Umeå University
Department of Political Science

Exploring Constraints to Russia's Foreign Policy in the Baltics and the South Caucasus

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Markar Sangkogian

Abstract

The thesis is an explorative study of the notion of constraints to Russia's foreign policy. The explorative attempt investigates Moscow's external behaviour vis a vis the states of the Baltics and the South Caucasus from 2013 to 2020. The analysis argues that the notion of constraints, under the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, can offer a certain degree of explanatory power in terms of foreign policy variance. The operationalization of the notion, based on Foreign Policy Analysis Theory, proposes specific factors for inspection. Initially, a thematic analysis of Russia's *Foreign Policy Documents* of 2013 and 2016, illustrates that the notion of constraints and regionalism is lacking from the perception of the actor. The two documents understand the external world more in terms of threat/risk instead of constraints. Consequently, an examination of the constraints on the level of the international system, and the regional actors demonstrates that the notion holds analytical value under certain circumstances, however, it overlaps with existing frameworks such as that of Tsygankov's constructivist version, and Structural Realism. The explorative research brings forward fields where the literature on Russia's foreign policy can be enriched. One of the suggestions is associated with inspecting the notion of *fear conditioning* in the policy documents of the country.

Keywords: constraints, Russia, foreign policy, Baltic, South Caucasus, neoclassical realism, foreign policy analysis.

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Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
FA	Federal Assembly
FIS	Foreign Intelligence Service
FP	Foreign Policy
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FPC	Foreign Policy Concept
FSS	Federal Security Service
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MFA	Minister/Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MID	Main Intelligence Directorate
MOD	Minister/Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SC	Security Council (of Russia)
SU	Soviet Union used also for Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USD	United States' Dollars

Introduction

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (from now on SU) has been characterized as more or less stable or peaceful by various scholars. With small exceptions, a union of 15 titular nations was able to establish sovereignty with no major escalations of violence.[1] The establishment of new states created a new environment for Russia and its foreign policy. This new reality created the need to understand how this new actor interprets and acts in its external space; a task which has been undertaken by several scholars.[2] The research has been advocating several factors towards explaining the country's foreign policy, both domestic and external. What has been of interest concerning the external environment is associated with the existing variance in terms of tools of the actor's foreign policy in specific regions. In connection to this, the current analysis tackles this issue by comparing the Russian Foreign Policy (FP) in two seemingly alike regions, the Baltics and the South Caucasus, regions which differ significantly concerning their transition process from the SU; with the former following a peaceful transition and the latter experiencing several conflicts. Both regions have the same number of actors, which can be predominantly classified as small and vulnerable.[3] Other common aspects are connected to the close geographical proximity with Russia and the fact that both have been part of the SU.[4]

The differences between the foreign policy in the two regions can be attributed to many factors as the domestic political scene of the regional countries influence the way Moscow acts, and Moscow's actions shape the way the former counteract. The policy it follows towards both regions can be assessed by understanding the foreign policy constraints the country has. Those constraints defined, later in the study, as the existence of increased costs towards realizing a foreign policy, may be connected with internal factors of both Russia, and the smaller regional countries, and also of other actors existing in the region that cooperate or compete with Moscow. The current study explores the interplay between those factors.

In short, the problematization of the thesis is connected with the following fact: Baltics and the S. Caucasus, which share some common systemic aspects (e.g. same amount of states,

[1] Segert, Dieter (2018) "The dissolution of the Soviet Union and its consequences. Crises in the post-Soviet spaces: from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the conflict in Ukraine", in Jaitner, Olteanu & Spöri et al. (eds.) *Crisis in the Post-Soviet Space*, 1st edition, Oxon and New York: Routledge, pp. 17.
[2] Bobo Lo (2002), *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[3] Kanet, Roger E. (ed.) (2011), *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. See also Nalbandov, Robert (2016), *Not by Bread Alone: Russian Foreign Policy under Putin*, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
[4] Both regions have had groups of people who were victims of forced migration see, Gatrell, Peter (2007) "Population Displacement in the Baltic Region in the Twentieth Century: From Refugee Studies to Refugee History" *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 47 – 48.

adjacent to greater powers, common Soviet past, and experiences) have seen a drastically different approach in terms of Russian FP. The main question that this thesis answers is concerned with this observation, why and if has Russia's approach varied towards the two regions based on the constraints it faces.

1.1. Aim and Research Questions

The main purpose of the current study is to analyze the post–Soviet Russian foreign policy towards two regions: the Baltics and the South Caucasus. The period of examination is from 2013 up to 2020. This analysis is done under the conceptualization of the notion of constraints to the foreign policy of a country, which can be understood as limitations to the choices an actor may take in its foreign environment. Theoretically, an actor may behave as it can visualize itself to, however, in practice the range of choices can be narrower. The narrowness of those choices is dependent on the goals an actor has.

By conducting a case study of the Russian FP for the designated period, the thesis investigates the way Moscow's foreign actions, have varied in two adjacent regions. In that aspect, the analysis has a contextual goal of describing the foreign policy issues under the Russian lenses, its actions, and the domestic and international constraints under which those have been materialized. In this context, the thesis has an exploratory role. In the process of exploring and explaining, the text utilizes the notion of constraints more elaborately and comprehensively concerning the Russian case. For that reason, it also has a degree of generative purpose. Nevertheless, the main purpose of the thesis is concerned with the exploratory nature of a qualitative research based on available primary and secondary sources. Generative purposes are of lesser importance, and lastly measuring the effectiveness of phenomena is out of the research's context of analysis. In order to clarify the purposes of the thesis, it is important to connect them with specific research questions which are guiding the totality of the analysis.

The current research is occupied with mainly, descriptive, comparative, and exploratory questions; suggestions for change are not in its scope. More specifically they are formulated below in the following way:

1) How is the contemporary Russian FP formulated?
2) What have been and are the constraints of the Russian FP concerning the domestic level of the actor and the countries of the two regions, for the examined period?
3) How can the notion of constraints under Neoclassical Realism theory offer explanations to the variance of Russian FP observed vis a vis the two regions?

The two first questions are of descriptive nature, whereas the one combines both comparative and exploratory characteristics. Research questions need a conceptualization of the factors which attempt to answer them. Those factors are formulated in the section after the brief introduction of the theoretical framework and the concepts which are utilized by the study. This is necessary, as a hypothesis is expressed in conceptualized notions, and also, has to take into account the nature of the actors and the basis on which they make their calculations and choices.

1.2. Theory

The theory chosen for the current study, which belongs to the school of realism, is neoclassical realism. The combination of systemic factors, which are actor-general along with variables that come from the domestic sphere of the actors, which are actor-specific, are important for the conduct of this analysis. Neoclassical realism coined by Gideon Rose in 1998, and elaborated by Lobell et al. in 2009, has been an emerging school of thought used by several scholars[5]. More recently, this framework has been further elaborated by Ripsman et al, who in 2016 attempted to "forge a neoclassical realist research program for the study of international politics"[6] by introducing a revised version of neoclassical realism termed by them as Type III.[7] In the same book, the authors advocate the explanatory capabilities of the theoretical framework vis a vis its contenders, claiming that neoclassical realism can account for more.[8] Nevertheless, there are specific limitations, concerning the thesis that the authors do not address, which are examined further in the theoretical section of the thesis.

Equally important with having a theoretical framework, is the definition of theoretical notions used. For that reason, further concepts which are connected with ways to define regions, and also the notion of constraints deriving from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) are examined in detail later in the thesis. Having briefly introduced the theoretical framework of the thesis, the conceptualization of the factors of the study is mentioned in the next section.

1.3. Conceptualization of the Factors

To operationalize the factors of the study, a conceptualization which works as an answer to the basic research question of the study is necessary. The concept which the current thesis attempts to explore is concerned with the constraints on power projection of an ex-hegemon as a factor in the variability of its foreign policy towards different regions.

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[5] Rose, Gideon (1998) "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy." *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 144–172. See also, Lobell, Steven E., et al. (eds.) (2009) *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[6] Ripsman, Norrin. et al. (eds) (2016) *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1.
[7] Ibid., pp. 34.
[8] Ibid., pp. 3 – 11.

The above conceptualization has important terms that need to be delimited; understanding what is foreign policy and what is meant by constraints, are questions that need to be examined. This task is undertaken in section three of the thesis.

1.4. Methodology

This section briefly covers the methods that have been utilized in order to realize the thesis. It mentions the research method, the sources, the way the sources are examined, and the time frame of the study.

The current thesis follows a case study approach. Specifically, a within-case study of Russian FP which compares the constraints to the external relations of the country towards two regions. Case studies are practical in research where the contextual variables of some phenomena cannot stay under our control.[9] Another factor leading the author towards a case study is connected with the research questions of the thesis. In order to understand the behavior of an actor, several actor-specific variables need to be assessed; a task which is best accomplished with the method of case study. The sources of the thesis are both primary and secondary, and of qualitative and quantitative nature. Primary sources have been collected from governmental agencies, international organizations, and databases, whereas secondary sources have been collected via various internet search engines and media outlets. The collected data are analyzed through thematic analysis in order to highlight how constraints, as understood from the Russian perspective, may predict its policy's variance. The data collection and the main analytical parts are limited by a specific time frame for the study, which primarily focuses on the period from 2013 – 2020.

The last section of the introduction deals briefly with the way the thesis is outlined.

1.5.Outline

The current thesis is outlined in the following way: initially, a literature review on Russian foreign policy, and then specifically on foreign policy towards the two regions is made to delineate the place of the thesis in the academic discussion. After that, the theoretical and methodological aspects along with ontological questions, ethical considerations, and limitations to the study are explored. The rest of the thesis analyzes Russia's constraints in foreign policy. Firstly, the way Moscow's FP is formulated is being illustrated. With the FP process explained the *Foreign Policy Concept* of the country is analyzed in order to highlight if Russia has

[9] Miller, Robert Lee, and John D. Brewer (eds) (2003) *The AZ of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 23.

internalized an understanding of regional foreign policy for the Baltics and the S. Caucasus along with the constraints those might entail. Subsequently, regional constraints are explored from an external view – out of the actor's understanding –to compare the external and internal perspectives on the examined notion. Lastly, the conclusions of the study are presented along with suggestions for further research.

2. Russian Foreign Policy: Academic Perspectives

Russian FP is an extensively researched field, with many scholars attempting to examine, through various perspectives, the way it is formulated, its actions, and the consequences. In this part of the text, a brief literature review of the existing bibliography is carried out. The review begins with a general outline of the literature's origins and then focuses on the most recent research done in the field of Russia's FP. Special emphasis is put on the bibliography after 2013 when Russia's turn towards a more assertive behavior became evident. The aim of the review is not an extensive evaluation of all the work that has been done in the field, rather a demarcation of the existing research, to which the current thesis is connected.

After the dissolution of the SU, the literature surrounding the foreign policy of Russia can mainly be divided into two sections: area or country-related studies, and research on Russian FP formulation. The first is usually related to areas such as the post-Soviet space[10], the West[11], along with Asia, Africa, the Middle East[12], and recently the Arctic.[13] In parallel, there are studies concerned with smaller areas such as the Balkans, the Baltics, the S. Caucasus, the Black Sea region, and the Eastern Mediterranean to mention some.[14] The second is connected with the examination of the external and internal factors that shape the formulation of Russia's foreign policy. Some researchers support the primacy of domestic factors in the formulation of the country's internal and external policies, whereas others advocate the external environment.

[10] See for example Jackson, Nicole J. (2003) *Russian foreign policy and the CIS*, London: Routledge and also Alexander, Libman (2007) "Regionalisation and regionalism in the post-Soviet space: Current status and implications for institutional development", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 401-430 and Nikitin, Alexander (2008) "Russian Foreign Policy in the Fragmented Post-Soviet Space." *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2008, pp. 7–31.

[11] See Leichtova, Magda (2016) *Misunderstanding Russia: Russian Foreign Policy and the West*, London: Routledge, 2016, Kanet, Roger, (ed.) (2011) *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. And also Petro, Nicolai. N. (2018) "How the West Lost Russia: Explaining the Conservative Turn in Russian Foreign Policy", *Russian Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 305-332.

[12] See Sumsky, Victor, Mark Hong, and Amy Lugg, (eds.) (2012) *ASEAN-Russia: foundations and future prospects*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Giles, Keir (2013) *Russian Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, and Litsas, Spyridon N. (2019) Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East under Putin: Can Bears Walk in the Desert?", in Yannis A. Stivachtis (ed.) *Conflict and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing. For a combination of two areas see Rezvani, Babak (2020) "Russian foreign policy and geopolitics in the Post-Soviet space and the Middle East: Tajikistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 6, pp. 878-899.

[13] See for example Sergunin, Alexander (2015) *Russia in the Arctic: Hard or Soft Power?,* Stuttgart: ibidem Press.

[14] Samokhvalov, Vsevolod (2017) *Russian-European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region: Great Power Identity and the Idea of Europe*, Cham: Springer International Publishing. Shlykov, Pavel (2015), "Russian Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean Since 1991", in Spyridon Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.) *The Eastern Mediterranean in Transition: Multipolarity, Politics and Power*, Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Moreover, in the domestic field, for example, some researchers attempt to understand Russian foreign policy by adding Putin's role as a variable[15], whereas others advocate the role of institutional decision making, ideology and identity.[16] In terms of the international environment as a factor of policy formulation, geopolitics play a dominant role.[17]

The aforementioned categories are not exclusive and do not contradict each other; usually, there is an interplay between area-related studies and research done on Russian foreign policy formulation. For example in the recent *Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, edited by Tsygankov, several researchers examine Moscow's foreign policy tools and its areas of action.[18] In that edited volume, there is a fourfold distinction, with theoretical approaches and global governance occupying distinct positions. Nevertheless, both theoretical approaches and global governance can be attributed in the categories of area/country related studies, and Russian FP formulation; with the exception of the study of theoretical frameworks outside of Russia attempting to examine the case under their own lenses, which are susceptible to bias.[19] Similarly, the fairly recent *Handbook of Russian Security*, which has a similar scope of investigation, with an increased emphasis on issues of traditional *hard* power, can be categorized under the two aforementioned themes.[20] It should be noted, however, that there is research that cannot be categorized under those two groupings. Instances of that kind of analysis are usually concerned with the way Russian FP is examined in third countries.[21]

It becomes evident that the object of Russian FP has several directions and approaches. For that reason, the next paragraphs of the literature review, focus on the topics which are more related to the research questions of the thesis. Thus, the bibliography surrounding the areas of the Baltics and S. Caucasus are examined below.

2.1. Russia and the Baltics

Often any academic research concerning the Baltics has to consider Russia's role as a variable.[22] A review that aimed to examine thoroughly Russia's FP towards the region would ideally assess

[15] For a meticulous inquiry see Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz. (2020) *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press and Galeotti, Mark (2019) *We Need to Talk about Putin: How the West Gets Him Wrong*, London: Ebury Press. See also McFaul, Michael (2020) "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy.", *International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 95–139.
[16] See Wood, Tony (2020) *Russia Without Putin: Money, Power and the Myths of the New Cold War*, London and New York: Verso.
[17] Moritz Pieper (2020) "Russkiy Mir: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 756-779, Rezvani, (2020), pp. 878-899. See also Andrey Makarychev & Alexandra Yatsyk (2018) "Illiberal geographies: popular geopolitics and Russian biopolitical regionalism", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 51-72.
[18] See Tsygankov, Andrei P., (ed.) (2018) *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
[19] Seva Gunitsky & Andrei P. Tsygankov (2018) "The Wilsonian Bias in the Study of Russian Foreign Policy", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 65, No. 6, pp. 385-393.
[20] Kanet, Roger E., (ed.) (2019) *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, Oxon and New York: Routledge.
[21] Gunitsky & Tsygankov (2018), pp. 385-393.
[22] Galbreath, David. J., Lašas, Ainius, & Lamoreaux, Jeremy. W. (2008). *Continuity and Change in the Baltic Sea Region*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

that field equally. The current part, however, examines the general work done connected particularly to Moscow's foreign policy role in the region, and more specifically on the way the academia examines this relationship from 2014 and afterward. The main directions the research in this field has taken are linked to minority issues and politics, energy security, and lastly, historical issues connected to the recent past.

Traditionally minority issues have been at the center of the research with several authors advocating the significance, and also the caveats this unresolved issue entails concerning Russia's relationship with the Baltic countries. Special interest has been showcased towards the minority issues in Latvia[23], and Estonia.[24] In Lithuania, that interest has been relatively lower due to the fact that the Russian minority is declining.[25] Usually, researchers associate minority politics with soft power, nevertheless more recently several academics who investigate this issue advocate that this issue in the Baltic perception is understood in terms of hard power.[26] According to Vorotnikov and Ivanova, Russian soft power is strongly perceived as a national threat, by elites and academics who originate from the Baltic region.[27] Equally important has been the investigation of the soft power tools Moscow has at its disposal. In the Latvian case, for example, Schulze mentions that the construction of *fail state* and *neo-fascist* narratives, the instrumentalization of the media for its Russian population, and the support for the increase of educational and cultural plans, can largely formulate the decision-making process by setting the political agenda inside the country.[28] This argument is showcased and supported by various researchers that describing a similar phenomenon utilize different terminology. For example, Suslov introduces the term of *geopolicization* of the Baltic minorities by Russia, whereas others support the term of *securitization*.[29]

[23] See for example Commercio, Michele E (2011) *Russian Minority Politics in Post-Soviet Latvia and Kyrgyzstan: the Transformative Power of Informal Networks*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
[24] For both countries see Schulze, Jennie L. (2018) *Strategic Frames: Europe, Russia, and Minority Inclusion in Estonia and Latvia*. Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press. Specifically, for Estonia see Hoffmann, Thomas & Makarychev Andrey (2017) "Russian Speakers in Estonia: Legal,(bio) Political and Security Insights.", in Andrei Makarchyev & Alexandra Yatsyk (ed.) *Borders in the Baltic Sea Region*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 147-173.
[25] The Russian population in Lithuania was 4.5% of the total in 2020 see Official Statistics Portal of Lithuania (2021), Proportion of the Population by Ethnicity, Compared to the Total Resident Population, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?indicator=S3R162#/ visited 02 March 2021.
[26] Vorotnikov, Vladislav V., & Ivanova Natalia A. (2019) "Russian Soft Power in the Baltic States Through the Lens of Research: Traditions, Competition, Confrontation.", *Baltic Region*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 111 – 112.
[27] Ibid., pp. 110.
[28] Jennie L. Schulze (2020) "Re-framing Russia's Soft power in Post-Accession Latvia: Education Reform and Naturalization for Stateless Children", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, pp. 7 – 11. The role of Russian NGOs in the Baltics is thoroughly examined in Kuczyńska-Zonik, Aleksandra (2017) "Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic states." *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 165-183.
[29] Mikhail Suslov (2018) "Geopolitization of the Post-Soviet Diaspora in the Baltic Sea Region", *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 4-5, pp. 521-535, and also Kuczyńska-Zonik, Aleksandra (2017) "The Securitization of National Minorities in the Baltic States" *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 26-45, Kachuyevski, Angela (2017) "The 'Russian World' and the Securitization of Identity Boundaries in Latvia" in Andrei Makarchyev & Alexandra Yatsyk (ed.) *Borders in the Baltic Sea Region*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 227-247.

After the Baltic accession to the EU, energy security in the region has been also examined under the EU – Russia energy thematic.[30] In late 2000 Elletson examined the sources of Russian energy foreign policy, its possible instrumentalization, and the consequences for the Baltics.[31] Similarly, Keith Smith connected energy relations and power projection to the attempt of Russia in maintaining its influence.[32] This includes the attempt to acquire energy infrastructures, and maintain a monopoly in the energy supply.[33] A fairly recent examination of the Baltic security in connection to Russia's energy foreign policy was conducted by Česnakas.[34] In his analysis, he concludes that even though initially domestic corruption in the Baltics was exploited by Russia's energy policies, with intermediaries acting as proxies for Russian interests by supporting political parties, steadily this influence has diminished and even the price regulation tactic from Gazprom has started to wane.[35] This development has been connected to the fact that the renewable energy sector in the countries of the Baltics has been evolving quickly for the last years. This point has been exhibited by Mórawska who supports that the renewable energy sector is a variable that will enhance interdependence instead of dependence by Russia.[36]

The third aspect inspected by the research on this field concerns the contestation of recent historical experiences during the Second World War and the Soviet era. The contested view on the Baltic annexation by the Soviets is claimed to be one of the most important issues which has been influencing the relations between Russia and the countries of the region.[37] According to Grigas, "Baltic elites held that the Baltic states were occupied by the Soviet Union with devastating consequences for their economies, societies, and populations"[38]. This view was not shared by Moscow which presented and viewed the same historical incident as liberation from Nazi Germany.[39] This issue, which is a part of memory politics, has been examined from several angles and has also been associated with the identity formation process of the Baltic states.[40] More recently the academic research has categorized this phenomenon in

[30] See Talseth, Lars-Christian U. (2017) *The Politics of Power: EU-Russia Energy Relations in the 21st Century*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
[31] Elletson, Harold (2006) *Baltic Independence and Russian Foreign Energy Policy*, London: GMB Publishing.
[32] Smith, Keith C. (2004) *Russian Energy Politics in the Baltics, Poland, and Ukraine: A New Stealth Imperialism?*, Washington: CSIS Press.
[33] Ibid., pp. 38.
[34] Česnakas, Giedrius (2018) "Baltic States", in Wojciech Ostrowski & Eamonn Butler. (ed.) *Understanding Energy Security in Central and Eastern Europe*, Abingdon: Routledge.
[35] Ibid., pp. 212.
[36] Mórawska, Grażyna (2020) "The Renewable Energy in Baltic States versus Russian Federation Political Interests", *Energy Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 5, pp. 48-55.
[37] Grigas, Agnia (2012) *The Politics of Energy and Memory Between the Baltic States and Russia*, Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 130.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Eva-Clarita Onken (2007) "The Baltic States and Moscow's 9 May Commemoration: Analysing Memory Politics in Europe", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 23-46. See also Eglitis, Daina S. & Laura Ardava (2012) "The Politics of Memory: Remembering the Baltic Way 20 Years After 1989", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 6, pp. 1033-1059.

the *entangled history* field and examined various aspects of it via several research methods and materials.[41] The role of history in threat assessment and threat perception has been highlighted in an interesting way by Lašas et al. who have examined this connection for the Lithuanian case.[42]

The Russian foreign policy in the Baltics has been influenced by material and non-material variables. Existing research shows that the post-Soviet Russian minorities, the energy interconnectedness left behind the Soviet era, along with historical disagreements which have been at the core of the state identities are at the center of Moscow's calculations. However, whereas the existing work in this region is especially attentive to soft political tools, the landscape in the South Caucasus is concerned more with a mix of hard and soft tools, painting a different landscape.

2.2. Russia and the S. Caucasus

The literature on Russia's foreign policy in the South Caucasus examines several factors, under different frameworks. Russia's investment towards the region of the Caucasus has been historically critical towards its own threat perception and identity.[43] For the current part of the thesis, the tools of Moscow's foreign policy are central. As is described below, researchers recently have been investigating Russia's regional role in terms of conflict management, its security and military role, and to a lesser extent to its cultural and diaspora policy.

Moscow has been involved implicitly or explicitly in all conflicts that exist on the S. Caucasus and has also been part of a military conflict in the region. For that reason, Russia's military and diplomatic role has been examined in connection to those.[44] The Nagorno Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has showcased the importance of Russia in terms of conflict resolution, and also instrumentalization.[45] In this context, Abushov claims that the existing research on the issue is overly dependent on geopolitical investigations; for that reason, he attempts to add Russia's identity as a variable in order to obtain more insight

[41] Platt Kevin M. F. (2020) "Entangled Histories in Eastern Europe: Complementary Occlusions and Interlocking Extremes in Baltic-Russian Memory Conflicts", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 429-450. See also Eneken, Laanes (2020) "Introduction: Entangled Cultures in the Baltic Region", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 301-313 and Kaljundi, Linda & Plath, Ulrike (2020) "Serfdom as Entanglement: Narratives of a Social Phenomenon in Baltic History Writing", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 349-372.
[42] Lašas, Ainius, Matonytė, Irmina & Jankauskaitė, Vaida (2020) "Facing Past, Present, and Future: The Role of Historical Beliefs and Experiences in the Lithuanian Public Perception of Military Threats", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 199-221.
[43] King, Charles (2008), *Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, New York; Oxford University Press, pp. 16 – 19, 249.
[44] Abushov, Kavus (2009) "Policing the Near Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 187 – 212.
[45] Romashov, Vadim & Rytövuori-Apunen, Helena (2017) "Russia's Karabakh Policy: New Momentum in Regional Perspective", *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 160 – 176 and Shirinyan, Anahit (2013) "Assessing Russia's Role in Efforts to Resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: From Perception to Reality", Caucasus Edition: *Journal of Conflict Transformation*.

into the actor's role.[46] Similarly, Moscow's role in the secessionist de facto states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been examined both in connection to Russia's bilateral relation with Georgia[47], Abkhazia[48], South Ossetia[49], and as a subject on its own, concerned with the former's role in *frozen conflicts*.[50] The most recent development in this field of studies is connected to the Second Nagorno Karabakh War (2020), which led Russia to obtain a peacekeeping mandate, while also cooperating with Turkey for that role.[51] Whereas the strategic movements of Russia seem preorganized, recent research in the legal aspects of Russia's military involvement in the region demonstrates a different reality. Nikitin, examining Russia's international law aspects in its involvement in conflict settlements, identifies that the country has utilized a variety of legal bases in order to legitimize its military presence in the region, which according to the author exhibits that there is "an absence of any unified or pre-orchestrated strategy of the Russian authorities to adhere to military force as means of resolving inter-ethnic conflicts".[52] Nonetheless, this argument does not mean that there is no continuity in Russia's foreign policy in terms of military security.

Initially, Russian military policy in the region has been under the auspices of various state agencies, which in times have had conflicting interests.[53] More recently, and after the Russo – Georgian war, German claims that Moscow was able to demonstrate "its ability to exert its authority, as well as its determination to re-establish Russia's authority as a strong state that is capable of influencing events within the global arena and pursuing an independent stance on international issues".[54] A similar point, is made by Shushentsov and Neklyudov, who present the Caucasus as a region which creates "a great deal of stresses" that push regional powers "into applying military might and prioritizing hard power".[55] According to the authors, the S. Caucasus due to its proximity to the North Caucasus, the possible NATO expansion, and its

[46] Abushov, Kavus (2019) "Russian Foreign Policy Towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?", *East European Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 72-92.
[47] Siroky, David (2016) "The Sources of Secessionist War: The Interaction of Local Control and Foreign Forces in Post-Soviet Georgia", *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 63-91.
[48] Kolstø, Pål (2020) "Biting the Hand That Feeds Them? Abkhazia–Russia Client–Patron Relations", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 140-158.
[49] German, Tracey (2016) "Russia and South Ossetia: Conferring Statehood or Creeping Annexation?", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 155-167.
[50] Kazantsev, Andrei A. et al. (2020) "Russia's Policy in the 'Frozen Conflicts' of the Post-Soviet Space: from Ethno-Politics to Geopolitics", *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 142-162.
[51] Russian MFA (2020), "Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's Interview with Russian and Foreign Media on Current International Issues – Moscow, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4429844 visited 10 February 2021.
[52] Nikitin, Alexander (2020) "Legal Norms or ad hoc Fixes? International Legal Aspects of Russian Military Involvement in Conflict Settlements in the Caucasus", *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 163-178.
[53] Baev Pavel K. (1997) "Conflict Management in the Former Soviet South: The Dead-end of Russian Interventions", *European Security*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 115 – 117.
[54] German, Tracey (2012) "Securing the South Caucasus: Military Aspects of Russian Policy Towards the Region Since 2008", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 9, pp. 1650-1666.
[55] Sushentsov, Andrey & Neklyudov, Nikita (2020) "The Caucasus in Russian Foreign Policy Strategy, *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 128.

possible role as a *foothold* of terrorist expansion, is of central importance to Russia's security policy in the region.[56] The main components which have been shown by researchers to be constant are concerned with its military presence in the region, its arms exports to Armenia and Azerbaijan, and also the enhancement of military relations with the former.[57]

Lastly, in terms of utilizing cultural policies and migrants of the region who work and live in Russia, the academia is supporting that Moscow is using those two as softer instruments of increasing its influence in the region. The first tool that Russia has in this respect is connected with its internal political system. Supporting authoritarian governance has been in some cases an important instrument for safeguarding its influence in the near abroad.[58] Other researchers, nevertheless, claim that there is limited evidence for supporting such a statement.[59] An additional instrument is connected with religious and linguistic policies. Valiyeva supports that in the case of Azerbaijan the linguistic aspect has been connected to maintaining religious neutrality in the country.[60] Similarly, Musayeva claims that the Russian language in Azerbaijan is rooted in the state's capital Baku.[61] According to Pashayeva, Russian is seen in Azerbaijan both as a potential soft power tool for Moscow, and an "indispensable tool in protecting the national interests of Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet space"[62]. Religious diplomacy has also been under research for Georgia. The role of the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches in normalizing the Russo-Georgian relations after the 2008 war has been examined recently by Petro.[63] Economic sanctions along with migrants from the region which work and live in Russia have also been proven to be effective tools in Moscow's toolbox. Newnham showcased how Russia was able to pressure Saakashvili out of office with economic sanctions and migrant restrictions, which has also worked as an effective signal for Armenia after its Velvet Revolution.[64]

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[56] Ibid., pp. 128 – 129.
[57] Kasapoglu, Can (2017). "Russian Forward Military Basing in Armenia and Moscow's Influence in the South Caucasus", *NATO Defense College*, No. 143. See also Connolly, Richard, and Sendstad, Cecilie (2017) *Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter. The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exporters for Russia*, London: Chatham House.
[58] Cameron, David R. & Orenstein, Mitchell A. (2012), "Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: The Influence of Russia in Its 'Near Abroad'", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 1-44.
[59] Roberts, Sean & Ziemer, Ulrike (2018) "Explaining the pattern of Russian authoritarian diffusion in Armenia", *East European Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 152-172. See also Way, Lucan A. (2015) "The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the 'Near Abroad'." *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 54, No. 4, pp. 691-706.
[60] Veliyeva, Malahat (2020) "Religious Aspects of Bilingualism in Azerbaijan," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 40, No. 6, pp. 6.
[61] Musayeva, Afet. (2019) "The Problem of Bilingualism in the Post-Soviet Period in Azerbaijan" in Yasemin Kirkgöz and Bahar İşigüzel *The Power of Languages: Multilingualism & Identity*, Çanakkale: Rating Academy Yayinlari, pp. 13 – 25.
[62] Pashayeva, Gulshan (2018) "Language as a Soft Power Resource: The Case of Azerbaijan" *Language Problems and Language Planning*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 140.
[63] Petro, Nicolai N. (2018) "The Russian Orthodox Church" in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, pp. 217-232.
[64] Newnham, Randall E (2015) "Georgia on My Mind? Russian Sanctions and the End of the 'Rose Revolution." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol 6, No. 2, pp. 161–170. See also Terzyan, Aram, (2019) "Russian Policy, Russian Armenians and Armenia: Ethnic Minority or Political Leverage?" *CES Working Papers*, Vol. 11, No.2, pp. 136 – 137.

2.3. Situating the Thesis

Both older and ongoing research, concerning Russia's foreign policy towards the two regions exists and examines various aspects and factors. What can be explored concerns the conceptualization of the constraint notion in order to assess a different perspective on the country's policy. It should be noted that research on the Russian FP is extremely rich, with the academic world publishing frequently on this field. In that context the aspirations of the current work are subtle. The current thesis, attempts at a smaller scale, to identify and explore the concept of constraints to the Russian foreign policy in two regions that have belonged to the post–Soviet area. Considering the study's disposition in connection to peace and conflict studies, the conceptualization of the constraints and its further elaboration can lead to specific insight concerning cognitive and perceptional constraints which lie at the foundation of the field. The exploratory character of the specific case study, however, has a limited scope considering this thematic.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical notions and assumptions which are utilized throughout the thesis are elaborated at this part of the thesis. As mentioned above the theoretical framework for the study is neoclassical realism. Additionally, in order to enhance the theory and operationalize the concept of constraints specific parts of FPA are also utilized. The following paragraphs firstly examine the evolution of neoclassical realism and its current standing in the academia, while also put arguments for and against its use for studying Russia. Secondly, FPA is presented, and the notion of constraints is put together.

3.1. Neoclassical Realism and Russian Foreign Policy

The theoretical school of realism has been central to the evolution of international relations theory. Initially, classical realism, which is traced back to Machiavelli and Hobbes, has been advocated by analysts such as Morgenthau, Carr, etc.[65] Power is assumed to be of central importance in this school of thought and is theorized to be the *currency* of international politics. Thus international relations are part of a general pattern of *power politics*.[66] Waltz's neorealist or structural realist framework which had dominated the IR field during the Cold War, introduced the notion of structure, in an attempt to create a *neutral* theory. The international

[65] Baylis, John, Owens, Patricia and Smith, Steve (eds.) (2017), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 102 – 104.
[66] Jackson, Robert H., & Georg Sørensen (2016) *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 66.

system is anarchical, and power distribution creates pressures in the system which constrain the behavior of the actors.[67] Nevertheless, Waltz's systemic theory lacked agency. Who were the actors and why did they act as they did? Was there any importance on domestic variables, or was structure the only thing that mattered? Those two main criticisms initially pushed towards the addition of two more assumptions which created the offensive and defensive neorealistic schools. The former assumed power as a goal in itself, and the latter advocated power as a means towards survival.[68] However, even those two additions were not adequate in explaining the significant variance in foreign policy that exists. Simply put, often materially similar powers, act in different ways, while also rationality is not a given.

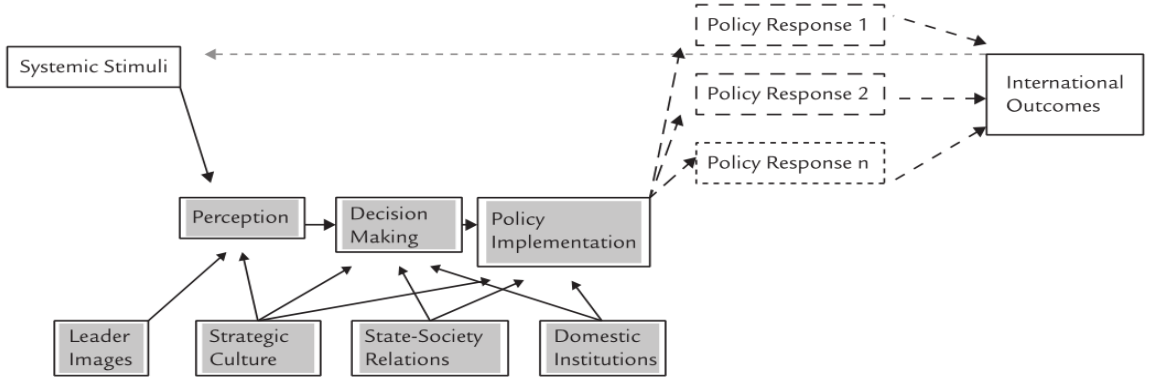
The viability of those criticisms has been accepted by a relatively newer approach in realism, which attempts to bridge material and non-material variables. That approach is neoclassical realism, which was initially coined by Gideon Rose.[69] In his work Rose, considers Thucydides as a neoclassical realist archetype, since he combined unit-level variables with systemic factors.[70] For Rose, anarchy is important, but not that evident (murky), systemic incentives are filtered through domestic variables and the output of both is foreign policy.[71] After Rose, neoclassical realism has been further expanded by Lobell et al. and Ripsman et al.[72] who drew the limits of neoclassical realism in relation to the realistic school of thought and also answered criticisms from other theories.[73] In their analysis, a state is "a generic term for a variety of autonomous polities with different geographic scopes, internal attributes, and relative material capabilities that coexist and interact in an anarchic environment".[74] A state is not a black box, and more importantly, it is not independent or autonomous from its society. Specifically, neoclassical theorists see policy outcomes as a "state-society coordination, and at times struggle".[75]

Neoclassical realism has evolved by neorealism as it accepts the importance of the international system. Nonetheless, Ripsman et al., claim that "the international system rarely provides that level of clarity and certainty. In most circumstances, there is greater room to debate the nature of international threats and opportunities"[76]. For that reason, neoclassical

[67] Ibid., pp. 80.
[68] Ibid., pp. 85.
[69] Rose, Gideon (1998), pp. 153.
[70] Ibid., pp. 154.
[71] Ibid. See also Lobell et al. (2009), pp. 20.
[72] Lobell et al. (2009), and Ripsman et al., (2016).
[73] Lobell et al. (2009), pp., 22 – 23.
[74] Ibid., pp. 24-26.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ripsman et al. (2016), pp. 3.

realism advocates a group of intervening variables which open up the *black box* and aid in identifying patterns of behavior in shorter chronological terms. Those variables concern the image and perception of state leaders, the strategic culture of a country, the relationship between the state and the society, and lastly the way the domestic political environment is organized institutionally – see Figure 1.[77] Critics of neoclassical realism support that the theory has lost its parsimonious character, whereas others claim that there are many unrelated intervening variables at use.[78] Additionally, the theory can also be criticized based on its ontological and epistemological assumptions, and also its support for policy-oriented research. Those criticisms, however, are out of the current section's scope.

Figure 1: 'The Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy'



Source: Ripsman et al, Figure 3.1. The Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy, p. 59.

The reason realism in general and neoclassical realism specifically, are suitable for examining Russian FP are elaborated in the current paragraph. The main reasons that realism and neoclassical realism are more suitable than other theories for examining Russia's external behavior are connected with two factors: the nature of the academic study of international relations in Russia and the strong predictability the theoretical framework has for the specific country's behavior. Russian studies of international relations can be summarized in three ideological forces: the *Westernizers*, the *Statists*, the *Civilizationists*.[79] The first group identifies Russia, as an idea belonging to the West. Thus its theoretical framework is closer to the liberal ideas of IR. The *Statists* are not anti-West but advocate balanced diplomacy and put emphasis on Russian independence, and political order thus being closer to the realist understanding.[80] Lastly, the third group is anti-West and supports Russian exceptionalism (constructivist-

[77] Ripsman et al. (2016), pp. 59.
[78] Jackson & Sørensen (2016), pp. 80 and Ripsman et al. (2016), pp. 60.
[79] Tsygankov, Andrei P., & Tsygankov, Pavel A. (2010) "National Ideology and IR Theory: Three Incarnations of the 'Russian Idea.'" *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 668.
[80] Ibid., pp. 669.

essentialist).[81] Russia is seen as a special civilization with a specific mission in the world.[82] Following from this, Tsygankov and Tsygankov claim that "Being well connected, Statists soon found ways to exploit state resources and established opportunities for funding realist IR scholarship".[83] This in practice means, that the realist thought is strongly rooted in the Russian understanding of itself, and its position in the external environment; for that reason realism would be the most plausible theory to utilize. The second reason is connected to the fact that Russian foreign politics have been examined by most of the researchers under the framework of realism, with a good degree of predictability. As Kropatcheva puts it "despite ups and downs within realism and all the critique it faces, realist approaches have been frequently – explicitly or implicitly – applied to explain Soviet and Russian foreign policies".[84]

3.2. Foreign Policy Analysis and Operationalization of Constraints

Foreign policy analysis after its initial conception in the post-World War Two era evolved into three distinct approaches.[85] According to Hudson, those approaches have been introduced by Harold and Margaret Sprout, James Rosenau, and Richard Snyder.[86] The first approach makes reference to the *psycho-milieu* (the psychological, situational, political, and social contexts), the second, attempts to propose middle-range theories, which ideally will become a unified general theory, and the last one examines the decision-making process itself as part of explaining foreign policy.[87] A series of reformulations, with the most important taking place after the end of the Cold War, have made those approaches more specialized, increasing their nuanced actor-specific contributions. Table 1 summarizes the approaches FPA research has turned to, by combining it with the three images of analysis by Waltz.

Table 1: Images of Analysis, FPA levels and Objects of Research

Images	FPA level	Objects of research
1st Image	Individual decisionmaker	Cognition, leadership, emotions, psychobiography, etc.
	Group decision-making	Small group dynamics, groupthink, etc.
2nd Image	Culture and identity	Role theory, identity, ideology, etc.
	Domestic politics	Regime type, electoral groups, etc.
3rd Image	National attributors/ International system	Geography, national resources, regional and international power distribution, etc.

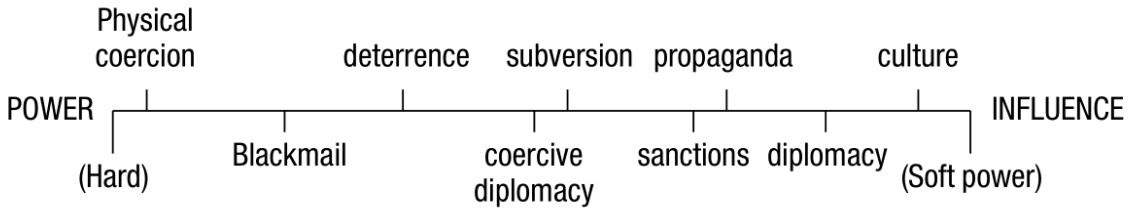
Source: Hudson Valerie M. and Day Benjamin S. (2020), *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, pp. 34 and Waltz, Kenneth N. (2001) *Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. Table prepared by the author.

[81] Ibid., pp. 675.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., pp. 674.
[84] Kropatcheva, Elena (2018) " Power and National Security" in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, pp. 54.
[85] Hudson, Valerie M., and Vore Christopher S. (1995) "Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow", *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 212.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Hudson, Valerie M. (2008) "The history and evolution of foreign policy analysis" in Steve Smith et al. (ed.) *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 15.

Examining foreign policy in all these aspects for Russia is not viable in a single work. For that reason, the thesis is concerned with a combination of 2nd and 3rd image investigations, which combine national attributors, the international and regional systems, domestic political landscapes, and identities as constraints in Russian FP for the two regions. More specifically in the third image the following are comparatively examined for the Baltic and S. Caucasus region: size, natural resources, geography, demographics, political systems, military capabilities, economic capabilities. In the same field, the regional power distributions are comparatively examined for both regions. In the 2nd image, the regime type of the countries along with their public perception are examined in terms of constraints to Russia's FP. Having clarified the levels and objects of analysis, it is important to define what foreign policy is, and what are its tools.

Christopher Hill, in his seminal work *Foreign policy in the twenty-first century*, defines foreign policy as the "sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually – not exclusively – a state) in international relations".[88] In the same respect, he identifies the FP tools limited to the following categories: diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural.[89] Those tools can also be identified in the following power continuum, which spans from *hard* power to *soft* - see Figure 2.[90]

Figure 2: 'The Continuum of Power in Foreign Policy'



Source: Hill, Christopher (2016) Foreign policy in the twenty-first century, 2nd edition, London, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 143.

According to the author the continuum in Figure 2, is not easy to distinguish with diplomacy for example oftentimes incorporating dialogue, and other times being more coercive by expelling diplomats.[91] Harder foreign political tools are usually found in the categories of diplomacy, military, and economy, whereas softer tools utilize all three with the addition of

[88] Hill, Christopher (2016) *Foreign policy in the twenty-first century*, 2nd edition, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 4.
[89] Ibid., pp. 148.
[90] Ibid., pp. 143.
[91] Ibid., pp. 144.

culture.[92] The combination of hard and soft tools has been characterized as smart power by Nye.[93]

Based on the above conceptualization, the notion of constraints, defined as the existence of increased costs towards realizing a foreign policy, works as a factor for examining foreign policy variance for the case study of the thesis. The aspects on which the countries of the two regions are compared is summarized in the following table.

Table 2: Levels, Aspects, Measurements, and Data for Constraint Analysis

Level	Aspect of Comparison	Measurement		Data
2nd Image	Demographics	Population Russian minorities Other minorities		World Bank, State Statistical Services.
	Societal forces	Support to Europeanization Attitude towards Russia		Public surveys by IRI and Turu Uuringute.
	Domestic political landscape	Political freedom Nation-building		Freedom House, BTI project, Corruption Perception Index.
3rd Image	National attributors	Geography	Size (sq.km) Access to sea Proximity to Russia Proximity to other major actors	World Bank, CIA Factbook, Google Maps.
		State Power	GDP Military Expenditure Armed Forces	World Bank, SIPRI, Defence Ministries, Global Firepower.
	Regional power distribution	Regional Power Balance	Diplomatic Economic Military	UNCOMTRADE, SIPRI, Foreign Ministries, News Agencies.

Source: Table prepared by the author.

In general, constraints are examined as costs created to the Russian FP towards the two regions' actors, in terms of the second image, and the third. The former contains data connected to the demography, the societal forces, and also the domestic political landscape. The latter is concerned with systemic levels and attributes as measured by the national attributors, and also

[92] Ibid., pp. 148.
[93] Nye Jr, Joseph S. (2013) "Hard, soft, and smart power" in Andrew F. Cooper et al. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 559 – 576.

the regional power distribution which is connected to the diplomatic, economic, and military influence other actors have. The aforementioned categories belonging to the two levels are further operationalized by specific measurements as presented in Table 2.

4. Methodological Aspects

This section reviews the methodological choices of the thesis. It includes the following: research question formulation, case selection and criteria, timeframe, preliminary discussions, material, and data collection.

The literature of research question formulation agrees on the fact that "not all questions are research questions".[94] Criteria that evaluate a research question's suitability are concerned with the possibility to research the issue – researchability, and the impact it can have on society – how much does it matter.[95] Under this specific context, research questions are divided into the following categories: descriptive, comparative, explanatory, normative, and in some cases exploratory.[96] Exploratory research has been characterized as *risky* but also as the "soul of good research" as it entails the will to "say something new".[97] The current research is occupied with mainly, descriptive, comparative, and exploratory questions; suggestions for change are not in its scope. Taking into account that the formulation of research questions is a reflective process, and can also be retrospective, the initial research questions of the author were of a general nature, and while the research process was advancing they became more strictly defined.[98] Research questions in qualitative studies "need to articulate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions".[99]

Researchability has been central to the thought of the author. By examining the existing literature, along with the logistical and situational limitations the choice of continuing the study has been made. This choice has been made under the facts of existing secondary literature, which can be supported and examined via more recent primary sources. Moreover, during the preliminary discussions that were undertaken by the author with various regional experts, researchability was not expected to be a problem, as there is a plethora of secondary and primary sources, both in English and in Russian. The fact that the author can work with only one of

[94] Alvesson, Mats & Sandberg, Jorgen (2013) *Constructing research questions: Doing interesting research* London: SAGE Publications, pp. 11.
[95] Ibid., pp. 11 – 13.
[96] Alvesson & Sandberg (2013), pp. 15 – 16.
[97] Swedberg, Richard (2020) "'Exploratory Research' The Production of Knowledge: Enhancing Progress in Social Science" in Elman Colin et al. (ed.) *The Production of Knowledge: Enhancing Progress in Social Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17 – 19.
[98] Agee, Jane (2009) "Developing Qualitative Research Questions: a Reflective Process", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 431-447.
[99] Ibid., pp. 432.

those languages is discussed in the limitations. Lastly, the criterion of having an impact on society is briefly examined, in the section under the ethical statement of the thesis later in the text.

Case studies are "an intensive study of a single or a small number of cases that promises to shed light on a larger population of cases".[100] Qualitative methods are more common in case studies, due to the fact that there is a small number of cases to be examined, which does not allow the use of quantitative models. Selecting case studies differs for that reason, as the latter utilizes randomness, while the former uses purposiveness as a criterion. Usually, case selection is based either on an exploratory criterion or a diagnostic. The former attempts to explore outcomes or variance of a variable, whereas the latter seeks to confirm/disconfirm or refine hypotheses.[101] The thesis based on its research questions utilizes exploratory criteria, as the basic aim is to investigate a new concept in actors which share some degree of similarities. The comparison between the actors of the Baltics and the S. Caucasus, concerning Russia's foreign policy constraints fills the above-mentioned criteria.

Having a specific timeframe for the current thesis is crucial due to the limitations of space, and also time. As mentioned above the timeframe for the current study is from 2013 up to 2020. The reason the latter is chosen is based on the fact that more recent events are harder to examine, and also there exists a lack of data concerning them. The initial choice was 2019, however, specific events that occurred during 2020 in the S. Caucasus, altered that decision. Moreover, the developments that occurred during 2020 have already been highly covered by think tanks, research institutes, and also media. Arguments concerning the choice of the timeframe's first year are more complicated. Having 1991 as the initial year for the study would offer more historical depth, continuity, and a better understanding of the existing constraints and the variation. However, the necessity for time and space would undeniably be increased compared to the needs of the current thesis. For that reason, a choice had to be made on the division of the timeframe. There were several possible choices such as Putin's first term in office, or the year 2008 when Medvedev took power in the Presidency, and also the Russo-Georgian war occurred. The next choices were 2012, when Putin took power again, 2014 when the Crimean annexation took place, or 2013 prior to the annexation when the country's Foreign Policy Concept was revised. The last one was deemed as one of the most plausible choices due

[100] Gerring, John (2007) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 20.
[101] Mills, Albert J., Durepos, Gabrielle and Wiebe Elden (2010) *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, California: SAGE Publications, pp. 188 – 190.

to the fact that it covers the goal of limiting space and time for the thesis, whereas also showcases a significant milestone in Russian foreign policy behavior.

An additional methodological step that was organized in order to assess the comparability of the cases, the researchability of the issue, while also having a dialogue with experts of the regions, concerned the preliminary discussions. Those took place in three stages. The first stage encompassed organizing the themes and questions to discuss, the second was concerned with identifying experts and academics of the field, and the last one was the discussion itself. In total ten experts were contacted. From them, three were interested in having the discussion. One was a senior lecturer in Sweden, the other an expert counselor for Russia at the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the last one an associate international relations professor in the USA. The outcome of the preliminary discussions in two of the cases highlighted the possibility of understanding the variance of the Russian FP in the two regions; whereas caution was suggested by all experts – with one stressing the fact that differences in the regions outweighed the similarities. Both Baltics and the South Caucasus, entail similarities in more general aspects, however, once a researcher goes into detail there are significant qualitative differences. This issue is taken into account, and for that reason, the comparison of constraints to Russia's FP in the two regions is based on specific criteria, transparent methods, and specifically defined notions. The researchability of the issue was considered to be possible even with the linguistic limitations as in terms of material all three interlocutors suggested that there is a plethora of primary and secondary sources to be utilized. Lastly, all experts had insightful suggestions and the discussions were of significant aid during the author's final formulation stages of the research design. For that reason, the author wishes to express his gratitude yet again in the current section of the thesis.

Lastly, in terms of material, both primary and secondary sources are utilized to identify events, actions, and perceptions. Events and actions which are "artifacts of decisions found in newspapers and chronologies"[102] are drawn from media coverage, governmental agencies such as foreign and defence ministries, and also international organizations. Secondary sources which offer explanations of Russia's FP towards both regions are utilized from academic journals, and books. The examination of existing data makes the current thesis a secondary analysis. The qualitative data are examined with the method of thematic analysis.[103] Thematic

[102] Hudson Valerie M. and Day Benjamin S. (2020), *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, pp. 4-5.
[103] Kiger, Michelle E. & Varpio, Lara (2020) "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131", *Medical Teacher*, Vol. 42, No. 8, pp. 846-854.

analysis has been characterized as suitable to analyze several issues connected to perceptions, experiences, and understanding.[104] It is defined as a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" and can at minimum organize and describe data, or proceed further by interpreting the data.[105] Its theoretical neutrality, along with the increased flexibility it offers, makes it one of the most suitable methods for the current thesis.[106] It should be mentioned that thematic analysis is primarily used in fields such as psychology, sport, and health sciences.[107] Nevertheless, the aforementioned flexibility of the method makes it possible to utilize it in examining foreign policy documents to highlight themes and perceptions. What should be noted as a caveat is that the flexibility of the method is mentioned by some researchers as part of the method's weakness.[108] In order to avoid this weakness, it is critical to be explicit on epistemological assumptions, correctly interpret the data (if doing so), while being meticulous and careful with the six steps of the method.[109] The first of these issues is examined in the following segment; the second and the third ones are discussed during the limitations of the thesis.

Additionally, quantitative data are utilized in terms of descriptive statistics in order to crosscheck the events, that have been observed along with the secondary sources. This offers a form of triangulation, by combining various types of data to assess the initial observations.[110] The quantitative data are drawn from institutes and agencies such as the Stockholm's International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the United Nations' (UN) Comtrade database, the Freedom House, the International Republican Institute (IRI), and others.

4.1. Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The view an author has on the existence of *reality* and how that can be examined, is a central issue that needs to be clarified early on in any research attempt. The reason those two notions are examined under the same sub-chapter is due to the interrelationship they entail. Ontological

[104] Herzog et al. (2019) "Analyzing Talk and Text II: Thematic Analysis" in Van den Bulck H. et al. (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 385 – 386.
[105] Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2006), "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 79 – 80.
[106] Ibid. pp. 387 – 390.
[107] See for example Smith, Brett & McGannon, Kerry R. (2018) "Developing Rigor in Qualitative Research: Problems and Opportunities Within Sport and Exercise Psychology", *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 101-121, and also Allen, Caitlin et al. (2021) "A Thematic Analysis of Health Information Technology Use Among Cancer Genetic Counselors", *Journal of genetic counseling*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 170-179.
[108] Kiger & Varpio (2020), pp. 853.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Kern, Florian G. (2018) "The Trials and Tribulations of Applied Triangulation: Weighing Different Data Sources." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 166–181.

assumption, or even epistemological – in cases that only specific methods are available – define each other.[111]

The thesis based on the material that is being analyzed can be classified under the subtle realism stance.[112] Both the theoretical framework of the neoclassical realism and the data utilized by the author give special importance to an independent reality that can be captured by the researcher. The positivist aspect of the study comes into effect due to the fact that the researcher's aim is to establish an understanding of a specific actor's behavior. Nevertheless, those choices have specific limitations with the most important being connected to the role of the investigator in the research process, as Stanley puts it "ontology should not be defined as 'the world as it actually is' but instead as 'the world as political scientists assume it to be'"[113]. Thus, the neoclassical realism's utilization of soft positivism is a more suitable epistemological assumption for the current study.[114]

4.2. Ethical statement

Due to the fact that in the starting phase of the research, preliminary discussions have taken place with various scholars working on the region, some ethical considerations should be noted. Furthermore, the ethical statement is also concerned with the impact on society.

During the preliminary discussions, all measures were taken to accomplish the protection of individual data and privacy. For this reason, the zoom meetings were not recorded, and the interlocutors were informed about the way the discussion is utilized for the thesis's purposes. In the same regard, only the role of the interlocutors is shared within the thesis, whereas names and other identifiable characteristics are not mentioned. Moreover, the notes that were kept by the author will be kept only for individual use and will be discarded after the thesis examination on 04 June 2021 is over.

Concerning the societal impact of the research, the author believes that the way through which political scientists examining international phenomena can impact society by their research, has been of less importance in the international relations field of the academia. In general, the main goal academics have had, has been to explain the phenomena, and also offer hypothesis which can under specific limitations predict state behavior. However, the process of

[111] Marsh, David, and Paul Furlong (2018) "A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science" in Lowndes, Vivien et al. (ed.) *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 4th edition, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 179.
[112] Ritchie, Jane, Spencer, Liz & O'Connor William, (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 16.
[113] Stanley, Liam (2012) "Rethinking the Definition and Role of Ontology in Political Science." *Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 95.
[114] Ripsman et al., (2016), pp. 105.

explaining and creating or refining theoretical concepts and frameworks may have effects on the way key persons influence policymaking procedures. This is not to say that an academic paper or a thesis can be the independent variable of policymaking, however, it is a contextual variable that needs to be taken into consideration. For that reason, researchers need to be clear of the way the research has been conducted and the specific limitations that exist. Simply put, researchers need to say what they cannot say, and what their claims mean. The current thesis is not a policy document, and the suggested conceptualization is only explored as a factor of explanation.

4.3. Limitations

The limitations of the current study can be grouped into two categories: contextual limitations concerning the text, and limitations associated with the author. The first category refers to the pragmatic limitations of space and time that a thesis entails. The second is connected with the author's skills and cognition.

As far as the contextual limitations are concerned the current study has been done with a pragmatic realization; that the methodology should be equivalent to the available space and offered time - approximately one academic semester. For that reason, a mixed-method was picked up along with an exploratory aim. Nonetheless, the most important aspects of limitations to the current study are concerned with the author's skill and cognition.

Initially in terms of linguistic capacity, even though the author explores the Russian case, he is not in place to utilize in research the Russian language itself. This entails an important constraint as far as the holistic view of the current study is concerned. Utilizing mainly English academic sources entails the danger of information bias. In order to moderate this danger, official Russian foreign policy documents[115] have been at the core of the research. An additional cognitive factor that could have potential implications for the thesis – even though it should not, is the author's research past and his own nationality. Previous familiarity with the South Caucasus and Russia's foreign policy was compensated with additional time invested for understanding Russia's external behavior in the Baltics. The descendance from one of the countries belonging to the investigative parts of the study (especially in connection to the method of thematic analysis utilized for examining policy documents) needs to be also considered as a potential limitation, and for that reason, the next paragraph briefly describes the way through which it was compensated.

[115] Unofficially translated and published in the Russian MFA webpage.

Preconceptions which can derive from previous knowledge and experience constitute both a necessary factor of understanding and a caveat. The latter concerns previous ideas that might affect the way social reality is perceived and understood.[116] In the author's case, this was compensated by the method of bracketing which even though lacks a consensus on its definition is a process of unraveling one's presuppositions, emotions, and preconceptions about a phenomenon.[117] The process of bracketing entails either two or a combination of the following two practices: setting one's presuppositions aside, or/and "rendering explicit the studied phenomenon."[118] In practice, two tactics were utilized the first one was a conscious decision to set aside pre-existing assumptions by keeping notes in a personal journal, and the second was to maintain frequent dialogues with a colleague who would highlight presuppositions. Those two practices entail their own risks, but they introduce a level of control. This process has not yet ended and is planned to end after the defense of the thesis which is to take place after the submission of the text.

5. Russian Foreign Policy Formulation

Historically Russia's behavior towards its external environment has been shaped by a multitude of factors. Geopolitical competitions with regional rivals, attempts of empire-building, and more recently sustaining its status are some examples.[119] Similarly, the country's position vis a vis the West has been critical to its identity formation, and for some researchers, it offers crucial insight in understanding Moscow's foreign policy. In this part of the thesis, a specific question is asked: How is the contemporary Russian foreign policy created? To explain and answer it, an understanding of Russia's foreign policy actors is necessary.

5.1. Actors of Russia's Foreign Policy

Russia being characterized by an authoritative form of governance gives a monolithic impression of policy formulation; individuals, and a group of elites controlling the political process.[120] Whereas this stands true, and Putin's role is crucial in understanding all political

[116] Gearing, Robin E. (2004) "Bracketing in Research: A Typology." *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 14, No. 10, pp. 1435.
[117] Tufford, Lea, and Newman Peter (2012) "Bracketing in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Social Work*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 84 – 85.
[118] Gearing (2004): pp. 1433.
[119] Abalov, Alexander & Inozemtsev, Vladislav (2019), "Russia: The Everlasting Empire?" *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 329-338, see also Götz, Elias & Merlen, Camille-Renaud (2019), "Russia and the Question of World Order", *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 133-153 and Nitoiu, Cristian (2017) "Aspirations to Great Power Status: Russia's Path to Assertiveness in the International Arena under Putin", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 39–48.
[120] There is a discussion concerning the illiberal or authoritative characteristics of Russia with some claiming that illiberal democracy is the correct characterization of the regime. Nonetheless, there is consensus to the fact that the Kremlin is a promoter of illiberalism in its external environment see Laruelle, Marlene (2020), "Making Sense of Russia's Illiberalism." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 116 – 120. 115-129.

processes inside the country, the landscape is more complicated.[121] A non-exhaustive list of categories of actors which overlap in some cases is the following: individuals, institutions, business groups, organizations.

In Western democracies, the national assemblies hold significant powers in terms of foreign policy. This is not the case for the Russian Federal Assembly (FA). The FA consists of the State Duma and the Federation Council. Those two, act as the lower and the upper houses, respectively. The State Duma has two minor actors in the field of foreign policy field. One is the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the President, and the other is the Committee on International Affairs, which lacks powers on policymaking, oversight, and constraint towards the Presidency.[122] For this reason, in examining the foreign policy landscape in Russia, the Federal Assembly is not the place to concentrate. The most central institution is that of the President.

Undoubtedly the most significant actor in creating and formulating the country's foreign policy is Vladimir Putin. In his specific case, the formal institutional role of the Presidency, which is the highest political position in the country, is intertwined with his informal personal governance which has been central to all aspects of Russia's political life. Formally the constitution claims that "the President of the Russian Federation shall determine the guidelines of the internal and foreign policy of the State".[123] Moreover, the President is responsible for setting up the Security Council, approving the country's military doctrine, appointing and also dismissing both the country's representatives to foreign countries and also the supreme command of the Armed Forces.[124] Similarly, the President is also the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.[125]

The most important article of the Constitution, which delineates the President's role in Russia's foreign policy, is article 86 which mentions:

"The President of the Russian Federation shall:

a) govern the foreign policy of the Russian Federation;

b) hold negotiations and sign international treaties and agreements of the Russian Federation;

[121] See Orttung Robert W. (2018) "Putin's Symbiotic Relationship with the Siloviki", *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 233, pp. 9 – 11. and also Taylor Brian D. (2017) "The Russian Siloviki & Political Change", *Daedalus*, Vol. 146, No. 2, pp. 53–63.
[122] Barkanov, Boris (2018) "Natural Gas" in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London: Routledge, pp. 132. See also Sergunin, Alexander (2016) *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, Stuttgart: ibidem, pp. 208.
[123] *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, 25 December 1993, Chapter 4, Article 80, Paragraph 3.
[124] Ibid., Article 83.
[125] Ibid., Article 87.

c) sign ratification instruments;

d) receive credentials and letters of recall of diplomatic representatives accredited to him.".[126]

This specific part of the constitution offers unsupervised powers to the institution of the President, making the individual which holds this position crucial to the country's external behavior.

Another factor that makes the President a dominant actor in foreign policy, is the power to nominate and appoint key people in institutional positions which have a say in foreign policy. The most illustratable example is the appointment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with his deputies. Even though the MFA, in theory, should be the key institution for foreign policy formulation; in practice, it obtains an advisory role, along with many other actors. As Gvosdev and Marsh put it: "the tendency in the Putin era has been for the foreign minister to be a skilled practitioner of the diplomatic arts and to serve as an advisor on foreign policy, rather than to be someone with a domestic political base who acts as an independent figure".[127] Besides this institutional *weakness* of the MFA, the fragmentation of the country's foreign policy is evident by the existence of parallel structures which share obligations on the field. The clearest example is the Security Council (SC) of the Russian Federation.[128] The SC's role is to generate "policy proposals on defending the vital interests of individuals, society and the state against internal or external threats" and it is staffed by high-ranking officials.[129] The organization is formed by the President, while the members are also appointed by her/him. The SCs Secretary acts as a "de facto national security advisor to the President" and represents him, marginalizing in some cases the MFA.[130]

Other actors that play a role in the foreign policy are the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and various security and intelligence governmental organizations such as the Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) and the Federal Security Service (FSS). Those actors can be categorized as national security-oriented agencies.[131] Initially, the MOD has been competing with the MFA in various aspects of foreign policy, especially those concerning military and armament issues in the near abroad.[132] More recently the role of the MOD in foreign policy has

[126] Ibid., Article 86.
[127] Gvosdev, Nikolas K. & Marsh, Christopher (2014) *Russian Foreign Policy, Interests, Vectors and Sectors*, California: SAGE Publications, pp. 46 – 47.
[128] Official Internet Resource of the President of Russia (Undated), "About Security Council", http://en.kremlin.ru/structure/security-council visited 16 March 2021.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Gvosdev & Marsh (2014), pp. 46.
[131] Sergunin (2016), pp. 173.
[132] Baev, Pavel (1997) *Russia's Policies in the Caucasus*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.

been downsized and put under increased central control.[133] Additionally, the military intelligence component of MOD the Main Intelligence Directorate (known as GRU – from now on MID) oversees military and technical developments abroad.[134] The MID has kept its name and structure from the Soviet era and is also believed to have the biggest network among the other intelligence services.[135] The FIS and the FSS, which both answer to the President of the country, in theory, have distinct areas of conduct. The former should be occupied with external intelligence and the latter with internal aspects. Nevertheless, the reality is more complex. In practice, the FSS has been assigned with the *near abroad*, while the FIS is occupied with strategic matters of the remaining countries.[136] However, as Strokan puts it "competition between agencies is considerable, and it forces them to transcend their 'typical' spheres of responsibility, thereby blurring them".[137] The competing nature of those agencies increases the costs of coordinated policy formulation, while also increases the risk of bureaucratic *mistakes*.

It is necessary to note that along with the institutional powers of Vladimir Putin, his personal leadership has played a crucial role. His tendency to centralize power in his hands shows that the foreign policy formulation of the country is not just an institutional matter, where rules, norms, and bureaucracies are the focal point. An illustrative example is Putin's tenure as a Prime Minister during the Medvedev Presidency. In the four-year period that Putin served as a Prime Minister, an increase of his institutional role's powers was observed.[138] This increase reduced the power gap between the two roles in terms of both internal and external policy by balancing their capabilities. Nevertheless, this *adjustment* was turned back to its initial state when Putin retook his position as President in 2012. The role of Putin as an individual in Russian politics is demonstrated in a detailed way by Sharafutdinova. According to the author, after the Crimean annexation "Russia's president turned from an individual who occupied the highest position of power in the Russian state into a charismatic national leader, and an embodiment of the Russian nation that the people could take pride in."[139] In that context being able to advise or inform President Putin, is an important channel for influence; which creates competition between both governmental and non-governmental actors.

[133] Sergunin (2016), pp. 176.
[134] Strokan Mikhail A. & Taylor Brian D. (2018) "Intelligence" in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.) Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, London: Routledge, pp. 159.
[135] Ibid."it has its personnel in almost all military bases across Russia and in almost all Russian embassies across the globe". And see also Reuters News Agency (2009) "FACTBOX: Five Facts About Russian Military Intelligence", https://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE53N3K820090424 visited 16 March 2021.
[136] Strokan & Brian (2018).
[137] Ibid.
[138] Monaghan, Andrew (2012), "The Vertikal: Power and Authority in Russia", *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1, pp. 16.
[139] Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz (2020) *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 32.

The non-governmental actors can be divided into three main categories: the business community, public policy centers/think tanks, and religious communities.[140] In the first group, there are groups of people and companies which function as interest groups in various sectors. The most prominent one is the energy sector. Some companies such as Gazprom, Rosatom, and Rosneft are state-owned, whereas other companies such as Lukoil, are private.[141] This category of interest group supports close ties with the West, as its main market is located in European countries.[142] In practice, this means that increasing tensions between Russia and the West are not seen favorably. Additional interest groups belonging to other sectors can be found in the mining industry, transportation, and also the tourism industry. Each group *presses* the government for different goals, however, the reality is that the central government utilizes its business community as a foreign policy tool. According to Gvosdev and Marsh "Business diplomacy matters to Russia because it is often through economic means that foreign policy objectives can be met – particularly in influencing other countries to align their policies with those of Russia."[143] This reality becomes more evident by the fact that frequently state officials belong also to corporate boards, whereas ex-officials get transferred to "run sensitive companies".[144]

In the same category, smaller actors of foreign policy formulation are think tanks, which usually are supported by the government or business groups. Think tanks work both as a tool for soft power projection and as an input for foreign policy formulation in a more indirect way.[145] Think tanks summarize and reproduce the ideological assumption for Russia's position in the international environment, its aims, and its interests. Tsygankov and Tsygankov, identify three ideologies, which lead to four theoretical approaches with differing concepts. *Westernism*, *Statism*, and *Civilizationism* lead to the theoretical approaches of Liberalism, Realism, Cultural Essentialism, and Constructivism. [146] These approaches academically support different objectives, such as the integration with the West (Westernism), maintaining a balanced and *multi-vector* foreign policy (Statism), sustaining self-sufficiency or recreating a *New Eurasia* (Cultural Essentialism), promoting cultural dialogue and globalism based on human values (Constructivism) and lastly, combining the "Eastern myth along with the Western reason in an

[140] Some also include human rights organizations along with environmentalists see Sergunin (2016), pp. 196.
[141] See Table 2.4. in Gvosdev & Marsh (2014), pp. 51.
[142] Siddi, Marco (2018) "The Role of Power in EU–Russia Energy Relations: The Interplay between Markets and Geopolitics", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 10, pp. 1552-1571.
[143] Gvosdev & Marsh (2014), pp. 51 - 52
[144] Ibid., 52 – 53.
[145] For the soft power projection see Pallin, Carolina Vendil, & Oxenstierna Susanne (2017) "Russian Think Tanks and Soft Power", *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, FOI-R--4451—SE.
[146] Table 2. in Tsygankov and Tsygankov (2010), pp. 677.

Orthodox synthesis" (Constructivism).[147] Those ideologies have the power to shape knowledge and understanding of international phenomena, by offering a means to filter complex historical events.[148] Based on the government's ideology different think tanks obtain resources to the state budget. An illustrative example are the Institute of Defense Studies and the Institute of Strategic Studies (established and financed by the Presidency), which both are well connected with the current governance that lies in the Statist/Realist approach.[149] Similarly, other examples of think tanks that have a connection with the government or the business world, are the Russian International Affairs Council, along with the Gorchakov Fund (both established by Medvedev) and the Dialogue of Civilizations which was founded by Vladimir Yakunin who has been the chair to the Russian Railways.[150]

Besides the input that think tanks add to the foreign policy formulation, there is an additional group of actors who works in a similar way – religious groups.[151] The Russian Orthodox Church – being the most prominent actor in this category – can be examined both as an actor and as a tool.[152] In its attempt to work together with the state the ROC seeks to promote the following goals: "save individual souls, save all national cultures that have been baptized into Christ, and to save all mankind."[153] A pushing force towards the ROCs foreign activity is the fact that the religious unity that existed during the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, became politically fractured.[154] Maintaining and promoting the formerly existing religious unity between Orthodox countries such as Belarus and Ukraine is a central aim for the ROC. Lobbying those aims to the government needs a degree of political leverage and coordination. According to Lomagin the ROC is able to generate ideas, and also rally political influence due to its activities in the social, economic, and educational fields of Russia.[155] Another way via which ROC can influence foreign policy is by identifying "moral threats" and setting "general norms and principles for decision-makers".[156] In practical terms the increased role of the ROC is evident by the interinstitutional cooperation with the MFA, the increased meetings with

[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 678.
[149] Tsygankov and Tsygankov (2010), pp. 674.
[150] For a fuller list see Pallin and Oxenstierna (2017), pp. 22.
[151] Lomagin, Nikita (2012) "Interest Groups in Russian Foreign Policy: The Invisible Hand of the Russian Orthodox Church", *International Politics*, Vol. 49, No.4, pp. 503.
[152] Nicolai (2018).
[153] Petro, Nicolai N. (2018) "How the West Lost Russia: Explaining the Conservative Turn in Russian Foreign Policy", *Russian Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 319.
[154] Lomagin (2012), pp. 503 – 504.
[155] Ibid., 504.
[156] Ibid., 505. See also Agadjanian, Alexander (2017) "Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin's Russia", *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 39-60.

governmental officials, along with the Presidency, the joint activities, and also the mutual support that the head of the ROC and President Putin show.[157]

5.2. Ideological Forces in Russia's Foreign Policy Formulation

One aspect of foreign policy formulation that encompasses all actors and individuals, is the ideological factor. As noted by Tsygankov, recurring patterns in Russia's external environment, have led to three main schools of foreign policy thinking; *Westernism*, *Statism*, and *Civilizationism*.[158] Those directions to Russia's foreign policy understanding have been hinted in previous sections of the analysis, and due to their significance are examined further currently. The historical depth of those three directions can be traced from the Russian Empire up till post – Soviet Russia.[159] Utilizing those distinctions analytically summarizes the basic components of Russia's foreign policy concerning its evolution in time. Currently, the most prominent school is that of Statism.

Statists in the tradeoff between internal freedom and stability prefer the latter. Their values are based on power, stability, sovereignty, and security and they put significant importance on the role of the state machine in maintaining the political order.[160] During the post–Soviet era of Russian history, one of the most prominent Statists has been Primakov, the second Foreign Minister of independent Russia (1996 – 1998). He believed in stabilizing the state domestically and he was the one who advocated for a turn to the East in terms of foreign policy. Other authors such as Light, utilize the term *Pragmatic Nationalists* for this category, but in practice, they describe the same notion.[161] Light also supports that Pragmatists are not against maintaining relations with the West, but they attempt to formulate an independent stance.[162] Primakov's turn towards Pragmatism or Statism has been continued and evolved by Putin who has turned to multi-vector diplomacy.[163]

[157] Blitt, Robert C. (2011) "Russia's 'Orthodox' Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia's Policies Abroad", *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law*, pp. 380 – 429. See also Payne, Daniel P. (2010) "Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?", *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 52, No. 4, pp. 712–727 and Amarasinghe, Punsara (2021) "The depiction of 'Orthodoxy' in Post-Soviet Space: How Vladimir Putin uses the Church in his anti-Western campaign?" *Open Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2021, pp. 74-82.

[158] Tsygankov, Andrei P. (2016) *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 4th edition, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. p. 2 – 4.

[159] See Table 1.1. on Tsygankov (2016), pp. 9.

[160] Ibid., 6.

[161] Light, Margot (2003), "In Search of an Identity: Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Ideology", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 42-59.

[162] Ibid., pp. 45.

[163] In his latest terms he has also been considered as a Civilizationist realist, utilizing that school's ideas for further consolidating power both inside and outside of the country. See Nicolai (2018), pp. 321.

Westernizers or Pro-Western liberals as Kuchins and Zevelev would characterize them, expect Russia to be a part of the West; seen as the most progressive civilization.[164] During the last years of the SU, Westernizers were able to capitalize on notions of democratization, constitutional freedoms, and a free market to attain power. Liberal Westernizers advocated Russia to abandon its historical great-power traditions, and also abandon its leadership role in the post–Soviet space.[165] The first foreign minister of the Russian Federation, Andrei Kozyrev (1990 – 1996) was the embodiment of the Westernizers. He supported a pro-Western foreign policy along with avoiding close relations with non – democratic states.[166] Currently, Westernism in Russia is not as powerful as it has been during the first years of independence. Nevertheless, notions of Westernism still can be found in Medvedev's tenure as a President, and also in specific business communities which benefit from stable relations with the West.

Lastly, the Civilizationist school argues for Russia's distinctiveness in terms of values and history.[167] This approach is a bit more complex, as agreeing on Russian distinctiveness does not automatically give the exact direction of foreign policy. Kuchins and Zevelev identify three directions: neo – imperialists, regional dominators, and ethnonationalists.[168] The first group supports the restoration of the SU, the second one favors state-building efforts in Russia along with the creation of buffer zones and protector states around the country, and the last group supports the unification of Russian communities with Russia.[169] Similarly, a Eurasian view advocates expansion and a power struggle against the "sea-based Atlanticism".[170] The ideas of this school are mainly seen as dangerous to be implemented and for that reason, this direction has limited public support.[171] Nevertheless, combinations of Statist and Civilizationist ideas are currently observed in the country's foreign policy formulation.[172]

The importance of those schools of thought lies within the groups that surround President Putin, as he is the central figure in foreign policy formulation. In practice, it is not just his ideas that shape this policy, but also of other actors that surround and advise him. This discussion has been connected to two groups of people: the *siloviki* and the *civiliki*. The first of those two factions refers to people who have a background in security/intelligence services

[164] See Kuchins, Andrew C. & Zevelev, Igor A. (2012) "Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 147-161 and also Tsygankov (2016), pp. 4 – 5.
[165] Tsygankov (2016), pp. 44.
[166] Ibid., pp. 61.
[167] Ibid., pp. 8.
[168] Kuchins and Zevelev (2012), pp. 149.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Tsygankov (2016), pp. 8.
[171] Ibid., pp. 67.
[172] Margot (2013), pp. 42-59.

(siloviki) and the second to those who have a civilian background (civiliki). After Putin's accession to power, a trend to increase siloviki in the governance has been growing steadily;[173] however, the degree of increase is still debatable.[174] Siloviki even though have their own differences and compete with each other for influence, share a common worldview. This view is based on the Statist approach: support for a centralized state, and high perceived external threats mainly from the West.[175]

Civiliki on the other hand, have a different view concerning the central elements shared by the siloviki. The existential threat from the West is not shared to the same extent in the civiliki camp, which supports at least closer economic relations between them and Russia. Furthermore, privatization of big businesses and firms is seen more favorably by this *faction* leading to a different understanding of state centralization.[176] The "civiliki plan", which was prominent during Medvedev's presidency, contained three specific aspects that were mainly connected to the domestic economic and political scene: reduction of the siloviki from key business positions, introduction of new investor's right laws, and lastly privatization of key businesses that were put under state control during previous years.[177] Nevertheless, this faction has a pragmatic understanding of domestic balances that translate also to foreign policy terms.[178]

The last thing that needs to be noted is the fact that those two factions belong to different sub-groups concerning the Russian foreign policy school of thought categories. Stepping upon various scholars Gvosdev and Marsh identify specific sub-schools of thought. Those are the liberal/Westernizers, the pragmatic Westernizers, the nationalists/Eurasianists, the Sinophiles, the pragmatic Easternizers, and lastly the penultimate pragmatists.[179] Those sub-schools represent in various degrees the way of thinking in-between and within the two aforementioned factions; a factor which illustrates the underlying competing nature both between the factions and also inside them.

[173] See Kryshtanovskaya, Olga & White, Stephen (2003) "Putin's Militocracy", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 293.
[174] Rivera and David W. Rivera, Sharon Werning (2019) "Are Siloviki Still Undemocratic? Elite Support for Political Pluralism During Putin's Third Presidential Term", *Russian Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 500 – 503. See also Rivera David W. & Rivera, Sharon Werning (2018), "The Militarization of the Russian Elite Under Putin", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 221-232.
[175] Soldatov, Andrei and Rochlitz, Michael (2018) "The Siloviki in Russian Politics", in Daniel Treisman (ed.), *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 95 – 98.
[176] Chausovsky, Eugene (2019), "Russia's Identity in the Putin Era", in Constatinos Filis, (ed.) *A Closer Look at Russia and Its Influence in the World*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, pp. 6.
[177] Stratfor (2009), "The Kremlin Wars (Special Series), Part 3: Rise of the Civiliki", https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/kremlin-wars-special-series-part-3-rise-civiliki visited 24 April 2021.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Gvosdev & Marsh (2014), pp. 64 – 65.

Having identified the actors and the institutional constraints that exist in the Russian FP formulation system, an examination of two main foreign policy documents which underline those positions follows. The two foreign policy documents are analyzed in order to assess the existence of constraints and regional aspects from within the case's view.

6. Foreign Policy Concept of Russia

The *Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation* are documents that describe in a systematic way the "basic principles, priority areas, goals, and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation".[180] The documents contain the aims, the actors, and the tools envisioned for the country's external behavior. The aim of examining the FPC was twofold: discovering if there is a regional aspect for the Baltics and the S. Caucasus, and also identifying the way those documents discern constraints in terms of foreign policy. The method used was thematic analysis, and after the main themes concerning the Baltic and S. Caucasus states were noted, the aforementioned questions were examined.

6.1. Regional Aspect of Foreign Policy Concepts

In identifying spatial themes in the documents the regional aspects of the two concepts were written down and then put comparatively. Both concepts have an approximately identical regional and geographical understanding, while they also stress more specific areas. The most stressed areas for both were those of the West, including the Euro – Atlantic dimension, and the Asia Pacific in the Eastern direction. One could potentially also identify the Eurasian space between those two dimensions. Those distinctions do not correctly highlight the geographical realities, as Latin America belongs in part to both the Euro – Atlantic and the Asia – Pacific dimensions. On a North and South scale, the documents pick out the Arctic and the Antarctic for each. Regions and areas mentioned in between those four dimensions are the N. European, North American, North African, Northeast Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Central Asian, Transcaucasian/South Caucasus, Black Sea, and also Caspian. Other themes which express the spatial concept of the documents are that of the CIS space and the post–Soviet space.

During the spatial thematic categorization, there was no mention of the Baltics as a region, rather that was done in terms of the Council of Baltic Sea States. Similarly, the South Caucasus/Transcaucasia was mentioned just twice in the 2013 concept and once in the 2016.

[180] *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013" (from now on FPC 2013), and "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2016" (from now on FPC 2016), Chapter 1.

Nevertheless, mentions of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and also the Abkhazian and S. Ossetian *Republics* were connected to this area.[181] The lack of explicit mention to those two regions was compensated in implicit mentions concerning more general areas such as those of the CIS space, the post–Soviet space, and the West (NATO, EU). The CIS, the CIS space, and the CSTO are mentioned multiple times in both documents and are highlighted in terms of integration, cooperation, mutual benefit, conflict resolution, stability, and security. The South Caucasus is in part represented by the CIS space and the CSTO mentions, however, Georgia is an exception to this case. Tbilisi effectively left the CIS in 2009 after the Russo-Georgian War (August 2008). For that reason, the document holds a unique mention to Georgia in both 2013 and 2016.[182]

The Baltics on the other hand, are represented by the spatial mentions concerning the European Union, and the West. In this context, the West is expressed in terms of its declining and diminishing role, along with a tendency to impose its point of view to maintain influence.[183] This is expressed as the underlying reason for global instability and the main factor which has put Russia in a crisis situation with the West. It should be noted that the 2013 document was written in more neutral lines and did not include the specific wording which puts Russia and the West explicitly into a crisis situation. This was not the case for the 2016 concept which states "Systemic problems in the Euro-Atlantic region that have accumulated over the last quarter-century are manifested in the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) along with their refusal to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework, have resulted in a serious crisis in the relations between Russia and the Western States."[184]

The European aspect in the 2013 document was seen as one which necessitates stability and is prone to create risks and uncertainties due to the European debt crisis.[185] Europe was seen as a direction of the Russian bridge, that would be connected with Asia.[186] The beneficial nature of the cooperation between the two was evident by expressing common and shared aims in terms of maintaining stability and enhance cooperation.[187] In the 2013 Foreign Policy

[181] Both are de jure part of Georgia. Encyclopædia Britannica (Undated), "Independent Georgia", https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia/Independent-Georgia visited 06 April 2021.
[182] FPC (2013), Article 52, and FPC (2016) Article 59.
[183] FPC (2016), Articles: 4,5, 61. FPC (2013), Articles: 6,11.
[184] FPC (2016), Article 61.
[185] FPC (2013), Article 11.
[186] Ibid., Article 32.g and 44.
[187] Ibid., Articles: 57, 58, 64, 65, 66.

Concept, Russia characterized its relationship with the Euro – Atlantic area, as one which shares "deep-rooted civilizational ties".[188] This specific wording was not present in the 2016 text, instead, it was replaced by the aforementioned quote mentioning systemic problems which have led to a crisis. Other differences concerning the Western thematic were connected to Moscow's *respect* towards European countries which are neutral and do not belong to an alliance.[189] The rest of the aspects have maintained a significant degree of similarities, with North Europe and Europe, in general, being framed in terms of dialogue, mutual benefits, and cooperation.[190]

6.2. Identifying Constraints in the Foreign Policy Concepts

Exploring the theme of constraints in the Russian foreign policy documents does not offer clear-cut evidence based on the way the notion is predefined in the current analysis. The existence of increased costs towards realizing a foreign policy is not evident in both documents. Other than specific systemic factors such as the financial and economic crisis, or increased competition, the rest of the themes had more affinity to notions of threats and risks.

The 2013 foreign concept showcases constraint and threat/risk thematics mainly in systemic terms, which can be divided into themes of competition, rapid change/ transition processes, unilateralism, and expansion. Hierarchically the main theme is connected to the "changes in the geopolitical landscape" that are also being accelerated by global and financial crises.[191] This is a recurring theme and frequently mentioned in connection to the West. Simply put, one of the themes is that the Western decline, along with the increased state interdependence leads to a transitional international system. This is seen as both a risk and an opportunity by the Russian foreign policy.[192] Meanwhile, the increased competition that manifests itself by modernizing offensive capabilities, decreasing strategic resources, and discriminative measures against Russian investors and exporters has negative consequences to the global stability and security. Other themes which are seen as a threat are unilateralism and expansion. In this context, there is an underlying accusation against the West, and mainly NATO.[193] Specifically, antimissile defensive systems that are "unilaterally and arbitrarily" build up, undermine the "strategic stability and international security" and also NATO's Eastern

[188] Ibid., Article, 54.
[189] FPC (2016), Article 69.
[190] FPC (2013), Articles: 57, 58, 59, 65, 66 and FPC (2016), Articles: 63, 64, 71.
[191] FPC (2013), Articles: 5, 8, 11, 24, 47.
[192] Ibid., Article 24.
[193] FPC (2013), Articles: 31b, 32f, 70, 63.

expansion.[194] Lastly, themes that cannot be put in the aforementioned categorization are linked to terrorism and organized crime.[195]

The more recent 2016 FPC has a similar framing, with some specific differences. The 2016 document agrees on the general patterns of systemic change, but elaborates further on what is meant: lower economic growth rates, volatile markets, fragmentation of economic space, and technological shift.[196] Those, along with "fundamental changes" lead to the emergence of a multipolar international system that is characterized by a "struggle for dominance".[197] The most significant difference in this document is the explicit mention against the "imposed ideological values and prescriptions".[198] According to the 5th article in the first part of the text, those imposed values may create xenophobia and ultimately conflict in international affairs.[199] An additional and significant differentiation between the two documents concerned the explicit indication in the 2016 text that the USA along with its allies is following a *containment policy* that pressures Russia.[200] In the same context, the expansion and upgrade of military capabilities is framed as a factor that, along with other causes, leads to an increased risk of regional conflicts and crises escalation.[201] Additional differences concerned the risk of cyber-threats and an explicit mention against the global terrorist threat which at that time was firmly associated with the Islamic State.[202] In terms of similarities, the core of both texts stays the same. Themes of threat from unilateralism, expansion, and global organized crime are stressed equally in both documents.

7. Russian Foreign Policy Constraints

The fact that Russia's policy documents do not explicitly mention constraints in their foreign policy does not lead to the conclusion that those do not exist. Academics identify cost-inflicting policies and situations which create frictions to Moscow's external behavior based on a limited toolset.[203] In this segment of the thesis those frictions, defined as constraints in the theoretical framework are explored and operationalized via various sources and indicators. This chapter is divided into two main components: constraints on the second image, and constraints on the

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., Articles: 17, 32r.
[196] FPC (2016), Articles: 10, 12.
[197] Ibid, Articles: 4, 5.
[198] FPC (2016), Article 14.
[199] Ibid., Article 5.
[200] Ibid., Articles: 61, 72.
[201] Ibid., Article 6.
[202] Ibid., Articles: 15, 16, 17, 28.
[203] Orttung, Robert W., and Overland, Indra (2011), "A Limited Toolbox: Explaining the Constraints on Russia's Foreign Energy Policy", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 74-85.

third image. The first component contains data on demographics, societal forces, and the domestic political landscape. The second is associated with the national attributors and the regional power distribution.

7.1. Constraints on the Second Image

Initially, the total population of the examined countries is showcased along with the existence of Russian or other minorities. This is achieved by examining the most recent census data for all six countries. Additionally, the societal forces towards the Europeanization of the countries and their attitude towards Russia are examined by public surveys that generate data on those issues. Lastly, the domestic political landscape is examined by indicators such as Freedom House's Freedom in the World Index, BTI Project Index, and also the Corruption Perceptions Index.

7.1.1. Demographics in the Baltics and the S. Caucasus

Both Baltics and the S. Caucasus have a complicated demographic landscape. Baltic states in general have a lower population compared to the S. Caucasus, but both regions host several minorities. Russian minorities are larger both in absolute and relative terms in the Baltics, whereas in the S. Caucasus only Azerbaijan hosts a comparable number of Russians. The most recent general censuses for the Baltics have been conducted in 2011, whereas in the S. Caucasus the Azerbaijani census has been in 2009, the Armenian one in 2011, and the latest Georgian in 2014.

Table 3: Population in the Baltic Countries (Census year)

	Estonia (2011)	**Latvia (2011)**	**Lithuania (2011)**
Total Population	1294455	2074605	3043429
Russian Minorities	326235	556434	176913
Other Minorities	*Ukrainians* – 22573 *Belarussians* – 12579 *Finns* – 7589	*Belarussians* – 73781 *Ukrainians* – 49134 *Poles* – 47201 *Lithuanians* – 26924	*Poles* – 200317 *Belarussians*– 36227

Source: 2011 Population and Housing Census (2011), *Statistics Estonia*, Tallinn. Population Census 2011 (2011), *Central Statistics Office of Latvia*, Riga. Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief (2012) *Statistics Lithuania*, Vilnius.

Table 4: Population in the S. Caucasus Countries (Census year)

	Azerbaijan (2009)	**Armenia (2011)**	**Georgia (2014)**
Total Population	8922400	3018854	3713800
Russian Minorities	119300	11862	26500
Other Minorities	*Lezgis* – 180300 *Armenians* – 120300 *Talyshs* – 112000	*Yazidi* – 2769	*Azerbaijani* – 233000 *Armenians* – 168100

Source: Republican Commission of 2011 Population Census Organization and Conduction (2013), *National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia*, Yerevan. Population of Azerbaijan (2020), *State Statistical Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, Baku. General Population Census of 2014: Main Results (2016), *National Statistics Office of Georgia*, Tbilisi.

Tables 3 and 4 summarize the census data for the two regions. Both Estonia and Latvia have a significant number of Russian-speaking population, and more specifically a big Russian diaspora. In Estonia, the percentage of the Russian population is approximately 25%, and in Latvia, this number is around 27%. The existence of large Russian minorities is an opportunity for the Russian FP. Both foreign policy documents express their will in safeguarding and promoting the rights of the Russian diaspora. The lack of a sizeable Russian diaspora in the S. Caucasus leads Moscow to utilize other means towards its goals. In the demographic aspect, the utilization of secessionist ethnic populations and dynamics has been one of the main tools.[204] Russia's role, however, does not equate to the main independent variable of the movements. Domestic variables offer more insight into the reasons behind the secessionist movements in the South Caucasus.[205]

For Moscow, the maintenance and empowerment of the Russian populations is a central goal that is also considered part of its soft power tools. This is evident in the case of the Baltic states, and specifically for Estonia and Latvia, which have a sizeable Russian population. This reality creates frequent frictions between Russia and the respective countries and is believed to be instrumentalized by Moscow for political goals.[206]

7.1.2. Attitudes Towards Russia and the West

Affinity towards Russia and the West is measured via the most recent public surveys available for the examined countries. For Armenia, Georgia, Latvia, and Lithuania, polls were available via the International Republican Institute (IRI). From those, Armenia and Georgia have some similarities in questions concerning their foreign affairs, whereas the same applies to Latvia and Lithuania. The S. Caucasus countries and the Baltic countries do not have comparable questions; however, a general comparison is still done. For the two countries that did not have polls from the IRI (Azerbaijan and Estonia), the latest alternative polls were utilized in order to assess at least the general trends on Russia and the West.

Beginning with the Baltic states that had available polls on IRI, two questions from Latvia and Lithuania were examined from the most recent surveys (January – February

[204] Broers, Laurence (2018) "The South Caucasus: Fractured Without End?" In Ed. Anna Ohanyan, *Russia Abroad: Driving Regional Fracture in Post-Communist Eurasia and Beyond*, Washington: Georgetown University Press, pp. 87 – 93.
[205] Broers (2018), pp. 92.
[206] Moritz Pieper (2020) "Russkiy Mir: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 764.

2020).[207] Both questions had the same wording and similar answers. The first question asked, whether the interests of the examined country, were best served by maintaining a strong relationship with various external actors. For Latvia, the first three partners with which strong relations was seen in the best interest of the country, were the Nordic states (strongly agree 60%), the EU (54%), and NATO (40%). Interestingly the following state was Russia (32%) which was above the USA (25%). In Lithuania's case, the ranking had some differences, with the Euro-Atlantic actors being at the top four positions: EU (64%), Nordic (55%), NATO (51%), US (34%). Russia (14%) came afterward. The survey's first question demonstrates that even though there are some differences in respect to the positioning, the Euro-Atlantic partners are perceived as the most important for the foreign policy interests of both Latvia and Lithuania. An interesting difference is observed in the role of Russia for Latvia, which assesses Moscow's position in a better light vis a vis the USA.

The second question for the two Baltic states was a follow-up to the first one. It asked the reasons why a person believed that the examined country's interests were best served by strong relations with Russia. Both Latvian (37%) and Lithuanian (34%) respondents answered that the proximity and the threat Russia posed were the number one reason for sustaining good relations with the country. The second reason for the countries was the fact that Russia was the biggest export market for them (19% and 18% respectively). If someone combines all the economic and energy-related responses (main energy provider, investor in examined country), the reasons associated with the economy would sum to 31% for Latvia and 33% for Lithuania. The greatest variance was observed in the response which claimed that Russia is the examined country's "True ally and guarantor of national borders/sovereignty". There was an 8% difference between Latvian and Lithuanian respondents, with the former having 10% supporting this statement and the latter 2%. The result of those responses indicates that for both Baltic countries the main reasons behind strong and stable relations with Russia are based on fear and economy. Nevertheless, there is a dissimilarity concerning the view on Russia being a true ally of the examined country, which is more positive for Latvia and less in the Lithuanian case.

[207] International Republican Institute (2020), Public Opinion Poll Latvia: January 10 – February 2, *Center for Insights in Survey Research*, pp. 35 – 36. International Republican Institute (2020), Public Opinion Poll Lithuania: January 7 – 26, *Center for Insights in Survey Research*, pp. 36 – 37.

Similar surveys from the IRI, have also been conducted for two S. Caucasus countries, Armenia (May 2019), and Georgia (September – October 2019).[208] In the category of *International Relations*, two questions were relative to the current study. The first one asked the way the respondent evaluated her/his state's relationship with a number of countries. For Armenia, there was no clear direction towards East or West. First was France (94% Good), second Georgia (92%), and third China (89%). Russia (88%) came only after Iran (89%), with both the EU (82%) and the USA (81%) following after. Azerbaijan and Turkey were both evaluated as having *Bad* relationship with the country, with 97% supporting this view (0% Good, 97% Bad). In the same context, Georgian respondents evaluated their relationship with Russia as *Bad* in 87%, as *Good* in 6%, and as *Neither good nor bad* in 6%. Good relationship was observed with Ukraine (90%), the EU (86%), and the USA (84%). Following those came Turkey (76%), Armenia (68%), and Azerbaijan (63%). Tbilisi showcases a specific direction in assessing third countries by evaluating better its relationship with Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic area (EU, USA). Regional countries such as Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are also positively judged.

The second question that is relevant for the current section asked the examined countries to assess several actors in terms of political and economic partners or threats. For Armenia, the top political partners were Russia (78%), France (46%), and Georgia (37%). The EU (29%) and the USA (27%) came immediately after. In terms of economy, the main partner states were Russia (62%) and Georgia (51%). The percentage of the EU, France, and the USA was less than 20% each. In terms of threats, both in political and economic concerns Armenia assesses Azerbaijan (85% political, 60% economic threat), and Turkey (76% political, 60% economic) as the major sources. The Georgian responses exhibit a different trend. Tbilisi assesses the West as its major partner with the USA (52% political, 33% economic partner) and the EU (50% political, 37% economic) being the major ones. The main threat for the Georgian public is Russia (82% political threat, 72% economic). The next two, with a significant difference compared to Russia are Turkey and Azerbaijan (less than 10%). What becomes evident from this question is the fact that the two countries have specific disagreements in terms of which actors are considered partners or sources of threat. This is illustrated by the fact that for the Armenian respondents Russia is assessed as a crucial political and economic partner, whereas for Georgia it is considered as a major threat.

[208] International Republican Institute (2019), Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Armenia: May 6 – 31 2019, *Center for Insights in Survey Research*, pp. 50 – 52. International Republican Institute (2019), Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Georgia: September – October 2019, *Center for Insights in Survey Research*, pp. 14 – 15.

Azerbaijan and Estonia that did not have available surveys from the same international organization were assessed on the basis of other polls. In Estonia's case, the country's MOD in cooperation with a public survey company publishes an assessment of the public's opinion in matters of defense and security.[209] Azerbaijan's case on the other hand was harder. Due to the country's regime, the civil society is kept under check and independent funding rarely is a choice.[210] In order to assess at least the Europeanizing aspect of the country, the *EU NEIGHBOURS East* project's public survey was utilized.[211] Baku's attitude towards Russia and other states was not possible to be assessed.

Responses of Estonia concerning threats to peace and security in the world and Estonia named several issues. Russia (definitely and to some extent a threat = 66.5%) in terms of a world threat was ranked in the 8th place with other threats being perceived as more important (e.g. epidemics – 86.2%, cyber-attacks – 84.8%, European migration – 83.4%, fake news – 81.1%). What is of interest is the fact that there was a great variance in terms of the Russian threat for Estonians (81.9%) and other nationalities (34.3%). As far as the threats to Estonian peace and security were concerned, "Epidemics" were assessed as the most likely (77.2% *very* and *rather* likely) due to the current pandemic situation. Military attacks from other states were assessed as least likely. What is noticeable again, is associated with the variance between Estonians and other nationalities in some of the responses. For example, cyber-attacks (74.2% for Estonians, 53.9% other nationalities) and all kinds of military attacks were assessed as less likely for other nationalities compared to Estonians. The spread of fake news was seen as a common threat for both groups (67.1% Estonians, 66.2% other) but there was a difference in terms of hate speech (52.2% Estonians, 34.3% other). These differences display the existing fracture between the Russian-speaking minorities in the country and the people who consider themselves as native Estonians.

The last question which is utilized in the thesis concerns the responses on security guarantees by various actors. The public survey demonstrates that NATO is seen as the most significant security partner in general (57.5%). However, this percentage if broken down displays yet again the existing fracture of opinions that is underlying the Estonian society. Other

[209] Estonian Ministry of Defence (2020), Public Opinion on National Defence September 2020 Report to Ministry of Defence, *Turu – Uuringute*, 29 – 35, 37 – 39.
[210] Independent external observants claim that complicated bureaucratic mechanisms along with legislation which prevents foreign citizens and stateless persons to offer their funds to NGOs are some of the main reasons of this situation. See CSO Meter (undated), "Azerbaijan: Overall Situation and State of Civil Society", https://csometer.info/countries/azerbaijan visited 15 May 2021.
[211] EU Neighbours East (2020), "Annual Survey Report: Azerbaijan – March 2020", https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/EUNEIGHBOURS_east_AS2020report_AZERBAIJAN_0.pdf visited 15 May 2021.

ethnicities supported NATO in 26.1% (Estonians in 72.5%), and the most important security guarantor in their view was cooperation with Russia (41.7%). A significant percentage of both populations supported that the most important security guarantor for the country is concerned with internal balancing: defense willingness (33%) and development of the country's independent defense capabilities (25.9%).

Coming back to the second country which did not have a survey from IRI the 2020 *Annual Survey Report* of Azerbaijan from the EU Neighbours East project was utilized. This report mainly examined Azerbaijani attitude towards the EU, thus there is no perspective on Russia or the West in general. It still remains possible to obtain a glimpse of the public opinion's attitudes. In respect to the image Azerbaijan has for the EU it's mainly *neutral* (35%) with *fairly positive* (26%) and *positive* (18%) coming immediately after. The respondents assessed in a similar way the nature of their country's relationship with the EU: *fairly good* (47%), *very good* (22%), *fairly bad* (10%), *very bad* (3%), and *do not know* (18%). What can offer a glimpse of Azerbaijan's public view on the West and Russia, is a question concerning trust towards specific institutions: the EU, the UN, NATO, and the EEU. The Azerbaijani preferences in terms of trust were higher for the EU. Both NATO and the UN were not trusted (38% *tend not to trust*), and the EEU was *trusted* for 26% of the respondents, *not trusted* for 27%, and around 47% did not know or had never heard of the institution. The survey poll does not give a clear picture of the Azerbaijani public's views on specific matters of Russia or the West but offers some insight in respect to the fact that the country has in a way a balanced perception towards various directions. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the country became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011.[212]

The internal attitudes of the Baltic states and the S. Caucasus countries display several constraints to Russia's foreign policy. To begin with, a consensus between the Baltic actors' perception towards the Western orientation of their countries creates frictions to Russian attempts of increasing influence. Nevertheless, this attitude if broken down exhibits fractures. The Latvian and the Estonian polls show that their minorities have a radically different opinion about Russia; seeing it in some cases even as a protector and a guarantor of the country's sovereignty. Nonetheless, the general trend is a negative perception of Russia in the Baltics. The same applies to Georgia, which has an almost antipathetic attitude towards the country. Georgia's public perception has more in common with the Baltics, compared to the other S.

[212] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Undated), Membership of Azerbaijan to the NAM https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/content/177/non-aligned-movement-nam, visited 30 April 2021.

Caucasus states. Armenian respondents see Russia as a strategic partner, whereas in Azerbaijan's case it was not easy to discern a perception due to the lack of appropriate polls. However, it is possible to at least claim that the Azerbaijani public maintained a neutral and more balanced stance compared to the other countries. Societal perceptions can and do work as a constraint to the foreign policy of other actors, especially in cases where soft power tools are utilized. Those perceptions are hard to overcome as far as Russia is concerned.

7.1.3. Domestic Political Landscape

Political freedom in the two regions has a clear distinction. The Baltics are significantly more democratized compared to the S. Caucasus, they have effectively lowered their corruption levels and in terms of state-building, they can be considered way ahead of the S. Caucasus states. The current section is based on research that supports that increased corruption and weaker state apparatuses are seen as opportunities by Moscow's foreign policy and the country follows an autocracy promotion strategy in its external environment.[213] In contrast, highly democratized states with low corruption levels and strong state apparatuses constrain Russia's external policies towards them.

From 2013 up to 2020, Estonia has had *perfect* scores in the Freedom House indicators. Both political rights and civil liberties categories have had a score of 1. The same applies to Lithuania, and with some small variance to Latvia. Riga's average score has been approximately 2. All three have been repeatedly characterized as *Free*. In comparison, the S. Caucasus countries have been characterized over and over, as *Not Free* or *Partly Free*. The former characterization has been used for Azerbaijan through the whole period of examination. Baku, from 2013 – 2020, has an average score of 6.6 in political rights and 5.9 in civil liberties. Armenia and Georgia both have been characterized as *Partly Free* but exhibit a small variance. For contextualizing this index, Russia's score in 2018 has been 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties.[214] These scores are very close to those of Baku and showcase a similarity in terms of authoritarianism and political governance. This political affinity is seen favorably by Moscow which assesses democratizing procedures as a threat due to their association with Westernism and ultimately NATO.[215] The authoritarianism and the institutional weakness are further attested by the BTI project's index.

[213] Yakouchyk, Katsiaryna. (2019) "Beyond Autocracy Promotion: A Review", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 147–160.
[214] Freedom House (2019), *Freedom in the World 2018*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 808.
[215] Tsygankov, Andrei P. (2018), "The sources of Russia's fear of NATO", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 101–111.

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index is published every two years and measures a country's political and economic transformation along with a governance indicator. To present the data below the Status Index and the Governance Index are utilized. The Status Index is the average of two indicators: political and economic transformation. From 2013 up to 2020, there have been four reports. Estonia and Lithuania from a perfect score of 10 have been reported for an average of 9 in the Status Indicator (9.5 and 9.2 respectively) and 7 in terms of governance (7.4 and 7.2). Latvia's scores have been in a similar direction (average of 8.6 and 7). In Transcaucasia, this index presents a greater variance, with Azerbaijan being in a less developed stage compared to Armenia and Georgia. Georgia having the highest regional scores takes an average of 6.4 in the Status Index and 5.8 in Governance. Armenia has 5.9 and 4.7 for each and Azerbaijan 4.4 and 3.9. To contextualize those numbers, Russia's reported scores for 2018 were 5.3 for the Status Index and 3.5 for Governance.[216]

The last indicator which reveals the perceived corruption illustrates that even states that are reported as highly democratized may score low in this aspect. Corruption facilitates implicit interventions especially in the field of business and is an evidence of weak institutions.[217]

Table 5: Corruption Perceptions Index in Baltics and South Caucasus (2013 – 2020)

	Azerbaijan	**Armenia**	**Georgia**	**Estonia**	**Latvia**	**Lithuania**
2013	28	36	49	68	53	57
2014	29	37	52	69	55	58
2015	29	35	52	70	56	59
2016	30	33	57	70	57	59
2017	31	35	56	71	58	59
2018	25	35	58	73	58	59
2019	30	42	56	74	56	60
2020	30	49	45	75	57	60

Source: Transparency International (Undated), Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 – 2020, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl, visited 17 May 2021.

The Corruption Perceptions Index presents three clusters of states. Those with medium or average corruption, those with relatively low corruption, and those with high to medium. Tbilisi, Riga, and Vilnius with average scores of 53, 56, and 59 for the examined period, belong to the first category. Tallinn belongs to the second and Baku along with Yerevan to the last one. This grouping however has been changing gradually with Armenia reporting lower scores of corruption compared to Georgia in 2020 (49 and 45 respectively). This index demonstrates that high scores in democracy and state-building do not necessarily lead to a less corrupt

[216] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2018), *BTI 2018 Country Report: Russia*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.
[217] Kunicová, Jana (2006), "Democratic Institutions and Corruption: Incentives and Constraints in Politics" in Rose-Ackerman Susan (ed.), *International Handbook on the Economics of Corruption*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, pp. 140 – 150.

environment. For example, the Baltic states have been frequently reporting almost perfect scores in various state-building and freedom scores, whereas their perceived corruption scores are relatively lower. This can be attributed to various reasons, one of which could be methodological. Measuring the belief of how much corruption exists, does not measure the exact phenomenon.[218] Nevertheless, this index combined with the previous two reduces to a certain degree the methodological incertitude. High corruption is an aspect that facilitates implicit interventions; lower corruption creates costs to various actors which might attempt utilizing this kind of situations for increasing their influence.

Increased democratization in the Baltics, along with relatively better corruption scores becomes a domestic constraint to Russian attempts of increasing its influence in the region by various means. The weaker state apparatuses of the S. Caucasus states along with their relatively higher corruption index scores demonstrate a more favorable environment for Russia's implicit interventions. Nevertheless, this process is dynamic and not static with democratization, state-building, and corruption changing in time. This is evident by the recent improvement of Armenia's position in some of the indicators and the worsening of Georgia's position. Similarly, in terms of corruption both Latvia and Lithuania have been in a stable position with worsening prospects.

7.2. Constraints on the Third Image

Systemic aspects in Russia's external behavior have been important in understanding the actor's behavior. In this part, the costs towards realizing Moscow's foreign policy in the two regions are examined under the national attributors (geography, state power) and the regional power distribution aspects. As mentioned in the previous chapter the systemic level is a significant variable in Russia's foreign policy concept documents. Nevertheless, the mentions are framed more in terms of threats and risks compared to the notion of constraints.

7.2.1. National Attributors

Several variables can create costs and frictions to the aspirations of a regional hegemonic power, whereas some of those characteristics can also facilitate a policy in some cases; those two are inversely proportional. What is of interest in the current segment of the analysis is connected to the geographical size and positioning of the countries along with their terrain. An additional factor of interest is access to the sea for the countries, and lastly their proximity to Russia and other regional powers. The importance of the geographical characteristics is

[218] Transparency International (2017), "Explanation of How Individual Country Scores of the Corruption Perceptions Index are Calculated", https://www.transparency.org/en/press/explanation-of-how-individual-country-scores-of-the-corruption-perceptions visited 17 May 2021.

anelastic but fixed, it does not change – rapidly at least – but it also can affect the external political life of the actors involved. For that reason, a firm understanding of the state power of the countries in the region offers further insight into the constraints Russian foreign policy may face.

7.2.2. Geographical Aspects

Baltic and S. Caucasus states are relatively small; both in general and in more specific terms compared to their regional neighbors. The smallest state compared to all examined countries is Armenia (29.740 sq. km). Estonia (45.340 sq. km) is relatively larger than Armenia but still smaller compared to the rest of the countries. Georgia (69.700 sq. km), Latvia (64.570), and Lithuania (65.290 sq. km) have approximately similar sizes. The largest is Azerbaijan (86.600) which is roughly twice the size of Estonia. In foreign affairs, usually, size is not that crucial compared to positioning – the place where a country is situated – that can influence its possible economic, military, and diplomatic choices.

Access to the open seas is an important factor that needs to be taken into account. According to the Estonian Ports Association, the country has 27 main ports belonging to the mainland or the islands surrounding the country.[219] The most important port for the country is that of Tallinn, which is the biggest in terms of both cargo and passenger traffic. Similarly, Latvia has 10 operational ports with three of them being the major ones: Liepaja, Ventspils, and Riga.[220] The third Baltic state has only one major port, that of Klaipeda. All three Baltic states enjoy open access to the Baltic Sea, and through that to the open seas. This increases their accessibility, and their specific positioning at the crossroads of Europe, Scandinavia, and the CIS space gives them a unique geographical location.[221]

This connectivity and accessibility that the Baltics enjoy is not an option for the S. Caucasus states, except Georgia. Georgia is the only S. Caucasus country that enjoys access to the Black Sea. Not including Abkhazia, Georgia has two main ports, one in Batumi and the other in Poti.[222] There are plans for a third one in Anaklia, but the project is still underway.[223] Georgia functions as a gateway for its landlocked neighbors: Azerbaijan and Armenia. Both countries utilize Georgian ports for their imports and exports, making Tbilisi a significant transit

[219] Estonian Ports Association (Undated), "Ports", https://www.estonianports.com/ports visited 3 May 2021.
[220] Liduma, Diana et al. (2015), "Comparative Analysis of Leading Ports of Latvia: Competitiveness of Liepaja Port", *Problems of Management in the 21st Century*, Vol, 10, No. 1, pp. 26 – 28.
[221] Castrel, Thomas (2017), "Seaport in the Baltic States", *Flanders Investment & Trade Market Survey*, pp. 3.
[222] Dolbaia, Tamar (2016) "Georgian Ports and Establishing the Regional Status of Georgia", *International Conference on Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, May 24-25 Paris, pp. 117.
[223] Agenda.ge (2017), Construction of Anaklia Deep Sea Port Kicks Off, https://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/2809 visited 03 May 2021.

country. Whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan are both landlocked, they also have low connectedness due to closed borders and economic sanctions which have been initiated and kept in place from the early 1990s in connection to the Nagorno Karabakh war.[224] Armenia's closed borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan, leave it with limited access to the outside world via Georgia and Iran.

Several hypotheses associate the landlocked status of countries with increased challenges in economic development.[225] Specifically for countries that are rich in natural resources and also landlocked, the *double economic curse* argument claims that there is a potential annual economic growth loss.[226] Further evidence exhibits that the *resources curse* along with domestic autocratic governance, negatively impacts both economy and society in terms of corruption, transparency, economic structural regulation, and welfare allocation.[227] This negative economic impact of this situational factor is a favorable condition for Russia's foreign policy. This is clear by Armenia's example which is dependent on Moscow in terms of energy, trade, and also security.[228] It should be noted, however, that this situational factor functions in conjuncture with other elements leading to Yerevan's dependence, and cannot be considered as an independent feature; it is rather one of the ingredients leading to the effect.

In the case of Georgia and the Baltic states access to the open seas has meant a higher degree of accessibility and a smaller degree of dependence on other actors for import and export activities. Nevertheless, increased accessibility does not automatically equate to economic welfare; there are several additional factors involved. This can be exemplified by comparing Georgia with the Baltic states. Both, having their own seaports, can freely access other markets, however, Georgia's per capita GDP in 2019 was close to 5.000 constant 2010 USD, whereas for example Lithuania's was 18.600.[229] Notwithstanding the variance in welfare, increased accessibility, can be considered as a constraining factor to aspiring regional power policies, as it offers to the former the prospect to draw a different foreign policy without having to withstand unbearable costs in the domestic scene.

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[224] Both Turkey and Azerbaijan maintain closed borders with Armenia. Efforts in normalizing Turkish – Armenian relations in 2008 – 2009 stumbled upon Azerbaijani opposition. See Yackley, Ayla Jean (2017), "Armenia, Turkey Trade Blame After Yerevan Abandons Protocols", *Eurasianet*, https://eurasianet.org/armenia-turkey-trade-blame-after-yerevan-abandons-protocols visited 3 May 2021.

[225] Faye, Michael L. et al. (2004) "The Challenges Facing Landlocked Developing Countries", *Journal of Human Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 31-68.

[226] Rivero, Roger Alejandro Banegas, et al. (2019) "Landlocked Countries, Natural Resources and Growth: The Double Economic Curse Hypothesis" *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 120.

[227] Franke, Anja et al. (2009) "Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as Post-Soviet Rentier States: Resource Incomes and Autocracy as a Double 'Curse'in Post-Soviet Regimes", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 125 – 133.

[228] Terzyan, Aram. (2018), "The Anatomy of Russia's Grip on Armenia: Bound to Persist?" Vol. 10, No. 2, *Centre for European Studies Working Papers*, pp. 234 – 250.

[229] The World Bank (Undated), GDP Per Capita (constant 2010 US$) – Georgia, Lithuania, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=GE-LT visited 07 May 2021.

Accessibility is not the only aspect that matters in a country's positioning. Its immediate neighborhood plays an equally – if not more – important role. Simply put, increased distance to Russia, lack of shared borders, along with the proximity to other regional powers or organizations, may infringe Moscow's aspirations in a specific region or country. For the Baltics high proximity to the EU states (specifically to the Baltic Sea countries) along with a strong allied organization (NATO), has been detrimental for its foreign policy course, and the constraints it has created to Russian intentions. Nonetheless, proximity to Russia and its allied states (Belarus) creates risks and fears, that are utilized as opportunities from Russia.[230] Lithuania is the only Baltic state that shares borders with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, instead of Russia proper. In terms of similarities the S. Caucasus countries – mainly Azerbaijan and Georgia – share around 1.230 km with Russia's North Caucasus states. Interestingly, Armenia which is a strategic partner for Moscow does not share any borders with the country. In terms of differences, however, S. Caucasus does not have proximity to alternative supra-national organizations such as the EU and belongs in a way to the outskirts of NATO, with neighboring Turkey being a member-state of the organization. The immediately available options for the S. Caucasus are the CIS, the EEU, and the CSTO in terms of security. However, all three organizations are under high Russian influence. Lastly, the main actors that can play a role in the region are Turkey and Iran. Those alternatives – mainly the Turkish one – have been utilized by Azerbaijan and Georgia. The analysis of the trilateral diplomatic mechanism belongs to the next section; nonetheless, before that, an examination of the state power indicators of the two region's countries is necessary.

7.2.3. State Power Indicators

Power is defined in various ways and one can refer to different aspects of it.[231] In this text, a narrow understanding based on the neoclassical realism theory is utilized. Power in the international arena is understood in material terms and is roughly measured by the GDP, defence expenditure, demographic trends, and size of the armed forces.[232] For this part of the thesis, the power of the Baltic and the S. Caucasus states is examined as a constraining factor to Russia's foreign policy.

In material terms, no state either on the S. Caucasus or in the Baltics is able to create any constraints to Russia in terms of economy, diplomacy, or military. Even if the integration

[230] See for example the Zapad military exercises: Giles, Keir (2018), Russia Hit Multiple Targets with Zapad-2017, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/25/russia-hit-multiple-targets-with-zapad-2017-pub-75278 visited 07 May 2021.
[231]

[232] Ripsman et al. (2016), pp. 44.

level between the actors of the regions was high, the possible combined power they would have without outside actors being involved, would not be enough to oppose any attempt of utilizing hard power from Russia. To demonstrate this, the total population of the Baltic and S. Caucasus states in 2019, as reported by the World Bank, is 6.026.223 and 16.701.431.[233] For the same year, the combined GDP in constant 2010 USD, has been 111.515 and 91.455 billion.[234] Similarly and more importantly, the average defense budget for that year has been 2% in the former and 3.6% in the latter.[235] Based on the mentioned GDPs this means that the Baltics would have a defense expenditure of 2.230 billion USD, and the S. Caucasus 3.292 billion. Those numbers dwindle before the equivalent Russian ones. Moscow's population during the same year was 144.406.261, the GDP 1.762 trillion USD (constant 2010), and the military expenditure was 3.9% (68.718 billion USD).[236]

On this basis, the balance between the armed forces for the regions and Russia is based on the same analogy. The Global Firepower, an independent statistical source that tracks defense-related information, demonstrates this analogy in its annual report on the armed forces for 140 countries. According to its Power Index (perfect score of 0.0000), Russia in 2019 had a score of 0.0639. This made Moscow the second most strong military globally. Based on Table 6, Baltic, or S. Caucasus states have just a small fraction of Russia's total military personnel (including active and reserve), total aircrafts, combat tanks, and navy. This disanalogy has been exhibited by an analysis of Rand Corporation in 2016. The analysis examined various scenarios of Russian invasion to the Baltics and concluded that Moscow would need 36 to 60 hours to enter the capitals of Estonia and Latvia.[237] In Lithuania's case – along with the other two Baltic states – a combined "pincer movement by Russian forces invading from Kaliningrad and Belarus could also close the Suwalki Gap (a narrow 60-mile-long strip of land connecting Lithuania to Poland)".[238] Despite the boggy terrain and the existence of large lakes and rivers

[233] The World Bank (Undated), Population, total - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AM-AZ-GE-EE-LV-LT visited 09 May 2021.
[234] The World Bank (Undated), GDP (constant 2010 US$) - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=AM-AZ-GE-EE-LV-LT visited 09 May 2021.
[235] Average percentages do not give a clear picture, but they give a necessary overview for our hypothetical example: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2021), Military Expenditure by Country as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 1988-2020, https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932020%20as%20a%20share%20of%20GDP%20%28pdf%29.pdf visited 10 May 2021.
[236] Ibid., see also The World Bank (Undated), GDP (constant 2010 US$) – Russian Federation, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=RU visited 10 May 2021 and The World Bank (Undated), Population, Total – Russian Federation, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=RU visited 10 May 2021.
[237] The scenarios included the NATO forces stationed in the countries. Shlapak, David A. and Johnson, Michael (2016) *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, pp. 4.
[238] See Flanagan, Stephen J. et al. (2019), "Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States through Resilience and Resistance", *RAND Corporation Research Report*, RR-2779-OSD, pp. 6.

that would limit maneuver warfare, the war games showcase that a military advance would have devastating effects for the Baltics in a short period.[239]

Table 6: Armed Forces Data of Baltics - S. Caucasus States and Russia (2019)

	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Russia
P. Index	0.7791	1.6888	1.4098	2.1115	1.8691	1.3751	0.0639
Total Mil. Personnel	367.000	245.000	20.000	18.500	13.300	25.500	3.586.128
Active	67.000	45.000	20.000	6.500	5.300	18.500	1.013.628
Reserve	300.000	200.000	0	12.000	8.000	7.000	2.572.500
Total Aircraft	138	63	67	5	5	12	4.708
Combat Tanks	665	110	143	0	0	0	21.932
Navy	31	0	9	6	18	12	352

Source: Global Firepower Index (2019), "2019 Military Strength Ranking", https://web.archive.org/web/20190805100605/https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp, visited through internet archive "wayback machine", 18 May 2021.

In the S. Caucasus, there is a lack of such scenarios; nonetheless, the historical reality shows that the mountainous environment of the region, can create frictions to Moscow's physical coercion. This was showcased during the Russo – Georgian war, which even though led to Georgia's quick defeat, had drawbacks in tactical terms.[240] The overall performance of the Russian army, however, demonstrated a reality similar to the Baltic war simulations.

7.2.4. Regional Power Distribution

Central to the study's notion of constraints based on neoclassical realism is the systemic level, and more specifically that of the international structure. Anarchy as stated beforehand is a contextual variable. The explanatory power of neoclassical realism lies in the examination of the relative power distribution.[241] In this context structural polarity is crucial to understand. For the examined period from 2013 up to 2020, the international system has started to get into transition. The USA maintain their position as the most prominent military, diplomatic and economic power, however arising contesters such as the BRICS, have initiated a dialogue concerning whether the international world is transitioning towards a multipolar system.[242] This debate is still ongoing and for that reason, the current study hypothesizes that for the examined

[239] Muzyka, Konrad (2020), "Russian Forces in the Western Military District", *Center for Naval Analyses Occasional Paper*, IOP-2020-U-028759-Final.
[240] Cohen, Ariel, and Hamilton, Robert E. (2011), *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, pp. 18 – 22.
[241] Ripsman et al. (2016), pp. 43.
[242] See for example Voskressenski, Alexei D. (2017) *Non-Western Theories of International Relations*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, and also Cunliffe, Philip (2019) "Framing Intervention in a Multipolar World, Conflict", *Security & Development*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 245-250, and Von Hauff, L. (2019) "Towards a new quality of cooperation? The EU, China, and Central Asian Security in a Multipolar Age". Asia Europe Journal, Vol. 17, pp. 195–210.

period the unipolar assumption is still in force, while agreeing that there is a tendency towards transition.

What is more important for the current analysis concerns the regional aspect of the relative power distribution between the actors that attempt to maintain or enhance their influence. The most significant counterbalance and constraining factor to Russia's influence in the Baltic region is that of NATO. The organization significantly constrains Russia's ability to utilize military tools for enhancing its own influence. The way the alliance functions is dynamic rather than static; even though it can be considered reactive rather than proactive. This becomes evident by the fact that after the assertive behavior of Russia became evident in Ukraine (2014), the alliance took a series of measures further constraining Russian aspirations in the North-Eastern front, which includes the Baltics. Those measures included declarations against Russia's behavior, and several adaptations of strategic and tactical nature such as increased assurances, policing, and also military exercises and training.[243]

The most important measure which translates to a direct limitation to Russia is NATOs *Enhanced Forward Presence* which has put multinational battlegroups on Baltic soil.[244] The measure was agreed during the Warsaw Summit in 2016 and planned to deploy in July troops from countries such as the UK, Canada, Germany, and the USA.[245] Those countries are the leaders of groups for specific country battalions. Specifically, the UK is the leading country for Estonia, Canada for Latvia, Germany for Lithuania, and the USA for Poland.[246] Some of the additional participating countries include France, Spain, Italy, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania.[247] The number of the troops based on each of the three countries has been fluctuating but there is a certain stability. Estonia in 2017 had 1.100 troops stationed in Tapa, but those got gradually reduced to 987 (2018), 973 (2019), and 964 (2020).[248] In Latvia's Adazi, the number of troops in 2017 has been 1.138, but it has increased to 1.525 in 2020.[249] Lastly, Rukla in Lithuania hosted 1.022 troops in 2017 and 1.233 in 2020.[250]

[243] Lanoszka Alexander et al. (2020), "Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence, 2017 – 2020", *NATO Defence College*, No. 14, pp. 2.
[244] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2021), Boosting NATO's Presence in the East and Southeast, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm visited 11 May 2021.
[245] Ibid.
[246] NATO (2017), "Factsheet: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_05/1705-factsheet-efp.pdf visited 11 May 2021.
[247] Ibid.
[248] NATO (2018), "Factsheet: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_06/20180606_1806-factsheet_efp_en.pdf visited 11 May 2021. NATO (2019), "Factsheet: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_02/20190213_1902-factsheet_efp_en.pdf visited 11 May 2021. NATO (2020), "Factsheet: NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/2010-factsheet_efp_en.pdf visited 11 May 2021.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.

The nature of the Russian constraints in the S. Caucasus is not the same as the Baltics, as the region lacks both coherence in terms of common initiatives and a defensive alliance pact like NATO. Regional actors aspiring to enhance their position vis a vis the countries of the S. Caucasus pose some limitation to Russia's behavior in the region; nonetheless inadequately. One of those actors is Turkey. The Turkish – Azerbaijani strategic pact, signed in 2010, is an official defense agreement between the two countries that offers a mutual support clause in case of a military aggression against either of the actors.[251] Similarly, increased military cooperation between the two countries is being showcased via frequent military exercises between the two.[252] This cooperation has created a *spill-over* effect with Georgia. The Caucasian Eagle exercises have turned into trilateral war games conducted by Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.[253] The trilateral mechanism which was cemented in 2012 by the Trabzon Declaration evolved steadily and has been also characterized as a geopolitical axis.[254] Nevertheless, other authors claim that the partnership's nature is overstated and internal divergence along with other obstacles stand in the way for further integration.[255]

An additional constraining factor is connected to the NATO aspirations of Georgia. Armenia and Azerbaijan have demonstrated a clear neutrality towards the organization, but the same does not apply to Georgia. Tbilisi's NATO aspirations have been expressed several times. Even though there has been specific progress towards that direction, the cooperation is mainly concerned with training and military modernization.[256] Joint educational centers along with common military exercises are the basis of the existing cooperation.[257] Nonetheless, Georgia's external territorial disputes complicate the procedure of accession for Tbilisi, as the Study on NATO enlargement claims that "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial

[251] Abbasov, Shahin (2011), Azerbaijan-Turkey Military Pact Signals Impatience with Minsk Talks – Analysts, *Eurasianet*, https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-turkey-military-pact-signals-impatience-with-minsk-talks-analysts visited 10 May 2021.

[252] See for example Guldogan, Diyar (2017), Azerbaijan Turkey Start Joint Military Exercises, *Anadolu Agency*, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/azerbaijan-turkey-start-joint-military-exercises/913179 visited 10 May 2021 and also Hürriyet Daily News (2019), Turkey Azerbaijan Launch Military Exercises, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-azerbaijan-launch-military-drill-144029 visited 10 May 2021.

[253] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2017), Azerbaijan's Military Personnel Take Part in Exercises 'Caucasian Eagle', https://mod.gov.az/en/news/azerbaijan-s-military-personnel-take-part-in-exercises-caucasian-eagle-18801.html visited 12 May 2021 see also Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2019), The Next Stage of the 'Caucasian Eagle - 2019' Exercises was Held, https://mod.gov.az/en/news/the-next-stage-of-the-caucasian-eagle-2019-exercises-was-held-28652.html visited 12 May 2021 and Huseynov, Vasif (2020), "Azerbaijan, Turkey Hold Large-Scale Military Drills Amidst Escalation of Tensions With Armenia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 17, No. 121.

[254] Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012), Trabzon Declaration Of The Ministers Of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan, Georgia And The Republic Of Turkey, 08 June 2012, Trabzon, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/trabzon--declaration-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan_-georgia-and-the-republic-of-turkey_-08-june-2012_-trabzon.en.mfa visited 13 May 2021 see also Shahbazov, Fuad (2017), "Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia: A Geopolitical Axis or an Accidental Alliance?", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 14, No. 75.

[255] Garibov, Azad (2018), "Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey: Advancing the Military Dimension of the Trilateral Partnership, *EUCACIS Online Paper*, No. 3, pp. 4 – 8.

[256] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2021), "Relations with Georgia", https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm visited 14 May 2021.

[257] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2017), "Media Backgrounder: NATO – Georgia Relations", Public Diplomacy Division, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_11/20171201_171201_Media_Backgrounder_Georgia_en.pdf visited 14 May 2021.

disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance".[258] This clause is understood by Moscow and the territorial conflicts it is involved with negatively affect prospects of accession, effectively preventing NATO expansion.[259]

8. Conclusion: Evaluating the Notion of Constraints

The exploration of the constraints notion in connection with the Russian FP has been conducted in two ways for the current case study: one based on the actor's view, and the other independent of it. During the first, the examination of the FPC documents demonstrated that the country's FP perceives its external environment more in thematic terms of risk and threat as compared to constraints. Risks and threats are closer to the concept of fear; a rational concept of constraints does not clearly derive from the country's FPC. Interestingly, what comes at the surface is that the factor of *fear conditioning* can offer specific insights to Russian FP research, especially in conjunction with the prospect theory.[260] In this context the proposed examination can impact equally the field of peace and conflict studies, as examining the perception of cognitive constraints in terms of ideology and perception can deepen the understanding of the country's rivalries. Concerning the second examined way, the categorization from Table 2 is utilized for the rest of this section to structure the discussion.

Firstly, Russia's institutional aspect in terms of FP is both centralized and complicated. The central figure in the FP of the country is the President who oversees and coordinates several structures to create FP outputs. Thus, the institutional aspect is both centralized and fragmented at the same time. The rest of the actors compete between each other for the President's attention and influence. This context leads to a complicated network-like system, which necessitates effective balancing by the center. For this reason, the first and foremost constraint that the thesis identifies – both in institutional and ideological terms – is Moscow itself. Nevertheless, the way those networks function specifically for the two regions was not demonstrated and can very well be examined further.

[258] NATO (2008), "Study on NATO Enlargement – 03 September 1995", Chapter 1, Paragraph 6, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm visited 17 May 2021.
[259] Katchanovski, Ivan (2011), "Puzzles of EU and NATO Accession of Post-Communist Countries", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 314.
[260] Stein, Janice G. (2013) "Threat Perception in International Relations.", in Huddy, Leonie et al. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 380 – 381.

In terms of demography and societal attitudes, the latter is one of the strongest explored aspects in investigating Russia's FP. Demographical realities may lead to the absence of some tools for Russia (e.g., lack of minorities), but even in cases where for example minorities are lacking Moscow may artificially create one as is evidenced by the passportization policy in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[261] Influencing societal attitudes, however, does not fall directly under Russia's potent tools. Both the Baltic states and Georgia, share a perception of threat and fear concerning Russia; this factor has been one of the strongest constraints to the Kremlin's FP, creating frictions and difficulties in its attempt to regain influence. This factor is one of the most fluctuating ones, but it has shown a specific degree of stability for the 2013 – 2020 period; demonstrating that Moscow's ability to influence is not coherent.

An additional element connected with domestic-driven constraints from the examined countries is associated with the political regimes. Corrupt, institutionally weak, and unfree regimes are seen more favorably by Russia. The opposite characteristics are frequently associated with Westernism in Moscow and they awaken a threat perception. Apart from that they also create several frictions to the potential involvement of third countries. What becomes evident, however, is the fact that this aspect overlaps with other explored components such as proximity to institutions and alliances, the regional balance, and the public attitude towards Russia. For that reason, a deeper understanding of the aforementioned characteristics would lead to similar conclusions, making this exploration more parsimonious. This realization is only connected to the current exploration of the constraint notion, as for other assumptions and studies of Russian FP it can be central.

The last category in Table 2 discussed the third image; referring to systemic traits. Exploring the aspect of size along with its specific terrain, in the Baltics and the S. Caucasus does not exhibit significant constraints to Russia's FP. Moreover, those factors are represented in a more insightful way by state power indicators; referring to the economic, military, and diplomatic capacity an actor has which was discussed in the subsequent segment of the thesis. In this setting, accessibility which was explored in terms of access to sea may entail constraints to Russia's external actions. Better and improved accessibility ameliorates diplomatic conditions for an actor. This is especially important for small and vulnerable states. The actors of the Baltic and the S. Caucasus cannot be compared with the Russian economic and military might even if they were aggregated together. The regional power balances can demonstrate the

[261] Nagashima, Toru (2019), "Russia's Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria." *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 186-199.

nuances of the notion of constraints towards Russia's FP; with diplomacy being the most significant factor. This realization led to examining the regional power balance as a constraint to Russia's FP.

The strongest aspect at the regional level for the Baltics is associated with the NATO alliance and the EU. Both in terms of physical coercion and of values, the will of those two organizations to incorporate the Baltics into their integrative and cooperative processes created and still maintains the strongest constraint to Moscow's endeavors. Under this condition, NATO pushes Russia to utilize softer tools of foreign policy such as strategic communication (propaganda), sanctions, culture (ROC), and subversion to the extent it can. The power balance even though seemingly static, is not. Its dynamic character is showcased with the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative which came after the Kremlin's assertive stance with Ukraine and Crimea. Military exercises and war games demonstrate the dynamic character this balance entails. In lack of a similar constraint in the S. Caucasus, Moscow has utilized additional tools such as physical coercion, blackmail, and coercive diplomacy. The tools at Russia's disposal are utilized in a combination due to the necessity of keeping the Russian internal factional struggle in balance. For the examined period Russia has not utilized physical coercion in the region, but it has turned to softer tools of FP. The recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan (2020) and the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Center established by Ankara and Moscow in the aftermath, demonstrates Kremlin's will to cooperate with actors that can also be perceived as competitors in the region.

In order to evaluate the explored notion of constraints, it should be said that there is an overlap, to a certain degree, with existing research and conceptualization for understanding Russia's FP, one of the most significant being the constructivist idea of Tsygankov, who examines Kremlin's policies in association with its Western other.[262] Similarly, even structural realism can offer insights of equal value by examining mainly the systemic aspects of the international and regional fields. The existence of different models which can offer more, or less similar explanative outputs is usually assessed on the basis of parsimony. In this aspect, the conceptualization of constraints in the Russian FP, as an attempt to explain the variance between two regions, is not the most parsimonious. It can, however, under certain conditions and with some targeted changes, illustrate and highlight variances in a quick and efficient way,

[262] This has been also considered during the preliminary discussions when one of the interlocutors mentioned that in her/his opinion the whole Russian FP in the two regions is planned and organized vis a vis the West.

as the data necessity is lower compared to the constructivist method, and higher compared to the structural realistic method.

Further research prospects, which became evident during the exploratory *journey*, can attempt to tackle the issue of the fear thematic in the Russian FPCs under the prospect theory. This endeavor can also be enriched by including additional foreign policy documents such as the National Security Concept/Strategy of Russia, and also the Maritime and Military Doctrines. This proposed study can function as a link towards the fields of FPA and peace and conflict studies, leading effectively to a deeper understanding of a perceived thematic of fear that may be a significant factor concerning the country's antagonisms. Moreover, the examination of the specific institutional aspects of the country's external policy mechanism towards the two regions can be of equal interest, highlighting the exact mechanisms and the way they function. Last but not least, to a certain degree the academic world is examining the minority issues in the Baltic region along with its fragmentation and the public attitudes, and the future constraints it might entail for Russian soft power projection, the same, however, is not equally done for the S. Caucasus, and specifically for the *passportized* de facto states of Abkhazia, S. Ossetia, and more recently the Nagorno-Karabakh which even though does not yet fall in the same category, it hosts Russian peacekeepers whose future status is ambivalent.

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Appendix

Table 7: Population of S. Caucasus and Baltic Countries 2013 – 2020 - World Bank

	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
2013	9416801	2897584	3717668	1317997	2012647	2957689
2014	9535079	2912403	3719414	1314545	1993782	2932367
2015	9649341	2925553	3725276	1315407	1977527	2904910
2016	9757812	2936146	3727505	1315790	1959537	2868231
2017	9854033	2944809	3728004	1317384	1942248	2828403
2018	9939771	2951776	3726549	1321977	1927174	2801543
2019	10023318	2957731	3720382	1326590	1912789	2786844
2020	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: World Bank (Undated), "Population Total - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania", https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AZ-AM-GE-EE-LV-LT, visited 17 May 2021.

Table 8: Size (sq. km) of S. Caucasus and Baltic Countries 2013 – 2020 - World Bank

	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
2013	86600	29740	69700	45340	64490	65300
2014	86600	29740	69700	45340	64570	65286
2015	86600	29740	69700	45340	64570	65286
2016	86600	29740	69700	45340	64570	65286
2017	86600	29740	69700	45340	64570	65286
2018	86600	29740	69700	45340	64570	65290
2019	-	-	-	-	-	-
2020	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: World Bank (Undated), "Population Total - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania", https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.SRF.TOTL.K2?locations=AZ-AM-GE-EE-LV-LT, visited 17 May 2021.

Table 9: Military Expenditure (%) of S. Caucasus and Baltic Countries 2013 – 2020

	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia*	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
2013	4.5%	4.0%	2.6%	1.9%	0.9%	0.8%
2014	4.6%	3.9%	2.4%	1.9%	0.9%	0.9%
2015	5.5%	4.2%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	1.1%
2016	3.7%	4.1%	2.1%	2.1%	1.5%	1.5%
2017	3.8%	3.8%	2.0%	2.0%	1.6%	1.7%
2018	3.6%	4.1%	1.9%	2.0%	2.1%	2.0%
2019	3.9%	4.8%	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
2020	5.4%	4.9%	1.8%	2.3%	2.3%	2.1%

*****Percentages for Georgia are SIPRI estimates.

Source: SIPRI (Undated), "Military Expenditure Database - Data for all Countries from 1988–2020 as a Share of GDP", https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932020%20as%20a%20share%20of%20GDP%20%28pdf%29.pdf, visited 17 May 2021.

Table 10: Freedom House Scores for the S. Caucasus 2013 – 2020

	Azerbaijan		Armenia		Georgia	
	PR	CL	PR	CL	PR	CL
2013	6	5	5	4	3	3
2014	6	6	5	4	3	3
2015	6	6	5	4	3	3
2016	7	6	5	4	3	3
2017	7	6	5	4	3	3
2018	7	6	5	4	3	3
2019	7	6	4	4	3	3
2020	7	6	4	4	3	3
Status	Not Free		Partly Free		Partly Free	

Note: PR stands for Political Rights and CL for Civil Liberties
Source: Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2013-2020 Raw Data", https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/2020_All_Data_FIW_2013-2020.xlsx, retrieved 10 April 2021.

Table 11: Freedom House Scores for the Baltic Countries 2013 – 2020

	Estonia		Latvia		Lithuania	
	PR	CL	PR	CL	PR	CL
2013	1	1	2	2	1	1
2014	1	1	2	2	1	1
2015	1	1	2	2	1	1
2016	1	1	2	2	1	1
2017	1	1	1	2	1	1
2018	1	1	2	2	1	1
2019	1	1	2	2	1	1
2020	1	1	1	2	1	1
Status	Free		Free		Free	

Note: PR stands for Political Rights and CL for Civil Liberties
Source: Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2013-2020 Raw Data", https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/2020_All_Data_FIW_2013-2020.xlsx, retrieved 10 April 2021.

Table 12: BTI Scores for the S. Caucasus Countries 2014 – 2020

	Azerbaijan				Armenia				Georgia			
	SI	PT	ET	M/G	SI	PT	ET	M/G	SI	PT	ET	M/G
2014	4.71	3.92	5.5	3.96	5.71	5.35	6.07	4.84	6.16	6.5	5.82	5.76
2016	4.44	3.48	5.39	3.76	5.56	5.23	5.89	4.31	6.31	6.7	5.93	5.72
2018	4.13	3.43	4.82	3.86	5.58	5.12	6.04	4.25	6.42	6.8	6.04	5.87
2020	4.34	3.43	5.25	4	6.69	7.1	6.29	5.32	6.6	6.6	6.18	5.86

Note: The scale of the scores is 0 – 10 (perfect). SI stands for Status Index, PT for Political Transformation, ET for Economic Transformation and M/G for Management/Governance.
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung (Undated), "BTI 2006 – 2020 Scores (Excel)", Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/data/BTI%202006-2020%20Scores.xlsx, retrieved 17 April 2021.

Table 13: BTI Scores for the Baltic Countries 2014 – 2020

	Estonia				Latvia				Lithuania			
	SI	PT	ET	M/G	SI	PT	ET	M/G	SI	PT	ET	M/G
2014	9.42	9.7	9.14	7.26	8.41	8.75	8.07	6.82	8.98	9.25	8.71	7.08
2016	9.49	9.7	9.29	7.4	8.63	8.75	8.5	6.97	9.15	9.3	9	7.19
2018	9.52	9.75	9.29	7.44	8.68	8.75	8.61	7	9.24	9.45	9.04	7.18
2020	9.54	9.8	9.29	7.46	8.75	8.9	8.61	7	9.3	9.5	9.11	7.21

Note: The scale of the scores is 0 – 10 (perfect). SI stands for Status Index, PT for Political Transformation, ET for Economic Transformation and M/G for Management/Governance.
Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung (Undated), "BTI 2006 – 2020 Scores (Excel)", Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/data/BTI%202006-2020%20Scores.xlsx, retrieved 17 April 2021.

Table 14: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Azerbaijan, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Belarus	33	33	-	-	10	37	-	-	114
Czechia	-	-	-	-	4	5	-	-	9
Israel	25	21	116	250	151	247	26	22	857
Pakistan	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
Russia	305	550	210	7	109	53	-	-	1233
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	12	12	-	-	24
S. Africa	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	-	13
Turkey	5	17	9	16	4	6	6	7	69
Ukraine	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
USA	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	4
Total	385	624	335	274	290	365	44	29	2346

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD with **"**0" indicating less than 0.5m USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Azerbaijan", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.

Table 15: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Armenia, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Jordan	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	-	21
Russia	16	-	-	110	18	-	228	-	372
Total	16	-	-	110	18	-	248	-	393

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Armenia", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.

Table 16: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Georgia, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Bulgaria	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
France	-	-	-	-	-	37	-	-	37
USA	-	1	-	-	7	6	6	-	21
Total	5	1	-	-	7	43	6	-	63

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Georgia", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.

Table 17: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Estonia, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
France	13	-	15	-	3	3	38	3	75
Netherlands	1	2	1	27	28	14	14	-	87
S. Korea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9
Ukraine	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
USA	-	-	2	2	2	-	2	4	13
Total	18	2	18	29	33	17	54	15	188

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Estonia", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.

Table 18: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Latvia, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Austria	-	-	-	-	20	4	-	-	24
Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
Germany	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Israel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Sweden	-	-	2	4	2	-	-	-	8
UK	-	-	1	2	4	2	3	2	14
USA	-	-	-	20	-	11	22	-	53
Total	5	5	3	26	25	19	25	5	112

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Latvia", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.

Table 19: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Lithuania, 2013-2020

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Bulgaria	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Denmark	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	8
France	-	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	10
Germany	-	-	-	13	2	6	46	60	127
Israel	-	-	0	2	-	-	14	-	15
Norway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	25
Poland	-	1	3	1	6	-	-	-	11
Sweden	-	-	-	5	-	-	2	-	7
UK	73	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	73
USA	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	127	128
Total	73	3	13	28	10	6	61	211	405

Note: TIV stands for Trend Indicator Value. Numbers in million USD with "0" indicating less than 0.5m USD.
Source: SIPRI (Undated), "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database TIV of arms exports to Lithuania", 2013-2020, visited 10 May 2021.