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The 2014 Crimean Crisis' Influence on the Russian Role Conception

An Attempt to Introduce Role Conception in the Russian Context

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Abstract

This thesis has researched whether the role conception of Russia has been affected by the Crimean Crisis in 2014. The aim of the study was to fill the current theoretical gap in role theoretical research, and add to the knowledge of how role conceptions change. Its analytical framework was based on role theory, where the notion of role conception was selected. The descriptive case study over time was researched by a discourse analysis, in which speeches made by decision makers were analyzed. The data was collected four years prior to the Crimean Crisis as well as four years after the Crimean Crisis. It was then studied in accordance with three operational indicators: *decision makers' perception of identity, cultural heritage and capabilities*. The findings of the research proved no valid results – a conclusion commonly reached in role theory. However, the thesis appears to have given valuable knowledge for future role theoretical studies.

Key words: Role Theory, Role Conception, Role Performance, Role Prescription, Russia, Crimean Crisis, Crimean Spring, Vladimir Putin, Dimitry Medvedev, Role Change

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1. Introduction

The sanctions imposed by the West in response to Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 resulted in Russia being increasingly dependent on its eastern neighbour. The Sino-Russian relations have seen great developments since. Some even assume that China in fact bankrolled Russia out of the crisis. However, during the years prior to the conflict in Ukraine there was a trend amongst Western countries to invest in Russia. The oil prices were low and the economic interests were high (Kubayeva – Overland, 2018: 98). The Crimean Spring of 2014 truly laid ground for a re-evaluation amongst Western states in the opinions of Russia. The international perception of the former Soviet Great Power shifted; but what about Russia's perception of themselves?

The generally negative attitude in Russia towards the United States was not significantly apparent before the Crimean Crisis (Vendil Pallin, 2015: 18). Russia changed; the enemy was to a greater extent perceived as *external*; the US and NATO being described as the greatest threat (Vendil Pallin, 2015: 17-18). Some scholars have described this pattern as a “new Cold War”. However, both the international community as well as Russia have changed significantly since the Cold-War era (Vendil Pallin, 2015: 19). Explanatory factors that were used then are no longer as useful.

Describing the structure of the international community as the one explanatory factor of foreign policy behaviour is no longer sufficient enough. Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Relations theory are in need of more sophisticated approaches. Studying the idenational aspects of states and their decision makers is one example of how to proceed. A *role theory* research of Russia before and after the Crimean Crisis in 2014 could broaden the knowledge on not only what roles Russia have in the international order and how these roles change, but also, assuming that states act in accordance with their national roles, it could

provide knowledge on why states act the way they do. Namely, what happens when the roles change. Presumably, the effects of the Crimean Crisis were not solely the result of the sanctions; Russia's perception of themselves must have mattered.

1.1. Purpose and Research Question

With base in the empirical question on changes in the roles of states, this research finds its base in role theory. The purpose of the study is to determine whether the Crimean Crisis in 2014 had an impact on the role conception of Russia. By carrying out a discourse analysis of speeches held by the decision makers before and after the Crimean Crisis in 2014, the research will enable to decide the role conceptions prior to, as well as after the events on the Crimean Peninsula. Consequently, it will be possible to determine whether they have changed. The research question thereby follows: *Has the Crimean Crisis in 2014 affected the Role Conception of Russia?*

2. Role Conceptions in the Russian Context – Yet to be Explored

There is little research on role conceptions in the Russian context. The examples of studies identifying Russia and its role within the international community have nearly exclusively been based on structural explanations. Historical events and the country's turbulent history are often used as explanatory factors for Russia's foreign policy behaviour.

Andrew M. Akin has in the study *Role Conceptions and Belligerent Foreign Policy: Why Russia is Remaking the International Order* (2019) analyzed the changes of priorities in Russian foreign policy. In his qualitative analysis, he applies role conception "lenses", and is unique amongst scholars in doing so in the Russian context. Despite the focus on idenational aspects in the study of role conceptions (clarified *here*), Akin, as so many before him, highlights the history of Russia as a key for understanding how the "[...] Russian state forms its external identity to shape and influence the international system" (2019: 121). Further, it is emphasized that Russian foreign policy is oriented around three roles: Great Power, Balancer and Revolutionary (Akin, 2019: 113). Indeed, the Great Power narrative has impacted and shaped its foreign policies (Akin, 2019: 121). However, this brings Akin to reach the conclusion that role *prescription* (clarified *here*) is the most convincing approach to explain how Russian foreign policy has changed – a change Akin summarizes as going from "cooperative to conflictual with the West" (Akin, 2019: 134).

Russia as a former Great Power has provided relevant explanations for understanding the complexity of Russia as a nation and player in the international community. What seems to have been forgotten, however, is that role theorists time and again have expressed that these types of definitions – Great Power, Balancer, Revolutionary – are too generic. They

are viewed as crude portrayals of the present world, being relevant for explaining the Cold War-era; merely seen as a “rough characterization of reality” (Holsti, 1970: 235). Whilst Akins’s method is of great value, the role-theoretical problem remains unsolved, and the “gap” remains unfilled. More role theoretical research is needed – international relations and foreign policies are complex. Role theory has potential to contribute with new explanatory models.

3. Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

This chapter is designed as an introduction of role theory and its cornerstones. It intends to illustrate the complexity of the theory – essential in order to understand this research and its focus on role conception. Despite some contestations, this chapter will state the relevance of researching role conceptions as a factor of determining a state's role.

3.1. Key Concepts

Emerging from the social sciences, role theory was recognized and acknowledged within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as Kalevi Holsti published his seminal article *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (1970). In his article, Holsti responds to the inadequacy of more precise descriptive and explanatory studies of foreign policy, and argues that the different roles states chose to enroll and identify with, will have significance for how they act within the international realm (Holsti, 1979: 234-235). Essentially, role theory within FPA builds on the concept of role as defined within sociology, namely that individuals are influenced by their assumptions and values, and that these in turn are influencing the interactions with others (Harnisch et al., 2011: 1-2). Put simply, roles are “[...] the notion of actors about who they are, what they would like to be with regard to others, and how they therefore should interact in (international) social relationships” (Harnisch et al, 2011: 2).

This definition brings forth an important distinction within the literature of conceptualizing the theory, namely the distinction between *role conception*, *role performance* and *role prescription* (Holsti, 1970: 239-240, see also e.g. Aggestam 2004: 64-65 and Harnisch 2011: 9-12, and note that the designations might differ slightly within the literature). Role

conceptions include actors' self-definitions, which in turn are actualized by the role performance; the *de facto* implementation of decisions and attitudes (Holsti, 1970: 240). Role prescriptions, then, implies “norms and expectations, cultures, societies, institutions, or groups [...]” (Holsti, 1970: 239) – it is shaped by the external environment, and built on expectations made by other actors (Aggestam, 2004: 65).

Role conception and role prescription suggests two different parts of the theory. The former – an actor's own prescription of its standpoint in relations to others – refers to the *ego*. The prescription of the role expectation, consequently, refers to the *alter*. The alter is subject to language and actions (Harnisch, 2011: 8-9). Social positions of roles are constructed by the ego as well as by the alter. As will be evident in section 3.1.2. *The importance of role conception in determining a states' role*, this study will be focusing on the *ego*.

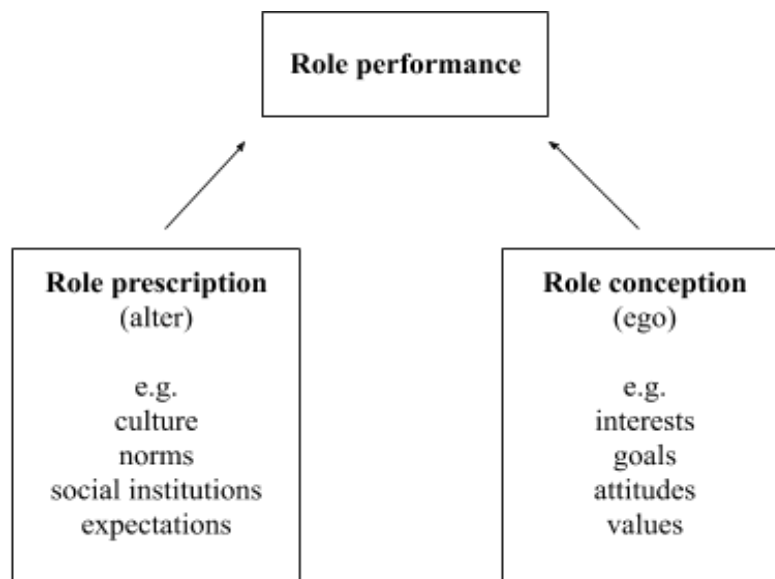


Figure 1. A summary of Holsti's key ideas within role theory.

Evidently, role theory is characterized by its ability to go further than the level of analysis of *material* characteristics of states, such as economic performance, size or military capability (Breuning, 2011: 20). By doing this, role theory enables for a study of decision makers and their

interpretation of the state. Norms, identity, self-image and culture is highlighted in a way it has not previously been within International Relations (IR) theory. In fact, Harnisch, Frank and Maull (2011: 1-2) stresses that the lack of adequate research within role theory is unfortunate, seeing that role theory has the ability to resolve “[...] one of IR theory’s intractable problems, the relationship between actors and the system in international relations” (2011: 2). Thus, role theory offers an additional approach, where the interaction between agent and structure is conceptualized (Breuning, 2011: 27).

This agent-structure approach, however, is not to confuse with constructivist IR theory. Rather, as Cameron G. Thies and Marijke Breuning mentions, role theory is nearly exclusively employed by FPA scholars (2012: 1-2) since the level of analysis within FPA normally is on the individual leader or state, whereas IR theorists focus on structures (Brummer – Thies, 2015: 275). FPA as a theoretical approach aims to explain foreign policy behaviours by focusing on decision makers (Hudson, 2008: 14). Role theory within FPA thus enables for an analysis of the behaviour of individual actors, which in turn enables for analyzing the behaviours of states.

3.1.1 Role Theory, the Literature

A debate within role theory started as early role theorists came to different conclusions regarding the correlation between national role conceptions of a state, and the role performance or foreign policy of that same state (Breuning, 2011:17; Harnisch, 2011: 7-8). Some theorists found a weak or nonexistent correlation (such as e.g. Walker, 1979: 193). Others found a strong correlation between the two (see e.g. Wish, 1980: 547-549). The inconsistency in the results laid a foundation of questioning the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, there are discussions in reference to the more structural approaches of role theory. Here, opinions that too much of a distance is

taken from the theoretical cornerstone are put forward. The same argument goes the other way, with criticism of disregarding the structure. As a result, many scholars have agreed that a structural approach *in combination* with an agent-based one is most likely to give valid results – that completely denying either seems to be insufficient (Breuning, 2011: 17-19; Holsti, 1970). As we shall see, this study will arise from the notion of role conception as defined by Holsti (1970). Being criticised, by some, for being “unsociological” (Breuning, 2011: 17), he emphasizes the ego part of the theory, whilst not denying the importance of external influence (Holsti, 1970: 239-241). This study intends doing the same. What should be recalled from this section is that the theoretical contestations have resulted in a call for a “careful assessment of the generalizability of findings” (Breuning, 2011: 20).

3.1.2. The Importance of Role Conception in Determining a State’s Role

Despite the above mentioned debate regarding role theory and its generalizability there seems to be enough evidence that a study of solely role conceptions in fact can be favourable and sufficient enough to draw reasonable conclusions. By way of introduction, role conception is defined as:

“[...] policy makers’ own definitions of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their “image” of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment” (Holsti, 1970: 245-246).

This research will assume, in accordance with Holsti (1970: 244-245), that “[...] role performance results from, or is consistent with, policymakers’

conceptions of their nation’s orientations and tasks in the international system or in subordinate regional systems”. National role conceptions are by that closely linked to norms, identity and self-perception (Breuning, 2011: 20-22). Hence, the ego is in the spotlight. Identity seems to be related to national role conceptions and national role performance, in turn, seems to be the way these conceptions are implemented (Breuning, 2011: 22).

In *Figure 2* the logic behind decision makers perceptions of states is visualized. The value of focusing on elites builds on the assumption that a leader is the spokesperson of the state (Brummer – Thies, 2015: 275). As Wish concluded in her research, a study of role conceptions can partly provide for a way of mapping out single decisions at specific occasions by elites, but, more importantly, it can help us navigate and anticipate *patterns* of behaviour (1980: 574). Typical decisions of states matches the role conceptions of leaders (Holsti, 1970: 247). In *Figure 2* three aspects are described as being the foundation of national role conceptions. These will lay ground for the analytical framework of this study, and are summarized from Marijke Breuning (2011: 22-26). As we can see, the aspect of capability is added. This is an attempt to respond to criticism of completely ignoring the *alter*.

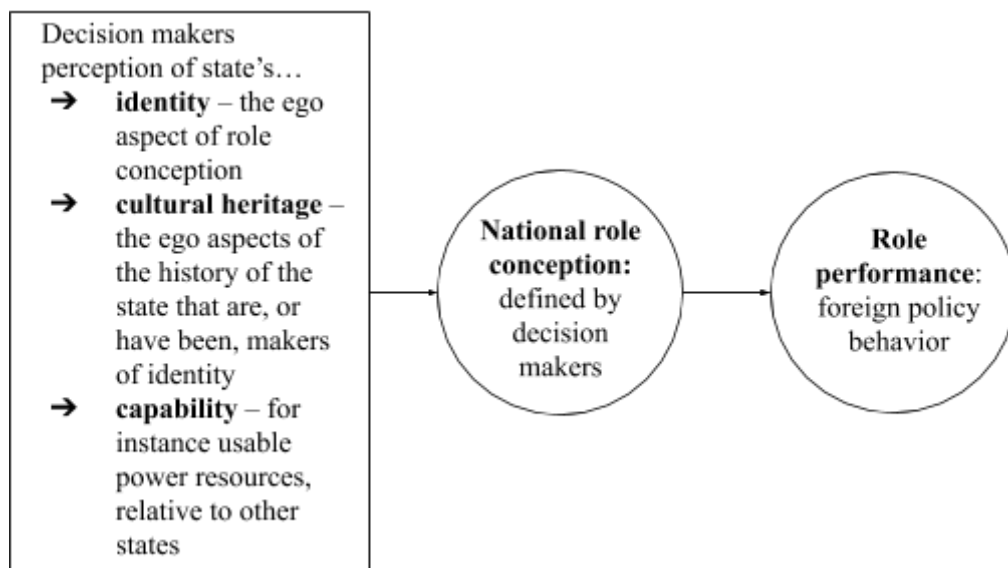


Figure 2. The logic behind studying decision makers in role theory.

Lastly, it is worth acknowledging that national role conceptions “mirror” the role prescriptions of other actors in the international arena (Holsti, 1970: 247-248). Role conceptions are thereby related to, or affected by, role prescriptions. This is another reason for studying role conceptions as if originating from decision makers perceptions of the state – it is in fact more comprehensive than merely the decision makers personal prescription. Thus, by elaborating and finding inclusive definitions of the key concepts within role theory, the critique that was presented in the previous section can be addressed. Self conceptions are in fact relevant for explaining foreign policy behaviours of states.

3.2. Role Change and the Research Contribution

Now that we have seen the relevance of researching role conceptions as originating from decisionmakers, we shall see that role theorists explicitly have expressed a lack of research on patterns and sources of foreign policy behaviour change. The reasons for changes in national role conceptions are yet to be determined. Role theorists have encouraged future research to clarify questions on how constant role conceptions *de facto* are, if they change drastically or slowly and whether they are adjusted actively in response to drastic events such as conflicts (Breuning, 2011: 19-20, 31; Harnisch et al, 2011: 8, 261; Nabers, 2011: 84).

By contributing with empirical findings, this study will add to the knowledge of role change. By thoroughly assessing the generalizability of the findings in the empirical data, this research will fill a current gap of empirical investigations on role change. Thereto, it will lay a foundation of role conceptions in the Russian context.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological framework will be introduced, focusing on the research design, the data and the analytical framework – consisting of three operational indicators. A transparent analytical framework is essential for the validity of the discourse analysis. A summary table of the concepts and their indicators can be found *here*.

4.1. Research Design and Units of Analysis

In order to answer the research question of whether the Crimean Crisis in 2014 has affected the role conception of Russia, the research design of this study is a descriptive case study over time. Studying Russia as a case of role conception is interesting, considering that role theorists have seen decision makers as shapers of foreign policy behaviour; thus constituting the role(s) of the state (Hudson, 2014: 69; Holsti, 1970: 239-249). Thereto, a study of role conception requires that the leader speaks on account of the state (Brummer – Thies, 2015: 275). In the case of Russia it could be argued that narrowing the theory down to emphasizing the leader is favorable, since there is a tradition of a powerful Russian leader. Additionally, it is an appropriate case for studying role change, using the Crimean Crisis in 2014 as a possible explanatory factor.

The study has no explanatory intentions. Rather, the aim is to fill a current gap in the research area. As mentioned above, researches have expressed and seen the value of more empirical investigations (Breuning, 2011: 19-12, 31, 34; Harnisch et al, 2011: 8, 261; Nabers, 2011: 84). A descriptive design is therefore in this case of great value, since it lays a foundation for future studies that will continue to contribute with empirical investigations that in turn will result in findings of patterns and correlations. Halperin and Heath (2017: 115-116) explains that descriptive studies in fact gives meaningful descriptions to phenomenons.

It is important to recall that the approach of analyzing the data therefore is interpretive. This could have an impact on the validity of the findings. However, by providing clear explanations for the operational indicators in the analytical framework, the study becomes transparent and therefore reproducible. This transparency will increase the validity and reliability of the discourse analysis (Bergström – Ekström, 2018: 289).

In accordance with role theory, highlighting the importance of actors as role creators, the method that will be used is discourse analysis. By analyzing decision makers' speeches four years prior to the Crimean Crisis and four years after the Crimean Crisis, it will be possible to identify whether the role conceptions have changed. The first step of the research will naturally be to analyze the data in accordance with the analytical framework and determine the role conception prior to the Crimean Crisis, followed by the same procedure of the data after the year of 2014. A change, or turn, in the national role conceptions will simply be identified by if there is a change in the conceptions of the four operational indicators after Russian Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

4.2. The Data Forming the Basis for the Analysis

The data that will be used to analyze the role conceptions of Russia before and after the Crimean Crisis in 2014 is exclusively collected from the official website of the Kremlin; the Government of the Russian Federation (<http://en.kremlin.ru>). On the website, transcripts from all the official meetings held are published – both in Russian as well as translated to English. There are also recordings of many of the speeches. They are official for all to read under the tab “Documents”, contributing to both transparency and credibility.

As previously mentioned, the value of focusing on elites builds on the assumption that decision makers are speaking on behalf of the state. Thus, the data has to be representative in order to serve this purpose. The transcripts that will form the basis of this study are from the yearly

Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly, in which the president of Russia addresses key matters and future plans on areas such as economy, development, health care and education. A great part is also devoted to foreign policies and national defence. The context in which the Presidential Addresses are held is with no doubt in agreement with the decision makers and elite in the state. Since they are not addressing specific topics, but general guidelines of how to act in domestic and foreign policies, it is reasonable to assume they are the perfect object for researching role conceptions. They provide for a general standpoint of Russia, based on the conceptions of the elites.

Naturally this study will focus on the foreign policy and defence part of the Presidential Address, even though a few more “general” domestic citations will be included. To achieve consistency of the data, it will be collected from the time period of four years prior to the Crimean Crisis, and for years after the Crimean Crisis. Since the Presidential Address in 2014 was held in December – and the Crimean Crisis took place in the spring (Kremlin, 2014) – the Presidential Address from 2014 will be classified as data *after* the annexation. A relevant deviation is the absence of a transcript from 2017. The reason for this remains unknown. To weigh out this absence the year of 2018 will be added to the data. In other words the transcripts of the Presidential Addresses that will be analyzed are from the years of 2010-2013 as well as 2014-2016 and 2018. During the years 2010 and 2011 Dimitry Anatolyevich Medvedev was president. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin held office the rest of the years in question relevant for this study.

4.3. Discourse Analysis

The data will be analyzed by a discourse analysis, building on the assumption that language is not neutral. Instead, it is viewed as a means for shaping and constituting the reality (Bergström – Ekström, 2018: 255). Language is therefore perceived as *more* than merely communicating a

message (Halperin – Heath, 2017: 336-337). Role theorists (see e.g. Holsti, 1970: 256) have argued that analyzing speeches is a favorable strategy for studies of role theory; speeches made by decision makers can serve as an advantageous means of understanding what roles they describe their state of having.

The discourse analysis will be carried out by several thorough readings of the data. This meticulousness is essential as the meaning of the language is in focus. The readings will be done in accordance with the analytical framework and the operational indicators – introduced in the following section.

4.4. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this research is based on *Figure 2*, in which the logic behind the study of decision makers in role theory is summarized. The analytical framework intends to avoid the risks of completely disregarding either the *ego* or the *alter* (Breuning, 2011: 17-19; Holsti, 1970). Despite its focus on role conception – the *ego* – the decision maker’s perceptions of material aspects – the *alter* – will be included. National role conceptions “must respond to [...] the international structure if it is to be useful as an instrument [...] and serve as the foundation for role performance” (Breuning, 2011: 24).

Consequently, the first two operational indicators are referring to the more idenational aspects of role conceptions. The first indicator therefore is the decision maker’s perception of Russias’ *identity*. Here the research will analyze two aspects. First, how Putin or Medvedev defines who they are; who Russia is; how the *We* or *Us* is described. This can either be in reference to how Russia’s relevance is claimed in a specific geographical area, or in a specific political area. Second, the research will analyze how Putin or Medvedev self-define Russia in comparison to other actors in the international system.

The second operational indicator is the decision maker’s perception of Russia’s *cultural heritage*. Here, the research will look to how Putin or Medvedev portrays their history as an identity-maker. It could for instance be in reference to the collapse of the Soviet Union, or its heritage of being a great power.

The final operational indicator refers to material aspects, since national role conceptions evidently do not emerge from identities and cultural heritage alone. The analysis will therefore consider the decision maker’s perception of Russia’s *capability*. This part is in regard to material aspects such as, for instance, military capabilities.

4.1.1. Analytical Framework: Summary

Concept	Indicator
<i>Identity</i>	Portrayal of “We”, “Ours” and “Who are we?”. Portrayal of Russia in regard to other actors.
<i>Cultural heritage</i>	Portrayal of history as identity-making. Portrayal of the nations’ status in the past.
<i>Capability</i>	Portrayal of material resources – e.g. military capability and power resources.

5. Empirical Findings: Addresses to the Federal Assembly

The following chapter presents the empirical findings from the data. It is disposed accordingly to the analytical framework and its associated operational indicators.

5.1 Addresses to the Federal Assembly Prior to the Crimean Crisis (2010-2013)

5.1.1. Decision Makers' Perception of Russia's Identity

In the Address to the Federal assembly of 2010, President Medvedev perceives Russia as a nation depending on, and being capable of, cooperation with other nations. He points out the relations with the European Union and the United States as being filled with “[...] great potential that can be used to achieve mutual goals”. Furthermore, he emphasizes his belief that Russia “[...] should work directly with the countries and companies that are ready to cooperate”. Additionally, the President seems to perceive Russia as being one of the leading nations, comparing the measures taken by Russia after the financial crisis in 2008, to the ones taken by “[...] all the leading nations”. Other than that, the notion of identity in the year of 2010 is not very influential (Kremlin, 2010).

In 2011, however, the portrayal of “we” and “ours” is somewhat more prominent. To begin with, Medvedev points out that Russia's foreign policy has become more modern and that joint efforts with the EU are proceeding, as well as an implementation of a Russian-US Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. There is still an emphasis on Russia as an important

cooperator with, particularly, the West. The perception of Russia as a serious actor in the international community is further expressed considering that Russia “[...] after 18 years of negotiations, [...] acceded to the World Trade Organization”. This, Medvedev explains, “[...] is a significant factor in Russia’s integration into the global economy. It meets both our national interests and the objectives of stabilizing the international trading system”. In 2011, there are also some indications of a portrayal of Russia as an initiative taker: “[...] *our* initiative to conclude a treaty on European security”, “[...] *our* role as a mediator [...] without foreign interference” and “[...] *our* ambitious task of creating the Eurasian Economic Union” (Kremlin, 2011. Emphasizes added).

The perception of Russia shifts slightly in 2012. Rhetorics like the following appears more frequently:

“Russia must be a sovereign influential country. We should not just develop with confidence, but also preserve our national and spiritual identity, not lose our sense of national unity. We must be and remain Russia.” (Kremlin, 2012)

The identity of a sovereign and strong nation, “[...] characterized by a tradition of a strong state”, is more prominent. President Putin talks about democracy, but explains that Russian democracy is different from that of other places; Russian democracy means “power of the Russian people with their own traditions of self-rule and not the fulfilment of standards imposed on us from the outside”. Talking about the American influence in the world, Putin asks why Russia should remain on the sidelines and explains further that Russia, together with their immediate neighbours must make use of all their advantages (Kremlin, 2012).

This reorientation from the West is further stressed in 2013, as the President expresses that the “reorientation toward the Pacific Ocean and the dynamic development in all our eastern territories will not only open up

new economic opportunities and new horizons, but also provide additional instruments for an active foreign policy” (Kremlin, 2013).

5.1.2. Decision Makers’ Perception of Russia’s Cultural Heritage

In the Address of 2010, Medvedev defends Russia’s need “to pay more attention to the patriotic upbringing” of the younger generations. The president proposes methods used in the past, such as for instance military games that are supposed to build character (Kremlin, 2010). The following year, the emphasis is put on ensuring a cultural revival, seen as “one of the main factors in Russia’s modernization”. A harmonization of the multiculturalism of the country is said to be invested in, as “[t]his multicultural world is [also] Russia’s unique advantage, a world in which representatives of different nationalities and faiths have lived together for more than a thousand years” (Kremlin, 2011).

Also in 2012 there are clear emphasizes on patriotism:

“Being a patriot means not only to treat one’s national history with love and respect, although, of course, that is very important, but first and foremost to serve one’s country and society.” (Kremlin, 2012)

Additionally, there is a notion of Russia as remarkable, being “[...] among the nations that not only create their own cultural agenda, but also influence the entire global civilisation”. The importance of preserving the unique historical memory of the “Fatherland” is stressed, portraying Russians as one people. There are also some tendencies of connecting to the former Soviet Union in a call for simplified procedures for granting Russian citizenships for people born in the Soviet Union (Kremlin, 2012).

In 2013, Putin emphasized that the ties with the former Soviet Union must be preserved. Being proud of the heritage, Putin mentions that

“We will strive to be leaders, defending international law, striving for respect and national sovereignty and peoples’ independence and identity. This is absolutely objective and understandable for a state like Russia, with its great history and culture, with many centuries of experience, not so-called tolerance, neutered and barren, but the actual common, natural life of different peoples within the framework of a single state.”
(Kremlin, 2013)

5.1.3. Decision Makers’ Perception of Russia’s Conception of Capabilities

When it comes to capabilities, Medvedev points out the development of high technology, and shares that “Russia’s nuclear industry is once again building and launching new power plants every year”. Without going too much into detail, he mentions Russia’s army modernization and the budget for a new high-tech army (Kremlin, 2010). In 2011, the President again mentioned the decision of upgrading the Armed Forces and Navy, and explained that they now are equipped with modern weaponry.

As of 2012, President Putin focuses on the capabilities of production suitable for export – not only for the domestic market. For that, he thanks Russia’s accession to the WTO. He emphasizes that:

“In the 21st century, the vector of Russia’s development will be the development of the East. Siberia and the Far East represent our enormous potential. [...] Now we must realise our potential. We have the opportunity to assume a worthy place in the Asia-Pacific region, the most dynamic region in the world.”
(Kremlin, 2012)

In 2013, Putin seems to put a bit more focus on weaponry. He highlights the issue of missile defence, defining it as a “[...] crucial component of

strategic offensive capabilities”. He further explains, vaguely, that Russia is developing new weapon systems, and claims:

“No one should entertain any illusions about achieving military superiority over Russia; we will never allow it. Russia will respond to all these challenges, both political and technological. We have all we need in order to do so. Our military doctrine and advanced weapons, weapons that are being and will be deployed, will unconditionally allow us to ensure the security of the Russian state.” (Kremlin, 2013)

5.2. Addresses to the Federal Assembly after the Crimean Crisis (2014-2016 and 2018)

5.2.1. Decision Makers’ Perception of Russia’s Identity

In the Address to the Federal Assembly in December 2014, President Putin explained that “[o]nly a mature and united nation and truly sovereign and strong state can withstand [...]” the sanctions that followed the Crimean Crisis. Furthermore, the notion of Russia as a “role model” is stressed as Putin mentions that the West only helped Ukraine with “petty politics”, whilst Russia “already made a major contribution to helping Ukraine”. This perception of Russia is further illustrated in the following quote:

“We will protect the diversity of the world. We will tell the truth to people abroad, so that everyone can see the real and not the distorted and false image of Russia. [...] we are strong and confident. Our goal is to have as many equal partners as possible, both in the West and in the East. We will expand our presence in those regions where integration is on the rise, where politics is not mixed with economy, and where obstacles to trade, to exchange of technology and investment and to the free movement of people are lifted.” (Kremlin, 2014).

In 2015, the perception of Russia is focused on arguments that the nation long has been “at the forefront of the fight against terrorism”. Once again Putin expresses an implication that the West is not doing enough, stating that “international terrorism never will be defeated by just one country”.

A new tendency is seen in the Address of 2016, as the suffering of the Russian people is brought to light: “[o]ur people have united around patriotic values not because everyone is happy and they have no demands, on the contrary, there is no shortage of problems and difficulties”. Putin expresses the need for “friends”, saying that Russia does not want confrontation with anyone. Further, he distances Russia from the accusations made by “colleagues abroad, who consider Russia an adversary”. Instead, he explains that Russia never has sought enemies, whilst simultaneously expressing that their interests will not be allowed to be ignored. Twice he mentions that the hard year has made Russia “truly stronger”. He also says that:

“Cooperation between Russia and the United States in addressing global and regional issues will benefit the whole world. We have a shared responsibility to ensure international security and stability, to strengthen non-proliferation regimes.”
(Kremlin, 2016)

Lastly, he portrays Russia as a proactive player in international organizations – especially in Eurasian area. This, he says, is “not because of the cooling in relations with the United States or the European Union, but for the reason that it serves Russia’s long-term interests and is consistent with the global development trends” (Kremlin, 2016).

The Presidential Address of 2018 puts emphasis on Russia ranking “among the world’s leading nations with a powerful foreign economic and defence potential” whilst still stressing the importance of the perseverance of “our identity in the era of major technological shifts”. The President

illustrates Russia as a nation with a “forward-looking drive, coupled with traditions and values”. Additionally, the nation is characterized as having grown stronger with the hardships in the recent years.

Finally, there is a perception of Russia as reasonable or righteous in comparison to the USA when talking about the mutual Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty:

“[...] we have consistently tried to re engage the American side in serious discussions, in reaching agreements in the sphere of strategic stability. [...] One of the parties, namely, the US, is permitting constant, uncontrolled growth of the number of anti-ballistic missiles, improving their quality, and creating new missile launching areas.” (Kremlin, 2018)

5.2.2. Decision Makers’ Perception of Russia’s Cultural Heritage

The Addresses to the Federal Assembly the three years following the Crimean Crisis provides many examples of perceptions of the cultural heritage of Russia. However, there are no clear indications from the year 2018, except for an argument of modern weapons being inspired from their “ingenious predecessors” in the Soviet Union (Kremlin, 2018).

In 2014, Putin accentuates the “historical reunification” of the Crimean Peninsula, portraying it as a spiritual source of the “development of a multifaceted but solid nation and a centralised Russian state”;

“Christianity was a powerful spiritual unifying force that helped involve various tribes and tribal unions of the vast Eastern Slavic world in the creation of a Russian nation and Russian state. It was thanks to this spiritual unity that our forefathers for the first time and forevermore saw themselves as a united nation. All of this allows us to say that Crimea, the ancient Korsun or Chersonesus, and Sevastopol have invaluable

civilisational and even sacral importance for Russia. [...] And this is how we will always consider it.” (Kremlin, 2014)

Further, Putin stresses the anniversary of the great patriotic war, arguing that everyone should remember how it ended, that it *de facto* was the Russian army that defeated the enemy and liberated Europe”. He also proclaims that the “[...] quality and size of the Russian economy must be consistent with our geopolitical and historic role” (Kremlin, 2014).

The following year, Putin declares Russia as a leader in the fight against terrorism:

“The firm stance taken by our people stems from a thorough understanding of the absolute danger of terrorism, from patriotism, high moral qualities and their firm belief that we must defend our national interests, history, traditions and values. [...] Unwillingness to join forces against Nazism in the 20th century cost us millions of lives in the bloodiest world war in human history.” (Kremlin, 2015)

Both in 2015 and 2016 a prominent argument is that Russia is not to hold any grudges after the imposed sanctions. This is in reference to the country’s history. In his argument, the President cites the Russian and Soviet philosopher Alexei Losev. The citation can be summarized by the Russian heritage being filled with struggle, that this is a part of the Russian narrative and that it is:

“[...] unacceptable to drag the grudges, anger and bitterness of the past into our life today, and in pursuit of one’s own political and other interests to speculate on tragedies that concerned practically every family in Russia, no matter what side of the barricades our forebears were on. Let’s remember that we are a single people, a united people, and we have only one Russia.” (Kremlin, 2016)

5.2.3. Decision Makers' Perception of Russia's Conception of Capabilities

The President's perception of the capabilities in 2014 indicates that Russia is a strong state. He argues that a recurring trend is that whenever Russia has become too strong or independent, other actors do what they can to bring them down. This becomes evident in statements like the following:

“The so-called sanctions and foreign restrictions are an incentive for a more efficient and faster economy. Speaking of the sanctions, they are not just a knee-jerk reaction on behalf of the United States or its allies to our position regarding the events and the coup in Ukraine, or even the so-called Crimean Spring. I'm sure that if these events had never happened – I want to point this out specifically for you as politicians sitting in this auditorium – if none of that had ever happened, they would have come up with some other excuse to try to contain Russia's growing capabilities, affect our country in some way, or even take advantage of it.” (Kremlin, 2014)

Russia is perceived as a potential threat, possessing the capabilities to strike back if needed. It is stressed that there are no intentions to be involved in an arms race, but if it came to it Russia, with all its power, would guarantee its country's security: “Russia has both the capability and the innovative solutions for this. No one will ever attain military superiority over Russia” (Kremlin, 2014).

In 2015, the emphasis is on the readiness of the Russian Army and Navy. Having been involved in the war in Syria, Putin explains that the weapons have proven to be effective, and that it has been an “invaluable practice” to use them in the field. This argument occurs again in 2016 as he says that the Army and Navy “[...] have shown convincingly that they are

capable of operating effectively away from their permanent deployment sites”.

A call for the Government and leading business associations is made in the Presidential Address of 2016, asking them to develop an economic plan to make Russia’s economic growth rates “[...] higher than in the rest of the world, [...] and therefore strengthen Russia’s position in the global economy”. Also the increased Sino-Russian cooperation is described as very important, partly because it is a “[...] model for shaping a world order free from the domination of a single country, no matter how strong it is, and taking into account the interests of all countries in harmony”, partly because “China is about to become the world’s largest economy” (Kremlin, 2016).

In the speech held in 2018, the rethorics regarding material capabilities is slightly different from that of before. President Putin is very clear in asserting Russia’s military capabilities; he shows a few videos to demonstrate the new missile systems, in order to say “I do not want to reveal more details. it is not the time yet. But experts will understand that with such weaponry, Russia’s defence capacity has multiplied.” (Kremlin, 2018). He also expresses that the Armed Forces have “3.7 times more modern weapons” and that:

“Both Russia and the entire world know the names of our newest planes, submarines, anti-aircraft weapons, as well as land-based, airborne and sea-based guided missile systems. All of them are cutting-edge, high-tech weapons. A solid radar field to warn of a missile attack was created along Russia’s perimeter (it is very important).” (Kremlin, 2018)

Again, the President is perceiving Russia as a nation capable of striking back, a nation that will take on all necessary measures to “[...] neutralise the threats posed by the deployment of the US global missile defence system”. The Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018 is

concluded by a statement of underlining that what have been said in this speech “[...] would make any potential aggressor think twice” and that “only a country with the highest level of fundamental research and education, developed research, technology, industrial infrastructure and human resources can successfully develop unique and complex weapons of this kind” – President Putin makes it clear that Russia has all needed resources.

6. Analysis

The perception of identity prior to the Crimean Crisis portrays an escalation. The data from 2010 demonstrates the Russian identity approaching a westernization, where mutual goals with the West are emphasized. The following years before the events in Ukraine the perceptions of *We* and *Us* becomes more prominent. The Presidential Addresses describes Russia as being an initiative taker, a strong and influential country that is not to stay on the sidelines in regard to the increased American influence. The relations with the West is seen as an important part of the Russian identity until the year of 2013, when a reorientation from the West to the Pacific Ocean is illustrated. The perception of identity is in summary not very prominent.

In the years following the Crimean Crisis, however, there are a lot of examples of the Russian suffering narrative, that the obstacles – namely the sanctions – were conquered as a strong and sovereign state; a mature and united nation. In 2015 and 2016 the perception of Russia as a role model stands out; partly in regard to Ukraine and the “petty politics” from the west, but also in regard to the fight against terrorism. There is a notion that Russia will protect the world. In 2016 the need for friends is expressed, and the accusations of Russia as an adversary are rejected; Russia never sought enemies. As of 2018, the suggestion of Russia as a role model recurs. The country is perceived as being more reasonable than the US in the discussions regarding the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Additionally, Russia is perceived as being amongst the leading countries in economy and defence potential.

The decision makers’ perception of cultural heritage and portrayal of history as identity-maker is well distinguished both before and after the Crimean Spring. A pride in history and heritage cannot be overlooked. The Addresses to the Federal Assembly of 2010-2013 stresses the importance of

a patriotic upbringing and a cultural revival as a means for modernization. In the two years leading up to the annexation of Crimea, the ties with the former Soviet states are emphasized. President Putin stresses the historical memory, being proud of the heritage. An aspiration to be a regional leader is evident, referring to the great history and culture of Russia.

The Presidential Addresses after the Crimean Spring provides a few more examples on perception of cultural heritage. The so called historical reunification with Crimea is explained as a spiritual source of a developing a multifaceted and solid nation, going back to its roots. The anniversary of the Great Patriotic War is celebrated, and the President mentions that it was in fact Russia that liberated Europe. In 2014, Putin says that the quality and size of the Russian economy must be comparable to the geopolitical and historical role of Russia. Furthermore, the heritage of the suffering narrative is brought up again. This time it is expressed as a reason for not holding any grudges.

Finally; the decision makers' perceptions of capabilities. In 2010-2013 there are a lot of examples of statements regarding the upgrade of the Navy and Armed forces. In 2013, this is emphasized additionally, as Putin claims that the new weapon systems means that no other nation is to gain military power over Russia, that they will respond to all military challenges coming their way.

As for the perception of capabilities after the Crimean Crisis, it is evident that the rethorics is sharpened. Russia is described as a strong state that other actors try to bring down whenever it becomes more powerful. Russia is perceived as a potential threat; ready to strike back if needed. The readiness of the Russian Army is time and again accentuated. A softened rhetoric is seen in 2016, where the stability seems to be most relevant. In 2018, however, a clear majority of the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly is about weaponry. Material capabilities are demonstrated not only rhetorically; also videos are shown to assert Russia's military capabilities, making sure a "potential aggressor thinks twice".

6.1. Concluding Table

	<i>Identity</i>	<i>Cultural heritage</i>	<i>Capability</i>
2010-2013	<p>Westernization</p> <p>Mutual goals with the West</p> <p>Some perception of being a strong and independent state</p>	<p>Pride and patriotic upbringing</p> <p>Cultural revival</p> <p>Some notions of reunification with former Soviet states</p>	<p>Ongoing upgrade of the Army and Navy</p> <p>Proclamation that the Army is upgraded and powerful (2013)</p>
2014-2016 & 2018	<p>Strong and sovereign state; a mature and united nation</p> <p>Role model and protector</p>	<p>Patriotism and pride in references to the cultural heritage</p> <p>Claims that the contemporary economy should be comparable to the geopolitical and economic history</p> <p>Russia portrayed as the liberator of Europe</p>	<p>Capability to strike back if needed</p> <p>The Russian Army and Navy ready for combat</p> <p>The power of the Russian military capabilities are accentuated</p> <p>Deviation in 2016: softened rethorics</p>

7. Concluding Discussion

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from the analysis? Initially there is no question that changes – or developments – can be seen in the role conceptions before and after the Crimean Crisis: (1) we see a slight shift in the conception of identity from dependency to strength and independency, (2) we see a successive turn to a reunification with former Soviet compatriots and (3) we see a dynamic perception of material capabilities, mainly military, going from soft, to strong, back to soft and then strong again.

However, giving a valid conclusion of whether the Crimean Crisis in 2014 affected the role conception of Russia is impossible. Indeed, we can for instance see an increase in military capabilities in 2018. However, the reasons for these are probably because of other factors, as for instance NATO approaching the borders of Russia. Perhaps the Crimean Crisis had some interference in the changes, but that is beyond this research to state. Moreover, this study did not take into account the shift of leaders in 2012. Different rethorics and emphasizes could be due to the different individuals. Of course, they worked together during Medvedev's presidency. But to disregard that factor seems misleading.

Adding the indicator of *capabilities* as a way of not completely disregarding the *alter* seems to have been inadequate. This research appears to have fallen into the same pitfall as so many role theorists have fallen into before. The problem of generalizability remains.

What this research can contribute for future studies is on the one hand that Russia indeed is an interesting case of role theory. On the other hand, that it is reasonable to assume that a bigger picture must be painted in order to frame the role (conception) of a country. To reach valid conclusions a multiple level analysis should be the most credible approach. It is plausible that role performance should be added to the analysis and not be seen

merely as a result. Adding the role performance in the analysis of role conception and role prescription seems like a reasonable approach for future studies.

Despite this research's inability to answer the question of whether the Crimean Crisis in 2014 affected the role conception of Russia, it has given some valuable knowledge for future role theoretical studies. Russia as a case should get more attention, considering its dynamic foreign policy. As mentioned in the introduction; explaining the structure of the international community as the *one* explanatory factor of foreign policy behaviour is no longer sufficient enough to explain foreign policy behaviour.

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