

# **A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO THE EXPLANATION OF THE EMERGENCE OF RUSSIA'S 'NEAR ABROAD'**

By  
Yuriy Onyshkiv

Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Political Science

Supervisor: Professor Tamás Meszerics  
Second Reader: Professor Carsten Schneider

Budapest, Hungary  
2007

## Abstract

In this thesis I analyze the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ concept in the Russian foreign policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The utilization of this conception by political elites in Russia as a particular assertive foreign policy strategy toward the other former Soviet republics normally leads analysts to link it to Moscow’s continuity of Soviet policies toward their satellite countries. It is argued in this thesis that despite such a reference, the ‘near abroad’ strategy of Russia has a different background in the post-Soviet times. After the breakup of the Soviet Union such assertive foreign policy toward the ‘near abroad’ states was not instrumentally constructed by the political elites. It was instead based on the existing societal construct of the perception of the post-Soviet countries from within Russia as well as generally in the post-Soviet states which are identified by popular discourse there as the ‘near abroad’ countries. In this research, I utilize discourse analysis to make a logical claim which supports the constructivist argument of the impact of ideas on policies. As it appears from the analysis, as a result of psychological, historical and cultural causes the societal consensus on the ‘near abroad’ emerged and this was prior to the political rhetoric utilization of this concept, which rejects the argument of the purely instrumental origin of the ‘near abroad’ and confirms the claims contended on the logical basis.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Tamás Meszerics for his valuable and thoughtful advices and suggestions without which this research would be hardly possible, to my parents whose long-term guidance over myself have formed my current perspectives, to my friends and future colleagues – Timur Onica, Liubov Yaroshenko, and Albert Zulkharneyev – for their insightful ideas and engaging discussions that would not let my brain rest, and to Nataliya who strongly encouraged me during this research and beyond.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH .....	8
1.1.1. <i>Socially Constructed Reality</i> .....	9
1.1.2. <i>Constructivism in International Relations Theory</i> .....	13
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE ‘NEAR ABROAD’ AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. COGNITIVE PERCEPTION.....	22
2.1.1. <i>History of Emergence</i> .....	24
2.1.2. <i>Indications of the Societal ‘Near Abroad’</i> .....	28
2.1.3. <i>Societal Consensus on the ‘Near Abroad’</i> .....	30
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE ‘NEAR ABROAD’ AS AN INSTRUMENTALIST TOOL.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1. THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT.....	33
3.1.1. <i>The ‘Near Abroad’ before and after the Collapse of the USSR</i> .....	34
3.1.2. <i>The Military Sector Variable: Failed Conversion</i> .....	37
3.1.3. <i>Which Path to Take: the Great post-Soviet Identity and Foreign Policy Debate in Russia</i> .....	42
3.1.4. <i>Political Consensus on the ‘Near Abroad’</i> .....	46
3.1.5. <i>Materialization of the Concept in Foreign and Security Policies</i> .....	49
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1. RUSSIANS IN THE SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>59</b>

## Introduction

At the very beginning of 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union opened up room for new political, economic, and cultural formations. Such a sudden event created a political and economic gap, the challenge of which was to rest on the shoulders of political elites of the newly independent states. It also created an identity gap<sup>1</sup> for a large part of the population of the former USSR. The latter, in fact, reflected not only on the society but also on the political discourse.

The lasting creation of the Soviet people with a single country, a single culture, and a single major language – which was Russian – for communication in various spheres amongst different ethnic groups who populated the country had had an impact of varying degree on the titular and minority groups in the ex-Soviet states. This was more than apparent when the USSR suddenly ceased to exist. While the titular ethnic groups who lived mostly in their respective newly independent countries escaped the identity crisis by referring to pre-soviet history with subsequent attempts to redefine their identities, the Russian minorities outside of Russia who happened to remain in those republics after the USSR fell were significantly challenged in how to redefine themselves. While for the Russians in Russia to identify themselves was a less pressing issue, the identification problem occurred both to bring together the identities of Russians in Russia and of the Russian minorities outside of Russia in the ex-Soviet republics<sup>2</sup>.

In this thesis, I study a sudden disintegration of a for-decades-single society which was divided by state borders as a result of a rapid unexpected state dissolution. When the USSR ceased to exist, millions of Russians wound up outside of Russia and, more importantly, in

---

<sup>1</sup> Igor Kon, (1993): Identity Crisis and Postcommunist Psychology, *Symbolic Interaction* 16 (4), 400.

<sup>2</sup> David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: the Russian-speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

different countries which used to be one. Due to the sudden emergence of new countries and new borders, a societal shock from the new paradigm followed. The shock reflected the need to accommodate such reality to the aspirations of the society that felt divided and was uncomfortable with such newly emerging reality. The natural response to such shock was to put the newly independent states into what had been later termed as the ‘near abroad.’ The ‘near abroad’ notion is interesting in itself as the by default reaction to the abrupt change of paradigm and strife to accommodate old and new perceptions of reality and, thus, identity.

Another interesting part draws attention to the instrumental use of the concept by the political elites in Russia. In mid 1990s relations of Moscow with the post-Soviet space were considered more important than with the USA or Europe.<sup>3</sup> By mid 1990s, the conception of the ‘near abroad’ was reflected in the security and foreign policy concepts of the Russian Federation as the area of priority for the Russian Foreign Policy. The same idea was later translated into the Russian national security strategy in 2000 under the new – Putin – administration. The post-Soviet Russian elite evidently did not neglect the opportunity to take advantage of such societal predisposition to further its geopolitical initiatives and interests in the post-Soviet space.

The idea of a different – closer – abroad can be traced back to the socialist camp countries, when Moscow’s satellites were explicitly referred to as an extension of domestic policies of the Soviet Union. In the past, politically constructed idea of relations with the socialist bloc countries was by analogy inherited by post-soviet political elites to institutionalize the societal construction of the ‘near abroad’ at the dawn of the post-Soviet era. The puzzling part is that although this can be interpreted as the continuity from the Soviet to Russian foreign policies. In fact, similar policies toward the ‘near abroad’ in post-Soviet Russia are based, in contrast to the Soviet ones, on the societal construct of the ‘near abroad’

---

<sup>3</sup> Nikita Lomagin, (Spring 2000): *Novie nezavisimiye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i SShA* [Newly Independent States as the Sphere of Interests for Russian and the US], *Pro et Contra*, 5 (2): 65-85.

which allow political elites to easily exercise the political rhetoric pertaining to it. The pre-existing shorthand was in the background as an analogy in the emergence of the social construct of ‘near abroad’ which was institutionalized by the countries’ political elites.

This thesis focuses on answering the following questions. What caused the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ in early 90’s? What are the origins of the concept as such? Where does the concept in the political discourse come from and what does it denote? In what way and for what purposes was the concept employed?

The evidence of the existence of a societal consensus on the view toward ‘near abroad’ before such consensus appeared in the political circles supports my hypothesis that the phenomenon is socially constructed as it appears prior to any instrumentalization in political discourse. Thus, mine is a logical claim that emergence of a construct socially precedes its reification instrumentally. In this research, I do not touch upon an analytical claim though.

In this thesis I argue that the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ in the early 1990s was a social phenomenon resulting from the sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union and disintegration of a people who having been born in one country suddenly ended up in different ones. The response to the collapse of the former paradigm paved the way for the creation of a societal construct of ‘near abroad’ denoting former fifteen Soviet republics as opposed to ‘far abroad’ indicating the rest of the world for the transition period to overcome such shock.

Although the political elites took over the phenomenon for rhetorical purposes, the phenomenon in itself has significant independent power. Instrumental use of the socially viable construct limits room for maneuver for rhetorical purposes. When Political elites wish to discard the notion they will have to look for societal consensus on that. Alternatively, disappearance of the notion from the political discourse and its concurrent survival on a social

level leaves much room for maneuver to prove the constructivist argument that ideas can exist by themselves.

To prove my hypothesis I take on the constructivist theory from the point of view where I analyze the emergence and sustainability of the ‘near abroad’ concept. I use two dimensions of the theory. First, I dwell upon the hypothesis of the social construction of reality, the idea of which became famous with the work of Berger and Luckmann<sup>4</sup> who argue that reality is constructed through participants’ perception of reality and is enhanced through intersubjective communication, which builds on their understanding and, thus, develops the perceived reality in a coherent construct. Second, from the discussion of a social phenomenon I switch to a more specific discussion about particular influence of social constructions on the interests and identities of political actors. At this point the discussion starts from the outline of constructivism in international relations theory. Overall, in this thesis I avoid theorizing the role of ideas in the relations and attitudes of states in the international arena. Instead, I rather give more attention to the impact of socially constructed views on the formation and formulation of those ideas and the vision of strategic paths of a state as derived from them.

In my view – and here I agree with Pursiainen<sup>5</sup> – constructivism can be more insightful in the unfolding of the ‘near abroad’ and factors influencing its development. A realist perspective has somewhat lesser tools to capture some of the important intervening variables such as emergence of new ideas and societal perceptions of reality. Idealism, in contrast, would miss out on the crude realities and would be at the other end of the spectrum missing out on a huge part of explanatory power. In addition, structuralism and neoliberalism focusing overwhelmingly on some factors miss out on a good part of others. Similarly, as Hopf pointed out, neorealism “captures only a fraction of empirical reality with its assumption that different

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Christer Pursiainen, *Russian Foreign Policy and International Relations Theory*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000.



distributions of power tend to produce different propensities toward balancing behavior by great powers.”<sup>6</sup> Constructivism in this respect can be regarded, as rightly contended by Adler<sup>7</sup>, a middle ground that accurately recognizes factors present in the conception of the ‘near abroad’ in the Russian foreign policy.

The topic I develop in this thesis has received considerable attention in the scholarly literature. However, most of the approaches are from the stance of the realist assumptions, less from the constructivist perspective, and just a few discussed it from the idealist viewpoint. I believe that the particular phenomenon of the ‘near abroad’ has not received proper attention in the constructivist literature which I to some extent overcome in this research.

There have been large contributions of a number of renowned scholars in the field to the constructivist interpretation of the Russian foreign policy. As argued by Pursiainen,<sup>8</sup> in the Russian foreign policy toward the ex-Soviet countries neither structural realist nor neoliberal institutionalism most carefully captures the policy variation. In contrast, constructivism can successfully overcome such gap. Similarly, from the constructivist basis, Tsygankov<sup>9</sup> pointed out internal and external factors determining the foreign policy of Russia by retrospectively tracing the continuity of the Moscow’s external directions from Gorbachev to Putin. In my mind, Ted Hopf<sup>10</sup> most closely approached to the constructivist claims in singling out the social cognitive factors to account for driving forces in the foreign policy of Kremlin during Soviet and post-Soviet times, particularly, toward the post-Soviet space.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, 271.

<sup>7</sup> Emanuel Adler, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3): 319-63.

<sup>8</sup> Christer Pursiainen, *Russian Foreign Policy and International Relations Theory*, Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Lanham, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Yet, some areas have remained underdeveloped and, thus, in need of research. Having generally picked up where Hopf left the debate, I focus on the emergence of new circumstances that induced the emergence of new identities. My primary focus, as an original contribution of this thesis, is on societal predisposition to new social constructs and the nature of new identities appearing at the beginning of 1990s in the post-Soviet world. Particularly, I contend that the ‘near abroad’ as a social construct is independent from the ‘near abroad’ as a rhetorical device of the Russia’s foreign policy. Moreover, the socially constructed ‘near abroad’ temporarily precedes the instrumental ‘near abroad,’ which in fact paved the way for a logic claim in favour of constructivism.

Second, attention is devoted to an analysis of the emerging political recognition of the already existing societal consensus on the perception of the post-Soviet countries and, then, building on it political consensus on the reflection of ‘near abroad’ amongst political elites. I do not extend Hopf’s thesis that identities *per se* have an impact in policy practices. Instead, I argue that an identity as cognitive societal perceptions of realities can (but not necessarily should) have such impact, which makes clear why my logical is different from an analytical one. This I show through the example of instrumentalization of the ‘near abroad’ concept by political elites in Russia to use it for foreign policy purposes.

In this research, I start by outlining the theoretical framework of the thesis to provide theoretical basis for the hypothesis I contend. Here I give a theoretical discussion on the social construction of reality and constructivism in international relations. In the second chapter an in-depth discussion on the causes of the emergence of the social construct of the ‘near abroad’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union is provided. Here I also provide the meanings of the ‘near abroad’ as a socially constructed phenomenon. The third chapter starts with the retrospective analysis of the ‘near abroad’ emergence and development until the present day and the factors that contributed to its instrumental usage now and in retrospect. This chapter is

also devoted to defining the ‘near abroad’ notion as an instrumental device. Finally, I conclude with prospects for further research.

In this thesis I use discourse analysis to, first, provide theoretical framework for the discussion of the phenomenon and then to analyze particularly the emergence and development of the phenomenon and its peculiarities.

To outline the constructivist approach for the analysis and discussion to follow, I look at the major works on constructivism. The theoretical outline provides room for the discussion on the emergence and sustainability of a societal phenomenon to follow. Here I mainly utilize the condensed outline of scholarly debate on the social construction of reality and constructivism.

In order to trace the grounds for the emergence of a socially constructed notion of the ‘near abroad’ as opposed to ‘far abroad’ I use discourse analysis to look at the popular discourse on the perception of what is foreign and not foreign for the societies in the former Soviet republics. This also presents the most challenging issue in this thesis and in the research beyond that. First, it is very hard to account for the existence or inexistence of a social reality in general since it is not obviously apparent. Second, there is a number of issues that constrain the possibility of conducting an independent sociological research to determine the existence of the societal origin of the concept I deal with.

To show the instrumentalization of the phenomenon, discourse analysis is used to look at the statements of public servants and politicians as well as political documents of the Russian Federation. Overall, I use discourse analysis to depict the emergence and usage of the ‘near abroad’ concept. I also rely on political documents and public political statements in the media, other than scholarly literature.

# Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This chapter is devoted to expand on the theoretical background I build my thesis on and the grounds and assumptions on which I defend my hypothesis. I start from a more general discussion of social construction of reality and continue with more specific for this research outline of constructivist approach in international relations theory. For these two parts, I devote two separate subchapters. I also briefly show the connection of the theoretic framework to the hypothesis of this research.

## ***1.1. Constructivist Approach***

I find it important to start from the discussion of the social nature of reality since the key concept of this research – ‘near abroad’ – has as I contend emerged as a result of social agreement. Secondly, after discussion the social construction I go on to discussing the international relations theoretical perspective on the phenomenon and leave the sociological theory of social construction of reality in the background.

This way I intend not to present the major debate on constructivism in its entirety as this is hardly a formidable afford for the research undertaken. Instead, I briefly focus on outlining major assumptions and arguments of both social construction of reality and constructivism as an international relations theory to introduce a reader to the less theoretical chapters to follow.

I use constructivism as it better explains both the emergence of the societal phenomenon of the ‘near abroad’ and its instrumental usage by political elites. Not only is the theory able to account for the ground of the existence of ‘near abroad’ as a socially constructed reality, it is equally able to capture the fact of instrumentalization of the construct into political discourse in order to operationalize rhetorics with an already existing and socially meaningful tool. In addition, constructivism can throw some light on the limitations of the instrumental

use of a socially created and meaningful idea. Such constraints relate to the flexibility of political elites in the utilization of the reality for furthering policy objectives and the ability to either emphasize or neglect the construct.

### **1.1.1. Socially Constructed Reality**

According to Berger and Luckmann<sup>11</sup>, social reality is created and supported through social interaction. Individuals perceive the reality of everyday life subjectively and only through communication with other individuals – intersubjective communication – who face the same or similar reality arrive at the social construction of reality, to put briefly, “a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, what might seem obvious and natural to many is actually a social construct. Common sense in this case helps not only to create a socially perceived reality but also to recreate it. When reality changes people by means of heuristics accommodate and reintegrate new reality in their common perception.

The idea of the reality, which is created by agreement among members of that reality, seems quite clear and non-arbitrary, however, apart from the whole sequence of how the construct is being built into socially accepted one there are a number of less straightforward assumptions. Mostly I would like to point out that I focus on one major assumption of how social constructs come about. Any notion or concept, should it be a concept of money or marriage which are frequent sociological examples of social constructs, appear with the almost mutual agreement of an entire society where the concept appears. Yet, I acknowledge the difference between the socially constructed reality and reality independent of social

---

<sup>11</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

agreement. I point out the importance of socially constructed reality for this research since a core concept of the research is a social construct.

The starting point in the social construction of reality is the appearance of a new object or phenomenon that engages personal attention and requires accommodating itself into the bulk of the notions already at hand. Thus, everyday commonplace encounters are captured by a human mind and extend the collection of realities humans live in. By means of conceptualizing reality, everyday life is structured within temporal and spatial coordinates. As has been noted by Berger and Luckmann, “the reality of everyday life is organized around the ‘here’ of my body and the ‘now’ of my present.”<sup>13</sup> This is a personal conceptualization in the everyday life. Yet, there is societal conception of everyday reality as perceived by a collective.

Before any objectively existing reality turns into a social construct, it should be not only shared in terms of its raw realities but also in terms of equally shared perception of a particular reality. Such shared with others common sense of reality is achieved through intersubjective nature of everyday world, which is not unique with any particular person. Since “the reality of everyday life further presents itself . . . as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others”<sup>14</sup> by means of everyday interaction with those others for whom the reality is the same and only the perception of it is different. This difference in the perception is further mutually adjusted in intersubjective communication until the point when there is some at least basic common ground on perceiving this reality. This is a simple path of how a concept gets into the body of socially shared knowledge.

Here I would like to draw the reader’s attention to a simple, however never simplistic, argument about the formation of a human being in a society. As put by Berger and Luckmann,

---

<sup>13</sup>Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 37.

“*Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, while a good part of what a human represents is constructed by the interaction with the reality usually referred to as socialization, from this point it is easier to conceive other reality as being constructed by ourselves and for ourselves.

Searle differentiates between the constructed reality: dependent on our perception of it as “facts dependent of human mind”<sup>16</sup> – which he calls socially constructed – and the reality which exists independently of us – the existence of which is sufficient regardless of anyone’s constructing it. There is part of reality the existence of which is independent of human perception and relation toward it and other part of the reality the existence of which depends only on the stance, attitudes or opinions of us as observers who experience this reality. Searle, therefore, agrees with his predecessors in the field of sociology of knowledge – Berger and Luckmann – that “there are portions of the real world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement.”<sup>17</sup> In sum, we can see that at the end of the day it ultimately takes social consensus on a particular social fact for this fact to actually become one for the common perception. This is because in the case of social facts, as Searle calls social phenomena, “the attitude that we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, social order is not given but produced by men. Since “social order exists only as a product of human activity”<sup>19</sup> there is room for further elaboration on social order which is a clear form of a social construct.

The less straightforward part begins with the construction of social reality for the sake of extending the existing reality of existence. Since “man’s self-production is always, and if necessary, a social enterprise” and they “produce a human environment, with the totality of its

<sup>15</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 69.

<sup>16</sup> John R. Searle, *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press 1995, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, , 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 70.

sociocultural and psychological formations,”<sup>20</sup> therefore humans extend their reality by producing social constructs of reality. This is done in order to fill in some gap or satisfy the need for, metaphorically speaking, a bridge between the already existing either independently from human capacities or socially constructed reality. To put it bluntly, a human creates some realities for their own convenience, otherwise these constructions would not appear. Otherwise by saying that as “man externalizes himself, he constructs the world into which he internalizes himself. In the process of externalization, he projects his own meaning into reality”<sup>21</sup> Berger and Luckmann particularly point to this idea as objective need for and, therefore, a cause of creation of social constructs. What the authors ultimately claim cannot be called the universal constructionism as was noted by Hacking but they rather speak of the idea about “the social construction of our sense of, feel for, experience of, and confidence in, commonplace reality.”<sup>22</sup>

Finally, most interesting in the framework of this research is the idea of the social construction of newly emerging realities. Since social construction of reality is an ongoing and never-ending process, it is necessary to remark on dynamics peculiar to it. Berger and Luckmann mention that “new ideas may appear when the old ones no longer adequately explain the empirical phenomenon existing at hand.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge both the construction of social reality and reconstruction of it as a structural adjustment to the changing objective reality. This usually happens when continuity is interrupted, then “the reality of everyday life seeks to integrate the problematic sector into what is already unproblematic”<sup>24</sup> and, hence, bridge the gap and reestablish social order. By

---

<sup>20</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966, 200.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 38.



means of such adjustment and readjustment the continuity in social construction is maintained.

In summary, I point out cognitive capacities to construct social reality and societal ability to construct mutually agreed upon conceptions. Here the main focus is not on the construction of the reality as such, although this is where I spare myself more, but instead on the dynamic process of social construction and reconstruction or adjustment of reality when old constructs happen to be outdated and therefore discarded by again social agreement. There also is historical possibility for manipulations of political groups. However, as Butler refers to the functionalist reasoning that, “an identity should be first in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken.”<sup>25</sup> To this point I return and concentrate on when discussing the constructivist approach in international relations theory which is the subject matter for the following subchapter.

### 1.1.2. Constructivism in International Relations Theory

Here I switch from the social construction of the overall general reality of everyday life to the constructivist view in international relations theory. I believe that the two approaches - one from sociology and the other from international relations – are strongly interconnected, as “constructivism believes that International Relations consist primarily of social facts, which are facts only by human agreement.”<sup>26</sup>

By providing a brief overview of the constructivist stance I focus on two major points of constructivist elaboration. The first of the two points refers to the value and norm based perception and the second refers to the rapid shift in ideas during the times when the window of opportunities is especially wide open. Even though it is recognized that there are different

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, “Identity, Deconstruction, and Politics” in *Social Construction: a Reader*, ed. Mary and Kenneth J. Gergen (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003), 129.

<sup>26</sup> Emanuel Adler, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3), 323.

strands of constructivism, I do not go into the debate about drawing borderlines in between different strands of the same approach and adopting any particular strand in this research, as I find the enterprise to be of little insight for this thesis. In contrast, I find it sufficient to introduce the theoretical background of constructivism in general where representatives of different sub-approaches within constructivism would still be able to agree. This is why a reader might notice references on constructivist scholars of different strands of constructivism.

Constructivists in the field of political science agree that what is known about the surrounding reality largely comes from what society knows about it or, to be more accurate, how society actually perceives it. Constructivist idea of the social element in the construction of the material world became popular for the ability to account for a larger number of factors. As noted by Adler, “the real world out there . . . is not entirely determined by physical reality and is socially emergent.”<sup>27</sup> Giving more importance to “the identities, interests, and behavior of political agents [which] are socially constructed by collective meanings and, interpretations and assumptions about the world”<sup>28</sup> provides more room for explanation in the identity building and communication politics in general. It also takes into consideration a popular societal discourse in pursuit of ultimate question of ‘quo vadis?’ for a nation and, therefore, for its political elite.

Popular societal discourse should not in this case be regarded as benign, since it does not represent a basic common popular will as such that political elites impose from above. Just the other way around, this is an implicit social consensus on major realities existing in a society as objective things in the conception of those living in this reality and inevitably developing through mutual interaction a common perception of it. Constructivists, in particular, try to account for the emergence of institutionalized practices and institutional

---

<sup>27</sup> Emanuel Adler, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3), 324.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 324.

change. In this last respect, the theory is significant in order to explain the emergence of a societal perception of a new paradigm in the post-Soviet space. It is also interesting in terms of the influence of this new socially agreed upon perception in policy practice.

Constructivist approach contending for the importance of ideas in the ‘construction’ of relations among states came, on the one hand, as a reaction to the realist and neorealist claim that only power is what reality matters in relations among states and, on the other hand, to the interpretive approach. Such a middle ground, as offered by Adler<sup>29</sup>, argues for the place in international relations theory discourse between interpretive approaches for which only ideas matter and rationalists for whom only behavioral responses is what can be taken into consideration in an analysis. Adler’s constructivism as a medium recognizes both that some reality exist prior to social construction and some although can be interpreted as raw data can bare interpretation which in itself is already a construction of such reality. It is consistent with Wendt who says that even such realist concepts as power politics is socially constructed.<sup>30</sup>

The assumption of the role of ideas in shaping politics comes to the significance of norms in the relations among states. It is important to include norms as they can be used to create leverage, since norms have instrumental values. This is why actors create norms to have the power of these instruments. The importance of norms had been particularly emphasized by Kowert and Lergo who although critically revise the importance of custom as opposed to capability and norm as opposed to material self-interest,<sup>31</sup> still remain positive on the impact of norms in the realm of politics just by delimiting their usage. Or as concluded by Hopf that grounds accounting for the threat emergence “can never be stated as an *a priori*,

<sup>29</sup> Emanuel Adler, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, *European Journal of International Relations* 3 (3).

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Wendt, (1992): Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46 (2): 391-425.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Lergo. *The culture of national security: norms and identity in world politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

primordial constant, it should be approached as a social construction of an Other, and theorized at that level”<sup>32</sup>

For instance, why do the two powerful states as the UK and the US do not perceive one another as a threat, which should be the case according to the rationalist claim of the impact of power politics? By the twenties century in general, which is particularly true for the West, warfare was excluded from the exercise of power.<sup>33</sup> For a constructivist it is clear that the common values in the two countries create common norms to build the cooperation between them. Similarly, the remaining threat left after perception of NATO in the former USSR was and is used. In Russia, this norm was instrumentalized in order for the defense elites to increase the financial supply of military sector which was about to decay at the beginning of 1990s. Therefore, the norm of hostility rhetorics as reflected from the actual hostile disposition between the countries was utilized instrumentally. It is consistent with Adler who says that ideas have direct or indirect effect on the construction of political agendas and disposition of political actors toward one another by drawing at socially emergent nature of reality arguing that, “the identities and, interests and behavior of political agents are socially constructed by collective meanings, interpretations and assumptions about the world.”<sup>34</sup>

For the discussion to follow, it is also important to mention the initial debate on constructivism as started by Onuf with his linguistic approach to the social construction of reality and generated by Wendt. Although Onuf was the one who introduced the concept in the international relations theory, Wendt in fact popularized it by pointing at the key assumptions of realists about the anarchical nature of inter-state relations. Wendt contended in

---

<sup>32</sup> Ted Hopf, (1998): The Promise of Constructivism International Relations Theory, *International Security* 23, 199.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Emanuel Adler, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3), 324.

his famous article of early 1990s that anarchy is what states make of it<sup>35</sup>. The phenomenon of anarchy, according to Wendt is socially constructed and depending on the interpretation of it by states determines whether the system will be more peaceful or can be characterized by warfare. This adds up to the bulk of key constructivist assumptions about the importance of the perception of reality as opposed to what it actually is, since the reality is not what it is until actors perceive it as such and say what it is and nothing else.

Nevertheless, the constructivist approach in Wendt's vision can hardly be strictly contrasted to the realist one, as the former shares a number of key assumptions with realists, such as the centrality of states in the international system and the anarchical nature of international system. What constructivists add to that is that the way politics unfold is not historically given but constructed as "identities and interests are constructed and supported by intersubjective practice."<sup>36</sup> Identity is in this case set forth as more basic than are interests and it precedes them. As is aforementioned, Wendt views anarchy in cultural terms as a social construct.

I see the emergence of 'near abroad' as a socially constructed phenomenon which had been skillfully instrumentalized by political elites to return to the realm of high politics and regain a formerly high status. The 'near abroad' is thought as its own security for the people living in Russia which is being used by political elites. With the collapse of the Soviet Union some groups, such as those overlooking the military sector was threatened with the loss of power. In their pursuit to survive under new circumstances, they tried to regain authority by creating threats that did not exist anymore but still remained in the perception of society as such. After the disappearance of threats, the military successfully used the still existent social perception to return to such an agenda.

---

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Wendt, (1992): Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46 (2): 391-425.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Wendt, (1992): Levels of Analysis vs. Agents and Structures: Part III. *Review of International Studies* 18, referenced in *Constructivism in International Relations: the Politics of Reality* by Maja Zehfuss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 12.

As a result of Westernization, Russia found out that due to the liberalization many groups can lose their positions (this again a sore point for the military sector). Westernization in Russia as well as throughout the post-Soviet space destructed the old system but never established a viable substitute. In the West, they refused to recognize Russia's space of exclusive influence. Therefore, Russian political elites switched to instrumentalizing the 'near abroad' and the rhetoric of common post-Soviet tradition and need for mutual reciprocal interaction in the time of transition. This was the way out in order not to lose leverage over former Soviet states.

Other than inherently constructivist claim about influence of ideas on politics and policy-making and on behavior of political actors and states in the international community, it is important to take into consideration that ideas have particularly prolific opportunity for such impact in times of rapid development and shock<sup>37</sup>. This is what Dueck calls "strategic ideas"<sup>38</sup> – a term denoting ideas and belief systems which serve as guidance and cognitive shortcuts during the periods of uncertainty.

Such a period of uncertainty for the Russian political elite existed after the dissolution of the USSR. This can explain why Russia had a significant turn toward the West which later became disapproved of due to: unrealized hopes of Russian political elite and – related to that – the vague acceptance of Russia by the European community,<sup>39</sup> and, hence, reconceptualization of Russian foreign policy toward strengthening ties with and, subsequently, leverage over the former Soviet states. I later in this thesis argue that the first several year of the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy were characterized by uncertainty rather than clear-cut Westernization. From this, it is clear that during this period of change and uncertainty a more refined alternative policy toward the former Soviet states as the area of

---

<sup>37</sup> Colin Dueck, (2004): Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy 2000-2004, *Review of International Studies*, 30 (4): 511-535.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 518.

<sup>39</sup> Here mean not the European communities which in 1993 reified as the European Union, but generally of the community of the Western European liberal democracies.

priority followed. This is consistent with Dueck who mentions that ideas have a tremendous impact in grand strategy development as they have the ability to frame interests under the conditions of uncertainty and, thus, have the power of their own.<sup>40</sup>

The socially nascent cognitive shortcut of different perception of ‘near abroad’ amongst the ex-Soviet countries as well as perception of the West and its institutions as the still enemies allowed Russian political elites to frame it appropriately. Since the people having been socialized in a single country appear suddenly in different states with only nascent various traditions of socialization. This has been used in instrumentalizing the construct for the purposes of introducing a different foreign policy toward the former USSR states calling for closer ties and pronouncing the territory of the ex-Soviet states as the priority region in the foreign polity concepts of the Russian Federation starting from mid 1990s.

For the reading of the next chapters, it would be necessary to remember that much room for the argument of social constructivist is not because everything is constructed. There is consensus amongst sociologists that there are things that are independent of social construction as well as there are phenomena that actually depend on social construction of it. Since at the core of my thesis is the concept of ‘near abroad’ which, I believe, is socially constructed I therefore emphasize the second part of the theory.

Also coming from the sociological social construction of things there is transition to the social construction of realities in the international relations theory. Similarly, relations among states in the international community are constructed through the perception of compatibility of norms and the significance of ideas. This is why a realist claim does not always hold in contending that power politics and balance of power is the only determinant in inter-state interaction. The constructivist assumption that ideas as social constructs have the power of their own and can (and do) influence political decisions as be shown throughout the research

---

<sup>40</sup> Colin Dueck, (2004): Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy 2000-2004, *Review of International Studies*, 30 (4), 523.

analyzing the phenomenon of the ‘near abroad’ in the post-Soviet space. Most importantly in the discussion above is that constructivists recognize the existence of material world independently from and in interaction with the social reality. Ultimately, to conclude I may offer a quote from the book edited by Kubáľková, Onuf, and Kowert who summarize that “constructivism maintains that sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice, and seeks to explain how this construction takes place.”<sup>41</sup>

In this theoretical chapter, there are two significant parts of the theory which are important for this thesis. First, I use in the thesis a notion which is socially constructed, as recognized by the theory of the social construction of reality and, second, the constructivism in international relations theory is handy as it explains that impact of ideas on policies. The second part, thus, serves as solid theoretical basis for the argument on the influence of the societal ‘near abroad’ on the reification of the instrumental ‘near abroad,’ which I develop in the subsequent chapters.

---

<sup>41</sup> Vendulka Kubáľková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert, “Introduction: Constructing Constructivism” in *International Relations in a Constructed World*, ed. Vendulka Kubáľková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 20.



## Chapter 2: The ‘Near Abroad’ as a Social Construction

Курица не – птица,  
Польша – не заграница.  
*Chicken is not a bird,*  
*Poland is not abroad*<sup>42</sup>

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ as a social construct. The task of this chapter is to show why there was room for the emergence of such a social construct, what caused it, and what indicators contributed to such a perception of the post-Soviet space not only in Russia but also in the other post-Soviet republics. Here I also define what the ‘near abroad’ meant in societal terms. I show that ultimately the vision of the former Soviet citizens toward the post-Soviet space came prior to any similar instrumentally materialized notions.

There are certain constraints in this research which are connected to and reflected in this particular chapter. One such obvious constraint is the length of the research and time limit to conduct it which prevented me from conducting a fully-fledged sociological study which would aim at pointing precise indicators of the ‘near abroad’ in the 1990s. There is also a constraint related to the lack of my personal proper training to conduct such a sociological study. The ultimate constraint is the vagueness of the whole notion of social reality. Any social construct is very ambiguous and, thus, hard to state its existence. There is no yardstick measure which would be able to clearly identify social reality immediately as it emerges. Therefore, I will defend my hypothesis by noting its existence through indicators which identify such existence or at least make it very plausible.

Despite the abovementioned boundaries there is enough evidence from the existing body of research to analyze and draw some conclusions. In particular, I resort to a number of

---

<sup>42</sup> A Russian saying used to indicate the common basic truth on the perception of ‘abroad’.

surveys done previously and related to my study. I show the indicators which allow us to be rather plausible about the thesis of the ‘near abroad’ as a societal phenomenon.

Since I am interested primarily in the influence of ideas among Russians on Russia’s foreign policy, I do not provide an in-depth analysis of the conceptualizing of the ‘near abroad’ among the non-Russians in the post-Soviet countries outside of Russia. Unless, however, it directly or indirectly touches upon my argument on the impact of ideas on policy making, which is given strong focus in the next chapter.

### **2.1. Cognitive Perception**

The emergence of the ‘near abroad’ in societal consciousness was reflected immediately with the cessation of the fourteen republics from under the control of Moscow. Even though there was unanimity in the disintegration of the USSR, the peoples in the post-Soviet societies subconsciously and frequently consciously rejected to view the other countries of the former Soviet Union as fully-fledged foreign states. This does not imply any societal indication of threat to the sovereignty of those countries, but rather a social reflection on the cognitive perception of reality.

The possibility for this phenomenon to occur was large, therefore, its appearance on the societal level is not surprising. The shock as a natural response to such rapid state disintegration created the identity gap reflecting the demise of state, which in social terms would be followed with demise of a society that used to be common to everyone. Almost all people at the beginning of the post-Soviet era either were born in the Soviet Union or grew up and socialized there or both and as a result perceived it as a single state. Even a more painful and awkward identity gap appeared for the ethnic Russians who all of a sudden appeared to be in different and legally foreign states. This not only broke down an ethnic group into different societies, but in all the cases put them in an unusual non-titular position.

Along with the unavoidable societal shock unavoidable in the light of a state disintegration there were a number of other factor which could (and did) contribute to the creation of the ‘near abroad.’ In the earlier years of NIS era, there were many reminders about the common Soviet past. It is important to stress that it was shared. Large number of people possessed and largely still bear the cultural societal heritage inherited from living and socializing in the USSR. Ultimately, this made people coming from the different post-Soviet societies have a lot in common, which they did not with other people outside of the post-Soviet space. For a number of societies in the post-Soviet space the ‘near abroad’ was also an extension of kinfolks.

The existence of the ‘near abroad’ phenomenon has consistently appeared in a number of different surveys conducted for different purposes by social scientists in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In different forms they depict the attitudes toward the post-Soviet space from within this space. They also point out the differentiated and identity lost perception of the Russian in the ‘near abroad.’ All that allows me to confirm the existence of the ‘near abroad’ phenomenon.

Finally, I provide an outline of what the ‘near abroad’ phenomenon meant (and means) in popular discourse. Different facets and connotation are taken into account as they are applied to the ‘near abroad’ countries. I also briefly differentiate the societal sentiment to the concept in different societies in defining the meaning of the phenomenon.

In sum, the following three subsections aim at respectively answering the following questions. Why should (and could) there appears such a phenomenon? What evidence gives us the possibility to identify and claim there is such phenomenon? What is the definition of the ‘near abroad’ in societal terms?

### 2.1.1. History of Emergence

The dissolution of the USSR to begin with and the transition period which followed created room for the incremental adjustment toward conceptualizing the recently renewed space of the former Soviet Union republics. Just the pure means of legal disintegration did not make the societies more prone to immediately switch to viewing former constituting parts of the same country they used to belong to as completely foreign states. On the other hand, there were many things – empirical and cultural – which remained after the Soviet Union and the existence of which is reminiscent of the common part. This ultimately made it difficult from the point of view of any post-Soviet citizen to put the rest of the post-Soviet countries into what can be regarded as ‘full abroad’.

The perception of the post-Soviet space among ex-Soviet societies can be broken down to two: the Russian and the non-Russian. The majority in the former satellite republics could draw a difference in their view toward other former Soviet states conceptualizing them as the ‘near abroad’ as opposed to the ‘far abroad’ – basically, all other countries. For Russian citizens and the Russians living outside of Russia such conceptualization of the ‘near abroad’ affinity was strengthened by the fact of millions of Russians living outside of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The psychological transition period had to be there in order to accommodate the cognitive disparity between the past and the present on the edge of such fundamental events unfolding in 1991. The best response to accommodate such a cognitive shock was a response very likely to bridge the two visions of the reality: one from the past and the other from the present and, to some extent in the early 1990s, of an uncertain future. This cognitive bridge resulted in a new conception arising in the popular opinion of the view of the post-Soviet countries and societies – the conception of the ‘near abroad.’ Such conception did not contradict the existing reality as there were certainly more similarities empirically (especially

in the just nascent newly independent states) among the post-Soviet states as opposed to any other.

A strong argument for the possibilities of the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ concept is a middle path between one’s homeland and what can be referred to, in contrast, as ‘abroad.’ The emergence of this middle path can be due to the existence (especially right after the dissolution of the USSR) of a lot of small reminders about the common past, which to some extent translated into the present. Such a theory was introduced by Michael Billig in his *Banal Nationalism*<sup>43</sup> where the author pointed out a number of what he called ‘reminders’ which contributed to the sense of common nationhood. Billig also mentions the term ‘flagging’ to point out that there is always a continuous reminder of nationhood.

Although this can be to a greater degree applied to the Russians in the post-Soviet space it is also to some extent true for other ethnic groups residing in the post-Soviet space. But as I draw on the implication of this social construct on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation and not any other state, I am interested, first of all, in the peculiarly the perception of the former Soviet Union countries by the Russians in the post-Soviet space.

These common features of the post-Soviet states ranged widely from visa regimes to the common media space, which ultimately contributed to preserving the links between post-Soviet states. Right after the collapse of the Union, people in different post-Soviet countries still had the same Soviet passports and there was a certain transition period for the exchange of those passports into new national passports or other identification documents. However, by the end of the 1990s a lot of people – predominantly pensioners – still carried an old Soviet passport, which in a few cases was associated with the sentiment toward the country which had ceased to exist, but rather reflected the inertia of the older generation to change the passport which was still considered valid. The old Soviet passport was valid in the nineties to

---

<sup>43</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

cross borders within the post-Soviet space and to travel beyond that. In addition, in the early nineties, the post-Soviet countries were a long way off adopting visa regimes against one another. Unlike today there did not exist visa regimes with Baltic states that now joined the EU and between Georgia and Russia. For those who traveled frequently, and there were quite a number of such people who were involved in small entrepreneur enterprises and, therefore, traveled much, the difference between the border checkpoints within the post-Soviet states and other countries, even with those countries to enter which one does not need a visa. Common passports and looser border checkpoints within the post-Soviet space were among several crucial factors which reflected in enhancing the societal 'near abroad.'

The media network space in the post-Soviet space also remained largely the same as in the Soviet Union with much TV broadcasting coming from Moscow. Russia could (and for many of the CIS countries still can) reach its former Union member-states through broadcasting its TV channels, despite the rapid development of national media in those countries. More interesting in this respect is the fact that now and back then in the early nineties media products remained to be very popular and often got higher rating than the Hollywood blockbusters. A peculiar feature of the media products – TV programs and films – is that in many of the CIS countries they are dubbed in their locals languages which is in most cases due to the respective legislation adopted. However, practically there is little reason to do that since Russian still remains in almost all of the post-Soviet countries (the Baltic states are an exception) at least comprehensible passively by the local population.

To a certain degree linguistic similarity also plays a role in maintaining links between the Slavic counties in the post-Soviet states. That is why a good command of Russian is very apparent especially in Ukraine and Belarus, which is due not only to the large Russian minorities there but also to the linguistic closeness in languages: these three languages belong to the eastern Slavic subgroup of languages, which makes them the closest possible to one

another. However, this was also the result of the Soviet Russification policy which limited the use of local languages. Instead, the use of Russian was very frequent, especially as a language of instruction in education institutions. In the USSR, Russian was clearly a *lingua franca*, which can be confirmed simply by the fact that doctoral dissertations in the USSR had to be written and defended in Russian. Such linguistic proficiency in a common language in the post-Soviet countries forced people once again make a distinction between the post-Soviet space the rest of the abroad.

The factor of the common past is linked to the argument about the inherent cultural cohesiveness as reflected in the civilizational aspect argued by Huntington in his famous *Clash of Civilizations*. One of the assumptions of the author draws on the non-clashes between culturally kin people – those belonging to the same civilization. In much of the post-Soviet space such civilization was, in Huntington's terms, an Orthodox one. Although not being generalizable for the entire post-Soviet space, the orthodoxy generally as specific culture among eastern Slavs prevails there and, therefore, serves as another point of measuring near of kin cultures, which in turn contributes to the cognitive enhancement of the 'near abroad' in the post-Soviet space.

Huntington arguing for the peaceful resolution of tensions between Russia and Ukraine regarding a number of issues – the post-Soviet settling of affairs such as Ukrainian nuclear arsenal, Black Sea Fleet, and most important of all – the territorial dispute over the Crimea which was put administratively by Khrushchev under to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954, made an interesting point in the civilizational perspective. Huntington said that, "if civilization is what counts, however, violence between Ukrainians and Russians is unlikely. These are two Slavic, primarily Orthodox people who have had close relationships for centuries and between whom intermarriage is common."<sup>44</sup> What followed was the

---

<sup>44</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, London: Touchstone, 1996, 167.

recognition of Crimean Peninsular as Ukrainian proper in 1997, which confirms the hypothesis about cohesiveness and the next of kin people.

Overall, there were a lot of reasons which contributed to the creation of the social construct of what was later termed by the Russian political elites the ‘near abroad.’ Apart from the cognitive shock as a response to the dissolution of the USSR, there were numerous transitional ‘leftovers’ from the Soviet times which reminded the citizens of the common past. Another factor to that was also the existence of cultural closeness amongst a number of countries of the former Soviet states.

### **2.1.2. Indications of the Societal ‘Near Abroad’**

Although the thesis does not aim particularly at testing the hypothesis argued for, there is nevertheless need to bring about some empirical evidence for the existence of social constructs. Despite the vagueness of social as such which has already been mentioned above, I present several surveys from the research of different scholars which are related to the topic of this thesis indirectly and are useful in hammering down and conceptualizing some of the issues related to the perception of the post-Soviet space from within. Since the claim in this thesis is logical it limits the use of any evidence indicating the societal consensus of the ‘near abroad’ coming from surveys which were conducted only prior to the established Russian foreign policy toward the ‘near abroad.’

Riasanovsky describing feeling regarding the USSR collapse which the Russian society was full of said that “the shock was enormous, mixed for very many Russians with great joy at the collapse of Communism.”<sup>45</sup> Such feelings especially in Russia were very frequently controversial. While people supported the dissolution of the Union in referenda throughout

---

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 231.



the former Soviet states, in Russia and in Russian ethnic diasporas there was strong regret in the loss of a great country status and ultimately the identity they subscribed to. Such a popular stance was reflected in polls conducted in Russia at the beginning of 1990s.

Pravda pointed out that popular sensitivity in Russia toward the post-Soviet countries was important in designing policies toward those states. By using the results of the polls conducted by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion the scholar points at the impact of the public vision toward the countries in the ‘near abroad’ where Russians live. He says that, “public sensitivity to the issues of Russian minorities in the former republics throughout the CIS was used by the opposition to highlight this as a top priority item on Moscow’s international agenda.”<sup>46</sup>

The elaboration of Huntington is partly confirmed by the polls conducted in Russia in 1994 and referenced by Pravda indication that “Ukrainians, regardless of the highly antagonistic picture painted by some Russian nationalists, were seen overwhelmingly as partners and friends.”<sup>47</sup> According to the polls in that period, many Russians shared a regret for the collapse of the USSR, the nostalgia was more pronounced among older people.

Many also favoured reintegration initiatives in the post-Soviet space, however not the restoration of the USSR, but softer forms of integration such advanced cooperation within the CIS framework. Measuring the public stance on the particular issue of whether the CIS can be a ‘zone of special interest’ two-fifths confirmed it while marginally fewer sided with the strategy which would recognize the relations as between fully independent states.<sup>48</sup> Support for the first option did not include tolerance to the use of military force, in contrast, intervention was strongly opposed even among people who felt nostalgic for the USSR.

---

<sup>46</sup> Alex Pravda, “The Public Policy of Foreign Policy” in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* by Nail Malcolm... [et al.] New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 189-190.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 192, See also VTsIOM (Vserossiiskiy Tsentr Izucheniya Obshchestvennogo Mneniya) 94-4 Monitoring Survey of Apr. 1994 (2,934 respondents, national sample); and Popov, ‘Vneshnyaya politika Rossii,’ pt. 2, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 169 – 230, See also VTsIOM poll 94-5 (May 1994)

Despite the lack of diversity of surveys pinpointing different facets of the issue, the evidence above is sufficient to declare the existence of the perception of the post-Soviet space as the ‘near abroad’ by Russians. The reasons for such a feeling toward other republics in the former Soviet Union are addressed in the preceding and following subsections, while this part dealt with analyzing public opinion to either confirm or reject the hypothesis. The confirmation of the hypothesis is reflected in the friendly disposition toward other countries of the ‘near abroad’ as a result of the remainder of the Soviet identity, cognitive perception of the present state of affairs, and cultural affinity.

### 2.1.3. Societal Consensus on the ‘Near Abroad’

This subsection is based on what has been said above and introduces the meaning of the ‘near abroad’ as a social construct. Despite its ambiguity I pinpoint the features which are peculiar of the Russia’s ‘near abroad,’ but also mention the meaning characteristically common to the post-Soviet space in general.

There can be singled out a number of distinctive features which denote different facets of the meaning of ‘near abroad’ in the Russia society as well as in the post-Soviet societies in general:

- There are about 25 million Russians in the post-Soviet space (accounting for approximately 17 percent of the total ethnic Russian population in the former Soviet Union)<sup>49</sup> which became a forced diaspora as a result of the state disintegration, and there are still very close ties with many family members back in Russia, which

---

<sup>49</sup> Pål Kolstø, *Political construction sites : nation-building in Russia and the post-Soviet states*. trans. Susan Høivik, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000, 82. For a more detailed outline of the ethnic Russian population in the post-Soviet states see Appendix 1. Also see Andrei Kortunov, “RUSSIA and the “NEAR ABROAD”: Looking for a Model Relationship” in *U.S.-Russian Partnership: Meeting the New Millennium* ed. Sergey Oznobishchev and James H. Brusstar (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, January 24, 2003); available from <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/books%20-%201999/US%20Russian%20Partnership%20July%201999/usrp7.html>; accessed May 25, 2007.

makes it hard to put those countries far from Russia in terms of family relations perspective,

- Given such a huge Russian diaspora in the post-Soviet countries, there is a natural societal focus on and sentiment toward those countries as opposed to others,
- The identity gap in the Russian society as a result of the USSR break up fostering “strife in the popular discourse within Russia to preserve the dominant positions in the lost territory is psychologically explainable,”<sup>50</sup>
- The societal ‘near abroad’ is a natural response to the shock destined to accommodate the inability to rapidly switch in cognitive perception to the new state paradigm in the post-Soviet space.
- In the post-Soviet space there is certain cultural capital that sustains the ‘near abroad’: common Soviet past and heritage, and the Russian language as a means of inter-ethnic communication in the ‘near abroad,’<sup>51</sup>
- It is clear that besides the common virtues, the post-Soviet countries “share a set of common problems, including environmental crises, economic dependence one another, and technological backwardness.”<sup>52</sup>
- The perception of maintaining the ability to influence other neighbouring countries contributes to the conception of Russia by its natives as a great country and because such a vision is so attractive, people express certain inertia toward recognizing new paradigm which is suboptimal (however, more accurate) to the new one. That was the “national pride after what can be regarded in Russia as a humiliating loss of

<sup>50</sup> Nikita Lomagin, (Spring 2000): *Novie nezavisimiye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i SShA*” [Newly Independent States as the Sphere of Interests for Russian and the US], *Pro et Contra*, 5 (2), p. 79

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Dmitri A. Fadeyev, Vladimir V. Razuvayev, “Russian and the Western Post-soviet Republics” in *Damage Limitation or Crisis? Russia and the Outside World*, ed. Robert D Blackwill and Sergei Karaganov (Washington: Brassey’s, 1994), 122.

international status.<sup>53</sup> In addition, Russia for a significant period of most of its recent history has been a so-called ‘elder brother’<sup>54</sup> to its immediate neighbours that were subjected to the Russian imperial rule which continued under the Soviet banner. That socially reflected on the perception of those countries as an indivisible part of Russia.

The peculiarity of this list is the fact that the above mentioned points can be applied not only to Russians. While most of them can be applied *only* to the Russian society, there are a number of points in its meaning which are generalizable on a societal level throughout the entire post-Soviet space.

In summary, the saying mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter is very familiar for many people coming from the post-Soviet societies and, though being outdated and in general anecdotal, concisely grasps the perception of the ‘near abroad’ concept from within. There is a certain closeness and similarity which societies perceive in the post-Soviet transition period and beyond. This is the result of multiple factors: cognitive shock related to the state disintegration, historical links, and cultural and ethnic affinity.

Since this thesis deals with a logical claim and for the last chapter below, it is important to point out the temporal boundaries of the emergence of the societal ‘near abroad.’ From the abovementioned analysis, it is clear that the ‘near abroad’ as a social construct could be clearly noticed already during the first years of the post-Soviet Russia before any political rhetoric either inconsistently sporadic and overall absent from the general scene of the political discourse.

---

<sup>53</sup> Nikita Lomagin, (Spring 2000): Novie nezavisimiye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i SShA” [Newly Independent States as the Sphere of Interests for Russian and the US], *Pro et Contra*, 5 (2), 92, See also Tolz, *The Burden of the Imperial Legacy*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> The role of the younger brother was commonly played during the imperial Russia by Ukraine then called *Malorosiya* (Little Russia).

## Chapter 3: The ‘Near Abroad’ as an Instrumentalist Tool

In this chapter the issues of the reification of the post-Soviet space as a priority area in the nascent Russian foreign policy of the early 1990s are raised. Starting from the last decades of the Soviet Union’s existence I touch upon how the USSR viewed the Warsaw pact countries and the foreign policy strategy toward them in order to link it to the perception of the ‘near abroad’ – though different – in the early years of the post-Soviet Russia. I particularly use the analysis of the foreign and security concept of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation to point out the instrumentalization of the ‘near abroad’ means in order to show its usage as an asset and a tool to exercise foreign policy objectives. Some room is also devoted to the actual outline of what the ‘near abroad’ for contemporary Russia and for purposes it has been given a particular space of influence.

In the retrospective analysis of the ‘near abroad’ materialization from the Soviet Union to Russia there is a particular focus on the debate about foreign policy intertwined with an identity debate which resulted in the consensus toward the ex-Soviet states as the ‘near abroad.’ Along with that, the research addresses specific reasons – beyond the identity debate and closer to economic and military causes – for the necessity of the restoration of tight relations with the ex-Soviet states.

### ***3.1. The Instrumentalization of the Concept***

One of the most engaging and well researched parts of this whole story might be the Russian foreign policy toward the former Soviet republics. However, some gaps in the existing body of literature give the opportunity to bridge the missing parts and combine them in a single piece in order to show from different facets the reification causes and outputs of

the ‘near abroad’ doctrine in the post-Soviet Russia, which is the focus of the subchapter below.

### **3.1.1. The ‘Near Abroad’ before and after the Collapse of the USSR**

Here I provide both the difference in the context of the conceptualization and the causes of resorting to the usage of the ‘near abroad’ instrumentally. First, I trace the ‘near abroad’ concept of foreign and security policy in the 1990s back to the Brezhnev Doctrine. Second, I give an outline of the precise circumstances which raised the alarm of the defense elite politically after Gorbachev’s conversion plan and further on during the early years of Yeltsin. Precisely, the continual decline of the military sector and failure of proper defense conversion in Russia were the factors that helped the former military elite regain its influence in the post-Soviet Russia.

The statement about the ‘near abroad’<sup>55</sup> – the territory of the ex-Soviet satellites of Moscow – as an inherent space of Russia’s influence was first mentioned in 1993 in the Russia’s foreign policy conception<sup>56</sup>. However, this tradition of satellite countries goes back to the Brezhnev times, when the whole bloc of Socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe was not only considered but also frequently proven to be as a territory of most immediate influence of Moscow.

A supposedly communist party analyst under the pseudonym Sergei Kovalev theoretically outlined what was later called ‘the Brezhnev doctrine.’ Initially in September 1968 in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* an article called “Sovereignty and the International

---

<sup>55</sup> Later – since 1996 – the wording of the ‘near abroad’ was omitted upon the request of the Council of Europe to the Russia Federation during the negotiations on Russian membership in the organization.

<sup>56</sup> Text of the Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (2000) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shackleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 27-64.

Obligations of Socialist Countries”<sup>57</sup> of the above mentioned author appeared. Two months later, in November, Leonid Brezhnev repeated this concept during the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party. In particular, his speech went on declaring that, “When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries.”<sup>58</sup> In the West it was termed as the ‘Brezhnev Doctrine,’ although generically such a concept was not original with Brezhnev. Namely, the Brezhnev Doctrine was a Soviet version of the Monroe doctrine. The similarity was traced by Glazer<sup>59</sup>, Franck and Weisband<sup>60</sup>, to mention just a few. Basically, this doctrine of ‘limited sovereignty’ theorized on justifications of subordinating the notion of sovereignty to the gains of socialism. In plain terms, such a doctrine toward the Eastern bloc countries indicated what was aptly noticed by Sanduc, a former Yugoslav correspondent to Moscow, that the USSR “regarded the socialist system as an extension of its own borders.”<sup>61</sup>

Later on, despite the introduction of ‘New Thinking’ by Gorbachev during *Perestroika*, a strong shade of ‘limited sovereignty’ doctrine was still present and the demise of the Brezhnev Doctrine was spurious, however, there is some disagreement on this point in the scholarship on Soviet foreign policy<sup>62</sup>. However, as Kubáľková and Cruickshank point out, “the doctrine of social internationalism<sup>63</sup> has been endorsed in all major political documents

<sup>57</sup> S. Kovalev, “Sovereignty and the International Obligations of Socialist Countries” [Suverenitet I internatsyonal’nye obiazanosti sotsialisticheskikh stran], *Pravda*, 26 Sept. 1968, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Leonid Brezhnev’s Speech at the Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party, Warsaw, 13 Nov. 1968, *Pravda*, 13 nov. 1968, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Steven G. Glazer, “The Brezhnev Doctrine,” *International Lawyer*, 5 (1): 1969-70, 168-79.

<sup>60</sup> Franck and Weisband, *World Politics*, 6 and in Robert A. Jones, *Soviet concept of 'limited sovereignty' from Lenin to Gorbachev: the Brezhnev Doctrine*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Robert A. Jones, *Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty' from Lenin to Gorbachev: the Brezhnev Doctrine*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 157.

<sup>62</sup> While Jones contends that Gorbachev’s ‘New Thinking’ did not clearly reject the Brezhnev Doctrine, Ouimet, and Garthoff note its decline with initiatives of conversion, *glasnost*, and demise of bi-polarity. See in Robert A. Jones, *Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty' from Lenin to Gorbachev: the Brezhnev Doctrine*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990, and Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and the Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003, and *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915 – 1991* ed. Willard C. Frank, Jr. and Philip S. Gillette (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992).

<sup>63</sup> This is another term for ‘limited sovereignty’ doctrine or Brezhnev Doctrine.

adopted since 1985.”<sup>64</sup> In general, the Soviet doctrine theoretically justified the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The intrusion in the internal affairs was pervasive through the entire time of the Union’s existence.

When the ‘near abroad’ strategy was officially introduced by Foreign Minister Kozyrev and later reaffirmed by his successor Primakov, it to a large extent conceptually reflected its aforementioned predecessor from the Soviet history. In this respect, the policy of ‘near abroad’ recognition in the Russian foreign policy is logically traceable from the original foreign policy of the Soviet Union. What can be peculiarly interesting and noteworthy is that unlike in the USSR its usage policy makers had to rely on the vague theorizing justifications of ideologists. In contemporary Russia, however, the conception of ‘near abroad’ rested on the shoulders of the respective social construct which emerged after and in a way as a result of the breakup of the Soviet Union.

There instrumental usage is closely related to the old and new threats. One of such threats was and remains to be NATO. Despite the thorny acceptance of the NATO enlargement in Europe Russia finally swallowed it in 1997. And yet Moscow could not “shake off some superpower fantasies when it comes to the ‘near abroad.’”<sup>65</sup> Psychologically, “many Russians still regard these countries [of the former Soviet Union] not merely as a sphere of influence, but as part and parcel of their own political identity. And Russia still has sufficient military muscle to play a school bully. Looked at from the West, Russia’s armed forces are a pathetic shadow of their former selves.”<sup>66</sup> Reliance on the popular opinion and feeding it with a shadow of the former great state has been one of the typical paths of Russian political elite in national reconciliation in general. Specifically, such popular sentiment

---

<sup>64</sup> See V.Kubáľková and A.A. Cruickshank, *Thinking New about Soviet ‘New Thinking,’* Berkley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1989, 98.

<sup>65</sup> Gale Stokes, “Introduction: Is Eastern Europe “Normal Yet?” in *The Challenge of Integration*, ed. Peter Rutland (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998) 14.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.



toward former Soviet republics was used to denote the 'Us' and the 'Other', where the 'Us' was not merely the Russian society, but beyond that all post-Soviet societies.

A more detailed discussion on what it meant and what it was constructed for is found later in this chapter. Before that I find it important to, first, discuss the issue of initiatives concerning defense industry conversion and subsequent behavior of military elite, which appears to be rather insightful in the analysis of the causes of the emergence of the 'near abroad' conception in political vocabulary.

### **3.1.2. The Military Sector Variable: Failed Conversion**

Since the rise of the USSR the military and defense elite was given the most prominent, wealthy, and prestigious place in the country. People constituting this elite – ranging from highly qualified engineers, scientists (particularly, nuclear physicists in the post-WWII period) to professional military officers – have been in social network terms potentially a very cohesive group having been of the same background and following largely the same professional path. Those were the people who graduated from the Ivy League technical schools of the country and either ended up in research institutes, one of the constitutive parts of the entire military complex, or were involved in the high military managerial positions. Throughout Soviet history, the military elite although being quantitatively a small minority in party nomenclature, had always up till Gorbachev been represented on the councils of the country on all levels. Often times the representative of the defense sector were on strategically important positions in the state apparatus. The highest post by a representative of this elite ever taken was when Yuriy Andropov, a former KGB head, succeeded Brezhnev after his death as a General Secretary of the Communist party. Incorporating the military elite into the party nomenclature and the state apparatus helped to stabilize it. This also paved the way for the military industry to become the most important and influential group in the society. As

noted by Cooper, the defense industry was “undoubtedly a powerful force in Soviet society, a significant interest group able to exert strong political influence.”<sup>67</sup>

The conversion initiative of the Soviet Union was declared in 1988 at the United Nations and was further reaffirmed during a meeting with the Trilateral Commission in January 1989 by Gorbachev who hoped it would bring about the revitalization of the civilian sector of the moribund Soviet economy. When the conversion scheme was adopted and a number of factories faced drastically reduced orders with no preliminary warning, the military sector was becoming full of tacit (not for long, though) opponents. To that time “the emergence of a distinct defense-industry lobby of directors of establishments and other leading personnel”<sup>68</sup> can be traced. They were gradually increasing to express and voice their discontent with the conversion which not only deprived the industry they were responsible for of the comfortable primary position in the whole state system<sup>69</sup>, but threatened the whole military complex of secure and lucrative profits and benefits.

The military complex consisted not only of military assembly factories but of also civilian plants that were producing parts and components for military equipment and where 25 percent of the workforce employed in the defense industry in Russia<sup>70</sup> which was socially and, thus, politically threatened. Furthermore, this went beyond the production for pure defense needs to anything like fridges and radio. This production being considered as strategic was under the control of the military industry. Therefore, any conversion of the Soviet and, subsequently, Russian military sector was threatening not only directly to political positions of the elite by losing profits but also indirectly – through high likelihood of a social

---

<sup>67</sup> Julian Cooper, *The Soviet Defense Industry: Conversion and Reform*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991, 85; in addition, Kubáľková and Cruickshank also did not find any rejection of Brezhnev doctrine in legal documents of the USSR since 1985, See V. Kubáľková and A.A. Cruickshank, *Thinking New about Soviet 'New Thinking'*, Berkley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1989.

<sup>68</sup> Julian Cooper, *The Soviet Defense Industry: Conversion and Reform*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Thierry Mallaret, *Conversion of the Defense Industry in the Former Soviet Union*, New York: Westview Press, 1992.

<sup>70</sup> See *After the Cold War: Russian-American Defense Conversion for Economic Renewal*, ed. Michael P. Claudon and Kathryn Wittneben (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

breakdown – to the ambitions to maintain their primacy in the new political context, basically not be reelected.

The opposition of the military elite at the end of 1980s and at the very beginning of 1990s had different origins. Initially, dissent in this circle “was prompted . . . by cuts in military orders and dissatisfaction with policy for conversion,”<sup>71</sup> though later it was due to further overall decrease in the influence of the sector in economy and politics and policy of Russia. In the second half of the 1980s – during the Gorbachev period – the defense sector had undergone significant budget cuts. Although it remained the top industry in terms of scale and budget funding, such a status was gradually ceasing to exist and the industry’s inefficiency was more than obvious. The military elite were also losing political influence at the highest levels of major decision bodies. The tendency that appeared clearly indicated separation of the military elite from the political realm. This tendency was threatened by the attempted coup of August 1991 which was due to the lack of the political institutional supervision of the military sector which was earlier maintained by incorporating defense industry elite figures into party nomenclature and state political structure.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, in the Russian Federation in the early 1990s, the defense industry within the decaying economic system was also moribund. This not only prevented the then partly business partly political elite from gaining more profits from state orders for military production but also undermined the political influence of the military industry elite because of responsibility for the nascent social threat. It was often warned that “large-scale conversion threatens mass unemployment”<sup>73</sup> which would be hard to overcome, due to the existence of clustered regions engaged in particular industrial sectors and being socially dependent on those industries. To boot, this seriously restrained political aspirations of the military elite in

---

<sup>71</sup> Julian Cooper, *The Soviet Defense Industry: Conversion and Reform*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 49.

the post-Soviet Russia and back in the Soviet Union, by burdening those elite with public indignation.

The involvement of American firms in the conversion process in Russian was very sporadic, inconsistent, and, as a result, their contribution to the military conversion was marginal. This was because those defense businesses were threatened by the American administration of being excluded from the American market. Furthermore, they were also advised to contribute to the decline of anything linked with the military sector in the former USSR. Such constraints of the American firms made them offer too little for the conversion of the defense sector in Russia.<sup>74</sup>

This argument comes from the analysis of the American business perspective on doing business on defense conversion in Russia. The existing evidence from the interviews conducted for the research<sup>75</sup> suggests that the US political circles knowing about the advance and might of the remainder of the Soviet defense sector were very cautious about turning it from the highly inefficient military industry into a viable civic sector of the nascent transitional economy in Russia. Such views, in particular in the US Defense Department transferred into nonpublic guidelines for the respective business circles.

What is interesting in this respect is the finding that while uncertainty owing to the internal circumstances in Russia could be eventually overcome, some of the interviewees pointed out that the messages being sent from the US Administration were very conflicting. In particular, “the Department of Commerce encourages, but the Department of Defense message is that ‘if you want to do business there, forget about doing it here.’”<sup>76</sup> In fact, the defense officials in the US were clearer on the role of the US businesses in conversion of defense industry in Russia. For instance, as cited in the aforementioned interviews, “the

---

<sup>74</sup> *After the Cold War: Russian-American Defense Conversion for Economic Renewal*, ed. Michael P. Claudon and Kathryn Wittneben (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 99.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald J. Atwood said that any industry in the FSU [former Soviet Union] that is capable of producing defense equipment should be allowed to die.”<sup>77</sup> Despite much potential in the industry where the best and the brightest work and where the most recent technology is located, such warnings from the US administration hindered closer and more efficient participation of US enterprises in Russian defense conversion projects. Not surprisingly, much bureaucratic inertia continued to exist in the US governmental agencies with senior officials still having the “Cold war” mentality.

All in all, the West viewing Russia emerge out of the ruins of the Soviet empire was very determined to decrease its military capability and, hence, to decrease the military threat to its countries. The West through NATO was heavily concerned and involved in the military scheme of redistribution of the defense assets in the post-Soviet space in order to decrease the military potential of Russia<sup>78</sup> and generally the threats to liberal democracies. The main focus was on the nuclear arsenal of the former USSR, enabling Russia to be the only nuclear weapon successor state of the Soviet Union, which although enhanced Russia in this particular arsenal was also better for the West to deal with just one nuclear weapon state in the post-Soviet space rather than with several. Therefore, both “in conventional and nuclear realms Russia’s inheritance [of the Soviet army arsenal] was heavily influenced by Western interests and preferences.”<sup>79</sup> This left Russia with a substantial part of the military arsenal of the former Soviet Union.

The lack of commitment of the US firms was one of the reasons which contributed to the failure of proper conversion of the defense industry in Russia. The failure of the conversion of the defense industry helped the military elite remain afloat in politics. The

---

<sup>77</sup> *After the Cold War: Russian-American Defense Conversion for Economic Renewal*, ed. Michael P. Claudon and Kathryn Wittneben (New York: New York University Press, 1993) 99.

<sup>78</sup> Steven E. Miller, “Introduction. Moscow’s Military Power: Russia’s Search for Security in an Age of Transition” in *The Russian Military: Power and Policy* ed. by Steven E. Miller and Dmitri Trenin (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences; London, England: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

defense elite fearing for the decline in the strength of their sector and for the possibility of their economic and political decline regained their influence by reframing the post-Soviet world order skillfully positioning the balance of power to resemble that of the Cold war with similar threat and ‘power zones,’ which the ‘near abroad’ used to be and again came to be.

### **3.1.3. Which Path to Take: the Great post-Soviet Identity and Foreign Policy Debate in Russia**

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a significant identity problem and, therefore, fostered a search for identity in the post-Soviet societies. While Moscow’s former satellites came to redefine their identities they had lost upon annexation to the Soviet Union or even formerly to the Russian Empire, for Russia the collapse of a great country project – which the USSR used to be – was not just the cessation of a former entity but the end of its former identity. The scale of the transformation was so great that it was even compared with the collapse of Kyivan Rus<sup>80</sup> upon the onset of the Tatar yoke in thirteenth century. President Putin, similarly, described it as the “biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed Russia faced the crossroads with multiple paths, which had accumulated throughout its diverse history. Here I provide an overview of the foreign policy debate in the light of the more general debate regarding identity.

I disagree with Kortunov that the post-Soviet identity crisis in Russia is “closely linked with our [Russian] inability to return to our [Russian] traditional path of nation state

---

<sup>80</sup> Sergei Kortunov, *The Fate of Russia: Several Observations on “New” Russian Identity* (Stanford University Conference papers, October 1998); available from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume/pdf/Kortunov.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007

<sup>81</sup> Andrei Piontkovski, *East or West? Russia’s Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy* (London, The Foreign Policy Center, 2006); available from <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/681.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.

development”<sup>82</sup> but rather I see the lack of such a traditional path and the historically long pursuit of its definition and agreement upon it. As was clearly put by Light, “from the point of view of geopolitics . . . the establishment of new, independent states to the west of Russia reinvoked an old identity problem: was Russia part of Europe, or had the loss of an empire turned it into an Asian or European power?”<sup>83</sup> This put Russia to face up to the long-existing identity dilemma.

The identity and foreign policy debate in the 90’s between “liberal westernizers, pragmatic nationalist, and fundamental nationalist”<sup>84</sup> reflects the nineteenth century discourse between Westernizers and Slavophiles. The long-going debate is even echoed in the Russian coat of arms with its double-headed eagle facing opposite directions, which shortly after its adoption became a cliché of Russian cultural and geopolitical orientation. The consideration of the debate can be illustrated by the evolution of views of Gertsen, a Russian nineteenth century literary critic and intellectual, who initially favoured European path for Russia, but later evolved into defending a *special* path for Russia.<sup>85</sup>

After the breakup of the USSR, as has already been mentioned above, there were three trends in identity and, hence, in foreign policy development. One such trend called for the adherence to the liberal values of the West, another one favoured the idea of building a strong Eurasian project, and the third idea was to develop a unique nationalist Russian state which was a middle option that was then called pragmatic nationalism.

During the early Yeltsin period and even back during Gorbachev the trend was leaning toward liberal democracies. The goal of Soviet foreign policy, as noted by Piontkovski was

---

<sup>82</sup> Sergei Kortunov, *The Fate of Russia: Several Observations on “New” Russian Identity* (Stanford University Conference papers, October 1998,); available from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume/pdf/Kortunov.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007

<sup>83</sup> Margot Light, “Foreign Policy Thinking” in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* by Nail Malcolm [et al.], New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 36.

<sup>84</sup> Andrei Piontkovski, *East or West? Russia’s Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy*. London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2006; available from <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/681.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.

<sup>85</sup> Alexandr Gertsen, *S togo berega* [From the Other Bank of the River] London, 1855.

“joining the community of civilized nations (or returning to the civilized world); for early Russian foreign policy, it was strategic partnership with the West.”<sup>86</sup> Although much of Russia has always geographically remained in Asia, its major cultural centers and, arguably coincidentally, capitals at different times of history – Moscow and St. Petersburg – belonged to the European part of the country and have always implicitly shared sentiments toward Europe as a cultural entity or explicitly subscribed to European values. In the post-Soviet period, “Westerners . . . face a difficult problem of overcoming deeply embedded anti-Western complexes and prejudices”<sup>87</sup> originating from the Soviet time propaganda of an evil *capitalist imperialism*. However, ultimately, denunciation of the go-West strategy was due to “liberalism *failing* to provide sacrosanct approach of the national idea.”<sup>88</sup>

In contrast, Eurasianist ideas have not really been that popular. They rather have appeared as Russia’s anger with the West.<sup>89</sup> The unfulfilled aspirations toward Europeanization throughout Russia’s history and the return to Eurasia were the results of Europe’s failure to recognize Russia as a European state for which from the western European point of view – to make the story complete – Russia has only sporadically qualified. Eurasianism, therefore, has never become either a true Russian identity or national idea.

Despite the continuity of Soviet and the early Russian foreign policies, such state of affairs did not last long. The very rarely mentioned in the West Burbulis doctrine, named after a counselor of Yeltsin during his first term, called for denouncing<sup>90</sup> direct control over neighbouring states. Being rather popular in Russia in 1991-92, it favoured joining the

---

<sup>86</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Andrei Piontkovski, *East or West? Russia’s Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy*. London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2006; available from <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/681.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Sergei Kortunov, *The Fate of Russia: Several Observations on “New” Russian Identity*, (Stanford University Conference papers, October 1998); available from: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume/pdf/Kortunov.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007

<sup>89</sup> Andrei Piontkovski, *East or West? Russia’s Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy*. London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2006; available from <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/681.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, 37.



European Community and NATO. However, after the clashes between the president and the parliament, which made the president mobilize the military in October 1993 and changed the constitution of the Russian Federation to give him more powers. From then on, one could see the disappearance of the liberal idea and the rise of the idea of *derzhavnost* (statehood-ness) which in the Russian case denotes enhancement of strong presidential power. In general, it resembles aspirations for the great power status and a strong state. One can also regard it as the return to the old tsarist and Soviet type of paternal state legacy.<sup>91</sup>

In the light of the prevailing *derzhavnost* mainstream foreign policy which focused on strengthening national interests, there was a shift in the foreign policy toward the ‘near abroad’. Here one could see an acute shift from the Burbulis doctrine toward a more interventionalist policy – an “enlightened postimperial course” as was euphemistically termed by Sergei Karaganov<sup>92</sup>. Yeltsin implicitly voiced this policy of partial reintegration of the post-Soviet countries to the sphere of Russian influence in his address to the UN General Assembly in October 1994 and one year later came up in the form of a presidential directive “On Russia’s Strategic Course with the CIS Countries.”<sup>93</sup>

As it is apparent from the discussion, the strategies were coming on the scene in succession: after the first in close cooperation with Western democracies failed another strategy with the focus on the ‘near abroad’ countries followed. According to this, some scholars distinguish particular periods in foreign policy orientation: pro-Western (1991 – May 1993) and pragmatic nationalistic (starting from April 1993). The latter developed the consensus on the CIS as the priority area for the Russian foreign policy.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Graham, “Novyi rissiyski rezhim” [New Russian Regime], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 November 1995.

<sup>92</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, 44.

<sup>93</sup> “On Russia’s Strategic Course with the CIS Countries” [Strategicheskiy kurs Rossii s gosudarstvami-uchastnikami SNG] Approved by the President of the Russian Federation, 14 September 1995 №940 “Din Vestnik” №10, 1995.

<sup>94</sup> Margot Light, “Foreign Policy Thinking” in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* by Nail Malcolm... [et al.], New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Out of the three possible paths, the failure of the first one which resembles the historically unfulfilled strife to share the heritage and benefits of the civilized Europe and the unwillingness to return to Eurasia resulted for Russia in finding its own unique way in between the two civilizational entities. Russia, being not only geographically but also culturally divided in between Europe and Asia, incrementally develops a strong paternalistic state. In pursuit of visible stability and relying on the paternalistic political culture of most of the population, the country looks for a strong almost autocratic leadership which is capable of focusing on, defending and furthering purely national interests in the international arena. In particular, those were *derzhavniki* (proponents of strong state power) who “considered the CIS and the ‘near abroad’ as the top priority for Moscow’s security policy.”<sup>95</sup> Even more importantly in terms of identity search it is for a new leader to overcome the frustration caused by the loss of a great country status. Therefore, adopting such a strategy by Yeltsin and strengthening of the concept through political practice of Putin, in this respect, fulfilled the idea. The national *derzhavnost* idea so far mirrored this popular need.

### 3.1.4. Political Consensus on the ‘Near Abroad’

Here I provide a brief account of what ‘near abroad’ meant in political terms at the time it was instrumentalized. Before outlining the consensus on the ‘near abroad’ in the political circles in the post-Soviet Russia, it is necessary to mention that the concept has been rather vaguely defined both in terms of the form and the content and rarely consistently exercised as a foreign policy instrument. For instance, Primakov preferred to use the term the ‘post-Soviet

---

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Segourin, “The Russian Dimension” in *Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe’s Baltic Rim*, ed. Hans Mouritzen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 65.

space' rather than the CIS.<sup>96</sup> It remains unclear, though, whether he implied the Baltic states as well or not.

More ambiguity than the meaning of the term and a concept is related to its temporal boundaries. While the 'near abroad' appeared at the dawn of the post-Cold war era in the post-Soviet space, this wording was prohibited from being officially used by the Russian representatives upon the request from the Council of Europe during the negotiations with the Russian Federation on its membership to the organization.<sup>97</sup> Though, it is hard to clearly distinguish the political usage of the rhetoric from the social connotation of the term usage, I contend that it became especially popular in political discourse in its contemporary meaning roughly in 1993-1994. This is the time to which I attribute the 'near abroad' concept's political erection. Despite the demise of the usage of the particular term – 'near abroad,' the concept and strategy belonging to it were not abandoned, similarly the rhetoric pertaining to it was not given up.

Approximately by the end of 1993 in Russia there appeared consensus on what the 'near abroad'<sup>98</sup> meant in political terms. Despite the aforementioned conceptual ambiguity, the major elements of 'near abroad', as offered by Lomagin, may be expressed in the following ideas<sup>99</sup>:

- Due to historical and geopolitical reasons this region (of the post-Soviet states) is of more importance for Russia than for any other big or regional state,

<sup>96</sup> Nazavisimaya gazeta [Independent newspaper], 9 Feb., 1996 See *Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe's Baltic Rim*, ed. Hans Mouritzen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

<sup>97</sup> "On Russia's request for membership in the Council of Europe," Opinion No. 193 (1996), Assembly debate on 25 January 1996 (6th and 7th Sittings) (see Doc. 7443, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Muehleemann; and Doc. 7463, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Bindig); available from <http://assembly.coe.int/documents/AdoptedText/ta96/EOP1193.HTM>; accessed May 14, 2007.

<sup>98</sup> The term denotes the territory of all ex-Soviet states, in geopolitical terms those currently are states signatories to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic countries. The term has often been referred to as the newly Russian version of Monroe Doctrine, however some Russian security scholars argued it to be incorrect and inappropriate to make such link, in particular Arbatov. See A. Arbatov, *Rossiyskaya natsionalnaya idea i vneshniaya politika: Mify i realnost* [Russian National Idea and Foreign Policy: Myths and Reality], Moscow: MONF, *Nauchnye doklady* [Scientific Reports], 53, 32.

<sup>99</sup> Nikita Lomagin, (Spring 2000): Novie nezavisimiye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i SShA [Newly Independent States as the Sphere of Interests for Russian and the US], *Pro et Contra*, 5 (2): 65-85.

- Russia has the right to counteract the interests of any other states in this region of its ‘power zone’,
- It is necessary to impede the formation in the former Soviet states of anti-Russia alliances and coalitions, and also not to tolerate the emergence of any instability as this weakens Russian positions in the region,
- It is impermissible to consider the status of the Russian-speaking population in the ‘near abroad’ as a solely internal matter of respective states, as this is also a matter of concern for Russia – both for symbolic and material reasons (arrangement of refugees and forced migrants),<sup>100</sup>
- The perimeter of the former USSR is important for Russia in geostrategic terms,
- The West uses temporal weakness of Moscow to undermine its positions in the vitally important region for Russia<sup>101</sup>.

From the list above, the mix of strategic down-to-earth elements is peculiarly mixed with the rhetorical claims. One of such pure rhetorical ideas is the concern for the wellbeing of the Russian minorities in the ‘near abroad’ as a fifth column. In this respect, the reliance on the Russians in the post-Soviet space would have been dubious as they were largely unconsolidated still in the end of 1980s<sup>102</sup>, as Melvin argues. It has also been confirmed that expectations from the Russians in the ‘near abroad’ as a fifth column are spurious.<sup>103</sup>

It is hard to call such combination a surprising one though, as the instrumental utilization was twofold. On the one hand, there was certain geostrategic reasoning behind it and, on the other hand, the instrumental usage of the concept was full of rhetoric which

<sup>100</sup> The same has frequently been pointed out in other literature and speeches of public officials in Russia as noted by Sergounin, See Alexander Segounin, “The Russian Dimension” quoted in *Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe’s Baltic Rim*, ed. Hans Mouritzen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 15 – 71.

<sup>101</sup> This position was particularly criticized in the West. For this see, for instance, Menon.

<sup>102</sup> Neil Melvin, *Russians beyond Russia: the Politics of National Identity*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995.

<sup>103</sup> Lowell W. Barrington, Erik S. Herron and Brian D. Silver, (2003): The Motherland Is Calling: Views of Homeland among Russians in the Near Abroad,” *World Politics*, 55 (2): 290-313.

played a different role. Those ideas can certainly be broken down to many more specific tactical points which derive from the strategic ones. However, I refrain from that as being interested in those ideas on the meta-level.

### 3.1.5. Materialization of the Concept in Foreign and Security Policies

In order to be able to finally prove that the ‘near abroad’ was instrumentalized it is not enough to note that such a term was for some period of time circulating throughout political elites until it was banned from official usage upon the request of the Council of Europe. In fact, to better hammer down the instrumentalization of the concept into official usage I show signs which legally constitute the ‘near abroad’ – the whole array of the former Soviet states – as a peculiar zone of Russia’s influence. This is done through the analysis of the foreign policy conception, a military doctrine, and a national security conception which appeared in Russia after the collapse of the USSR.

Since 1991 in the Russian Federation there have been adopted the following political documents pertaining to foreign policy strategy: Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (in 1993 and 2000), Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2000), and National Security Conception of the Russian Federation (2000). All of them, as is shown in the analysis below, put the ‘near abroad’ into priority zones within the post-Soviet space.

The initial post-Soviet foreign policy doctrine of the Russian Federation proclaimed the CIS as a special space of influence.<sup>104</sup> Shortly afterwards this strategy appeared to be the so-called Kozyrev Doctrine owing largely to his speech in January of 1994<sup>105</sup> when the former Foreign Minister outlined what was the strategic direction of the emerging Russian foreign

<sup>104</sup> Text of the Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (1993) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. by Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 32.

<sup>105</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, ” Strategy for Partnership” in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 193 – 205, originally published in *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* [International Affairs], 1994, 5, 5-15.

policy. He especially mentioned “Russia’s special role and responsibility within the former USSR”.<sup>106</sup> Kozyrev declared that “the vital strategic direction for Russian diplomacy was the defense of the rights of the Russian minorities in the ‘near abroad.’”<sup>107</sup> This was a clear presentation of the above mentioned *derzhavnost* idea in the foreign policy and not surprisingly that Kozyrev, one of the megaphones of *derzhavniki*, voiced it first. As Light concisely summarizes:

“With regard to the ‘near abroad,’ Russia would strive for the maximum possible degree of integration with those states that wished to co-operate. Russia’s responsibility for ensuring the stability and security of the territory of the former Soviet Union demanded the development of an effective system of collective security, co-operation in strengthening the external borders of the CIS, and the retention of a military infrastructure sufficient to safeguard the security of its members.”<sup>108</sup>

The peculiar feature of the Russian foreign policy conception is that it has even used the exact wording, namely, the ‘near abroad, to indicate the priority of the relations between Russia and the rest of the ex-Soviet states as by default belonging to the ‘near abroad’.<sup>109</sup> Certainly, for the reasons mentioned earlier, from 1996 onward such wording was discarded from official use.

In the Russian foreign policy conception adopted in 2000 by President Putin, the CIS is repeated as a priority zone for the foreign policy of Russia. The conception states that “it is a priority of Russia’s foreign policy to ensure the stability of multilateral and bilateral

<sup>106</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, “Strategy for Partnership”(text of the speech) in *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* (2000) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 193 – 205.

<sup>107</sup> Alexander Segourin, “The Russian Dimension” in *Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe’s Baltic Rim*, ed. Hans Mouritzen, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 67.

<sup>108</sup> Margot Light, “Foreign Policy Thinking” in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* by Nail Malcolm... [et al.], New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Text of Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (1993) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 27 – 64.

cooperation with the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for the country's national security tasks.”<sup>110</sup>

Identical provisions to the foreign policy conceptions are reflected in the conception of the national security and military doctrine as of 2000. The National Security Conception of the Russian Federation adopted in 2000, echoes the foreign policy priorities mentioned in 1993 and 2000 with regard to the CIS. It notes that in international relations Russia aims at “developing equal and mutually beneficial interaction with all nations and integration associations, above all with the Commonwealth of Independent States.”<sup>111</sup> It goes further, also specifying the priority of the CIS regarding military and economic security and preservation of the cultural heritage of Russia. One of the threats to Russia identified in the conception for Russian national security is the decline of the integration within the CIS countries. Similarly, to safeguard its military security “the Russian Federation attaches priority importance to enhancement of the collective security system within the CIS framework”<sup>112</sup> as the military doctrine states.

All in all, one can conclude that in the key political documents pertaining to the perception of a state's stance in the international arena and the strategic interests of its foreign policy of the Russian Federation clearly reflects the vision that the ‘near abroad’ – referred to in those document mainly as the CIS – is indeed a special zone of influence. This view is consistent throughout the foreign policy conception in 1993 and 2000. Such strategy toward the ‘near abroad’ countries is equally present in national security conception and the military doctrine, where the CIS countries were given priority importance.

<sup>110</sup> Text of Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation (1993) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shackleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 97.

<sup>111</sup> Text of National Security Conception of the Russian Federation (2000) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shackleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 131.

<sup>112</sup> Text of Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2000) in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shackleina (New York: CEU Press, 2005), 109.

The instrumental usage of the ‘near abroad’ concept in a larger context is not new with the post-Soviet Russia. During the entire existence of the Soviet regime the Politburo used to resort to numerous acts of intrusion into other states internal matters. However, theoretically the doctrine was outlined only in the post war period. And again it was not new in the USSR as there is much research contending its links with the Monroe Doctrine of the United States toward its so-called ‘near abroad’ – Latin America. Interestingly enough, though, is also that in the 1990s, as opposed to the Soviet period, the ‘near abroad’ in the instrumental political discourse reflected popular societal vision of the reality, in particular, the perception of the newly independent states.

The struggle of the military elite that grew in the USSR toward regaining its influence in politics and a number of other factors, namely, the defense conversion and economic liberalization failure turned Russia from its unsuccessful experimenting with liberal democracy to pragmatic nationalism. Part of such old-newly defined concept in Russia was the ‘near abroad’ which was a commonly shared vision of the other fourteen post-Soviet republics as its special sphere of influence. These views in political elite consolidated by 1993 when it was put in paper for the first time in the Russia’s foreign policy conception. Ever since then all major political document pertaining to the Russian foreign policy sphere and priorities in the international arena reflected the ‘near abroad’ – nicely framed as the CIS and the rest of the ex-Soviet republics – as constituting a ‘power zone’.

It is peculiar that prior to mid nineties when such vision of the post-Soviet states gained importance in political circles, there existed in Russia a similar societal notion which differentiated the post-Soviet states from other foreign countries putting the former cognitively in a more affiliate position. Just by the temporal priority, one can infer the influence of the social concept on the political discourse. A supporting argument for the reification of a social construct is that such vision of the post-Soviet states existed prior to



gaining popularity amongst political elite when the Russia foreign policy was characterized by its Westernization direction. As is apparent from the analysis above that such societal cognition of the reality was utilized by the political elites to successfully use rhetorics on strengthening ties with the ‘near abroad’ countries in order to exercise foreign policy goals in this space.

## Conclusions

This research has shown that there is much room for maneuver in applying constructivist theory to the Russia foreign policy. In particular, the research demonstrated that ideas can have an independent power, exist by themselves, and have an impact on policy making. This is apparent from the analysis of the emergence of the societal phenomenon of the ‘near abroad’ countries in the post-Soviet space as partly the response to the shock associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Apart from the shock, there are a number of other factors – such as cultural and historical affinity amongst some of the post-Soviet republics – that contributed to the reification and sustainability of the conception of the post-Soviet countries in popular perception as the ‘near abroad.’

Despite the instrumentalization of the concept by the political elites in Russian in order to pursue foreign policy objective, particularly, in the post-Soviet space, the research shows that this concept is not constructed by political elites but instead rests on the shoulders of the societal consensus. The logical claim points this out by taking into consideration the temporal sequence of the discourse to depict prior existence of the social conception of the ‘near abroad’ to its rhetoric usage.

Thus, the available evidence shows strength of a societal phenomenon in the foreign policy making. Along with that, it rejects an alternative hypothesis that there might be a clear straightforward connection between the Soviet concept of the ‘near abroad’ and the similar strategy in the Russian foreign policy discourse as the latter is based on the societal phenomenon which is used to justify and sustain the respective foreign policy.

Although this research aims at somewhat bridging the gap in the existing body of literature on the topic, it opens room for other valuable scholarly deliberations to come. On the one hand, the need for further research aims at overall overcoming the constraints of this

research in order to refine the claim in terms even more substantial evidence and, on the other hand, to investigate more on the topic to provide a different kind of proof for the hypothesis and the theory expressed.

An independent fully-fledged sociological study on the existence of the societal phenomenon of the ‘near abroadness’ in cognitive perception of the post-Soviet societies would definitely enhance research on this topic. Particularly, by supplementing the research with a more refined account of the indicators which would allow the research to be more plausible in the existence of the ‘near abroad’ as a societal phenomenon. Such a detailed sociological study would also point out the temporal boundaries which is destined to strengthen the logical claim of the research.

This research approached the temporal stage in the evolution of the Russian foreign policy when the ‘near abroad’ has become dramatically unconsolidated in terms of political developments. Events in the post-Soviet space in the last several years unfold quite dynamically and damaging to the ‘near abroad’ space as a political instrument. With the accession of Baltic states into the NATO and the EU and visa regimes between Russia and Georgia and a number of other factors the ‘near abroad’ has become more fragmented than it used to be in early 1990s and tends to become obsolete in the political discourse. Therefore, there is need to study precisely, the levels and degree of the ‘near abroad-ness’ as both in the societal discourse in comparison with the political one. Even though the CIS is noted as a priority zone in the foreign policy doctrine of 2000, a number of indicators show that Russia recently went beyond this particular space of influence. Therefore, there is need for further research, on the one hand, a fragmentation of the ‘near abroad’ and, on the other hand, cessation of usage of the ‘near abroad’ rhetoric. The demise of the ‘near abroad’ rhetoric gives room for further elaboration of the social construction of the ‘near abroad’ by studying

the existence of its phenomenon in the so-called post-‘near abroad’ political framing, which might be again insightful from the constructivist point of view.

Despite such pragmatism and the decline of a priority strategy for the ‘near abroad’ lately, the popular discourse, though fragmented and existing in different degree, is still a significant social reality which is impossible to disregard and, furthermore, discard, which provides the room and the need for further constructivist analysis. While this research dealt with logical claim of the impact of ideas on policy and politics, there is still much room for the constructivist theorists to extend the research with a purely analytical claim for the impact of ideas on political discourse with ambition to test the theory.

This research with its logical claim opened up room for the analytical claim to follow. Ultimately, the most valuable contribution of the further research to particularly the constructivist explanation of the emergence of the ‘near abroad’ in the post-Soviet space is by conducting a study with an analytical claim. By aiming at testing the validity of the constructivist theory it will contribute to the understanding the evolving Russian foreign policy.

Outside of the research on the Russian foreign policy this work can also contribute to the policy recommendations. This particular research and further research generally on the topic can be utilized to build on it recommendations regarding the Russian foreign policy toward the post-Soviet countries. Specifically, the recognition of the social origin of the ‘near abroad’ construct significantly ties the hands of policymakers in trying to disregard this construct. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that any attempts of policymakers and politicians to move away from acknowledging the ‘near abroad’ concept in order to switch to a different strategy will be a rather challenging task which can eventually become a failure.

This research confirms the hypothesis of the impact of the socially constructed reality in the post-Soviet space on the Russian foreign policy toward former-Soviet countries by

retrospective analysis of the reification of the construct to show its logical priority. This, however, methodologically throws light on only part of the picture, which has to be taken over by an analytical claim of the impact of ideas, in particular of the idea of Russia's 'near abroad,' which expresses the need for further research on the topic.

## Appendix 1. Russians in the Soviet Successor States, 1989 Census

Republic	In Thousands	In Percentage of the Total Pop. in Republic	In Percentage of Nontitular Pop. in Republic
<i>Russia</i>	119,866	81.5	-
<i>Estonia</i>	475	30.3	78.8
<i>Latvia</i>	906	34.0	70.7
<i>Lithuania</i>	344	9.4	45.8
<i>Belarus</i>	1,342	13.2	59.5
<i>Moldova</i>	562	13.0	36.4
<i>Ukraine</i>	11,356	22.1	80.8
<i>Georgian</i>	341	6.3	21.1
<i>Armenia</i>	52	1.6	23.0
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	392	5.6	32.2
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	334	9.5	33.7
<i>Tajikistan</i>	388	7.6	20.2
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	1,653	8.3	29.1
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	917	21.5	45.1
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	6,228	37.8	62.6

SOURCES: *Natsional'nyy sostav naselenia SSSR* [The national composition of the population of the USSR] (Moscow: Finansy I Staistila, 1991); Y.V. Arutyunyan, ed., *Russkie. Etnisotseologicheskie ocherki* [The Russians: Ethnosociological sketches] (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 25.

## Bibliography

- Adler, Emanuel, (1997): Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics, *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3): 319-63.
- After the Cold War: Russian-American Defense Conversion for Economic Renewal, ed. Michael P. Claudon and Kathryn Wittneben, New York: New York University Press, 1993.
- Allison, Roy, Margot Light and Stephen White. *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House Papers) and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Arbatov, A., "Rossiyskaya natsionalnaya idea i vneshniaya politika: Mify i realnost" [Russian National Idea and Foreign Policy: Myths and Reality], Moscow: MONF, *Scientific Reports* [Nauchnye doklady,] №53.
- Arutyunyan Y.V. ed., 1992. *Russkie. Etnisotseologicheskie ocherki* [The Russians: Ethnosociological sketches], Moscow: Nauka, 25.
- Barrington, Lowell W., Erik S. Herron, and Brian D. Silver, (2003): The Motherland Is Calling: Views of Homeland among Russians in the Near Abroad," *World Politics*, 55 (2): 290-313.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.
- Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Blackwill, Robert D and Sergei Karaganov., ed. 1994. *Damage limitation or crisis? Russia and the Outside World*. Washington: Brassey's.
- Butler, Judith, "Identity, Deconstruction, and Politics" in *Social Construction: a Reader*, ed. Mary and Kenneth J. Gergen, London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T., (1997): International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide," *European Journal of international Relations* 3: 473-95.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Social Construction and Integration," a paper presented at the workshop on "Social Constructivism in European Studies," University of Aarhus, June 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1998): The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory, *World Politics* 50: 324-48.
- Cooper, Julian. *The Soviet Defense Industry: Conversion and Reform*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991.
- Dueck, Colin, (2004): Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000-2004, in: *Review of International Studies* 30(4): 511-535.
- Eckstein, Harry, (Sep., 1988): A Culturalist Theory of Political Change, *The American Political Science Review*, 82 (3): 789-804.
- Frank, Willard C., Jr. and Philip S. Gillette., ed., 1992. *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915 – 1991*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Gergen, Mary and Kenneth J. Gergen, ed. 2003. *Social Construction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gertsen, Alexandr, *S togo berega* [From the Other Bank of the River], London, 1855.
- Goldstein, Judith and Robert O. Keohane., ed. 1993. *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Graham, Thomas, "Novyi rissiyski rezhim" [New Russian Regime], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 November 1995.
- Hacking, Ian. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

- Hopf, Ted. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1998): The Promise of Constructivism International Relations Theory, *International Security* 23: 171-200.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 1999. *Understandings of Russian Foreign policy*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Huntington, Samuel P.. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. London: Touchstone, 1996.
- Jones, Robert A.. *Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty' from Lenin to Gorbachev: the Brezhnev Doctrine*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Katzenstein, Peter J., ed. 1996. *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kolstø, Pål. *Political construction sites : nation-building in Russia and the post-Soviet states*. trans. Susan Høivik Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000.
- Kon, Igor, (winter 1993): Identity Crisis and Postcommunist Psychology, *Symbolic Interaction* 16 (4): 395 – 405.
- Kortunov, Andrei, “RUSSIA and the “NEAR ABROAD”: Looking for a Model Relationship” in *U.S.-Russian Partnership: Meeting the New Millennium* ed. Sergey Oznobishchev and James H. Brusstar (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, January 24, 2003); available from <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/books%20-%201999/US%20Russian%20Partnership%20July%201999/usrp7.html>; accessed May 25, 2007.
- Kortunov, Sergei. *The Fate of Russia: Several Observations on “New” Russian Identity*, (Stanford University Conference papers, October 1998,); available from: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume/pdf/Kortunov.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.
- Kovalev, S., “Sovereignty and the International Obligations of Socialist Countries” [Suverenitet i internatsyonal’nye obiazanosti sotsialisticheskikh stran], *Pravda*, 26 Sept. 1968, 4.
- Kozyrev, Andrei, “Strategy for Partnership,” *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* [International Affairs], 1994, No. 5, 5-15.
- Kubáľková, Vendulka., ed. 2001. *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Kubáľková, V. and Cruickshank A.A.. *Thinking New about Soviet ‘New Thinking’*. Berkley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1989.
- Kubáľková, Vendulka, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert., ed. 1998. *International Relations in a Constructed World*. Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe.
- Kudryavtsev, Ilya, (1994): Rossiya i Mir: Blizhnee zarubezhie i russkoyazychnoe naseleneye [Russia and the World: Near Abroad and the Russian Speaking population], (*Politicheskii monitoring* [Political Monitoring] 2(1): 15-19,) available from [http://www.igpi.ru/bibl/igpi\\_publ/monit-brosh/capital/brosh-kudr.html](http://www.igpi.ru/bibl/igpi_publ/monit-brosh/capital/brosh-kudr.html); accessed May 10, 2007.
- Laitin, David D.. *Identity in formation: the Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lo, Bobo. *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Lomagin, Nikita (spring 2000): Novie nezavisimiye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i SShA” [Newly independent states as the sphere of interests for Russian and the US], *Pro et Contra*, 5 (2): 65-85.



- Lukyanov, Fedor, "Doktrina Brezhneva – Doktrina Busha" [Brezhnev Doctrine – Bush Doctrine], (Gazeta.ru, August 21, 2003); available from [http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2003/08/a\\_48146.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2003/08/a_48146.shtml); accessed April 18, 2007.
- Lynch, Dov. *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: the cases of Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000.
- Malcolm, Neil, Alex Pravda, and Margot Light. *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Mallaret, Thierry. *Conversion of the Defense Industry in the Former Soviet Union*. New York: Westview Press, 1992.
- McFaul, Michael, (winter 1997/98): A Precarious Peace: Domestic Politics in the Making of Russian Foreign Policy, *International Security*, 22 (3): 5-35.
- Melvin, Neil, *Russians beyond Russia: the Politics of National Identity*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995.
- Mouritzen, Hans., ed. 1998. *Bordering Russia: Theory and Prospects for Europe's Baltic Rim*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- "On Russia's request for membership in the Council of Europe," Opinion No. 193 (1996), Assembly debate on 25 January 1996 (6th and 7th Sittings) (see Doc. 7443, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Muehleemann; and Doc. 7463, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Bindig); available from <http://assembly.coe.int/documents/AdoptedText/ta96/EOP193.HTM>; accessed May 14, 2007.
- "On Russia's Strategic Course with the CIS Countries" [Strategicheskii kurs Rossii s gosudarstvami-uchastnikami SNG] Approved by the President of the Russian Federation, 14 September 1995 №940 "Diplomaticeskii Vestnik" №10, 1995.
- Onuf, Nicholas Greenwood. *World of our making: rules and rule in social theory and international relations*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.
- Ouimet, Matthew J.. *The Rise and the Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Pettman, Ralph. *Commonsense Constructivism, or The Making of World Affairs*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000.
- Piontkovski, Andrei. *East or West? Russia's Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy*. (London, The Foreign Policy Center, 2006); available from <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/681.pdf>; accessed April 23, 2007.
- Poppe, Edwin, and Louk Hagendoorn, (2000): Types of Identification among Russians in the 'Near Abroad,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53 (1): 57-71.
- Pursiainen, Christer. *Russian Foreign Policy and International Relations Theory*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V.. *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Russell, Wynne. *Russian Policy Towards the 'Near Abroad': The Discourse of Hierarchy*. (Australian National University: Canberra, 1995 Working Paper No. 1995/7); available from [http://rspas.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work\\_papers/95-7.pdf](http://rspas.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work_papers/95-7.pdf); accessed May 16, 2007.
- Melville, Andrei and Tatiana Shackleina., ed. 2005. *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*. New York: CEU Press.
- Miller, Steven E. and Dmitri Trenin., ed. 2004. *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*. Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences; London, England: MIT Press.
- Rutland, Peter., ed. 2001. *Business and State in Contemporary Russia*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 2000. *Holding the course*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 1998. *The Challenge of the Integration*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Sarbin, Theodore R. and John I. Kitsuse., ed. 1994. *Constructing the Social*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Searle, John R.. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press, 1995.
- Shporluk, Roman. *Imperiya ta natsiyi: z istorychnoho dosvidu Ukrayiny, Rosiyi, Polshchi ta Bilorusi* [Empire and the States: from Historical Experience of Ukraine, Russia, Poland, and Belarus]. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2000
- Tsygankov, Andrei. *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Lanham, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006.
- Vladislavlev, A. and S. Karaganov (1992): The Idea of Russia. *International Affairs* (Moscow), 38 (12): 30-36.
- Wendt, Alexander, (1992): Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46 (2): 391-425.
- Zehfuss, Maja. *Constructivism in International Relations: the Politics of Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.