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# **Vladimir Putin's narrative of Russian identity**

**Vladimir Putin's perspective on Russian identity in the speeches to  
the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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## **Abstract**

Throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Russian policy has been identified primarily by one unalterable person – Vladimir Putin. His coming to power as president of the Russian Federation marked a new course in Russia's policy. Putin's political decisions and visions are of considerable importance in Russian domestic policy as much as in international politics.

The aim of this paper is to study how Vladimir Putin, in his speeches to Russian diplomats, constructs his narrative about Russian identity in relation to the West, in particular, with the European Union and the United States of America. With the use of comparative and narrative thematical analyses as methods, combined with theories about constructivism, Russian ideas and history, the speeches have been compared and analysed in order to show how Putin narrates Russian identity throughout the years.

The results show that the narrative of Russian identity changes over time. Russian identity evolves into a great power, while the narrative of the West becomes more negative. The study can contribute to deepening the understanding of how political leaders impact the formation of the country's identity through the creation of a narrative that they share with the public.

**Keywords:** Vladimir Putin, Russian identity, narrative, EU, US, Eurasia, constructivism

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# Introduction:

*“Russia was always “we”, the West was always “them”. And “them” were guilty of all the sins in the world.”<sup>1</sup>*

Bengt Jangfeldt, *“Vi och dom, om Ryssland som idé”*

## 1.1 Background

Russian peculiarity lies in its special relationship with the West in general and with Europe in particular. Ever since Russia emerged as a state in Europe, its European identity has been questioned by Western Europeans as much as by Russians themselves.<sup>2</sup> Often perceived as “backwards” and “hostile” by Western Europe, Russia has faced periods of convergence with Europe and periods of isolation from it throughout its history. However, the most important role in Russian relations with the Western countries was played by the Russian rulers who were setting the course for Russian policy, choosing the country’s allies and identifying the country’s enemies. Historically, the Russian tsar Peter the Great is considered a precursor of Russia’s “*Europeanisation*” at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> After him, Russia had leaders like the tsar Nicolai I who turned his back on Europe and “banned” European culture in Russia, succeeded by his son Alexander II who reestablished it.<sup>4</sup> Even during Soviet times, the policy of the Soviet Union was swinging between hostile during Stalin and warming during Gorbachev.<sup>5</sup>

Even now, post-Soviet Russian relations with Europe are identified mostly by one single person – Vladimir Putin. Being more or less a constant leader of the Russian Federation since the year 2000, Putin’s attitude and opinion guide the course for Russian ideology, identity and development. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Putin worked on forming Russian identity and Russian interests the way he sees them. He also managed to consolidate his authority and strangle the opportunity for democratic development in the country. His aim was to restore Russian international position as a great power – as it was during Soviet times -under the name

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<sup>1</sup> Bengt Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, Lettland: Livonia Print, 2017, 70

<sup>2</sup> Birgitta Furuhausen, *Ryssland- ett annat Europa* (Stockholm : Utbildningsradion, SNS förlag, 1995), 7-9

<sup>3</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 16-20

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 88

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 27

of Russia. Though this time not as a communist – but as a capitalist country, where paradoxically enough, the role model was the United States of America (the U.S).<sup>6</sup>

Considering the latest events in the world politics, such as the Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian war and the Crimean issue, Russia seems to have regained its position as a great power in the world political arena since the 90s with a strong ability to make decisions. With this current geopolitical context, it is interesting to study the questions related to Russian identity from the perspective of Russian foreign policy. As it has been mentioned above, Vladimir Putin is the leading and unchangeable figure within Russian politics. He was the president of Russia in 2000-2004 (first term) and 2004-2008 (second term), after, a prime minister of Russia in 2008-2012. In 2012 he again became president, now for six years, until 2018 (third term), and 2018 – current (fourth term). Thus, this thesis will examine the rhetoric of Vladimir Putin's speeches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MFA). In particular, the focus will be on the attitude provided by Putin in his speeches towards Western countries. But also, on whether Vladimir Putin perceives Russia as a part of Europe. Therefore, research on Putin's speeches is of interest.

This research aims to identify the identity of Russia within the frames of the constructivism theory which makes this research relevant within the domain of humanities. What distinguishes this research from being purely "socio-political" is its historical and ideological approaches. Much attention is drawn to Russian history and identity ideas in a search for Russian ties with Europe, which also makes this research relevant for the European studies.

## **1.2 Hypothesis and research question**

The hypothesis of this thesis is that throughout the period 2002-2016, Putin's rhetoric about Western countries gets more and more hostile while he sees Russia as a stronger and independent country with its own specific identity. Therefore, I assume that Putin does not narrate Russia to have a purely European identity.

The aim of this thesis is to understand which identity Putin attributes to Russia and how he characterises Russian relationship with the Western countries, in particular with the EU and the U.S.

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<sup>6</sup> Kristian Gerner, *Ryssland, en europeisk civilisationshistoria*, (Gargzdai: UAB PRINT-IT, 2013), 281-291

Therefore, the questions that will be addressed in this thesis are the following:

1. How does Putin, in his speech to the Russian ambassadors, perceive Russian identity in its relation to the Western countries (in particular the EU and the U.S) and how does it evolve from 2002 to 2016?
2. How Putin, in his representations of the country's position, sees Russia as part of Europe or of its own "civilization".

### **1.3 Previous research**

Meanwhile, there is plenty of research on the interdependence of Russian identity and culture or history, it is hard to find researches that analyse the narratives of Russian presidents about Russian identity.

Nevertheless, one of the Russian researchers who investigates on Putin's narratives of Russia is a political scientist Olga Malinova. In her book *“Актуальное прошлое: Символическая политика властвующей элиты и дилеммы российской идентичности”*, O. Malinova analyses how Russian political leaders and presidents construct Russian identity by using national history in their narratives. In her study, she provides a theoretical claim that Russian presidents use politically actual past in order to justify their policy, for example when legitimizing the current order, criticizing some decisions or when creating an image of an enemy. Furthermore, O. Malinova claims that politicians are the ones who can change the past and the ones who rule the future.

The theoretical claims presented by O. Malinova are of relevance in this thesis. However, it is important to precise that the focus of this thesis is not on how Russian presidents use the past, but rather how they construct Russian identity in the present in interaction with other political actors.<sup>7</sup>

### **1.4 Research Limitations**

As stated at the beginning of the thesis the aim of this essay is to analyse how Vladimir Putin perceives Russia's relations with Western countries and which identity he attributes to Russia in relation to it. The notion of the West in this thesis includes Western Europe (the EU) and the

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<sup>7</sup> Olga Malinova, *Актуальное прошлое: Символическая политика властвующей элиты и дилеммы российской идентичности*, (Политическая энциклопедия, 2015)

United States of America. Furthermore, the notion of Eurasia is of a geographic character that includes all the states in Europe and Asia, however, it is important to distinguish from the Eurasian Economic Union which includes only the member countries. In total there are three speeches (altogether 20 pages A4) that constitute the basis of the analysis of this thesis. The time frame of the speeches is fourteen years. However, there is a time gap of ten years between the first and the second speeches and four years between the second and the third speeches. Why these time differences are chosen is explained in chapter 2. The timeframe is applied to further investigate how Putin's narrative changes over time.

This research does not have the intention to analyse Russian foreign policy. This research is focused on analysing Putin's narrative about Western countries, Russian identity and interests in international relations.

The constructivism theory defined by Alexander Wend has been chosen as a theoretical framework for this research. The theory embraces the notions of; "states formed by culture", "states identity" and "states interests". The theoretical framework is complemented by the methodological approaches; narrative thematic analysis and comparative analysis. The narrative thematic analysis limits the research to an investigation of the most important themes identified in the text, rather than the whole text. Meanwhile, the comparative analysis helps to investigate the changes between the narratives.

## **1.5 Disposition**

The thesis is introduced with the background to the Russian identity described with the historical context and with contemporary events. Followed by the chapter about the material in which the information about the research material and the secondary sources is provided. After this, in the method chapter, the methodological considerations and the framework are explained. Also, in the method chapter, the narrative methodology is explained together with the comparative and the narrative thematic analyses that constitute the methods for the analysis. Afterwards comes the theory chapter where constructivism theory in international relations is presented together with the theoretical claims on ideas and history that explain Russian identity. Subsequently follows the analysis which is divided into themes. In each theme, first Putin's narratives from different years are described and compared with each other, then an analytical discussion for each theme is presented. The results of the analytical discussions are summarized and presented in the conclusion chapter together with further research proposals.

## **2. Material:**

Since the purpose of this research is an investigation of Putin's narrative of Russian identity in relation to Western countries it is relevant to choose the speeches that relate to Russian foreign policy. The primary material used in this research is official transcripts of Vladimir Putin's speeches from biennial meetings with the diplomats of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MFA). It is important to acknowledge that these speeches in first place address diplomats of the MFA. However, they are published on the official Kremlin website and are available to the wider public. The speeches contain specific terminology and address specific themes that are considered relevant for the meeting with the Ministry's diplomats. Given the fact that the speeches are biennial, they constitute a good source to trace the changes over time in the speeches. Of course, the speeches can't cover everything due to time limitations, however, it would be reasonable to consider that what is mentioned in the speeches is of the greatest importance.

Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that in the selecting process, all the speeches for the period 2002-2018 has been read. Among them, the three most interesting speeches in regard to their content and context have been chosen.

The first speech by Putin from 2002 remarks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MFA Russia and is also the very first speech from these traditional meetings between Putin and the MFA. This speech has been chosen because it reflects on Vladimir Putin's narrative of Russian identity in international politics at the beginning of his presidency. The second speech that has been chosen is from 2012 since it remarks Putin's third period as president after 4 years as a prime minister. Finally, the third speech is from 2016. This year has been chosen due to the contextual reasons such as the Ukrainian crisis, the Crimean issue and the Western sanctions. Thus, the speeches provide a unique perspective on Putin's narrative of Russia and its relation to the West.

The other material used in this thesis is secondary sources such as books, e-books and web-based articles. They have been used mainly in the background, theory and method chapters, but also in the analysis.

### 3. Method:

Thematic narrative analysis and a comparative analysis will be used as methods of research in this thesis. The thematic narrative analysis is considered useful because it might help to understand what is being said and why. Meanwhile, the comparative analysis should compare the speeches with each other in order to provide a clear conclusion on any changes in how Putin narrates Russian identity. Together, the chosen methods form a tool which enables a deeper analysis of Putin's view on Russian role on the international arena and Russian identification as a European state. The analytical methods described below will be used in the analysis chapter.

#### 3.1 Narrative methodology

It is not the easiest task to define a narrative since it can have different forms and aims. However, according to the book "*What is Narrative Research*" a narrative is explained as written, oral or visual elements that have a meaning. Though, a connection between the elements is required in the form of sound, reading or image sequences to form a coherent narrative. Narratives carry a particular meaning that is tied together by a plot and therefore has special requirements on how to understand it.<sup>8</sup> A narrative involves practical and theoretical elements. One theoretical concept of relevance is *narrative performance*. The use of the concept of performance in the narrative analysis is based on the argument that identities are constructed by presentations of various parts of our self in interaction with audiences.<sup>9</sup> Within this framework, Putin can, therefore, be seen as a social actor, who performs his impressions of Russian identity for others through his narratives. However, it is important to mention that Putin speaks as the Russian president and therefore he is not communicating his personal narrative. Narratives help to define identities and are very particular for providing an insight into certain times and events. However, the narrative analysis is also interdisciplinary and therefore is useful when conducting researches that include empiricism and theory. Therefore, this methodology

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<sup>8</sup> Corinne Squire et al, *What is Narrative Research?* (Bloomsbury Academic; 2015), 5-6  
<https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/what-is-narrative-research/ch1-what-is-narrative-research-starting-out>

<sup>9</sup> Corinne Squire et al, *What is Narrative Research?* 28

provides a relevant base when studying politics, society and identity relation.<sup>10</sup> There are several approaches in the narrative research, for example; narrative structure, narrative content and narrative context. In the narrative structure, the focus lies in the analysis of the language and syntax. The narrative content has meanings, content and themes in its focus. Consequently, the narrative context focuses on the background environment, events that affect the narrative.<sup>11</sup> These approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be used together in the same analysis. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the content and context approaches, in particular, the narrative thematic analysis.

### 3.2 Narrative thematic analysis

In the narrative thematic analysis, the focus lies on the content, on *what* is being said in a text or a speech. This analysis seeks to illustrate specific experiences, thoughts, and opinions in each theme. An interpretation focuses on the meaning where the language works as a tool and is not a main field of analysis. While the context plays a smaller role, it is, however, important to mention that little emphasis is put on the “local” context (where, to whom the speech is told) but more attention is drawn to the “societal” context that discusses larger social events that affected the narrator and therefore his narrative.<sup>12</sup>

The narrative thematic analysis is considered useful when the data consists of several narratives in which we try to find common traits. It is used to theoretically make an interpretation of the story theme.<sup>13</sup> However, it is important to precise that the analysis used in this thesis is the narrative thematic analysis. Therefore, the themes are not chosen in advance (as in the thematic analysis) but are rather found in the text and then presented in the analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Göran Bergström & Kristina Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, (Författarna och Studentlitteratur, second edition, 2005), 220

<sup>11</sup> Corinne Squire et al, *What is Narrative Research?* 8-10

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Riessman, “Thematic analysis”, 54, 76

[https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/19279\\_Chapter\\_3.pdf](https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/19279_Chapter_3.pdf) (accessed 2019-05-13)

<sup>13</sup> Corinne Squire et al, *What is Narrative Research?* 8-9

By adopting the standpoint of a story analyst, three speeches of Putin are analysed.

In this analysis, several themes are identified, however, with the point of departure in my research questions the decision is taken to analyse only six themes that are considered relevant;

- 1) Putin's view on relationships with the EU
- 2) Putin's view on relationships with the U.S
- 3) Putin's view on terrorism
- 4) Putin's view on the Russian position in the world
- 5) Putin's view on the Russian neighbourhood
- 6) Putin's view on Russian interests and priorities

By using these themes, I produce an analytical account of the speeches. The results of the analysis are communicated in the discussion part of every theme.

However, the problem with this approach might be a creation of certain themes I in person find important and relevant, which makes the analysis more subjective. Furthermore, the thematic analysis does account only for the content of the text, but much less for the context, which limits the abilities of the method.<sup>14</sup>

The use of this analysis enables to analyse where Putin puts his focus in his speeches to the MFA. It helps to categorise different important actors, such as the European Union, the United States and the Commonwealth of Independent Nations. By creating this thematical division, a deeper insight can be provided in what is said about every particular actor.

### 3.3 Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis means a comparison between A and B.<sup>15</sup> In my thesis I am comparing three of Putin's speeches. Thus, I make a somewhat extended comparison analysing A, B and C. As stated above, I do a narrative thematic analysis to identify and analyse certain themes and what Putin is saying about them. Subsequently, I do a comparative analysis comparing the themes identified in the thematical analysis. There are two ways to perform a comparative analysis; "*point by point*" and "*text by text*". A "point by point" analysis comprehend an identification of points (themes) that are found in A and afterwards compared

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Riessman, "Narrative Analysis", (University of Huddersfield, 2005), 3  
[http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4920/2/Chapter\\_1\\_-\\_Catherine\\_Kohler\\_Riessman.pdf](http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4920/2/Chapter_1_-_Catherine_Kohler_Riessman.pdf) (acc. 2019-04-28)

<sup>15</sup> Walk Kerry, "How to write a comparative analysis", (Harvard university)  
<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-write-comparative-analysis> (Accessed 2019-05-05)

with the ones found in B. The analysis of both texts is done simultaneously. Meanwhile in “text by text”, texts are analysed and afterwards compared to each other as a whole, which means that you first discuss everything in text A and then everything in text B.<sup>16</sup>

In this thesis, I analyse Putin’s speeches from a point by point perspective. I use the themes identified in the thematic analysis and compare *how* and *if* Putin’s narrative about Russia and the West changes over time. Followed by an analytical discussion that incorporates the thematic analysis and the comparative analysis.

I am using explanatory research when comparing the speeches with each other. The aim is not only to explain the situation, but also to explain *why* the situation has taken place. It enables to question the differences and similarities between the themes and why they appear in a certain way.<sup>17</sup>

## 4. Theory

### 4.1 The constructivism theory

As a president of Russia, Putin is presenting his view on Russian identity in international politics. His narrative is built upon Russian cultural values and history. Throughout this presentation, Putin is constructing his own narrative of Russian identity that is different from the narratives of other Russian leaders. In order to investigate which narrative Putin is constructing, the constructivism theory has been chosen as a theoretical framework for this thesis together with two types of research that investigate ideas and history of Russian identity.

This thesis is based on the theory of constructivism within the framework of international relations. Constructivism is built upon an idea that international relations are socially constructed. In the book “Social theory of international politics”, Alexander Wendt states; “... *the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature*”.<sup>18</sup> Loosely speaking, within international relations constructivism sees states through an anthropological perspective with the focus on identity and ideas. Constructivism hypothesizes that the structures of human association are

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> T. Denk, *Komparativ metod - förståelse genom jämförelse*. (Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2002), 12

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2

primarily cultural rather than material phenomena. These structures regulate behaviours and construct identities and interests.<sup>19</sup>

As it has been mentioned before, identities play an important role in the constructivism theory. It is important to mention that identities are not only applicable to humans but can also be applied to states, which is the case in this theory. One can explain identity as a subjective quality rooted in an actor's self-understanding. However, identity is also dependent on whether other actors perceive this self-understanding in the same way as the actor himself. This creates an intersubjective (i.e. two-sided) quality of identity. Thus, identities are established by both internal (the Self) and external (the Other) structures.<sup>20</sup>

Alexander Wendt identifies four kinds of identities: personal/corporate identity, type identity, role identity and collective identity. Whereas personal identity is applied to organisations, corporate identity is constituted of self-organising structures where the actors are distinct units. This kind of identity comprehends a consciousness and a memory of Self, a sense of "I". The members of the states, in this case, should have a narrative of themselves as a corporate actor. There is only one personal/ corporate identity that an actor can have.

However, there are several "type of identities" that can be possessed by one actor. Type identity can be seen as a label applied to actors who share the same features. Hence, "Others" are involved in the construction of this identity type since it involves several actors who share the same traits. However, these traits should have a recognised social meaning. In particular, when it comes to states, this social meaning corresponds to "regime types" or "form of states".

Subsequently, role identities are dependent on culture and exist only in relation to the "Others". One acquires a role identity by occupying a position in a social structure where "Others" possess relevant counter-identities. At a state-scale, role identities are applied within foreign policy. For example, a recognition of a state's sovereignty by other states gives this sovereign state a role identity. Though, one problem with role identities is that some of these roles are not always freely chosen by the states but are rather imposed on them by the Others". This often depends on the degree of states interdependency. In this situation, a state cannot voluntarily abandon a role because the "Others" (i.e. other states) would prevent it since they desire to maintain their role identity.<sup>21</sup> An absence of roles results in identity confusion. For example, this is the case

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<sup>19</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 193

<sup>20</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 224-225

<sup>21</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 224-229

for the USA and Russia after the end of the Cold War during the 90s. Since the hostile roles of enemies were no longer applicable, they lost their role identities and could not identify their interests.<sup>22</sup> The interdependence of identities and interests will be considered later in the chapter.

Finally, a collective identity identifies the Self-Other relationship as one identity. The “Self” is categorised as a part of the “Other”. The collective identity seeks to extend the boundaries of the “Self” to include the “Other” and merges into a single identity. It goes beyond role and type identities. An example of an emerging collective identity is the European Union. However, Wendt explains that there is no guarantee that states can actually form a full collective identity.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, it is now important to consider the other essential part of the constructivist theory, namely interests. Identities are the basis of interests. As A. Wendt puts it; “*Identities refer to who or what actors ARE. ... Interests refer to what actors WANT.*”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we can say that the identities provide directions for actions and the interests explain the actions. However, it is important to acknowledge that the actors do not have a prepared selection of their interests, but they define their interests depending on the situations.<sup>25</sup>

According to the social theory, there are two kinds of interests; objective and subjective. Objective interests are the necessities which must be fulfilled if identity is to be reproduced. All kinds of identities have this reproduction requirement. To give an example, a capitalist state has to fulfil the requirement of a free market in order to be considered as a capitalist state. In contrast, subjective interests refer to the *beliefs* about how to meet their identity. These interests types are not required by society but are considered assumptions regarding what is needed to fulfil their identities. Though, they should be considered as a motivation for behaviour but not as the behaviour itself.<sup>26</sup>

With the following information in mind, the constructivism theory provides a suitable theoretical framework for this thesis. In my opinion, the constructivism theory can help to explain Russian identity seeking and Putin’s perception regarding the Russian position in the world. With this theoretical framework, it is important to have the “Self” and “Other” division

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International organisation*, Vol. 46, No,2 (Accessed 2019-05-04), 399

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858?seq=9#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858?seq=9#metadata_info_tab_contents)

<sup>23</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 229-230

<sup>24</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 231

<sup>25</sup> Wendt, “Anarchy and what states make of it : Social Construction of Power Politics”, 398

<sup>26</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 231 -233

when analysing Russian foreign policy, which is provided by the constructivism theory. Furthermore, it is relevant to understand how Putin's attitude towards the West reflects on Russian identity as being a part of Europe. Thus, constructivism is important since it implies that the identities of states form international politics. This might explain why Russian foreign policy is guided by certain ideas that can be considered as hostile from the Western point of view.

## 4.2 Russian identity defined through ideas and history

According to several professors and researchers, Russia has always had a "special" identity within the European civilisation and this speciality has always been a big issue for debate. To better explain the Russian identity presented by Putin, it is, therefore, useful to add the following theories into the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Bengt Jangfeldt, Swedish writer and expert in Russian literature, discusses in his book "*Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*" the idea of Russian identity. B. Jangfeldt claims that Russian identity is dual in its nature. It is rather different from the European one, but it is neither strange to it. There are similarities, but in a wider context; "... Russia constitutes a separate, distinctive civilisation that is not only different from the West but is morally superior to it."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, B. Jangfeldt suggests that Russian role on the European arena was never constant, but was rather dependent on the policy pursued by Russian tsars, who had a tendency to be either pro-European or pro-Russian or sometimes both. Therefore, Russian history is characterised by a series of cycles where Russian policy is either positivist towards the West or negative towards it. These cycles have been taking place from the time of Peter the Great and onwards. Today's Russia doesn't break this tradition. After soon twenty years in power, Putin had its time of a rather short pro-European period followed by a pro-Russian one.

Meanwhile, the historical explanation of Russian identity is provided by the Swedish historian Kristian Gerner. He suggests that Russia is a part of the European civilisation, not only geographically, but also historically. K.Gerner states that Russian history should be seen, not only as Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian but also as Finnish, Swedish and Polish for instance because Russia and Europe are historically interdependent.<sup>28</sup> For example, Russia greatly contributed to the European civilisation by providing raw materials, firearms and culture. The

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<sup>27</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 6

<sup>28</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 24

ties with Europe also include wars and alliances. He suggests that Russia was always striving to become more European and was always playing an important role in the European arena.<sup>29</sup>

Kristian Gerner also mentions the western historical writing tradition about Russia. He suggests that the West tends to see Russia from a west-perspective where western states are seen as the “ideal” states and taken as standards. There is an existing bias in the minds of westerners about Russia. Gerner, however, criticizes it, since all nations can’t be seen and measured by the same standard. Moreover, Gerner states that all historical writing is about the contrast with “the Other”. From Swedish, Finnish and Polish perspective, the Russians had the role of “the Other” in their historical writing since the beginning. Russia has been seen as the forever student by western historians under several centuries. Apart from an already existing religious division, another divisional line was drawn during the Renaissance. Voltaire and Diderot drew a line where Eastern states were seen as “barbaric”. Additionally, the vision of east-Europe as Not-Europe got especially strong during the Cold war.<sup>30</sup> All of these contributes to the view of Russia as a non-Europe within the western perspective.

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<sup>29</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 19-39

<sup>30</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 34-39

## 5. Analysis

Below, an analytical discussion of the three chosen speeches is presented. The analysis is based on the theoretical and methodological framework identified previously in this thesis. First, all the speeches are presented and compared in relation to each theme. After this, an analytical discussion of the content is presented.

### 5.1 Putin's view on Russian relations with the European Union

In the first speech given in 2002, Putin focuses on the positive aspects of Russian relations with the EU. According to him, considerable achievements have been made in order to establish a closer relationship with Europeans.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Putin sees the main goal of Russia in the formation of a Common Economic Space with the EU which shows Putin's desire for a closer partnership with Europe. Moreover, Putin adds that "*European partners do not tolerate abstract diplomacy*".<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Putin also shows his concern with the EU's enlargement towards the East.<sup>33</sup> He is primarily concerned by the Kaliningrad region which will be encircled by the EU-member states. Therefore, Putin in his speech emphasises on the fact that there should be a clear limit for the compromises with the EU. In particular, they should not be made on behalf of Russian interests.<sup>34</sup>

However, in 2012 speech, Putin's narrative of the EU changes considerably and becomes rather pessimistic when this latter is compared with the 2002 speech. Putin sees the Eurozone in decline due to the economic crisis of 2008. He states that the downfall of the world economic superpowers, such as the U.S and the EU creates socio-economic problems and a fierce competition for resources that undermines the "historical West" (countries in Western Europe). Nevertheless, as in 2002, Putin still envisions the development of cooperation with Europe. He mentions that a quarter of Russian export falls on Europe, thus, strategic dialogue with the EU still remains a priority. Though, the level of cooperation in his opinion could be more ambitious

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<sup>31</sup>Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002", Kremlin, (Accessed 2019-05-06)

<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21674>

<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002",

<sup>33</sup> "Further expansion", European union, (Accessed 2019-05-04) [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2000-2009\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2000-2009_en)

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002"

and could improve in both political and economic aspects. For example, the Russian president states that Russia is ready to introduce a visa-free regime with the EU in order to strengthen the cooperation with European commerce. Also, Putin mentions a common economic market which will extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He sees it as a requirement for stronger economic cooperation between Russia and Europe. Furthermore, Putin also mentions that with Russian payments through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Russia provides help to the declining European economies.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, in comparison with Putin's narratives of the 2002 and 2012 speeches, the one given in 2016 regarding the EU is the most disapproving of all. In the speech of 2016, the Russian president expresses his concern about the continuation of the Ukrainian crisis and is condemning NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe in a vitriolic manner;

*“This [the Ukrainian crisis] will lead to a worsening of the already unhealthy situation on the European continent, aggravate the consequences of that big mistake made in due time, I mean now the choice in favour of expanding NATO to the east instead of building with full participation of Russia architecture of equal and indivisible security from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean.”<sup>36</sup>*

Putin also condemns NATO for having a strong anti-Russian incline and making confrontationist decisions towards Russia. For example, he names that the organisation continues to install missiles and increase the number of military training in Eastern Europe. He states that these actions aim to undermine the existing parity between Russia and the West that has been built for decades. Next, Putin reflects on Brexit and defines it as a difficult period for Europe that considerably affected the European market. This year again, as in 2012, Putin narrates Europe as economically weakened. However, Putin specifies that Brexit is a decision of British people and Russia is not involved in it in any way. Putin proclaims that Russia will follow the development of the events considering Brexit to see what the consequences will be for the whole Europe and for Russia and how *“principles of democracy will realize themselves in Europe”*, expressing his scepticism towards European democracy. Finally, at the end of his speech about the EU, Putin adds that Russia still does not reject the idea of the formation of common economic space with the EU. Rather the contrary, Russia considers it to be a very promising idea in order to create stability on the Eurasian continent. This claim is similar to

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<sup>35</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012”,

<sup>36</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016”, Kremlin, accessed 10-04-2019, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52298>

the ones Putin had in 2002 and 2012 speeches. However, the general rhetoric towards the EU is much more critical than in 2002 for example by Putin openly stating that Europe makes “the wrong choice” by enlarging NATO.

Finally, throughout the whole speeches, when Putin speaks about Europe, he makes a linguistic distinction between Russia and Europe, for example in 2012 he says; “*We and Europe could set very ambitious goals*”<sup>37</sup>.

## Discussion

Derived from the following statements, a conclusion can be made that in 2002 Putin has a rather positive attitude towards Europe than in the later speeches. When Putin mentions “considerable achievements”, it is possible to assume that he refers to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1994 that sets the legal basis for the EU - Russia relations. The PCA includes political, economic and cultural frameworks.<sup>38</sup> The agreement was an alternative proposed to Russia, after its rejection to participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), directed towards post-Soviet countries. Russia rejected the ENP because; “it would not be treated as an equal” if it would have joined.<sup>39</sup> Even though the PCA agreement was created during the Yeltsin presidency and not Putin’s one, it shows that Russian ambitions to be treated respectfully and equally were already present during the 90s. With relation to the above quote from 2002 about “abstract diplomacy”, it can even be said that Putin in some sense attributes Europe his respect. In fact, at the beginning of his presidency, Putin was trying to improve Russia - West relations and sought integration into Europe.<sup>40</sup> Therefore it can be said that in 2002 Putin seems to be willing to attribute Russia more of the European identity through cooperation and association with Europe. Meanwhile, he does not want Russia to be associated with weak nations.

However, it is obvious that Putin’s narrative changes considerably in 2012 and 2016. For example, in 2012 Putin narrates Europe as weakened by the economic crisis meanwhile Russia “indirectly” provides monetary help to European countries through the IMF. Hence, it is

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<sup>37</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012”

<sup>38</sup> “Russia”, Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament, (Accessed 2019-05-10)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/177/russia>

<sup>39</sup> Joan DeBardeleben, “Revising the EU’s European Neighborhood Policy: The Eastern Partnership and Russia”, in *Russian foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Roger Kanet (Palgrave & Macmillan, 2011), 246, [https://link-springer-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/chapter/10.1057/9780230293168\\_1](https://link-springer-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/chapter/10.1057/9780230293168_1)

<sup>40</sup> Dmitri Trenin, “Russian foreign Policy as Exercise in Nation Building” in *Russia’s foreign Policy*, ed. David Cadier, Margot Light (Palgrave MacMillian UK, 2015), 34

possible to say that in this speech he intentionally presents Europe as weak and attributes to Russia the role of a “saviour”. Most likely Putin does this because he wants to attribute Russia a stronger identity. His interest in expressing himself in the following way might be of a subjective type since that is how he sees that Russian identity of great power will be fulfilled. Within the constructivism theory, “the great power identity” that Putin wants to attribute to Russia can be classified as a role identity. However, identities are intersubjective and stand in relation to the external structures - the “Other”. Therefore Russian identity needs to be accepted by the West in order to become a role identity.<sup>41</sup> As Swedish writer and journalist, Staffan Skott names it in his book “*Det Nya Ryssland och arvet efter Sovjet*”; during the first eight years of Putin’s presidency Russian economy improved and Russia regained its self-awareness. Therefore, even if Russia has not shown itself as a superpower for the last decade, it seems that there is a will to become one once again.<sup>42</sup> Thus, through the use of a so-called *heroic narrative*, Putin tries to attribute to Russia a great power role. Historically, Russian leaders liked to use heroic narratives when talking about Russia. As O. Malinova states, during the Brezhnev era, a common narrative was «*narod osvoboditely*» (liberator people). It positioned Russians as liberators of Europe during the Great Patriotic War.<sup>43</sup> Therefore it is possible to suggest that Putin also represents Russia as “heroic” in its relations with Europe in order to confirm his idea of Russia as a great power.

Although Putin’s narrative of Europe gets more negative, he still envisions deeper cooperation with the EU throughout all speeches. However, Putin mainly discusses Russian economic association with Europe. K. Gerner explains that this cooperation with the West is considered as a priority since it finds its roots within history. Russia has historical ties with Europe, in particular with regards to commerce. Since the middle ages, Europe has been dependent on Russian natural resources.<sup>44</sup>

Lastly, in accordance with the constructivism theory, it might be said that in all the speeches Putin generates a narrative where he creates a distinction between Russia and the rest of Europe, where Russia is seen as the “Self” and Europe as the “Other”. Thus, Putin does not represent Russia as a part of Europe in his narratives.

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<sup>41</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 226-227

<sup>42</sup> Staffan Skott, *Det nya Ryssland och arvet efter Sovjet*, (Stockholm: Hjalmar & Högberg Bokförlag, 2009) 347

<sup>43</sup> Malinova, Olga, *Актуальное прошлое: Символическая политика властвующей элиты и дилеммы российской идентичности*, (Политическая энциклопедия, 2015), 116

<sup>44</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 23-24

## 5.2 Putin's view on the United States

In 2002 speech Putin states that Russia and the U.S have a particular responsibility in ensuring global stability. Therefore, good relationships with the U.S are important and should be considered a priority. Putin declares that a mutual understanding of each other's interests has been achieved and considers it as positive news.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly to the 2002 speech, in 2012 Putin mentions Russian interest in building a constructive, predictable and beneficial partnership with the U.S. This year, as in 2002, Putin states that many solutions on international and regional levels depend on Russia and the U.S since they are the world's biggest nuclear powers. Furthermore, Putin emphasises that with the current situation - when the world is going through a series of crises - establishing diplomatic relationships with the U.S is more important than ever. Nevertheless, the major difference with the 2002 speech is that Putin also criticises the U.S electoral campaign. He states that some candidates are tempted to score additional votes by making use of hard, ideologized stereotypes towards Russia. Putin condemns these actions since this rhetoric deteriorates international relations. Also, Putin mentions the transformation of the Jackson-Vanik amendment (an amendment from 1974 that grants Jewish freedom by imposing higher taxes on the import from the USSR)<sup>46</sup> into an anti-Russian law as a worrying act.<sup>47</sup>

In the 2016 speech, Putin again mentions the U.S elections as in 2012. Though, this time he does not criticise the U.S but instead he affirms that Russia will respect the decision of the American people and is willing to collaborate with their new president. Moreover, as in 2002 and 2012 Putin underlines that Russia is interested in close cooperation with the U.S in international affairs. However, the main difference with the previous speeches this year is Putin's determined rhetoric towards the U.S. He considers as unacceptable that only the U.S gets to decide in which areas they want to cooperate and in which areas they want to pressure Russia, for example by implementing sanctions. Putin states that Russia will cooperate with the U.S only on conditions of an equal partnership with mutual consideration of interests.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002"

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/opinion/sunday/trade-relations-with-russia.html>

<sup>47</sup> Putin, Valdimir, "Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012"

<sup>48</sup> Putin, Valdimir, "Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016,"

## Discussion

Visibly in 2002, Putin has a very friendly attitude towards the U.S as in the case with the EU. As already explained in the previous theme, this is due to the fact that Putin identified Russian interests in the West and therefore sought Russia's identity as a more European friendly.<sup>49</sup> However historically, Russia's relations with the U.S had a rather negative connotation, in particular during the Cold War. Therefore, another possible explanation to this unusually friendly attitude is given by Alexander Wendt; "... *without the Cold War's mutual attributions of threat and hostility to define their identities, these states seem unsure of what their interests are*"<sup>50</sup>. As B. Jangfeldt explains it; since Yeltsin never managed to identify Russia's national idea it later became Putin's responsibility to try to find one.<sup>51</sup> That might explain Putin's swing from westernization to nationalism since he was trying to identify this idea. Furthermore, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia became capitalist which made Russia closer to the West ideologically.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, as mentioned before, Putin changes his rhetoric towards the West in 2012. Though, it is important to mention, that this change was not momentary but progressive. In 2001 after 9/11 Russia sought to get closer to the US, for example by supporting the US-led coalition against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Putin hoped that with Russian support given to the U.S Russian interests will be considered. However, the Bush administration ignored Russian interests and instead proceeded with NATO enlargement and withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty - that was limiting the nuclear arms race -stating that it will proceed with its nuclear defence.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the U.S intervention in the beginning of 2000s, in the so-called "coloured revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia (which remarked Western-friendly leaders coming to power) made it clear to Putin that the U.S will continue to pursue a policy harmful to Russian interests.<sup>54 55</sup> Another important factor was Russian growing economy that increased country's capabilities and self-confidence to act and contest the U.S.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, during the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev, in the Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of July 2008 Russia for the first time defined itself as a Eurasian rather than a European power, meaning that

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<sup>49</sup> Trenin, "Russian foreign Policy as Exercise in Nation Building", 34

<sup>50</sup> Wendt, "Anarchy and what states make of it, The Social Construction of Power Politics", 399

<sup>51</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 159

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 172

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/abmtreaty>

<sup>54</sup> Andrew C. Kuchins, "Mismatched partners: US-Russia Relations" in *Russia's Foreign Policy*, ed. David Cardier and Margot Light (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015) 124

<sup>55</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 180-181

<sup>56</sup> Kuchins, "Mismatched partners: US-Russia Relations", 119

it did not deny its European identity, but would focus on strengthening the relations with the East and namely China.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Russo-Georgian conflict in August the same year led to a further deterioration of Russian relations with the West. Finally, considering ideology, B. Jangfeldt writes that Putin took a more nationalist course when he returned as a president in 2012. Nationalism became the new ideology in Russia in the same way as liberalism was 10 years ago.<sup>58</sup> All of these facts combined might explain Putin's negative and daring attitude towards the U.S in his speech in 2012. Nevertheless, in 2016 Putin does not openly criticise the U.S anymore. However, the Russian president clearly expresses his opposition towards the one-sided policy of the U.S and now states his conditions for cooperation. The fact that Putin is able to state his conditions supports the idea that by 2016, Putin has achieved and consolidated the Russian position as a great power.<sup>59</sup>

### 5.3 Putin's view on terrorism

In 2002, Putin confidently states that Russian prominent position helped to achieve considerable successes in the fight against terrorism. However, the fight against terrorism is "a long and tedious process". Therefore, Putin asserts that this problem should always be in the centre of attention both between the members of the anti-terrorist coalition and within the UN Security Council. Putin also affirms that the work should not only be done on the diplomatic level, but also through a strengthening of the international legal framework.<sup>60</sup>

The terrorism issue is not addressed at all in the 2012 speech, however, in 2016 Putin devotes a significant part of his performance to the terrorist threat. In contrast with the 2002 speech where Putin addresses terrorism in general terms, Putin now mentions concrete examples such as illegal military interventions in Iraq and Libya that led to the rise of terrorism and the formation of organisations like ISIS. The president states that these cases are examples of the so-called "exported democracies" where terrorists try to use the weakness of the fragmented governments on their behalf. Putin claims that the terrorist threat has greatly risen and now constitutes a major problem for contemporary society. The terrorists are looking to establish

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<sup>57</sup> Charles E. Ziegler, "Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus after the Georgia Conflict" in *Russian foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011) 157

<sup>58</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och dom om Ryssland som idé*, 180-182

<sup>59</sup> Fiona Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World view Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" in *Russia's Foreign Policy*, ed. David Cardier and Margot Light (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 59

<sup>60</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002"

themselves in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and close to Russian borders. It is also the reason why Russia agreed to help the official Syrian regime to fight terrorist aggression. Putin also adds that Russian diplomacy played a considerable role in the Syrian conflict. Moreover, Putin attributes great value to cooperation and says that Russia is persistently proposing to create a common anti-terrorist front. The importance of Russian diplomacy, together with the value of cooperation in solving common problems constitutes a similarity with the 2002 speech.<sup>61</sup>

### Discussion

The conclusion that derives from the following is that Putin attributes Russia a very important role in the fight against terrorism. When Putin was giving his speech in 2002, the second Chechen War was in the context<sup>62</sup>. According to the book "*Russia's foreign policy*," Putin wanted his intervention in Chechnya to be perceived as a fight against global terrorism by the West. Furthermore, Putin could call Russia being a "*staunch protector of Muslims*".<sup>63</sup> If looked from the constructivism perspective, Putin's claims about the terrorist threat, the Chechnyan War and Russian support of the US coalition against the Taliban (mentioned in the US theme) can be understood as a subjective interest of the Russian president to show Russian leading position together with the West and to consolidate Russian identity as a great power.

Nevertheless, Putin's discourse of terrorism in 2016 is considerably different. Apart from some similarities mentioned above, Putin now puts the blame for terrorism on NATO and the U.S. Even though he does not state it out loud, an unmistakable reference can be deduced from his speech for example when he refers to Iraq and Libya, where NATO intervened in 2003 and 2011 respectively.<sup>64</sup> The Syrian crisis can, therefore, be seen as an indirect conflict between the West and Russia, where the West bitterly blames Russia for helping the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, whereas Russia blames the West for trying to forcefully impose a new regime.<sup>65</sup> That Russia confronts with the West in 2016 is a fact. However, this year Putin narrates Russian identity in relation to terrorism as a fighter against global terrorism and the guardian of legitimised regimes.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Putin, Valdimir, "Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016,"

<sup>62</sup>Richard Sakwa, "Dualism at home and Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy Neo-revisionism and Bicontinentalism" in *Russia's Foreign Policy*, ed. David Cardier and Margot Light (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015) 69

<sup>63</sup> David Cardier and Margot Light, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015) 39 and 192

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 20 and 78

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 20

## 5.4 Putin's view on Russian role in international politics

The start of the 2002 speech marks Putin's statement that Russia got out of a long period of confrontation in international relations and is no longer seen as an enemy, but rather as a stable and equal partner on the international arena. He emphasises that Russia does not have or need any "preferences" in international politics. However, Russia is now also seen as a growing economic competitor. Furthermore, Putin makes the following statement about Russian foreign policy;

*"Whether Russian foreign policy stays global in its range? .... Of course, it does. Not only due to Russian military and economic potential, but also due to geography. We are present in Europe, in Asia, in the north and the south. Certainly, our interests are present everywhere!"<sup>67</sup>*

However, if in 2002 he was more focused on stating Russian position in the world, in 2012 he attributes more importance to a discussion of the overall situation in the world. In 2012 Putin states that international relations only get worse and can't be defined as stable. He says that trust and openness in international relations are not in demand. He expresses his concern regarding the fact that certain countries often use one-sided measures in attempting to keep their influence, for example, they use so-called "missile-bomb diplomacy" and get involved in internal conflicts. He then reminds how unbalanced the reform processes are in North Africa and in the Near East where these involvements occurred. As mentioned in the terrorist theme, Putin indirectly blames the West. Furthermore, he declares that these actions are an unacceptable violation of international law. Instead, Putin emphasises that a peaceful political solution should become a norm and Russia should promote regulation of these types of problems. Moreover, Putin affirms that Russian policy has always been independent, consequent and self-sufficient. It has for centuries generated the role of Russia in international politics and in the development of the world's civilization. Putin asserts that Russian policy has nothing in common with isolationism and confrontation politics but seeks integration into global processes.

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<sup>67</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002"

Furthermore, in his first speech in 2002 Putin describes Russian role through a perspective of other international actors and states that this role is rather positive. However, in 2012, Putin acknowledges that the vision of Russia is unfortunately not formed by Russia itself and is therefore often false. According to the president, this vision shows neither the real situation in the country nor the Russian contribution to the world's civilisation, science and culture. This obviously constitutes a contrast with what he had said in 2002. Therefore Putin encourages the use of the "soft power", which means a promotion of interests through persuasion and attraction of sympathy towards Russia.<sup>68</sup>

In 2016 Putin starts his speech by declaring that Russia pursues an independent foreign policy and seeks an open, fair interaction with all the other countries around the world. This claim is very similar to the one made in 2012. Also, Putin underlines that Russia does not impose its ideas or values to anyone and strongly follows the international legislation and the UN Security Council. In this speech, Putin puts a great emphasis that difficulties can be avoided only through dialogue.

Additionally, as in 2012, Putin again pronounces that certain countries try to keep their political dominance by using unacceptable means. More precisely, he names that they interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and incite regional conflicts. The results of these types of politics, he remarks, are visible even near Russia – namely in Ukraine. In 2012 Putin mentioned the Arabic countries as an example, however this year he focuses on Ukraine. Putin announces that the internal conflict that was set on fire in Ukraine in November 2013 (due to a separation between those who wanted closer cooperation with the West and the ones who wanted cooperation with Russia)<sup>69</sup> has resulted in people's deaths and a refugee flow to Russia. Putin devotedly expresses that Russia wishes a soon resolution of the Ukrainian conflict. Therefore, continuous cooperation within the Normandy format and with the U.S is necessary. Putin declares that Russia will not tolerate being blamed for the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, Putin now openly states that the West pursues an information attack against Russia. If in 2012 Putin was promoting a policy of the soft power, in 2016, however, Putin states that Russia should confront Western media. Besides, Putin asserts that Russia is being drawn to participate in a military uprising that will undermine Russian force and resources. However, he asserts that Russia will not give in for this and will continue to focus on social-economic development.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Putin, Valdimir, "Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012"

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know>

<sup>70</sup> Putin, Valdimir, "Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016,"

## Discussion

In 2002, Putin describes the Russian role in world politics through the perspective of the “Other”. For example, when he states that Russia is no longer perceived as an enemy. Therefore it is possible to suppose that when Putin says that Russia is no longer seen as an enemy, he refers to that Russia is no longer seen as an enemy by the West. With reference to the constructivism theory, it is possible to suggest that Putin here features a new role identity for Russia in international politics, the role of the Western ally.

However, both in 2012 and in 2016 the situation gets a throwback and Putin claims that the view on Russia is distorted abroad and does not represent the truth about Russia. Historically, this might be explained by the fact that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Russia has been perceived by the West from a perspective where the West was considered as “standard”.<sup>71</sup> Obviously, Russia does not fit in the Western perception of the standard anymore (it did apparently in 2002) which might be explained by the ideological differences. Russia changes towards a more nationalistic, less democratic country, nostalgic of its communist past.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Russia has been historically perceived as “hostile” or “different” by the countries in the West. K. Gerner explains that since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russia together with Turkey was seen as a “threat to Europe”, thereby intensifying European otherness from Russia. This imposed role identity intensified its hold in the West during the times of the Soviet Union when communism was seen as threatening.<sup>73</sup> Apparently, Russia does not have the role identity that Putin wants for it. Explained by the constructivism theory, this is due to a high level of interdependence between the Self and the Other. Role identities are not always a choice but are representations of the Other that are forced on the Self. In this case, the West represents the Other who attributes Russia – the Self; a negative role identity. Furthermore, this role identity can’t be easily discarded since the Other will also lose the role identity it has in relation to the identity of the Self. Therefore, Russia cannot discard its role identity it is being attributed by the West since the West might then lose its role identity which is assumed positive.<sup>74</sup> Obviously, the identity Putin wants for Russia in international relations is of a country that pursues a just, open and consequent international policy, a role of the “good”. Meanwhile, the role that Putin narrates of the West, which challenges the sovereignty of other countries and interferes in domestic affairs, is a role of the “evil”.

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<sup>71</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 22-23

<sup>72</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 177-178

<sup>73</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 36

<sup>74</sup> Wendt, *Social theory of International Politics*, 228

## 5.5 Putin's view on Russia's neighbouring countries

Russian relations with its close “*near abroad*” (former Soviet republics)<sup>75</sup> have always been particular. In 2002 Putin talks about the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as important cooperation for Russia. The CIS is an organisation built in 1991 that consists of former Soviet republics excluding the Baltics.<sup>76</sup> Putin devotes great hopes for the further development of the CIS, especially in security and economic cooperation areas. In particular, Putin believes that the improved economy of the CIS member countries can form a stable platform for the business communities. He states that the CIS partnership can create an advantage in the global economic competition. Additionally, Putin refers to the CIS members as one, addressing the CIS as “we” and “us”.<sup>77</sup>

In 2012, as ten years before, Russian integration with the CIS is still considered the main priority of Russian foreign policy. According to Putin, the main driving force of the integration consists of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. These three countries have also formed a single economic space (SES) which constitutes the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This union would enforce even stronger cooperation. The aim of the SES is to create common economic legislation and the free circulation of capitals, services and workers. In comparison with the 2002 speech, in 2012 Putin has greater plans for the CIS development. Nevertheless, Putin expresses his regrets about “*brotherly Ukraine*” that did not join the SES. Even though Putin considers that Ukraine's participation would have been beneficial for all parts, he, however, acknowledges the sovereign right of Ukraine to make its own decisions and respects its choice. Putin then affirms that Russia will look for other suitable ways to cooperate with Ukraine.<sup>78</sup>

Even in 2016, Russia still prioritises the strategic partnership in Eurasia, as much, or even more, than in the previously mentioned speeches. However now, Russia is even closer to the creation of the Eurasian Union. In cooperation with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kirgizstan the EAEU project is being achieved. Putin describes the EAEU as intended to eliminate the barriers

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<sup>75</sup> Björklund, Frederika & Johnny Rodin, *Det nya Östeuropa* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009), 73

<sup>76</sup> “Commonwealth of Independent States”, NTI, last updated October 2011, (accessed 2019-05-09) <https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/commonwealth-independent-states-cis/>

<sup>77</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002”

<sup>78</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012”

for investment and trade. Furthermore, it is supposed to form a common socio-economic space with a common policy within some areas of agriculture, unified standards and a developing production and technological cooperation. Nevertheless, it is of interest to mention that this year Putin does not address the CIS but rather talks about the Eurasian cooperation, which constitutes a difference with his previous speeches. Just as before, Putin speaks of the partnership and partners as a whole. However now, instead of the CIS, he is talking about the EAEU as “us”. Also, as in 2012, Putin is regretful regarding the situation in Ukraine. He states that Russia wishes to see Ukraine as a reliable, predictable and civilised neighbour, who is living in peace.<sup>79</sup>

### Discussion

It is not unpredicted that Putin gives such an important role to the CIS throughout the years. It always appears first on the list of Russian regional policy priorities.<sup>80</sup> The explanation of this priority of CIS might be historical as much as political. The fact that Russia is so interdependent with its “near abroad” historically is described by K.Gerner. The historian writes that since the middle ages Russia did not only incorporate what we now understand as Russia but many different ethnicities including Ukrainians and Belarusians. For example, the nowadays Ukrainian capital Kiev once was the capital of Kiev-Rus. For a long time, Russia was a mixture of many regions and people from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea and with borders in the West and East. Therefore, Russian history can’t be seen as purely Russian, because it is not.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, the nowadays political explanation to Russian particular interest for the near abroad is about its underpinning of the great power identity in the world through its role as a leader in the CIS for example. Furthermore, due to Russian worsening relations with the West, Russia has its interest in counteracting the “western influence” near its borders.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Russian growing interest in stronger Eurasian cooperation is a fact. An interesting view about this is stated in B. Jangfeldt’s book by Alexander Dugin – a Russian contemporary political philosopher and adherent of the “Eurasian idea”. A. Dugin expresses the idea that cooperation with Eurasia helps to strengthen Russian identity as a leading power and comprises an alternative to the U.S cooperation.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, in the speech, Putin names Russia to be one of

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<sup>79</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016,”

<sup>80</sup> David Cardier and Margot Light, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 17

<sup>81</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 45-47

<sup>82</sup> Ingmar Oldberg, “Ways and Means in Russian foreign Policy” in *Russian foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Roger Kanet, 37

<sup>83</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 172-173

the “main driving forces”. Thus, he attributes Russia the role of a leading country in the Eurasian cooperation. Furthermore, in his narrative, Putin also attributes a common identity to Russia and the CIS and later also to the EAEU as he refers to them as “we”. It can be said that he includes the former Soviet countries into one “Self”. This can be understood as that Putin associates Russian identity with Eurasia and not with Europe.

As a result, it can be said that Russian interest in prioritising its near abroad is what reinforces Russian identity as a leading country and furthermore incorporates these countries into its sphere of interest in order to resist the Western influence.

## **5.6 What Putin sees as Russian interests and priorities**

In the 2002 speech, apart from Russian interest in cooperation with the Western countries and deeper integration within the CIS, Putin is interested in finding new allies for Russia around the world. However, he specifies that these allies should cooperate with Russia on equal terms, respect Russian national interests and provide tangible paybacks. Furthermore, the president emphasises on the protection of national business from discrimination on the international arena and even within the country. Putin declares that this is due to the fact that international politics are not entirely formed by diplomats but also by business. The president also envisions Russian entrance to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and encourages the diplomats to work more actively in that direction. Putin finishes his speech by stating that national success is interdependent with the international and economic success. Moreover, the ability to create allies and pursue skilful diplomacy will raise the authority of the country.<sup>84</sup>

A very important priority for Russia in 2012 is Russian relations with China in economic and international cooperation. However, Putin also mentions that Russia is interested in stronger cooperation with other Asian countries, for example, India. These are new priorities in comparison with the 2002 speech where Asia was not explicitly mentioned.

Furthermore, in 2012 Putin argues that Russian diplomats should be more active in influencing the situations where Russian interests are involved. Since the economic crisis of 2008 Russian business is facing hard restrictions due to the protectionist policy pursued by other

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<sup>84</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Выступление на расширенном совещании в Министерстве иностранных дел с участием глав дипломатических миссий за рубежом 2002”

countries. Similarly, with the year 2002, the president asserts that Russian diplomacy should improve at lobbying and protecting Russian business interests.

If ten years ago, Putin was encouraging alliances, in 2012 he affirms that Russian participation in the summits that Russia will host can considerably strengthen Russian position in the world and help to more vigorously promote the unconditional priority of legal political and diplomatic regulation of acute problems.<sup>85</sup>

Apart from 2002 and 2012 speeches, however, the 2016 speech even greater emphasises Russian interests on the Asian continent. Putin mentions the initiation of dialogue concerning the formation of an even greater economic partnership in Eurasia on a basis of the EAEU and the Chinese project “Economic belt of the Silk Road” that will incorporate more Asian countries. Except for the currently traditional priority of the Eurasian cooperation, Putin stresses Russian interest in open diplomatic dialogue as the only way of conflict resolution and insists that Russian diplomats should actively work with resolving conflict in first place close to Russian borders. He emphasises the importance of friendly relations with Russian neighbours. As in the previous two speeches, Putin again discusses Russian national business and claims its promotion in foreign countries, on regional and global markets. Finally, Putin states that Russia should dynamically develop as a legislative democratic state with a socially oriented market economy.<sup>86</sup>

## Discussion

A conclusion that derives from the following speeches and comparisons is that in 2002 Putin is interested in developing international relations with the outer world and is in a search for alliances. This search for new alliances in 2002 can be considered as Russian objective interest that would confirm the identity of an open, cooperative country that Putin attributes to Russia throughout his speech.<sup>87</sup> In 2012, Putin wants to demonstrate the country’s potential for international agents through international summits. In fact, Putin’s view of Russia is in accordance with Russian actions. Russia indeed seems open for new associations with the rest of the world. As stated in the book “*Russian foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*”; through Russian active engagement in international organizations and groupings since the 1990s, it might be

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<sup>85</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России, 2012”

<sup>86</sup> Putin, Valdimir, “Совещание послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации, 2016,”

<sup>87</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 282

concluded that Russia has gained prestige and recognition and even in some sense maintained its position as a great power (for example since Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council).<sup>88</sup>

Also, throughout the years Putin starts to identify Russian interests more in China and in cooperation with Asia. However, as it has been mentioned before in the US theme, the process towards closer cooperation with the East was gradual, partly because of the worsening of Russian relations with the West, partly due to the enlargement of the Eurasian cooperation. Nevertheless, it is also important to add that Putin's choice for the East had also its economic reasons. Since a considerable part of Russian trade is related to the EU and the EU was experiencing economic difficulties due to the economic crisis of 2008, a decision to find new partners in the East was made.<sup>89</sup> However, it would be reasonable to state that these events are interdependent.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Putin does not seem to be very approving towards the Western companies who intake the Russian market with sometimes "unacceptable" means and outcompete Russian business. Here Putin refers to the rapid and extensive westernisation of Russia during the 1990s where many Western companies seized Russian market meanwhile Russian production started to lose its investment and popularity.<sup>90</sup> Putin emphasises on the protection and promotion of Russian commerce. If before his reasons were mainly to protect Russia from significant westernization and in 2012 it is due to the protectionism resulted by the crisis, in 2016 however, it is considered important due to western sanctions imposed on Russia over its involvement in the Ukrainian conflict and Crimea. Furthermore, it might be added that these sanctions pushed Russia for closer Eastern cooperation.<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the analysed speeches Putin identifies Russian interests in foreign policy in closer cooperation with China and in Asia in general and in the protection of Russian business and its interests abroad and at home. Finally, Putin wants Russia to be considered as an open and just partner that is ready for cooperation with the world since it also strengthens the Russian position in the world.

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<sup>88</sup> Oldberg, "Aims and Means of Russian foreign policy" 33- 36

<sup>89</sup> David Cardier and Margot Light, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 75

<sup>90</sup> Gerner, *Ryssland, en Europeisk civilisationshistoria*, 279

<sup>91</sup> David Cardier and Margot Light, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 209

## 6. Conclusion

A summary of the results of the analytical discussion is presented in this chapter and suggestions for further research are given.

After the analysis of the three speeches, it is clear that during the first term of Putin's presidency and during his third term, he constructs two different narratives. The narratives become each other's antitheses and represent two outermost different opinions on Russian relations with the West as well as on the Russian identity.

At the beginning of Putin's presidency, the positive narrative of the European Union and the United States is attributed to Putin's will to define Russian identity as Western-friendly. Putin prioritises economic cooperation but also seeks to improve political relations. During that time Russia has not yet fully identified its national idea and identity in the world. Therefore, it has been assumed that due to this, Putin first sought an alliance with the West. However, because of an inability to realise Putin's goal to bring back and uphold Russian identity as a leader and a great power country due to Western actions that Putin perceived as intimidating, Russian policy took a nationalistic course. Moreover, between 2002 and 2012, the Russian economy has recovered significantly, which gave Russia additional confidence. This could, therefore, explain Putin's more dared narrative after his return to the presidency for his third term in 2012. The narrative of the West became more negative and sceptic. The EU was narrated as weakened by economic and political crises (i.e. Brexit) while Putin attributed Russia a role of the saviour of the European economy as it once was attributed a role of the liberator of Europeans from Nazism in the Second World War. Considering the US, in 2012 and after, it was addressed with criticism and determination. Putin criticised the US for its anti-Russian attitude in 2012, whereas in 2016 he even stated his conditions for the cooperation. The main subjects of Russian confrontations with the West, however, were geopolitical conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Regarding terrorism, Putin narrated Russian identity as a country that fights global terrorism and protects the legitimate rule from illegitimate rebels supported by the West. By contrast, in 2002, Putin attributes Russia a leading position together with the West in the fight against terrorism. Another geopolitical conflict that Putin blames the West for is Ukraine. Putin states that the West (foremost the U.S) gets involved in internal conflicts in order to promote its subjective interests. Ukraine is obviously concerning Russia since it is considered as a near abroad which constitutes Russian prior sphere of interests due to historical reasons but

furthermore due to the political and subjective interest of Russia to maintain the leader position in the Eurasian region. Also, the evolution of the near abroad and the EAEU creates economic opportunities for Russia. In the context of deteriorating relations with the West and weakening of the European economy, an economic partnership within the Eurasian Economic Union and China got prioritised during Putin's third term.

Finally, in international politics, Putin narrates Russian identity as an open and just country which - from 2012 onwards - also regained its leading position in the world as the great power. However, due to the historical tendency in the West to see Russia as an enemy, Russia cannot easily discard this enemy identity and be identified in the way Putin sees Russia. Furthermore, Russia has not been identified as Europe in any of the analysed speeches. In his narratives, Putin creates a distinction between Russia and Europe. However, Putin attributes a common identity to Russia and its neighbour countries. In general, it might be said that Putin rather narrates Russia to have an identity in between the West and East – a Eurasian identity.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the research questions have been answered. The two hypotheses that were presented in this thesis were confirmed. Indeed, Putin's narrative of the Western countries changes and becomes more negative, meanwhile, Russian identity becomes greater and more significant with time. Furthermore, in the analysed speeches Putin does not identify Russia as Europe but rather as Eurasia. The elements of constructivism explained in the theoretical part were identified in the speeches. Even the elements within historical and idea-based theories have emerged in the speeches further explaining Putin's narratives.

Nonetheless, due to the limitations of time and scope of this thesis, generalizations about Putin's narrative of Russia are difficult to make. Future research could constitute a broader study of Putin's narratives including research of other speeches given by him in other circumstances. For example, it would have been interesting to analyse Putin's narrative of Russian identity in his speeches considering domestic policies or when speaking at international meetings where other countries are represented. Also, another extension could include a comparison of how Russian and European political leaders define Russian identity and role in international politics.

I would like to conclude this paper with a quote that summarizes the results identified in this thesis:

*“Russia can exist only as a great power or as nothing at all”.*<sup>92</sup>

Bengt Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé.*

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<sup>92</sup> Jangfeldt, *Vi och Dom, om Ryssland som idé*, 181

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