

THE ROLE OF THE “NEW COLD WAR” CONCEPT IN CONSTRUCTING RUSSIA’S GREAT POWER NARRATIVE

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Abstract: *For the past two years, since the annexation of Crimea (2014), there is strong evidence to confirm that the relations between the West and Moscow have deteriorated. As conflicts are unfolding both in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, the tensions between the United States and Russia are at their highest point since the end of Cold War. In this context, the concept of “New Cold War” started to be more frequently used in Western media and think tank analyses, but also in Russian high officials’ discourses. The concept was frequently used as a metaphor in public discourse with various tensed occasions in the last 2 decades. But it was most frequently used after the events in Ukraine. The main purpose of the article is to investigate the present context in which this concept is being used in relation with the main premises of Russian foreign policy. We are initializing our research with our research question: “How the “New Cold War” concept fosters the idea of the Russian Federation as a great power?”. This paper argues that the “New Cold War” is a symbolic concept used to strengthen Russia’s great power narrative. Using constructivists’ arguments of the international relations theory, we will examine this idea and will observe how this social construct helps Russia to strengthen its great power and offers a new interpretation to the international environment.*

Keywords: Russia; New Cold War; Great Power narrative; Socialization; foreign policy

Introduction

The Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea have opened a new chapter of divergences between the West and Russia. While the United States and the European Union adopted economic sanctions on major Russian state companies, banks and several high level officials for the annexation of Crimean Peninsula (BBC, 2014), Russia responded by banning certain EU agro-food products (McEldowney, 2016). Moreover, in April 2014 NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia, including NATO-Russia Council (only three meetings for the past two years, all of them in 2016) (NATO, 2016a).

Numerous events that occurred in the 2014-2016 period deepened further the shaken cooperation between the West and Russia: from Russia’ support of the far-right parties in Europe¹, to

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¹ As was demonstrated by the research conducted by Political Capital Institute entitled “The Russian connection, the spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right”, published on 14th March 2014 and available at: http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00007035/01/PC_Russian-Connection_2014.pdf, last accessed on 21st August 2016.



MH17 Malaysia plane crash in Donbas (above the area controlled by the separatists) with a Russian-made surface-to-air BUK missile (Parket, 2016), to Russia’s support for the al-Assad Government and its involvement in the Syrian conflict, to the alleged Russian hack on the American elections and cyber-attacks on American media outlets². In addition, disagreements concerning the implementation of the Minks Agreements and recent tensions between Kiev and Moscow about an alleged “terror” claim conducted by the Ukrainian intelligence services in Crimea³ complicate furthermore the relations. In the same time, the European Union and the US announced that they will continue with the economic sanctions (European Council, 2016) and NATO will deploy four battalions on Eastern Europe for deterrence purposes (as decided in the Warsaw Summit in July 2016). Those decisions have more reasons for observers’ claims that Russia and the West are on the verge of a “New Cold War”.

Within this context, more and more Western media, think tanks or various academic voices are speaking about the concept of “New Cold War”. Not only Western outlets are using this concept, but what is even more challenging is that also high officials from Russia started to refer to it in public discourse. Most recently, during the 52nd Munich Security Conference in 2016, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared that “The political line of NATO toward Russia remains unfriendly and closed. It can be said more sharply: We have slid into a time of a new Cold War” (Meyer *et al.*, 2016), warning that the Western countries and the US do not follow any more the Post-World War II security architecture that brought peace and stability to the continent and the only way to avoid it is through cooperation. While Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of the Alliance, in the statement of the NATO Summit in Warsaw, dismissed the allegations of a possible new Cold War by saying that: “*NATO doesn’t seek confrontation, we don’t want a new Cold War. The Cold War is history, and it should remain history*” (NATO, 2016b).

Nevertheless, there is a shared view expressed by a segment of influential international experts stating that starting with 2014 the relations between the United States and Russia are “*at their lowest point since the end of Cold War*” (Stavridis, 2016). Moreover, as Michael Ignatieff suggests, the Ukrainian crisis highlights the new structure of the post-Cold War order as “*we seem to have the re-problematisation of post-Soviet borders everywhere from the Baltics, through the Balkans, through Poland, through Romania, through Georgia*” (Ignatieff, 2014, p. 4). Beyond various contradictory

² These alleged Russian cyber-acts are still under investigation. Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cyber-media-idUSKCN10Y21I>, last accessed on 23th August 2016.

³ More on this subject: “Russia Accuses Kyiv Of Plotting 'Terror' In Crimea; Ukraine Denounces Moscow's 'Fantasies'”, in Radio Free Europe, published on 10th August 2016 and available at: <http://www.rferl.org/a/crimea-fsb-ukraine-incursion/27912985.html>, last accessed on 11th August 2016.

opinion, one thing is evident that tensions have rose between the US and Russian Federation on frictions concerning the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, different views regarding possible solutions for the Syrian crisis and the buildup of NATO and its troop exercises near the borders of Russia. And Russia's dissatisfaction, together with its concerns for the security of Kaliningrad are leading to a downgrade to a Cold-War mentality that was translated in practice, in the spring of 2016, in two risky manoeuvres of flyover of Russia's over a U.S. warship in the Baltic Sea and a U.S. aircraft in the international space nearby (Stavridis, 2016).

Keeping in mind the situation briefly described above, this article will analyse the concept of the "New Cold War" and particularly how this concept is used by Russia in the international community to reinforce the country's great power status and the projection of its position/role in the new world order. We are initializing our research with our research question: "How the "New Cold War" concept fosters the idea of the Russian Federation as a great power?". During this paper, we will assess the assumption that the "New Cold War" is a symbolic concept used to strengthen Russia's 'Great Power Narrative' (GPN).

Inside the paper we opted for a qualitative approach. We will use a mix of descriptive and explanatory studies with the purpose of analysing the existing data, to find a suitable academic explanation for the research question. The data analysed includes primary sources (online discourses and official documents) and secondary sources (books, academic articles, think tank papers, journalistic sources). Because of language barriers, the main understanding of the "New Cold War" term employed in this research is based almost entirely on Western sources. Therefore, the author comprehends the danger of having a bias interpretation but tries to limit it by using more empirical Russian data that are available in English. The primary sources (online discourses and official documents) are mainly Russian. For this analysis, we will analysis three types of Russian data: (a) the official narrative (represented by official documents and discourses of the Russian leaders with a focus on the narratives of President Putin, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), (b) experts' narratives (here we will analyse three leading think tanks: Carnegie Moscow, the Valdai Club and Russian International Affairs Council) and (c) the media representation of the subject (three important Russian media outlets were selected: Russian Today, Sputnik and the Moscow Times). It is important to mention that we will work with the English version of the texts of the chosen sources. The period analysed is between 2013 (with the publishing of the Foreign Policy Concept 2013) until the launch of the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. As a methodological framework, we will use foreign policy analysis, understood as "*the process and resultants of human*

decision making with reference to or having known consequences for foreign entities” (Hudson, 2005). Since foreign policy analysis is a wide umbrella which includes multiple determinants that influence foreign policy decision makers and foreign policy decision making, this paper will have a multifactorial and multilevel ground. Therefore, during the research we will employ both discourse analysis and document analysis because they offer us an important insight into Russia’s foreign policy in relation with the West.

The theoretical paradigm that will be employed during this research is constructivism. Constructivism is an international relations approach that places ideas, interests, norms at its core. We will focus on Alexander Wendt’s constructivist premises, thus the indicators that will be used in this paper are: identity, the normative structure and the socialization process. Identity, as defined by constructivists, represents the construction of the self in opposition to an “other”. The constructivist approach do not take identity as fixed but rather claims that the actors (states) constructs their identity from history, previous interactions, norms and values. It is important to mention that since identities are constructed through interaction, they can alter (Baylis *et al.*, 2011).

As defined by Wendt, a normative structure (the international system) constructs the identities and interest of the actors but also the interactions between the actors may lead to the replication or transformation of the structure (Wendt, 1992). The third indicator, the socialization process is “*a causal process of learning identities and interests through social interaction.*” (Wendt, 1999).

The analysis will first present the various conceptualizations of “new Cold War” and the various meanings attached to it in different contexts. In the second segment, we will highlight the most important events of Russian external relations that recalibrated the country’s foreign affairs agenda (starting already with 2007) with the objective of regaining the image of a great power on the international arena. The last part of the paper will analyse, using the constructivists indicators mentioned above, the reasons why Russia uses the “New Cold War” concept, its success in constructing the Russia’s great power narrative in the international community, and how this term is employed by Russian foreign policy.

1. Conceptualizing the “New Cold War”

The Cold War was a significant historical period that shaped the behaviour of the world for more than half of century. The fundamental characteristic of the Cold War period was its clear bipolarity that divided the world in two camps on the West-East sloap (on one side there was the Western Bloc, led by the United States and on the other the Eastern Bloc with the Soviet Union in

charge), which was sustained by a fierce ideological battle (liberalism/capitalism versus communism/socialism). During this period, both parties tried to ‘demonize’ the enemy and fabricate ominous attributes about the other. Moreover, other important elements include the existence of two military alliances (NATO vs. the Warsaw Pact), two different economic systems, the threat of mutual nuclear annihilation, proxy wars. The appeal to reason, morals, law or the attempt to understand the other’s point of view was disregarded in favour of oneself’s interests and ideas.

For the past twenty five years, speaking about the end of Cold War was a leitmotif in international relations. But as Michael Cox underlines, using analogies to the past to understand the current events was an overused recurrent exercise even though a legitimate one (Cox, 2014). Therefore, the literature is abundant with articles referring to the “Cold War” and analogies of a new “Cold War”. From ideas that associate global terrorism to a new cold war (Buzan, 2006), to analogies to religious nationalism (Juergensmeyer, 1993), or energy security (Kandiyoti, 2015; Ciuta and Klinke, 2008) to US-China relations (Shambaugh, 1995), or the confrontation of political Islam with the Western model (Salla, 1997), and more recently Cyber espionage (Jones, 2016) and cybersecurity (Moss, 2013), these are just few attempts of the past two decades to categorize some international events according to history and integrate them into a familiar framework. The concept of Cold War is “*a contemporary international relations metaphor for a fundamentally strained relationship that cannot be resolved within the framework of the world views of either party but requires a rethinking of both*” (Sakwa, 2008, p. 26).

The frequency of the term “New Cold War” both in academia and mass-media has reached a high level with the Ukraine crisis and the worsening relations of the West with Russia. For Legvold, the annexation of Crimea by Russia is the starting point of the new cold war. In his conception, this war will be different from the original in intensity and ideology. Even if it will have an effect on the international affairs it will be a limited war between Russia and the West. Moreover, some of the patterns that were distinct for the Cold War (ideology driven objectives) are lacking but the political animosity is replacing that gap (Legvold, 2014).

The “New Cold War” concept does not have a commonly acknowledged definition and that is why various experts have different approaches to the term. Some scholars consider that we are already in a new Cold War regardless of the fact that this one does not have the characteristic elements of the classical one (Cohen, 2014). Acknowledging the profound changes that Russia faced since the demise of USSR and its integration into the capitalist system, its actions towards its neighbours, its rising

nationalist discourse, its perception as a great power and its anti-West attitude are characteristics common to the Cold War mentality and should not be disregarded (Cox, 2014).

Others like Gromyko consider that a new Cold War is most unlikely since the world in which we live is a poly-centric one. Nevertheless, the author doesn’t deny the re-appearance of opposing political and military alliances with a different ideological path, either real or constructed. On this argument, he suggests the idea of a possible “small Cold War” that will be limited in action and impact (Gromyko, 2015).

For Richard Sakwa, a “New Cold War” represents the results of the inability to efficiently prevail over the structures and sentiments that accompanied the “original struggle” (Sakwa, 2008). Nevertheless, since the world is not split anymore between the two rival ideological projects used by the US and Russia, the conditions for a Cold War reappearance following its classical patterns are not present. In his view, bipolarism is not valid any longer as the relations of Russia with the United States do not represent anymore the nucleus for the world politics (Sakwa, 2008).

While some scientists are already admitting the existence of a New Cold War world, others are declining this assumption.

As we can see from the definitions presented above, there is not a unified acceptance of the possibility of a new Cold War, its characteristics or the type of its impact. The common ground found in the literature review is that all authors support the idea that a return to the bipolar system it is improbable as the structural changes held for the past twenty-five years both in Russia and the U.S. and the appearance of other important political and economic players (China, India, Japan, Brazil, the European Union) makes the idea of a clear demarcation between two politically-military blocs impossible. In addition to the elements presented in this section, we want to accentuate that the transformative nature of the globalized system created a dependency between states that cannot easily and without enormous cost can be rearranged.

While we are accepting the fundamentals of the “New Cold War” concept (the political animosity between Russia and West, the probability of a small scale conflict, the nuclear threat and the fact that an eventual “new Cold War” will be low in intensity and territorial impact), we depart from the other definitions by stating that we consider this term to have a strong symbolic meaning. The distinction is that we view the “New Cold War” as a tool that can play an ideological purpose if empowered by policy makers.

2. Russia's foreign policy: from accepting the global status-quo to challenging it

The end of the Cold War was represented by the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The new international status of Russia was completely different as the state has lost its global power status and faced international humiliation, when the government had to default on its debts in 1998. Therefore, there is no surprise that the dissolution of USSR is viewed in Russia as a “major geopolitical catastrophe” (Dadak, 2010).

In his article “*New Cold War*” or *twenty years’ crisis?*, Richard Sawka introduces the idea that the end of the Cold War was asymmetrical since one side (Russia) has renounced to its Cold War structures (even the ideological ones) while the other had preserved and even strengthened them (e.g. NATO was not replaced by a common collective security regime, it was maintained and enlarged). The author also states that these changes, in the ‘90s, were accompanied by internal asymmetries within the political transformation of Russia. While the country had given up on its ideological and geopolitical alternative systems to the capitalist order and to the military political blocs, it preserved its civilizational identity and ambition to take part in the world’s leadership. The fact that the West acted as having the right to impose its values and norms on Russia was eventually considered intrusive and humiliating thus exacerbating the already complicated internal transformation of Russia (Sakwa, 2008).

Both the domestic and international environments of Russia started to change with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin. In his first mandate as president, even though there were disagreements regarding the United States’ international approach, Russia’s foreign policy carried on a non-confrontation foreign policy that accepted the unipolar world order. The first term of Putin was focusing more on the economic development of the country and securing the state from external threats (terrorism being the top-tier) (Tsygankov, 2008a).

As most scholars state, a visible change in foreign policy can be seen starting with 2005. The American intervention in Iraq, the coloured revolutions of Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan (2003-2005), the Washington global policy of democratizing and liberating, NATO’s enlargement towards including former Soviet states, and the 2007 United States declaration of building up a missile defence system in Eastern Europe were considered by Russia as security vulnerabilities that should be addressed (Tsygankov, 2008a). In this regard, assertiveness became a new length of Russian foreign policy. By assertiveness, the state “*no longer accept[ed] the status of a West’s junior partner*” but rather started to carry out a confident foreign policy, based on Russians national interests with the

objective of fostering security, economic development and stability (Tsygankov, 2008a). This new foreign policy shift is comprised in a new foreign policy report called “A Review of the Russian Federation’s Foreign Policy,” that was published by the Russian Foreign Ministry on 27 March 2007. The document describes the Russian Federation “great power pragmatism” and introduces the concept of multipolarity, which is constructed around the idea of “*a more equitable distribution of resources for influence and economic growth*” (Tsygankov, 2008b)

This foreign policy turning point was also translated into practice. In Putin’s speech held at the 43rd Munich Security Conference, he manifested his grievances with the international system architecture. The “unipolar world” is to be blamed for “*an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations...that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts...One state and, of course, first and foremost, the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way.*” (Putin, 2007a). The fractions of Russians with the international order was also expressed at the 62nd anniversary of the Victory Day when Putin, in his public remarks, in which he indirectly blames the US for dominating the world and imposing its system: “*We have a duty to remember that the causes of any war lie above all in the mistakes and miscalculations of peacetime, and that these causes have their roots in an ideology of confrontation and extremism. It is all the more important that we remember this today, because these threats are not becoming fewer but are only transforming and changing their appearance. These new threats, just as under the Third Reich, show the same contempt for human life and the same aspiration to establish an exclusive dictate over the world*” (Putin, 2007b).

Not only Putin, but also Medvedev (at that time president of Russia) in the 2009 annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation had claimed that: “*The foundation of my vision for the future is the firm conviction that Russia can and must become a global power on a complete new basis*” (Medvedev, 2009). These speeches represent a transposition in Russia’s acceptance of the unipolar system and signals that the relations of the country with the West can degrade. Moreover, it is a clear sign that Russia’s adoption of a more assertive foreign policy is translated into practice by a more bold, strong attitude in which Russia renounced to the idea of proving that it is a great power and started acting as one (Rotaru, 2014).

Russia’s great power status was not just an abstract idea, it encompassed also foreign policy and security objectives. The main objective, (to promote its national interest), led to a move to authoritarianism, European energy security concerns, Russia’s meddling in the neighbours’ internal affairs that worsened the country’s relations with the West (Rotaru, 2014). Following Russia’s great power rationale, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 represents a clear message that the Russian

Federation still views the post-Soviet region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a vital area for the Russian interests. A proponent of a multipolar system, the Russian Federation perceives its vicinity as essential for its security and foreign policy ambitions. In order to make sure that the states from its “privileged” interest region remain under Russian influence, methods of political, economic, energy, military pressure, and hard power instruments were used. Georgia was the example that Russia is willing to use military methods when other instruments fail in order to preserve its strategic foreign policy and security objectives (Wieclawski, 2011).

An important lesson for West from the Russia’s intervention in Georgia was that Russian leadership ignored the Western warning and sanctions and started caring on an independent stance within the international system (Wieclawski, 2011). In this regard, Russia increased its collaboration with some Latin American countries (Cuba, Venezuela) that were averse to the US foreign policy in the region. This was a clear message from Moscow that any United States’ engagement in Russia’s sphere of influence will be reciprocated by strengthening of the Russian Federation relations with US neighbour states and countries that are reluctant to the American hegemony (Wieclawski, 2011). This was a piece of puzzle in a bigger picture where Russia’s foreign policy goal was to diversify its diplomatic ties. In this regard, Russia’s initiative of creating BRICS (Brasil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) had the purpose of providing the Russian state with a special status, a liasson between the West and Est. In practice, this politico-economico-cultural alliance had also the scope of balancing the Western influence and to highlights Russia’s leading role in the international community (Salzman, 2014).

The “back to business” approach between West and Russia and the Obama’s reset policy on the US-Russia relations (The White House, 2010) were indicators for Moscow that the United States and the European Union do not have a clear, unite and coherent stance and response, and were not willing for Georgia’s sake to sacrifice their collaboration with Russia. This message reinforced Russia’s risk taking attitude in foreign policy.

For Fyodor Lukyanov, the five days war represents a turning point in the foreign policy of Russia as *“It was proof that Moscow can say no. The United States and its allies were shown that Moscow was serious about drawing a line in the sand. They accepted the signal.”* (Lukyanov, 2011). According to the author, this follows two decades of Russian frustration with NATO’s expansion and a warning from Moscow that Ukraine and Georgia are beyond the crossing line that the West can cross.

As a follow-up of Russian intervention in Georgia, the 2013 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, adopted by the Russian Government, represents a conceptualization into a strategic document of the country’s external relations objectives, views, and priorities for the next seven years. A main goal of Russia, according to the concept, is to secure “*its high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world*”. Russia’s important role and priorities in the emergence of a new world order are clearly defined as the state’s intention to “*establishing a just and democratic system of international relations based on collective decision-making in addressing global issues ...as well as on equal, partnership relations among nations*” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013).

The dissatisfaction of Moscow with NATO is also presented in the document: “*Russia maintains a negative attitude towards NATO's expansion and to the approaching of NATO military infrastructure to Russia's borders in general as to actions that violate the principle of equal security and lead to the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe.*” In addition to that, regardless of the attempt of normalizing the American cooperation with the state, Russia’s perceptions of the US actions are still negative and warning, as the strategy suggests: “*Russia expects that US actions in the international arena will be strictly guided by international legal norms, primarily the UN Charter, including the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of other states.*” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013).

The most important foreign policy action of the Russian Federation since the end of the Cold War were the annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014 and the intervention in Eastern Ukraine. Russia by breaking the principles that sustain the European security system and challenging the international system order might provoke possible serious consequence for the international law and norms, inplaced by the United Nations, whose permanent seated member Russia is (Allison, 2014).

Russia’s annexation of Crimea in spring 2014 is in line with the Russian coercive actions taken to pressure Ukraine. Regardless of the many interpretation towards Putin action to seizure the Crimean Peninsula, either if he is a “defender” thus reacting to the security threats posted by a NATO expansion in Ukraine and the loss of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet; or either as an “imperialist”, a part of a greater agenda to reintegrate in the Russian state former territories of the USSR; or as an “improviser”, view that supports the hypothesis that Putin’s decision to occupy Crimea was more a spontaneous, risk-taken decision than as part of a larger geopolitical agenda; the action represents an unthinkable reaction that overthrew the post-Cold War European order (Treisman, 2016).

For the past two years, Russia’s actions in Ukraine and Syria are visible signs that the country wants to restore its status as a global power and only with an “iron fist” can Russia stop the Western

expansion (Lukyanov, 2016). Through this logic, we can understand the annexation of Crimea and supporting the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, as a way through which Russia is trying to make sure that Ukraine will not be able to join neither NATO nor the European Union. Russia could not lead Ukraine to adhere to the European system (by continuing its Association Agreement process within the Eastern Partnership) for two reasons: first, such thing would have created a risk that Ukraine (through the implementation of the reforms) to successfully become a model for the other Post-soviet states and therefore to undermine Putin's regime legitimacy in Russia (Menkiszak, 2015-2016). Moreover, by intervening in Syria, Moscow not only had succeeded in strengthening the position of al-Assad but also leveraged the U.S. to negotiate with Russia on an equal basis. Apart from that, Russia also prevailed to increase its international image as a global power, moving the attention from the Ukraine conflict; protecting its naval resupply basis in the Mediterranean Sea, fighting terrorism and Islamists (Itani and Abouzahr, 2016).

The Russian successful strategy in Syria demonstrated its military aptitude and expertise. Nevertheless, since Russia is fully aware of its military capacity comparing to the one of the United States, being outgunned and investing less on defence, its policy is trying to maximize its advantages and not to provoke a military confrontation (Rumer, 2016). In cases where military risks are too significant, other tools will be used. In this context, we can understand the military intervention in Syria as a somehow safe bet while the idea of a classical attack on Baltic states will never be carried out since it can lead to a retaliation from NATO and the danger of nuclear annihilation (Rumer, 2016). For other cases, in order to make these countries doubt NATO's commitment to protect them, tools from Russian "hybrid war" will be used: from cyber-attacks, to disinformation, propaganda and airspace violations.

The past three years (2013-2016) were abundant in external events for the Russian Federation and all the changes in the country's foreign policy but also its objectives, priorities, views were gathered in a new Foreign Policy Concept, that was published on the 1st of December 2016. Built on the previous document, the current concept presents the way how Russia perceives itself and its relationship with the rest of the world. An important change from the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept lays in the way how the Russian Federation sees the international order. For the first time, in a strategic document, Russia declares that the past event had led the "*to the emergence of a multipolar international system.*" (The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). Other modifications in the Russian foreign policy refers to Russia's goal to engage more in solving the world's problem (where the fight against terrorism plays an increased role), conducting an equal-

based relation with the United States (the collaboration between the two countries is focusing on arms control; the Eurasian Economic Union is presented as being a bigger priority than the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition, the document also expresses Russia’s desire to strengthen its bilateral relations with the European countries (Germany, Italy and France in particular).

3. The “New Cold War” concept and its place on the Russian foreign policy agenda

Russia’s re-emergence as a great power culminates with the changes in Russian foreign policy and security made during Vladimir Putin’s mandate. If in 2007-2008, the scholars’ perception was that Russia was in a crucial moment of changing its future, a crossroads between choosing the “menace” way or the “salvation” way (Galbreath, 2008) and the possibility of a new cold war was something still hard to comprehend, today we can observe that Russia under Putin’s leadership carried on a series of foreign policy and security actions that have provided the country with a stronger voice within the international community and has got the attention that it sought.

In this section of the article, we will research how the concept of the “New Cold War” is used to foster the recognition by the international community of Russia’s great power status and to project the start of a new world order, a multipolar system. Using constructivist indicators, we will present how an analogy to a past event (Cold War) is used by Moscow to gather the international attention towards projecting itself as a leading world power. The primary sources are mainly Russian sources.

For this analysis, we analysed analysis three types of Russian data: the official position (represented by official documents and discourses of the Russian leaders with a focus on the position of President Putin, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), experts’ views (here we studied three leading think tanks: Carnegie Moscow, the Valdai Club and Russian International Affairs Council), media representation of the subject (three important Russian media outlets were selected: Russian Today, Sputnik and the Moscow Times). The period of analysing the data is 2013 (with the publishing of the Foreign Policy Concept, 2013) until the launch of the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. The findings identified 49 articles in the 3 media outlets that are mentioning the “New Cold War” term, 12 references in the analysed think tanks and no acknowledgement in the official documents. Nevertheless, there were some cases when high ranking Russian official have used the analogy of a “New Cold War” to build more on the intricate relations of Russia with the West.

3.1. Searching international recognition for a self-image

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had maintained its great power identity and expected to be one of the pylons of the international system. According to Russian policymakers and academia, the country's global power attributes were given by its nuclear capabilities, military strength, significant raw resources, geopolitical stance, and cultural, intellectual and historical heritage (Omelicheva and Zubyska, 2016).

Russia's image was constructed also in opposition to "the other". In this case, the other is represented by the Western society (more precisely the United States). The self-image of Russia as a great power also means that the country expects to be treated as an equal by the other international actors. Nevertheless, Russia's perception is that it is treated as a "second class state" by the Western states. This idea is so strong embedded in the Russian mental that in a press interview, when asked if Russia's relations with the United States are worsening because of differences of opinions on Syria, Vladimir Putin answered that: "*It is not because of Syria. This is about one nation's attempt to enforce its decisions on the whole world*" (Oliphant, 2016).

In order to be a great power, one has to be recognised as being a great power. In the Russian case, the examined data shows us that there are two distinct discursive narratives, present both in the most high ranking Russian policy makers (the president and the ministry of foreign affairs) but also in the media. Recurring elements of this narrative refer to the aggressive behaviour of the West towards Russia that is only responding as an antagonisation of Western actions. And the other is to portray Russia as a defender of the international principles of the United Nations Charter. As constructivists suggest, the force of a great power should not be only material but also ideational. In this regard, legitimacy becomes an important factor to the foreign policy agenda of an actor. The belief that a state follows and is behaving within the principles and norms of a wider international community is fundamental for legitimacy.

Following this rationale, the legitimisation of Russian foreign policy is put in practice by the two discursive narratives briefly described above. The West (the examined data shows us a particular focus on NATO) is portrayed as aggressive and headed by a Cold War mentality. For example, in an interview for Rossiya 1 in December 2015, president Putin declared: "*The bipolar system collapsed. And our partners should have thought about how to become moral leaders of the newly emerging global relations. But they continued to act and think in the old ways, using Cold War clichés.*" (Russia Today– Putin, 2015). This claim as also employed by Putin in its interview with the German

newspaper, Bild: *“We did not overcome Europe’s division: Twenty-five years ago the Berlin Wall fell, but Europe’s division was not overcome, invisible walls simply moved to the East”* (Russia Today, 2016a). The Cold War rhetoric that is embedded in the Western attitudes towards Russia was also suggested by Alexander Grushko (Russia’s permanent representative to NATO) that said: *“We have to overcome the tangible heritage of the ‘cold war.’ Until recently we considered that it was an issue of the past, but the Ukraine crisis has revived the ‘cold war’ ideology”* (Russia Today, 2016b).

By employing this narrative, the Russian top officials are trying to reconstruct the perception of the Western actions in regards to the Russian state and to present the Russian Federation as having only a defensive attitude rather than being an aggressive/imperialist/revisionist state as it was portrayed after the intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. This type of discourse follows two goals: a) to discredit the Western countries and b) to present Russia in another light, a more favourable one.

The second type of narrative, that is fostered by the Russian Federation in order to project its self identity in the international community, is focusing on Russia as an “alternative guardian” of the international norms, principles and values of the United Nations. President Putin, in addressing the nation on the subject of Crimes, stated that: *“After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability. Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right.”* (Putin, 2014). This view is also expressed in the new strategic foreign policy document of the country, as a main objective: *“continue promoting efforts to strengthen international peace and ensure global security and stability with a view to establishing a fair and democratic international system that addresses international issues on the basis of collective decision-making, the supremacy of international law, primarily the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations (the UN Charter), as well as equal, partnership relations among states, with the central and coordinating role played by the United Nations (UN) as the key organisation in charge of regulating international relations.”* (The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016).

The foreign policy agenda of the Russian Federation does not only seek international recognition of its great power status, but also to impose itself as an alternative model to the American hegemony. By utilizing ideology to its foreign policy agenda, Moscow praises Russian values of conservatism, traditionalism, religion, the traditional family to deplore the decadent Western society and liberal values promoted by the US and the EU. In leading an ideological battle with the West,

Putin tries to obtain two goals: to assure Russia's position as an international model for those who do not feel represented by the West and also to divide and undermine the Euro-Atlantic unity (Baker, 2015).

3.2. Is the socialization of Russia's great power narrative changing the international system?

As Russia carries a self-perception constructed by its belief system, history and the previous interactions within the global community, the country's reactions to the events or actions of the other actors can foster the international system institution or can challenge it by moves to alter or modify it.

According to constructivists, the post-Cold war system is an institution because it contains a "relatively stable set or structures of identities and interests". These structures are codified in formal norms and only through socialization and participation in the collective knowledge, they receive a meaning. The norms of the international system are thus produced through interactions between the actors and that interaction alters the actors' practices (Wendt, 1992). As indicated by Dmitri Trenin: *"...Russia's attitude toward the West (and vice versa) often determined the country's view of itself and its role and mission in the world."* (Trenin, 2007, p. 51).

Since Russia's self-perception of Russia was never of a second class power, its actions and declarations were a way of claiming recognition from the other great powers of its affiliation to the same circle. And by recognition, Russian leadership understood the imperative of Russia's right to be respected and share its views on global matters even though theirs weren't following the same line as the ones of the Americans (Arbatov, 2007). Adopting a "pragmatic great power" attitude and admitting that a return to bipolarism is not possible in the current international context, Russian policy makers started to promote multipolarity as a structure to a more stable, balanced, and equitable world.

As presented in the second part of the article, since the integration of the multipolarity idea in the Russian foreign policy agenda, a series of strategic steps (that were translated into actions or discourses) were made with the purpose of socializing the need for a change in the world order. Simply put, what Russia's trying for almost a decade is to alter the international system (the multilateral world order by promoting the idea of multipolar order in which some powerful militarized countries control the international system (Speck, 2015).

3.3. The place of “New Cold War” concept in the multipolar world order’s view

The change of paradigm in the international society and the unfolding of unprecedented events for the past two years, starting with the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, gave rise to various intellectual attempts to understand some of these events and categorize them into a known construction. In this logic, the worsening of the US-Russian relations can grow fears of an ignition of a new conflict between the two actors.

Despite the fact that the notion of “new cold war” had become a constant of possible scenarios when speaking or analysing about the current US-Russia relations, the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, during this speech for the 52nd Munich Security Conference in 2016, was the first high ranking state official that employed this analogy (of a “New Cold War”). If until this point, the construct of a “new cold war” was more an academic or media idiom, this discourse may be interpreted as the internalization of the concept also by the policy makers. And while it is rarely used by the Russian policy makers, the concept is carrying the beliefs, meanings and the symbolism of the Cold War.

The Cold War, a period that was defined by an ideological, political, military, economic battle of two different systems and their allies have different understandings for the West comparing to the Russians. For the Russian Federation, the Cold War was one of the most prolific periods in the history of the country when the USSR hard and soft powers and sphere of influence were at their highest point. During that period, the state was one of the two superpowers that controlled the international system.

Symbolically, the Cold War represents also a shift in the world order. If the beginning of the Cold War made the turning point from a multipolar system to a bipolar world where two superpowers divided the globe, the end of the Cold War was also translated into a structural international system change as the world became unipolar, leaded by the United States. Following this rationale, the possibility of a “New Cold War” automatically highlights the end of the current order and another shift in the international relations. The first thought about the possibility of a “New Cold War” is a return to bipolarism. The preliminary findings of analysing the collected data, show us that Russia is acting as a “pragmatic great power” by supporting the idea of a multipolar world order, rather than a bipolar system.

This idea is strengthened by the narratives of the Russian high ranking officials. For example, when asked about the possibility of a new Cold War, Minister Sergei Lavrov said: *“On the one hand, the Cold War was based on an uncompromising confrontation of ideologies. We have no*

contradicting ideologies at the moment, we follow the same principles in economy and politics, so no objective reasons for... the second edition of the Cold War." (Sputnik News, 2015). In addition, according to the new National Security Strategy of Russia, adopted in December 2015, an important element for the national interest of the country is "*consolidating the status of the Russian Federation as a leading world power*" (Gozman, 2016).

As Timothy Snyder suggests, the Russian propaganda has an important purpose: not presenting the situation as it is but rather to create it. Following the model of the Soviet propaganda, Russia's ideology today even though it employs contradictions and factual errors, it tries to present "*not a version of the world in which we live but rather a representation of the world to come*" (Snyder, 2014).

Following these premises and the analogy to historic moments in order to construct a meaning to a current situation that cannot be easily integrated into a pattern, we can observe that the concept of "New Cold War" has some symbolic meaning for the Russian foreign policy agenda and thus it was used and is internalized by the Russian policy makers.

Using legitimizing narratives, the Russian foreign policy agenda is trying to foster the idea that we made the shift from a unipolar world order to a multipolar system where Russia is also an important player. In this logic, the term of "New Cold War" if employed by policy makers can construct and reconstruct meanings to the current international system. Therefore, language is an important instrument in constructing the practice of speaking and the formation of rules. Through an act of speech, a policy maker transmits a message in a specific way to be understood. This shared and contextual meaning of the message gives birth to rules, which are sets of shared meaning. Thus, declarations in which Russia blames the United States for 'damaging' the world order, mass-media reports on the increase of Russia's military involvement in Crimea, the transfer of nuclear-capable missiles to Kaliningrad by Russia, the suspension of the plutonium agreement with the United States are all carrying the symbolism of a "New Cold War" with the purpose of highlighting the turning point in the structure of the international system.

Conclusions

The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the conflict in Ukraine open a Pandora box in the international community. Questions about the end of the unipolar order and what should we put in place, started to be more present in the academic, think tank and media environments. In this highly

volatile and complicated international context we tried throughout this paper to analyse the Russian foreign policy. We started our research from the assumption that the “New Cold War” is a symbolic concept employed by the Russian foreign policy agenda to strengthen its great power status and promote the need for a multipolar world.

After conducting a thoroughly contextualization of the foreign policy agenda of the Russian Federation and its main important events for the past decade, we dealt with the conceptualization of the “New Cold War” term. The preliminary findings show us that Russia adopted an assertive and pragmatic great power attitude starting with 2007. That was translated into a more confident, bold and risk-taking external relations approach.

Another important result is that Russia tries to obtain international recognition for its status as a great power. In this regard, we can analyse the term of the “New Cold War” suitable for the case. Symbolically, the concept holds the meaning of a shift in the international system. As such, the possibility of a “New Cold War” can also be perceived as carrying on the beliefs of the former Cold War. Nevertheless, the interesting finding is that Russia is not promoting a return to Bipolarism, but rather the model of multipolarity where the country is an equal international participant as the other actors (states).

Keeping in mind, that the international context that is observed in this research is still unfolding and changes to the West-Russia relations are happening at a higher intensity, the preliminary findings of the author confirm this article main idea: “New Cold War” is a symbolic concept used to strengthen Russia’s great power narrative with the objective of deconstructing and constructing a new set of norms and rules that define the institution of the international system.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the vast pool of information, the high rate how the situation is evolving on this subject can affect the findings of this research.

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