

Contemporary Realism and the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation

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Abstract

This article refers to the Russian foreign policy seen from the perspective of the theory of contemporary realism. Its aim is to analyze the complex nature of the foreign activity of the Russian Federation against the background of the main theses of classical realism, neorealism and neoclassical realism. In this regard the article considers the explanatory ability of contemporary realism and its different streams. It defines a broad catalogue of international – systemic and internal political determinants of the foreign policy of Russia. The article notes the evolution of the Russian foreign activity after the end of the cold war as well as growing significance of neorealism and neoclassical realism as the explanatory tools in this respect. Yet the author's conclusion is that the foreign policy of Russia has still been deeply anchored in the classical realistic attitude to the international relations.

Keywords: Realism, neorealism, neoclassical realism, Russia, foreign policy, theory, international relations.

1. Introduction

The foreign policy of the Russian Federation has been a complex phenomenon in the contemporary international relations. Facing the challenges of the present day globalization and integration it has still been deeply anchored in the heritage of the USSR hegemony during the cold war. Besides, despite the problems with the economic and political transformation, the position of Russia as the biggest country in the world as well as its nuclear and raw material potentials have significantly influenced the Russia's place in the international system. Thus, despite the globalization and integration processes the theory of realism in the international relations remains an interesting explanatory tool while analyzing the Russian foreign activity.

The aim of the article is to analyze the foreign policy of the Russian Federation against the background of the main theses of classical realism (understood as the theory developed by Edward Carr and especially Hans Morgenthau), neorealism as well as neoclassical realism. Discussing the issue of neorealism a distinction has been made between the structural realism, as the theory developed by Kenneth Waltz, and the theories of hegemonic rivalry, and mainly the Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war. The above distinction clearly illustrates that realism in the international relations has not necessarily been a cohesive approach with some different streams responding to the evolution of the world affairs and emphasizing different aspects of the theory. Yet there are some general assumptions typical for each of the realistic visions. Thus, analyzing the foreign policy of the Russian Federation the article refers to those typical and general theses in each of the streams of realism.

From the author's point of view Russia is an example of the state the foreign policy of which has for a long time been reflecting the classical realistic theses. Yet the constraints imposed on the policy by the new distribution of power in the international system as well as ineffectiveness of its military instruments have contributed to slow, reluctant but steady evolution of the Russian foreign policy to include more neorealistic and neoclassical realistic assumptions. Thus, analyzing the foreign policy of Russia the perspective reflecting all the three theoretical approaches within the broad stream of realism should be applied. Nevertheless, the author's thesis is that classical realism, with its focus on a state's interests and power, has permanently been the key to understand the complex nature of the Russian foreign policy. In the case of structural realism its contribution to the analysis is the explanation of the structural limitations imposed on the foreign policy of Russia after the collapse of the bipolar order, yet some of the structural realistic theses do not necessarily reflect the complexity and nuances of the Russian external activity.

The explanatory ability of the hegemonic theories as well as neoclassical realism has at the same time been growing, pointing out the changeable nature of the state's power, more flexible attitude towards the structure of the international system as well as internal political determinants of the Russian foreign policy, yet both streams are still not as important for the analysis of the foreign activity of Russia as classical realism.

2. The Russian foreign policy and the theses of classical realism

The foreign policy of the Russian Federation has been reflecting most of the theses fundamental for classical realism. In many cases it has been practically illustrating the concept of the state's central role in the international relations, the aim of its power and priority of its national interests as well as the self-help nature of the state's foreign policy and significance of the power politics in the world affairs.¹

In fact, the international relations seen from the Russian perspective reflect the classical realistic thesis about the state as the main player on the international scene. The international relations remain the relations among the sovereign states and the role of other subjects, including international organizations and transnational companies, is secondary and limited. Good illustration of this attitude has been the problems with activity of foreign NGO's and foreign investors in Russia as Moscow has usually been sensitive and cautious to any foreign presence on its territory. Although the attitude has been changing together with development of the Russia's economic cooperation with foreign partners, yet the sensitivity to uncontrolled activity on the territory of Russia remains and independent foreign subjects are still perceived as potentially dangerous for the interests of the Russian state.

One of the most illustrative examples in this regard has been the restrictive law on the NGO's passed in 2006 during the Vladimir Putin's presidency. Declaring the need to protect the state from money laundering, terrorist and foreign spy groups using the NGO's cover the law has in fact provided for a restrictive and intrusive scrutiny procedure upon the NGO's registration. The financial control over their activity, bureaucratic barriers as well as unnecessary paper work have effectively limited the freedom of the NGO's in Russia and only the strong opposition of international human rights activists as well as the Moscow's interest in improving the state's international image have inclined president Medvedev to ease the law to some extent.² The problems of the foreign investors in Russia have at the same time concerned mainly those of them investing in the energy and raw material sectors that remain sensitive for the Russian economic interests. Typical example of the problems could be the case of the British-Russian BP-TNK joint venture oil company, the activity of which has been accompanied by the Russian efforts to take a real control over the company, using the visa problems for the British part of the management and accusations of espionage.³

Fully consistent with classical realism has been the Russian attitude towards the activity of international inter-governmental organizations. Russia has usually been using them instrumentally, taking advantage of the work of those considered as beneficial for the Russian interests, while ignoring those of them the activity of which Moscow has seen as an "interference" in the Russian "domestic affairs". One of the best examples has been the Russian approach to the United Nations, the only global organization where Moscow has kept its leading role after the end of the cold war. Thus, further activity of the UN has been in the Russian interest and Moscow's position as the permanent member of the UN Security Council has allowed Russia to refuse the international authorization for some US international operations, as the case of the war in Iraq illustrates. The most telling, however, is the Russian attitude towards the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Having a full right of veto to all of the organization's decisions Moscow has for a long time been treating the OSCE as a ground for any future pan-European political and security order.

¹ Scott Burchill, Richard Devetak (et al), *Teorie stosunkow miedzynarodowych*, 2006, (Warsaw: KiW), pp. 108-114 (this is a Polish translation of the original publication – *Theories of International Relations*). Compare Colin Elman, "Realism", in: M. Griffiths (ed.), *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century. An Introduction*, 2007, (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge), pp. 12-13.

² See: "Russia Starts Review of Putin-Era NGO Restrictions", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) *News*, May 14, 2009; "Russia: Revise NGO Law to Protect Rights", *Human Rights Watch*, May 13, 2009, available: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/13/russia-revise-ngo-law-protect-rights>

³ See: "Oligarchs Win BP Concession in TNK Peace Deal", RFE/RL *News*, January 09, 2009. Compare: Sarah Arnott, "BP-TNK faces fresh call for British chief executive to resign", *The Independent*, 3 July 2008, available: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/bptnk-faces-fresh-call-for-british-chief-executive-to-resign-859127.html>

Yet starting to observe carefully also the human rights situation in Russia (especially after the war in Chechnya) has soon lost a lot of its significance for the Russian foreign policy.⁴ Russia remains at the same time a perfect illustration of another fundamental classical realistic thesis about the anarchy in the international relations and priority of the state's interests as a result. The international order is anarchic, which means that there is no world central power able to enforce its rules over the community of sovereign states. This implies the focus on the national interests that remain the fundamental criteria for effectiveness of the foreign policy of any sovereign state. In the case of the Russian Federation the priority of its national interests is in fact absolute. It has clearly been reflected by all important official state documents, including the concept of the state's foreign policy⁵ as well as the state's military doctrine,⁶ and the wording of the documents has often made an impression that Russia is not interested in any international cooperation that does not satisfy its interests.

Besides, Moscow has always been strictly committed to the protection of its aims in cooperation with the U.S., the European Union and other foreign partners, to mention the expectations of concrete compensations for Russia during the negotiations on the enlargement of NATO and the EU.⁷ The priority of national interests is accompanied in the theory of classical realism by the state's lack of confidence to any other subject on the international scene. The anarchic nature of the world affairs implies the self-help character of the state's foreign policy and each state should rely on its own ability to provide for its security and interests. In fact, the lack of confidence to other international players and the rhetoric of external threats to the Russian "legitimate interests" are permanent elements of the Russian foreign policy. Good example in this regard have been the Russian rhetoric of objection accompanying the NATO enlargement as well as the Moscow campaign of opposition to the US plans to deploy the missile shield's elements on the territory of Poland and the Czech Republic.

Clearly defined by Russia as contradictory to the Russian interests both plans have been met with Moscow's warnings of adequate response, irrespective of the real threats both events could really cause for Russia.⁸ One of the crucial classical realistic assumptions and the reflection of the anarchic international order is the special attention paid to the state's power, and especially its military potential. Thus, the effectiveness of the state's foreign policy depends on its power, and first of all on its military might. This, in turn, implies the state's efforts to increase its power and its military capabilities and for many classical realists the power remains an objective in itself.⁹ In the case of the Russian Federation the state's military capabilities have indeed played a key role in the Russian foreign policy and facing the problems with the modernization of the conventional armed forces Moscow has been using a card of its nuclear arsenal instead. Thus, it is not a coincidence that both in the case of the NATO enlargement and the US missile shield plans in Central Europe the response of Russia was the threat to deploy its nuclear missiles on the territory of the Kaliningrad enclave.¹⁰

⁴ See: Liz Fuller, "Analysis: Russia Coordinates New Broadside Against OSCE", *Strategypage*, 7/25/2004, available: <http://www.strategypage.com/militaryforums/47-1330.aspx>. Compare: "Should Russia Leave the OSCE", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 3, July/September 2008, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru>

⁵ See: "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" (Approved by Dmitry A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on 12 July 2008) available: http://www.russianmission.eu/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf

⁶ "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" (Approved by Russian Federation Presidential Edict on 5 February 2010), available: http://www.sras.org/military_doctrine_russian_federation_2010

⁷ To mention the Russian expectations of the U.S. not to deploy significant NATO troops on the territory of the new members in East-Central Europe and the Moscow's expectations of the EU to compensate Russian economic losses together with the Eastern enlargement of the European Union. See: "Joint Statement on EU Enlargement and EU-Russia Relations", Brussels, 27 April 2004, available: http://www.russianmission.eu/userfiles/file/joint_statement_on_eu_enlargement_and_russia_eu_relations_2004_english.pdf

⁸ See for example: Claire Bigg, "Russia Warns Czech Republic, Poland On Missile Defense", *RFE/RL News (by country: Russia)* February 20, 2007.

⁹ Colin Elman, "Realism" ..., p. 12.

¹⁰ See: Ahto Lobjakas, "NATO Says Russian Missile Deployment Threatens Arms-Control Efforts", *RFE/RL Features*, November 06, 2008.

Limited economic and financial abilities of Russia to modernize its conventional forces have at the same time not prevented Moscow from spectacular and symbolic (and sometimes a bit grotesque) demonstration of its military power – to mention the repeated flights of the Russian strategic bombers close to the Canadian and the US territorial waters as well as the recent demonstrative visit of the Russian fleet to Venezuela.¹¹ As a consequence, the nature of international relations in the theory of classical realism remains conflictual and the world politics is considered as a power politics – with a focus on the potential of conflict among the great powers, the zero-sum game and the logic of the zones of influence. Such a way of thinking has still been alive in the Russian foreign policy. Being aware of radical losses in its international position after the end of the cold war Moscow has always been using the rhetoric of its return to the “right place” in the world affairs.¹² Russia has been expecting the U.S., the EU and other international partners to respect its “legitimate interests” and to treat it on the special terms (good example is the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council and the NATO-Russia Council established together with the NATO enlargement process). At the same time, however, Russia has not ceased the efforts to consolidate its own influence on the post-Soviet area of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), considered by Moscow as the zone of its exclusive interests. Kremlin has been reluctant to any (and mainly the US) interference into this area and the last war in Georgia has shown that Moscow is determined to use the military force to keep its influence there, irrespective of the international consequences.¹³

3. The Russian foreign policy and the concept of structural realism

Structural realism has emphasized the fundamental role of anarchy in the international relations and the self-help nature of the state’s foreign policy. Yet the theory developed by Kenneth Waltz has primarily focused on the structure of the international system and the distribution of power existing within its frames and not on the state’s level and internal political preferences. In fact, the structural stream of realism has been the theory analyzing international relations on the level of the system’s structure seen as the main determinant of the state’s behavior on the international scene.¹⁴ Structural attitude to the international relations was an interesting explanatory tool during the cold war with a huge potential for analyzing the bipolar order, including the patterns of behavior of the blocs and their leaders. Structural stream of realism has at the same time contributed to the debate between defensive and offensive realism, both related to the bipolar order and proposing different views of the state’s military and foreign policy. For defensive realism the state’s survival has been the basic aim, the power has not been a goal itself and the states in the system, including the strongest ones, should pursue moderate policy communicating restraint.

Offensive realism, for its part, has assumed that the international anarchy provides strong incentives for expansion and states strive to maximize their relative power, including their military capabilities.¹⁵ Yet the fall of the USSR and the collapse of the bipolar order have considerably influenced the theory of structural realism, illustrating its serious problems with anticipating the rapid and peaceful changes of the global order and in fact contradicting the Kenneth Waltz’s predictions about the cataclysmic confrontation the cold war had to end with. Facing structural realism’s problems with the anticipation of the collapse of the USSR Erik Jones points out that structural realism failed to notice the internal determinants of the disintegration of the Soviet Union¹⁶ and William C. Wohlforth indicates that the fall of the USSR was not only a result of the decline in the Soviet relative power but also a perception of this decline by the Soviet elites.¹⁷

¹¹ See for example: Daisy Sindelar, “Feeling Expansive, Moscow Looks To U.S. ‘Backyard’: Latin America”, *RFE/RL Features*, October 09, 2008.

¹² Compare: Thomas Gomart, *EU-Russia Relations – Toward a Way Out of Depression*, Centre for Strategic & International Studies/IFRI, July 2008, p. 13.

¹³ For more detailed explanation of the reasons and consequences of the Russia’s intervention in Georgia see: “Roundtable: Causes And Effects Of The Russia-Georgia War”, *RFE/RL Commentary*, August 8, 2009.

¹⁴ Colin Elman, “Realism” ..., pp. 13-15. Compare Kenneth Waltz, “Neorealism: Confusion and Criticism (Guest Essay)”, *Journal of Politics & Society*, 2004, Volume XV, pp. 2-5.

¹⁵ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy. Defensive Realism Revisited”, *International Security*, (Winter 2000/01), Vol. 25, No. 3 pp. 128-130. Compare: Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, “The Typologies of Realism”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2006, Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 123-124, 127-129.

¹⁶ Erik Jones, “Look for the Blind Spot where Structural Realism Meets Pluralistic Stagnation”. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2009, Vol. 11, pp. 225-226.

¹⁷ William C. Wohlforth, “Realism and the End of the Cold War”, *International Security*, Winter 1994/95, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 91-93, 100, 105-115.

Thus, the explanatory ability of structural realism in the post-cold war dynamic international relations seems to be a little problematic, especially facing the complex character of the foreign policy of Russia and lack of Moscow's acceptance for its new place in the system. Indeed, observing the foreign activity of the Russian Federation one may notice a clear Moscow's objection towards the place and role it is going to play in the international system, especially in the context of the Russian global aspirations and the position it has lost after the fall of the USSR. After the collapse of the bipolar order Russia has been demonstrating its opposition to the US policy, criticizing the Washington for creating a "unipolar order", and it has been demanding a new multipolar system reflecting the "legitimate" role of the Russian Federation. Good example in this regard has been the Moscow's fierce opposition towards the NATO operation in Kosovo and the US war in Iraq perceived in Russia as totally ignoring the Russian objections and denying Moscow the right to co-decide in the world affairs.¹⁸

Besides, it seems that the structural realism's focus on the structure of the international system as well as little attention paid to internal determinants like political leaders, internal political regimes or state ideology do not necessarily reflect the reality of the Russian foreign policy. In the case of Russia that policy remains a complex mixture of post-Soviet imperial nostalgia and the position of the biggest country in the world but at the same time limited economic capabilities and perception of decline in the global position after the end of the cold war. The tradition of a strong central government as well as Russia's hegemony in relations with its neighbours have still been present in the policy of Moscow, to mention the centralization processes in the Russian political life during the presidency of Vladimir Putin¹⁹ and the recent war in Georgia. Thus, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation has so far been full of political and ideological dilemmas and it is clear that structural realism with its systemic level of analysis will face a lot of difficulties in analyzing them correctly.

Nevertheless, structural realism could be an interesting tool while explaining the structural post-Cold war limitations for the Russian foreign activity, despite Moscow's ambitions and objections to the US hegemony. In fact, the structure of the international system as well as the new distribution of power within its frames after the fall of the USSR have considerably limited the Russian ability to influence the global affairs, restricting Moscow's position to local, but certainly not global player. Thus, despite its great power rhetoric and demonstrations to prove its leading role in the international relations Russia is no longer the global superpower. Besides, structural realism underlines a tendency among the strongest players in the system to impose their rules over other subjects. It explains the Moscow's efforts to participate in the global decision making mechanisms yet it is still truth that neither Russia's political nor military and economic capacities compare the power of the U.S. as a leading subject in the system.

Structural realism has at the same time remained a useful tool to analyze the distribution of power in the system.²⁰ In the case of the Russian interests a clear illustration of the new distribution of power has been the process of NATO enlargement increasing the US presence in Europe and shifting the US political influence closer to the Russian borders. The next example could be the Russian problems with the US presence in the post-Soviet Central Asia accompanying the US operation in Afghanistan. Although Vladimir Putin has agreed to US military bases in the region it has soon become clear for Moscow that the Washington's presence there has changed the previous distribution of power on the area to the detriment of Russia and its regional interests.²¹ In the case of the Russian Federation, however, the structural analysis on the system (global) level would meet serious problems in reflecting the nuances of the foreign policy of Russia and considerable differences existing between the relatively limited role of the Russian Federation on the global level, its growing position on the regional – European level as well as its aspirations to play a hegemonic role on the subregional level of the post-Soviet area of the CIS.

¹⁸ See: Ingmar Oldberg, "Russia's Great Power Ambitions and Policy Under Putin", in: Roger E. Kanet (ed.), *Russia Re-Emerging Great Power*, 2007, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 20

¹⁹ See for example: Paul Goble, "National Republics Resist Moscow's Demand To Amend Constitutions", RFE/RL *Features*, June 23, 2009 as well as "Former Official Says Moscow Punishing Ethnic Republics", RFE/RL *News* June 10, 2009.

²⁰ Robert Jackson, Georg Sorensen, *Wprowadzenie do stosunkow miedzynarodowych. Teorie i kierunki badawcze*, 2006, (Krakow: UJ), pp. 88-89 (this is a Polish translation of the original publication – *Introduction to International Relations 2/e*).

²¹ Roger E. Kanet, Larisa Homarac, „The US Challenge to Russian Influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus”, in: Roger E. Kanet (ed.), *Russia Re-Emerging Great Power ...*, pp. 182-185.

Structural realists, and more precisely structural offensive realists, would of course be able to recommend some strategies to strengthen Moscow's position there,²² yet they would have serious problems in identifying the complex determinants of the Russian policy reaching far beyond the structure of the international system.

4. Neorealist theories of hegemonic rivalry and the foreign policy of Russia

The theories of hegemonic rivalry, including the Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war, remain structural ones highlighting the significance of the international system and analyzing the international relations from the perspective of the system's structure. Yet contrary to structural realism they note and consider the potential of dynamic changes existing in the system.²³ Explaining the mechanisms of the hegemonic war Gilpin has been indicating an uneven and differential growth of power among the states in the system as a source of dynamic changes leading to a hegemonic conflict. He has been pointing out that a clear hierarchy of power in the system contributes to its stability and minor changes in the distribution of power do not necessarily disturb systemic stability.²⁴ Yet the structure of the system is stable as long as political, economic, technological or other changes, that accompany disproportionate growth of power in the system, do not threaten the fundamental interests of the hegemon. The most important in this regard is the role of the second powerful state in the system as the growth of its power and the decline of the hegemon may undermine the status quo and lead to the hegemonic war.²⁵

The US-USSR bipolarisation during the cold war was a reflection of the hegemonic rivalry with the United States as the first player in the system and the Soviet Union as the main challenger.²⁶ The collapse of the USSR, however, has strengthened the hegemony of the U.S. and it would be difficult to expect Russia to become a new challenger to the US global position. Facing the problems of the Russia's economic transformation and its dependence on the world prices of oil and gas as well as alarming demographic trends Moscow is not a candidate to compete with the US for a global hegemony, despite its nuclear potential. Russia strives for a regional hegemony on the post-Soviet area and it would certainly compete with the US influence there yet it seems that the position of the second great power in the international system has been clearly and dynamically shifting to Beijing.²⁷ Nevertheless, the explanatory ability of the theories of hegemonic rivalry with regard to the foreign policy of Russia does not limit itself to less a more dynamic vision of the structure of international system. Contrary to structural realism they also refer to a much broader catalogue of factors determining the change in the distribution of power in the system, including a broad spectrum of political, military, demographic, economic and technological processes.²⁸

In fact, Russia has for a long time been adhered mainly to the military determinants of its international power. Yet the economic weakness of the state has contributed to significant losses of its military potential and despite the nuclear capabilities the Russian armed forces have not been able to effectively compete with the military and technological power of the U.S. and some leading European states. Besides, the traditional politico-military instruments of pressure have become much less effective in the new post-Cold war regional environment, not only in relations with Europe, but also with some members of the CIS. It does not mean that the military factor has ceased to play an important role in the Russian doctrine, yet it has been clear that, especially in the relations with the most developed states, it must be supplemented by other, non-military instruments. Thus, the evolution of the Russian foreign policy initiated during the presidency of Vladimir Putin has reached for the economic measures to enhance the Russian international influence and mainly for the export of Russian oil and gas and European dependence on the Russian supplies. The evolution in the Russian foreign policy has clearly been reflecting the assumption of the hegemonic theories about the broader than military sources of the state's power in international relations.

²² Peter Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: an offensive realist between geopolitics and power", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, December 2005, Volume 8, Number 4, pp. 383-386.

²³ Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, "The Typologies of Reaslim" ..., pp. 114-115.

²⁴ Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Spring 1988, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 591-593.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 595-597.

²⁶ William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War" ..., pp. 96-100, 105-115.

²⁷ Compare: John Berryman, "Russia and China in the New Central Asia: The Security Agenda", in: Roger E. Kanet (ed.), *Russia Re-Emerging Great Power* ..., pp. 165-167.

²⁸ Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War" ..., str. 597-599, 603-605.

Yet again, despite that shift, the foreign policy of Russia has remained deeply anchored in classical realism with the focus on the state's interests, strong linkage between the raw material export and the state's political aims as well as permanent reluctance to the activity of foreign transnational companies in Russia. Moscow has been supporting the international expansion of its own energetic giants, to mention the state's support for Gazprom and Russian oligarchs,²⁹ and Russia has not necessarily been willing to accept any new international obligations, as for example to liberalize its energy market and to accept the European standards of management in its relations with the European Union.³⁰

As a consequence, neorealist theories of hegemonic rivalry remain an interesting reference while analyzing the place and role of Russia in the contemporary international relations as well as Moscow's attempts to adjust the instruments of its foreign policy to the reality of the second decade of the XXI century. Proposing the vision of a dynamic international system they would also be able to reflect the nature of the Russia's foreign activity better than the static theory of structural realism. Yet again, the foreign policy of Russia will be looking back to its classical realistic roots, irrespective of the dynamic changes in the world affairs.

5. The Russian foreign policy and the optics of neoclassical realism

One of the areas of debate within contemporary realism has been a distinction between (structural) neorealism, as the theory of international relations focused on the systemic level of analysis, and neoclassical realism, as the theory of foreign policy focused on the level of a state.³¹ Some neoclassical realists, however, do not see the need for separation between the external – systemic and internal – domestic levels of analysis. They have been striving to explain the foreign policy of a state as a result of both international structure but also domestic factors able to strengthen or weaken the influence of structural determinants.³²

In fact, emphasizing the significance of domestic factors neoclassical realism has to some extent referred to classical realism and dilemmas of leaders deciding about the foreign policy of a state. Neoclassical realists, however, have been going a bit further emphasizing the state's perception of its adversaries' power and intentions, ability of the state's elites to mobilize social support for their political aims as well as changing national preferences and interests that under certain circumstances may also prefer (limited) cooperation among the states in the system.³³ Neo-classical realism has been criticized for undermining the theoretical core of realism and challenging its distinctiveness in comparison with other theories,³⁴ yet it is clear that proposing the approach analyzing internal determinants of the state's foreign policy it certainly may be a useful tool of analyzing the foreign policy of Russia. In fact, facing the game of different interest groups in the Russian internal politics, including the role of the military lobby, oligarchs, raw material sector as well as different camps of the governing elite it would be extremely difficult to approach the foreign policy of Russia without the reference to its internal determinants.

Neoclassical realism would also help to understand different roles Russia plays on different levels of the international system, taking into account Russian interests in its relations with the global leader – the U.S., the regional leader – the European Union as well as in relations with the countries of the CIS. Besides, neoclassical realism considers more state's readiness to act rationally upon the calculation of costs and benefits, including flexibility in its attitude to the international cooperation, as it has been reflected by the concept of the four Common Spaces for cooperation between Russia and the EU and the road maps agreed to implement each of them.³⁵

²⁹ See; Brian Whitmore, "Crisis Proves Convenient As Russia Seeks To Restore Control Over Industry", RFE/RL *Features*, February 05, 2009.

³⁰ Russia has remained reluctant to ratify the European Energy Charter Treaty which promotes the liberalization of the energy market in Europe. For more details see: Marco Fantini, "The Economic Relationship between Russia and the EU: History and Prospects", in: Jackie Gower, Graham Timmins (eds.), *Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership*, 2007, (London and New York: Anthem Press), pp. 255; 257-263.

³¹ See: Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy. Defensive Realism Revisited" ..., pp. 131-134.

³² Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, "The Typologies of Realism" ..., pp. 121-122.

³³ See: Jeffrey W. Legro, Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?", *International Security*, Fall 1999, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 28-29, 30, 32-33. Compare: Charles L. Glaser, "Structural Realism in a more complex world", *Review of International Studies*, 2003, Vol. 29, Issue 03, str. 409-411.

³⁴ Jeffrey W. Legro, Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" ..., pp. 6-8.

³⁵ For more details about the new Russian approach see: Richard Sakwa, "Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Policy towards the West: Towards a New Realism", in: Jackie Gower, Graham Timmins (eds.), *Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership* ..., pp. 5-12.

Another symptomatic process reflecting the evolution in the foreign policy of Russia towards the neoclassical realistic point of view has been the growing respect for the state's international image and the role of propaganda as an important instrument of the state's international influence. The Russian propaganda campaigns accompanying the enlargement of NATO and the debates around the US proposal of the missile shield in Central Europe illustrate that Russia has mastered this instrument perfectly. Yet again, despite the growing will of cooperation with the neighbors the foreign policy of Russia has often been looking back to classical realistic fundamentals of the state's interests, self-help policy and the primacy of the state's security.

In fact, facing the challenges of the globalization and its limited competitiveness Russia has been afraid about the consequences of the world economic integration processes for both the Russian economy and the Russian society.³⁶ Thus, Moscow has not necessarily been interested in deeper international cooperation, especially with regard to "politically sensitive" branches of its economy like energy and raw materials sectors and the Russian foreign policy has remained anchored in the classical realistic way of thinking about the international relations.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is a difficult task as the policy has been based on different and complex determinants. They include the heritage of the cold war and the legacy of the USSR on the systemic level but at the same time the political and economic transformation in the domestic field. Nevertheless, despite the present day globalization and integration processes the broad theory of realism in the international relations has remained an efficient tool to analyze the foreign activity of Russia. The Russian foreign policy has for a long time been reflecting the fundamental theses of classical realism. Moscow has focused on the principle of the state's interests, its power and especially military potential.

The post-cold war dynamic evolution of the international relations has not significantly changed this approach and classical realism remains the main explanatory tool while analyzing the foreign policy of Russia today. Nevertheless, together with globalization and regional integration processes the analysis of the Russian foreign activity should not be based exclusively on the perspective of classical realism. The evolution of the Russian foreign policy, although reluctant and slow, has had to take into account limitations imposed on the state by the new post-cold war distribution of power in the international system as Moscow has lost a lot of the previous USSR dominant global position. Thus, structural realism as the theory focusing on the international system remains an interesting tool to explain the changes, although not all of its theses reflect the complex nature of the Russian foreign activity.

Facing the lack of effectiveness of the previous political and military instruments Russia has at the same time had to consider other than military sources of its power, including its economic and raw material potential. Thus, neorealist theories of hegemonic rivalry have appeared a useful instrument of the analysis as they reflect the changeable nature of the state's power and the flexible attitude towards the international system. Besides, neoclassical realism is becoming an interesting and valuable approach as it proposes a focus on the internal political determinants of the Russian foreign policy, including the game of different internal interest groups and specificity of the Russian political system. As a consequence, both neorealism and neoclassical realism may be the useful tools (although with a growing explanatory potential of neoclassical stream of realism) yet analyzing the foreign policy of the Russian Federation one cannot forget that it has still been deeply anchored in the classical realistic tradition.

³⁶ See chapter III – "Priorities of the Russian Federation in Resolving Global Problems" in "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" (Approved by Dmitry A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on 12 July 2008).

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