simple: despite the ineffectiveness of the “Admiral

Kuznetsov,” only the U.S. and France are equipped to deploy aircraft carriers in contemporary military campaigns aside from Russia. However, in the long run, Moscow’s potential to project its military might far beyond its borders will remain unchanged and could even diminish when the “Admiral Kuznetsov” goes under repair.

Still, a few years ago, Russia negotiated the procurement of two French Mistral helicopter carriers and the construction of a further two such ships in Russia under license. New capacity for overseas campaigns was supposed to strengthen Russia’s position in terms of political bargaining with the West and in the international arena in general. However, American and European sanctions, imposed in the aftermath of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, put an end to these plans, much to the surprise of the Kremlin. Consequently, it will be precisely troops on the ground which will be Moscow’s main military means of achieving its foreign-policy goals.

Russia’s options in terms of the Syrian campaign are few given the objective limitations of its military capabilities. If negotiations with the West (first and foremost with the United States) are unsuccessful, Russia will either have to agree to a partition of Syria between Bashar al-Assad, his warlords, opposition forces and ISIS or increase the number of Russian boots on the ground.

Although the idea of more boots on the ground has already been given a dry run by the Russian army during drills, supplying a large contingent on the ground far from Russian borders could prove a difficult task for Moscow. Moreover, it is worth remembering that the modernization of the Russian army is intended to enhance efficiency in confrontations with regular armies and large-scale operations against combatants who have the support of the local population. This remains an altogether different challenge to deployments in a country like Syria.

In other words, the Kremlin has most probably plumped for diplomacy involving separate talks with key players in the region. Regardless of how long the Syrian conflict continues, Moscow will, by all means necessary, try to maintain its presence on the ground at the current level, with only special operation forces engaging in tactical operations.

Still, this might result in a vicious cycle. Moscow is unlikely to rest on its laurels for very long, even in the case of the conclusion and implementation of a most favorable agreement in Syria. Any diplomatic victory will soon turn into a Pyrrhic victory against the backdrop of the economic impasse and the inability to offer an attractive future to Bashar al-Assad (not to mention the Syrian people). It turns out that capability and readiness to fight remains the only tangible embodiment of Russia's foreign-policy status—which means that, in a bid to break the deadlock in one war, the Kremlin will almost certainly lunge headlong towards another, even against the wishes of some of its leaders.

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LEADERSHIP AND BUREAUCRACY
IN “POST-CRIMEAN” RUSSIA

The events of March 2014, including both the annexing of Crimea and wider geopolitical changes, left a deep imprint on President Vladimir Putin’s regime and triggered a bifurcation: the country began moving in a different direction, followed by a shock period which lasted until around early 2016. The country’s leadership and bureaucracy needed nearly two years to adapt itself to completely unfamiliar and uncomfortable conditions, and to adjust its internal mechanisms to a new reality and new challenges.

“THE TRANSITION PERIOD” OF 2014–2015

The Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space posed a major threat to Putin’s Russia in the early 2000s. Until 2014 Putin’s policy response was an attempt to divide influence between Russia and the U.S.; tactical and strategic moves were crafted in the hope of obtaining a guarantee that the U.S. would not interfere in processes occurring within “Russia’s traditional sphere of interest.” In practice, this has turned out to be wishful thinking. Lacking leverage to protect its own interests, Russia took a radical step and crossed a red line by annexing Crimea in March 2014, which instigated a profound transformation. Not only in his country’s relations with Ukraine and the West, but dramatically reshaping his own regime. Until then, stability had been the priority of his regime; it had been unable and unwilling to undergo major structural changes in government branches or in the wider economy.

The shift was slow; government needed nearly two years to digest the geopolitical crisis and begin to transform itself. The country was in the grip of an absolutely unprecedented crisis: the geopolitical disaster unrolled hand in hand with plummeting global commodity prices that constituted the fundamentals of the Russian economy. The crisis was unprecedented in that it was associated not only with the country's downsized financial resources, but also new challenges that Putin's regime had never encountered before. Sanctions and a policy of deterrence in general based on an unexpectedly strong alliance between Western Europe and the U.S. created a sense of deadlock. Even the military campaign in Syria, which started in September 2015, had tactical rather than strategic objectives: to force the West into a partnership with Russia in the face of international terrorism, in the hope of breaking the deadlock over Ukraine.

In 2014 and 2015, the regime hesitated over whether to choose a conservative stance clearly visible from the beginning of the Vladimir Putin's 3rd presidential term,¹ or opt for reforms, as urgently demanded by systemic liberals.² A proposal for an early presidential election in an attempt to implement speedy but unpopular reforms with minimal political risks—i.e. the re-election of Putin followed by reforms—was put forward by Alexey Kudrin in 2015. This period was also marked by Putin's almost total withdrawal from decision-making on domestic policy: the president focused entirely on geopolitical issues. The bringing forward of the election to the State Duma from December to September 2016 was symbolic: the aim was to minimize social and political risks, given the feeling of uncertainty and growing fears for developments in the country. That period was characterized by a feeling of uncertainty and the absence of a plan for dealing with the fully-fledged crisis. The regime was, as is traditional, moving by inertia towards ultimate collapse.

¹ I. Bunin, A. Makarkin, "Nikakogo totalitarisma, tolko konservatsiya i inertsia," *Vedomosti*, 22 October 2012, www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2012/10/22/ot_konservatizma_do_inercii.

² A. Kudrin, "Kak vernut doverie mezhdru vlastyu, obshchestvom i biznesom," *Vedomosti*, 21 November 2014, <http://info.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/36287891/kak-vernut-doverie>.

The first signs of internal transformation and adaptation to the new reality appeared as late as in early 2016, when Vladimir Putin re-embraced a domestic agenda. This was also the onset of the most profound “perestroika” in the entire history of Putin’s rule, in the retrogressive, historic sense of the word. Such an unprecedented revision of the very essence of the regime’s HR policy³ had not even been seen during the watershed years of 2004 and 2012. New characteristics of the regime were formed two years following the annexation of Crimea, becoming indicative of the development of the country under “mature” Putin during his 3rd term.

TOWARDS A POST-CRIMEAN PSYCHE

The psychology of any government bureaucracy often absorbs that of its leader. As is often said of Putin, he is a tactician not a strategist. He is an advocate of *realpolitik*, who talks of his pragmatic approach to foreign policy. (In contrast to the U.S. policy of furthering its interests based on an idealist concept of “democratization”). His focus is on fostering interdependence mechanisms on energy-related issues⁴ and new security architecture, and minimization of geopolitical competition via the re-establishment of tacit spheres of influence. Yet Putin had grown fully disappointed with the potential of this approach by the beginning of his 3rd term in office. The strongest conservative wave, an isolationist trend, a “tightening of the screws” and a reactionary policy⁵ were all observed in early 2012. All were in line with a policy of internal political “shriveling,” a search for new “pillars” for the regime and the “spiritual bonds” first mentioned by the president in December 2012. Domestic policy embraced an axiological component which remained an absolutely propagandist, secondary and reactive element of last

³ T. Stanovaya, “Putin’s New Personnel Policy,” *Carnegie.ru*, 16 August 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=64331>.

⁴ T. Stanovaya, “Energeticheskaya strategiya Rossii: ispytanie krizisom,” *Politcom.ru*, 27 April 2009, <http://politcom.ru/8064.html>.

⁵ *Vlast’—elity—obshchestvo: kontury novogo obshchestvennogo dogovora*, Moscow School of Political Science, February–March 2013, www.msps.su/files/2013/04/VlastElityObshestvo.pdf.

resort in foreign policy—a sign of deep disappointment with the possibilities of coming to terms with the West.

Following Putin's lead, the Russian government has utterly changed the psychology behind its policy. Legal depreciation and denigration are some of the most significant manifestations of these changes: the reduced legal and political value of international and national legal norms in the aftermath of the Crimea annexation and Russia's involvement in the Donbas conflict has been noticeable. Having crossed the rubicon of the permissible, the regime has automatically reduced its level of respect for formalized rules, restrictions or principles. It now needs to legitimize its illegal actions. Thus, legal depreciation becomes an inevitable consequence of the entire set of policies targeted at Ukraine.

Another—and by no means less important—consequence of the annexation of Crimea is Russia's attempt venturing beyond what it saw as its own spheres of interest prior to March 2014. Just look at the key policy statements and speeches of the Russian leader during his first two terms in office, when he emphasized the priority of principles such as non-interference with the affairs of other states, territorial integrity and non-violent methods of conflict resolution. Moscow was informally delineating its direct spheres of interest in those days, within the borders of the former Soviet republics. The annexation of Crimea marked Moscow's violation of its own previously declared foreign policies and actively protected principles. Russia went far beyond its "traditional sphere of influence" afterwards, getting directly involved in the Syrian conflict and attempting to affect the domestic political affairs of Western countries.

Vladimir Putin gave up any attempts at finding understanding in the West in 2015–2016, switching tactics to one of active participation in a game with European countries and the U.S. by fair means or foul. A new approach followed: supporting Euro-skeptics across the continent, nationalist right-wingers, and any politicians sympathetic to Russia and its leader.

This "Extra-zonality," i.e. going beyond the traditional spheres of influence, manifested itself in the emergence of the new threat of cyber-attacks from Russia, which have now become a means of

influencing and intimidating Western states. Moscow has moved⁶ from anti-Western propaganda and promotion of traditional values, shared primarily by Russian society, to active involvement with external target audiences. The aim being to strengthen the political voice of those that oppose the traditional Western political elite, and to weaken the West’s value-based approach to foreign policy—that is, the promotion of democracy around the world as a tool for geopolitical expansion. It would be hard to imagine Germany being afraid of Russia’s influence on its 2017 parliamentary election five years ago, and that “Putin’s interference”⁷ would become one of the hottest topics of the presidential race in the U.S. The Russian regime’s new psychology means that Moscow is no longer confined to the boundaries of its own “backyard,” and is actively expanding its influence far and wide. As long as its resourcefulness is either relatively stable or growing, the borders of its “backyard” could be moved further into previously unthinkable areas.

“NEW PUTINERS”
—THE MAIN PILLAR OF POST-CRIMEAN BUREAUCRACY

A shift from a policy of ensuring stability to a policy of administrative mobilization took place in 2016. Stability has always been the highest priority throughout Putin’s rule. Highly valued and treated as a safeguard against the loss of control, it in fact concealed the regime’s fear of change, both with respect to HR and to structural policy.

Putin used to try to avoid layoffs and other major staff reshuffles. He used to be gentle and careful when it came to the people close to him. Putin found it easier to create new structures rather than reform existing, inefficient ones, or dismiss their leaders.

⁶ T. Stanovaya: “‘Opasna, no predskazuyema’. Kak Rossiya napugala mir khakerami i prostitutkami,” *Republic.ru*, 12 January 2017, <https://republic.ru/posts/78445>.

⁷ This Joint Analysis Report (JAR) is the result of analytic efforts between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statement on “GRIZZLY STEPPE—Russian Malicious Cyber Activity,” 29 December 2016, www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/JAR_16-20296A_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf.

Thus, his managerial decisions were peculiar as he found it easier to create special institutions to deal with a given problem. This led to a bloated multitude of commissioners with unclear competencies; the Agency for Strategic Initiatives as an alternative to the Ministry of Economic Development, and the special regional ministries that bridge the gaps in regional policy. The All-Russian People's Front (ONF) also took on certain quasi-governmental functions. And all of this sprawling administrative de-concentration, accompanied by corruption as well as the lack of managerial results, used to characterize Putin's governance style prior to Crimea.

The regime moved to managerial mobilization in 2016: the fear of change gave way to the need to create a more viable power vertical. This had to do with issues of security rather than economy, where the old principles still prevail. The regime opted for a personnel shake-up aimed at improved dynamism in implementing decisions, de-politicization of top positions and technocratic governance. These principles are at the heart of the staff reshuffle that affected the management of the FSO (Federal Protective Service), the SBP (Presidential Security Service), the presidential administration, the Federal Customs Service, governors, the FSB (Federal Security Service), and the Investigative Committee. Gone are those who made too much ado, caused political conflicts, had their own ambitions which were against the "common cause," or, as with Sergey Ivanov, those who were bored with routine and did not really delve into detail. Apart from that, there is a growing demand for technocrats and managers who are ready to serve Putin based on the new principles and are devoted to predefined tasks, bypassing clan logic. Managerial posts can also be occupied by those who are ready to achieve the maximum at minimum cost. A wave of "new Putiners"—technocrats, personal aides and bureaucrats—is rising, solidifying. They accompany the president every day, but do not enter into dialog with him.

As a result, Putin has distanced himself from his informal entourage of cronies, former comrades-in-arms and associates, and is no longer interested in satisfying their needs and demands, which have become too expensive. One can therefore see yet another peculiarity of the post-Crimean regime: the president is not inclined to further maintain and "feed" his own elitist "safety cushion"—i.e.

the entourage he entrusted with control over informal spheres of influence in the 2000s. The political system will enter a mature stage when Putin is able to maintain outright control without the support of his entourage. Moreover, at this stage, his "own people" have stopped being an asset and have become a burden that requires continuous maintenance and attention.

In this sense, 2016 is indeed a watershed year from the point of view of the quality of the ruling elite undergoing a shake-up. The Putin elite (cronies and former comrades-in-arms) were invited into the government system in the 2000s to solve problems related to politics and state apparatus, and their influence has since expanded. Subsequently, they have gradually been promoted to significant posts in strategic sectors (Rostec, Rosneft or the Russian Railways), having formed a dense layer of new oligarchy. However, in 2014–2016, a distance between the state and this Putin-based oligarchy was formed, springing from an ever more clear contradiction between the interests of corporations and those of the government. "The interests of the company are important, but the interests of the entire economy are also at stake," Vladimir Putin said to the head of Rosneft in February 2015. This was in response to Rosneft's request to cut taxes. The head of JSC Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin, requested subsidies too often and lost his post only a few months later. He was not offered substantial compensation, either. The story of Rosneft's privatization⁸ in December 2016 in accordance with Sechin's exclusive plan is the story of the latter's triumph. However, we should not let it mislead us. In the end, it might turn out to be too expensive for the current management of the oil company to operate, and become a one-off success. The general tendency to distance the oligarchy from the state will continue along with the further strengthening of the role of Putin's technocracy.

The major 2016 reshuffle became the first practical sign of the psychological transformation of the regime that had tried to adjust to the changing conditions. One could conclude that Vladimir Putin crossed the Rubicon in 2016 when he dismissed his own people without fear of the wrath of the offended. Political life

⁸ T. Stanovaya, "Sdelka goda," *Politkom.ru*, 12 December 2016, <http://politcom.ru/21855.html>.

has since been devalued—it has become easier to fire people with no compulsory damages involved, unlike in the pre-Crimean days. Putin believes⁹ that he earned a place in history in the aftermath of the Crimea annexation. He believes he played the role of a missionary. Subsequently, he has been distancing himself from “earthly concerns,” reconstructing the pyramid of values whereby geopolitics replaces the daily routine of socio-economic life, which would free himself to neglect the feelings, emotions and interests of his “boyars.”

THE PEOPLE ANNEXED TO THE MISSION

The distance between Putin and his entourage (or cronies) became apparent in 2015–2016, while the distance between Putin and society will be a matter of the near future. Missionary work is built around global, historic tasks, not social interests. Subsequently, society will have to fit into Putin’s global project. In the pre-Crimean period the president used to take social sentiment into account (public opinion polls were carefully studied). But the interests of society ceased to be a reference point in his decision-making after 2014, and have instead become supplementary to the mission. This could be called the Crimean syndrome of absolute legitimacy, when one major merit of a politician serves to legitimize all of their subsequent actions. In psychological terms, society’s interests become synonymous with state interests, whereas private, sectoral and corporate manifestations of these interests become an anti-state factor. This is why, for instance, the authorities equated protests by truck drivers to protests by the opposition.

Lower sensitivity to social issues and a heightened focus on the interests of the state can mean that general social policy will become more rigid and unpopular, while grassroots discontent will be politicized by the authorities themselves (and not society), as seen in the trucker protests. In the truck drivers’ case they had appealed to the president for help while the state-owned media

⁹ Eadem, “‘Ne znayu’ i ‘ne ponimayu’: chto ne tak s Putinim?,” *Carnegie.ru*, 17 December 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=62311>.

accused them of acting in the interests of the U.S. State Department. Hence, a loyal and conformist segment of society appealed to the supreme authority for arbitration, and was rejected as a hostile element by this very authority. Social frustration is mounting. However, it could escalate into political discontent only if the state fails to fulfill its basic obligations, or generates expectations it fails to meet for a long period of time.

THE AMALGAMATION OF THE MILITARY AND THE *SILOVIKI*

The barely noticeable distance between Putin and his elite (including his "cronies"), as well as the potential growth of alienation between the state and society, forms new institutional and political foundations for the regime based on the prominent role played by both the military and the *siloviki* (the Russian security forces). This has to do with, amongst other things, a problem of total distrust: Putin cannot rely on the country's civil elite since he believes it is unpatriotic or not "mature" enough, and is irresponsible from the point of view of the interests of the country.

Putin's deep distrust of the elite has altered his style of governance, with the authorities operating under a regime of never-ending special operations¹⁰ against the backdrop of a policy of sanctions and a "besieged fortress" mentality. This special operations logic served as exceptional leverage in past high-risk "special cases" (for example, when the head of the government changed in 2004 and 2007; when the successor was selected in 2007 and Yuganskneftegaz was sold, etc.), whereas it has become perhaps the most popular problem-solving mechanism nowadays. It was precisely this mechanism behind the purchase of Bashneft, the arrest of Alexey Ulyukaev and the choice of buyer for the 19.5% share of Rosneft.

A "special operation" as a special style of governance also defines the kind of sweeping HR decisions made out of the blue and *en masse*. Putin's decision on 28 July 2016 to dismiss four

¹⁰ Eadem, "Press-operatsya prikrytiya," *Carnegie.ru*, 23 December 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=66548>.

governors—the heads of the city of Sevastopol as well as those of Kaliningrad, Yaroslavl and Kirov Oblasts, as well as three presidential plenipotentiary envoys to the North Caucasian, Volga and Northwestern Federal Districts simultaneously—is one of the most spectacular examples. Putin also appointed the new head of the Federal Customs Service (FTS). Such decisions are focal in nature: one focal reshuffle serves as a nucleus, with the rest of the peripheral changes following. Such decisions have a negative effect on the quality of an HR policy fraught with setbacks when, for instance, Yevgeny Zinichev, the former FSO officer who was completely unprepared for his new role as the governor of the Kaliningrad Oblast had to be replaced just two months after his appointment.

Putin finds it easier to appoint a candidate who is a former FSO-FSB officer to a top position than to find a civilian manager, believing a civilian manager would be inferior to any “Chekist” because of a lack of “nation-focused thinking.” Putin is surrounded by the *siloviki* and military of his own choosing, since he does not seem to trust others. And he does not ask them to fill the vacancies because he does not know them that well, either.

Promotion of former security officers to civilian posts is not a new phenomenon for the Putin regime. However, the geopolitical crisis in Crimea and Donbas, as well as the Syrian campaign, have together created an amalgamation of the military and the *siloviki* as the basis for discussion and decision-making at government level. This is a familiar, comfortable and confidential milieu that Putin feels part of. He feels that he is surrounded by people with expert knowledge and competence, in demand during “wartime.”

It is noteworthy that the government has not adopted a single strategically important document in the last two years. In contrast, in those same two years the Security Council of the Russian Federation¹¹—an advisory body that had previously lain dormant—adopted the military doctrine, the National Security Strategy, the IT Security Doctrine, the Concept of Foreign Policy and the Strategy for Economic Security. The Security Council has become a forum

¹¹ Eadem, “Kak Sovet bezopasnosti zamenil v Rossii pravitelstvo,” *Carnegie.ru*, 28 January 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=62605>.

for the discussion of food, financial, economic as well as regional policy. Putin’s weekly meetings with the members of the Security Council have gradually become the main forum for discussion of key issues in state policy, especially following the downfall of the Cabinet of Ministers after the arrest of then-incumbent minister Alexey Ulyukaev in November 2016.

The military and *siloviki* are in demand now, given the new geopolitical reality associated with Russia’s presence in Donbas and the Syrian campaign. This also bolsters their gravitas within the country. We are currently witnessing the first wave of an anti-corruption campaign in Putin’s Russia, which is affecting Putin’s entourage and henchmen. This is the other side of the coin, with the above-mentioned process of letting go of the defiance of dismissing “his own people.” Not only has Putin decided to fire them, he has decided to put them behind bars.

The watershed years of 2015–2016 that became a turning point in Putin’s relations with the elite, resulted in exclusive prerogatives being vested in the FSB. I do not think it makes sense to look for a special, secret plan of the president to strengthen the security services or scare the regional and federal bureaucracies. This process is, instead, spontaneous and haphazard. The FSB offers its services in its fight against “politically unreliable individuals” with a siege mentality—and the president accepts these services.

The peculiarity of the situation lies in the fact that the system of identifying “enemies” is changing. Before 2014, those who were—or even potentially could be—against Putin and his political system were regarded as “politically unreliable.” Whereas now, after Crimea and the onset of the geopolitical crisis and a policy of deterrence against Russia, much wider circles have become “politically unreliable,” including both the opposition and vulnerable elite. From the perspective of the security services, vulnerability has a broader potential for weakness in the event of a choice between “self-interest” and the Homeland. Given such a perspective, a corrupt official almost immediately becomes a potential traitor.

Hence, everyone who steals, who has family, funds or property in the West, who shows off a luxurious lifestyle or does not fully understand the “acuteness of the wartime moment”

becomes suspicious and a *priori* “politically unreliable” from the point of view of the security services. Given the scale of corruption in Russia, those at risk are primarily politically weak individuals at loggerheads with the authorities, who cannot boast of the highest political immunity, or whose patrons have lost their status. Thus, the loss of influence of the head of the FSO, Yevgeny Murov, triggered a number of corruption cases. His much-publicized case was for smuggling, associated with the business Murov was involved in (which also saw the arrest of Dmitry Mikhailchenko). This then led to the replacement of Andrey Belyaninov, head of the FTS, and the subsequent major reshuffle (being, as of 28 July 2016, a whole chain of new appointments). Moreover, several high-ranking generals from the SKR (the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation) were also arrested (as a result of the FSB’s attempts to deprive¹² the SKR and its head, Alexander Bastrykin, of a degree of autonomy).

The FSB has become a political factor in the development of the country, and this could seriously affect certain existing amendments to the Russian legislation¹³ (such as the anti-terrorist and anti-extremist initiatives), the situation of the opposition (criminal cases against critics of the government), the role of NGOs (the fight against “foreign agents”), as well as the staffing of various public offices. In 2015–2016 alone the FSB succeeded in arresting three governors, the then-incumbent Federal Minister of Economic Development, and the Deputy Minister of Culture. This wave of arrests also led to the shake-up in the Ministry of the Interior and the SKR. And all of this will determine the vector of further changes, both in terms of staffing and institutional transformation.

LIBERALS NON-GRATA

Post-Crimean Russia exhibits a growing political mistrust of systemic liberals who have been forced to become ideological

¹² Eadem, “Gromke aresti v SKR: simptomi sistemnikh problem v silovikh strukturakh Rossii,” *Politcom.ru*, 26 July 2016, <http://politcom.ru/21338.html>.

¹³ I. Shumanov, “FSB kak zakonodatel’,” *Vedomosti*, 10 August 2015, www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/08/11/604257-protivodeistvie-korruptsii-fsb-kak-zakonodatel.

allies of the West, following the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the latter. In other words, they have become “politically unreliable.” In the political system, systemic liberals have become redundant voices on most issues; they are the unheeded advocates of an easing of Russian policy, the ignored proponents of structural reforms and change of confrontational rhetoric, and marginalized opponents of conservatives and traditional values.

The role of the systemic liberals has been undermined by a stabilizing global energy market, amongst other things, and the emergence of hopes for the recovery of economic growth in 2017. Moreover, decisions made by Rosneft’s Executive Chairman, Igor Sechin, are seen by Putin as the most effective countermeasure to perceptions of government incompetence. From the president’s perspective, it is Sechin who helped the government close the budget gap (by offering a working solution of replenishing the budget through sales of 19.5% shares in Rosneft), while the liberals continued to offer risky and unappealing solutions.

So the reforms project launched by Putin in early 2016 was borne of severe institutional and ideological competition. Former Minister of Finance Alexey Kudrin was invited to the Presidential Economic Committee to construct a strategy for the country’s development. Eventually, it turned out that Kudrin represented only one of a number of centers in charge of the development of this important strategy. He had to compete with¹⁴ Dmitry Medvedev (Presidential Council for Strategic Development), and the economic assistant to the President of Russia, Andrey Belousov (who is associated with the Stolypin Club). Analytical work in the development of the strategy entrusted to the liberals has so far not become a political reality.

The liberals’ ideological mistrust of the *siloviki*—and *vice versa*—means that the former are at great risk from Putin’s anti-corruption campaign. It would be a mistake to assume that, for example, Alexey Ulyukayev’s arrest was Rosneft’s banal reprisal for his stance on Bashneft. Rather, we are speaking here of a conceptual

¹⁴ T. Stanovaya, “Bor’ba strategiy,” *Politcom.ru*, 16 May 2016, <http://politcom.ru/21095.html>.

fight¹⁵ between adherents of liberal economic principles and those who believe these principles can be forsaken for practical efficiency when state interests are at stake. It is wrong to sell Bashneft to Rosneft from an economic point of view. However, this deal is effective from when trying to maximize budget revenues on the spur of the moment, as a last minute quick fix to close a budgetary gap. The arrest of Ulyukayev was not an exceptional, private case, but a new rule in this new context. This means liberal values will be more likely to lose out to these sorts of “efficiencies.”

FROM RESHUFFLE TO STRUCTURAL SHIFT

The forming of the Russian regime’s new psychology was first observed in post-Crimean Russia. Then came the shake-up, from both administrative reshuffles and criminal cases. The onset of structural and institutional transformation—adjustment of the form to the new content—seems to be a logical consequence of this series of changes. So far, the decisions on establishment of the Russian Guards followed by the liquidation of the FSKN (Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation), and the FMS (Federal Migration Service, whose functions were transferred to the weaker Ministry of the Interior), have been made in line with this logic. The Russian Guards are meant to simplify the management of the *siloviki* in the event of the country’s destabilization.

The institutional transformation is intended to go much deeper: structural changes based on the accumulation of the regime’s new properties are being naturally delayed. In the current situation, the system has been held hostage to two fundamental factors: a low-price energy market, which is keeping the government on “boxed lunches,” and the approaching end of Vladimir Putin’s 3rd term. These factors have laid the groundwork for radical institutional changes in the government’s workings, which should eventually lead to an era of maturity in Putin’ regime. The system will then reach the next point of bifurcation, when it will have to make a strategic

¹⁵ Eadem, “Kto sdes vlast’, ili zachem Sechinu arest Ulyukayeva,” *Carnegie.ru*, 17 November 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=66176>.

choice between structural transformation under the continuation of Putin’s rule (including re-editing of the Constitution), and transformation of the political leadership (with election of an heir to the system of “collective Putin”). In both cases, the country is facing huge transformations. Which route is taken will bear a strong mark of the events of March 2014, which have become critical to development of the Russian state.

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BEN NOBLE

THE STATE DUMA, THE “CRIMEAN CONSENSUS,”
AND VOLODIN’S REFORMS

On becoming chairman of the State Duma in October 2016, Vyacheslav Volodin introduced a range of reforms. In light of these changes—and to mark the end of the first session of the Duma’s 7th convocation—there have been various attempts to evaluate the emerging nature of “Volodin’s Duma.”¹ Have recent developments really affected the Duma’s place in Russian politics; is it all empty PR; or is it too soon to tell? This chapter begins by placing recent Duma reforms in the context of public opinion and the annexation of Crimea, before discussing the details of institutional reforms introduced at the beginning of the 7th convocation. The chapter also discusses preliminary evidence regarding the effects of these changes, with a focus on three subjects: whether the Duma is a “place for discussion;” whether the “Crimean consensus” has been maintained; and whether the Duma leadership has been able to reset relations with the executive. Overall, the evidence across these three areas is mixed—something this chapter argues is a reflection of timing: it is simply too soon to make authoritative judgments on the nature and effects of Volodin’s reforms.

¹ This phrase is the title of the author’s *Intersection* post from 13 December 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/volodins-duma>. This chapter draws on some of the material presented in that post.

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE “CRIMEAN CONSENSUS”

The Russian State Duma has been a much-maligned body. The proliferation of derogatory monikers like “rubber stamp,”² “rabid printer,”³ “voting machine,”⁴ and legal “conveyor”⁵ belt reflect the popular perception that the lower chamber of Russia’s Federal Assembly is an ineffectual institution—a body stuffed with inactive deputies, whose task is simply to distract citizens from real decision-making processes.⁶

This negative portrayal of the Duma was particularly pronounced during the beginning of the lower chamber’s 6th convocation. Protests following the December 2011 parliamentary elections challenged the Duma’s legitimacy, and, although certain opposition politicians attempted to block the passage of repressive legislation directed at protestors—most notably during the “Italian strike” of 5 June 2012—the legislature gained a reputation for quickly adopting bills drafted by the Government and the President.⁷

Russia’s annexation of Crimea altered perceptions of the Duma—at least in the eyes of a significant proportion of Russian citizens. March 2014 saw the beginning of the only period since Vladimir Putin’s first election to the presidency during which a majority of Russian citizens viewed the Duma in a positive light (see Levada Centre survey data in figure 1). As citizens rallied around the legislature—comparatively, at least—so too did political parties with parliamentary seats rally around the president, often

² See S. Rosenberg, “Russia’s election and the need for legitimacy,” *BBC*, 13 September 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37339192.

³ See M. Yepifanova, A. Mineyev, “Vzbesivshiy printer v roli gayechnogo klyucha,” *Novaya gazeta*, 9 July 2014, www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2014/07/05/60224-vzbesivshiy-printer-v-rol-i-gaechnogo-klyucha.

⁴ See G. Kuznetsov, “100 dney posle vyborov,” *Nezavisimaya*, 17 January 2017, www.ng.ru/politics/2017-01-17/2_6904_100days.html?print=Y.

⁵ See “Ot redaktsii: Prazdnik poslushaniya,” *Vedomosti*, 24 November 2011, www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2011/11/24/prazdnik_poslushaniya.

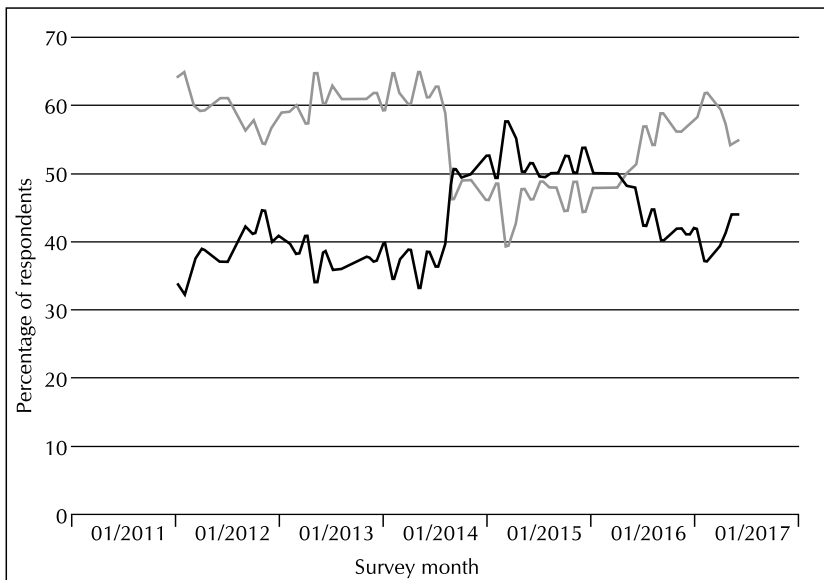
⁶ See “Pravila zhizni deputatov v Rossii,” *Lenta.ru*, 2 December 2014, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2014/12/02/oniskazalipravdu>.

⁷ For a discussion of law-making during the Duma’s 6th convocation, see B. Noble, E. Schulmann, “Parliament and the Legislative Decision-making Process,” in: D. Treisman (ed.), *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics and Policy in Putin’s Russia*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press (forthcoming).

presenting a united front, in what became known as the “Crimean consensus.”⁸

This more positive evaluation of the Duma did not last, however. As figure 1 shows, the balance of approval tilted to negative by the end of 2015, albeit slightly less so than pre-annexation levels. Going into the September 2016 elections, 62% of respondents to a Levada survey reported not approving of the Duma’s activities.

Figure 1. Approval of the State Duma—Levada Centre survey data, 2011–2016



Notes: The grey line relates to the response “Do not approve,” the black line to “Approve” in response to the question “Do you on the whole approve or not approve of the activities of the State Duma of Russia?” Data taken from *Levada.ru*. See www.levada.ru/indikatory/odobrenie-organov-vlasti. See “Odobrenie organov vlasti,” *Levada.ru*, www.levada.ru/indikatory/odobrenie-organov-vlasti.

⁸ See D. Kulikov, “Krymskiy konsensus: politicheskiy smysl i znachenie,” *RIA Novosti*, 24 March 2015, https://ria.ru/zinoviev_club/20150324/1054181774.html.

THE DUMA'S 7TH CONVOCATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The State Duma's new chairman, Vyacheslav Volodin, has set about to change the body's standing, both in the eyes of citizens and with regard to other political institutions in today's Russia.⁹ Since being elected, Volodin has directed a raft of changes aimed, it seems, at raising the Duma's professionalism and prestige. Efforts to increase deputy discipline have included: a ban on voting by proxy on the Duma floor;¹⁰ a crackdown on deputy absenteeism from plenary sessions, by restricting the legitimate reasons for not attending sessions and by introducing pay deductions for non-attendance;¹¹ a cancellation of the Duma's traditional New Year's party;¹² a requirement for deputies to deal personally with appeals from citizens;¹³ the creation of a working group—chaired by Communist Party (KPRF) deputy and first deputy chairman of the Duma, Ivan Mel'nikov—to develop requirements for introduced bills, with a view to improving the quality of law-making;¹⁴ and the introduction within United Russia of formalised measures to filter legislative initiatives, partly with a view to limiting the emergence of odd, PR-motivated bills.¹⁵ But, on the other hand: deputies have

⁹ See O. Churakova, "Deputaty Gosdumy budut yediny v voprosakh bezopasnosti i vneshney politiki," *Vedomosti*, 6 October 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/10/06/659809-deputati-gosdumi-edini.

¹⁰ See "Gosduma zapretila deputatam golosovat' po doverennosti," *Vedomosti*, 21 October 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2016/10/21/661949-gosduma-zapretila-golosovat-po-doverennosti.

¹¹ See I. Rodin, "Yedinorossy obeshchayut vysokuyu yavku v Gosdumu," *Nezavisimaya*, 17 October 2016, www.ng.ru/politics/2016-10-17/3_edro.html.

¹² See N. Demchenko, "SMI uznali ob otkaze 'Nochnym volkam' v zayavkakh na prezidentskiye granty," *RBK*, 22 November 2016, www.rbc.ru/politics/22/11/2016/583340e59a79471b53c6771c.

¹³ See T. Zamakhina, "Deputatam pridetsya lichno rabotat' s obrashcheniyami grazhdan," *RG.ru*, 8 November 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/11/08/deputatam-pridetsia-lichno-rabotat-s-obrashcheniyami-grazhdan.html>.

¹⁴ See O. Churakova, "Gosdumenadoyel imidzh 'beshenogoprintera'," *Vedomosti*, 16 December 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/12/16/670030-gosduma-ofiltruet. Deputies will also now be aided when writing bills by a dedicated law-making centre, staffed by lawyers and legal experts (O. Churakova, "Pisat' zakony deputatam pomozhet tsentr zakonotvorchestva," *Vedomosti*, 24 January 2017, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2017/01/24/674578-pisat-zakoni-deputatam).

¹⁵ See T. Zamakhina, "Fil'tr dlya zakonov," *RG.ru*, 14 November 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/11/14/edinaia-rossiia-postavila-zaslou-ot-strannyh->

been returned the right to use VIP lounges in airports;¹⁶ the number of cars with *migalki*—blue flashing lights with sirens, that give priority through traffic—has gone up;¹⁷ more money has been made available for law-making expertise;¹⁸ the number of parliamentary advisors and aides has risen;¹⁹ deputies might be given the right to bestow an honour—*blagodarnost’ deputata* (deputy’s gratitude)—on individuals and organisations;²⁰ and Government ministers and their deputies are now required to present and discuss their legislative initiatives in person in Duma committees.²¹

A “PLACE FOR DISCUSSION”?

Moments of reform in the Duma are now ritually signalled by the claim that the lower chamber has, once again, become a “place for discussion.”²² Sure enough, Volodin has made such a claim in the

zakonov.html; V. Markova, “Zachem parlamentarii pridumyvayut strannyye zakonoprojekty,” *MK.ru*, 20 April 2016, www.mk.ru/politics/2016/04/20/zachem-parlamentarii-pridumyvayut-strannyye-zakonoproekty.html.

¹⁶ See M. Makutina, “Deputaty snova vazhnyye persony,” *RBK*, 10 November 2016, www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2016/11/11/582479d79a7947f941592492.

¹⁷ See “Putin rasporyadilsya dat’ deputatam bol’she mashin s ‘migalkami,’” *Meduza*, 26 October 2016, <https://meduza.io/news/2016/10/26/putin-rasporyadilsya-dat-deputatam-bolshe-mashin-s-migalkami>.

¹⁸ See O. Churakova, “Gosduma potratit 100 mln rubley na yekspertizu zakonoprojektov,” *Vedomosti*, 17 November 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/17/665269-gosduma-ekspertizu-zakonoproektov.

¹⁹ See I. Nagornykh, “Spiker Gosdumy vospol’zuyetsya sovetami,” *Kommersant.ru*, 10 November 2016, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3138111>; T. Zamakhina, “U glav dumskikh fraktsiy budet po chetyre sovetnika,” *RG.ru*, 10 November 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/11/10/u-glav-dumskih-frakcij-budet-po-chetyre-sovetnika.html>.

²⁰ See S. Samokhina, V. Khamrayev, M. Ivanov, “Deputatam vydayut gramotu,” *Kommersant.ru*, 12 December 2016, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3169359>.

²¹ See O. Churakova, “Gosduma samoutverzhdayetsya cherez apparatnyuyu bor’bu s pravitel’stvom,” *Vedomosti*, 10 November 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/10/664426-gosduma-samoutverzhdaetsya; P. Panov, M. Yurshina, A. Galanina, “Pravitel’stvo mozhet izmenit’ reglament raboty s Gosdumoy,” *Izvestiya*, 30 November 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/648486>.

²² Boris Gryzlov suggested on 29 December 2003 that the Duma “is not a venue in which it is necessary to hold political battles, to assert political slogans and ideologies. It is a venue in which people should be occupied with constructive, effective law-making activities” (a transcript containing Gryzlov’s remarks is available here: <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/1386/>). These comments have since been condensed into the oft-cited phrase “the Duma is not the place for political discussions”—see, for example, the reference on page 97 of the chapter

context of his recent reforms.²³ However, going by the institutional changes already instituted, it seems that, rather than opening up space for discussion, the new speaker seems focused on creating a well-disciplined cadre of deputies, aimed at, *inter alia*, implementing the vision set out in Putin's address (*poslanie*) to the Federal Assembly.²⁴ The Volodin reforms are top-down, bureaucratic-administrative reforms, which appear to be motivated more by efforts to consolidate the speaker's power *vertikal'*, rather than to foster parliamentarians as champions of constituents' concerns and influential political actors in their own right. If there is any desire on the Kremlin's part to make the Duma a "place for discussion," then this renewed debate will be tightly controlled. Discussion, according to Putin, should be aimed at solving important tasks, rather than being an end in itself.²⁵ And there is a sense that deputies will have more room for discussion on economic issues important to the regions, whereas they will present a united front on security and foreign policy.²⁶ In effect, this is an example of something the political scientist Rory Truex calls "representation within bounds"—when deputies are encouraged to act as genuine citizen representatives, but only regarding areas outside the core concerns of the regime, including political reform.²⁷ Indeed, in an example suggesting that the rhetoric of change might have outpaced the reality of reform, a presidential bill regarding criminal responsibility for improperly launching criminal cases was recently adopted by the Duma without amendment, in spite of calls for significant changes voiced by the lead committee and the Duma's Legal Department.²⁸

by Paul Chaisty in: G. Gill, I. Young (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, Abingdon–New York: Routledge, 2011.

²³ See "Spiker Gosdumy Vyacheslav Volodin nazval parlament mestom dlya diskussiy," *RBK*, 12 January 2017, www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/587741cf9a79472cddb825d7.

²⁴ See M. Yurshina, "Gosduma pristupayet k realizatsii poslaniya prezidenta," *Izvestiya*, 11 January 2017, <http://izvestia.ru/news/656814>.

²⁵ See V. Kazantsev, "Gosduma vozvrashchayet status mesta dlya diskussiy," *Nezavisimaya*, 6 October 2016, www.ng.ru/politics/2016-10-06/1_gosduma.html.

²⁶ See O. Churakova, "Deputaty Gosdumy budut..." op.cit.

²⁷ R. Truex, *Making Autocracy Work: Representation and Responsiveness in Modern China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

²⁸ See M. Ozerova, "Prezidentskiye zakonoprojekty lishayut deputatov golosa," *MK.ru*, 1 December 2016, www.mk.ru/politics/2016/12/01/prezidentskie-zakonoproekty-lishayut-deputatov-golosa.html. This case speaks

It is, of course, difficult to measure accurately the level of discussion within the Duma. However, if the amount of time taken to discuss the budget bill on the Duma floor is any indication of the level of scrutiny and discussion by deputies, then the 2017 budget bill received *less* scrutiny than the 2016 budget bill, although more than the 2015 budget bill.²⁹ This goes against claims that the Duma has become a place for substantive debate when compared to the previous, 6th convocation. At the very least, this information on budget discussions should make us cautious when evaluating claims of the return of healthy debate to the Duma.

Deputies have themselves grumbled about the new reforms.³⁰ This is, in part, tied to the difficulties associated with working in regional constituencies, now that the number of weeks for such work in the monthly parliamentary cycle has been reduced from two to one—a particular challenge for deputies representing citizens in federal subjects far from Moscow. More generally, some deputies have balked at the disciplinary measures introduced during the first legislative session of the 7th convocation. Possibly as a result, the number of sick days taken by deputies has increased markedly since fines were introduced for missing plenary Duma sessions without a valid excuse.³¹ So far, however, no fines have been imposed on deputies for absenteeism since 16 November 2016,³² although the higher attendance numbers have caused problems in the Duma

to the absence of a systematic, unified approach to criminal law policy in contemporary Russia—something noted by a recent report from the Centre for Strategic Research (*Razvite sistemy ugolovnogo pravosudya: vektory, mery reformirovaniya, osnovnyye igroki*, <http://csr.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Report-12.01.2017-2.pdf>).

²⁹ See the author’s article—“Amending Budget Bills in the Russian State Duma,” *Post-Communist Economies* 29 (2017) for a defense, and use of, this measure, as well as data for previous years. Of course, the measure does not capture activity by deputies in Duma committees or in the pre-parliamentary stages of budget preparation.

³⁰ See V. Kholmogorova, M. Makutina, “Deputaty pozhalovalis’ na kontrol’ nad distsiplinoy v Gosdume,” *RBK*, 1 December 2016, www.rbc.ru/politics/01/12/2016/583ef1cc9a79474bceaba192.

³¹ See M. Makutina, “Bol’nichnyy vmesto shtrafa,” *RBK*, 18 November 2016, www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2016/11/21/582f1e349a79474ffdb11a17.

³² See “Gosduma: ni odin otsuststvovavshiy na zasedaniyakh deputat s 16 noyabrya 2016 goda ne byl nakazan vychetom iz zarplaty,” *Nezavisimaya*, 18 January 2017, www.ng.ru/politics/2017-01-18/3_6905_duma.html.

lifts and dining room.³³ One United Russia deputy—Alexandr Skorobogat'ko—has even given up his mandate, ostensibly in response to the inflexibility of Volodin's new regime.³⁴ In the words of the political commentator Fyodor Krasheninnikov, deputies are “simply cogs in the system—officials, and not politicians.”³⁵ And, in another metaphor linked to the new disciplinary measures introduced by Volodin, deputies have been likened to “soldiers.”³⁶

MAINTAINING CONSENSUS?

Although the September elections returned a Duma dominated by the “party of power,” United Russia (which won 343 out of 450 seats), UR deputies did not monopolise leadership positions in the lower chamber. 13 out of 26 committees were taken up at the beginning of the 7th convocation by non-UR deputies—3 for Just Russia, and 5 apiece for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and KPRF.³⁷ Distributing posts to nominally “opposition” parties is one way by which the Duma leadership—and the curators of domestic policy in the Kremlin—can seek to foster the “Crimean consensus” in a period during which the urgency of external conditions prompting the initial “rally round the flag” effect has fallen. At the same time, KPRF deputy Vladimir Pozdnyakov has argued that, even “if the head of a committee is from an opposition party, then the majority of deputies in the committee are, all the same, from United Russia, and they determine all decisions.”³⁸

³³ See “Punktual'nyye deputaty okkupirovali lifty Gosdumy,” *Lenta.ru*, 2 November 2016, <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/11/02/fullhouse>; “V dumskoy stolovoy vznikla davka iz-za zapreta golosovat' po doverennosti,” *Lenta.ru*, 21 October 2016, <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/10/21/bitvazaedu>.

³⁴ See S. Samokhina, Ye. Grobman, “Gosdumu pokidayut milliardy,” *Kommersant.ru*, 28 November 2016, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3156099>.

³⁵ See O. Churakova, “Novaya Gosduma nikak ne mozhet izbavit'sya ot starykh 'khvostov',” *Vedomosti*, 30 November 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/11/30/667488-gosduma-starih-hvostov.

³⁶ See G. Kuznetsov, *op.cit.*

³⁷ See “Komitety i komissii Gosudarstvennoy Dumy,” www.duma.gov.ru/structure/committees.

³⁸ See M. Makutina, V. Kholmogorova, “V novuyu Dumu vnesli vdvoe men'she zakonov po sravneniyu s proshloy osen'yu,” *RBK*, 21 December 2016, www.rbc.ru/politics/21/12/2016/585a9a809a7947a26686175f. Possibly in response

This suggests—somewhat unsurprisingly—that formal changes may appear less consequential than at first sight.

Data on voting patterns and evidence of a maintained “Crimean consensus” is similarly mixed. According to a joint report from the Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research (ISEPI) and the Centre of Law-making Assistance (TsSZ), the frequency of “consensus voting”—when a majority (more than 65%) of each party votes in favour of a bill—was higher in the first session of the 7th convocation than during the spring 2016 session for bills considered in 2nd reading: 55.5% versus 26.3%, respectively.³⁹ Although a number of commentators—including the authors of the ISEPI/TsSZ report—have attributed this rise in consensus voting to the incorporation of opposition party views in the form of amendments during 2nd reading, there is no evidence that this is, in fact, the reason for the observed voting patterns.

Moreover, an alternative statistic regarding voter unity—the frequency with which votes are unanimous (in practice, when 95% or more of deputies vote in favour of a motion)—paints a different picture.⁴⁰ Figure 2 presents the percentage of such unanimous votes for all previous convocations. The trend over time is clear: a rise in the proportion of unanimous votes over time. Within the 6th convocation, these same data paint a picture that will be similarly unsurprising for observers of Russian legislative politics. Figure 3 presents the percentage of all votes that were unanimous for each session of this convocation. The lowest point

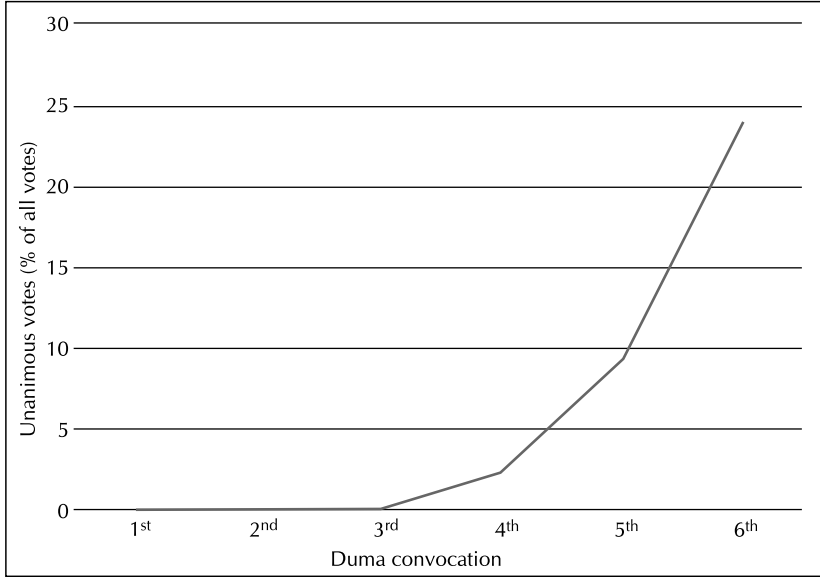
to this, the KPRF’s Central Committee has debated whether to shift to a more oppositional stance in the Duma, see pp. 13–14 in a joint 2017 report from the Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research (ISEPI) and the Center of Law-making Assistance (*Rejting zakonotvorcev: soderzhatel’nyye i partiynyye trendy pervoi sessii Gosdumy VII sozyva*, www.doc.knigi-x.ru/22raznoe/54633-1-rejting-zakonotvorcev-soderzhatelnie-partiynie-trendi-pervoy-sessii-gosdumi-vii-soziva-yanva.php).

³⁹ See *ibidem*. Unfortunately, the report does not provide information on “consensus voting” in earlier legislative sessions.

⁴⁰ Strict unanimity—that is, when 100% of deputies vote in favour of a motion—will likely give a distorted picture of actual support amongst deputies, given, for example, the temporary absence of deputies from the chamber or the fact that certain seats are unfilled, pending by-elections (as with the case of Sergey Naryshkin’s seat at the beginning of the 7th convocation). 95%, therefore, serves as an approximate measure of unanimity which covers such cases, although future work should explore how unanimity patterns might vary for different percentages.

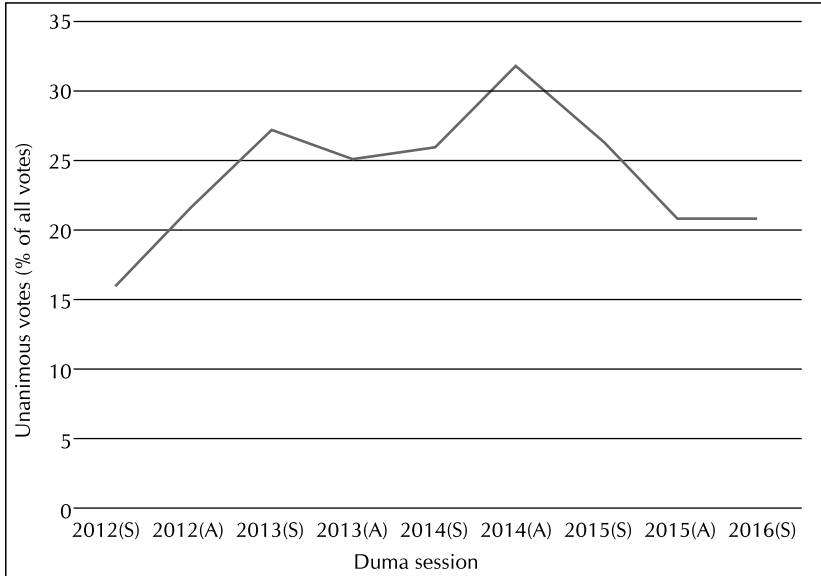
for unanimous votes was the first session following the contested December 2011 elections; the highest point came soon after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Figure 2. Unanimous voting across Duma convocations



Notes: These data are taken from the Duma's online archive of voting results: <http://vote.duma.gov.ru>.

Interestingly, however, the first session of the 7th convocation—the autumn session of 2016—saw *only* 11% of votes achieving unanimity, which was a marked reduction from the levels observed during the previous convocation. At the same time, although this significantly lower percentage is interesting to note, it is not yet clear whether it is an intimation of voting practices to come. It is important to remember that the first session of the 7th convocation was *unusual*, given a number of factors: the early termination of the 6th convocation; the shortened sitting time of the autumn session compared to other years; the significant influx of new deputies, unfamiliar with the Duma's practices and procedures; and the session's focus on passing budget bills—something that takes place every year in the autumn session, but not in the first session of convocations, which have historically been spring sessions.

Figure 3. Unanimous voting across Duma sessions (6th convocation)

Notes: “S” refers to spring sessions of the Duma’s year; “A” refers to autumn sessions. These data are taken from the Duma’s online archive of voting results: <http://vote.duma.gov.ru/>.

RESETTING RELATIONS WITH THE EXECUTIVE?

The Duma leadership wants a different kind of relationship with both the Government and the Presidential Administration. This was made apparent at the start of the autumn 2016 session, with attempts to restrict access for Presidential Administration officials to the Duma Council.⁴¹ (As a former first deputy chief of staff in the Presidential Administration [PA], Volodin is well aware of the PA’s capacity—and desire—to micro-manage Duma politics.) The perceived failure of the-then “curator” of relations between the PA and the Federal Assembly, Sergey Smirnov, to manage this situation effectively led to his removal from office.⁴² Other changes include:

⁴¹ See O. Churakova, “Gosduma samoutverzhdayetsya...,” *op.cit.*

⁴² See S. Samokhina, “Federal’nomu sobraniyu naydut novogo kuratora,” *Kommersant.ru*, 12 December 2016, kommersant.ru/doc/3169217; N. Galimova,

requirements for the Government to produce—or inform about the preparation of—regulations (*podzakonnyye akty*) needed to implement legal changes at bills' 3rd reading in the Duma; a shake-up of "Government hour," when ministers report on their work in front of, and answer questions from, deputies;⁴³ and calls for a formalised role for deputy involvement in the pre-parliamentary development of key bills, in a practice redolent of "zero readings" for budget bills.⁴⁴ According to the political commentator Konstantin Kalachev, the Duma wants to be a partner with the Government, not merely an annexe to it.⁴⁵ That this renegotiation of the relationship between the Duma and the executive is even possible speaks—according to the political commentator Abbas Gallyamov—to the personal relationship between Volodin and President Putin.⁴⁶ Indeed, this view should temper claims that Volodin's reforms are a manifestation of autonomous parliamentarism.

This list of challenges also includes the longer-running battle by the Duma leadership against covert bill initiation by Government departments.⁴⁷ In order to circumvent the oftentimes arduous process of intra-Government sign-off, ministries and other executive bodies have reverted to introducing their policy initiatives through deputy proxies. Both core executive actors and the Duma leadership have complained about this backdoor route, which diminishes core executive control over policy-making and can lead to the displacement of intra-executive disagreements into the legislature. There are three clear problems with attempting to stop this practice,

"Kurator Gosdumy i Sovfeda uvollilsya iz Kremlya iz-za nedovol'stva Kiriienko," *RBK*, 12 December 2016, www.rbc.ru/politics/12/12/2016/584ecd739a79473cf03b9a26.

⁴³ See O. Churakova, A. Prokopenko, "Gosduma budet zhestche rabotat' s pravitel'stvom," *Vedomosti*, 15 December 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/12/15/669795-gosduma-zhestche-pravitel'stvom.

⁴⁴ See A. Pestereva, "Deputaty khotyat obsuzhdat' zakonoprojekty vmeste s pravitel'stvom," *Kommersant.ru*, 17 January 2017, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3194841>.

⁴⁵ See O. Churakova, A. Prokopenko, *op.cit.*

⁴⁶ See V. Kholmogorova, "Gosduma uskorenno rassmotrit popravki k zakonu o kontrole kabmina," *RBK*, 20 December 2016, www.rbc.ru/politics/20/12/2016/5858153e9a7947ad825127e1.

⁴⁷ See S. Zhavoronkov, "Duma po Volodinu: chetkiye zakony i nikakikh korporativov," *Polit.ru*, 22 November 2016, <http://polit.ru/article/2016/11/22/duma>.

however. Firstly, executive actors could simply learn to do a better job of covering their tracks when introducing bills through deputies. Secondly, a united executive occasionally introduces initiatives—sometimes unpopular measures—through other formal bill sponsors.⁴⁸ For example, a bill drafted by the Presidential Administration (concerning changes to the voting procedures used to elect members of the Public Chamber) was introduced into the Duma by a group of deputies on 15 December 2016 and signed into law on 28 December without amendment.⁴⁹ If the executive itself takes advantage of this covert practice, then it is unlikely to be an effective champion of effective reform.⁵⁰ And thirdly, it is not clear whether this clampdown will also involve amendments made to bills during second reading, which sometimes modify bills beyond recognition.⁵¹ If it does not, then the proposed reform regarding bills will have little effect, since executive actors will be able to achieve the same goal by other means. Alexandr Shokhin—President of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs—has often voiced criticism of such practices in audiences with Putin.⁵² In spite of promises for reform, however, little has changed—and it is far from certain that significant results will be achieved in the near future. Indeed, there is already evidence that—in spite of attempts to crack down on the practice—the Duma leadership has so far been unsuccessful in the 7th convocation in ending proxy bill sponsorship, as well as preventing the introduction of concept-changing amendments to bills during 2nd reading.⁵³

⁴⁸ See “Zakonodatel'naya retseptura,” *Kommersant.ru*, 26 January 2015, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2644727>.

⁴⁹ See M. Ozerova, “Zakonnoye kachestvo Vyacheslava Volodina: v Gosdume nachinayet rabotat' ‘pokhoronnaya komanda’,” *MK.ru*, 10 January 2017, www.mk.ru/politics/2017/01/10/zakonnoe-kachestvo-vyacheslava-volodina-v-gosdume-nachinaet-rabotat-pokhoronnaya-komanda.html. This is the bill’s webpage: [http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/\(Spravka\)?OpenAgent&RN=55549-7](http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/(Spravka)?OpenAgent&RN=55549-7).

⁵⁰ See A. Mel'nikova, “Poklonskaya priglasila Uchitel'ya na ‘molitvennoye Stoyanie’, chtoby veruyushchiye yego ‘vrazumili’,” *Znak*, www.znak.com/2016-12-16/v_gosdume_hotyat_uporyadochit_vzaimodeystvie_ryadovyh_deputatov_s_administraciy_prezidenta.

⁵¹ See “Kak zhe vy besite,” *Lenta.ru*, 22 March 2013, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2013/03/22/printer>.

⁵² “Rabochiy den’,” <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/events/news/18709>.

⁵³ *Rejting zakonotvortsev...*, op.cit., pp. 10, 22–26.

CONCLUSIONS

This is not the first time that the Duma leadership has attempted to stamp its mark on the lower chamber. Volodin's reforms are an effective way for the new speaker to demonstrate that this is his Duma—not Naryshkin's, not Gryzlov's, not Seleznyov's, not Rybkin's. Portraying past actors as ineffective in contrast to the promise of the new is a familiar approach: as KPRF deputy Nikolay Kolomeitsev has argued, "each new speaker and each new deputy is sure that all previous incumbents were time-wasters."⁵⁴ But have the speaker's reforms been effective? In his 1 December 2016 address to the Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin argued that the "role of the State Duma as a representative organ has increased. In general, the authority of the legislature has been strengthened."⁵⁵ If Putin is right, that is quite a feat to achieve in two months. On the other end of the spectrum of evaluation, however, Fyodor Krasheninnikov claims that the new Duma is "boring, predictable, and controlled."⁵⁶ Who is right?

This chapter approached the question by looking at three areas: the level of discussion in the Duma; indicators of consensus between political parties with seats in the lower chamber; and efforts by the Duma's leadership to alter its relationship with executive actors. The evidence from the beginning of the 7th convocation in all three areas is mixed: it is still too early to tell what long-term effects recent reforms will have on law-making in the lower chamber, as well as perceptions of the body's place in Russian

⁵⁴ See V. Khamrayev, M. Ivanov, "Zakonoprojekty v pervom spisanii," *Kommersant.ru*, 11 January 2017, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3187994>.

⁵⁵ A transcript of Putin's speech is available here: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>. Putin has previously expressed a desire for the State Duma to be more than the supine Supreme Soviet in the USSR: "We need an effectively operating State Duma. Not one that obediently rubber stamps any proposal as in Soviet times, but one that thinks" ("Putin: Rossii ne nuzhna Gosduma, kotoraya 'poslushno shtampuyet' zakony," RIA Novosti, 28 October 2011, <https://ria.ru/politics/20111028/473755833.html>). At the same time, Putin has praised the lower chamber's support for Government policy, contrasting the Duma's behaviour against that of the Ukrainian Rada ("Putin ne khochet 'ukrainizatsii' Gosdumy," *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, 18 October 2011, www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2011/10/18/6680385/?attempt=1).

⁵⁶ See O. Churakova, "Deputyaty Gosdumy stali...," *op.cit.*

politics. In November 2016, approval of the Duma’s activities saw an increase to 44%; December 2016 saw the same approval level.⁵⁷ In spite of claims to the contrary in the Russian media,⁵⁸ it is not clear whether these changes can be attributed to Volodin’s reforms. A similar rise in approval of the activities of President Putin, Prime Minister Medvedev, the Government, and regional governors suggests a broader shift in support for political institutions and individuals, rather than a localised response to the appearance of increased parliamentary professionalism. Recent reforms might change the State Duma’s role and place in Russian politics in the long-run—only time will tell—but the dominant role played by Volodin in their genesis might prove a hindrance to establishing lasting, depersonalised sources of legislative autonomy.

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⁵⁷ Note, however, that the disapproval level increased from 54% to 55%.

⁵⁸ See G. Kuznetsov, *op.cit.*

FABIAN BURKHARDT

PRESIDENTIAL POWER IN PUTIN'S THIRD TERM:
WAS CRIMEA A CRITICAL JUNCTURE
IN DOMESTIC POLITICS?

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 marked a watershed in international law and politics. It caused, as the political scientist Richard Sakwa puts it, "the most dangerous confrontation since the end of the Cold War, if not since the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962."¹ At the time, even seasoned analysts were unsure what this watershed might entail. Writing shortly afterwards, the political scientist Andrew Wilson struggled over whether it meant an "immediate end to the post-Cold War order. Or, like the original Crimean War in the 1850s, it might mark the beginning of a transition to something else."²

DID CRIMEA MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN DOMESTIC POLITICS?

While the argument that the first land grab since the end of the World War II in Europe marks an international caesura is straightforward, the assessment of its meaning for domestic politics in Russia demands a closer look. Beyond the obvious observation that Russia (*de facto*, not *de jure*) incorporated Crimea and the city of Sevastopol into its federal system, many aspects of Russian

¹ R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2015, p. 238.

² A. Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2014, p. 205.

politics were affected. After Crimea, those who had participated in the diverse, anti-government “Bolotnaya” protest movement of 2011–2012 were split over how to respond to Russia’s actions in Ukraine; subsequent subnational elections in Russian regions grew even less competitive; independent media increasingly came under pressure; and the “politics of fear”³ was applied against potential challengers of the official policy. This tendency led Vladimir Gel’man to conclude that the Ukraine crisis should be viewed as a “trigger event that accelerated the Kremlin’s existing trend when it came to changing the domestic political agenda.”⁴

This combination of continuity and accelerated change after Crimea sparked divergent assessments of Russia’s regime type. While Gel’man sees an increased militarization and personalism, he still puts the Russian regime in a bracket of electoral authoritarianism, citing its regular multi-party elections.⁵ In the view of Lev Gudkov, one of Russia’s leading sociologists, state media and social media are both used as an instrument of propaganda to manipulate public opinion: Crimea, in this respect, marked a return to Soviet paradigms and even a “relapse into totalitarianism.”⁶ Kirill Rogov, an independent analyst and former senior research fellow at the Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy, and Nikolay Petrov, a professor at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics, take Gel’man’s argument about regime personalization and deinstitutionalization a step further. In Putin’s 3rd term between 2012 and 2016,⁷ they believe, the regime has transitioned from a form of “corporatism” to “sultanism.”⁸ In sum, those authors adhering to cross-national regime type classifications tend to

³ V. Gel’man, “The Politics of Fear: How Russia’s Rulers Counter Their Rivals,” *Russian Politics* 1, no. 1 (2016), pp. 27–45.

⁴ Idem, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015, p. 127.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ L. Gudkov, “Putin’s Relapse into Totalitarianism,” in: *The State of Russia: What Comes Next?*, Houndmills–Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 86–109.

⁷ The next presidential elections are slated for the 18 March 2018, the 4th anniversary of the annexation of Crimea.

⁸ K. Rogov, N. Petrov, “Ispolnitel’naya vlast’ i silovyye korporatsii,” in: *Politicheskoe razvitie Rossii. 2014–2016: Instituty i praktiki avtoritarnoy konsolidatsii*, ed. K. Rogov, Moscow: Fond “Liberal’naya Missiya,” 2016, pp. 133–153.

argue that Russia has remained within the same regime type of electoral authoritarianism or personalist dictatorship. Others who focus on changes over time from a non-comparative, longitudinal perspective seem to stress the qualitative changes Russia has undergone after Crimea. In this chapter, I first argue that a before/after analysis of Crimea as a potential critical juncture in domestic politics can be a useful research design for this purpose. In the following sections, I divide several key dimensions of presidential power such approval ratings, appointment and dismissal powers, repression, and presidential legislative success in periods before and after Crimea to assess the effect of this “external shock.” The conclusion summarizes the findings: Crimea caused a “rally around the leader” effect both in terms of presidential approval ratings and legislative activity and thus contributed to a more pronounced personalist form of authoritarian governance, but other key regime characteristics remained in place. Crimea was thus both a trigger and an accelerator for domestic politics and presidential power in particular. On the other hand, slow-moving, more inert features allow the Russian regime to adapt to external challenges, but also make wholesale changes even in the face of major external shocks improbable.

A BEFORE-AFTER ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER: CRIMEA AS CRITICAL JUNCTURE?

This chapter aims to tackle this ambiguity of continuity and change in domestic politics by employing a “before-after” research design⁹ to assess presidential power in Vladimir Putin’s 3rd term. A single, longitudinal case—i.e. Putin’s 3rd presidential term—is divided into two sub-cases with the annexation of Crimea as the dividing line. If presidential power significantly differs before and after this alleged watershed, one could argue that Crimea also marked a critical juncture in domestic politics. Critical junctures arise in periods

⁹ A.L. George, A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005, pp. 167–167.

of crisis and are seen to be produced by “generative cleavages”¹⁰ such as Russia’s strained relations with the West. In the course of a relatively short window of opportunity “the range of plausible choices open to powerful political actors expands substantially and the consequences of their decisions for the outcome of interest are potentially much more momentous.”¹¹ The junctures are critical because in the aftermath it becomes increasingly difficult or even impossible to return to the *status quo ante*, and the previously available range of choices is narrowed down to the one path selected.¹² Moreover, change that ensues such critical junctures has to be significant, swift and encompassing.¹³

With the annexation of Crimea as an exogenous “shock” or “treatment”—brought upon Russia and the world by a small group of actors which reportedly included president Putin and the four officials Sergey Ivanov (head of the presidential administration), Nikolay Patrushev (Secretary of the Security Council), Alexandr Bortnikov (Director of the FSB), and Sergey Shoygu (Minister of Defense)¹⁴—a quasi-experimental design can be achieved by holding a maximum of potential factors constant across these two sub-cases before and after.

Several challenges arise with this kind of research design. Two stand out: firstly, oftentimes more than one variable changes at a time making causal inference complicated. The annexation and the subsequent conflict between Russia and Western states triggered several waves of sanctions by the EU, the U.S. as well as other countries with increasing intensity, and counter-sanctions imposed by Russia in August 2014 as a response to the second sanctions wave launched by Western countries after the downing of the Malaysian airliner MH17. According to some computations,

¹⁰ J. Hogan, “Remoulding the Critical Junctures Approach,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 3 (2006), pp. 657–679.

¹¹ G. Capoccia, R.D. Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007), p. 343.

¹² J. Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (2000), pp. 507–548.

¹³ J. Hogan, *op.cit.*

¹⁴ M. Zygar, *All the Kremlin’s Men: The Four Metamorphoses of Vladimir Putin*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2016.

"1.97% of the GDP quarter-on-quarter growth is estimated to be lost due to sanctions by Russia."¹⁵ Furthermore, the collapse of the oil price in the second half of 2014 until early 2015 was a further shock to Russia's energy-dependent economy. Not only did this mean a significant decrease of revenues for Russia's state budget, but also the ruble lost more than 50% of its value against the U.S. dollar, a slump that needs to be attributed precisely to the oil price shock, and not sanctions.¹⁶ Due to these harsh environmental factors, Russia's GDP shrank by 3.7% in 2015, but only 0.9% in 2016 and is expected to grow in 2017 again. Over the years, Russia managed to adapt to these circumstances due to the "government's policy response package of a flexible exchange rate policy, expenditure cuts in real terms, and bank recapitalization—along with tapping the Reserve Fund."¹⁷ Hence, proximity to the "trigger event" in March 2014 might indicate in how far domestic developments are related to the critical juncture under review, nevertheless the confluence of the mentioned confounding factors (land grab, sanctions, oil price shock and slump in budget revenues) call for caution in terms of attribution of single causes.

Secondly, to gauge how significant and encompassing a critical juncture is the size of the window of opportunity matters. Depending on the demand for change directed at leaders, the freedom of action enjoyed by these leaders and the magnitude of the "rally round the flag" moment, windows could be micro or macro.¹⁸ Moreover, "even when political systems as a whole face 'unsettled times', many institutions may remain unaffected."¹⁹ There is little doubt that the annexation of Crimea was a swift event. Daniel Treisman even described it as a chaotic muddling through, where the

¹⁵ K.A. Kholodilin, A. Netsunayev, "Crimea and Punishment: The Impact of Sanctions on Russian and European Economies," *Deutsches Institut Für Wirtschaftsforschung Discussion Papers*, 2016.

¹⁶ Christian Dreger et al., "Between the Hammer and the Anvil: The Impact of Economic Sanctions and Oil Prices on Russia's Ruble," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 44, no. 2 (2016), pp. 295–308.

¹⁷ World Bank, "Russia Economic Report. The Russian Economy Inches Forward," *The World Bank Russia Economic Report*, no. 36, November 2016, www.worldbank.org/en/country/russia/publication/rer.

¹⁸ A.P. Cortell, S. Peterson, "Altered States: Explaining Domestic Institutional Change," *British Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1999), pp. 177–203.

¹⁹ G. Capoccia, R.D. Kelemen, *op.cit.*, p. 347.

political events “revealed an almost farcical lack of preparation.”²⁰ Putin, according to Treisman, showed himself “ready to gamble at moments of high tension, taking actions that were both highly risky and hard to reverse.”²¹ The idea of irreversibility already attests to a new path taken with Crimea. Nevertheless, in how far this change was all-encompassing for presidential power, one central aspect of domestic politics, needs further investigation. This is because in theory it is conceivable that for example Putin’s popularity was bolstered in the long-term, but party politics or relations between the center of power and the regions remained relatively unaltered.

Presidential power notoriously is a fuzzy concept without a universally accepted, clear-cut definition. For the purpose of this chapter I propose to scrutinize those aspects of presidential power and activism that received broad attention after the annexation and were thought to be affected in the aftermath, in particular presidential approval ratings, appointment and dismissal powers, the fight against corruption and repression, as well as presidential success in the Duma.

PRESIDENTIAL POPULARITY AND LEGITIMACY: CRIMEA CHANGED—AND ACCELERATED—EVERYTHING

High presidential approval ratings in Russia are a crucial power resource for presidents to show other political actors—such as the government, the parliament or business—that their own political course taken is perceived to be on the right path by the broader population. But ratings can also signal to potential counter-elites that rebellion is futile, due to large-scale popular support. As Russia’s political system is president-centered, presidential approval is also a crucial aspect of regime legitimacy in general.

Russian pollsters have conducted opinion surveys on presidential popularity since the early 1990s, and the overall finding

²⁰ D. Treisman, “Crimea: Anatomy of a Decision,” *Russia Political Insight*, 26 August 2016, p. 13, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55510affe4b06afeca50df07/t/57d3917e3e00be430c4c5b4e/1473483134670/Crimea+FINAL+Aug+26.pdf>.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

about presidential approval in the last quarter century is that Yeltsin kicked off his presidency with 81% approval in 1991 with the rating plummeting into the single digits by the end of his 2nd term while Putin kicked off his 1st term in the early 2000s with approval ratings between 60% and 80%. Treisman showed that public perceptions of economic performance best explain this glaring difference between presidents Yeltsin and Putin.²² Consequently, Putin's ratings were continuously subsiding from well-above 80% in 2008 to record low 63% in 2012 when the global financial crisis and Russia's structural reform deficit hit the economy, and, in turn, public perception. The regime successfully managed the *rokirovka*—the power transfer from Medvedev back to Putin in 2012—and then saw off the street protests in the aftermath of this *rokirovka* as well as falsified parliamentary elections in 2011. But the economy, and hence presidential approval, did not pick up again.

However, as Sergey Guriev noted, Russia's intervention in Crimea in early 2014 "changed everything."²³ Already by March 2014, Putin's rating had jumped back to over 80%, and in October both VCIOM and independent Levada reported 89% approval. The magnitude of this "Crimean consensus effect"²⁴ was not unfamiliar to the Putin administration: The Kremlin had experienced before how military campaigns such as the Second Chechen War after 1999, the five day war with Georgia or international disagreement with the United States, such as after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, can significantly help boost presidential popularity. Much more consequential than the mere "rally around the flag effect" and the already proverbial 84% approval was that Crimea helped to decouple presidential popularity ratings from the well-being of the Russian economy. It was not the perception about expected improvement of future public and personal welfare that led Russians to rally round their president: The main drivers became Russia's improved international standing in the world. This was done through Putin showing off Russia's defense capabilities and

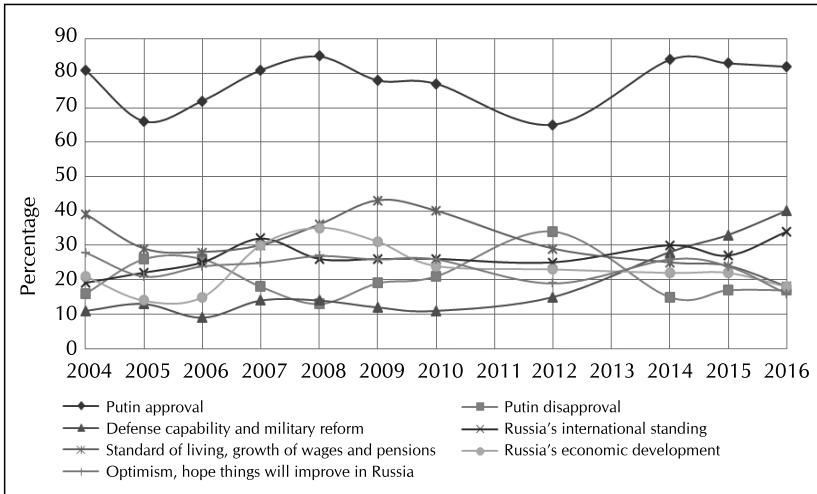
²² D. Treisman, "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin," *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011), pp. 590–609.

²³ S. Guriev, "In Russia, It's Not the Economy, Stupid," *The New York Times*, 25 December 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/12/25/opinion/in-russia-its-not-the-economy-stupid.html.

²⁴ See Ben Noble's chapter in this volume on the Crimean consensus and legislative politics.

reformed military—both to its people and to the world—with a *tour de force* first in Ukraine, and later in Syria.

Figure 1. Approval of Vladimir Putin and answers to open questions about Putin's main achievements between 2004 and 2016



Source: Compiled by the author with data from levada.ru and a data set provided by Stepan Goncharov: <https://infogr.am/2e301a41-6d1e-4a8a-95c1-cd4c2ce98977>.

Figure 1 shows that until 2009, Russians primarily considered Putin's main achievement to be rising living standards through wage growth and secure pension plans. Russians approved of Putin because they associated him with the country's wider economic development. Another reason Russians approved of Putin back then was that he gave Russians reasons to be optimistic about the future. While Russia's international standing became an important aspect of Putin's approval already by the mid-2000s, Russians had shifted their focus onto defense and military capabilities only in 2014, when 28% said these were Putin's main achievements. By 2016, the reversal of this larger trend had been cemented: for a majority, Russia's military and international standing now comes first, and economy and welfare have been pushed into second place when assessing the main achievements of their president. Hence, for presidential popularity, and for regime legitimacy as a whole, Crimea was both an accelerator and trigger at once.

PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT AND DISMISSAL POWERS

Appointment and dismissal powers are certainly among the most significant ways a president can steer political processes. In most general terms, presidents face a dilemma: appoint loyal, ideologically close officials from their patronage networks, or guarantee competence and performance through a more meritocratic choice. In Russia, it is usually assumed that preference is given to loyalty over competence²⁵ although meritocratic elements also exist.²⁶ A second crucial aspect is the frequency with which these appointments occur. Since the mid-2000s a system of cadre rotation has been in place,²⁷ which regularly rotates outsiders into federal state organs and regional administrations²⁸ to prevent departmentalism and localism respectively. When presidents sack officials this is oftentimes perceived as a purge or a weakness of the president as these subordinates allegedly cannot be trusted anymore. On the other hand, regular cadre rotation can also be assessed as a “feature of administrative centralization”²⁹ and state formation. Moreover, regular rotation has been found to be conducive to coup-proofing—i.e. by preventing vested interests from coordination and rebellion against the autocrat.³⁰

²⁵ O.J. Reuter, G.B. Robertson, “Subnational Appointments in Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Russian Gubernatorial Appointments,” *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 4 (2012), pp. 1023–1037.

²⁶ V. Gimpelson, V. Magun, R.J. Brym, “Hiring and Promoting Young Civil Servants: Weberian Ideals versus Russian Reality,” in: *Russian Bureaucracy and the State: Officialdom from Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, ed. E. Huskey, D.K. Rowney, Springer, 2009, pp. 231–252.

²⁷ E. Huskey, “Legacies and Departures in the Russian State Executive,” in: *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. M.R. Beissinger, S. Kotkin, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 111–127.

²⁸ M. Rochlitz et al., “Performance Incentives and Economic Growth: Regional Officials in Russia and China,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56, no. 4 (2015), pp. 421–445.

²⁹ D. Siegel, “The Political Logic of Cadre Rotation in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 4 April 2017, p. 2.

³⁰ S. Chestnut Greitens, “Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence,” *Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute*, Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

In the following, I will review presidential appointment patterns in the presidential administration, the government, federal districts and regions.

PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

Two major appointments made waves in 2016: in August, the *silovik* heavy-weight Sergey Ivanov was replaced by the young technocrat Anton Vayno as new head of the presidential administration (PA).³¹ Later in October, Rosatom's Sergey Kiriyenko became new head of the PA's Domestic Politics Department as Vyacheslav Volodin was soon to be elected new chairman of the State Duma after United Russia's landslide victory in the September parliamentary elections.

Table 1 shows all dismissals and appointments of top officials in the PA ranging from the head, deputy heads to department heads.

Table 1. Dismissals and appointments of high-ranking presidential administration officials compiled from presidential decrees

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total Dismissals	4	2	0	1	3
Total Appointments	22	5	1	1	4

What becomes clear is that the year 2016 was not so extraordinary after all. Several trends need to be noted: elections are important, in particular presidential elections. In the course of election campaigns, leading staff in the PA must be dismissed and reappointed, which explains the highest figure of 22 in 2012. Secondly, none of the dismissals can be classified as an explicit purge: all officials were transferred and reassigned to other positions. These new postings obviously could also be less prestigious, such as Sergey Ivanov's move to special envoy for the environment, or the senate mandate given to the former head of the

³¹ F. Burkhardt, "Russia's New Generation of Technocrats," *Intersection*, 16 August 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/russias-new-generation-technocrats>.

Domestic Politics Department Oleg Morozov. (Senate mandates are often seen as a sinecure. Morozov left this post as well in 2015.) Thirdly, it is easily observed that in the period between the presidential elections of 2012 and the Duma elections of 2016, cadre decisions are idiosyncratic. In 2013, for example, Ksenia Yudayeva was promoted from the PA's Expert Department to Vice Chairman of Russia's Central Bank, Yudayeva was replaced by Vladimir Simonenko, who had been Deputy Minister of Economic Development. Also in 2013, a new department for the fight against corruption was created within the PA which was the result of a restructuring of the Department for State Service and Cadres, from which the new head Oleg Plokhoy was promoted.

Certainly, Vayno's style as head of the PA is less hands-on, more detached than their predecessors'—and the same goes for Kiriyyenko in his new role. Nevertheless, it will only be after the presidential elections in March 2018 when a definite judgment on their appointment strategy and governance style will be possible. So in sum, other factors besides Crimea are crucial for assessing cadre policy in the PA.

GOVERNMENT

The same logic as with the PA applies to government ministers: the government lays down its mandate before presidential elections, and the president-elect appoints the new PM and cabinet ministers. In contrast to the 1990s, when cabinet reshuffles were frequent also in between presidential elections, in the 2000s cabinets usually remained relatively stable over the presidential terms, and ministers were replaced only on rare occasions.³²

The government under Prime Minister Medvedev was installed on 21 May 2012 by presidential decree and consisted

³² G. Neyaskin, "Rasstrel'nye dolzhnosti: kak chasto rossiyskiye ministry ostayutsya bez raboty," *Republic.ru*, 1 September 2016, <https://republic.ru/app.php/posts/72647>; E. Semenova, "Russia. Cabinet Formation and Careers in a Super-Presidential System," in: *The Selection of Ministers around the World*, ed. K.M. Dowding, P. Dumont, *Routledge Research on Social and Political Elites* 5, London–New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 139–155.

of 21 ministers: seven of them had been replaced by the end of 2016. The Ministry of Economic Development experienced the highest turnover. In June 2013, Alexey Ulyukayev replaced Andrey Belousov who became economic advisor in the PA. In November 2016, Ulyukayev was arrested on corruption charges; his place was taken by the 1982-born Maxim Oreshkin. Already by November 2012, Minister of Defense Serdyukov was accused of embezzlement in the case of the MoD contractor Oboronservis, and was replaced by Sergey Shoygu. Beside these two exceptional cases, it was mainly the restructuring of the federal executive that affected appointment patterns. This concerned the upgraded Ministry for Utilities (ZhKKh) in 2013, and the creation of the Crimea Ministry in March 2014 and the North Caucasus Ministry in 2014. The Minister for Crimean Affairs Oleg Savel'ev remained in office for only 15 months—the ministry was liquidated in July 2015 after it had launched a 708 million ruble funding program for the peninsula, the management and supervision of which was subsequently transferred to the Economy ministry. Appointments of Alexandr Tkachev (Agriculture) in 2015, Ol'ga Vasil'eva (Education) and Pavel Kolobkov (Sports) in 2016 attest to minor policy adjustments rather than larger reshuffles with the purpose of broader policy shifts. Vasil'eva, for example, was widely portrayed as an *ideocrat* who would give education an increasingly patriotic touch. Her main initiative in office, however, was to cut spending on education, something her “technocratic” predecessor Livanov had resisted. The abolishment of the Crimea ministry and the appointment of Tkachev—a staunch supporter of Russian counter-sanctions, import substitutions, and first and foremost his own agriculture business—suggest that already by mid-2015 Crimea and its management have been fully incorporated into the federal economic policy making routine. More importantly, in the case of the Ministry of Agriculture, Crimea did have a clear and persistent effect, while change at top of the Ministry of Education followed a different logic.

PRESIDENTIAL REPRESENTATIVES AND GOVERNORS

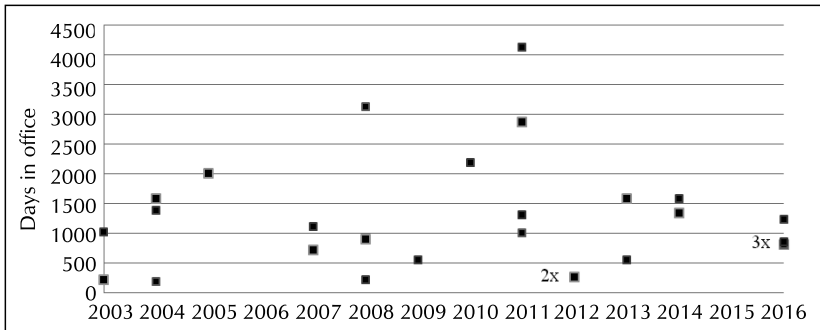
A year later, on 28 July 2016 the Crimean Federal District—it had been created on 21 March 2014 and comprised the two subjects Crimea and Sevastopol—was abolished and incorporated into the Southern Federal District. Reducing the number of federal districts to seven again and thereby losing its special status, by mid-2016 also Crimean security and law enforcement related issues were managed in conjunction with other federal subjects of the Southern District. On the same day, in a “massive cadre reshuffle”³³ a total of 4 governors and 5 presidential representatives in federal districts (*polpredy*) were dismissed and appointed.

Was this reshuffle in any way unprecedented, and can we draw any inferences about a potential coup-proofing strategy, or an increased regime personalization after Crimea? Figures 2 and 3 present annual dismissal rates of *polpredy* and governors as well as exit fates of the latter. As the systematic overview of *polpredy* dismissals since their inception in 2000 shows, by the end of 2016 Putin has dismissed the same amount of envoys in his 3rd term as Medvedev during his presidency: nine each in total. In 2011, Medvedev also dismissed four *polpredy* in the course of four months, in particular the two long-time *polpredy* Poltavchenko (since 2000) and Klebanov (since 2003). In Putin's 3rd term *polpredy* would serve between three to four years, hence over time cadres were rotated more frequently than in the previous presidential terms. The exit fates of the *polpredy* dismissed in 2016 also attest to the cadre rotation principle at work: Vladimir Bulavin (North-Western) was appointed Head of the Federal Customs Service, Sergey Melikov (North Caucasian) became 1st Deputy Head of the National Guard with Oleg Belaventsev (Crimean) replacing him, Vladimir Ustinov was reappointed in the Southern Federal District now united with the Crimean District, and Nikolay Rogozhkin (Siberian) left state service as he reached retirement age with 65 years. The main difference to previous practice was that this occurred on one day

³³ N. Raibman, “Putin provel masshtabnye kadrovye perestanovki,” *Vedomosti*, no. 28, 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/07/28/650900-glavnogo-tamozhennika.

while earlier this would have been implemented over the course of several months. The following years will show whether this practice—which certainly demands more planning ahead from the PA—persists in the future.

Figure 2. Presidential representatives in federal districts (*polpredy*) dismissed per year (by days in office)



Source: compiled by the author based on presidential decrees.

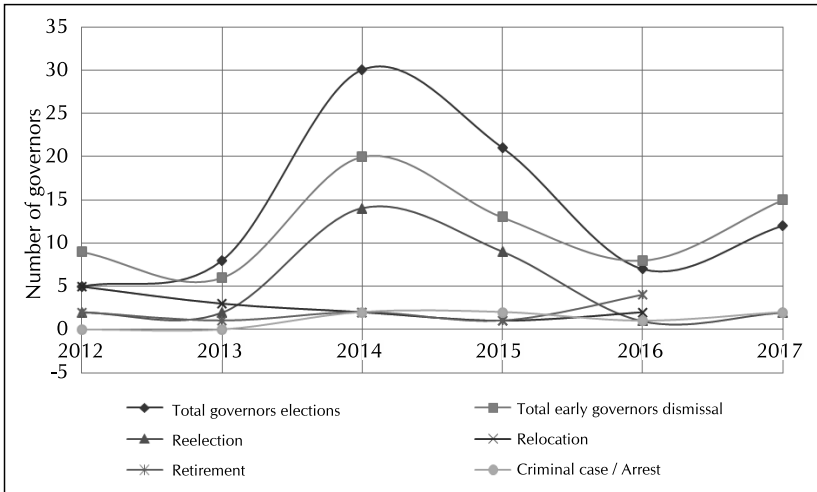
Figure 3 visualizes governor dismissal data and exit fates. Between 2004 and 2012 governors were appointed by the president, in late 2011 Medvedev had announced the reintroduction of gubernatorial elections that had been in place before 2004. On the one hand, the intention of this reform was to increase the legitimacy of regional heads of administration, on the other it was rather obvious that the PA was concerned with reducing the uncertainty related to electoral processes from the very beginning.³⁴

One of the measures to assert central control was the introduction of United Voting Days which combined elections in several federal subjects. Another informal institution used has been the early dismissal of incumbent governors, which is usually accompanied by a presidential appointment to serve as interim governor until the next elections. This practice increases presidential leverage over governors; presidential endorsement also increases

³⁴ H. Blakkisrud, "Governing the Governors: Legitimacy vs. Control in the Reform of the Russian Regional Executive," *East European Politics* 31, no. 1 (2015), pp. 104–121.

the legitimacy of interim governors in the eyes of the electorate, and with regard to potential competitors.

Figure 3. Gubernatorial elections and exit fate of governors in Putin's 3rd term. Only first quarter for 2017



Source: compiled by the author.

Figure 3 illustrates that, in 2014, almost 2/3 of gubernatorial elections were held after early presidential dismissals of governors. Gulnaz Sharafutdinova argues that this strategy was chosen “in order to use the patriotic momentum associated with the Crimea annexation (‘krymnash’ effect) and get re-elected before the negative impact of Western (and anti-Western) economic sanctions were felt in the regions.”³⁵ This Crimea effect was most noticeable in 2014 and 2015 when early dismissals were predominantly employed to safeguard the reelection of incumbent governors. In 2016 and early 2017, however, early dismissals were used to replace incumbents by new governors and therefore preempt election by “quasi-appointments.” 2014 and 2015 were thus more about cadre stability while 2016, and in particular 2017, mark a decided return to the principle of cadre rotation.

³⁵ G. Sharafutdinova, “Regional Governors Navigating through Putin’s Third Term,” *Russian Politics* 1, no. 4 (2016), p. 376.

This informal institution of early resignation certainly did not contribute to a heightened legitimacy of governors. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to argue that the stability trend in 2014 and 2015 was due to a “scarce gubernatorial cadre pool.”³⁶ In fact, only the strategy changed—electoral authoritarianism tweaked in order to guarantee an uneven playing field favoring the ruling elite. The appointments in early 2017 show, especially, that a new cohort of governors born in the 1960s and 1970s is about to replace an older one born in the 1940s and 1950s. Figure 3 also illustrates that among those who were eased out of their positions, arrests and criminal investigation were an exception: two detentions of governors in 2014, two in 2015, one in 2016, and two by April 2017 respectively—i.e. the predominant presidential strategy towards governors was an adaptive mixture of stability of cadres and rotation, not open repression.

DISMISSALS AND THE “FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION” IN RUSSIA

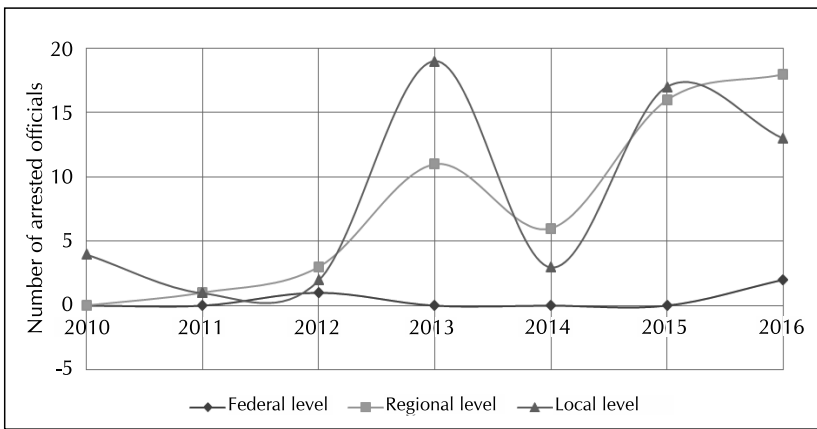
The ostentatious arrests of so-called “systemic liberals” like the arrest of Kirov’s governor, Nikita Belykh, in June 2016, or that of the Minister of Economic Development, Alexey Ulyukayev, in November 2016, sent shock waves through Russia’s political and economic elite. Was this the beginning of a new purge of remaining systemic liberals in Russia’s public administration, the start of a major shift in economic policy? After all, Ulyukayev had been one of the main pillars of monetary and economic policy under Putin when he had served as deputy finance minister, deputy chairman of the Central Bank; he was the 1st acting Minister in post-Soviet Russia to be arrested on charges of corruption. In the aftermath of such high profile arrests, usually a number of theories begin to circulate: was it a conflict between the government and Rosneft’s Sechin over the privatization of the oil company Bashneft in the case of Ulyukayev? Or the misappropriation of informal election funds in the case of Belykh? Court trials in such prominent cases can drag on for long time and the “rule by law”-logic usually

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 382.

determines highly politicized cases, so it is more than difficult to determine the true motives behind the arrests.

The option that these arrests were instances of a systematic, consistent campaign against corruption should be excluded; this would undermine the basis upon which the current regime rests. Instead, it can be argued that graft and corruption are part of the “institutional mechanisms used to secure the loyalty and obedience of officials.”³⁷ Following this logic, widespread informal practices and corruption are accepted or even encouraged, so that subordinates in the administrative hierarchy can be blackmailed. Prosecution and punishment are suspended, and, as a rule, are meted out towards disobedient or even politically disloyal subordinates.

Figure 4. Officials arrested on corruption charges



Source: Based on a data bases collected³⁸ by means of media reporting on such cases.

Bearing in mind Russia’s ongoing economic stagnation and the “Crimea consensus effect” potentially subsiding, one might indeed surmise that increased punishment and repression was needed to control the *administrativniki*—state officials in the

³⁷ K. Darden, “The Integrity of Corrupt States: Graft as an Informal State Institution,” *Politics & Society* 36, no. 1 (2008), p. 37.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

federal, regional and local administrations. To track the corruption-related arrests of bureaucrats over time, I use a data set collected by Dmitry Filonov and Anastasiya Yakoreva³⁹ and recoded it to allow for a differentiation of arrests on the three levels of administration.

Several trends can be observed. The first recent wave of arrests started already in 2013 and saw almost twice as many arrests of local officials than from regional administrations. Being a mayor is notoriously dangerous in Russia.⁴⁰ It is estimated that by 2007 every sixth acting mayor had either been in prison, is in prison or will likely wind up in prison, a development attributed to local conflicts around municipal land or real estate. In the first comprehensive academic paper on Russian mayors, it was found that between 2000 and 2012, "10% of elected mayors leave office under arrest, compared to 4% of appointed mayors."⁴¹ Local officials had always been even more endangered. However, the persecution of governors, their deputies and regional cabinet ministers appears to be a fairly recent phenomenon; by 2016, the majority of arrests were largely of this type of official. So far, it seems to be too early to say whether regional and even federal civil servants have been increasingly persecuted by law enforcement, but the figures for 2016, at least, point in this direction. In 2014 and 2015, two governors were arrested on corruption charges while in 2016 one governor, one deputy minister and one minister (Ulyukayev) were put on trial. In the first quarter of 2017, already two governors (Savel'ev from the Republic of Udmurtiya and Markelov from the Republic of Marii-El) were taken into custody, a sign this trend is at the very least persisting. Seizures of high-ranking officials are usually planned and implemented by the Federal Security Service FSB and the Investigative Committee. Often both agencies work in tandem, and their increasingly prominent role during these arrests indicates that selective repression against a few officials is used to discipline the federal and regional executive as a whole.

³⁹ D. Filonov, A. Yakoreva, "Vse protiv vseh. Kak sazhayut chinovnikov v Rossii," *Republic.ru*, 2016, <https://republic.ru/posts/76987>.

⁴⁰ V. Lebin et al., "Pochemu sazhayut merov?," *Expert.ru*, 2007, http://expert.ru/russian_reporter/2007/02/pochemu_sazhayut_merov/.

⁴¹ N. Buckley et al., "Elections, Appointments, and Human Capital: The Case of Russian Mayors," *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 1 (2014), p. 111.

Often, a network of closely interconnected officials in one region is arrested all at once. This happened, most notably, in Voronezh in 2013, in Komi in 2015, and in Sakhalin, Perm, Kirov and Vladivostok in 2016. The annexation of Crimea added one more region where frequent arrests of officials were used to enforce federal control: 6 officials were captured on peninsula in 2015 and 3 in 2016. In this sense, for the federal center, Crimea became yet another problematic region. Officials there were persecuted at a higher rate than an average Russian district. Alleged purges of prominent officials such as Belykh and Ulyukaev should thus be seen in the context of this federal strategy of “discipline and punish and make an example”—while regional and local conflicts also contribute to a pressure from below on officials at that level.

RELATIVE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT IN EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS: VELOCITY AND VOTING PATTERNS IN THE DUMA

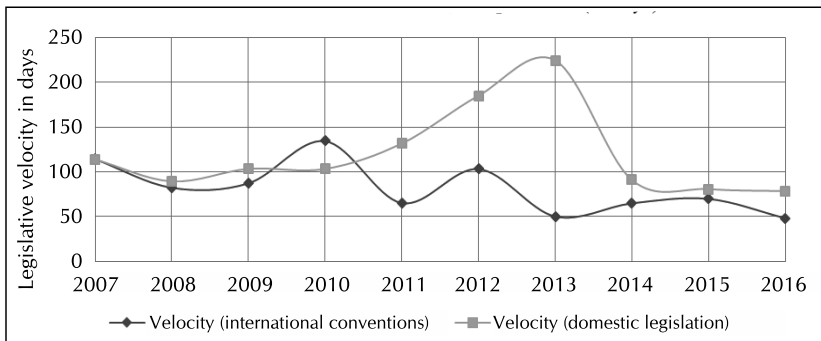
When Crimea was annexed, President Putin initiated three laws that were passed in the Russian State Duma with lightning speed. Their sole purpose was to formalize Crimea's status as a part of the Russian Federation.⁴² All bills passed through the Duma with a majority of over 98%. Il'ia Ponomarev, who was the only MP who voted against the accession of Crimea, was subsequently expelled from the Duma and is now living in exile. Several others abstained, but as Ponomarev has noted, high pressure was asserted to achieve a unanimous vote. Far more meaningful than the percentage voting

⁴² These three laws are: (1) *Zakonoprojekt № 475944-6 “O prinyatii v Rossiyskuyu Federatsiyu Respubliki Krym i obrazovanii v sostave Rossiyskoy Federatsii novykh sub”ektov—Respubliki Krym i goroda federal’nogo znacheniya Sevastopolya,”* initiated on 19 March 2014, <http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/%28SpravkaNew%29?OpenAgent&RN=475944-6&02>; (2) *Zakonoprojekt № 475948-6 “O ratifikatsii Dogovora mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Respublikoy Krym o prinyatii v Rossiyskuyu Federatsiyu Respubliki Krym i obrazovanii v sostave Rossiyskoy Federatsii novykh sub”ektov,”* initiated on 19 March 2014, <http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/%28SpravkaNew%29?OpenAgent&RN=475948-6&02>; (3) *Zakonoprojekt № 484131-6 “O prekrashchenii deystviya soglasheniy, kazayushchikhsya prebyvaniya Chernomorskogo flota Rossiyskoy Federatsii na territorii Ukrainy,”* initiated on 28 March 2014, <http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/%28SpravkaNew%29?OpenAgent&RN=484131-6&02>.

in favor was the speed with which the bills passed the Duma and were signed by the president: the two bills on the accession of Crimea were rushed through in a record low of two days; the bill on the suspension of the Black Sea fleet agreement took just five days before it was promulgated.

Analogous to the presidential approval rating discussed above, this speedy, unanimous voting pattern begs the question if, and for how long, a potential Crimea effect persisted. Unanimous parliamentary votes and the pace of legislation are useful indicators assessing presidential power. As Paul Chaisty's research has found, higher legislative velocity in particular is a robust way to view Russia's authoritarian turn.⁴³ If there is a persistent sign of this after Crimea, that could also hint at further authoritarianism and a further shift of relative power towards the presidency.

Figure 5. Velocity of legislation initiated by the president measured in days between registration of the bill and presidential sign-off, the years indicate when the bills were initiated by the President. N = 407 bills



Source: data compiled by the author.

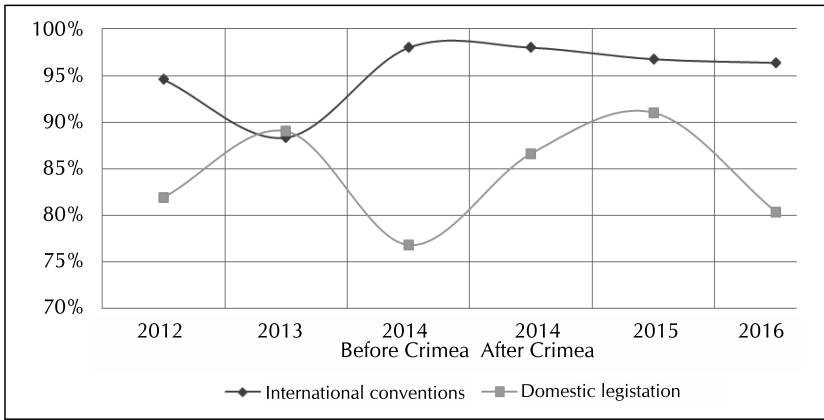
Figure 5 visualizes the velocity of all bills initiated by the president in the period between the two Duma terms from 2007 to September 2016. Quite strikingly, between 2007 and 2010 the speed of both domestic legislation and international conventions remained roughly equal averaging around 100 days per year.

⁴³ P. Chaisty, "Presidential Dynamics and Legislative Velocity in Russia, 1994–2007," *East European Politics* 30, no. 4 (2014), pp. 588–601.

However, by 2013 domestic legislation took more than four times as long to make it into law. Backlogs suggest that major disagreements existed within the executive that delayed legislative policy making. After Crimea, the average annual velocity dropped below 100 days and almost converged for both domestic and international legislation. The “rally around the legislative leader” with Crimea effect is clearly substantial.

Once we turn to Duma voting results on presidential bills, a similar picture emerges. Especially in 2014, before the almost unanimous Crimea legislation, the voting rift between international and domestic legislation was almost 100 votes on average or 442 compared to 345.

Figure 6. Voting results in the Duma for all bills initiated by the president in Putin’s 3rd term until the end of the 6th Duma convocation. N = 171 bills



Source: data compiled by the author.

While the United Russia faction would vote unanimously as a rule, at times mostly the Communist faction, a Just Russia, and on rare occasions the LDPR voted against or withheld their support for presidential initiatives. After Crimea, those of the nominal opposition would also rally around the “legislative leader,” and only on rare occasions the Communist faction would vote against. For instance, their opposition to a controversial anti-corruption legislation (Bill 664950-6). However, by 2016 the Crimea effect had markedly subsided, and on average, support for domestic

presidential bills dropped to 80%. Naturally, this does not mean that bill failures became likely. Nevertheless, with the looming Duma elections in September 2016, opposition factions—first and foremost the Communists—returned to their previous *modus operandi*: that is, signaling to their electorate that they sometimes differed from the mainstream. The Communists also used this option of voting against legislation as leverage with the PA. United Russia’s landslide victory at recent parliamentary elections, where the party gained an unprecedented constitutional majority, suggests that this endeavor from the Communists largely failed. Nevertheless, the increased representation of the Russian regions could lead to a situation where “deputies will have more room for discussion on economic issues important to the regions, whereas they will present a united front on security and foreign policy.”⁴⁴ More debate within the United Russia faction and increased bargaining with the regions will only be feasible, however, if no other international adventure akin to the annexation of Crimea causes another “rally around the legislative leader” effect.

CONCLUSION

The chapter started with the intention to investigate how far the annexation of Crimea affected domestic politics in Russia, and more specifically several prominent dimensions of presidential power. To answer this question I proposed to carve up Putin’s 3rd presidential term by means of a before/after research design to find out in how far Crimea was a critical juncture.

The findings bear implications both for our understanding of the annexation of Crimea on Russian domestic politics as well as of external shocks and critical junctures more generally. On the one hand, the effect of Crimea was consistent and protracted, both with regard to presidential approval ratings, velocity of law-making and to a lesser degree voting patterns in the Duma.

⁴⁴ B. Noble, “Volodin’s Duma,” *Intersection*, 13 December 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/volodins-duma>.

On the other hand, for other dimensions of presidential power Crimea was less of a caesura: for appointments and dismissals of officials in the federal and regional executive electoral cycles and the cadre rotation principle were crucial determinants of presidential activism. What is more, a gradual increase in rare, punctual repressions suggests that the Crimea effect has been gradually subsiding and that for policy-making under an ever more constrained basis of resources, a “discipline and punish” approach is employed as a technique of administrative control. Corrupt practices at the core of the system, meanwhile, remain in place.

Crimea caused a “rally around the leader” effect both in terms of presidential approval ratings and legislative activity contributed to a more pronounced personalist form of authoritarian governance. But other key regime characteristics remained in place: non-competitive multi-party elections still perform important functions for the turnover of personnel in the state administration, and selective punishment of officials can be seen as a major instrument of governance. Crimea was thus both a trigger and an accelerator for domestic politics and presidential power in particular. On the other hand, slow-moving, more inert features allow the Russian regime to adapt cosmetically to external challenges, but even in the face of major external shocks, wholesale change of Russia's governance structures looks improbable.

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VLADISLAV INOZEMTSEV

DOWNWARD SPIRAL:
THE PROSPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY

Russia is marching through 2017 with hopes of vanquishing its economic woes. The Kremlin asserts with confidence that the worst effects of sanctions and recession have passed, and now is the time to start making up lost ground. Russians, the thinking goes, have grown accustomed to a “new normality” of international isolation and tougher living conditions. The only way is up. Yet it is more realistic to view the next two years with much more caution. Economic forecasts point to 2017 being part of a “lost decade” that dates back to 2008. If you factor in this year’s projected growth rate of 1.1–1.5%, then this “lost decade” will have had just 0.7% average GDP growth per year. To put that in perspective, it is equivalent to around half that of Germany’s growth; exactly a quarter of Poland’s; roughly a third of that of the U.S. and around a tenth of China’s.¹

Unless there are active steps to nurture and realign our economy, it will also be hard to be optimistic looking further into the future. No one today dares to dream of replicating the success of Vladimir Putin’s first two terms in office, when average GDP growth amounted to 7.1% each year. And not a soul cares to mention the notion of catching up with Portugal, for instance. This small country is still far wealthier than Russia in terms of GDP per capita, and remarkably it is a gap that has grown. Taking into

¹ Russia’s economic growth figures are estimated based on the data of Rosstat (the Russian Federal State Statistics Service). Other countries’ results are estimated based on data provided by the Trading Economics website: www.tradingeconomics.com.

account market exchange rates, that gap widened from \$9,480 in 2000 to \$11,100 in 2015.²

So the real objective of policy makers is not a return to the boom years of the early 2000s. The goal is much more modest: attain at least some growth and avoid sharp dips. However, the key question today is whether this modest goal is attainable. I will attempt to answer this through a health check of Russia's economy, finding reasons for its strength in the early 2000s, and its relative weakness today.

WHAT FACTORS PAVED THE WAY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH IN RUSSIA?

Liberals attribute to the Russian "economic miracle" of the 2000s to favorable external conditions, primarily the rise in the global price of oil. Statists, on the other hand, laud the genius of President Putin. Both stances are feasible, although neither offer a complete explanation.

Undoubtedly, oil revenues became the major source of economic growth in Russia. The inflow of petrodollars was substantial: net additional revenue in Russian oil industry above the 1999 benchmark amounted to \$33.5 billion from 2000–2003. It was \$223.6 billion from 2005–2008, and as much as \$394.0 billion from 2011–2013.³ This fueled cross-sectoral investment, especially the construction industry, retail and the service sector. Even though much of this growth was asymmetrical, it clearly presented wide opportunities. The sum of \$394 billion was almost equivalent to 20% of GDP in 2012, quite a significant stimulus.

² According to data from the World Bank and national statistical agencies, in 2000, GDP per capita in the Russian Federation amounted to \$1,771 and \$11,259 in Portugal; 15 years later, at the end of 2015, the former figure increased to reach \$8,100 and the latter—\$19,121. Hence, the gap between the two countries only increased in absolute terms although Vladimir Putin had announced plans to bridge the gap in his famous article published on the eve of his moving to the Kremlin (see: V. Putin, „Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletiy,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 30 December 1999, pp. 1, 3).

³ For more detail, see: V. Inozemtsev, „Chto sdelala neft' s Rossiyey,” *Vedomosti*, 16 December 2014, pp. 6–7.

Undoubtedly, the government did implement fairly successful reforms aimed at normalizing the economic situation, especially prior to the notorious YUKOS case. Few remember today that in 1999, inflation in Russia was as high as 36.5% and up to one-third of all transactions between businesses were conducted using non-monetary means of payment or in lieu payments.⁴ These sorts of barter systems had been eradicated entirely by 2003, and inflation had dropped to 12%.⁵ Federal budget revenues increased 4.2-fold between 1999–2003 and the period saw a relatively stable ruble-dollar exchange rate.⁶ Delayed payments of remuneration to employees of enterprises, including state-owned enterprises, were almost unheard of during this period. In fact, the government re-nationalized the gas industry in 2002–2003 and ensured princely rewards for its oil industry representatives in 2004–2005 as well as for the banking sector in 2004–2006. Undoubtedly, putting the register of property rights in order, as well as the establishment of an up-to-date system of cadastral and fiscal accounting also paid dividends during this period.

Yet there is much more to the story. In the 2000s, the Russian economy was unrecognizably different to the Soviet model of, let's say, the 1980s. Underinvestment at the state level was vast, and this proved helpful in keeping budget deficits down and left less scope for wasteful spending. Despite the fact that the period which preceded *perestroika* is believed to have been one of stagnation, the economy was treated to significant investment which accounted for 31–34% of Soviet GDP, according to numerous estimates.⁷ The effectiveness of these investments was low; funds were mostly allocated to the construction industry, while comparatively meager

⁴ A description of substitutes for money can be found in: C. Gaddy, B. Ickes, *Russia's Virtual Economy*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2002, pp. 14–17.

⁵ For more details about inflation in 1999 and 2003, see *The Russian Statistical Yearbook 2005* (online version www.gks.ru/bdg/regl/b05_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/22-04.htm).

⁶ See *The Russian Statistical Yearbook 2005* (online version www.gks.ru/bdg/regl/b05_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/20-06.htm).

⁷ See M. Goldman, *What Went Wrong with Perestroika*, New York–London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992, pp. 132–134, C. Gaddy, B. Ickes, *Bear Traps on Russia's Road to Modernization*, London–New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 48–49 and other.

sums were spent on the development or manufacture of new technologies. Funds for the majority of these investments were taken directly from the public purse and represented little value for money. Turning to the economy of the early 2000s, we can see that investment had fallen to 12.7–16.3% of GDP.⁸ So when public spending increased by 12–15% of GDP, that was only possible because it was much lower than before. That allowed the increase in public spending to be even greater than the increase in the price of export goods, without running up large deficits like in the 1990s. Underestimation of this factor seems to be a very common mistake made by both Russian and foreign economists⁹ to this day.

Another omission: all the rhetoric about Russia's "rise from its knees," and the image of military revival following victory against terrorist militant groups in the Northern Caucasus did little to change an economic fact: the early 2000s represented Russia's most "harmonious" period in nearly a hundred years. The average military spending in the USSR as determined by Western experts amounted to 15–17% of GDP in the 1970s. The 2015 defense budget, as estimated by SIPRI analysts, was equivalent to 5.4% of GDP.¹⁰ Russian military spending however in 2001 accounted for as little as 2.7% of GDP—\$7.4 billion at the market exchange rate.¹¹ Like many investments in never-ending Soviet construction projects, those aimed at improving the "defense capacity" of the state are often a further drain on the public purse, steeped in inefficiency. Military spending in Russia has traditionally generated negligible economic multipliers and barely contributes to the emergence or commercialization of new technologies.¹² A breakthrough in the attitude to defense spending (i.e. substantial cutbacks) occurred

⁸ The share of investments in GDP in Russia in 2003–2004 is estimated based on: *The Russian Statistical Yearbook 2005* (online version www.gks.ru/bdg/regl/b05_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/21-02.htm and www.gks.ru/bdg/regl/b05_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/01-01.htm).

⁹ For more details about savings on investments and their role, see V. Inozemtsev, "Zhizn' za schot budushchego," *Vedomosti*, 15 November 2010, p. 4.

¹⁰ See www.sipri.org/databases/milex.

¹¹ Read an analysis of the 2001 defense budget in Russia: www.protown.ru/information/hidden/3265.html, the weighted average exchange rate based on the data of the Central Bank of Russia.

¹² For more details, see: V. Inozemtsev, "Voyennye raskhody v Rossii—eto plata za mnitel'nost' vlastey," *Slon.ru*, 8 April 2015, www.slon.ru/posts/50155.

not in 1992–1993—which might have been expected during the turmoil after the Soviet collapse—but in 1998–1999. The first half of the 2000s was the time when funds from military spending cuts were, to a large extent, injected into the economy. It is also perfectly clear that the reversal of the trend, noticeable since 2007, coincided with an economic downturn.

Another factor in the 2000s was that new sectors became locomotives of the contemporary Russian economy. Both traditional and hi-tech services became the main drivers of growth in Russia: the rapid development of wholesale and retail trade, banking, the real estate sector, mobile networks, the Internet and data transmission systems. Virtually none of these sectors existed in their current form in the 1990s: having come into being at the turn of the century, they produced an economic effect in the 2000s, having accounted for between 55% and 60% of cumulative GDP growth in Russia for a given period.¹³ These sectors reached their saturation points as the crisis was gaining a grip on the country in 2008–2009. We cannot grasp the logic behind economic growth in Russia in 2000–2008 without taking this into account. In contrast, for example, to China, economic growth in Russia was not generated by industrial development. In fact, the country significantly lagged behind the 1989 RSFSR (the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) in 2005–2006 with respect to most commodities. Unlike Qatar or even Kazakhstan, Russia failed to significantly increase oil and gas production. In 2012, the corresponding figures were 4.7% lower and 6.2% higher than in 1989 while gas production ballooned 25.3-fold in Qatar and oil extraction surged 3.12-fold in Kazakhstan.¹⁴

Thus, the economy of the Russian Federation lived through its *dix glorieuses*¹⁵ extremely successfully for a number of reasons that are often overlooked. The economic recovery of the early Putin period cannot be explained by one of these circumstances alone,

¹³ See: idem, „Putinomika rosta,” *Business Week (Russia)*, no. 40, 22 October 2007, p. 64.

¹⁴ Estimated based on: *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2016* (bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2016-workbook, downloaded from the website www.bp.com).

¹⁵ I have paraphrased a set phrase *trente glorieuses* which refers to nearly thirty years of sustainable economic growth in France from 1946–1975.

nor can the subsequent crisis be explained purely by changes to some of the abovementioned factors. It is also noteworthy that modernization—which is fundamental to the majority of successfully developed economies—should not be mentioned here, neither in a positive nor negative sense; no new branches of industry have emerged nor qualitatively new technologies used in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. All development has been based on exploiting the country's commodities-based potential, changes of direction and intensity of financial flows via the state treasury, and occasional innovations in the services sector introduced solely due to private business innovations.

“THE LOST DECADE” OF 2008–2017

All the factors that led to economic growth in Russia in the 2000s were transient: oil prices could not go on rising forever; the potential of new sectors could not but exhaust itself since they were not supported by new, promising technologies; rising incomes of the population were destined to conflict with the interests of businessmen at some point.

The first signs of economic meltdown emerged back in 2006–2007. A serious blow was then dealt to Putin's system in 2008 with the onset of the global financial crisis, arising from problems with the high-risk financial instruments market in the United States. These processes fueled the crisis. According to Dmitry Medvedev, “if we are to be open and frank, strictly speaking, we have never fully recovered from the crisis.”¹⁶

Then Russia was hit by a subsequent crisis in 2014. The 2008–2009 crisis unveiled certain frailties of the Russian economic model: first of all, its dependence not only on the shape of the commodity market but also the influx of foreign investment, stock market performance and, most importantly, investor expectations. Although the government allocated nearly as much as the

¹⁶ A quotation from Dmitry Medvedev cited from www.vestifinance.ru/articles/50589.

developed countries most affected by financial fluctuations¹⁷ did, the country's economy plummeted by 7.8% in 2009—a downturn unparalleled in any other G-20 country including those which were fully dependent on oil prices and the global commodity market.

Actually, Russia and its leadership were faced with a need for sustainable growth in 2008–2010 for the first time. President Dmitry Medvedev believed that limited liberalizing of entrepreneurial activity, the country's further integration into the global economy and, most importantly, advanced technological modernization¹⁸ could ensure sustainable growth. However, a lack of interest of the political class and business elite in real modernization, and a quick rebound of oil prices and growing political instability in the country and in the world, resulted in a speedy abandonment of this approach. And the abandonment turned swiftly to condemnation. Most of the political elite came to the conclusion that the country's further economic development should be accompanied by increased "statism." Consequently, a historic decision which led to Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency was made in the fall of 2011.

However, Putin's third term differed significantly from the period of 2000–2007. An element of the elite, entirely dependent on control over budgetary funds, had been firmly established by the time 2012 rolled around. They were, let's say, apologists for the new form state capitalism that was taking hold, and they espoused rhetoric reminiscent of a great superpower. In the early days of Putin's rule, one could say that liberals, realists-technocrats, conservatives and the most radical opponents of reform—the bigots—were virtually represented in equal measures in the power elite. But in 2012, the latter two categories had a firm grip on most of the levers of power.¹⁹ Vladimir Putin returned to the Kremlin with the intention of "tightening the screws" to the nth degree; his

¹⁷ See: V. Goreglyad, *Mirovoy krizis i paradigmy gosudarsvennogo finansovogo regulirovaniya*, Moskva: FGBOU VP REU, 2013, p. 206, footnote.

¹⁸ See: D. Medvedev, *Rossiya, vperyod!*, 10 September 2009, kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5413.

¹⁹ For more detail, see: V. Inozemtsev, „Progressisty, neutraly, konservatory i mrakobesy,” *Gazeta.ru*, 21 December 2016, www.gazeta.ru/column/vladislav_inozemcev/10439171.shtml.

rhetoric rocked the economy instantly. GDP growth slumped from 4.9% in 2012 Q1 to 2% in 2012 Q4 and from 1.3% in 2013 Q3 to 0.6% in 2014 Q1. The 2014 results were largely unaffected by the reckless policy Russia employed towards Ukraine.

Despite the economic slowdown, the authorities dramatically hiked taxes and increased budgetary spending in the least productive areas. In 2009, an entrepreneur had to pay 110.8 thousand rubles in insurance premiums per annum for an employee who earned 900 thousand rubles a year—75,000 rubles or 1,700 euros a month—whereas the level of these expenses soared to 216,100 rubles—an increase of 95%²⁰—in 2014. From 2012–2014, more than 20 additional levies were imposed on entrepreneurs; the official cadastral value of land increased dramatically which resulted in a hike of real estate taxes as well as many local taxes. As a result, spending on bureaucracy and the *siloviki* increased: federal budget spending on national defense and security ballooned from 1.87 trillion rubles in 2008 to 4.78 trillion rubles in 2015.²¹ Naturally, entrepreneurs began to limit their investment and to withdraw capital from the country (outflow more than quadrupled from \$33.6 billion in 2010 to \$151.5 billion in 2014).

Russia approached a watershed year in 2014 bearing a huge burden—as had been the case long before the drop in oil prices and the imposition of Western sanctions. Russia's economy had not been functioning normally since the late 2000s; it had become used to generating expenses in order to compensate for low efficiency. The 2009 and 2014 crises partially alleviated this problem through devaluation (from 24–25 rubles/dollar up to 35–36 in 2008–2009 and from 34–35 rubles to the dollar up to 64–66 in 2014–2015). The grim situation, though, did not change substantially: domestic producers need both the undervalued domestic currency and imposed restrictions on competitor access to the market in order to improve their competitiveness on the domestic market (let's leave the international market aside—total industrial exports from

²⁰ See: M. Prokhorov, „Pyat' nabludenniy i chetyre idei dlia budushchego krizisa,” *Kommersant*, 29 January 2015, p. 7.

²¹ See data on the execution of the 2008 budget: base.garant.ru/12171993/5/#block_6000; 2015 budgetary plan: www.aif.ru/dontknows/infographics/1394939.

Russia is virtually zero). After all, Russia has failed to introduce an innovative system and the implementation of new manufacturing technologies remains as sporadic as it was in the Soviet days. At the same time, the authorities have grown increasingly convinced that the economy exists only in order to ensure there is money in the coffers to fund spending on political (and geopolitical) projects.

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine and the resulting Western sanctions imposed on Russia greatly exacerbated the economic crisis, although they were not the causes by any means. Two decisive factors behind the recession, which continues to this day, include the drop in oil prices as well as lower prices of the majority of other components which make up Russian exports. As a result, exports fell by \$239 billion from 2013–2016²² which equals 17.3% of 2016 GDP calculated at market exchange rates. Another important factor is related to purposeful governmental actions aimed at augmenting the gravitas of the *siloviki* to the detriment of conditions for entrepreneurial activity (at a cost of 4–6% of GDP in 2012–2015). Sanctions put paid to the possibility of securing loans from the West, although the latter have generally been replaced by Russian currency from reserve funds and the printing of money by the Central Bank of Russia. The sanctions also contributed towards sliding imports, although the absence of financially viable demand within the country was a greater problem. In other words, I would say that sanctions have been of secondary importance in the context of the Russian economic crisis and their impact is incommensurate with the effects of the commodity crisis and the unreasonable policies pursued by the authorities.

The result is well-known: cumulative economic growth amounted to as little as 6.6% in 2008–2016; over the course of nine years, GDP was decreasing for three years and increasing for six. In fact, not only have the authorities failed to kick-start the economy, they have also come to accept that its anemic state will continue over the long-term. Projections by the Ministry of Economic Development, published in fall 2016, predicted that economic growth would remain between 0.6–1.7% per annum

²² Calculated from the Federal Customs Service data (see: www.customs.ru).

until 2035. Despite numerous optimistic statements, the prospects of sanctions being lifted remain slim. Oil prices have recently climbed only thanks to political speculations and the country lacks a growth mechanism of domestic origin (it is noteworthy that the 2016 economic slump to 0.6% at the end of the year occurred at the very same time that the government's economic stimulus package was meant to be taking effect at the expense of a budget deficit of 3.7% of GDP, unprecedented military spending of 3.9 trillion rubles (4.7% of GDP), eating away at the reserves (which decreased by 2,67 trillion rubles in 2016) and further financing of large investment projects such as construction works in preparation for the 2018 FIFA World Cup). Should defense industry injections remain at the level of 2009–2010 and the budget deficit not exceed 2% of GDP, economic growth would have exceeded 2%.²³ Although some ever-optimistic experts believe that "the authorities have identified a need to implement reforms to liberalize the economy,"²⁴ I personally see no such signs.

IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS

In 2014–2015, many Russian and foreign experts and politicians were falling over themselves to predict Russia's imminent collapse. President Barack Obama uttered the famous words: "Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated, with its economy in tatters."²⁵ Nothing of the kind happened. Despite the ongoing economic downturn, Russia's economy remains afloat. The population is willing to put up with a more meager real income and the political unity of the nation

²³ For more detail, see: V. Inozemtsev, „Prognozy—2017: pochemu nado gotovit'sya k sduvanyu ekonomicheskogo puzyrya,” *Forbes*, 29 December 2016, www.forbes.ru/biznes/336393-o-prognozah-na-2017-god-pochemu-nado-gotovitsya-k-sduvaniyu-rossyskogo.

²⁴ See, for example, the opinion of Mikhail Dmitriyev, <https://republic.ru/posts/78056>.

²⁵ See: B. Obama, *State of the Union address 2015*; quotation from the original: www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-state-of-the-union-address-2015-remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery/2015/01/20/fd803c4c-a0ef-11e4-b146-577832eafcb4_story.html?Post%20generic=%3Ftid%3Dsm_twitter_washingtonpost&utm_term=.fc3c3f5b23e8.

appears to be much stronger than it was during the “pre-Crimean” period. This is precisely why the forecast that economic difficulties will not, first of all, trigger a catastrophic recession nor, secondly, threaten political stability, remains a realistic forecast.

The most pessimistic scenarios with respect to both oil prices and the geopolitical situation in 2017–2018 will not transpire. Oil prices will most probably stay above \$50 a barrel this year. Even at \$50 a barrel, over 2.3 trillion rubles of additional revenue will be generated over and above the figures cited in the newly-adopted federal budget (as stated by Vladimir Putin—every additional \$10 a barrel give the budget an additional 1.75 trillion rubles. So I do not expect the deficit to exceed 1.5% of GDP and the reserve fund will not be fully depleted in 2017—seen as inevitable by the majority of experts. The United States can boast of its potential to increase extraction capacity. However, at least a year-and-a-half to two years will pass before this potential is fulfilled and oil prices are affected. Hence, no negative consequences are expected to arise, from a Russian perspective, as a result in 2017–2018.

Russia has the option of curtailing its involvement in the Syrian conflict and refraining from escalating the conflict in Ukraine; changes in U.S. attitude towards Russia under the Trump Administration could also provide a tailwind; elections in France and Germany could change the EU’s posture to a degree. In other words, the global political climate is apparently neutral at worst for the Russian economy. Domestically, the authorities will introduce certain deregulatory measures for entrepreneurs and will elevate the economy to one of the most commonly visited issues of pre-election rhetoric.

The “lost decade” will linger on, however. No sectors which have huge potential to become growth drivers will emerge; the extraction of commodities is unlikely to increase—in line with the agreements between oil exporters, if not for internal reasons; political “statism” will remain an obstacle to foreign investment; further bureaucratization and the enhanced role of the *siloviki* among Kremlin decision making will continue to cool off entrepreneurial activity.

Without impetus, Russian economy will become a hostage to one factor over the course of the next five to ten years: prices

of export commodities, and most notably, oil. Rising oil prices will result in increased revenues which will provide a boost for the budget and increase the average Russian's disposable income. Declining prices will trigger a recession. Russia's financial authorities are striving to normalize the economy today from a formal point of view: inflation is falling, an up-to-date banking system is being built and the ruble-free floating rate is being maintained. However, the problem does not lie with the financial sphere as such. The main question is whether the economy is capable of developing within the framework of statism in the context of Russia's growing isolation from the outside world.

My answer is probably not. Russia has entered an era of "unseasonable weather." The country will consistently overcome difficulties but will struggle to keep up with its competitors. Its increasing reliance on demand from China is also a cause for concern, making Russian fortunes dependent on sustained rapid growth in China.

A POLITICAL-ECONOMY OF DISILLUSION

The fundamental, distinctive feature of the Russian economy since the mid-2000s—and perhaps until the mid-2020s or even later—is the complete absence of any agenda drawn up with development in mind. Neither have the authorities intended to devise one. There is no strategy aimed at creating Russian economy capable of adapting to its place in the global distribution of labor; no policy that addresses and improves Russia's technological fundamentals; no strategy to create a wider system of interrelations with its partners and allies, or a more transparent link between business and government.

Society largely now believes in the precedence of politics over the economy and the supremacy of government over business.²⁶ While modernization on this model comes up against constant obstacles, this is precisely why the economy "under mature

²⁶ For more detail, see: V. Inozemtsev, "La modernisation de l'économie russe: les causes de l'échec," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 96, September 2016.

Putin” survives rather than thrives²⁷ and represents such a peculiar symbiosis of commodity sectors, state-owned enterprises, and companies which emulate Western business models, but remain devoid of any spirit of innovation. This type of economic system is doomed to lag behind competitors in an open and global world; it simply cannot attract the attention of international investors; nor are its manufactured goods, services or technologies capable of excelling globally.

I have previously described this phenomenon using the terms “the economy of hope” and “the economy of disillusionment.”²⁸ My view was that high growth in the 2000s was not only due to an increase in oil prices but also due to the Russia’s status as a new, “virgin” economy with a liberal financial and fiscal regime, huge stock market potential and an emerging middle class which demands world-class goods and services. The inflow of investment and the arrival of Western companies to the country was a decisive growth factor but the optimism of Russians themselves, who came to believe in the “normality” of their country, proved far more important. The role of this combination was undermined by the 2008–2009 crisis and, to an even greater extent, by the 2014–2016 events. Not only did the “lost decade” halt economic growth, it also catapulted Russians’ incomes (denominated in key global currencies at the market exchange rate) back to 2005–2006 levels. The same goes for key stock market indices; consumption of durable goods plummeted and even problems of Russia’s trade partners, usually attributed to Western sanctions, were largely generated by the shrinking, financially-viable demand in Russia as well as the impotence of domestic entrepreneurial activity. And since there are no signs that the government’s economic policy will undergo any changes, at least until the mid-2020s, disillusion will take hold.

I am not inclined to state now, as I did a year ago, that the next eight years²⁹ will see a constant shrinking of economic activity in the country. However, I am convinced that, while Russian

²⁷ See: idem, „Novaya nenormal'nost',” *Vedomosti*, 24 October 2016, pp. 6–7.

²⁸ See: idem, „Putin’s Self-Destructing Economy,” *The Washington Post*, 18 January 2016, p. A15.

²⁹ See: idem, „Dozhyvyom do 2023: pochemu nastoyashchiy krizis tol'ko nachinayetsya,” *RBC*, 22 December 2015, p. 7.

economic growth exceeded that of European countries and Northern America 1.5 to 2.5-fold in 2000–2007 and was approximately on a par with them or slightly behind them from 2008–2016, the Russian economy will lag significantly behind not only the leading developing countries, but also the majority of developed ones from 2018 until 2025, even if the commodities market enjoys a period of stability. Although these developments might not be fraught with catastrophic consequences for the global economy in purely economic terms (contraction of the country's less than 2% of the gross world product will not pose a huge threat) or for Russia itself (Russia's population is used to surviving under complex conditions and there is still a huge stock of patience remaining), the problem might be much more serious in geopolitical terms.

By undertaking aggression against Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin assumed that Russia could force neighboring republics into cooperating. He had a view to reintegrate them into an afterglow of the Soviet Union.³⁰ The logic underlying his policy was not only determined by a desire to project an image of Russia as a superpower which “rose from its knees” in military terms, but also to create conditions for the sustainable development of the domestic economy in the aftermath of the pre-crisis period, aided by the return of oil prices to maximum levels. However, it turned out that confrontation with the rest of the world, which coincided with adjustments affecting the commodities markets, was accompanied by an immediate devaluation of the ruble and a significant weakening in terms of influence to affect neighboring states. In the late 2010s, Russia found itself in an entirely new situation: the ratio of its market-value GDP to EU indicators was half of what it was in the early 1990s. Russia's GDP ratio was 4.5-times lower than China's. At the same time, Moscow ceased to be the “center of gravity” for post-Soviet countries oriented towards Brussels, Beijing or Ankara. Accordingly, the Russia of the 2020s will face the unenviable tasks of counteracting the impact of the EU on the one hand and China on the other as “centers of gravity.” Will Russia be able to retain its status as a self-sufficient economy or is it destined to become a “white spot” on the economic map of

³⁰ See: V. Putin, „Noviy integratsyonnyy proyekt dlya Evrazii—budushcheye, kotoroe rozhdayetsya segodnya,” *Izvestia*, 4 October 2011, pp. 1, 3.

Eurasia? In my opinion, this will be a key problem in the coming decade and the expectations of both economic and geopolitical actors will play a decisive role.

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To wrap up, it is noteworthy that the 2012–2014 economic crisis, brought about by both economic and political decisions of the Russian authorities, has had a crushing impact on the country and its global standing. Russia is now perceived as a country which broke free from global economic trends and went on to consistently underperform compared to frontrunner countries with developed economies. This situation has brought into question Russia's standing both as an economic and political player: this disillusionment can be ignored for the time being, but it becomes a key factor in the further development of the country. It is precisely in this context that Crimea became a "point of no return"—a point when Moscow tried to exchange economic for politics, surrendering both. And we will all have to await the consequences over the next decade. No substantial deviation from the chosen political course is imminent.

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OLGA GULINA

MIGRATION AS A (GEO)POLITICAL CHALLENGE
FOR RUSSIA

Russia's annual immigration levels are among the highest in the world, consistently in the top three alongside the U.S. and Germany.¹ The major change in Russia's migration dynamics over the last few years has come from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which has had a dramatic effect on the volumes and composition of migration flows. Over the course of 2014 to 2016, migration flows from Ukraine outpaced those from Central Asia, traditionally the largest source of migration to Russia. There are now 2.5 million citizens of Ukraine residing within the territory of the Russian Federation (RF), the largest grouping of foreign citizens in Russia.²

In general, migrants heading for Russia both from Central Asian states and Ukraine do not perceive Russia as their new homeland, but mostly as a source of income and/or employment. In most cases, they are not humanitarian migrants, either—refugees or asylum-seekers—not least because granting asylum in Russia is a *casus extraordinarius*.³

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *International Migration Report 2015: Highlights* (ST/ESA/SER.A/375).

² According to Olga Kirillova, Chief of the General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Russian Federation, www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/06/30/8348279.shtml.

³ In Russia, refugee status was granted to 239,359 individuals in 1996; to 79,727 individuals in 1999; to 26,065 individuals in 2000; to 458 individuals in 2005; to 785 individuals in 2010; to 763 individuals in 2012; to 632 individuals in 2013; to 808 individuals in 2014; to 227 individuals in 2015; to 770 individuals in 2016.

This chapter reveals the specific nature of migration flows in Russia from 2014–2016 and answers the question: Why does migration remain a demographic, political and social challenge for the country?

DEPOPULATION OF THE COUNTRY: MIGRATION AS A DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

Two factors should be addressed here: the lack of stable, positive population growth, and Russians' unfaltering emigration sentiments. The growth or preservation of the population's size is a priority in today's Russia. The Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) has published estimates that outline three scenarios Russia's demographic prospects up to 2050. All are strongly linked to new waves of immigration:

- In a low/inertia scenario, a fall in the RF population by 36.9 million residents will be partially compensated by the arrival of 7.7 million new migrants.

- In a medium/realistic scenario, the decrease in RF population by 16.1 million people will be compensated by the arrival of 13.6 million new migrants.

- In a high/futuristic scenario, the population growth of +3.1 million people in Russia will be accompanied by an inflow of 19 million new migrants.⁴

Any of the three scenarios will have a significant impact on the political, legal and socio-economic landscape of Russia. Population growth in 2014–2016—self-proclaimed by Russian authorities—was generated by the annexation of two new entities—the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol (to be noted, these territories are recognized by Ukraine as being under temporary occupation). This bucked a trend: Russia's population growth—and in particular its labor market—have been dependent on migrants

⁴ *Russian Demographic Yearbook*, Rosstat, 2015, www.gks.ru/free_doc/doc_2015/demo15.pdf.

for years.⁵ At present, no objective reasons exist which would change that overarching trend. According to various estimates, the country's labor resources will have fallen by 18–19 million by 2025; the ratio of able-bodied to unemployable residents will have reached a critical point: 2:1 by 2022 and 1.6:1 by 2045.⁶ To put that in perspective, the ratio of able-bodied to unemployable residents in 2015–2016 was 2.5:1.

Demographic data also show a worsening geographical imbalance. The majority of the Russian population—79%—live in the European part of the country, while the territories of Western Siberia and Russia's Far East are scarcely populated. 19.3 million people live in the Siberian Federal District, while just 6.2 million people reside in the Far Eastern Federal District today. Just across the border in China, three neighboring provinces—Heilongjiang, Jilin and Inner Mongolia—are populated by more than 100 million residents. Russia's population density is 8.4 people per square kilometer, which is 18 times lower than that of China; 14 times lower than that of the European Union; 6 times lower than the world's average arithmetic density.⁷

Population growth at current rates is very low. Since 1992, contemporary Russia has consistently witnessed population decline. As underlined by Prof. Anatoly Vishnevsky: “simply replacing generations was already impossible back in 1964 in the USSR ... [at the moment] the population growth rate in the RF is negative.”⁸

Another concern: Russians' willingness to emigrate. According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), the majority of respondents (86%) have no plans to leave Russia entirely, and believe that their children and grandchildren would be better off living in the country rather than abroad (75%).

⁵ Yu.F. Florinskaya et al., *Migratsiya i rynek truda*, Moskva: The Institute of Social Analysis and Projections, 2015; E.V. Tyuryukanova, Zh.A. Zayonchkovskaya, Yu.F. Florinskaya, *Trudovaya migratsiya v Rossiyu: kak dvigat'sya dal'she. Seriya spetsyal'nykh dokladov*, Moskva: MAX Press, 2011.

⁶ S. Aleksashenko, “Kak vymirayet Rossiya: vyvody iz novogo demographicheskogo prognoza,” *RBK*, 30 January 2015, <http://daily.rbc.ru/opinions/economics/30/01/2015/54c8d2459a7947498564d371#%5Blenta>.

⁷ O. Gulina, “Zatrat na rubl', dokhod—na dva,” *Gazeta.ru*, 26 September 2016.

⁸ A.G. Vishnevsky, “Al'ternativy migratsyonnoy strategii,” *Rossiya v global'noy politike*, 2004, no. 6.

However, 11% of respondents harbor opposing views and would like to emigrate. That is a marginal improvement: there were 16% of them in 1991 and 13% in 2011; 11% in 2012 and 13% in 2015.⁹

Table 1. The number of temporary and permanent residence permits issued to citizens of the RF by EU member states

Country	Number of temporary and permanent residence permits issued to citizens of the RF	Percentage of temporary/permanent residence permits issued to citizens of the RF as a % proportion of the total number of applications
Latvia	2,084	32.8%
Bulgaria	2,729	29.0%
Estonia	970,000	24.3%
Lithuania	1,108	21.4%
The Czech Republic	11,289	16.4%
Cyprus	2,069	13.3%
Malta	902,000	9.0%
Hungary	1,321	6.4%
Croatia	219,000	6.4%
Luxembourg	276,000	5.6%
Switzerland	1,946	4.7%
Slovenia	531,000	4.7%
Germany	9,054	4.6%
Greece	1,175	3.1%
Poland	3,932	0.7%

Source: Eurostat.

However, a substantial amount of this 11% willing to emigrate are young people. A report by the Committee for Civic Initiatives¹⁰ notes that data from polls conducted by the VCIOM, Levada Center and Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) regarding key indicators such as the percentage of those who want to emigrate (11% by the

⁹ "Emigratsionnyye nastroyeniya–2016: potiv techeniya," *VTSIOM*, no. 3229, 26 October 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115921>.

¹⁰ O. Vorobyova, A. Grebenyuk, *Doklad "Emigratsiya iz Rossii v kontse XX nachale XXI veka*, Moskva: The Committee for Civic Initiatives, 2016, pp. 31–39.

VTSIOM and 19% by the Levada Center¹¹) and the profiles of the respondents inclined to emigrate (on the whole, young people aged 18–24) are compatible. Eurostat statistics confirm this: Russians are high on the list for number of applicants to the European Union for permanent or temporary residence¹² (Table 1) and they make up a sizeable group of naturalized citizens in the EU (Table 2).

An increasing number of Russians who have left their home country are striving to obtain citizenship in EU member states—the main countries of destination of Russian migrants.¹³

Table 2. Proportion of naturalized Russians among naturalized citizens of EU member states

EU member state	Number of naturalized Russians among the total number of naturalized citizens of a given country*
Lithuania	49.6%
Cyprus	40.5%
Finland	32.4%
Bulgaria	16.4%
Malta	15.1%
Estonia	12.7%
The Czech Republic	12.4%
Poland	9.5%
Hungary	8.4%
Austria	6.8%
Germany	5.9%
Latvia	5.3%
Luxembourg	5.3%
Belgium	4.9%
Slovenia	2.6%
Croatia	1.8%
Greece	1.5%

* Main countries of former EU and non-EU citizenships of persons acquiring citizenship in the EU-28 and EFTA, 2014, Eurostat 2015.

Source: Eurostat.

¹¹ “Emigratsiya,” *Levada.ru*, 19 July 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/07/19/emigratsiya.

¹² Main citizenships of persons granted first residence permits, in 2015, Eurostat 2016.

¹³ “Emigratsiya,” *op. cit.*

There is a significant demographic surplus of Russians in other states whereas in Russia itself, there is a demographic deficit. 4.5 million Russians left the country from 1990–2014. 308,475 citizens left Russia in 2014; 257,324 of whom emigrated to CIS countries and 51,151 of them—to non-CIS countries.¹⁴ Russian statistics, it should be noted, do not determine the nature or purpose of the emigration dynamics, since the purpose of entry/exit is not identified. It would, therefore, be more accurate to use statistical data from destination countries (Table 1, 2) when looking at Russians' emigration sentiments and the dynamics of outflows from Russia.

Experts from the Committee for Civic Initiatives note that four waves of emigration of citizens of post-Soviet Russia can clearly be identified after the collapse of the USSR. The first wave of emigration (1990–1994) comprised of refugees, migrant workers, scientists and ethnic emigrants returning to historic homelands (for the most part, Germany and Israel, but also other countries). The second wave of emigration, from 1995 to 2000, had a similar makeup of refugees, migrant workers, ethnic emigrants, scientists and highly-qualified specialists, students, and entrepreneurs. The composition of those willing to leave their homeland changed starting with the third wave of emigration, from 2001 to 2005: the number of young, able-bodied Russians choosing to emigrate increased. A similar tendency persisted among emigrants during the fourth wave of emigration from 2006 to 2010.

Experts from the Committee for Civic Initiatives have overlooked one more wave of emigration: Russians seeking asylum in the West. In the fiscal year of 2016 which ended on 30 September 2016, there were 1,912 Russians applying for asylum in the U.S. That is an increase of 31% year on year—and up 164% compared to the same period in 2012.¹⁵ In the EU, 7,510 citizens of Russia applied for asylum during the first ten months of 2016—

¹⁴ *Chislennost' i migratsiya naseleniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii v 2014 godu*, Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoy statistiki, www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b15_107/Main.htm.

¹⁵ C. Schreck, *Russian Applications for U.S. Asylum Surge Again in 2016*, Radio Free Europe, 6 December 2016, www.rferl.org/a/russia-increase-seeking-us-asylum-in-2016/28159435.html.

up 31% compared to the same period of 2015.¹⁶ Within the EU, the most popular destination countries for asylum-seekers from Russia were Germany, which registered 4,435 asylum applications (59% of all asylum applications submitted by citizens of the RF in the EU), Poland—with 1,860 asylum applications (25%), and France—395 applications (5%).¹⁷

The population decline, combined with the emigration of mostly working-age citizens from the country, may lead to a situation where scarcely populated areas of the Russian Federation (with its average population density of 8.4 people per square kilometer) become the targets of geopolitical interest from Russia's neighbors. Most notably, that's China (population density: 139 people per sq. km) or even Japan (336 people per sq. km).¹⁸ Russia's future, therefore, rests on a surge of migration, since only new immigrants can become a replacement mechanism for an emigrating, ageing and dying population, or even just a mechanism to slow down the depopulation process.

MIGRATION AS A POLITICAL CHALLENGE

The topic of political challenges posed by migration has many facets in domestic and foreign policy. The migration flow between Russia and independent states which emerged from the rubble of

¹⁶ *First-time asylum applicants in the EU-28 by citizenship, Q3 2015–Q3 2016*, Eurostat 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:First_time_asylum_applicants_in_the_EU-28_by_citizenship_Q3_2015_%E2%80%93Q3_2016.png

¹⁷ *Thirty main citizenships of first-time asylum applicants by destination country in the EU 28, 3rd quarter 2016*, Eurostat 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/6/6a/Thirty_main_citizenships_of_first_time_asylum_applicants_by_destination_country_in_the_EU_28%2C_3rd_quarter_2016.png.

¹⁸ For more details see: N. Mkrtychyan, "Goroda vostoka Rossii 'pod natsikom' demographicheskogo shatiya i zapadnogo dreypha," in: *Pereselencheskoye obshchestvo Azyatskoy Rossii: migratsii, prostranstva, soobshchestva. Rubezhy XIX–XX i XX–XXI vv.*, eds V.I. Dyatlov, K.V. Grigoriev, Irkutsk 2013, pp. 41–61; L. Karachurina, N. Mkrtychyan, "Dinamika chislennosti naseleniya munitsipal'nykh obrazovaniy RF kak otrazheniye tsentro-peripheriynoy kontseptsii prostranstvennogo razvitya (1989–2002 gg.)," *Demoscope* 2010, no. 437–438.

the USSR has always been one-directional.¹⁹ Russia has always been, and still is, a magnet for migrants from the countries of Central Asia, Transcaucasia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The dynamics of these migration flows has recently been influenced by the events and circumstances both in the countries of origin and in Russia itself. These included military conflicts in South Ossetia and the introduction of two-way entry visas between Russia and Georgia; the 2008 financial crisis; the devaluation of the Russian ruble and stagnation of Russian economy during 2014–2015.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict stands out as a political event that has affected migration flows. From 2014–2016, migration from Ukraine surpassed immigration flows from Central Asian states which dominated through the preceding ten-year period. Economic recession, the imposition of EU and U.S. sanctions, devaluation of the Russian currency and a tightening of migration legislation diminished the demand for the labor from Central Asian countries at a time when migrants from Ukraine flooded into Russia.

According to Rosstat, the migration balance (the difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants) between Ukraine and Russia looked as follows: +36.4 thousand people in 2013; +84.9 thousand people in 2014; +146.1 thousand people in 2015; +93.6 thousand people in 2016. To compare, the migration balance between Uzbekistan and Russia comprised +67.3 thousand people in 2013; +36.7 thousand people in 2014; –(minus) 20.6 thousand people in 2015; +14.2 thousand people in 2016. The migration balance between Tajikistan and Russia was as follows: +33.7 thousand people in 2013; +19.3 thousand people in 2014; +11.3 thousand people in 2015; +19.4 thousand people in 2016.²⁰

As of 1 October 2016, 531,471 citizens of Azerbaijan; 523,124 citizens of Armenia; 741,453 citizens of Belarus; 613,067 citizens of Kazakhstan; 582,863 citizens of Kyrgyzstan; 490,844 citizens of Moldova; 999,035 citizens of Tajikistan;

¹⁹ Kazakhstan is the only exception. In the 2000s, Kazakhstan also became a recipient country and is still receiving migrants from other Central Asian countries, although far fewer than Russia.

²⁰ Official data by Rosstat from 2013–2016, www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/. The 2016 data will be updated.

1,779,002 citizens of Uzbekistan and 2,581,380 citizens of Ukraine registered in the RF.²¹

Such a transformation of migration flows has served Russian interests, not least because of the cultural affinity and linguistic unity of Ukrainians and Russians. However, according to the majority of experts, Ukrainian migration to Russia has become a burden rather than a blessing due to complex migratory regulations and bureaucratic procedures. These have prevented Russia from leveraging the full potential of well-qualified and highly-educated Ukrainian migrants.²²

Migrants without qualifications and low levels of education have been a serious problem, in general. Migration to Russia, on the whole, does not contribute sufficiently to dealing with the current shortage of professional staff. Nearly 90% of migrants entering Russia arrive from countries with a lower average level of employee skills.²³ Every second citizen of Tajikistan (53%) and every third citizen of Kyrgyzstan (38%) focus on migration to Russia in search of work, education and/or new place of residence.²⁴ At the same time, the level of education of the majority of migrants is far lower than that of Russian citizens.²⁵ In 2010, as few as 14.3% of migrants residing within the territory of the RF could boast of having completed higher education whereas 23.1% had completed vocational training.²⁶ Nearly 63% of migrants arriving in Russia only have a high school certificate.²⁷

²¹ Stay of citizens of the CIS in the RF as of 1 October 2016. Statistical data of the Migration Department of the Ministry of the Interior, the Central Database of the Registration of Foreigners.

²² V. Malakhov, *Otsenka riskov, ugroz i zadach migratsyonnoy politiki v usloviyakh dolgosrochnogo massovogo prisutstviya na territorii Rossii bezhentshev iz sopedel'nykh gosudarstv*, Moskva, 2016, <https://komitetgi.ru/analytics/2557>.

²³ *The Russian Federation. Systemic country diagnostic*, World Bank 2016, p. 119; *Developing skills for innovative growth in Russia*, Moscow, World Bank, 2015, p. 12.

²⁴ EDB Integration barometer, Eurasian Development Bank 2015, www.eabr.org/general/upload/EDB_Centre_Analytical_Report_33_Full_Rus.pdf.

²⁵ M. Lokshin, E. Chernina, "Migranty na rossiyskom rynke truda: portret i zarabotnaya plata," *Ekonomicheskiy Zhurnal WShE*, 2013, no. 6 (3), pp. 41–73 [59–60].

²⁶ Zh. Zayonchkovskaya, *Migratsya v sovremennoy Rossii*, vol. 1, Moskva: Russian International Affairs Council, 2013.

²⁷ N. El-Sibai, *Fundamental'nyye issledovaniya*, 2015, no. 2 (25), pp. 5689–5692.

On the one hand, this creates conditions for the expansion of a shadow labor market while, on the other, it increases tension in the legal sector of the labor market. According to Russian specialists, the problems of legalizing employment and the influx of undocumented migrant workers from CIS countries became even more acute in 2016, since the number of migrant work permits issued in the RF bears no resemblance to the real number of migrants who enter the country with the intention of gaining employment.²⁸

The opposite side of the process which creates serious tensions in the Russian migration field are the demands to introduce a visa regime for Central Asian states. Some of the political *beau monde* perceive migrants from Central Asia as *magna bestia*, encroaching on the interests of Russians. A Senator, the First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on Defense and Security Frants Klintsevich (United Russia),²⁹ Valery Rashkin (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation—the CPRF),³⁰ Sergey Mironov (Just Russia) and many others are convinced that “a visa regime with Central Asian countries should be re-introduced ... fingerprints definitely have to be taken from everyone who enters our country and leaves it without a visa.”³¹ Leaders of opposition parties compete with representatives of pro-government factions when it comes to proposals for limiting the number of immigrants entering Russia. In his election manifesto “Navalny 2018,” Alexey Navalny stated that it was not only necessary to introduce a visa regime for Central Asian countries but also for Transcaucasian states.³²

At the same time, a visa regime for Central Asian countries does not meet the interests of Russia; those in the high echelons of executive power are well aware of this. Prime Minister Dmitry

²⁸ Yu. Florinskaya, N. Mkrchyan, “Migratsya v Rossii. Staryye trendy, novyye problemy,” *Monitoring ekonomicheskoy situatsii v Rossii. Tendentsii i vyzovy sotsyalno-ekonomicheskogo razvitya*, The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, 2016, no. 19 (37).

²⁹ “V Sovfede vystupili za vvedeniye viz so stranami Sredney Azii,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 2 May 2016.

³⁰ V. Rashkin, A profile page on the website of the CPRF, <https://kprf.ru/personal/rashkin>.

³¹ “Mironov predlozhil vvesti vizovyy rezhim so stranami Sredney Azii,” *RIA Novosti*, 29 August 2016, <https://ria.ru/society/20160829/1475572857.html>.

³² The key issues of Alexey Navalny’s election manifesto, <https://2018.navalny.com/platform>.

Medvedev and President Vladimir Putin have repeatedly stated that Russia was not going to introduce visas for citizens of Central Asian states, since it would “put off former Soviet Republics.”³³ Besides, the only land border between Russia and Central Asian states is shared with Kazakhstan. So far, the border between Kazakhstan and Russia has not been equipped with special border security measures, which means that considerable financial investment would be needed to organize passport and visa controls—investment which has not been provided for in the Russian budget. The visa regime for Central Asian states could not only seriously affect the role of Russia on the Eurasian “chessboard,” it could also destroy integration unions: namely the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, which unite Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia for the purpose of establishing and maintaining free movement of goods, works, and services, including free labor turnover.

“US” AND “THEM.” MIGRATION AS A SOCIAL CHALLENGE

Over the past few years, one of the most common concerns of the average Russian citizen is related to the change in the ethnic composition of the country’s population—largely due to the arrival of immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet states. Should current trends continue, including population decline and its substitution by migratory influx, migrants and their descendants will have indeed made up one-third of Russia’s population by 2050 and will have become the backbone of Russian society by 2100.³⁴ Thus, growing anti-immigrant sentiments among Russian society is ominous.

According to a 2016 survey by the Levada Center,³⁵ the idea of “Russia for the Russians” was accepted by 38% of respondents.

³³ “Putin o migratsii: vizovyy rezhim lish’ ottolknet partnerov po SNG,” *RIA Novosti*, 8 October 2013, <https://ria.ru/society/20131008/968476674.html>.

³⁴ E. Andreyev, A. Vishnevsky, “Demograficheskiye perspektivy Rossii do 2050 g., Naseleniye Rossii 2006,” *Chetyrnadtsatyy yezhegodny demograficheskiy doklad*, 2008, pp. 265–286).

³⁵ “Intolerantnost’: i ksenofobiya,” *Levada.ru*, 11 October 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/10/11/intolerantnost-i-ksenofobiya.

This is up from 35% in 2015, and 36% in 2014. Levada also asked whether this idea was “fully supported,” not just accepted. 14% responded that it was, which represents a continued level: 16% in 2015 and 18% in 2014. Russians believe it is necessary to limit the number of the following ethnic groups (listed in Table 4) from entering the country.

Table 4. Ethnic groups, whose number should be limited within the territory of the Russian Federation, in the opinion of Russian respondents

Ethnic group / Year	2016	2015	2014
People from the Caucasus	34%	29%	38%
People from Central Asia	29%	29%	29%
Chinese	24%	24%	33%
Jews	6%	7%	8%
Ukrainians	13%	14 %	8%
All nations except for the Russians	18%	15 %	14%

Source: the Levada Center.

Two contrasting trends can be observed in Russia today. The first: A majority of Russians—66% of respondents in 2016, 68% of respondents in 2015 and 76% of respondents in 2014—were in favor of restricting the entry of members of certain ethnic groups into Russia.³⁶ The second: a majority of Russians is interested in the return of “direct descendants of those who were born in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and are Russian native speakers and bearers of Russian culture.”³⁷ This contradiction strengthens the ethnicization of migration legislation, exacerbates the social opposition between “us” and “them” and turns migration policy mechanisms (the institutions of citizenship and asylum) into foreign policy instruments.³⁸

³⁶ “Intolerantnost’: i ksenofobiya,” *Levada.ru*, 11 November 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/10/11/intolerantnost-i-ksenofobiya/#_ednref3.

³⁷ The draft federal law no. 69201-7 “On the amendments to the Federal Law as of 31 May 2002, no. 62-FZ ‘On citizenship of the Russian Federation’ and to the Federal Law of 25 July 2002, no. 115-FZ ‘On the legal status of foreigners in the Russian Federation’ in relation to Russian native speakers.”

³⁸ See The draft Federal Law no. 54735-7 “On the amendments to Article 14 and 35 of the Federal Law ‘On citizenship of the Russian Federation’.”

Today, internal and external migration flows and migration to Russia are managed on an *ad hoc* basis, according to the necessity to resolve a given problem. The cooling of Russian-Turkish relation in 2015 was accompanied by a ban on employing citizens of the Republic of Turkey. Namely, those who were not involved in labor and/or civil law relations with Russian employers on the territory of Russia as of 31 December 2015.³⁹ The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which triggered growing flows of migrants from Ukraine to Russia, once again demonstrated the ability of Russian migration management to serve political interests of the country.

“US” AND “THEM.” UKRAINIAN MIGRATION TO RUSSIA

According to the RF’s Migration Department of the Ministry of the Interior (GUVM MVD), Ukraine was the main migration donor for Russia from 2014–2016. As stipulated in the legislation of the RF, migrants from eastern regions of Ukraine are “citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons arriving on the territory of the RF *en masse* in an emergency.”⁴⁰ However, the definitions of “the mass nature” and “emergency” of these inflows to Russia make it impossible to regard citizens of Ukraine as refugees. To begin with, refugee status is granted by Russia only under exceptional circumstances (Table 5). Secondly, a few citizens of Ukraine who were granted refugee status in Russia were previously employees of the Ukrainian state apparatus in the days of President Yanukovich.⁴¹

³⁹ The Decree of the President of the RF no. 583 as of 28 November 2015, “On measures to ensure the national security of the Russian Federation and to protect citizens of the Russian Federation against criminal and other illegal acts and on the adoption of special economic measures against the Republic of Turkey.”

⁴⁰ See The Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation as of 22 July 2014, no. 691 “On citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons who used to permanently reside on the territory of Ukraine and arrived on the territory of the Russian Federation *en masse* in an emergency to be located in different territorial entities of the Russian Federation;” the Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of 15 September 2014, no. 936 “On assistance granted to citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons who used to permanently reside on the territory of Ukraine and have arrived in the territory of the Russian Federation *en masse* in an emergency in ensuring their travel and transportation of their luggage to their place of stay on the territory of the Russian Federation.”

⁴¹ E.Yu. Burtina, E.Yu. Korosteleva, V.I. Simonov, *Rossiya kak strana ubezhishcha*, Moskva: Vash Format, 2015.

Table 5. Comparison of the number of citizens of Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan to have been granted asylum and temporary asylum

	Ukraine	Syria	Afghanistan
Refugees as of 1 January 2015	227	2	414
Temporary asylum as of 1 January 2015	234,360	1,924	693
Refugees as of 1 January 2016	273	2	352
Temporary asylum as of 1 January 2016	311,134	1,302	572
Temporary asylum as of 1 October 2016	approximately 329,900*		

* Yu. Florinskaya, N. Mkrchyan, "Migratsiya v Rossii. Staryye trendy, novyye problemy," *Monitoring ekonomicheskoy situatsii v Rossii. Tendentsii i vyzovy sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitya*, The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, 2016, no. 19 (37), p. 17.

Source: Rosstat.

Refugee status and temporary asylum differ from a legal standpoint; they have different deadlines for reviewing applications, offer different protection mechanisms and imply different legal consequences.⁴² Implied by the Law "On refugees,"⁴³ an individual should submit an application for refugee status to the local office of migration services [the former Federal Migration Service (FMS), currently GUVM MVD]. A review of the merits of the application is carried out within 3 to 6 months. Refugee status is granted for up to three years and can be extended in the case of life-threatening circumstances. A refugee identity card is issued.

The procedure for granting temporary asylum is stipulated in the Resolution of the Government of the RF no. 690.⁴⁴ Decisions on granting temporary asylum are taken by the local office of migration services within 3 working days from the day of the application's submission. Temporary asylum is granted for up to 1 year and can be extended subject to a positive decision by a local office following

⁴² O. Gulina, "Humanitarian Migration from Ukraine," *Russian Analytical Digest*, 2014, no. 157, pp. 17–22.

⁴³ The Federal Law as of 19 February 1993, no. 4528-I "On refugees."

⁴⁴ *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF of 22 iyulya 2014 g. N 690 "O predostavlenii vremennogo ubezshishcha grazhdanam Ukrainy na territorii Rossiyskoy Federatsii v uproshchennom poryadke,"* <http://base.garant.ru/70701742/#ixzz4YfgmRrZD>.

the submission of a written application by an applicant. A temporary asylum certificate is issued. However, such an individual remains a citizen of Ukraine after having obtained the right to temporary asylum. An individual can abandon the temporary asylum status at any time, receive a national ID and regain the status of a person temporarily staying on the territory of Russia. At the same time, such a person cannot be employed without having been granted temporary asylum.

Citizens of Ukraine employ other means when it comes to legalizing their stay within the territory of Russia: they apply for a work permit; a temporary residence permit; citizenship of the RF; participation in the State Program to Facilitate Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the RF. The State Program, notably, was amended back in 2014 based on Presidential Decree no. 531. According to the amendments, foreigners and stateless persons who have obtained temporary asylum in Russia⁴⁵ can become beneficiaries of this State Program.

It is clear that migration from Ukraine was the focus of strategic attention and interest in Russia in 2014–2015: 321 temporary accommodation facilities (TAFs) were established in 69 territorial entities of the Russian Federation housing 18,156 citizens of Ukraine. An additional 569,566 individuals found accommodation in the private sector.

Migratory privileges for Ukrainian citizens were revoked on 31 October 2015⁴⁶ and all TAFs had been closed by late 2015.⁴⁷ The closure of TAFs meant that citizens arriving in Russia from Ukraine were left with a choice: either return to Ukraine or legalize

⁴⁵ *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 25.07.2014 g. N° 531*, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38741>.

⁴⁶ "Izmenilis' usloviya prebyvaniya na territorii Rossii dlya nekotorykh grazhdan Ukrainy," *GARANT.RU*, 2 November 2015, www.garant.ru/news/668627/#ixzz4WQ0DWriK.

⁴⁷ *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 31 oktyabrya 2015 g. N 1177 "O vnesenii izmeneniy v Pravila predostavleniya v 2015 godu iz federal'nogo byudzheta byudzheta sub'ektov Rossiyskoy Federatsii inykh mezhyudzhetykh transfertov na finansovoye obespechenie meropriyatiy po vremennomu social'no-bytovomu obustroystvu grazhdan Ukrainy i lits bez grazhdanstva, postoyanno prozhivavshikh na territorii Ukrainy, pribyvshikh na territoriyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii v yekstrennom massovom poryadke i nakhodyashchikhsya v punktakh vremennogorazmeshcheniya*," <http://base.garant.ru/71238722/#ixzz4YHH3Ldg7>.

their stay in the RF. At the moment, citizens of Ukraine are in the same situation as citizens of other independent states of the former USSR which are not members of the Eurasian Economic Union and have to apply for a temporary residence permit; work permit; participation in the State Program to Facilitate Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the RF or apply for Russian citizenship.

Residents of Eastern Ukraine from the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts enjoy some legal privileges. Despite non-recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), the Russian Federation does recognize legal documents issued by state bodies of the above-mentioned republics. In 2016, approximately 40 thousand people were granted DNR passports⁴⁸ and 10 thousand residents of the LNR obtained LNR passports.⁴⁹ Identification documents issued by the LNR and DNR such as passports, driving licenses, birth certificates, death certificates, certificates of change of name, certificates of marriage and divorce entitle persons to purchase tickets for all means of road, rail and air transport from all Russian carriers as well as the right of the freedom of movement within the territory of the RF. All Russian airlines: S7, Aeroflot, Pobeda and UTair admit passengers from the self-proclaimed republics based on documents issued by the LNR and DNR.⁵⁰ It turns out that Ukrainian migration to Russia has its own specificity and citizens of eastern Ukraine from the self-proclaimed LNR and DNR belong to the category of "us" rather than "them" from the point of view of Russian authorities.

⁴⁸ "Pasport grazhdanina DNR v 2016 godu poluchili boleye 40 tysyach zhiteley–migratsionnaya sluzhba, *Dan-News*, 10 January 2017, <http://dan-news.info/politics/pasport-grazhdanina-dnr-v-2016-godu-poluchili-bolee-40-tysyach-zhitelej-migracionnaya-sluzhba.html>.

⁴⁹ "Pasporta LNR poluchili boleye 10000 zhiteley Respubliki," *NewsRussia Today*, <https://newsrussia.today/donbass/742-pasporta-lnr-poluchili-bolee-10000-zhiteley-respubliki.html>.

⁵⁰ "Rassledovanie RBK: Kak v Rossii priznali pasporta DNR i LNR," *RBC.ru*, www.rbc.ru/politics/02/02/2017/587cf9159a7947e5f86ee045.

CONCLUSIONS

Migration in contemporary Russia constitutes a demographic, political and social challenge, largely because the ruling elite is not responding sufficiently to the dynamics and characteristics of migration processes going on within the country and abroad.

Migration is the only way of replenishing an aging labor force and repopulating Russian regions such as Siberia and Russia's Far East. Russia has been the country of destination for migrants from the independent states of the former USSR, and it has been a country with a high population outflow index over the course of the last twenty-five years. A multitude of circumstances influence the trajectory and dynamics of migration processes. The tightening of migration legislation in the RF, the devaluation of the national currency, and difficulties in the execution of migrant rights have all had an impact on quantitative and qualitative characteristics of migration flows.

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has become a trigger for the transformation of migration flows across the post-Soviet space. It has affected both the recipient countries and the countries of origin of migrants (Central Asian states, the Caucasus and Ukraine). From 2014–2016, Ukraine became the main donor country of migrants to Russia. Ukrainian migration to the RF has its own specifics. Unlike other citizens of Ukraine, migrants from the self-proclaimed LNR and DNR enjoy a number of legal privileges within the territory of Russia.

Migration management in today's Russia focuses on meeting the political needs of the country, which is detrimental to Russia's demographic, socio-cultural and other interests and diminishes the institutions of citizenship and asylum to purely foreign policy instruments.

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OLESYA ZAKHAROVA

HUMAN RIGHTS IN “POST-CRIMEAN” RUSSIA:
READING BETWEEN THE LINES

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 was one of the key turning points during Vladimir Putin’s 3rd presidential term, and a watershed moment in Russian history. The Western liberal world unequivocally deemed this an act of aggression and violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Meanwhile, Russia hijacked Europe’s human rights rhetoric; Vladimir Putin claimed the action was primarily aimed at defending human rights: “... we have to do everything,” Putin said live on TV on 17 April 2014, “to help these people defend their rights and decide on their own future. This is what we are going to fight for.”¹

The referendum itself he described as a vital means of freedom of expression: “... it was impossible in any other way to conduct the referendum openly, honestly and with dignity, and help people to express their opinion,” he said in the same speech.

Using the concept of human rights for political purposes is a well-known rhetorical trick. It is unlikely, however, that many from an international audience found this argument from Putin’s speeches very convincing. Russian internal policies initiated by Putin at the start of his 3rd presidential term, in particular those concerning human rights, were far from democratic. Russia entered its watershed year of 2014 with a whole range of new laws limiting rights and freedoms. There were stricter regulations on large scale

¹ Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

events, which virtually equate the freedom of association with extremism. A ban on distribution of materials related to non-traditional sexual relations was introduced, which in practice authorized discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and provoked aggression towards LGBT members of Russian society. Also introduced was a “foreign agent” category in the legislation on non-profit organizations, and the introduction of criminal liability for anyone “insulting the feelings of believers” and a criminalization of slander, which limited media freedoms and freedom of expression. Added to this were laws that violated the rights of migrant workers and a number of other repressive measures. According to Freedom House data for 2014, the general freedom rating for Russia was 5.5 (1 = most free and 7 = least free), while civil liberties scored 5, and political liberties—6. Consequently, Russia received an overall ranking of “Not Free.”

Greater infringement of rights was accompanied by an intense “securitization” of political discourse, in which the exercise of most rights and freedoms started to be portrayed as actions that pose “serious” threats to citizens, and from which the state has to protect them. Legal acts limiting rights were presented as actions necessary to protect society from approaching, inevitable threats. All in all, at both institutional and discourse levels, a “state-centrist” form of human rights representation was established. The idea of strong statehood, which was characteristic for Putin’s discourse from the start of the 2000s, was tightly combined with prioritized respect for human rights, in effect forming a state-center structure with a humanistic focus: a “strong, effective” state was presented as a necessary and obligatory condition for securing human rights. Consequently, to guarantee respect for human rights, it was necessary to guarantee a “strong” state. Nevertheless, human rights were presented as a state priority, and citizens themselves were viewed as active participants in the process of building a “strong state.” At the start of Putin’s 3rd presidential term, liberal elements were removed, and the discourse set forth a purely state-center paradigm in which the concepts of sovereignty and human rights, rather than complementing each other, become rivals, with the former clearly dominant.

The rest of this article will consider whether and how the annexation of Crimea affected Russian domestic policy and official discourse.

HUMAN RIGHTS AS AN “AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN INFLUENCE”

The official human rights paradigm is “stripped” of any ambiguities or tolerance of rival concepts in the “post-Crimean” period; the idea of clear domination of state interests over human rights principles has crystallized as the highest state value. The proposed concept is being legitimized through the rhetoric of threats, combined with the traditional dichotomy of Russia and the West. The only difference is that “after Crimea” the security aspect of the discourse became much stronger, since the “Us-Them” dichotomy presented to the public, previously based on a rather historical narrative that the West has always wanted a weaker Russia, has now become obvious and quite real. The Maidan, Ukraine’s revolution of 2013–2014, has become the main bogeyman for Russian citizens, and an example that threats from “so-called democratic” (as Putin describes them) “orange revolutions” exported by the West are real, and their only outcome is devastation and human rights violations. Putin vividly described the negative consequences of Western influence in a speech at the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015:² “The export of the so-called ‘democratic’ revolutions continues. ... But what happened in reality? Aggressive intervention from abroad instead of reforms brought presumptuous destruction of state institutions together with the way of life itself. Instead of triumph of democracy and progress we see violence, poverty, social disaster, and utter disregard for human rights, including the right to live.”

To counterbalance these “orange revolutions,” Russian discourse proposes the principle of integrity of state sovereignty, presented in terms of *progress*, *freedom* and *free choice* for everyone, as Putin announced to the world: “What is the state sovereignty that has been discussed by colleagues here today? Above all, it is an

² Putin’s address on 70th session of the UN General Assembly, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>.

issue of freedom, freedom of every person, every nation, every state to choose its own fate.”

The negative image of the West, which is exposed by state discourse as the main culprit of “orange revolutions,” has inevitably affected the presentation of the human rights concept itself. Human rights, which the public firmly associates with the West, are increasingly presented as Western ideas, alien and harmful to Russia, which: a) does not correspond to unique Russian values, and is therefore threatening to Russian culture; and b) is an instrument of Western opponents that is used to undermine and deter Russia. This idea has been expressed by both federal and regional politicians. For example, commenting on the Germanwings A-320 crash that happened in March 2015, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy listed “a timid commitment to respect human rights” as one of the causes. The LDPR leader criticized the pilot who left the cabin during the flight to “relieve himself,” leaving the young co-pilot on his own. “This is also a type of culture: the human right to comfort at the expense of security.” As a result, negative “labelling” was used to juxtapose human rights and security.

In one of his speeches, Vitaly Milonov, a member of the legislative assembly of Saint Petersburg, described freedom of speech as “beautiful labels covering up ideological ‘carcinogenic E food additives’,” thus portraying one of the key human rights as something dangerous, and “carcinogenic.”

SIDELINING HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH LEGISLATION

The marginalization of human rights was facilitated by a range of legal acts, which in effect institutionalized a “Russia-West” juxtaposition, and focused political discourse on the preeminence of security. The law introducing the category “foreign agent” into the legal system back in 2012 was one of the first. Since the Crimean crisis, this process has accelerated.

Amendments to the federal Act on Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of Citizens of the Russian Federation were a significant contribution to this process. Signed by the president on 23 May 2015, the new law was

described by the media as a law on “undesirable organizations.” The main targets were international and foreign non-profit organizations, as well as non-profit organizations that receive funding from the U.S.: according to the new standards, their activities could be suspended without a trial if the prosecutor’s office decides that they threaten the interests of the Russian Federation. Representatives of the Russian political elite presented this law as necessary not only for guaranteeing national security, but also for defending citizens’ rights. For example, this is how Federation Council Chairwoman Valentina Matviyenko commented on the act: “This law aims to defend our state, citizens of our state. It corresponds to international practices.”

Speaking about this law being aimed at the defense of citizens, Matviyenko passes on a message to society that the West and pro-Western organizations, and, therefore, their ideas and principles, pose a threat to Russia and its population. Human rights are among those ideas. It is no coincidence that organizations which promote human rights—the Soros Foundation (Open Society), the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice, the MacArthur Foundation, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and similar organizations—were among the first to receive the status of “undesirable.”³

It is also quite significant that these new provisions of the law were included in the federal Act on Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation. The first two articles of this law correspond to its title, while the language of the following articles on “undesirable organizations” does not include “human rights and freedoms of the citizen of the Russian Federation.” According to articles 3 and 3.1, the new regulations are aimed at protection of the country’s defense capacity and national security. The term “human rights” is not used in those two articles. It is unlikely that these two regulations were included in this law by chance, because they could have been added to the federal law “On non-profit organizations.” Nevertheless, the legislature chose to include

³ List of all the undesirable organizations, <http://minjust.ru/activity/nko/unwanted>.

those regulations in this law, which has not only symbolic but also practical meaning.

First, including the rules on undesirable organizations in this law allows it to be presented to the public as aimed at defending human rights, and politicians have already exploited this. At the same time, while hinting in the title that the law will affect those who violate human rights, the wording of articles 3 and 3.1 point to interests of the Russian Federation and national security as objects to be defended. It follows that the legislature mixes up the concepts of *human rights* and *state interests*, shifting the focus toward state interests. State interests are made virtually equal to human rights. As a result, the main provisions of liberal theory are put aside—the provision that human rights are primarily the rights of separate individuals, citizens, and that their defense is first of all aimed at defending citizens' interests with respect to the state, and limiting the latter.

Similar arguments were used when adopting the 23 May 2015 decision of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, which provided a justification for the Russian government's refusals to comply with decisions from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), whose jurisdiction Russia recognized in 1996. Bear in mind that in that decision, the Constitutional Court explained that the Constitution has priority over the Convention on Human Rights, and therefore, if an ECHR decision goes against the provisions of the Russian Constitution, it may not apply. On the one hand, the reasoning behind this decision was that ECHR's decisions concerning Russia are biased and politically motivated: "...*collaboration of European and constitutional rule of law is impossible under conditions of a chain of command*, because only dialog between different legal systems is the basis of adequate balance."

On the other hand, the Court repeated a common refrain of parliamentarians about the decision being made primarily to defend Russian citizens' rights: "What did the Constitutional Court articulate?" asked Chief Justice Valery Zorkin. "We will be able to say how enforceable this part of the decision is only when, for example, the Constitution and legislation based on it is better at defending citizens' rights. This part is ignored, and we only hear

about the Constitutional Court turning against Europe, undermining everything European, and so on.”⁴

Together, all these legal acts not only constructed a specific official discourse devaluing the liberal concept of human rights. They added to the transformations that were taking place at the institutional level.

TINKERING THE CONCEPT OF “HUMAN RIGHTS”

It is impossible to avoid human rights rhetoric altogether in today’s Russia, given its place in current Russian legislation. Yet the focus of Russia’s policy making elites has been on granting these concepts a new meaning. The aim is to replace a liberal concept of human rights with something that sounds the same but much more convenient for Russia’s rulers wanting to wield extensive power. This resulted in a specific reframing of the liberal concept of human rights. On the one hand, the traditional human rights vocabulary—freedom, human rights, social injustice—was preserved, although expanded to include moral⁵ categories, which are mostly alien to the liberal concept. On the other hand, the “lenses” through which the substance and understanding of human rights are interpreted were switched, and something similar to Soviet human rights doctrine emerged.

What exactly is this doctrine? Its main trait is a focus on the social and economic rights of the citizen, which sounds relevant to the public, taking the recent economic crisis into account; and, on the other hand, it syncs well with the population’s habitual paternalism. A tilt towards social and economic rights, to a varying degree, undoubtedly has always been a characteristic of Russian official rhetoric in the human rights field, but now the status of such rhetoric is advancing from being just one element of the discourse to a its centerpiece.

⁴ V. Putin, Meeting of the Human Rights and Civil Society Council, 2015, www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/50925.

⁵ O. Zakharova, “Na raznih yazikakh,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 March 2013, www.ng.ru/ideas/2013-03-25/9_values.html.

This paradigm shift is evident both in the topics chosen by officials, and in the terminology used by speakers describing issues related to human rights. Social and economic topics dominate, and political rights are omitted in the president's speeches at conferences with bodies whose statutory function is to promote human rights. These include, for example, his speeches at the Civic Chamber, the All-Russia People's Front, the presidential Human Rights and Civil Society Council, meetings with the Commissioner for Human Rights. This is also reflected in the president's remarks. At a meeting of the Human Rights and Civil Society Council, when Putin mentioned that the state pays special attention to the development of human rights institutions by allocating grants, he only mentioned issues related exclusively to social and economic security, thus reducing the "human rights" concept to mere social and economic rights, and the third sector—to only NGOs focused on social issues:

I want to emphasise that the state will continue to pay special attention to the development of human rights and civil society institutions. ... Let me remind you that starting from 2015, the list of priorities for grant allocation is extended to include the defense of workers' rights, identifying and supporting talented children and youth, assistance to people with limited physical abilities and retired people. Overall, we should note that the role of social-oriented organizations, the so-called third sector, is growing worldwide. Russia is not an exception.

This thought is repeated in many other statements by Putin, including his last message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on 1 December 2016, in which he encouraged "full assistance" exclusively for social-oriented NPOs, i.e. those that don't influence political decisions.

When Putin is asked about political rights, for example during public discussions, as a rule he does not change the subject; instead he leaves the question unanswered.⁶

⁶ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 1 December 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>.

The trend of reducing the interpretation of human rights to social and economic security has been picked up by other officials, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation. This tendency was already present to some extent in the language of the previous High Commissioner, Ella Pamfilova. Although in her report on the situation of human rights in Russia in 2015 attention was paid to all categories of rights, in public meetings with Putin she has focused mostly on social and economic issues. For example, in their May 2015 meeting, Pamfilova mainly discussed the topics of access to medical services, education, housing, and the unacceptably low minimum wage. However, together with social and economic problems, from time to time issues of the relationship between the state and its citizens have also been mentioned, such as “social contradictions between *chinovniki* and the population,” the over-broad legal definition of political activities, and excessive control of NGO activities by administrative bodies. In relation to the case of Yevgeniya Vasilyeva, the Commissioner also raised issues of flaws in the judicial and law enforcement systems and the problem of “separation of investigations and proceedings into two levels—‘elite’ and ‘for the rest of the people’.”

With the appointment of the new Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova on 29 April 2016, the Commissioner’s discourse became more homogenous, with Moskalkova setting a narrow range of topics as priorities after taking the office: “protection of employment rights, health care, education, utility services, migration, penal enforcement and criminal proceedings.”

The Commissioner’s discourse has developed in the direction she announced. An analysis of her interviews and public meetings with regional commissioners, as well as representatives of foreign delegations, shows that when talking about human rights, Moskalkova means “social support,” “utility services,” “re-housing residents of houses unfit for human habitation,” “social benefits to vulnerable citizen groups,” unpaid wages and other social problems.

For example, the Commissioner’s website states:

On August 18, Tatiana Moskalkova met with Governor of Vladimir Region Svetlana Orlova. The head of the region and the High Commissioner exchanged their views on a wide range of human rights issues ... In particular, they

discussed interaction in the field of social support, public and utility services.

The second most frequently mentioned topic was the rights of people in detention and prisoners.

The attention of regional commissioners has also been focused on issues related to improving living conditions, labor and migrants' rights. It appears that the current discourse of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia completely avoids such topics as political rights, freedom of expression, media and accountability of the state authorities, which should be the main spheres of a national ombudsman's attention, according to the liberal concept.

If civil and political rights are briefly mentioned in some politicians' speeches, it is, as a rule, done in a context of their irrelevance to the population. For example, during his meeting with Putin, Chief Justice Zorkin stated:

As to our internal problem, of course, above all citizens are interested in their rights and freedoms. This is understandable. I would say that the most complaints are connected to the right of ownership in particular, and generally rights on property, civil and employment rights, criminal proceedings and criminal legislation. This is the traditional list, and it remains the same. It should be mentioned that from the point of view of political rights, they occupy one of the last places in disputes. I am not saying this because we refuse to admit something, this is not what I am saying; I am talking about the statistics on complaints we receive.

SO WHAT DO HUMAN RIGHTS MEAN NOW?

Under the "post-Crimean" isolationism and full-blown "securitization" of political discussion the long-running process of "reviewing" the human rights concept has become more pronounced.

As mentioned, the authorities have not discarded the liberal vocabulary, and the political elite is still happy to use the terms "human rights," "freedom" and "freedom of choice," which has been clearly demonstrated in President Putin's last address. However, the meaning Russian politicians place on these terms is far from what is understood by "human rights" in international practice.

This concept is represented in Russian political discourse by a special state-oriented structure in which a strong state becomes not just a condition for respect of human rights (as it was at the beginning of 2000s), but a central ideological concept. Compared to the strong state, human rights become secondary, and should be respected only in cases where they are compatible with state interests. Occasionally, the discourse takes this thought to the extreme, and there are glimpses of the idea that human rights are equivalent to state interests, which allows the political elite's aspirations to be disguised as human rights.

Alexey Pushkov provided the clearest definition of the idea of the priority of state sovereignty over human rights in his interview with *Izvestiya* in March 2015, where he proposed promoting such values as "state sovereignty and independence:" "The BRICS countries have their own system of values, and it differs from the Euro-Atlantic one. It is, let's say, prevention of "orange revolutions," i.e. changes of government and authorities of other countries with outside influence. Why couldn't that be a value?"

In his comments on the ruling that European Court decisions are not binding, Zorkin also puts "capacity of the state" in first place, calling it "balanced opinion:"

We are not shying away; we believe that we apply constitutional criteria, of course taking the capacity of the state into account.

In cases where human rights do not overlap with state interests, their content boils down to social and economic rights, which suits the Russian authorities very well. On one hand, in an economic crisis, social and economic security becomes relevant to the public. On the other, due to the paternalism and demonization of the West that are deeply rooted in public consciousness, juxtaposing political

rights with social and economic rights is a lost cause, and discourse returns to the antagonism between the USSR and the West, further fuelling the rhetoric of hostility and isolationism.

This kind of reframing of human rights not only changes the main meaning of this concept, but transforms the principle of the relationship between the citizen and the state. The liberal concept sees the latter as an instrument for a citizen to express their discontent at state abuse, and one that guarantees the accountability of state institutions. The state-centrist frame, with a paternalistic tilt, pictures the state not as the main entity against which human rights should defend the citizen, but as the entity that provides these rights and serves as their main defender. It is no coincidence that law enforcement agencies are presented in the discourse as defending human rights, which has been repeatedly articulated by Putin in his speeches. Nor is it surprising that a police colonel was appointed as Human Rights Commissioner.

In this way, a peculiar formula is presented to the public: Since the state is the main defender and “donor” of rights, it cannot be viewed as a potential violator of human rights, and, therefore, it is impossible to claim or demand anything from it. In this way, the highest authorities and officials representing the state are excluded from accountability.

Human rights, as they are known in international practice are seen as an instrument to ensure the accountability of authorities through guarantees to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press. These are rights which ensure communicative freedom, using Habermas’s terminology. Yet Russia’s state discourse sees this championing of human rights as attempts to organize “orange revolutions,” i.e. destabilization of the society, a threat to the principle of sovereign integrity.

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STEPAN GONCHAROV

VALUE SYSTEMS
WITHIN RUSSIA'S NEW NORMALITY

The basis for a robust system of international relations, as Pitirim Sorokin wrote in his work *The Cause of War and Conditions of a Lasting Peace*, "...is the existence of a complete, well-connected and integrated ... value system ... in each functioning society, and, what is more, these systems should be compatible." If not, the author warns, war is inevitable—a civil war if a value-based conflict arises inside a society, or an international war if the conflict affects different societies.

At the end of 2015, Levada Centre sociologists published their work *War Instead of Future: The Solution for the Anomic Consciousness*,¹ where the combination of civil and international war is described as a self-regulating instrument for Russian society. Support for military action from Russian society is exclusively an initiative of the state and its propaganda machine. However, the reasons behind the events that unfolded following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 are to be found in the peculiarities of the Russian social order.

Russian society is rejecting elements of the modern social-organization system imported in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. At first glance, such a statement would suggest a barbarization of society—i.e. it is returning to a "natural state" in the idealist terms of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Nevertheless, I will defend the point of view

¹ A. Levinson, S. Goncharov, "War Instead of Future: The Solution for the Anomic Consciousness," *The Russian Public Opinion Herald. Data. Analysis. Discussions*, 2015, no. 3–4, pp. 45–66, www.hse.ru/pubs/share/direct/document/174201723.

that these circumstances in no way confirm the naïve, idealistic aspirations of society and its leaders under the motto “back to nature.” Obviously, in place of formal legal and moral Western-type guidelines, home-grown institutions are being developed according to formal and informal legal practices.

If there was a Russian equivalent of the Oxford Dictionary’s word of the year, the term “import-substitution” might well have received the award in 2015. According to *Google.Trends* data, this was the most searched-for word in Autumn 2015, corresponding to interest from the media and state policy priorities. “Import-substitution” was initially a purely economic-related term but, in keeping with historical materialist traditions, Russian society has expanded its use to encompass all spheres of life. There is talk of creating a Russian Internet, and a Russian payment system; Russia is withdrawing from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, and dialog on a whole range of other issues is being discontinued. In general, the tendency towards economic and value-based autarky is increasing. At the same time, imperialistic ambitions are on the rise, becoming a feature of domestic policy—the Russian population itself has become the target of war propaganda, since the country’s authorities have no economic motivation to be involved in any military campaigns abroad. All the military ventures in the last two years have obviously been populist moves.

THE ESTABLISHED SYSTEM OF RULES

Starting from the mid-1990s in Russia, there has been a gradual refusal to adhere to the liberal standards of a law-governed state. The president’s power has been bolstered excessively, the media monopolized, and watchdog institutions degraded. Each subsequent electoral cycle is accompanied by changes to the electoral regulations. Businesses become directly dependent on the make-up of Vladimir Putin’s entourage, which is defined by personal connections.

However, these volatile conditions and planning timeframe affect not only businesses, but also a significant part of Russian

society as a whole. Only slightly over two-thirds of Russians (36%) are able to envisage their future in one year's time or a longer period. This indicator has remained stable for the past few years. Furthermore, the near future that Russians anticipate is marred by a lack of any outside support² should any difficult situations arise: 70% of Russians count only on themselves, 60% rely on support from their relatives and friends, while only 4% count on support from state social security. Although this figure is higher than at the end of the 1990s, its stabilization at the current level points to a lack of significant changes in the consumption model in recent years. Three-quarters of the Russian population (76%) claim to experience difficulties in purchasing expensive household goods (refrigerators, TVs, etc.).

The spike in positive expectations observed after Crimea's annexation was replaced at the end of 2014 by fear of abrupt adverse economic changes and panic caused by currency exchange-rate volatility. In the first half of 2015, the economic problems became less salient, and Russians gradually adapted to their worsening standard of living by trying to replace their usual assortment of consumer goods and services with cheaper alternatives. On the whole, this has allowed a controlled economic recession with a high level of support for the authorities to be maintained, although society's attitudes towards the country's leadership are also being eroded. The overwhelming majority of Russians (80%)³ would rather be politically unengaged, while 69% admit that they prefer to avoid all unnecessary contact with the state.

The theory that the social contract (according to which social loyalty and readiness to comply with rules laid down by the state is "traded" for the authorities' commitment to sustain a certain standard of living) seems untenable. Even in December 2014, when we registered the highest fear of economic collapse, we also recorded the least readiness to protest. We certainly cannot claim

² See "Na chyu pomoshch rasschityvayut rossiyanе v trudnoye vremya," *Levada.ru*, 16 December 2014, www.levada.ru/2014/12/16/na-chyu-pomoshh-rasschityvayut-rossiyane-v-trudnoe-vremya.

³ S. Goncharov, "Russia's Opposition: Can It Be Great Again?," *Intersection*, 20 March 2017, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/society/russias-opposition-can-it-be-great-again>.

that there is no connection between the state of the economy and public attitudes, but a minor decrease in the standard of living can be compensated by re-focusing public attention onto different issues. An overwhelming majority (81%) of Russians report⁴ a lack of opportunities to influence life in their country or even their own cities; 69% state that the majority of Russians would be unable to survive without state assistance—all this emphasises that a significant part of the Russian population is wholly dependent on external factors, despite the clear absence of state support.

Another widespread theory regarding the relationship between state and society, directly connected to the previous one, is that “TVs” are competing with “refrigerators,” where “TVs” mean state propaganda and “refrigerators” are a metaphor for basic needs. The main difference in this case is that the people are not considered as equal partners in their “dealings” with the state. No matter what, they are controlled: either by propaganda or a self-preservation instinct. Even though the theory of competition between “TVs” and “refrigerators” is not entirely unfounded, this model of society’s behavior as a reaction to stimuli seems to be an oversimplification. In my opinion, it is related to the profoundly socio-cultural basis for the current authorities’ support, rooted in a specific perception of history and the role of the state. Indeed, propaganda appears to be a highly effective tool for controlling the attitudes of the public. However, “TVs” are only effective when society endorses a certain narrative. In this case, annexation Crimea to compensate for the trauma of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The annexation of Crimea acted as a symbolic repayment for lost feelings of belonging to a great empire. The almost unanimous popular support for Crimea annexation demonstrated how important the issue of “correcting historical mistakes” is to Russians. Trying to dispute the theory that “it is impossible to step into the same river twice,” Russians are seeking to revive the situation of 25 years ago and, obviously, alter the consequences of what they consider to be the tragedy of the 1990s. For Russians, social development stalled after the “largest geopolitical disaster of

⁴ See “Rossiyane ne khotyat mitingovat’,” *Levada.ru*, 15 November 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/11/15/rossiyane-ne-hotyat-mitingovat.

the 20th century,” as Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the USSR. On this issue, Russian society concurs with the state, so the attack on liberal values is coming from both sides.

PUBLIC DEMAND FOR DE-LIBERALIZATION

On the one hand, liberal methods have been rejected by public opinion since they contradict long-standing habits and standards of a non-historical nature. Russians are unaware of when those habits and standards were established, and consider it unimportant. They have always existed and are hence contrasted with the formal law which, when it was amended, led to the social upheavals of the last century. The legal basis for interaction between individuals and the state seems precarious to the majority, and citizens are skeptical about their ability to apply the law to influence any serious decision-making. Focus-group respondents remarked:

“– If the authorities are involved in a matter, resolving it through the courts is probably impossible.”

A phenomenon of “time standing still” is developing—the absence of a future, which Russians no longer need because basic relations are not intended to go beyond mundane tasks. The very existence of particularistic relationships is limited by the period of time during which connections function within private circles. These standards make up Russian society, constituting its real nature and considerably limiting its planning timeframe. We should not forget that the power of modern law significantly narrows the margin between rulers and subordinates, and, ideally—erases it: each person has a chance to progress to any level in the hierarchy of power. The bureaucratic system idealized by Max Weber allows appeals from citizens to reach the relevant authorities. The current Russian system, built on informal relations, radically reduces the effectiveness of bureaucratic mechanisms and heightens the role of corrupt connections and nepotism. Citizens’ opportunities become directly dependent on the scope and “quality” of their social circles. Once again, it is worth pointing out that the overwhelming majority (70%) of Russians claim they can only count on themselves. Likewise, over 70% of residents in large cities believe that the most

effective ways to solve social problems are help from relatives and friends (75%), nepotism (71%) and bribes (63%).

“Written appeals,” which Russians usually threaten to send to “the president himself,” have acquired the mystical meaning of the most powerful non-legal instrument for solving social problems. If what people are saying is true, this ritual has the same sacred significance for careless *chinovniki*, who also live above the law and are therefore afraid of their superiors’ changing moods. Replacing the law with informal social relations drastically decreases average Russians’ range of possibilities, since they usually have no means of contacting the powers-that-be. Considering that citizens’ political functions are reduced to minimal participation in the distribution of power, and their social functions are also pretty much limited by the widespread culture of non-participation in public affairs, people are meant to keep silent about social problems, sneer at them, or elevate them to the status of national exceptionalism, which everyone is supposed to be proud of. Russians articulate this as follows:

“– Optimism, because the Russian people only stay afloat thanks to optimism.”

“– Why is our country the way it is? Who is guilty – the president or the administration? It is our fault, because the majority doesn’t care about anything.”⁵

Powerlessness and the inability to fix anything inside the country, in my opinion, are directly connected to attitudes towards Russian foreign policy. The absence of effective legal means to control the authorities, coupled with an unwillingness to play an active part in any forms of civic self-organization result in growing cynicism and apathy. The lack of experience, and reluctance to accept that society could possibly function in any other way, have resulted in a prevailing opinion that the rest of the world is not much better off: “there is no democracy,” “freedom of expression does not exist.” This convenient, morally relativist attitude removes the onus to act from citizens’ shoulders, turning them from actors into passive observers. It is also important to take into account that

⁵ From focus-group respondents’ answers.

young people are one of the most apolitical social groups, and are susceptible to information attacks. They show the highest level of support for the president and the least willingness to take part in politics. While there is a common psychological term “learned helplessness,” when analyzing public opinion we should rather speak of “perceived helplessness,” because this state is transmitted together with public attitudes, and does not imply personal negative experience in attempts to change one’s own situation. Crimea annexation and the phenomenal support for Russian military operations are caused in part by shifting particularistic relationships to a global level and dividing standards into “ours” and “theirs”—the only means available to rationalize what is happening in the world. This norm for international relations appears to be eternal and, therefore, unchangeable.

“— You see, all countries, whether it’s the USA or Russia, have their own specific interests. The Middle East is in flames, it always has been and always will be, no matter whether it was two thousand years ago, a thousand, or nowadays.”⁶

Russians find it hard to believe in the existence of unbiased international arbitrators, and Russia is perceived as being surrounded by enemies. In this case, annexation of Crimea was in defense of national interests, not an attack. Uniting around the Crimean issue is seen to be much more significant than a simple restoration of justice; it is a way for society to “build a nation” in which the narrow particularistic interests of various individuals and elite groups find common ground.

DELIBERALIZATION AS A MEANS OF REMAINING IN POWER

On the other hand, developing particularistic standards turns out to be very advantageous to those in power who define the rules of the game. What Simon Kordonsky called a “class”⁷ in modern Russia consists of servile layers of society which have duties to

⁶ From focus-group respondents’ answers.

⁷ S.G. Kordonsky, *Soslovnaya struktura postsovetsoy Rossii*, Moskva: Public Opinion Foundation, 2008, p. 216.

the central authorities in exchange for certain exclusive rights and privileges for each of their legally autonomous factions. These rights and privileges are not unlimited, but correspond to conventional practices for interaction between institutions delegating authority and certain classes. The standards for interaction can change, similarly to what is happening in the struggle between “system liberals” and “*siloviki*.” As demonstrated by the Alexey Ulyukayev case, even governmental ministers can become victims of such class confrontation. His case is illustrative: according to rumors, Alexey Ulyukayev’s arrest was the outcome of his conflict with Igor Sechin, the head of Rosneft. Perhaps the Minister of Economic Development’s attempt to act within the bureaucratic system’s standards contravened the unwritten hierarchy and agreements, according to which Sechin had a blank cheque to violate common standards.

Apparently, the majority in society accept this class inequality and deliberate humiliation. An increasing number of citizens ready to protest could upset the society’s class structure. The figure of the president, who supposedly links the interests of “average citizens” and “the elite” is used to neutralize people’s frustration. In order to make it possible for him to unite society, the maximum possible number of sanctions for violating regulatory restrictions have been removed. The durability of Russian society depends on how long the nation has need of the president’s personality. The events of the past two years demonstrate that he was given a symbolic “mandate” not only to wage war in Ukraine and Syria, but also to violate the social standards which serve to strengthen the state. What was labelled a “hybrid war” or “doublethink” is one way of completely or partially concealing real information from society (both in Russia and abroad). The president is allowed to deceive us or them. It is, however, equally obvious that the disappearance of social threats could deprive the country’s leader of this special mandate. The number of respondents sympathizing with Putin reached its peak by the start of 2015, then began to return to normal levels as the conflict in Ukraine deescalated and people grew used to the Syrian issue. Of course, serious negative events would be required for attitudes towards Putin to change significantly, not just the scarcity of glorious victories. Nonetheless, the very trend for decreased

support for the authorities, combined with the lack of significant achievements, indicate a heavy burden of social problems which cannot be resolved via the current system of rules, and which are thus avoided not only by the authorities, but also by citizens themselves.

Table 1. Poll: "In which words would you describe your attitude to Vladimir Putin? (several answers are possible)"

Data from Levada Centre, %	Mar.14	Mar.15	Mar.16	Jul.16
Admiration	6	10	8	8
Fondness	31	37	30	29
Nothing bad to say about him	29	30	30	31
Neutral, indifferent	15	10	15	17
Cautious, "wait-and-see" approach	6	5	8	4
Nothing good to say about him	7	3	4	6
Dislike	2	2	3	2
Disgust	<1	1	1	1
Hard to say	4	2	3	1

Source: "Vladimir Putin vospriyatiye i doveriye," *Levada.ru*, 8 August 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/08/08/vladimir-putin-vospriyatie-i-doverie.

OPINIONS ABOUT LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not only the reason for a profound social trauma, but also signalled the beginning of the end for ideology-based politics. The crisis came at the moment when the collective consciousness had rejected both communism and liberalism. By 1991, the communist ideological system had been compromised, with only 30% of citizens believing in its naïve ideals. In 1992, 52% of Russians felt that the communist idea had exhausted itself, while 30% disagreed with that statement. It is noteworthy that this research was conducted after the liberalization

of prices, when Russians ran into the first consequences of the badly regulated market economy.

The swift demise of communism, however, did not imply that people would be quick to embrace ideas of liberalism. Liberalism soon became associated with social and political instability, and difficulties in adapting to the rapidly changing rules of the game. The main problem for the “democrats” was that liberalism had been built on top of the previous system of power relations. That was done in order to preserve the positions of some of the party *nomenklatura*, for fear that control over the country might be lost. At the same time, relations between state and society were never modified, and a paternalistic basis for dialog between civil society and the state remained in place. By the mid-1990s, it became clear that big businesses and idealistic liberals, affiliated to the state, were losing out to “patriotic” forces in terms of attractiveness and ability to fulfil the basic popular expectations. All this laid the foundations for modern society’s mistrust of liberal ideas and politicians. A relative majority of Russians (40%) admit to having no political views whatsoever and, among the remainder, only 6% consider themselves liberals. At the moment, many Russians feel that the democratic opposition is invariably weaker than the authorities, that it cannot propose a comprehensible, relevant political platform, and that it is out of touch with the people and has other interests.

– There was an opposition movement. There was Udaltsov. There was Navalny. There was Yavlinsky. These were the people who were dissatisfied with the elections. Well, that was a real mess, and the people went out onto the streets. An opposition bloc clearly did exist. Of course, the Americans “sniffed it out” and began playing them with money. And, of course, those people got spoilt right away.

– Here, for some reason... it is only really possible in Russia for the word “opposition” to be so strongly associated with concepts of Russophobia, hatred and disdain for the motherland. Nothing like this exists anywhere else. I even recall some American politician—I don’t remember who exactly—saying “I understand why the liberal opposition is so strongly disliked in Russia” after one of our opposition activists compared the victory of Lipnitskaya [author’s

note: a Russian figure skater] to the victory of some fascist sportswoman.⁸

Liberalism and democracy are often regarded as interconnected. It is important, however, to distinguish liberal and democratic ideals from attitudes towards certain components of these normative categories. According to Levada Centre data,⁹ the majority of Russians (62%) believe that Russia does need democracy. Moreover, democracy is usually linked to “positive” definitions: freedom of expression (39%), the country’s economic prosperity (27%), order and stability (25%), the rule of law (22%), and direct elections (20%). Negative definitions—such as impunity (7%), “idle chatter” (6%) and anarchy (4%)—are used much less frequently.

At the same time, out of all the components of democratic rule, Russians highlight order and rule of law (36%) and the authorities’ attention to people’s needs (34%), but the authorities’ electability and accountability is mentioned less often (19% and 18% respectively). It becomes clear that, to Russians, the content of democratic ideas themselves is being replaced by the ideals of a social state. Simultaneously, freedom and respect for individual rights (which are rather the foundations of liberalism than democracy) are mentioned most frequently, yet have the lowest substantive content. The West remains an example of a system that guarantees a decent standard of living. However, there is also a sense that some elements of this system, which allow Western countries to thrive, are “alien” to Russia. That is why almost half of Russians (46%) suppose that their country requires a “special” democratic model. The desire to disconnect from the rest of the world arises from a fear of losing in competition with other nations, fear of losing one’s identity if the high administrative authority is its cornerstone, and if other social institutions turn out to be (at best) mere appendages to the “strongman” of the state, while some are even branded “agents” influenced by some third party.

⁸ From focus-group respondents’ answers.

⁹ D. Volkov, S. Goncharov, *Demokratiya v Rossii: ustanovki naseleniya*, Moskva: Levada Centre, 2015, p. 43, www.levada.ru/old/sites/default/files/report_fin.pdf.

The existing arrangement contains immense potential for monopolization of power. A third of Russians (35%) assert that the Russian people need a strong leader, while approximately a third (37%) feel that supreme power should be in the hands of just one person. Only one in five Russians (21%) are strictly against the monopolization of power. Yet, it is implied that the power should lie with the country's president, not some abstract state. Over half of Russians (52%) consider that all the power should be in the hands of a leader, while only a third (34%) would prefer to see the power split between the president, parliament and judicial authorities, as envisaged by Western democratic traditions.

The authoritarian, anti-liberal traditions supported by the majority indicate a possible paradox of democracies. The policies of authoritarian governments which resort to populism are often more *ostentatious* (as can be confirmed from the Russian example). However, the *effectiveness* of such policies in economic terms might turn out to be less important than the authorities' ability to convince the nation that they are capable of solving its problems. The symbolic importance of Crimea annexation was not simply territorial expansion, but the ability to turn the great social myth of a powerful state into reality.

PART OF A GLOBAL TREND

This text might have been interesting to just a narrow circle of experts on Russia, were it not for last year's events, which convincingly proved the global nature of the anti-liberal tendencies described. It turns out that Russia was not lagging behind, but was in fact ahead of Western countries in certain respects. At the same time, it is equally evident that history is non-linear, and smooth transitions of societies from one socio-economic formation to another are fairly uncommon. Sporadic "setbacks" are inevitable and probably even healthy, provided that the system of social connections and self-organization which defines the political environment is independent from the state. In such an environment, it is essential for independent intellectuals to identify conflicts among social groups and define common tasks and goals.

Searching for social dissonance (to use Jacques Rancière's terminology¹⁰) and constantly overcoming internal confrontation are undoubtedly typical traits of the Western world. Current victories could signal that, some time ago, society chose an "easy" way to ignore the internal conflicts which hinder the implementation of universal values. Some citizens were forced out of the ideal model and, as recent events have revealed, such people are numerous. For Western researchers, a thorough study of Russian experience could be the key to understanding European and American processes. And it would be beneficial for Russians to realize that tectonic shifts can occur very quickly in the political landscape, given the appropriate social predispositions.

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¹⁰ J. Rancière, "The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics," *Critical Mass*, 2005, no. 2.

OLGA IRISOVA

WHO GETS TO SPEAK IN “POST-CRIMEAN” RUSSIA?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seemed in Russia that censorship had been thrown onto the scrapheap of history.¹ Soviet information control, if anything, served as a warning to society, an abuse of human rights not to be repeated. This consensus lasted about a decade or so, but in the years after President Vladimir Putin took power, suppressions of free speech gradually returned. The result is that by 2017, Russia’s news media have largely lost their main communicative social function: that of informing the public and holding power to account through investigations, dialog and debate. Putin’s consolidated control has limited the scope for editorial independence; most media outlets have been reduced to the role of mouthpieces for the authorities. A few media outlets with an independent editorial policy still exist in Russia. But they are increasingly subjected to pressure. The activities of such organizations are curtailed by repressive laws that limit freedom of expression and prevent widespread coverage of information inconvenient to those in charge.

This chapter focuses on identifying and analyzing the nature of censorship in “post-Crimean” Russia, as well as the means of manipulation employed in order to divide Russian society and ensure its loyalty to the regime.

¹ A. Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: The Journey from Gorbachev’s Freedom to Putin’s War*, London: Atlantic Books, 2015.

THE LEGISLATIVE GROUNDS FOR FILTERING INFORMATION

Encroachment on media freedom in Russia started within the first few months of Putin's first presidential term. On 9 September 2000, Putin approved the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation (RF)² which set out the fundamentals for the development of state policy for ensuring information security. It set the stage for the classification of media outlets as "good" or "bad."³ Thus, "the information and propaganda activities of political forces, public associations, the media and individuals distorting the strategy and tactics in the foreign policy activity of the Russian Federation" was outlined as a separate item in a paragraph on the most dangerous internal threats to the information security of the RF in the field of foreign policy. "Deformation of the system of mass information owing to uncontrolled expansion of the foreign media sector in the national information space" is listed as one of the greatest dangers in the sphere of spiritual life. The former provision actually means that whenever the media or a public figure interprets the Kremlin's foreign policy in any other way than the Kremlin does, it poses a threat to Russia's national interests. In other words, the principle of the "Kremlin's monopoly on the truth" was formulated back in 2000.

The latter provision logically resulted in the restriction of the right of other states, international organizations, foreign companies, foreigners (and citizens of Russia with dual citizenship) to own Russian media outlets. In 2008, foreign ownership of various large media organizations was capped at 50%, a law which hit a number of Russia-wide TV channels, radio stations and newspapers.⁴ The restrictions were extended to encompass all media assets (including

² *Doktrina informatsionnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 9 sentyabrya 2000 g.*, N PR-1895, www.femida.info/14/19002.htm.

³ The Doctrine itself is not a law yet. It is a kind of a "declaration of intent," the backbone of theoretical provisions which serve as the basis for subsequent adoption of legislative acts. The importance of such documents lies in the fact that they allow one to predict the subsequent vector of development of laws in a given field.

⁴ *Federal'nyy zakon ot 29 aprelya 2008 goda N 57-FZ g. Moskva "O poryadke osushchestveniya inostrannykh investitsiy v khozyaystvennyye obshchestva, imeyushchiye strategicheskoye znachenie dlya obespecheniya oborony strany i bezopasnosti gosudarstva,"* <https://rg.ru/2008/05/07/investicii-fz-dok.html>.

printed and online editions) holding a media license in 2014, a few months after the annexation of Crimea. The maximum allowed share of foreign shareholders in the equity of such companies was restricted to less than 20%, and foreigners and Russians with dual citizenship have been banned from founding media outlets⁵ since 2014. It is noteworthy that Vadim Dengin, the first Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Information Policy, Information Technology and Communications, and one of the co-authors of the amendments to the Law on the Media (on restricting the share of foreign shareholders in Russian media outlets to a maximum of 20%), openly announced that the amendments would help protect Russia’s information field from the influence of the West and “the fifth column” which is, in fact, tantamount to recognition of the authorities’ desire to isolate Russians from information other than that disseminated by pro-Kremlin media outlets.

The Kremlin focused largely on homogenizing views presented in the traditional media until 2012, when it recognized the growing influence of internet news portals and social media. Demonstrations had taken place against elections fraud that year, which started in late 2011 and came to be known as the Snow Revolution. Independent television was subjected to purges, as would have been the case in previous years, but it also came alongside a major blow to Internet-based media outlets and a regulatory response to social media ownership structures. Russia’s authorities had noted how the Arab spring had unfolded, observing how social media had played an integral part in communication between protesters: how it had enabled real-time footage of demonstrations to be broadcast globally.⁶ The logic was that the same forms of communication—social media and niche online media outlets—had already begun to play an important role during the anti-government protests of 2011–2013.

⁵ *Federal’nyy zakon ot 14 oktyabrya 2014 g. N 305-FZ “O vnesenii izmeneniy v Zakon Rossiyskoy Federatsii ‘O sredstvakh massovoy informatsii,’”* <https://rg.ru/2014/10/17/ino-smi-dok.html>.

⁶ H. Braun, E. Guskin, A. Mitchell, *The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings*, Pew Research Center, 28 November 2012, www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings.

By the time the Kremlin turned towards greater control of the Russian internet, or Runet, as it is also known, the government was already in a commanding position with traditional TV outlets, though there was still some consolidation to go. The process—began during the night of 13 April 2001, when the NTV channel was forcibly seized and later nationalized—was completed by 2015, when the Tomsk TV-2 channel was stripped of its broadcasting license.⁷ The punishment for TV-2 had been meted out following its coverage of a truthful and potentially damaging story about the deployment of Russian “volunteers” in the Donbas who were conscripted on a national scale. At one point, it seemed that it was possible to fully erase inconvenient facts from the consciousness of millions of people simply by eradicating them from TV coverage. However, judging by the results of surveys, TV’s popularity has waned while that of the Internet has soared over recent years.⁸ These factors have all played their part in determining the ways and means of the state’s encroachment on the freedom of online media.

The turning point of the state’s shift from deterrence to an active offensive in this field was the adoption of the amendments to the Law “On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development”⁹ which entered into force on 1 November 2012. Based on this law, Roskomnadzor compiled a single register of sites “containing banned information” to be blocked.

⁷ The Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) refused to renew a TV-2 radio broadcasting license in spring 2016 while referring to the fact that a TV-2 media outlet could not provide evidence of the lack of a second citizenship of one of the founders, as required by the provisions of the Law on the Media mentioned above according to which individuals with dual citizenship have no right to own more than 20% of the equity as founders of a media outlet. However, no law stipulates which documents would prove the absence of a second citizenship. The lawsuit between TV-2 and Roskomnadzor on this issue is still pending.

⁸ Press-vypusk N° 3098 “TV, Internet, gazety, radio: doveryay, no proveryay?,” VTSIOM, 4 May 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115679>.

⁹ *Federal’nyy zakon ot 28 iyulya 2012 g. N 139-FZ “O vnesenii izmeneniy v Federal’nyy zakon ‘O zashchite detey ot informatsii, prichinyayushchey vred ikh zdorov’yu i razvitiyu’ i ot del’nyye zakonodatel’nyye akty Rossiyskoy Federatsii,”* <https://rg.ru/2012/07/30/zakon-dok.html>.

The “Lugovoi Law”¹⁰ was added to the main law on “blacklisted sites” in February 2014. The “Lugovoi Law” provides the possibility of blocking access to the sites which disseminate calls for mass riots; as sites which publish “extremist” content would also be blocked without having to obtain a court order. Given the ambiguous wording of some Russian laws, virtually every statement can be classified as suitably extremist were it to contradict the Kremlin’s official stance. Effectively Roskomnadzor, Russia’s online regulator, secured a monopoly over censorship and is now empowered to block online sources merely upon the request of the prosecutor general or one of his deputies. Roskomnadzor used its power to deal out the full extent of this censorship as early as on 13 March 2014, when the Kremlin’s anti-Ukrainian information campaign was in full swing; it restricted access to several online media outlets with independent editorial policies for political reasons—all without a court order. These included, among others: Grani.ru, Kasparov.ru, and Ej.ru—the Yezhednevnyi zhurnal (Daily Journal) site of political commentaries. Alexey Navalny, an opposition leader, had his blogs specifically blocked on LiveJournal and the Echo of Moscow website.¹¹ In addition to the blocking of sites for politicized reasons, the laws on “blacklists” are used to exert pressure on the editorial policy of independent media outlets. For example, the Lenta.ru news site received a warning for publishing an interview with the leader of the Ukrainian Right Sector party in March 2014. Consequently, the owner of the outlet demanded that editor-in-chief Galina Timchenko dismiss the journalist who wrote the interview which was not to Roskomnadzor’s taste. Timchenko refused to obey and was fired; the majority of staff resigned in solidarity with her. In February 2016, the Prosecutor General’s Office demanded that Otkrytaya Rossiya (Open Russia) remove content relating to actions planned to commemorate the death of Boris Nemtsov, another prominent opposition leader, who was shot on 27 February 2015, in Moscow a stone’s throw from the Kremlin.

¹⁰ *Federal’nyy zakon ot 28 dekabrya 2013 g. N 398-FZ “O vnesenii izmeneniy v Federal’nyy zakon ‘Ob informatsii, informatsionnykh tekhnologiyakh i o zashchite informatsii’,”* <https://rg.ru/2013/12/30/extrem-site-dok.html>.

¹¹ Echo of Moscow and LiveJournal met the requirement and limited access to Navalny’s blogs and were subsequently removed from the “blacklist.”

Were they to refuse to remove the material, *openrussia.org* would have been added to the blacklist.

According to the independent “Roskomsvoboda” organization, as of April 2017, there have been 2,243,022 domains blocked without sufficient grounds; the total number of domains listed in the register since the adoption of the Law on “blacklists” is 4,378,528 (out of which 4,216,376 have been blocked indirectly and unlawfully because of sharing the same IP address). Bans on some of these outlets have since been lifted. The number had grown so large by a lack of accuracy: although less than 67 thousand Internet resources have been targeted directly, “neighboring sites” have also been inadvertently blocked due to technicalities; for instance, tens of thousands of sites sharing the same IP-address can be parked on the same server. At the same time, the number of Internet resources blocked based on the “Lugovoi’s Law”—i.e. without a trial and often for clearly politicized reasons—has been growing year upon year.

Many blacklisted sites have attempted to get round blocks by creating so-called “mirror sites.” However, such sites are easily identifiable and are also ultimately blocked. Thus, the process of creating new mirror sites is potentially an endless and exhausting one, which can become both a financial and psychological headache for site owners. At the time of writing, the State Duma has already adopted amendments to the anti-piracy law at the first reading. According to the amendments, Roskomnadzor is authorized to block mirror sites of pirate sites. Currently, the amendment only relates to mirror sites of pirate sites; but the fact that a new term of a “derived Internet site” (i.e. a mirror site) was introduced into legislation suggests there is potential for expanding the practice of pre-trial blocking of mirror sites to encompass other sites, too. Especially since the procedure of pre-trial access restriction to such sites was defined—and the Kremlin has shown no shortage of an inclination to establish control over critical information. In addition, so-called “anonymizers” (i.e. anonymous proxies)—proxy servers used to circumvent blocks while hiding users’ real IP addresses—have become the subject of a blanket block.

In spring 2015, however, the international human rights organization Reporters without Borders (RSF) provided a clear example of a means of how the international community can help

independent media outlets bypass the editorial policy imposed by the Kremlin. The RSF provided access to the previously blocked Grani.ru site as part of their fight against political censorship. They posted mirror sites of Grani.ru and eight other blocked sites originating from other countries using the cloud services of major network operators.

It meant that the Russian authorities—or any one of the countries which blocked access to one of the nine sites unblocked by RSF—tried to restrict access to these sites again, they would be forced to block thousands of sites belonging to other owners, as they would have to target the entire cloud service. At present, it seems that the authorities wish to avoid resorting to such drastic measures.

HUSHING UP UKRAINE

Another significant part of the Kremlin’s information policy has been its attempts to stifle and distort truthful information about events in Ukraine. For instance, attempts to restrict information on Russian combatants who lost their lives in Ukraine. In May 2015, Putin extended the list of types of information deemed to be secrets of the state to include data on Russian military losses suffered during wartime. The extension included any losses incurred during special operations in peacetime. Six months earlier, Pskov Deputy Lev Schlosberg published an article about the funeral of paratroopers killed in unknown circumstances.¹² Articles about the military combatants in the Donbas also appeared in Novayagazeta.ru and a number of other media outlets with an independent editorial policy. As of May 2015, authors of such publications can be charged with disclosing state secrets—punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment.

In this way, independent media outlets are effectively now forbidden to publish interviews or other items concerning Russian servicemen deployed in Ukraine or Syria. Another political

¹² L. Schlosberg, “Myortvyye i zhyvyye. Rossiyskoe gosudarstvo pytayetsa skryt’, chto ono posylayet svoikh synovey na voynu, kak oni pogibayut i gde pokhorony,” *Guberniya*, 25 August 2014, http://gubernia.pskovregion.org/number_705/01.php.

intervention designed to distort the truth about Russia's policy towards Ukraine was the introduction of Article 280.1 on "Public calls for action aimed at the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation" into the Criminal Code in May 2014. According to this article, individuals who undermine Russia's right to Crimea, by airing their views via the mass media or online, may be imprisoned for up to five years. Words such as "occupied" or "Ukrainian" are being erased from the Russian media space in reference to Crimea. Online discussions about the status of Crimea have been restricted as a result: as many as 15 cases concerning Article 280.1 were pending by 2016 and the majority (8) unsurprisingly concerned Crimea.

According to another law adopted after the annexation of Crimea, any member of the online community with a daily audience of over 3 thousand who posts or re-posts materials of someone deemed to be extremist or separatist can be jailed. According to this law, popularly known as the "Law on Bloggers," influential online personalities now virtually classified as media outlets and subjected to all the applicable restrictions that come with having to register with Roskomnadzor. The details of as many as 640 bloggers¹³ were entered into the register within a year of the law's enactment. Popular publicly accessible pages of social media outlets such as VKontakte, MDK, and Lentach—via which materials criticizing authorities are published frequently—are also targeted. The administrators of the public page Lentach have announced that they have been included in the register against their will. Precise data on the minimum number of daily visitors allowed before compulsory registration applies have not been voluntarily presented by Roskomnadzor. Popular global social media sites—such as Twitter or Facebook—defend their users' rights by refusing to provide Roskomnadzor with information about the number of visitors some of their pages attract, and have also refused to relocate their servers to Russia as demanded by the RF. Twitter is reported to be reviewing its policy and most likely will transfer Russian users' data to local servers in Russia by

¹³ "Chislo zaregistrovannykh Roskomnadzorom blogerov prevysilo 600 chelovek," *Lenta.ru*, 3 August 2015, <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/08/03/rknbloggers>.

mid-2018.¹⁴ Incidentally, LinkedIn was blocked on the territory of Russia in fall 2016 by Russian authorities for refusing to comply with similar demands about server relocation.

For the time being, popular opposition bloggers like Navalny have avoided having to register their Twitter accounts as mass media sources. However, according to the law, not only bloggers but also platform owners are held responsible for disseminated content which violates RF legislation. It means that, hypothetically, should Twitter fail to satisfy a Roskomnadzor request to remove content deemed unlawful under RF legislation, it may be blocked on Russian territory.

THE SILENCE OF AGGREGATORS

News aggregators have also, in fact, been equated to media outlets when it comes to liability of content. A “Law on news aggregators”¹⁵ as of 1 January 2017, aggregators with a daily audience of more than 1 million unique visitors are obliged to verify the reliability of published information—save for reports by media outlets officially registered with Roskomnadzor. The Yandex.Novosti portal, which is popular in Russia, as well as SMI2 and Novosti Mail.Ru, have already been registered as news aggregators governed by this law.

It is, of course, impossible to fully automate the process of checking the “reliability” of information and its compliance with the laws of the RF; and it is just as futile to manually audit thousands of publications links which are published daily by aggregators. So Yandex, for example, has decided not to link to news articles published on sites not registered with Roskomnadzor on its main page. Many media outlets with Kremlin-independent agendas are not registered in this way, and are therefore deprived

¹⁴ See “Twitter Reportedly Caves to Russian Censors, Will Possibly Move Data to Russian Servers,” *The Moscow Times*, 19 April 2017, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/twitter-plans-to-transfer-personal-data-of-russian-users-to-russia-by-2018-57759>.

¹⁵ *Federal’nyy zakon ot 23 iyulya 2016 g. N 208-FZ O vnesenii izmeneniy v Federal’nyy zakon ‘Ob informatsii, informatsionnykh tekhnologiyakh i o zashchite informatsii’ i Kodeks Rossiyskoy Federatsii ob administrativnykh pravonarusheniyakh,* <https://rg.ru/2016/06/28/zashita-dok.html>.

of substantial traffic by not being listed on aggregators like Yandex. This applies to both Russian and foreign media: for example, the Russian-language BBC website—and ensures a near-monopoly of pro-Kremlin content on the RuNet, at least on a scale wide enough to be impactful. The SMI2 resource, registered as an aggregator, will not be able to disseminate publications from independent media outlets not registered with Roskomnadzor either. Its cooperation with a “patriotic” media holding created by the St Petersburg “troll factory,”¹⁶ which litters the media space with ideologically-tainted publications, has also been revealed.

Nearly half a year has passed since this news aggregator restriction came into force. And there is every reason to speak of a homogenized agenda when it comes to Russia’s main aggregators. Articles about the anti-corruption rallies which took place on March 26 in more than eighty towns across Russia, which attracted more protestors than any other rally of the last five years—and was the most numerous in terms of the number of detainees in general—did not appear among the top five news stories on Yandex’s main page at the time. The aggregator had, of course, stopped processing information disseminated by independent media outlets which were not registered with Roskomnadzor, and which were actively reporting the demonstrations and arrests across the country. This is how the Kremlin managed to conceal information about the rallies not only from TV viewers, but also from Internet users who are accustomed to avoiding certain news sources and who read articles from a selection of top news stories compiled by aggregators.

However, the Kremlin apparently does not intend to stop there. The number of users of instant messengers has been growing rapidly over recent years. In particular, the encrypted messenger app Telegram has introduced channels—including the increasingly popular anonymous political channels—which have emerged as a key source of news untainted by Kremlin censorship, especially for young people. This soon came to the attention of the Kremlin. It would be hard to ignore any such trend, especially in the leadup to Russia’s 2018 presidential election. Back in January 2017, a few

¹⁶ A. Zakharov, P. Rusyayeva, “Rossledovanie RBK: kak iz ‘fabriki trolley’ vyroslo ‘fabrika media’,” April 2017, *RBK*, www.rbc.ru/magazine/2017/04/58d106b09a794710fa8934ac.

weeks after the RF introduced its aggregator law, German Klimenko, who advises Putin on his internet policy, spoke of needing to equate Telegram channels to mass media outlets. Klimenko frankly admitted that “Telegram channels multiplied in response to regulation of social media.”¹⁷ That is, he actually confirmed that the authorities were conducting a witch hunt against newly emerging bolt holes of critical information.

So the authorities, having limited the capabilities of traditional media, then online media, have then attempted to control social media and news aggregators; now that users have switched to messengers in search of uncensored content, they have decided to regulate them, too. The Russian Media-Communication Union and Roskomnadzor have already developed amendments to the Laws “On Information” and “On Communication” as well as the Code of Administrative Offenses aimed at tightening up the regulation of messengers. The amendments will be adopted sooner or later. It is only a matter of time. The bill will require messenger services to register with Roskomnadzor and will introduce the same liability for disseminating information in violation of legislation of the Russian Federation: the same rules which apply to mass media, bloggers and aggregators.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of repressive initiatives which have been introduced since the annexation of Crimea with the aim of restricting the dissemination of information. Even so, it is an insight into the Kremlin’s effectiveness when it comes to limiting the dissemination of information that does not sit well with its interests, the news that does not echo the “reality” as portrayed by media outlets under control of the Kremlin’s inner circle. Over the last three years, online censorship has meant that Russian cyberspace is on its way to resembling the ideal proclaimed by Klimenko: the great firewall of China.¹⁸

Understandably, this situation is reflected in the country’s international press freedom ratings. For example, the World Press

¹⁷ “Sovetnik Putina dopustil priznanie Telegram-kanalov sredstrami massovoy infoprmatzii,” *GovoritMoskva*, 31 January 2017, <https://govoritmoskva.ru/news/108189>.

¹⁸ “German Klimenko predozhil ogranichit’ v Rossii internet,” *Vedomosti*, 26 January 2017, www.vedomosti.ru/technology/news/2017/01/26/675045-klimenko-internet.

Freedom Index¹⁹ by Reporters without Borders—an international, non-governmental organization—assesses the freedom of media by applying criteria such as pluralism, media independence, legislative framework and safety of journalists in a given country. Russia’s media freedom demonstrated steady deterioration between 2014–2016. With a score of 100 points meaning zero media freedom, Russia’s rating went up from 42.78 points in 2014, to 44.97 in 2015, and to 49.03 in 2016. This trend looks set to continue.

*DIVIDE ET IMPERA: CREATING AND USING IMAGES
OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL “OTHER” IN RUSSIA*

Having seriously limited the ability of Russian citizens to obtain independent information, the Kremlin’s strategists have managed to unify the “picture of the world” received by the overwhelming majority through the media. Reinforcing this view are the so-called “trolls”—internet users who are paid to echo the same messages as the pro-Kremlin media do, but through using other, less formal platforms. This is mostly via social media, messengers, fora, commentaries to articles, etc. The aim is to create the appearance of a false grassroots consensus and to undermine the credibility of any opposing voices, or to bully them into silence and submission.

The number of political talk shows broadcast by major TV channels has significantly increased over recent years. Many of them are now scheduled during prime time, though the format typically occupied night time slots in the past. Pro-government TV channels are now peddling propaganda of “proper” political and ideological views in one form or another night and day—keeping pace with the 24 news cycle. Russians greatly appreciate the most vitriolic and controversial political talk shows: “Vesti nedeli” (News of the Week) hosted by Dmitry Kiselyov and “Voskresnyi vecher” (Sunday Evening) hosted by Vladimir Solovyov top the list.

However, propaganda cannot be effective if there are no corresponding ideas and stereotypes entrenched in a given society. It is also ineffective if its messages do not correspond to the

¹⁹ 2016 World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

objective reality which can easily be verified. Hence, when the stagnation of the Russian economy began—it was first of all caused by structural problems and high dependence on oil prices—the manipulation of consciousness through a positive message was not in demand and would not have been plausible. Few attempts were made to paint the economy and well-being as improving. After all, people who identify a negative economic trend when it comes to their own pocket refuse to believe information to the contrary. So public opinion was shifted by the creation of an external enemy on which to place the blame. In this regard, appeals to more abstract constructs such as spirituality and patriotism became important.

For an external enemy, it was easy to point the finger at “the West.” Mistrust of the West runs deep; anti-Western scare stories were a staple of Soviet propaganda. These suspicions have stayed because no large-scale, post-Soviet attempt has been made at correcting these sorts of anti-Western myths.

The thesis on the particular effectiveness of the external component of propaganda is also confirmed by the results of sociological surveys. Thus, according to a public opinion poll conducted by the Levada Center, 58% of respondents believe that television provides the most objective information on issues related to foreign policy whereas the proportion of those who consider information regarding domestic policy, society and the economy to be objective is much lower: roughly a quarter. At the same time, 33% of respondents agreed that the least objective information, concerning both the economy and life of the society, appeared on TV (while as little as 13% of respondents confirmed that foreign policy was covered in a biased way).²⁰

The observed waning trust of the Russians in traditional media (47% of Russians often experience the feeling that television, radio and newspapers “talk around corners”) results in some sociologists and political scientists announcing that “an erosion of the faith of Russians in state-run media” has taken place. However, it would be more accurate to say that many Russians are disappointed with the coverage of domestic events—Russians have always typically been more critical of coverage concerning domestic policy. On the

²⁰ “Doverie SMI i gotovnost’ vykazyvat’ svoe mnenie,” *Levada.ru*, 12 August 2016, www.levada.ru/2016/08/12/14111.

other hand, so far, views on the developments outside the country presented on TV sit well with their own, deep-seated beliefs—and international news stories are more prevalent than Russian news stories on Russian TV. Thus, public attention is purposefully diverted from more pressing domestic issues towards safer, external issues.

Therefore, we can conclude that the effectiveness of propaganda can be judged by how much resentment it can rouse towards the collective West, and deflect from domestic issues. World history is full of such similarly minded formulations of “Us” and “Them.”²¹ The use of a collective image of the West as the “external other” to temporarily mobilize public support in Russia is not a new strategy for the Kremlin in the post-Soviet era, either. Over the course of the 17 years of Putin’s reign, Russians have rallied around the regime precisely against the backdrop of active anti-Western information campaigns²²—when confrontation with the West as the significant other was presented as a way of preserving a special Russian myth.

The Kremlin is now wholly dependent on this image of the West as the external “other,” and it is precisely this image that serves as the basis for the mobilization of support. Mobilization is built, but identity cannot be consolidated, since it is extremely difficult to create a Russian identity which is converse to Western identity since the West or Europe, to be more precise, is not an antithesis, but rather somewhat of an ideal for Russians. The impossibility of attaining this ideal breeds resentment. Besides, in previous years, all attempts to create an identity based on opposition to the West followed the formula of “we as the object,” whereas stable identities are built in accordance with the opposite principle “we as the subject.”

The Kremlin has come to grasp this problem: on the one hand, full polarization to the West is impossible while, on the other, the objectification of Russian society as a victim of Western forces is not entirely effective. Messages are usually conveyed in an attempt to strike this balance: for instance, “Russia has its own path,” or “Russia

²¹ Th.H. Eriksen, “We and Us: Two Modes of Group Identification,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 4 (1995), pp. 427–436.

²² O. Irisova, “The West through the eyes of Russians. The anti-Western rhetoric of Russian propaganda as a tool for preserving the regime and eroding the European identity of Russians,” *Intersection*, 6 November 2015, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/society/west-through-eyes-russians>.

is exceptional” or “Russia is a Eurasian rather than a European civilization” dominated discourse in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea; a new narrative, however, is coming to the fore—a form of “Russia is a true European Christian civilization” in confrontation with the West “which has turned away from true Europeanness.”²³

Given such interpretations, the West as the other is divided into two categories: the “close other” that allegedly pursues the same goals as the tentative “us” (primarily countries where “traditionalists” and political forces representing conservative values are in power belong to the category of “close other”) and the “oppressive other” which is an opponent (mainly liberal democracies) allowing the creation of an image of a besieged fortress—an effective means by which to mobilize support.

At the same time, we can see that the image of the external other has become more opaque in recent years. This dichotomy is no longer built based on geographical or institutional principles—the geographically defined West or the West united by institutions. Abstract values whose interpretation strongly depends on the Kremlin’s goals are at the core of this image. Thus, the Kremlin now occupies a broad field of maneuver and is free to alter the characteristics of the alien “other” on an *ad hoc* basis. However, the attribution of internal problems to the external other remains a constant feature.

The Kremlin, it should be noted, also creates an image of the alien internal other precisely due to their alleged affinity to the external other. Therefore, critics of the Kremlin are defined not as internal dissenters by pro-government media outlets, but as individuals who possess the identity of the other. Suggestive examples include lists of “national traitors” and the “fifth column” allegedly representing the interests of the external other disseminated by the pro-government “patriotic” niche media, or official lists of NGOs with a telling label of “foreign agents.”

These examples also include attempts to undermine the “Russianness” of opponents. The most telling examples are occasional attempts to equate Jews to liberal dissenters dissatisfied

²³ M. Engström, “The New Russian Renaissance. Why the Kremlin is fascinated by classical antiquity,” *Intersection*, 4 April 2017, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-europe/new-russian-renaissance>.

with the regime, which accuse them of being potential destabilizers of the *status quo*.²⁴ The result is an appearance that only an external other would have an interest in challenging Putin.

This strategy of linking the image of the internal other with the external other—the enemy—has turned out to be extremely effective; many of those who are currently dissatisfied with the developments in the country prefer not to be associated with any of the opposition forces and retreat into so-called “internal emigration” so as to avoid being associated with the opposing (according to propaganda) side of this dichotomy. At the same time, another significant proportion of Russians employs a method of social adaptation known as “mimicry of the majority.” The authorities frequently stress that they have the support of the overwhelming majority, however flawed that view might be in reality.²⁵ Both internal migrants and majority-mimicking individuals reproduce an illusion that Russians approve of the country’s developments. At the same time, Kremlin-controlled information platforms tune out protest moods. For example, none of the national channels has covered trucker protests that have swept across Russia, and do their utmost to preserve an illusion of total support.

Effective censorship and active use of the image of the external and internal other are primarily aimed at preserving the regime; these effective techniques prevent society at large from realizing that there are many more dissenters in the country than it would seem.

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²⁴ O. Irisova, “Manageable anti-Semitism: The Kremlin is keeping anti-Semitism “under control,” *Intersection*, 19 May 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/manageable-anti-semitism>.

²⁵ Eadem, “Where did the Russian ‘democrats’ disappear to?,” *Intersection*, 19 August 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/society/where-did-russian-democrats-disappear>.

DENIS VOLKOV

HOW RUSSIANS VIEW THE WEST

The overwhelming majority of the Russian population almost entirely base their opinions about Western states on what they see on TV. As of March 2016, less than 1% of Russians had visited the U.S. in the last five years and less than 10%¹ had visited any EU country. The same percentage of people have friends and acquaintances in the West. In total, no more than 15% of the population actively follow developments outside of Russia. The majority of Russian citizens have only a vague idea of what is going on abroad and about the modern world in general; it is usually difficult to hold group discussions on these issues. Stereotypical and hackneyed beliefs dominate public opinion in this respect.

In the eyes of most Russians, the West is not exactly tantamount to the U.S. but is politically and economically controlled by America. It is widely believed that it is precisely the U.S. which defines not only NATO's, but also the EU's policy. In March 2016, 67% of the population shared this view regarding NATO and 37% (relative majority)—regarding the EU. The leading role of Germany in the EU (the second most dominant country in this regard) was mentioned by 24% of respondents. 85% of Russians also thought

¹ Here and below, the data of regular nationwide opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center (VCIOM until 2003) are cited unless otherwise specified. On the dynamic series on the attitudes towards the U.S. and EU see www.levada.ru/indikatory/otnoshenie-k-stranam. A selection of nationwide polls on the Russians' attitudes to the U.S. see www.levada.ru/tag/ssha/?category_name=press. A selection of polls before 2015 on Russians' perception of the relations between Russia and the Western countries see *Russian Public Opinion—2013–2015*, Moskva: Levada-Center, 2016, pp. 286–309, www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2013-2015-Eng.pdf.

that European states imposed sanctions against Russia under pressure from the U.S. and as few as 6% of respondents believed that the EU acted independently on this issue. Besides, looking at opinion polls on the generalized positive or negative attitude to the U.S. and EU, one can conclude that these sentiments change in parallel although negative feelings towards Europe are a little less pronounced than those towards the U.S. (see fig. 1 and 2).

Figure 1. General attitude to the U.S.

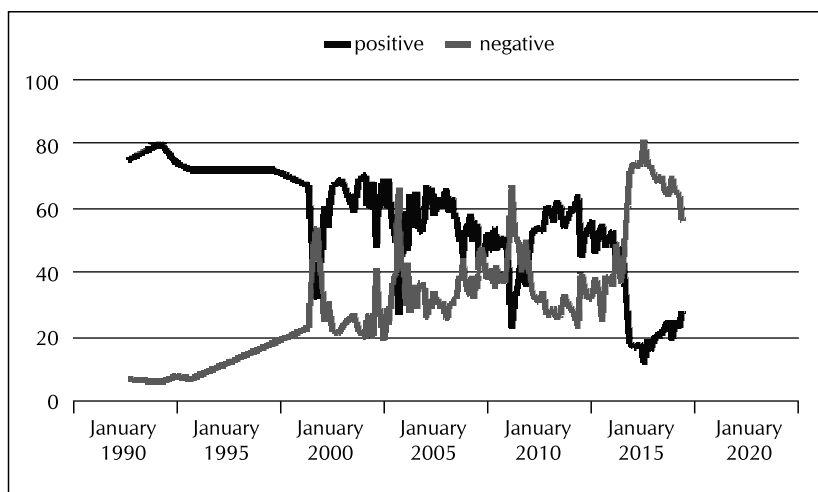
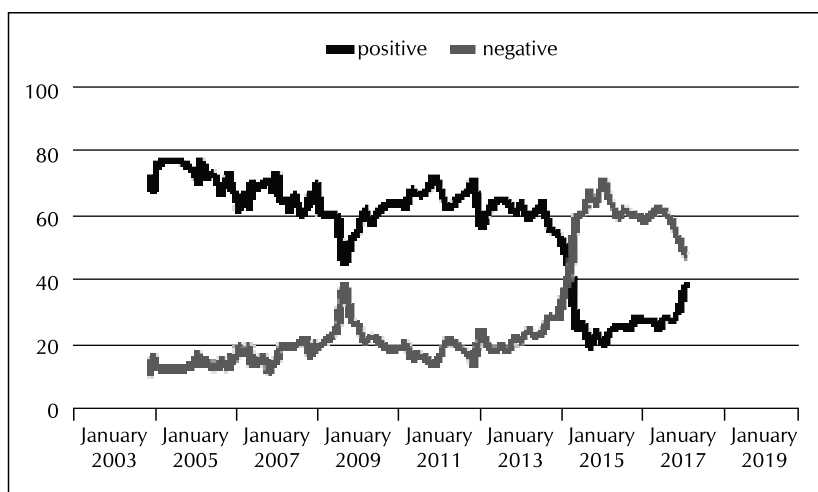


Figure 2. General attitude to the EU



Thus, today's conflict between Russia and the West is primarily perceived as a Russian-American confrontation. Moreover, NATO and militarism are seen as central constituent parts of the image of the West in general and the U.S. in particular. Attitudes towards America and Europe have undergone significant change over the last quarter of a century according to sociological studies, while NATO's image in the eyes of Russians has always been rather negative and has been associated with a military threat to Russia. Western countries are seen through the prism of the conflict between Russia and the West over Ukraine nowadays. A historical journey will help us better understand today's anti-Western sentiments.

SENTIMENTS IN THE 1990s AND 2000s

Strange as it may seem, in the early 1990s, the majority of the Russian population perceived the West and the U.S. in the first place as an indisputable role model and the main benchmark in foreign policy. According to 1990–1991 poll results, 39% of respondents were curious about the U.S., which attracted most attention among all countries in the world (27% of respondents showed interest in Japan and 17%—in Germany). When respondents were asked to choose a Western country with which Russia should cooperate first and foremost, the absolute majority (74%) cited America. The second most popular prospective partner—Germany—was mentioned barely over half as much. The U.S. was perceived as the richest and most well-developed country in the West.

Not only was America perceived as a benchmark by Russians during this brief period, but it was also considered its most reliable partner which could always be counted on; the U.S. was believed to provide help in the first place if assistance was needed (37%). To compare, as few as 9% expected Germany to offer a hand in times of trouble. Moreover, the majority (44%) were convinced that the United States of America would definitely help if necessary (as few as 18% did not believe it, the remaining respondents were unsure or believed that no help would be needed). The U.S. was perceived

as a friendly country (51%) or an ally (16%). Between 1–2% of respondents believed that the U.S. was hostile towards Russia.

The image of the U.S. in Russian public opinion had gradually changed by the mid-1990s. The role of this country on the global arena was assessed more negatively and certain American steps in foreign policy were met with disapproval; discontent was brewing. Russians' positive attitude towards the U.S. was first challenged following the U.S. bombing of Iraq in 1993. Russian public opinion was divided: one third of the population supported U.S. actions whereas half of the population expressed disapproval (moreover, 26% of respondents "absolutely condemned" the bombing). Still, in 1995–1996, the majority of respondents still believed that U.S. actions towards Russia were friendly on the whole. The U.S. was not perceived as an opponent or enemy at the time. As few as 7% perceived the U.S. as an enemy (in comparison, approximately 60% of respondents do today).

A clear increase in the proportion of negative attitudes towards the West has been observed since the mid-1990s. As few as 6% of respondents were inclined to cite the U.S. as one of many enemies in 1996 whereas since 1999, the country has ranked third in terms of Russian enemies after only "international terrorists" and "the Chechens." In 2008, the U.S. was Russia's main enemy in the eyes of 35% of respondents. In 2014, at the peak of anti-Americanism, a record 65% of the population saw the U.S. as Russia's main enemy. This figure fell to 46% in spring 2016 and the U.S. is now listed as Russia's main enemy on a par with ISIS, banned in Russia. Back in May 1998, nearly 75% of respondents believed that America wanted to weaken Russia and turn it into its "commodity appendage." Approximately 80% of respondents shared this view in 2016.

The 1998–1999 events became a watershed in terms of Russia's attitude towards the U.S. Apart from the intervention of NATO forces in the Balkans, this period saw the onset of the Second Chechen War, harshly criticized by the West, the announcement of the intention of the U.S. to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and first NATO eastward expansion since the collapse of the USSR. This constituted a serious blow to Russians' perception of the United States of America.

According to the polls, in 1999, 55% of Russians believed that the American stance as regards missile defense “was contrary to the interests of Russia.” A similar proportion (50%) of respondents maintained that Russia should augment defense and security in response to NATO enlargement (another 23% insisted on the development of cooperation while 13% believed no reaction was necessary). It was then that the U.S. came to top of the list of countries which “posed a threat to Russia’s security” (23% of respondents expressed this view in 1998 compared to 35% in 1999). 75% of Russians stated that they agreed with the statement that “the U.S. takes advantage of the hardships in Russia in order to turn it into an insignificant country.” Similar opinions were expressed by a slightly higher percentage of Russians in March 2016—in the days of open confrontation with the Western countries—when 85% of respondents agreed with the statement that “the West has always sought to weaken and humiliate Russia.”

It is noteworthy that the image of the U.S. as the global hegemon was prevalent among Russians by the early 2000s. A universal formula for the interpretation of all international conflicts involving the U.S. emerged: half (or more) of Russians saw American policy as being motivated solely by an intention to establish control over a given territory and not to ensure fulfillment of international norms and to avenge foes. A comparable number of respondents explained the causes of the Kosovo, Iraqi and subsequent conflicts by interests of the U.S. itself. This pattern can be observed in the way Russians perceived interventions of the allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, responses to the developments in Libya and Syria, Georgia, and Ukraine.

The next watershed period following the 1998–1999 events was perhaps the period of 2003–2004 when the U.S. Army invaded Iraq. This period also saw a series of “color revolutions” supported by the West and perceived by the Russian elite as a conspiracy against Russia (interestingly, only one-fifth of the Russian population shared this view back then compared to the main explanatory approach to the developments in Kyiv as an “anti-Russian conspiracy” which dominated in 2014), and a second wave of NATO eastward expansion. The Russian establishment

finally understood the futility of talks on Russia entering the Euro-Atlantic security structures back then.

As a result, Russian foreign policy was gradually becoming hostile towards the West and the U.S. In parallel, Russian public opinion was steadily drifting away from cooperation and towards isolation and confrontation. In 2002, half of the population supported cooperation with the military bloc and one-quarter of respondents were against it, whereas the situation reversed over the next decade. The current conflict between Russia and the West has cemented this opinion: the number of respondents against rapprochement with NATO had reached a record 55% by spring 2016; the number of Russians who welcomed such rapprochement had fallen to 18%. Besides, the U.S. and NATO occupied the leading positions among "Russia's enemies" by the mid-2000s.

Another event which triggered a new wave of anti-Western sentiment in Russia was the Russo-Georgian War; polls recorded more negative attitudes towards the Western states (the first peak of anti-NATO sentiments was recorded back then). Russians believed in the desire "of the United States of America to extend its influence so as to encircle Russia's neighboring states" and half of the population believed that to be the main cause which led to the war. 32% held Georgia responsible and just 5% believed that Russia was at fault. In August 2008, the general attitude, not only to the U.S. but also the European Union, (and Ukraine) changed from "positive" to "definitely negative" in several days against the backdrop of a mass Russian propaganda campaign.

The Russo-Georgian conflict also reveals a commonly-held attitude towards re-living the collapse of the USSR; former Soviet republics are denied much recognition as independent actors, and the Russian population is loath to accept that the Western path of development might be more attractive to these states than the Russian one. The same pattern can be observed both with respect to Georgia and Ukraine. In the eyes of Russians, Georgia became the main "enemy" and "the most unfriendly country" (approximately 60% of respondents expressed this opinion in 2008–2009) as a result of the Russo-Georgian War, while the U.S. ranked second (45% of respondents). From 2014–2016, America was enemy number one, while Ukraine was not even perceived

as an unfriendly country. At the same time, the attitude towards Germany deteriorated drastically (Germany was perceived as one of the most friendly countries towards Russia for a long time) as well as that towards the UK. Russians' attitude towards Poland became even more hostile, too.

A significant proportion of the population (usually 40–50%) is highly susceptible to official rhetoric concerning foreign policy and they correctly identify the “enemy” even in the absence of an open military conflict between Russia and the said state. In the mid-2000s, the Baltic States competed for the role of the main enemy and were succeeded by Georgia in the late 2000s. The U.S. had become Russia's main enemy by 2013. Interestingly, the hostile attitude to America increased noticeably two or three years before the conflict (see Table 1), just as it did in the case of Georgia in the second half of the 2000s.

Table 1. The dynamics of the changes in perception of the countries most unfriendly towards Russia*

	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
U.S.	37	35	45	26	33	35	38	69	73	72
Ukraine	27	23	41	13	20	15	11	30	37	48
Turkey	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	29
Poland	7	20	10	14	20	8	8	12	22	24
Latvia	46	36	35	36	35	26	21	23	25	23
Lithuania	42	32	35	35	34	25	17	24	25	23
Germany	2	2	3	1	4	3	3	18	19	19
UK	5	3	8	6	8	7	9	18	21	18
Estonia	28	60	30	28	30	23	16	21	19	16
Georgia	44	46	62	57	50	41	33	19	11	10

* The following wording was used: “Name five countries which are the most unfriendly and hostile towards Russia.” This relates to a Russian nationwide sample conducted among the adult population of the country. The ten most frequently mentioned countries are listed here. The results are listed according to the last ranking.

Therefore, one should distinguish two different levels of Russians' attitude to the Western countries: the most generalized

attitude and basic perception of the international image of a given country including its attitude towards Russia. For example, a generally positive or generally negative attitude towards America and the European Union is the indicator most liable to fluctuations. At the moment of open conflicts between Russia and Western countries like for example the one in the Balkans in 1999, over Iraq in 2003 or over Georgia in 2008, the Russian public opinion instantaneously shifted from a positive attitude to a negative one, and quickly returned to positive perception in the aftermath of the conflict. We can say that public sentiments fluctuated alongside the changing rhetorical stance of television programs. Perceptions of Western countries quickly deteriorated in 2014. However, in this case, the “normalization” of public attitudes toward Western countries is slow. It is unlikely to become highly positive until sanctions are lifted and the Russian establishment decides the conflict has been settled.

However, a closer look at the history of how the image of the U.S. is formed in the eyes of public opinion (this not so much data on other Western countries) reveals that a consistent prejudice against America was gradually being formed—even during the periods marked by the most positive general attitude. As far back as the late 1990s, the theme of America as the puppeteer who pulls the strings of the regimes in Russia’s neighboring countries, and a threat to Russia itself, was constantly recurring. Caution towards the U.S. (and other Western countries to a lesser extent) had developed even before Vladimir Putin came to power and consolidated control over the major state-owned media outlets. Strangely enough, the 2014 events, which prompted record high negative attitudes to the U.S. and EU (the results of the surveys can also be projected on attitudes to other Western countries), only slightly affected the basic ideas about the Western states (about their place in the world, motives behind their policy towards Russia etc.).

THE PERIOD OF OPEN CONFRONTATION (2014–2016)

The current conflict with the U.S. and other Western countries is different in that this time, we are dealing with an open confrontation

(the countries have introduced reciprocal sanctions) which is now in its third year. The attitude towards the U.S. and the European Union worsened significantly immediately after the onset of the Ukrainian conflict. Negative feelings towards America saw a rise from 44% in January 2014 to 71% in May 2014 and had reached their maximum level by the early 2015 (81% in the poll in January). The corresponding figures were 34%, 60% and 71% with respect to the EU, respectively. Unlike in the case of previous conflicts, public opinion resembled doom and gloom when it came to the relations between Russia and the U.S.; the understanding that relations between the states were “chilly” was gradually becoming widespread throughout the 2000s. However, a majority assessed these relations as “tense” and even “hostile” in 2014 for the first time. The tension has eased a little since around the first half of 2015. However, we have not seen a reversion “to the norm” which is a generally positive attitude to the West, as happened in the aftermath of previous conflicts.

The observed record high in terms of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments can partially be explained by the fact that Russian society was subjected to relentless television propaganda in the case of this conflict. Having analyzed 2013/2014 television broadcasts, TV critic Arina Borodina wrote in June 2014 that “every Russian TV channel broadcasting news without exception ... fulfilled the ideological imperative of the Russian authorities entirely. It was an unprecedented ideological avalanche incomparable to any political campaign: neither President Putin’s election nor congresses of United Russia nor even the war against Georgia in 2008 were accompanied by such a campaign.”²

To begin with, Euromaidan had to be discredited in the eyes of Russian TV viewers since polls conducted by Ukrainian sociologists indicated³ that the sentiments and motives harbored by protesters in

² A. Borodina, “Televizor Olimpiady i Ukrainy,” *Forbes.ru*, 3 July 2014, www.forbes.ru/mneniya-opinion/konkurenciya/261539-televizor-olimpiady-i-ukrainy-rekordy-propagandy.

³ On sentiments of Euromaidan protesters see: V. Paniotto, “Evromaidan—Do i posle Maidana,” *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya*, 2014, nos 1–2 (117), pp. 135–140, www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/vom_1-2_2014.pdf. On sentiments of protesters at the Bolotnaya Square in Moscow see: D. Volkov, “Protestnyye mitingi v Rossii kontsa 2011—nachala 2012 gg.: zapros na demokratizatsiyu

Kyiv at the outset strongly resembled those shared by the Russians who took to the streets at the Bolotnaya Square in 2011–2012. The example of public disobedience in the neighboring state was unacceptable for the Russian authorities. Russian television resorted to tried and tested rhetoric by accusing the West of inciting protests in Ukraine (scandals involving American officials at the Maidan⁴ covered by the Russian media legitimized this version). Hence, from the point of view of half of the Russian population, the main factor which brought protesters to the streets of Kyiv was “the influence of the West seeking to draw Ukraine into the orbit of its own political interests.” This belief was becoming even more popular with time (an increase from 41% in December 2013 to 54% in December 2014). In April 2015, the majority (56%) explained the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine by the fact that it was “beneficial to the leadership of the U.S. and Western countries” and not at all by Russia’s actions (only as few as 6% thought so). Thus, from the very start, the events in Ukraine—prior to the annexation of Crimea and imposition of Western sanctions against Russia—were perceived by Russian society as the results of interventions by Western states aimed at damaging Russia.

However, it would be erroneous to assume that anti-Western sentiment (and, in general, the “official” version of the conflict promoted by Russian television channels) is characteristic only of those who watch Russian television. Even the majority of those who regularly access independent media as a source of information denied the presence of the Russian troops on the territory of the Luhansk People’s Republic and Donetsk People’s Republic, and were happy about Crimea “joining” Russia. They also expressed negative feelings about the West (although the figures in this group were slightly below the proportion of the population on average).⁵ They should know better and hence, we cannot attribute their views to ignorance or blind faith in official propaganda, or

politicheskikh institutov,” *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya*, 2012, no. 2 (112), pp. 73–86, www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/vom2_2.pdf.

⁴ A telephone conversation between Victoria Nuland and the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, *Ekho Moskvy*, 7 February 2014, <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1253668-echo>.

⁵ For more detail see: D. Volkov, “Rodina vne kritiki,” *Vedomosti*, 17 March 2016, www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2016/03/18/634111-rodina-kritiki.

uncritical acceptance of the developments. Based on the results of qualitative research conducted by the Levada Center in 2014–2016, we can assume that an important role in the population's approval (among population as a whole and among the majority of the audience of the independent media) of the policy of the Russian authorities regarding Ukraine and Syria, as well as confrontation with the West, is played by the idea of the resurgent grandeur of Russia. As described by participants of focus-group interviews, the country "bares its teeth," "makes others reckon with it," "makes others respect it," talks "on equal terms" with the leading global superpowers and does not yield to their pressure. It brings satisfaction and a sense of self-importance. It turns out that the feeling of belonging to a great superpower is almost as important to the enlightened Russian public as it is to an ordinary person. The idea of restoration of the status of a great superpower which it itself lost in the post-Soviet era (according to popular belief) has legitimized Russia's involvement in conflicts in Ukraine and Syria in the eyes of the Russian population. It has also become one of the foundations for a new form of legitimacy for the Russian authorities.⁶

Focus-group participants were saying enthusiastically: "It took only two days—and Crimea is ours!" "Earlier, Putin only spoke of the greatness of the country whereas now, he has proven it with his deeds." According to public opinion polls, it was precisely the annexation of Crimea which evidenced Russia's resurgence to the status of great superpower for 80% of the population. The objections of the U.S. and Europe have served to stoke Russian national pride: "we did it to spite everyone." And although joy stemming from Crimea "joining" Russia had subsided by late 2014 (although 80% still believe it was the right step which is beneficial for the country), the ongoing confrontation with the West, reciprocal sanctions and mutual accusations are now perceived as proof of the country's importance in the international arena. "They do not like us, they are afraid of us, they are trying to weaken us, and hence, they take us seriously."

⁶ For more details about the dynamics of approval ratings and their dependence on the perception of the greatness of the country see *idem*, "86 protsentov Putina: verit' ili net," *Vedomosti*, no. 3977, 9 December 2015.

The need for self-importance (in the eyes of others and, consequently, in one's own eyes) which underlies today's negative attitude of the majority of the Russian population to the U.S. and West explains the paradoxical, simultaneous presence of the contrasting desire to cooperate with the West in the mass consciousness. For example, nearly 70% of Russians were in favor of "developing economic, political and cultural ties with Western countries" in November 2016. This figure never fell below 50% even during the period of hostile confrontation with the U.S. in 2014–2015 and reached 76% in "peaceful times." And this is not surprising since the current conflict has not changed Russians' perception of the Western countries as advanced, economically developed states where citizens enjoy a high standard of living.

However, the majority is convinced that it is the West which is not inclined to conduct a dialog. This aspect of relations with the Western countries can be characterized using the formula which shifts the entire responsibility for the continuation of confrontation onto a rival: "we want to cooperate with them; it is they who do not want to cooperate with us." In early 2017, the majority of Russians were still preparing themselves for a protracted (non-violent) confrontation with the West rather than insisting on seeking a compromise. Reconciliation and a dialog can be accepted, according to Russian public opinion, only if the West recognizes Russia as an equal partner, lifts sanctions and makes concessions (at least the Russian authorities and Russian television should have grounds to present it in such a way). If this happens, the legitimacy of the Russian regime could be built on cooperation with the West instead of confrontation.

All in all, a shift in public opinion towards cooperation with the West seems possible today. The peak of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments was reached in early 2015 and less hostile attitudes have been observed over the last two years. The victory of Donald Trump (presented by the Russian media in a positive light, at least until recently) consolidated this trend, although no radical changes have been observed since he took office. According to a survey conducted in January 2017, as few as 7% of Russians associate "significant improvements" in relations between the two countries with Trump. Approximately 40% speak

of “minor improvements.”⁷ However, these expectations are very close to those recorded following 2009 polls pertaining to Barack Obama. No euphoria or elevated hopes for serious improvement of relations are observable. Sentiments can be encapsulated in a single phrase uttered by a respondents participating in a focus-group interview in January 2017: “Barack Obama also promised mountains and marvels in the beginning.” In other words, Russians do not believe in the possibility of radical improvements in Russo-Western relations. Even in the case of normalization of diplomatic relations, the majority of the population will still harbor a deep-seated distrust in Western policy towards Russia.

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⁷ “Izbranniye Trampa,” *Levada.ru*, 26 January 2017, www.levada.ru/2017/01/26/izbranie-trampa.

ANTON BARBASHIN

CRIMEA IN CONCLUSION: A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

Three years have passed since Russian troops, operating without military insignia, seized control over the Crimean peninsula and held a referendum at gunpoint. The result: an annexation of Ukrainian territory roughly the size of Belgium with a population a little larger than Latvia's.

The majority of Western experts today believe this annexation has caused Russia a lot of trouble,¹ but Russian officials claim their policies have been a success.² Who is right? Holders of both views tend to agree on its historical significance at least—both for the post-Soviet space and for the Western world, which makes the question of success or failure a relevant one. But also a tricky one to address: declaring the Crimean annexation a success or failure for Russia requires looking far beyond the Black Sea. That is why this chapter makes an assessment by measuring the wider impact of Crimea on Russia's relations with the West, its pivot to the East, its regional integration projects, and its economic health.

¹ K. Bennett, "Is Putin's Russia Headed for a Systemic Collapse?," *The American Interest*, 26 August 2016, www.the-american-interest.com/2016/08/23/is-putins-russia-headed-for-a-systemic-collapse.

² S. Karaganov, "Russian Foreign Policy Finding New Bearings," *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 June 2016, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Russian-Foreign-Policy-Finding-New-Bearings-18203>.

RUSSIA-WEST: BROKEN RULES. SHATTERED TRUST

Throughout President Vladimir Putin's rule, he has regularly spoken of his desire for Russia to be on an equal footing with the West. Time and again, he has sought to be recognized as a leader of an important power, a leader that his counterparts in the West consult before making strategic decisions. The majority of Russia's ruling elite echo this wish. Intelligence and military figures publicly and frequently complain about issues like NATO expansion and democracy promotion in the post-Soviet space; they believe any Western push for either requires a Russian kickback. Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military actions in Eastern Ukraine that followed was portrayed as a kickback in this spirit. But instead of raising Russia to the level of equal partner, it brought the West closer together and further from Russia, strengthening NATO and shattering efforts, built up over the twenty years before, to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect.

When, in 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula, the Western reaction was slow; only after the escalations in the east of Ukraine did sanctions come thick and fast. Ukraine is not a NATO member, but Russia's violation of international law and ongoing activities on the territory of Ukraine have stimulated the NATO members of nearby countries in Central and Eastern Europe to call for greater reassurance and deployments in the region. One could argue that because Russia has attacked Ukraine, NATO was given a "second life." A revival of its initial Cold War purpose elaborated by its first Secretary General, Lord Ismay: "keep the Russians out."³ Already today the NATO is reassuring its Eastern Flank with four brigades rotating between Poland and the Baltic States. Moreover, Russia has jolted NATO's military top brass into mulling over various war scenarios that involve Russia, as well as returning to much a tighter scrutiny of Russian military capabilities⁴ that was displayed in Crimea, the east of Ukraine and in Syria. No matter what actual military threat Russia poses to the Baltics and Poland, Russia's actions

³ S. Blank, "The Years of Living Dangerously," *Intersection*, 28 April 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/security/years-living-dangerously>.

⁴ J. Cohen, "Do not underestimate the Russian military," *Intersection*, 8 January 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/security/do-not-underestimate-russian-military>.

in Ukraine rejuvenated NATO; giving it a new reason to demand for each member state to meet its 2% of GDP minimum spend commitments as well as rekindling a general feeling of unity.

Russia's relations with Western nations' governments and its people have worsened even more noticeably. Traditional partners like Germany and France have given up on Putin; the 2003 Moscow-Berlin-Paris solidarity against the Iraq's invasion seems a long time ago now. The new Franco-German attitude is characterized best by the words of Chancellor Angela Merkel, who, after talking to Putin in 2014, has concluded that he "lives in another world."

Aside from the United States under President Donald Trump, or isolated leaders such as the Czech leader Miloš Zeman, Hungary's Viktor Orban, or to a lesser extent Alexis Tsipras of Greece, Western leaders have been standing firm in their support for Ukraine, and frequently condemn Russian aggression. While talk of sanctions being dropped is often mooted in countries like Italy, the EU keeps prolonging its sanctions against Russia, despite lobby group efforts to promote the idea of sanctions relief as an incentive to get Russia back into a spirit of cooperation.

Taking the cue from their leaders, public opinion in Western nations is becoming increasingly Russophobic. According to the Pew Research Center,⁵ 26% hold a positive view of Russia on average across the EU; in Poland it is just 15%, while the Italians are the most predisposed at 34%. In the United States, just 22%. The world median viewing Russia positively is now only 30%, which means Russia has actually helped the U.S.: for the first time since the invasion of Iraq, Russia has taken the mantle of "world's least favorite" big nation from the U.S.

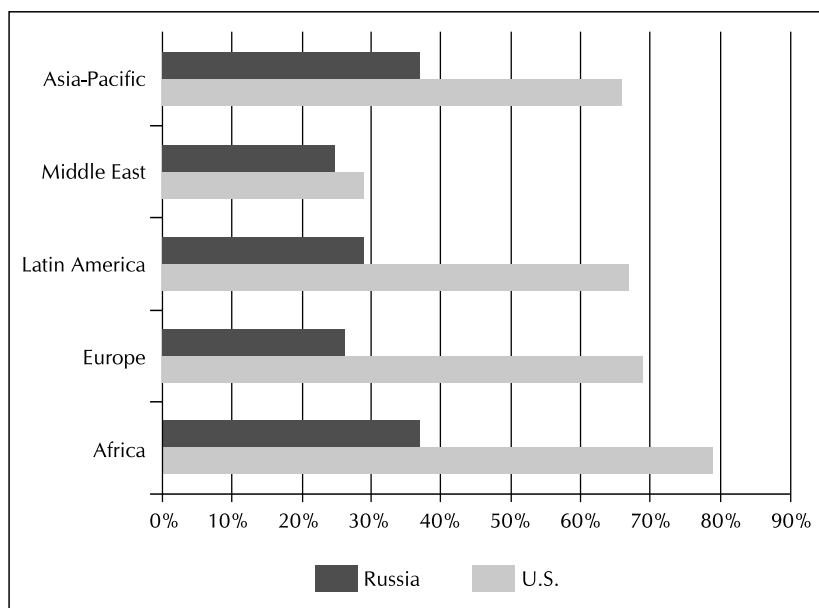
Global public attitudes towards Vladimir Putin himself as the leader who "would do the right thing in the world affairs" is even lower, ranging from 6% in Spain to 24% in Germany with a EU medium of 15% (21% in the USA).

By 2016–2017, any ties to Russia, whether past or present, whether business partnerships, political affiliation, or just a personal acquaintance with a Russian state official is turning into nothing

⁵ *Russian image in the world*, Pew Research Center, 5 August 2015, www.pewglobal.org/2015/08/05/russia-putin-held-in-low-regard-around-the-world.

anyone would want to boast about. To the public in Europe and Americans, these sorts of links could cost a moderate politician their reputation or even their career. Except for mostly far-right and far-left politicians, ties to Russia are proving to be a considerable downer for public approval, especially with the ongoing FBI and CIA investigations into links between the Russian government and Trump's presidential campaign team.

Figure 1. Favorable views of Russia and U.S. in all parts of the world



Source: Pew Research Center Spring 2015 *Global Attitude Survey*, 23 June 2015, questions 12 a, d.

Russia is guaranteed to maintain a low trust profile for the West for at least as long as Putin is in power, made worse the longer the Ukraine conflict remains unresolved, and if further reports of human rights abuses in Crimea (and across Russia, particularly Chechnya) continue to circulate. This is a far cry from the equal footing with the West that Putin and his entourage have been calling for over the last seventeen years.

This “cold peace” with the West is pushing Russia under Putin to seek alternatives in Eurasia and East Asia.

ILLUSIONS OF EURASIANISM

In 2010, Russia was eager to promote a Russia-led integration project that mirrored the European Union. The idea was to create an alternative to European integration for the post-Soviet space. The EU's Eastern Partnership had been launched a year before, and a number of ex-Soviet states were gravitating towards it, especially Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. The Kremlin felt threatened by the Eastern Partnership, which excluded Russia and could potentially be seen as a step towards eventual EU and NATO membership for these countries in what Russia knows as its "near abroad."

By launching the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (since 2015 the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan), the Kremlin was hoping to prove that it was able to offer its own development path for these countries. After all, most in Moscow concluded, Russia had an advantageous position over the EU in this regard: its economic ties were far deeper in these countries.

Any Eurasian integration project, however, only made sense if Ukraine was involved. Without Ukraine, it would become purely a "Russia+Club" where Russia makes up 80% of the Eurasian Union's population, 84% of its territory and 84.3% of its GDP. By comparison, Germany—the largest economy of the European Union (EU)—makes up only 16.3% of the EU's population, 8.1% of its territory and 18.1% of its GDP.⁶ If Ukraine would have joined the Eurasian integration project, it would have been the second largest, raising its overall population from 183.7 million to 229.2, much closer to a critical mass for a viable trade zone in the same league as the EU.

When Russia annexed Crimea, though, it not only closed the question of whether Ukraine will ever join the Russia's integration projects, it has effectively killed off any hopes that the Eurasian integration might ever work. Politically, Russia made irrelevant the hopes of its Eurasian Union allies, Belarus and Kazakhstan,

⁶ A. Barbashin, "To save the 'Eurasian Dream'," *Intersection*, 3 August 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-world/save-urasian-dream>.

to get integrated faster into the global economy. The attraction of Eurasianism for these two countries had been the hope of gaining better terms in trade deals with the rest of the world when done in tandem with Russia; but Russia's trade isolation and economic ill-health after the Crimean annexation dashed these hopes. Both Minsk and Astana had to distance themselves from Moscow to some extent, mixing support for Russia and condemnation of the annexation of Crimea, depending on the audience they were addressing. Generally speaking, it made it much harder for Russia's partners to remain Russia's allies while continuing to pursue their relations with the West. To some extent, both Minsk and Astana have every right to be afraid of possible Russian meddling in their domestic affairs. Neither can count on any Western country making much effort to come to their defense. Both nations have authoritarian leaders that have ruled for over two decades; a political transition once their rule comes to an end might be a tricky process, especially given that Kazakhstan has 24% of ethnic Russians, mostly living in its northern part close to the Russian border, and Belarusian sovereignty is questioned by Russia even more than the sovereignty of Ukraine.

Russia's sanction "war" has *de facto* crippled the customs union within the Eurasian Union. When Russia introduced rounds of counter-sanctions or simply an embargo on several European goods, other members of the Union have not followed Russia. This has led to a number of high profile banned products showing up in Russia, after coming in via Belarus or Kazakhstan. Moreover when Belarus has introduced a 5 day visa-free regime (though with many limitations) for 80 nations, including the entire EU, it led to Russia bringing back border checks on its Belarusian border that effectively terminated proclaimed freedom of movement within the Eurasian Economic Union.

Despite seven years of integration, Eurasian Union states share in Russia's trade has only increased by 0.5% from 2010 to 2016. The only aspect of integration that could be even remotely considered successful is customs regulation between countries, but this is the opposite of a desired outcome.

By annexing part of Ukraine, Putin has irreversibly taken away any meaningful opportunity to unite the post-Soviet space

within any form of Moscow-led integration project. The Eurasian Economic Union, like the Commonwealth of Independent States, might very well stay a feature of official rhetoric and protocol. In practice its bearing on regional politics looks set to diminish, bowing to more lucrative paths to development increasingly offered by China's New Silk Road and the EU.

A PIVOT TO ASIA-PACIFIC THAT DID NOT HAPPEN

Since 2012, Russia has been attempting a "Pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region—a shift in foreign policy that should have balanced Russian trade and foreign relations, pulling them away from a perceived over-dependence on Europe. Russia was hoping not only to increase its presence on the Asian markets, especially when it comes to energy supplies, but to attract investments to the Far East and by "using our country's transit potential to create new, shorter, more profitable routes that will link the Asia-Pacific and Europe."⁷ The annexation of Crimea and consequent crisis in the relations with the West has only increased the incentives to push this eastward turn; data suggests, though, that its success has been marginal.

Russia's promise, however, to guarantee the transit between Europe and Asia-Pacific is a pure fiction: the Northern Sea Route that in 2012 was promised to deliver 64 million tons of cargo by 2020 in 2015 accounted for only 39,000 tons of transported cargo, down from 274,000 in 2014, and 1.18 million in 2013. Russian Railways, which in 2015 proudly announced a 7-fold increase of Trans-Siberian cargo transit to 131,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit of cargo capacity) from 2009 to 2014, is dwarfed by only one Chinese sea port. The port of Shanghai exceeds the capacity of the biggest Russian transporter by almost 300 times, with an annual transport of 36.54 million tons of cargo.⁸

⁷ Putin's reply to a journalist after the APEC Leader's Week, 9 September 2012, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/16432>.

⁸ A. Barbashin, "To save the 'Eurasian Dream'," *Intersection*, 3 August 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-world/save-eurasian-dream>.

Russia's pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, instead of addressing half the global economy, is only addressing China with Russia's trade with China growing from 10.5% in 2013 to 14.1% in 2016, while trade with two other key trade partners in the region was far less impressive. Trade with South Korea increased by 0.2% over the same period, while trade with Japan actually decreased by 0.5%.

China does not guarantee even a fragment of investments that were pouring in from Europe into Russia. In 2012 China has invested in Russia \$450 million, \$597 million in 2013, then \$1,27 billion in 2014 and back down to \$645 in 2015 and roughly \$500 million in 2016.⁹ Hardly is it comparable to pre-Crimean amounts of investment coming from the EU which in 2013 amounted to \$38 billion. What is more curious is that in 2016 Chinese outgoing investment amounted to \$170 billion, so only 0,3% were directed at Russia. Russia, to China, is still a peripheral interest for its economy.

Instead of substituting Europe with China, Russia increases its political commitment to Beijing, and Crimea has left it in a weaker bargaining position at the table. By focusing on China, it compromises its relations with other regional partners, especially Vietnam¹⁰ without getting any evident gains from what you could call a "China First" approach. The hope that China, during debates throughout 2014–2015 in Russia, would be a backstop for the Russian economy, have so far turned out to be woefully misplaced.

COUNTING IN DOMESTIC COSTS

Russia in 2017 is much worse off economically than it was in 2014 before the annexation of Crimea. Russia's GDP dropped from \$2,232 trillion in 2013 to \$1,331 trillion in 2016, GDP growth rate that in 2011 stood at 4.2% has gone down to 0.7% in 2014 to -3.7% in 2015 and is slightly above 0% now.¹¹ The Reserve Fund

⁹ Figures according to Central Bank of Russia, www.cbr.ru/statistics/?PrId=svs.

¹⁰ M. Kaczmarek, "Russia in East Asia: Ambitions Fall Short of Reality," *Intersection*, 16 April 2017, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-east-asia-ambitions-fall-short-reality>.

¹¹ According to World Bank data: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=RU>.

that stood at \$87 billion right before the annexation have been almost depleted and are leveling around \$16 billion today¹² and expected to be fully exhausted before the end of 2017.

The economy is not collapsing. But it has been stagnating. Industrial production and manufacturing has been flat for the last three years. Retail—one of the main catalysts of Russia's economy through much of Putin's era has been subsequently weak for the last two years and today stands at just 75% of 2014 volumes.¹³ Russia's trade has suffered even more starkly. The overall volume of trade has halved from \$844.2 billion in 2013 to \$467.8 billion in 2016.¹⁴ Still, we need to clarify that the ongoing economic stagnation is not all due to the sanctions and anti-sanctions that followed Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the east of Ukraine. Russia's economy has been slowing down since 2011 and the 2015 dip would have happened even without the introduced sanctions. Moreover the key component of this decline was the oil prices that have dropped from the average of around \$110 per barrel of Brent in 2011–2014 to around \$50 in 2017 with a low point of around \$32–\$35. This decline in oil prices has also caused the two-fold devaluation of Russian national currency in late 2014. It is worth noting that such a high dependence on oil prices—the fundamental problem that Putin has been constantly promising to resolve, is as urging today as it was 5, 10 or 15 years ago, if not more.

Despite a seemingly doomed state affairs in the Russian economy, as it was seen by various analyses in 2014–2015,¹⁵ the Kremlin maintains that all troubles are temporary and thus does not change its political course. Putin's conviction that the economy does in fact endure is based on a few key figures. Russia's foreign-exchange reserves in March of 2017 remain at a comfortable

¹² According to Ministry of Finance of the RF, <http://minfin.ru/ru/performance/reservefund/statistics/volume>.

¹³ According to data by the Rosstat: www.gks.ru/free_doc/doc_2017/info/oper-02-2017.pdf.

¹⁴ According to data by the Russian Federal Customs Agency: www.customs.ru/index.php?option=com_newsfts&view=category&id=125&Itemid.

¹⁵ For example, P.R. Gregory, "A Russian Crisis with No End in Sight, Thanks to Low Oil Prices and Sanctions," *Forbes*, 14 May 2015, www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2015/05/14/a-russian-crisis-with-no-end-in-sight-thanks-to-low-oil-prices-and-sanctions/#4797ccd211a5.

\$397 billion, which are of course down from \$493 billion three years ago, but still hold a relatively safe volume. The foreign debt is down by \$40 billion over the last three years from over \$550 billion to little \$510 billion (with state debt being very small—only \$11 billion). According to official data inflation in 2016 stands at 5.3% down from 13% in 2015—though there are considerable concerns that there is a lot of manipulation with official data, especially when it comes to inflation. Even so, these are the numbers that Putin sees when he has economic reports sent to him by his assistants.

This macroeconomic stability of stagnation—given an assumption oil prices will not collapse again to 2014 lows—guarantees that if properly adjusted through budget cuts, sliding tax raises and basically squeezing of small and medium size business that Russian economy would not repeat the vertical drops similar to crises of 1998 or even 2008. What is perceived by most Western analysts like a depressive downwards outlook for Russia's economy is perceived by the Kremlin as an inevitable price to pay for its status as great power that Russians have to accept and work through. (When asked in late 2014 about economic hardship by a journalist, Putin replied: "This is actually the price we have to pay for our natural aspiration to preserve ourselves as a nation, as a civilization, as a state."¹⁶) Clearly today's Russian leadership lacks the same economic rationale that has been the basis of Western political thinking over the last decades. Nevertheless, the numbers in this case are hard to argue against a clear failure in this regard.

NO BACK PEDAL

Considering the rather depressing state of affairs in and around Russia, one might ask why Putin is not changing his policy orientation in order to revamp the economy and rebuild its relations with the West. The problem here is that despite the rational assessment that Crimea was a major policy mistake is self-evident, for Putin it constitutes an already fundamental pillar of

¹⁶ Annual Press conference of Vladimir Putin, 18 December 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>.

his legitimacy. Crimea has secured a long-standing high approval rating for Putin. Just as with previously in his career, every conflict with the West led to a rise of his popularity and a general trust in the government.¹⁷ Besides providing for overwhelming support and readiness to neglect certain social limitations, the effect of sanctions and economic stagnation by the population, it cemented its irreversibility. In the poll conducted by Levada Center and published in March 2017, the “return of Crimea” ended up being the second most important event in Russia’s history that Russians were proud of.¹⁸ In a sense, this newfound feeling of being a great power that compensates for a lack of economic success, or civic freedoms and a sense of future prospective, is both the problem and the solution for Putin. It helped him build the consensus that still stands after three years since annexation and will most likely guarantee his victory in the 2018 presidential elections. But it carries all the side effects mentioned in the previous chapters, clearly creating a number of concerns for the years to come.

Putin has chosen to maintain power instead of addressing in a true manner any of the outstanding concerns: whether that is a faltering economy in need of diversification, or a costly foreign policy of war and isolation. Under existing political circumstances with Putin as a formal or informal leader, it would be practically impossible to reverse or even alter the status of Crimea in the Russian Federation. Thus, what could and should be considered a failure for Russia ends up being trumpeted (perhaps rightly, in a way) a relative personal success for Putin.

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¹⁷ O. Irisova, “The West through the eyes of Russians,” *Intersection*, 6 November 2015, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/society/west-through-eyes-russians>.

¹⁸ See Levada Center poll “Pride and Shame,” 1 March 2017, www.levada.ru/2017/03/01/gordost-i-styd.