

# Why the Lion did not roar

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*Foreign policy analysis of the Dutch decision to continue the bilateral Dutch-Russian Year of 2013 despite diplomatic troubles between the Russian Federation and the Netherlands.*



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## **Abstract**

This research tries to answer why the Netherlands continued the bilateral Dutch-Russian Year of 2013 while different diplomatic conflicts arose. As eventually even diplomats proved to be unsafe, the Netherlands still send their king and queen to the Russian Federation to attend a concert. Why did the Netherlands not cancel these frivolous events given the diplomatic tensions between the countries? This is an interesting question because it is a conflicting image of Dutch foreign policy. Besides that it might give some insights into the priorities of Dutch foreign policy of the Dutch government at the time.

This research will present the Dutch-Russian Year of 2013 as an example of cultural diplomacy, whereas the choice of the Dutch government to continue the bilateral year will be presented as a question of path-dependent behaviour. In order for this research to explain the mechanisms that caused the continuation of the bilateral year this research will apply the institutionalist approaches of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. The research looks for evidence among official documents released by the Dutch government, news articles of different media and three conducted interviews. In the end the research will conclude that Russia is a huge economic player to the Netherlands and that the Netherlands was bound by norms and identity.

Key words: Cultural diplomacy, path-dependency, rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and the bilateral Dutch-Russian Year of 2013.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The empirical puzzle

2013 was supposed to be a year in which the bilateral relation between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation was commemorated with over 600 events in the fields of culture, economy, and politics. The initiative for the bilateral year was taken by Russia in 2009 and accepted by the Netherlands. The organization of bilateral years has been a tradition in the Russian Federation for years and several countries have preceded the Netherlands as the Russian partner country. A commission under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, together with other institutions, museums, levels of government and many other partners, started organizing these events. In the first half of the year, the majority of the events were going to take place in the Netherlands and in the remaining months the emphasis was on the Russian part of the program. On April 8<sup>th</sup> 2013, the program was officially started in the Netherlands by Dutch Prime-minister M. Rutte and President V. Putin of the Russian Federation. The program was to be ended on November 8<sup>th</sup> by the Dutch king and queen. But the events would take place over the entire year of 2013.

But out of sight of the program, troubles arose concerning the diplomatic relationship between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation. The first incidents took place before the start of the program and the situation worsened around the opening of the bilateral year. Even bigger events emerged at the end of the official Dutch-Russian Year, as Russian officers boarded a Greenpeace ship sailing under the Dutch flag. The Russians seized the ship and its crew was charged with piracy. Tensions rose to a height near the end of the program, as Russian diplomat D. Borodin was arrested by Dutch police, sparking anger in Moscow, as diplomats are protected under the Treaty of Vienna. On top of that, a Dutch diplomat in Russia was molested when two masked men stormed his official residence on the night of October the 14<sup>th</sup>. All in all, tensions between the Netherlands and Russia rose throughout the year to a new height not seen since the founding of the Russian Federation.

Despite these troubles, the program of the Dutch-Russian Year continued as though nothing had happened. It is as though someone is continually slapping you and you keep on partying with this person. This contrast was noticed within the Dutch society, media and politics, but the Dutch government still continued the bilateral year. This is especially puzzling when one knows that in other cases, like in the United Kingdom in 2014, the bilateral year with Russia was adjusted, and Poland decided in 2014 to cancel their bilateral year with Russia, which was planned for 2015, due to diplomatic differences with Russia. This only emphasizes the puzzling discrepancy.

## **1.2 Research question and theoretical framework**

This research aims to discover the causes behind the Dutch decision to continue the Dutch-Russian bilateral year of 2013. To do so, this research will answer the following question:

*Why did the Dutch government continue the Dutch-Russian Year despite Russia's provocations?*

Presumably, everyone reading the above mentioned puzzle will come up with a similar question. But it would be especially puzzling for scholars in the field of cultural diplomacy. This relatively new field within political science lacks the theoretical tools to explain causal mechanisms. But the program of the Dutch-Russian bilateral year does seem to represent cultural diplomacy. Other theories are therefore required to analyse this puzzle, even though these other theories are less obvious in the context of the Dutch-Russian Year.

To answer the research question, this research will turn to two theories that might explain why the Dutch foreign policy was path-dependent. Because despite external shocks, such as the diplomatic troubles, the Dutch remained on their course of organizing and financing hundreds of events to commemorate the relations between Russia and the Netherlands. I will turn to organizational theories, as they might provide the causal mechanism that cultural diplomacy lacks. The first organizational theory is that of rational choice institutionalism. This theory focuses on rational actors who have materialist interests. By applying calculations within an institutional structure, actors make choices (in this case to continue on their

previously chosen path) because of their material interests. Notions that will be applied within rational choice institutionalism are that of sunk costs, increasing returns and network externalities. From this theory it might be inferred that the Dutch government and Dutch societal actors had some materialist stimulus to continue the Dutch-Russian Year.

The second theory that will be adopted in this research covers sociological institutionalism. This theory too will be applied to analyze why the Netherlands continued the bilateral year. In contrast to rational choice institutionalism, this theory does not focus on actors' materialist interests. Sociological institutionalism focuses on sociological incentives that might explain why actors are resilient to change within a sociological structure. In this research, this theory will be based on the notions of norms, identities and standard operating procedures. By adopting these notions, it might become clear that the Dutch decision to continue the events was a result of norms that are important to the government and societal actors, a pursued identity the government aimed for, or a standard operating procedure because of a lack of priorities.

Both these theories might help explain why the Dutch foreign policy was path-dependent. Both theories deploy different causal mechanisms to explain path-dependency. Therefore, this research investigates whether a hybrid approach to the research question is possible by combining these theories. But more about this later.

### **1.3 Relevance of this research**

The research question asked is important both for science and for society. First, the situation is puzzling given the conflicting Dutch interests in the events that were part of the program of the bilateral Dutch-Russian Year and the interests in the incidents that were not related to the program. Given that the bilateral year was meant to commemorate the bilateral relationship, one would expect that under the influence of the conflicts there would be no time to celebrate or commemorate. Therefore, the choice to continue the program is a puzzling outcome of Dutch foreign policy and it might be interesting for society to explain these kinds of puzzles.

But there is more to the societal relevance. Answering the research question might provide insight into the Dutch foreign policy priorities regarding Russia. Whether or not to move on with the bilateral year was frequently discussed



throughout the year, both inside and outside the Dutch parliament. Analyzing the motives behind this choice will provide insight into the Dutch priorities. The research will also explore the opportunities and constraints the Netherlands has to deal with when interacting with countries such as the Russian Federation.

This leaves open the question of scientific relevance. This thesis represents a topic within the field of international relations. This research is innovative in applying theories in the field of comparative politics and organizational theories. This application of theories outside of international relations might help provide insights into the theories of institutionalism and the explanatory mechanisms these theories introduce. Therefore, this research might provide causal mechanisms through which cultural diplomacy functions, which is rather neglected in the literature on international relations. The adopted theories represent organizational theories used to explain Dutch foreign policy, but more about this later. Additionally, as was previously mentioned, this research might also shed light on whether or not the theories of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism are compatible or can be used in a hybrid model.

#### **1.4 Structure of this research**

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of both theories that provide different mechanisms to the question of path-dependency. This theoretical chapter will be based on a literature study in the field of the related theories. The works of other authors in the field are employed to build on their experiences with cultural diplomacy, institutionalisms and path-dependency. This will provide six different institutionalist approaches that might explain the puzzle in this research. The chapter will end by providing an evaluation of the adopted theories.

The third chapter will introduce and justify the research methods used in this thesis. This too will happen on the basis of scientific literature. The third chapter will ultimately connect the theoretical chapter to the empirical chapter. This chapter will also provide the expectations, hypotheses, operationalization of the hypotheses, limitations of this research and an inquiry of the used sources.

The fourth and main chapter will analyse the case of the bilateral year and will try to answer the research question by using the hypotheses from the third chapter. This chapter will ultimately form the key to answering the question.

In the fifth and final chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the case and the implications for both this research and future researches will be given.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter will provide a theoretical overview to better understand the empirical evidence. This chapter will provide an argument for why cultural diplomacy has failed to provide mechanisms through which path-dependency can be explained. To offer explanations myself, this research will turn to institutionalist approaches to make inferences for this case study. The two institutionalist theories share the aim of explaining human behavior, but are applied to this case of the Dutch-Russian Year to explain path-dependency. To fully comprehend these theories, this chapter will provide an introduction to path-dependency and new institutionalism. Afterwards I will introduce the two theories to provide a theoretical framework. The theoretical overview is split up into two sections, in which both theories are individually presented and assessed. This will lead to a conclusion that will provide certain expectations towards the empirical evidence of the bilateral Dutch-Russian Year and an overview of the use of the discussed theories.

### 2.1 Cultural diplomacy

Although I argue that the bilateral year should be seen as an example of cultural diplomacy it is not helpful in explaining the empirical puzzle of the year. The Dutch-Russian Year appears to be in line with the following definition of cultural diplomacy: *"The exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding which can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its politics and point of view, or telling its story to the rest of the world"* (Cummings, 2003, in: Mark, S., 2009, p.6). Because this is similar to the goals of the Dutch-Russian Year, I first turn to cultural diplomacy. However, the framework of cultural diplomacy fails to explain why the bilateral year was continued, because this relatively new field of research still lacks causal mechanisms. Cultural diplomacy is currently descriptive. Consequently, other theories are needed to explain the Dutch continuation of the Dutch-Russian Year. On top of that, the literature of cultural diplomacy does not provide any ideas on which the decision to continue the bilateral year can be explained, in other words the Dutch' path-dependent behaviour. Therefore, this

research is built on the two introduced institutionalist approaches, which potentially provide these necessary mechanisms.

## 2.2 Introduction to path-dependency

As mentioned before, I interpret the decision to continue the Dutch-Russian Year as path-dependent behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary to first look into path-dependency. Levi (1997, p.28) adopts the following definition: *"Path dependence has to mean, if it is to mean anything, that once a country or region has started down a path, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct easy reversal of the initial choice. Perhaps the better metaphor is a tree, rather than a path. From the same trunk, there are many different branches and smaller branches. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other – and essential if the chosen branch dies – the branch on which a climber begins is the one she tends to follow"*. This definition shows how path-dependency addresses the tendency of actors to stick to a previously chosen path. Or in other words, the notion of path-dependency addresses the issue of stickiness of institutions and its actors. As soon as an institution – legal or sociological – is adopted, it will be harder to deviate from the chosen course.

Pollack (2009, p.127) states the following about path-dependence: *"...in [path-dependence] early decisions provide incentives for actors to perpetuate institutional and policy choices inherited from the past, even when the resulting outcomes are inefficient"*. This quote shows how outcomes that result from path-dependency can be puzzling, which is indeed the case in the Dutch-Russian Year. Another crucial part of this quote is where Pollack mentions that early decisions provide incentives for actors. Although in this definition path-dependency can explain puzzling outcomes, the notion is insufficient to answer the research question. This has to do with the different mechanisms which explain the process of path-dependency.

The structure-agency debate is the crucial mechanism in explaining institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism has different assumptions regarding the structure-agency debate than the theory of sociological institutionalism, which is much broader. Therefore, both theories will be presented and assessed to explain

path-dependency. In the end, each theory will be narrowed down to three notions that represent the theory. These six notions might be key to this research.

### 2.3 Introduction into new institutionalism

The two institutional approaches have a common background, as they both are part of the so called new institutionalisms. These institutionalist approaches are 'called new institutionalism' because of the revival of institutional accounts of politics during the 1980s and early 1990s. But what are institutions? Institutions provide a context that is stimulating, enabling or restricting for actors (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1995, p.43). This means that institutions help actors take actions. But what then are actors? According to Mayntz and Scharpf (p.43), actors are defined as capable organizations. This research focuses on a few of these capable organizations, like the Dutch government or the commission that led the bilateral year.

The revival of institutionalism within political science did not take place independent of other fields of science, but was rather a reaction to the revival of institutionalism within other social sciences (Pollack, 2009). The first of the new institutionalisms that regained its explanatory power was the theory of rational choice institutionalism, about which more will be said later. Afterwards, the theories of historical institutionalism<sup>1</sup> and sociological institutionalism were adopted in political science. Ever since, the literature and the application of these theories have increased in the field of international relations and in other social sciences. New institutionalism is thus plural, in that it consists of the different institutionalisms, which all developed in an individual way.

Although the new institutionalisms have developed differently, they do share two fundamental issues. According to Hall and Taylor (1996), all institutionalisms address the following two issues: how the relationships between institutions and behaviour of actors are constructed, or as it was previously called, the structure-agency debate, and how the process of originating or changing of institutions can be explained. Rational choice institutionalism addresses these issues from the perspective of rational actors who make cost/benefit analyses in a certain structure,

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<sup>1</sup> Historical institutionalism looks at previous actions taken by actors and institutions and how these actions provides incentives for future action. This theory however will not be addressed in this thesis because the other two institutionalist approaches are more clearly opposed, providing a better overview and a more useful operationalization of institutionalism.

whereas sociological institutionalism tries to find norms within the structure to which actors react. But the theoretical approaches differ more regarding the second issue, on how institutions, or structures, change and originate. But in a sense, all institutionalisms address the way in which structures constitutes agency. The theories of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism will now be addressed in more detail to provide expectations for the use of path-dependency in the case study.

## **2.4 Rational choice institutionalism**

### **2.4.1 Key features of rational choice institutionalism**

This institutional approach originated in economics, but was later adopted in political science as well. Its first entry into political science was with the explanation of the behaviour of United States congressmen regarding their stable policy choices in the late 1970s (Riker, 1980, in: Wiener and Diaz, 2009). There are four key features to rational choice institutionalism. Although they are nicely summarized by Hall and Taylor (1996), many other authors in political science have had their own view on institutions. The four key features will be discussed as presented by Hall and Taylor (1996), but they will be expanded by additional thoughts about these features from other authors in the field.

The first key feature is that of the assumptions underlying rational choice institutionalism. Three behavioural assumptions can be distinguished within rational choice institutionalism. These assumptions are based on a worldview in which individuals are rationally self-interested and their choices are based on the institutional constraints and opportunities. The first assumption is that actors have a given or fixed set of interests and preferences (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.12). These interests, preferences and tastes are treated as the independent variable within rational choice institutionalism, as these interests guide the actors within the institutions. And it is these institutions that make up the agency in the structure-agency debate.. It is important, however, to distinguish the short term and long term interests of actors, which may differ. A certain policy might be against a state's interest in the short term, but beneficial to the state over the long term (March and Olsen, 2004, p.11). This might be empirically puzzling for researchers when looking

for either the short or long term consequences. This should be kept in mind when addressing the bilateral year.

A second behavioural assumption is that actors behave as strategic utility maximizers (Pollack, 2009, p.126). Because the preferences are given, actors try to reach the maximum satisfaction in interaction with other actors. Therefore, actors behave instrumentally (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.13).

The third behavioural assumption of rational choice institutionalism is that the strategic manner of actors is preceded by extensive calculations (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.13). Not only do actors calculate the costs and benefits of certain policies for themselves, but they make a similar analysis for the other actors involved (Aggarwal and Dupont, 2014, p.55). Both calculations are necessary to make a rational decision. The Prisoner's Dilemma of Axelrod (1997), for example, demonstrated how important it is to calculate not only the preferences of the player, but also the interest of the other players and all the possible outcomes. But an important aspect has yet to be discussed, that of iteration. Not only do actors calculate their own preferences and that of the other involved actors, but they also keep in mind what choices have been made in previous situations. If actor X always chooses to not cooperate, actor Y would be stupid to keep pushing for cooperation. As Shepsle (2008, p.32) puts it: *"Players take into account how the game was played before."*

The second key feature of this analytical framework is that according to Hall and Taylor (1996), politics are seen as a series of collective action dilemmas; meaning that outcomes are produced that are collectively suboptimal. These outcomes are suboptimal in the sense that other outcomes could have been better for at least one actor without making any of the other actors worse off. It has previously been shown by the Prisoner's Dilemma that all outcomes of cooperation are suboptimal.

The dominant strategy within dilemmas and political decisions is to aim for the so-called Nash Equilibrium (Aggarwal and Dupont, 2014). This is an outcome of a decision in which the results cannot be positively altered by a single actor. To reach a better outcome for all the actors involved, all must work together. But the collective optimal situation is not preferable either. The players cannot trust each other, because within sub-optimal outcomes no actor could become better off

without worsening the situation of another actor. Actors can, however, change their strategy and go for an outcome that is better for their own situation (Aggarwal and Dupont, 2014). This creates trust issues, which in many cases create a suboptimal outcome. However, Axelrod (1997) showed that with an iterated game this can be overcome as players remember how the game was played before. Another option described by Krasner (1983) is to create some sort of regime in which rules are institutionalized.

The third key feature of rational choice institutionalism is the emphasis on the role of strategic behaviour. Hall and Taylor emphasize that actors are driven by a strategic calculus, which will be deeply affected by the actor's expectations of the choices of the other involved actors. The role of strategic behaviour has already been touched upon by the previous key features, but some aspects remained untouched, especially the role of institutions.

Legal institutions craft actors' responses. Institutions can point actors towards certain outcomes and even eliminate sharply asymmetric outcomes among actors. Additionally, institutions can help actors gather information and set agendas. Institutions can also help craft responses of actors via multiple mechanisms (Aggarwal and Dupont, 2014). Besides that, institutions can even create actors or places for these actors to meet and organize the relations and interactions among these actors (March and Olsen, 2004). Taken together, institutions can create the actors, their preferences, the information at hand, the options, the places for actors to meet, the relations and the interactions and even the environment for the actors (Aggarwal and Dupont, 2014; Hall and Taylor, 1996; March and Olsen, 2004). The calculations by these actors are thus partially constructed by the institutions through which they cooperate. But how do these institutions affect the actors' expectations? According to Aggarwal and Dupont (2014), institutions lessen actors' fear of one another and therefore increase their willingness to cooperate.

This is supported by March and Olsen (2004), who argue that the rules, which they argue are institutions too, hold the different actors together and create cooperation. They even go as far to argue that rules can help overcome conflicts (March and Olsen, 2004, p.11). Institutions do so by constraining bargaining within



comprehensible terms and by enforcing agreements. So the third key feature shows how institutions can truly affect cooperation and interactions between political actors.

The fourth key feature focuses on the creation and changing of institutions. Although this is an interesting matter, it does not contribute to the case of the Dutch-Russian Year, since I focus on the first debate within institutionalism: the agency-structure debate. The previous key features of rational choice institutionalism have covered this by introducing causal mechanisms through which structure, or institutions, creates agency.

#### 2.4.2 Notions of path-dependency within rational choice institutionalism

This section will discuss the three notions of rational choice institutionalism that might help explain path-dependency: sunk costs, increasing returns and network externalities.

The notion of sunk costs covers the typical expression: "*To throw good money after bad*" (Mc Dermott, 2004, p.300). This expression is used to define a situation in which actors are faced with decisions that involve sunk costs. Sunk costs are initial investment in a strategy or policy, which might consist of money, time or even effort of actors or institutions. According to Garland and Newport (1991, p.55), there is much evidence that such sunk costs matter when actors have to make decisions regarding continuing a previously begun course. Or as Arkes and Blumer (1984, p.124) put it: sunk costs are manifest in the continuing of an endeavour once an initial investment of money or time has been made. They also noticed that actors typically incur small, continuous losses to wait for an eventual goal, which they call entrapment (p.137). According to Garland and Newport (1991, p.58), this choice to continue is often framed as persistence. Withdrawal is perceived as a sure loss of the costs already sunk, while persistence might still give a chance of recovery. In the end, persistence might also lead to even higher costs. But because actors chase materialist interests, they want to recover as much of their invested money as possible. Sunk costs are perceived as a loss once there is no return from a certain reference point (Garland and Newport, 1991, p.58). Therefore, actors probably evaluate the outcome of decisions in terms of gains and losses vis-à-vis a reference point. But in the end, actors appear to be willing to pay more to recover their costs or to justify their initial investments (Mc Dermott, 2004, p.300).

But according to McDermott, deteriorating situations should not be supported with additional investments (2004, p.300). This is also noticed by Arkes and Blumer (1985, p.124), as they state that reacting according to sunk costs is irrational, because according to them, sunk costs are irrelevant in making new decisions (p.126). Even Garland and Newport (1991, p.55-6) argue that making decisions on the basis of sunk costs is irrational from the perspective of classical economics and normative decision theories. Garland and Newport argue that individual decisions are probably made based on the expected incremental gains and losses (p.55-6). However, there still seems to be a relationship between the gains and losses and the value such an actor places on these gains and losses (Arkes and Blumer, 1985, p.130).

According to Garland and Newport (1991), the effect of sunk costs appears not only because of absolute costs, but also because of relative sunk costs that can influence path-dependency. But if path-dependency because of sunk costs is irrational according to these authors, then why is it a notion of rational choice institutionalism? To understand this, a distinction has to be made between collective action and individual action. Whereas reacting according to sunk costs is collectively irrational, it might be rational for individual actors. But it is the individual actors who influence the collective decision to move on with the initially chosen path. Therefore, a relatively large part of the literature on sunk costs is dedicated to the different actors who are affected by sunk costs.

Arkes and Blumer (1985, p.134) state that a person's own money connects that person personally to the responsibility of an investment. Therefore, that person is more influenced by the wastefulness of investments than if it would be someone else's money. Mc Dermott (2004, p.300) agrees and goes so far as to say that actors who are not responsible for the initial policy have a larger tendency to deviate from that policy and act less path-dependently. This can also be found in Garland and Newport (1991, p.56), as they argue that personal responsibility results in a greater willingness to commit additional funds, as they repeated Staw's research (1981). Therefore, these personal, rational considerations might influence the collective, irrational choice to stick to a previously chosen path because of earlier investments,

whether these investments be money, time or effort. The sunk costs effect thus exists because of the eagerness of individuals to maximize their materialist gains.

A second notion of rational choice institutionalism that might affect path-dependency is increasing returns. Pierson (2000) calls increasing returns a self-reinforcing process or a positive feedback process (p.251). According to Pierson, the process of increasing returns captures two key elements of path-dependency: first, it highlights the increasing costs of switching between alternatives, and second, it emphasizes the influence of timing and sequence, which can influence outcomes more than is often presumed (p.251). Pierson emphasizes the history of paths, as *"we cannot understand the significance of a particular single variable without understanding how it got there"* (p.252). The process of increasing returns describes how the benefits of a certain path increases compared to the benefits of other paths over time. Thereby, increasing returns increases the likelihood of institutions and actors continuing down a previously chosen path (p.252).

Arthur (1994) discussed four characteristics of increasing returns, from which I will discuss the three that contribute to this thesis. First, increasing returns makes actors and institutions inflexible, as the further they are down a path, the harder it is for them to deviate from that path. Second, the process of increasing returns is nonergodic, meaning that accidental events occur and that they cannot be denied or treated. The third characteristic is that increasing returns leads to potential path inefficiency, which is the core of this notion for this research.

But how does the process of increasing returns function? First, new initiatives entail considerable start-up costs, making it less beneficial from a rational perspective to switch. Besides that, organizations learn by doing, making it once again more beneficial to remain on the chosen path. Finally, activities are enhanced if they are coordinated or fit with the activities of other involved actors and organizations (Arthur, 1994, p.254). Pierson points to an example of this stickiness originally described by North (1990a): once an institution creates the possibility for piracy, actors will invest in becoming good pirates. Therefore, organizations have a strong tendency to remain institutionalized (p.258-9).

Pierson also discusses increasing returns for institutions. First, he notices that political institutions are influenced by increasing returns as well. He goes on by

stating that all political actors are eventually constrained by institutions and that these institutions are ultimately backed up by force (p.259). These political institutions generate learning effects, coordination effects and adaptive expectations. But the stickiness of institutions is a result of their political design. According to Pierson (p.262), politics are designed to bind political successors in politics and constrain other political actors. Therefore, Pierson argues that political institutions are even more path-dependent than economic institutions. Therefore, Pierson's notion of increasing returns can be used to explain path-dependence, because the mechanism is based on rational actors who calculate the short and long term benefits of previously chosen institutions and alternative institutions.

The third notion of rational choice institutionalism that can explain path-dependency among actors is that of network externalities. There is little available scholarly work on network externalities in the field of political science, because it is mainly used in the field of economic competition, for example, to explain why one out of two similar technologies has become obsolete. The basic idea is that when you want to buy a new game computer and you cannot decide which of the many similar ones to buy, you look at the game computers your friends have. Because when you buy the same brand of game computer as your friends have, you can play together online, while this would not have been possible if you bought a game computer from a competitor's company.

Actors calculate their choices to be compatible with the networks they find important. In different situations, the authors Katz and Shapiro found that *"... the utility that a given user derives from the good depends on the number of other users who are in the same 'network' as is he or she"* (Katz and Shapiro, 1985, p.424). In a later article the same authors elaborate: *"Because the value of membership to one user is positively affected when another user joins and enlarges the network, such markets are said to exhibit 'network effects', or 'network externalities'"* (Katz and Shapiro, 1994, p.94). More recently, Kikuchi (2007, p.327) described the process like this: the more people who use a certain network, the more useful this network will become to the individual user.

From these articles it could be derived that network externalities would mean that actors rationally calculate whether the activities or institutions they are

considering are compatible with the activities and institutions of other actors they have to work with or want to work with in the future. This is also represented by consumer behaviour according to Katz and Shapiro (1985, p.425), who argue that consumers form expectations regarding the size of networks. The core of the notion of network externalities is the feature of compatibility. Actors do not chose a certain institution because their friends have chosen that institution, like a sort of norm, but rather actors calculate the advantages of a certain institution for themselves with regards to compatibility with the institutions of other actors they find important. Network externalities describes what Axelrod (1997) called the iteration game, where actors keep in mind how other actors have acted in the past. Krasner (1983) called institutions a regime to which actors are bound and new players want to be bound to. This potentially leads to maintaining or expanding sub-optimal institutions even when more optimal institutions are available.

This chapter has thus far introduced the theory of rational choice institutionalism as an explanatory mechanism of path-dependency. It first described the roots of the theory and afterwards proceeded with giving a broad and necessary overview of the theory. The last part provided three key notions of rational choice institutionalism that help operationalize path-dependence later in this research. The chapter will now proceed in a similar fashion with the opposing theory of sociological institutionalism.

## **2.5 Sociological institutionalism**

### **2.5.1 History of sociological institutionalism**

According to Hall and Taylor (1996), sociological institutionalism arose from organization theory. Organization theory in turn dates back to the famous sociologist Max Weber. At the end of the 1970s, sociologists began to question the distinction between those parts of the world that were organized because of means-ends and those parts that were supposedly constructed because of culture. Sociologists found that in certain cases, forms and procedures were not efficient according to means-ends, but rather these forms and procedures had a background in cultural terms.

From this perspective sociological institutionalism took flight and entered political science. The scholars in the field of sociological institutionalism started

explaining why organizations adopted certain institutions, procedures and symbols. On top of that, they emphasized how these institutions, procedures and symbols were diffused throughout the organizational field or across nations. With that sociological perspective, the scholars made it possible to explain puzzling empirical situations, for example the differences between the organization of certain ministries in different countries. Eventually, it was possible for the scholars in the field of sociological institutionalism to explain inefficient institutions, inefficient from a rational choice perspective.

### 2.5.2 Key features of sociological institutionalism

According to March and Olsen (2004, p.4), three characteristic questions were asked by sociologists to study their cases of interest: What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation like this? These three questions, which were found repeatedly by March and Olsen throughout the literature, hint towards identities and scripts as part of the explanatory mechanism. But to get a sufficient view on sociological institutionalism, it is necessary to discuss the key features of sociological institutionalism, as was done with rational choice institutionalism. Although the key features were presented by Hall and Taylor in their article '*The Three New Institutionalisms*', the perspectives and views of other authors are added as Hall and Taylor only represent a part of the field.

The first key feature addresses the definition of institutions. It is clear what constitutes legal institutions: formal rules, procedures or norms (Hall and Taylor, p.14). Sociological institutionalism adds symbol systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates, which are supposed to provide meaning to actors to guide their decisions (Hall and Taylor). Pollack (2009, p.126) defines sociological institutions as "...*norms and conventions as well as formal rules...*". These norms, conventions and rules allegedly guide actors and the way in which such actors see the world.

March and Olsen (2004, p.5) in turn point to "*a relatively stable collection of rules, and practices, embedded in structures of resources that make action possible – organizational, financial and staff capabilities, and structures of meaning that explain and justify behaviour – roles, identities and belongings, common purposes, and causal and normative beliefs.*" These definitions clearly point to more sociological

aspects of human thinking and behaviour, as actors' belonging to a certain group helps create a world for these actors.

Pollack (2009, p.127) states that people act in accordance with a logic of appropriateness and that this logic is the key to sociological institutionalism. A logic of appropriateness constructs the preferences of actors and helps actors select the socially correct behaviour for a given environment (Pollack, 2009, p.127).

Hall and Taylor (1996) conclude that the breaking down of the divide between institutions and cultures is a shared understanding of sociological institutionalism. They connect this breakdown of the division to two implications for the theory of sociological institutionalism. First, this challenges the aforementioned divide between institutional explanations and cultural explanations, based on either organizational structures – institutions in the sense of rational choice institutionalism – or culture as a shared understanding of attitudes and values. Although this might look trivial when one looks at the definitions above, it is not when one considers the clear division between the two in political science prior to the 1970s. The second implication of the breakdown of the division is the redefining of culture. Culture currently includes institutions, as this understanding makes culture into templates for behaviour deduced from networks of routines, symbols and scripts (Hall and Taylor, 1996). This is the true basis of sociological institutionalism, as the name would already suggest.

The second key feature of the theory, as described by Hall and Taylor (1996), deals with the main question of institutionalism: how does structure influence actors' behaviour? Hall and Taylor (1996) distinguish two different dimensions. In the normative dimension, actors internalize the norms of behaviour of institutions into themselves. Some scholars within the field of sociological institutionalism seem to still adhere to this dimension. But the cognitive dimension appears to have the consensus within sociological institutionalism. According to the cognitive dimension, institutions influence actors' behaviour by providing the necessary cognitive scripts. These cognitive scripts provide categories and models that prescribe actions for actors and also help actors interpret the world in a prescribed way. These scripts specify what actors should do and even what one could imagine doing in a given context. However, individuals will think that their actions are the result of rational behaviour, even though their choice was socially constructed.



For example, the goals towards which individuals are striving are defined in a broader way than rational choice institutionalism defines them. March and Olsen (2004) appear to be in the cognitive dimension as well, because according to them, humans have a repertoire of roles and identities that provide appropriate behaviour in situations in which they are relevant. March and Olsen acknowledge that acting in accordance with appropriate behaviour is the result of complicated processes that involve reasoning, according to Hall and Taylor (1996). March and Olsen continue by stating that actors usually take this rule or script as an unquestioned given. There appears to be no desire for the actors to justify their decisions or discuss its consequences.

The key of March and Olsen's *Logic of Appropriateness* (2004, p.4) is that following rules of role or identity are not the result of the process of reasoning with the logic of consequences, like rational choice institutionalism proposes, because actors use the criteria of similarity and congruence to follow rules and identities and not the criteria of likelihood and value. Following a logic of appropriateness is based on mutual understanding of what is considered good or right and acting appropriate might even feel natural or reasonable. According to March and Olsen, the matching of these rules of roles and identities happens on the basis of experiences, expert knowledge or even intuition. These rules prescribe what is appropriate in certain situations and provide actors with scripts that tell them where to look for precedents, who the important people are that interpret the different types of rules and what key interpretative traditions exist.

However, March and Olsen (2004, p.7) argue that rules do not always dictate behaviour and it is important to understand the process through which guiding behaviour happens. The second key feature thus deals with the cognitive process through which institutions prescribe appropriate behaviour for actors. According to March and Olsen (2004, p.7-8), this relationship between rules and action happens most likely in a stable institutional regime. In such a stable institution, action is governed by clear and adequate resources and unambiguous scripts.

The third and final feature deals with institutional change and origin. But just like rational choice institutionalism, this feature adds little to this research. Although it is interesting to know how sociological institutions change, this case study works



with given institutions and not with changing institutions. Therefore, I will not further elaborate on this feature.

### 2.5.3 Notions of path-dependency within sociological institutionalism

This final section will concretize sociological institutionalism into three different notions that might help explain the puzzle of this case study. The first notion discussed in this context is that of norms. A lot has already been said about norms in the previous sections on sociological institutionalism; for example, that there is consensus on norms as a standard of appropriate behaviour (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p.891). The following quote provides a basis of the notion of norms: *"Experiences are routinely coded into rules, rules into principles, and principles into systems of thought in many spheres of life"* (March and Olsen, 2004, p.15).

This is acknowledged by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p.916), who notice that empirical research keeps showing how perceptions of the good and that what 'should be' in the world are translated into policy. This means that actors develop a system of thought for what is either right or wrong. This system of thought can then lead to the creation or continuation of policy. For example, a country that thinks that drinking alcohol is inherently bad will act in accordance with this norm and might eventually adopt a ban on alcohol. Such actions can be against the materialist interests of actors. For example, if that same country receives a lot of tax income from the sale of alcohol, the income of that government might decrease after a ban. However, this country is willing to deal with the decreasing tax incomes because of the norm on alcohol.

This contradiction between both institutionalisms was nicely captured by Risse (2000) in the book of Dunne, Kurki and Smith (2013, p.191): *"...norms and rule-following can be distinguished from instrumentally rational behaviour in that actors try to 'do the right thing' rather than maximizing or optimizing their given preferences"*. Here we can clearly distinguish between rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, as discussed in the first key feature of sociological institutionalism. Furthermore, this quote shows how valuing a norm can lead to appropriate behaviour, just like the second sociological feature of structure-agency shows.

Another mechanism through which actors are bounded to systems of thought is that of identities. The key features of sociological institutionalism have already shown that humans carry a repertoire of roles and identities. Actors create identities to fit themselves into an incomprehensible world and create in- and out-groups to make it easier to understand the world around them. These roles and identities provide the logic of appropriateness to actors (March and Olsen, 2004, p.4). This means that actors who consider themselves part of a certain sphere of life or fancy joining a certain sphere of life will begin acting according to the rules, principles and systems of thought of that sphere of life. In the end, such an actor will behave just like the other actors: according to the script of appropriateness that has a consensus within this sphere of life. If a country, for example, wants to join a regime of some other countries, this country might adopt the system of thought of that regime to show that it wants to join the regime.

A sense of belonging to a sphere of life is crucial as this forms the structure which constitutes the behaviour, preferences and interests of agents. These identities are based on the experiences of actors, the knowledge of relevant experts or intuition (p.4). Authors like Fierke (2013) argue that identities are also constituted by norms (Fierke, 2013, p.190). Fierke takes human rights as an example that constrains actors not because of their power, as realists would believe, but because human rights are a constitutive feature of liberal democratic states and nowadays even more so for any legitimate states (Fierke et al., 2013, p.190). These identities are crucial, as they create the actors through acquiring and fulfilling an institutional identity (Sending, 2002, in: Fierke, 2013, p.190). Identities are thus important for actors as they help them choose the normative path.

According to Hall and Taylor (1996, p.16-7), sociological institutionalism argues that organizations often adopt new institutions because they enhance the social legitimacy of the organization. This perspective can help explain path-dependence. Actors remain on their path because it is important for the identity they chose. Or, as described by March and Olsen (2004, p.14), change is slow when the rules of organizations express the historical, collective identity of a community and when the organization is built on norms like the truth, right, or good.

Another important feature of norm-following is that it might contradict instrumentally rational behaviour. In the previous example of a country that adopts a system of thought to join a regime, the country might adopt strict laws on tax evasion because the other countries in the regime have done so. However, this country might house tax evading companies, which might potentially leave, resulting in a decrease in tax income, which is opposed to the materialist interest of this country.

The third and final notion of sociological institutionalism covers that of standard operating procedures. This notion is different from the previous notions because it addresses a process that happens unconsciously within organizations. Whereas norms and identities are goals that organizations try to reach, does the effect of standard operating procedures represent restrictions of organizations, leading to unconscious effects. Allison (1969) says that large organizations like ministries require standard operating procedures, as they give such organizations the coordination they need (1969, p.698). Allison defines standard operating procedures as rules according to which things are done (p.698) and as a general proposition of organizational processes that constitute routines for dealing with standard situations (p.702).

Allison gives a great analogy of how the mechanism works. He describes how a football team can only perform adequately when each player performs in accordance with the play that was picked prior to the game (p.698). If all players would play individually in the way they think would be the best, there would be no coordination and the team would only represent the combined strength of all the players' individual strengths. By deciding on a play prior to the game, all players can work together and the strength of the team is greater than the sum of the players' strengths. But the problem with standard operating procedures is that in standard operations individual actors will stick the previously established procedures. In the analogy of the football team, if a team decided to play a defensive game, but the opposing team manages to break through their defences, a new strategy is required. If the team does not deviate from the previously chosen procedures, it will most likely lose the game. Therefore, Allison noticed that organizations that adopt

standard operating procedures might appear formalized, sluggish and even inappropriate (p.700).

Allison continues by saying that organizations cannot easily change their program in a particular situation (p.700). Therefore, he provides a framework for the notion of standard operating procedures, as he both justifies the use of standard operating procedures for adequate work within large organizations and points to the fact that such standard procedures can lead to dubious outcomes. From Allison's work it can be deduced that large organizations that adopt standard operating procedures become path-dependent, as these organizations cannot easily adjust their standard strategy to individual cases.

With the notion of standard operating procedures covered, all notions have been discussed, both within rational choice institutionalism and within sociological institutionalism. Therefore, it is time to look at some preliminary assumptions for this research.

## **2.6 Path-dependency from an institutionalist perspective**

Chapter 1 introduced the goals of this case study. One of these goals was to check whether the institutionalist approaches can be applied as a hybrid theory. In this chapter, both theories are discussed separately to give an overview of the key causal mechanisms of these theories. With these key features in mind, six different notions are presented, which provide potential answers to the research question of this thesis. This leads to the following figure in which the theories are visually presented (Figure 2.1).

# Path-dependency

## Rational choice institutionalism

- Sunk costs
- Increasing returns
- Network externalities

## Sociological institutionalism

- Norms
- Identities
- Standard operating procedures

Figure 2.1

This figure represents how both theories of institutionalism provide different answers to the mechanism of path-dependency and how both theories have different key mechanisms through which the theories can be applied to cases. Therefore, this research will proceed by applying the six different notions to answer the research questions and evaluate the usefulness of both theories. As the literature review showed, both theories have distinct mechanisms of analysis. Rational choice institutionalism covers rational, materialist calculations of actors that lead to expected consequences, which in turn lead to the choice to stick to the previously chosen path. Sociological institutionalism focuses on sociological goals, which actors try to reach by finding their own place within a world replete with political actors and with organizational errors.

I think both theories potentially provide sufficient mechanisms to explain the outcome of the Dutch decision to continue the bilateral year. Rational choice institutionalism does so by pointing to the material benefits of the choice for the Netherlands. As partners had already invested money, the chosen path was, at the critical juncture, more attractive and was compatible with the policies of other actors the Netherlands find important. On the other hand, sociological institutionalism would describe how the Netherlands intrinsically values the chosen path and how the path expresses the Dutch national identity. In addition, the organization that made the choice was restricted by standard procedures resulting in the same outcome.

Therefore, both theories provide the mechanisms that are needed to proceed in this research.

## **2.7 Conclusion and critical evaluation**

This conclusion will address the commonalities of both theories. Then it will address criticisms of both theories and some recommendations provided by authors within the field. Finally, a connection is drawn between the literature and this research.

Both theories that are deployed to explain path dependence have distinct explanatory mechanisms. Despite their different mechanisms, they do share the same possible outcome, that of path-dependency. According to the theories, actors are bound to some sort of interests, either rational or sociological, as a result of the structures or institutions they are in.

With rational choice institutionalism, it was shown how actors calculate their materialist position within a structure, which consists of institutions. These actors behave rationally by calculating their own preferences, the preferences of others and the expected behaviour of others in both the short and the long term. One of these calculations looks at what investments individual actors already made within a certain process, that is, the sunk costs. Another variable in actors' minds is increasing returns, as they calculate the materialist attractiveness of alternatives for the chosen path. Finally, they keep in mind how compatible the chosen path is with the path of other important actors and whether alternative paths might provide advantages. All these notions together might say something about actor stickiness towards a certain path.

Sociological institutionalism focuses on the position of the actor within a world replete with actors. Actors try to enhance their legitimacy by adopting policies and institutions they believe are in line with their own identity. Another variable is what actors intrinsically believe is the appropriate, normative or right thing to do. It was discussed that liberal democracies, for example, value human rights greatly and will act in accordance with these rights. A possible downside is the tendency of organizations to adopt standard operating procedures and always stick to these procedures. It is often necessary to modify these procedures, as not all situations require the same resolution. But because these procedures are usually adequate,,

organizations often fail to do so. According to sociological institutionalism, these are potential explanatory mechanisms of path-dependence.

There are some criticisms of these theories in the literature as well. First, Hall and Taylor (1996) argue that rational choice institutionalism is built on a too simplistic image of human behaviour. They worry that important dimensions of human motivations are left out in this theory. March and Olsen (2004) agree with this point. Shepsle (2008) adds that humans are not fully rational in all decisions, which would completely wipe out this theory. Shepsle also argues that actors are cognitively constrained, meaning that there are some psychological constraints to human calculation, such as loss aversion, framing effects and hyperbolic discounting (Shepsle, 2008, p.33). Defenders of rational choice institutionalism would, according to Hall and Taylor, point to the predictive power of their theory. But Hall and Taylor are not satisfied with the argument of predictive power, as the assumptions of rational choice institutionalism are both unsupported by data and arbitrary. They also criticize rational choice for their estimation of actors' preferences. But Hall and Taylor do agree that rational choice institutionalism contributes to social sciences by looking at human calculating behaviour.

As for sociological institutionalism, according to Hall and Taylor (1996, p.18-19), it is well suited to explain strange empirical puzzles. Sociological institutionalism manages to specify the ways through which institutions can affect the preferences and identities of actors. It is these preferences and identities of actors that are treated as given within the rational choice model. Sociological institutionalism can also be used to explain how even highly instrumental actors make culturally-specific decisions (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.18-19), which rational choice institutionalism cannot do. However, sociological institutionalism cannot explain the outcome of conflict between competing interests over institutional change or creation. Hall and Taylor (1996, p.21) try to explain this by highlighting the focus of sociological institutionalism on macro-level processes, which drops the actors out of sight. In contrast, an occupation with actors is part of the rational choice institutionalism model.

This leaves the sense that sociological institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism are complementary. Hall and Taylor (1996, p.21) are stunned by the

distance between the three new institutionalisms, which all evolved in their own separate ways. They do see the potential advantages of combining the theories.. March and Olsen (2004, p.19) conclude the same. They state that human thinking is complex, making it impossible to rule out either rational choice institutionalism or sociological institutionalism. Therefore, they too argue that both theories should be applied complementarily to political science (March and Olsen, 2004, p.19).

This chapter began by stating that the theory of cultural diplomacy does not provide any causal mechanisms with which foreign policy outcomes could be explained. Therefore, it turned to institutionalist approaches to explain the path-dependent outcome. Although both theories are based on institutions, they have different assumptions and mechanisms. But many authors argue that despite their similarities, both theories have grown apart and should be reconnected. This research will use a case study to test a hybrid model in the conclusion of this research.



### **3. Research design**

This research tries to explain why the Dutch government decided to continue with the Dutch-Russian Year despite the growing agitation between the two countries. This research therefore serves as an example of path-dependency. The previous chapter already looked into possible explanations for this path-dependent behaviour from different theoretical frameworks. This chapter will operationalize these theories into hypotheses. Furthermore, this chapter will present and justify the research model adopted in this research. Finally, it will address the sources on which the empirical chapter is built and evaluate the applied method.

#### **3.1 Hypotheses and operationalization**

What aspects of the theoretical framework are interesting for this case study and how could they be inferred? These are the questions of interest in this and the following section. Six notions were discussed as part of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism to explain the path-dependence of Dutch foreign policy in the previous chapter. These notions have to be turned into hypotheses and operationalized. But first, this section will operationalize the dependent variable.

##### **3.1.1 Operationalizing the dependent variable**

The dependent variable has already been mentioned as an example of path-dependent behaviour, as the Dutch government actively decided to continue the program of the bilateral year. This research tries to answer why the Dutch government decided to continue the bilateral year. It focuses on the Dutch government because it is the responsible legal institution who agreed to the bilateral year with Russia. However, there is no such thing as a single decision. The government signed a document with Russia in agreement over the year, but this only started the organization of the bilateral year. During 2013, as the empirical evidence will point out, there was no such thing as an official moment at which the decision to continue was made. Between the beginning of the year and the end of the official program of that year, the government could have made the decision to end the program at any time. Therefore, 'the decision' is hypothetical and the research

actually focuses on the absence of a decision by the Dutch government to cancel the bilateral year.

As was just stated, this decision could have been made during the official program or even prior to it; for example, Poland cancelled its planned 2015 bilateral year with Russia in 2014. This research thus focuses on arguments made by relevant actors in the period between the signing of the agreement between Russia and the Netherlands and the end of the official program of the bilateral year. As the empirical evidence will show, at some moments there were clear decisions made by the government to move on, but the scope of this research is bigger than those single moments of parliamentary debate.

### 3.1.2 Rational choice institutionalism hypotheses and operationalization

The first notion discussed was that of sunk costs. According to this notion, individual actors are inclined to commit themselves to a course of action when they have already invested in that course. Therefore, it can be deduced that:

*RCI #1: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors have already invested in that course.*

To confirm this hypothesis, the following empirical research would have to identify key actors that were involved with any of the 600 events of the bilateral year and who stated that they wanted to continue the activities because of their investments. These key actors can be public or societal actors, which applies to this hypothesis and to subsequent hypotheses. The policy makers can provide evidence of this decision to continue the bilateral year too. If it can be proven that policy makers within the Dutch government stated that they cannot reject the program of the bilateral year due to investments that were already made by actors, this would also confirm the hypothesis. The hypothesis is rejected if organizational actors of one of the activities stated that the investments should not influence the decision of the government or if the policy-makers stated that they do not count previous investments as a factor in the discussion.

The second notion of increasing returns deals with the attractiveness of a chosen path opposed to that of competing paths. Because of learning and adaptation

to an initially chosen policy, actors expect returns for their efforts. The corresponding hypothesis is:

*RCI #2: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors anticipate increasing returns of that policy.*

To confirm this hypothesis, this research should find actors who stated that they would stick to the program because by cancelling the program they would lose future gains. As with the previous hypothesis, this one can be proven by any evidence suggesting that this view was taken into account in the process of policy making. The hypothesis would be rejected if key actors involved with the organization of one of the activities or with the setting of the policy said that returns for any of the actors did not influence the decision to continue the bilateral year and its activities.

The last rational choice notion discussed network externalities, which take into consideration the compatibility of a chosen policy towards the policies of other important actors.

*RCI #3: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors expect this course to sustain their position within a network.*

The corresponding hypothesis supposes that actors wanted to continue the bilateral year because doing so was compatible with the anticipated behaviour of other actors and therefore they can stay sustain their position within their network. Confirming evidence would be actors who expressed their concerns for future repercussions from foreign states or other important actors if the Netherlands would cancel the bilateral year. Domestic networks can be of concern as well, as the Dutch government might become an unreliable partner in organizing these events. But this hypothesis also covers the network externalities of the partners involved within the program of the bilateral year. For example, a Dutch museum would be considered unreliable if it is forced to cancel an exhibition. The hypothesis would be rejected if any organizational or policy-making actor or other partner stated that such calculations did not influence the decision.

### 3.1.3 Sociological institutionalism hypotheses and operationalization

As part of sociological institutionalism, three different notions were introduced. This theory assumes that actors belong to a certain group and form their own identity. Additionally, the theory covers the potential sociological errors of organizations. The first notion reviewed the notion of norms.

*SI #4: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors and organizations act in accordance to norms they find important.*

This can be confirmed if actors point to certain norms. For example, if a public administrator argued that the Netherlands should be a reliable partner for Russia or that it values open discussion about human rights within international relations. It would be rejected if key actors stated that values were not important at all for deciding to continue the program.

The second notion that was discussed within sociological institutionalism was that of identities. Actors and organizations, even states, act in accordance with an identity they pursue.

*SI #5: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors and organizations are constrained by what actions they believe fit their identity.*

This notion can be confirmed as an independent variable to the outcome if an actor within the policy-making of the government noted that the program of the bilateral year represents courses of action that are part of the Dutch collective identity or are considered to be typical for Dutch behaviour. An example would be that the Dutch see themselves as a sort of prophet of human rights and their task is to spread human rights all over the world. Rejection requires an influential actor of the policy to state the opposite, that the program either does not represent the Dutch collective identity or that the representation of that identity did not play a role in the decision to continue the program.

The last notion is that of standard operating procedures. Organizations adopt standard operating procedures to function more efficiently. However, this leads to a stickiness in situations that might require another approach.

*SI #6: A foreign policy course will be maintained if key actors do not deviate from their standard operating procedures.*

This can be confirmed by an actor stating that the continuation of the bilateral year is the usual way to act, because it represents how the Dutch government has always acted. Due to this standardization of procedures, key actors might not have noticed the uniqueness of situations. To confirm this hypothesis, both aspects have to be present: actors reacted in a pre-defined way and the actors did not evaluate the situation by asking critical questions. It would be rejected if proof can be found that the decision was the result of extensive calculations in which the other possibilities (cancellation or adjusting of the program) were considered or by an actor stating that similar situations in the past did not affect this situation.

# Path-dependency

## **Rational choice institutionalism**

- Societal and/or public actors have already invested in a course of the government and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.
- Societal and/or public actors anticipate increasing returns of a governmental policy and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.
- Societal and/or public actors value a policy more when it is compatible with the policies of other countries and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.

## **Sociological institutionalism**

- Societal and/or public actors and organizations act in accordance to norms they find important and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.
- Societal and/or public actors and organizations are constrained by the actions, which they believe fit their identity and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.
- Organizations create standard operating procedures which can be retained while alternative action is required and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.

Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 presents an overview of all the hypotheses. This section provided the hypotheses deduced from both theories with the corresponding operationalization.

### 3.2 Case justification

According to Gerring (2007), it is important for scientists to be aware of the kind of case they are studying. The Dutch-Russian bilateral year can be described as a typical case, especially as this case is considered as a first theoretical step in cultural diplomacy. Gerring explains the following about typical cases: *"In order for a focused case study to provide insight into a broader phenomenon, it must be representative of a broader set of cases. It is in this context that one may speak of a typical-case approach to case selection."* (p.91) In other words, if a case study aims to draw conclusions for other cases, the case that is being studied has to be representative. As this case aims at identifying causal mechanisms for cultural diplomacy, this case has to be representative for cultural diplomacy to be useful for other cases in the field of cultural diplomacy. As the program of the bilateral year represents the use of culture in Dutch international relations, I argue that this case represents the broader phenomenon of cultural diplomacy and therefore that the Dutch-Russian Year is a typical case.

This research is thus framed as a case study. According to Gerring (2007, p.20), *"A case study may be understood as the intensive study of a single case..."*. However, this case study comes closer to the disciplined interpretive case study described by Odell (2001, p.162). Such a case study *"...interprets and explains an event by applying a known theory to a new terrain."* As there has been no research on the bilateral year within political science at all, this case is truly a new field. The goal of this research clearly represents the definition of Odell. However, Odell acknowledges that some case studies can be better studied by looking into multiple historical events. Therefore, the evidence will be structured into three distinct periods of the bilateral year. In the end, the evidence of the three periods will be generalized into a single conclusion about the bilateral year.

### 3.3 Methodology

This section explains what information is used in this research and how it is used. It will show that this research builds on two kinds of sources: written sources, through process tracing, and interviews. Both sources are discussed separately.

The empirical evidence that will be discussed in this case study is disclosed via explaining outcome process tracing. Process tracing methods can have three different goals, one of which applies to this case: *"Third, and most common in practice, is the situation where we want to explain a particularly puzzling historical outcome"* (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p.11). This means that the analytical mechanisms are focused on a theoretical level but are more pragmatically understood (p.36). This should lead to a causal mechanism of X contributing to an outcome Y. But how does process-tracing work? Beach and Pedersen (p.68) first assume that reality cannot fully be measured, so small sets of empirical observations are selected. But the problem is that observations are only raw material data. That is why Beach and Pedersen depict the process by  $o + k \rightarrow e$ , where o is the observation or the raw material data, k is the case-specific knowledge and e is the evidence, which is a result of the observations in the context of the case-study (p.73). In the presence of material in the context of a case, observations become evidence and it might become possible to make inferences regarding the hypotheses. The sources to which process tracing is applied are governmental reports and newspapers.

Newspapers, news articles and even television programs provide useful information because they were critical of the bilateral year and provide an overview of the discussion. This is proven by the only other academic article on the Dutch-Russian Year (Wijk-Wouters, 2014). That master thesis looked at the negative media coverage of Russia and the bilateral year in the Netherlands. But other media can also be useful tools and might provide an overview over the societal debate about the year and the reaction of public administrators, politicians or other people involved. News articles will especially provide a large amount of information in this research, as there has been plenty of media coverage of the bilateral year and the diplomatic incidents surrounding it.

Additional written sources are provided by the national government. As a democracy, the Dutch members of parliament enter into a debate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and eventually these reports are published online. The online database of the Dutch parliament also provides letters of the minister sent to parliament, an evaluation of the bilateral year and other important documents. The debates with the minister were the ideal moment for him to defend his choice for continuing the bilateral year. Therefore, they might provide insightful arguments.

Besides the written sources on which process tracing is conducted, three interviews proved to be useful source as well. One interview was conducted with the highest public administrator in the Netherlands involved with the Dutch-Russian Year. Tony van der Togt led the commission, which had to report directly to the minister (Interview 1). The second interviewee is Bert Panman, head of the commission '*Noord-Nederland Rusland*'. This commission represented the three northern provinces of Groningen, Drenthe and Friesland as well as the municipalities and companies in the region. It also coordinated activities related to the Dutch-Russian Year (Interview 2). The third interviewee was the cultural director of the program within the administration of Dutch Foreign Affairs. Sjeng Scheijen was a co-worker of the non-governmental organization Dutch Culture, which was hired by the Dutch ministries to organize cultural events in the Russian Federation. Scheijen also became a spokesman of the government within the public debate (Interview 3). Therefore, the interviewees represent various levels of policy-making and the implementation of the policy on both the higher and lower level of government.

All interviews were prepared in the same way. Questions were formulated to represent the six notions deduced from the literature. The questions were shared beforehand. The interviews started off with orientating questions, as the Dutch-Russian Year took place several years ago. These questions tried to explain who the people are and what their specific role was. Then the questions tried to focus on the goals of the program, as this might provide insight into what variables were important for the relevant actors. A third set of questions covered the key matter: why the government continued the program. In the end, the interviewees were asked to evaluate the decision in light of regular Dutch-Russian relations.



These three interviews matter a lot for this research for two reasons. First, they provide insight into the thoughts and processes of the public administrators who were involved in the bilateral year. This information was not covered by the media or the governmental documents. Second, the interviews gave a comprehensive view of the bilateral year and the corresponding discussion. In contrast, the media articles covered the bilateral year only superficially, as the focus of the articles was often on local events. Moreover, the evidence will show that not everything that matters in politics is discussed openly. Therefore, the interviews made it possible to discuss the bigger picture, which is crucial for this research.

### **3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the research design**

This research model has some drawbacks. First, there is the problem of subjectivity. A large problem of social sciences is that they leave open the possibilities for the researchers to be subjective, e.g., through misinterpretation of evidence or simply wanting the hypotheses to be confirmed. Odell calls this selective reconstruction (Odell, 2001, p.164). To deal with this, research has to be repeatable to confirm its reliability. Therefore, this research makes use of open sources, available to anyone, so that everything presented here can be checked. A second potential problem is that the research model is non-scientific. The author tried to overcome this problem by showing its methodological foundations based on the literature within political science and using that literature as a justification. The third problem is the trade-offs of the research model. Conducting only a few interviews might result in biased results. In other words, the more interviews the better. As I only interviewed three people, this might be problematic. This choice was the result of restrictions in time and resources. On the other hand, the interviewees were very influential in the decision making process surrounding the Dutch-Russian Year. Therefore, I argue that they have provided a reliable image of events.

A last matter to be resolved is that of alternative research models. This research is based on a qualitative case study. This has some implications that could have been avoided by choosing another model. But all methods have their advantages and disadvantages. Instead of doing content analyses and conducting interviews, I could have conducted a survey among the involved actors. This might have resulted in larger data sets. But it is hard to ask the right questions in a survey

and the questions asked in surveys are often superficial. To understand the reasons for continuing the bilateral year and get to the thoughts and processes behind the decision, in-depth knowledge is needed, which cannot be obtained with a survey.

For the sake of generalising, a focus-group could have been conducted. Such a method gives the possibility to interview relatively many people using few resources. But this method too is relatively superficial and can lead to groupthink. It is also hard for organizational reasons to have public administrators and influential people at the same time and place. Therefore, I argue that the presented model is the best choice for this research given the restrictions in time and resources.

## 4. Empirical data

This chapter will provide an overview of the empirical evidence used to test the hypotheses. To make the evidence comprehensible, it will be presented in three different time slots. The first time slot will deal with the preparation of the Dutch-Russian Year, from the first agreement between J. P. Balkenende and D. Medvedev until the day before the start of the official part of the program of the bilateral year in April 2013. Why is it important to look into the preparation of the bilateral year with the research question of this thesis? The arguments used prior to the start of the year that supported accepting the Russian offer might have also been used to continue the bilateral year. Therefore, this time slot might contain useful arguments. Additionally, this section will show that the first call for an alteration of the bilateral year was made before the start of the year. The second slot will go from the day on which the official program began until October 2013. During this time slot, multiple smaller incidents took place. The last time slot will cover October and November 2013, in which the most severe incidents took place. All three time slots will describe and analyse the events in the period.

### 4.1 The preparation of the bilateral year

#### 4.1.1 Events

2013 was supposed to be a year in which the bilateral relation between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation was commemorated with over 600 events in the fields of culture, economy and politics. The bilateral year was proposed by Russian President D. Medvedev in 2009 and accepted by the Prime-Minister of the Netherlands J. P. Balkenende. The organization of bilateral years has been a tradition within the Russian Federation; several countries have preceded the Netherlands as the Russian partner country, e.g., France and Germany. But the Dutch government is familiar with bilateral years too, as it had a bilateral year with Turkey in 2012.<sup>2</sup> The year between the Netherlands and Russian Federation was originally planned to be solely cultural, as agreed upon by Balkenende and Medvedev. However, following regime changes in both the Netherlands and the Russian Federation, the bilateral

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<sup>2</sup> This Dutch-Turkey bilateral year was ironically too disrupted with incidents, surrounding the Turkish President Erdogan and the leader of the Dutch right-wing party PVV (interview 1).

year was going to host economic and political-societal events as well. This was initiated by M. Rutte as the new Prime-Minister of the Netherlands (Interview 3). But apparently Putin was not a fan of cultural programs between countries and placed the organization of the bilateral year under Medvedev's authority. Putin was by then committed to the bilateral year because of the agreement signed by his predecessor Medvedev (Interview 1). In different ways, both countries committed themselves to a bilateral year with the three cultural, economic and political-societal pillars. The real motives behind the widening of the program are unfortunately not clear (Interview 3).

However, the widening of the program was communicated between the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and parliament. Prior to an economic mission by the Dutch government to Russia, the Dutch Parliamentary Commission of Foreign Affairs, under the initiative of a member of parliament of the right wing party *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, requested a letter in which the Minister of Foreign Affairs would state the goals of the economic mission (Rijksoverheid, 2011A). The clerk of the commission sent such a letter on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September (Rijksoverheid 2011B). The Minister replied on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October by mentioning his intentions regarding the economic mission.

In this letter, the bilateral year was mentioned for the first time in governmental papers. The Minister wrote that the Dutch government delegation was going to discuss the preparation of the bilateral year. Additionally, the onetime Minister of Foreign Affairs U. Rosenthal wrote that the Dutch government wanted the three cultural, economic and political-societal pillars as basis of the program (Rijksoverheid (2011C). In a report of the minister on the economic mission, Rosenthal wrote that the Netherlands and Russia agreed upon the three pillars (Rijksoverheid 2011D). However, these documents do not provide any insights into the motives behind this widening of the bilateral year.

The goals of the bilateral year were once again communicated between the minister and parliament in the months prior to the start of the program. In a letter to the Tweede Kamer, the minister wrote that the program of the bilateral year offered opportunities for widening and deepening the political-societal debate between both countries (Rijksoverheid 2013B). But the minister also emphasized the traditional role

of economics within the Dutch-Russian relationship. Interestingly, the minister wrote that the program took place in an already troubling environment. The minister points to the restrictions on political opposition, demonstrations, non-governmental organizations and Internet freedom within the Russian Federation. The minister also mentioned the anti-LGBT law, about which more will be said later. All this clearly shows that the economic and political-societal parts of the program were highly valued by the Dutch government.

The real preparations for the bilateral year, however, started during 2010. Because of the frequency of their bilateral years, Russia has a committee in their Ministry of Education that organizes all their bilateral years. In the Netherlands, a commission under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap: OCW) started organizing all these events together with other institutions, museums, levels of government and other partners. The commission took some of the public administrators directly from the committee who organized the Dutch-Turkey Year of 2012. The head of the committee was Van der Togt and the cultural director was Scheijen, who was hired as a subcontractor as part of the nongovernmental organization Dutch Culture. In the first half of the year, the majority of the events were going to take place in the Netherlands under Russian accountability and in the latter half the emphasis was on events in the Russian Federation under Dutch accountability. Because of this clear division between accountability, the bilateral year was sometimes referred to as the Russian Year in the Netherlands and the Dutch Year in Russia (Interview 1).

However, the organization of the program got off to a bad start on the Dutch side. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was not enthusiastic about the program and at first refused to pay in advance for events, making it hard to plan any events. Second, the ministry refused to sign an agreement with Russia on financial accountability (Interview 3). However, the Russian public administrators required such an agreement to receive money from their Minister of Education. After long negotiations, an agreement between the Netherlands and Russia was signed, which became a hollow and meaningless agreement. Eventually the hollow agreement made it possible for the Russians to receive their money from their government and the Dutch were not tied to huge financial agreements. Now both countries could

start organizing the year, as obstacles were taken away. Despite these struggles, there was no discussion regarding continuing the bilateral year from either side. The Dutch Ministry of OCW did not sabotage the program on later moments prior to and during the bilateral year (Interview 3). Any of such resistance from a ministry could be seen as an attempt to end the bilateral year, but there is no evidence suggesting deliberate sabotage at a later stage.

Despite little available money from the Dutch government and the struggles with the Ministry of OCW, the organization of the bilateral year appeared to be a success. Both involved Dutch ministries invested €750.000 and the different events were able to get smaller investments for individual events (Interview 1; Interview 3). About the half of the entire budget came from companies and other sponsors. The Russians, however, acted as a generous partner, sponsoring Dutch events as well as their own (Interview 3). Partners other than the Dutch government appeared to have had plenty of money (Interview 2).

All in all, the difference in available money among the organizers seems to show a conflicting image between the different levels of organization. Companies reacted generously in the organization of the bilateral year, which is interesting as this might point to expected returns and sunk costs. It seemed to be easy for the commission of the bilateral year to find partners in the program. Eventually partners offered their events to the committee to receive the official logo that was created for the official partners of the bilateral year (Interview 1). Therefore, the organization did not have to spend much time searching for partners. As soon as the Dutch committee included events in the official program, this proposal was sent to the Russian counterpart who would approve them. No events were refused by the Russians (Interview 1).

Meanwhile, the involved cultural and economic partners started organizing their own events and looking for sponsors. It even seemed as though some cultural partners anticipated investments from Russian investors and henceforth engaged in sunk costs. Examples are the museum of the house of Tsar Peter the Great in Zaandam, which invested a large sum of money to prepare for the bilateral year (Noordhollands Dagblad, 2012A), and the city of Rotterdam, which expected investments in their new port and therefore wanted Putin to visit the city

(Noordhollands Dagblad 2012B; Interview 1). Even the big lobbying group for employers, the VNO-NCW, devoted an article in their magazine on the attractive business environment in Russia because of the approaching bilateral year (Forum 2013). In an interview with the Russian head of the bilateral year, M. Syvidkoy, a newspaper reported a large number of partners who expected increased Russian investments (de Volkskrant 2012).

But out of sight of the organization of the program, troubles arose concerning the diplomatic relationship between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation. The first juncture took place in January of 2013, when the Russian Federation banned the import of Dutch veal because the Dutch testing standards did not meet the Russian standards. The ban was lifted in September of the same year. But this was just the beginning. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, the Russian refugee Aleksandr Dolmatov was found dead in a detention cell in the Netherlands. This Russian activist was fleeing from Russia to the Netherlands to avoid arrest by the Russian police. Many supporters of Dolmatov protested and demanded an investigation. Eventually, even the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded an investigation. An investigation by the Dutch government proved that mistakes were made in the process of rejecting Dolmatov's request and the following eviction. Eventually a debate took place in the Dutch parliament in which the Minister of Safety and Justice F. Teeven faced a vote of no-confidence, for which 48 out of the 150 members of parliament voted in favour.

One of the biggest issues for the bilateral year arose in February, when a Russian law on the prohibition of LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender) propaganda aimed at people under the age of 18 was presented. The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs F. Timmermans told Russia that he was worried about this law on non-traditional relationships. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov was not amused and asked the Netherlands not to interfere in Russia's national business. The anti-LGBT law sparked anger among Dutch columnists as well. A call for a cultural boycott emerged within the Dutch media, implicitly pointing at the bilateral year (NRC, 2013A).

The commission of the bilateral year entered the public debate by arguing that a cultural boycott would not serve Dutch interests. The commission argued that such

a boycott would likely have the opposite effect: ending bilateral diplomatic talks would make it impossible to influence Russian policy. According to Scheijen, the spokesman of the committee, if the Netherlands wanted to influence Russian policy, it should point at its commonalities with Russia (NRC, 2013B; Interview 3). A discussion within Dutch society and government appears to be at play in the background on how to deal with discussing values with Russia.

In a parliamentary debate a month before the start of the program, the human rights violation in Russia were discussed. All the members of parliament complimented the minister on his approach regarding the prohibition on LGBT propaganda. However, according to one speaker, other human rights issues required more attention, like the disappearance of Russian civilians and the role of the Christian Orthodox church (Rijksoverheid, 2013D). During this debate, the minister repeated his disapproval of the prohibition on LGBT propaganda, which was repeated by the media (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013A). In his contribution to the parliamentary debate, the minister addressed the question on how to best raise such matters in bilateral meetings. He noted that the Netherlands identifies itself with LGBT matters and that raising such matters is typically Dutch (Rijksoverheid, 2013D). Timmermans even goes as far as to state that the Netherlands should take a leading role in advancing LGBT rights globally (Rijksoverheid, 2013D).

But only days before the start of the program, a broader parliamentary debate took place regarding the Russian Federation. A few issues were raised that I think were typical for debates throughout 2013. The first issue was the Dutch economic dependency on the Russian Federation. Some members of parliament had a different image of this dependency than the minister did (Rijksoverheid 2013C), especially on the matter of gas and other natural resources. The second issue covered Russia's human rights violations. A third issue was the importance of economic relations. Some members of parliament argued that the human rights issue should play a bigger role in Dutch-Russian relations, whereas other members argued that the economic issues should be more prominent. The minister eventually argued that the Dutch dependency on Russian gas does not mean that the Netherlands will not addresses human rights issues in the Russian Federation (Rijksoverheid 2013C). This discussion was continued in the media over the following days, with different media



making different inferences (NRC 2013D; NRC 2013E; Vrij Nederland 2013A; Elsevier 2013).

A fourth issue was the Dutch-Russian Year itself. The minister stated that there will be no celebration and that the program will be sober because of Russia's human rights violations. In other words, the frills were to be removed. This removal of frills was repeated throughout the media (NRC Handelsblad 2013; het Financieel Dagblad 2013A).

Despite public protests, President Putin landed in Amsterdam on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March for the official opening of the bilateral year. The program would be sober, but in line with the norms for such events. Unfortunately for Rotterdam, Putin's schedule not allow him to leave Amsterdam and visit other cities. The same was true for Groningen. The bilateral year was about to begin, and up to this point the Dutch government had clearly been lobbied for a more economic and political-societal program. However, all the actors involved already knew that under president Putin, times were changing for the worse.

#### 4.1.2 Analysis

What do these facts say about the confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses? Let me first focus on sunk costs. Two facts appear to be evident in this time slot. First, that companies are responsible for at least half of the financing of the program (Interview 1). Given their financial commitment, they were not likely to give up on the bilateral year. Think of the Museum of the house of Tsar Peter the Great, which invested to prepare for the bilateral year (Noordhollands Dagblad, 2012A). Next, there are the governmental sunk costs. The government financed the other half of the program and therefore committed itself to the cause as well.

Next to the financial sunk costs, there is the time and effort that were invested in organizing the year. However, an interesting fact is the reluctance of the Ministry of OCW, which was not eager to invest at first. But eventually things were set straight and there is no evidence that suggests that the Ministry deliberately sabotaged the bilateral year. Therefore, I argue that different partners were eager to engage in investments in the program. However, there is no evidence that sunk costs led to a continuation of the program.

Second, there are the anticipated increasing returns. Especially from the side of the cultural and economic partners, evidence suggests that such calculations were made. A great example is the city of Rotterdam, which invested a lot to get the attention of investors for their extended port. But the same can be said from the side of the government. I see the widening of the program to include an economic pillar as proof of anticipated increasing returns. So I do argue that increasing returns appear to have played a large role in the organization of the bilateral year.

Then there is the notion of network externalities. An interesting point in this regard is the number of partners who wanted to be part of the program. The commission did not need to search for partners, as the partners themselves applied to participate in the program (Interview 1). But in this time slot there is no available evidence that this extensive network led to the effect of network externalities or that networks were strategically used.

Norms have clearly already played a role in the first public discussion about the bilateral year. I point to the discussion around the cultural boycott. The commission clearly responded to the call for a boycott by arguing that the program made it possible to talk about norms and values. Adding the political-societal pillar to the program was another example of norms playing a role.

Identity was only mentioned once in all the documents I studied. It was used by the minister in the discussion around the anti-LGBT law. Timmermans stated that fighting for equal LGBT rights is part of the Dutch identity. He even goes so far as to state that the Netherlands should take a leading role in advertising LGBT rights. Therefore, I argue that talks between Russia and the Netherlands about LGBT rights resulted from this identity.

I turn to standard operating procedures. It is interesting to note the connection to the Dutch-Turkey Year of 2012. Although the public administrators from the Dutch-Turkey Year had little influence on the whole organization, it is typical that these people were chosen as public administrators of the commission. The committee might have chosen other public administrators who were not involved with the Dutch-Turkey Year. In the interviews with the members of the commission, I found no other evidence that they turned to procedures from the Dutch-Turkey Year.

For now, I conclude that sunk costs, increasing returns and norms played a large role in organizing the bilateral year. Other influencing factors were identity and standard operating procedures. The notion of network externalities offers little explanation in this stage. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the above.

<b>Table 4.1 Influence of notions</b>	<b>Preparation</b>	<b>April – September</b>	<b>October – November</b>
<b>Sunk costs</b>	Yes		
<b>Increasing returns</b>	Yes		
<b>Network externalities</b>	No		
<b>Norms</b>	Yes		
<b>Identity</b>	Yes		
<b>Standard operating procedures</b>	Yes		

## 4.2 Minor incidents between April the 8<sup>th</sup> and October

### 4.2.1 Events

The start of the bilateral year took place rather late in 2013, on April 8<sup>th</sup>. Both President Putin and Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands opened an exhibition in the Hermitage in Amsterdam. Meanwhile, at the Beurs van Berlage, a group of over 700 industrialists met to discuss business. Among these industrialists were representatives of AkzoNobel, Philips, ING, Unilever, Gazprom Neft, Summa Group and Rosneft (Financieel Dagblad, 2013B). Later the Russian president travelled to the Scheepvaartmuseum for a program with Prime Minister Rutte, where delegations of the Beurs of Berlage met them to sign agreements and contracts (Rijksoverheid, 2014). It seems as though the opening of the bilateral year was supposed have an economic character. This was even mentioned in an official document (Rijksoverheid, 2014).

However, given NGO's criticisms and the negative public opinion of Russia's policies, the organization of the bilateral year faced a challenge. The opening at the

Scheepvaartmuseum drew lots of protestors (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013B). The demonstrations were aimed at the Russian anti-LGBT law. Due to the number of demonstrators and the noise they produced, the stage inside the Scheepvaartmuseum had to be changed so that Rutte and Putin could hear each other (Interview 1; Interview 3). These demonstrations were supported by NGOs like Human Rights Watch (Metro, 2013) and Amnesty International (BN de Stem, 2013) to discuss the human rights violations in the Russian Federation. There were also two parliamentary debates in which the minister was called upon to discuss the human rights issue with his Russian partners. Therefore, Rutte's administration deemed it necessary to meet the demonstrators by addressing the Russian human rights situation (NRC, 2013F). A whole new agenda concerning the human rights dialogue was added to the program at the Scheepvaartmuseum.

In a letter to Parliament a month later, Minister Timmermans explained that during the meetings both the human rights dialogue and economic relations were addressed (Rijksoverheid, 2013E). According to Timmermans, the Russian Federation also had some critique concerning the Dutch human rights situation. The Russians brought up the paedophile association 'Marthijn' and the 'Staatsgereformeerde Partij', a political party that did not allow women to their ranks (Rijksoverheid, 2013E). Other matters on the table were the death of the Dutch journalist S. Storimans during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, the Russian law on nongovernmental organizations and the death of Dolmatov in a Dutch detention centre. However, half of the letter concerned the economic agreements that were agreed signed.

In the Dutch media, a discussion emerged on whether the human rights dialogue should have dominated the opening of the bilateral year, given the economic importance of the Dutch-Russian relationship (de Volkskrant, 2013). This is interesting because this discussion represents both institutionalist approaches (rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism). Different newspapers emphasized either the human rights dialogue or the trade negotiations (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013C; Boerderij Vandaag, 2013A). Some newspapers called on the government to give more attention to the human rights dialogue, others to the economic mission. One newspaper called the whole event '*a feast for commercial interests*' (Spits, 2013), denying the government's account of a

'sober meeting'. One way or another, the human rights dialogue found its way into the program despite its original economic character.

In the end, the official opening of the program was adjusted to fit political opposition, public opinion, the demonstrators and the nongovernmental organizations. But at least one person was not happy: President Putin. I learned from one of my interviews that the demonstrations that were personally experienced by Putin and broadcasted on Russian television angered him. The anti-LGBT law pushed Europe and Russia further apart. That Europe, and the Netherlands specifically, kept demanding LGBT rights annoyed the Russians (Interview 3). Russia felt that it was unequally treated in this matter and speaks of Europe as 'Gayrope' (Interview 3).

Putin specifically was humiliated in the Netherlands, which had some impact on the bilateral year later on. Some critics in the Netherlands questioned the focus on LGBT rights as well, as this discussion seemed to dominate the bilateral year at this point. Other, perhaps even more severe, human rights violations lost their attention. This has probably to do with intense LGBT lobbying by some Dutch political parties (Interview 1).

After two calm months of April and May, the anti-LGBT law was adopted by the Duma in June of 2013. This was reason enough for the Dutch political party D66 to send parliamentary questions to Minister Timmermans. These questions discussed the impact of the anti-LGBT law and the planned strategy for both the Netherlands and the European Union. The last question in the letter involved the implications for the Dutch-Russian Year. In his answers, Timmermans once again emphasized the role of the human rights dialogue in the bilateral year and argued that the Dutch-Russian Year contributes to the discussion.

For some media this was not satisfying enough, as they argued that the economic interests won out over the human rights dialogue. The traditional Dutch identities entered the discussion here: the merchant and the pastor (Nederlands Dagblad, 2013A). The money-hungry merchant seems to have beaten the morals-spreading pastor. These two ideal types of the Dutch identity were used more and more as the discussion continued.

In July, the Russian Federation banned Dutch potatoes, as they supposedly carried hazardous substances. This ban once again hit the agricultural sector, an

important Dutch industry. Ironically, the agricultural sector gained a lot from the bilateral year. July added more victims of Russian policies, as four Dutch journalists were detained for spreading LGBT propaganda. These journalists were making a documentary on the effects of the anti-LGBT law on the everyday lives of Russians, which was going to be a part of the Dutch-Russian Year. Eventually they were released because of procedural errors in the judicial process. But one can only imagine the shock in the Netherlands as it was exactly this law that was so extensively discussed. That is why one of the journalists, who is a city councilmember as well, called for instrumental use of the cultural ties between Dutch and Russian cities (*stedenbanden* in Dutch) to discuss the situation of the LGBT community in Russia (Nederlands Dagblad, 2013B). I think this call for a dialogue between cities counts as engaging in dialogues on human rights matters. So even when parts of the program were at stake, cultural ties were used instrumentally to discuss human rights.

While the majority of the program events in August took place in Russia, an important event took place in Amsterdam on August the 25<sup>th</sup>. The Russian bureau that offered cultural events for Russians abroad (Rossotrudnichestvo) organized a concert at the Museumplein in Amsterdam. With the demonstrations at the opening of the bilateral year in mind, the Russians feared yet another catastrophe. Fearing mass demonstrations, the Russian officials warned the Netherlands that if things went wrong they would immediately end the Dutch-Russian Year (Interview 1).

Meanwhile in the Netherlands, an NGO concerned with LGBT rights demanded a cancelation of the concert. The city council of Amsterdam shared the NGO's concerns regarding Russia's human rights situation. However, the council preferred not to cancel the concert because they thought that in the Netherlands everybody should have the right to speak their voice (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013D). Additionally, the city council found that such a concert is what makes Amsterdam, Amsterdam (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013E). The city council declared that any demonstrations were to be allowed. Therefore, a To Russia With Love concert was planned prior to the Russian concert, in which NGOs and protestors were able to express their concerns (Het Parool, 2013). The concerts were planned in this order to ensure that the Russian concert would not be disrupted

(Interview 1). When the Russian concert started, many demonstrators stayed to view it, but they did not disrupt it. The demonstrators seemed happy at the end (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013F). The Russian officials were also pleased and the Dutch-Russian Year continued (Interview 1).

This whole discussion on whether or not to cancel the Russian concert and whether or not there should be demonstrations once more sparked the discussion on how to deal with Russia. Yet again columnists wrote that there should be a boycott on the Russian Federation (NRC, 2013G). This discussion sparked many columns throughout the media for the entire month (NRC, 2013H). Once again the commission of the Dutch-Russian Year sent Scheijen into the debate. Scheijen repeated his arguments that a boycott only hurts the Russian progressive-liberals who oppose the anti-LGBT law and that a boycott does not serve Dutch interests (Interview 3). Eventually, Scheijen gained support from different NGOs concerned with LGBT rights (Interview 3).

In hindsight, Scheijen raised the hypothetical question of whether there would have been such massive demonstrations if the king of Morocco was to visit the Netherlands. He answered his own question by stating that such critiques aimed at Russia are standard and that Russia is unequally treated (Interview 3). This whole discussion on a boycott on Russia seems to be a repetition of March.

Many economic events took place in Russia in September. Hundreds of representatives of different branches of Dutch business travelled to Russia for exhibitions and meetings. Sometimes they were accompanied by a Dutch minister. This received some attention in Dutch newspapers, which were rather critical of these meetings. Some newspapers even went as far as to state that the merchant now definitely had beaten the pastor (Vrij Nederland, 2013B). Other newspapers tried to convince their audience of a direct link between such meetings and a lift on the ban on Dutch veal enacted by Russia in January (Boerderij Vandaag, 2013B).

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, a serious conflict took place on the Pechora Sea. A Russian oilrig in the North pole area was the site of an action by Greenpeace against oil drilling in that area. The crew, aboard their ship the Arctic Sunrise, travelled towards the oilrig and some of the activists tied themselves to it. Russian policemen boarded the Greenpeace ship and arrested the entire crew. The ship, which was

sailing under the Dutch flag, was confiscated by Russian forces. Eventually the crew got charged with piracy and the ship was moved to Murmansk where it was chained. The crew consisted of many different nationalities, sparking anger all over the world. The Netherlands faced a double problem of having two of its citizens detained and having a ship under its flag captured in international waters in the middle of its bilateral year. The Dutch government filed an official complaint at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Eventually the charges for the crew were replaced with hooliganism instead of piracy.

The situation was serious, as the crew of the Arctic Sunrise could have been sent to work camps for a long period (Interview 1). But the Russians faced an easy choice as to whether they were going to permit future demonstrations near their North Pole drilling rigs. Therefore, they probably wanted to set an example to prevent such future actions. The Dutch government of Rutte immediately started talks with Russian counterparts. The Dutch government considered cooperation in such a matter important to resolve the situation (Interview 1). Ending all talks was never considered by the Dutch government. If the bilateral year was cancelled at such a moment, it might have made it harder for the Dutch government to help free the activists (Interview 1). The Dutch-Russian Year was thus used instrumentally to free the activists and later the Arctic Sunrise. However, I found it strange that there appears to be consensus on this strategy, as no newspaper or columnist wrote about cancelling the bilateral year during this period.

In the last days of September, yet another incident took place. Two Dutch artists were refused entrance into Russia and their visa were cancelled. The duo planned to travel to Russia to prepare the Sochi Project. The Sochi Project was an exhibition on the preparations of the Olympic Games in Sochi that were going to take place in the winter of 2014. The project attracted a lot of negative attention. Therefore, the location where the exhibition was going to take place cancelled the exhibition. The Dutch embassy demanded answers from Russian officials. Eventually the exhibition was transferred to another location. This was apparently the only problem specifically related to the program of the bilateral year (Interview 1).

These events and conflicts provide an incomplete image, because the greatest part of the bilateral year activities took place in smaller cities and towns throughout



the Netherlands and Russia. There were discussions on how to deal with the conflicts between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation in those places as well. As an example, I point to a small event in the city of Deventer. Local citizens addressed questions to the burgomaster of Deventer and the local newspaper regarding a gala-evening that was going to take place as part of the bilateral year. In a response, the burgomaster said that he was going to address the human rights violations in Russia in his speech (de Stentor, 2013). In another example, a local columnist wrote to an alderman from Maastricht to address the human rights situation during the alderman's official visit to Russia as part of the Dutch-Russian Year (Dagblad de Limburger, 2013A). Interestingly this alderman found it important to share his disillusioned experiences in the same newspaper after his visit (Dagblad de Limburger, 2013B). In the article, he addressed the importance of the LGBT dialogue with Russia.

The benefits and the controversies of the Dutch-Russian Year were spread throughout the Netherlands. The Universiteit van Maastricht, for example, started cooperating with the Lobachevsky State University of Nizjni Novgorod on the areas of research, investigation and exchanges (Dagblad de Limburger, 2013C). Another example is het Historisch Museum Vriezenveen, of which the director proudly told a newspaper that the museum was generating profit because of the Dutch-Russian Year (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2013). Finally, the museum of the house of Tsar Peter the Great reached a historic number of visitors because of the Dutch-Russian Year (Noordhollands Dagblad, 2013).

So despite the repetition of the LGBT discussion, there was little discussion on cancelling the bilateral year. This is especially interesting in the period around the arrest of the Greenpeace crew. But overall, the public opinion and media became more critical of the bilateral year during this period.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis

Throughout this time slot I found no mentions of sunk costs or any references to previously made investments in any of the consulted sources. I think the explanation is that, as shown by the last examples, many partners started seeing the benefits of their investments. Parts of their investments might have already returned, like in the

example of the Historisch Museum Vriezenveen, which even started generating profit. Thus I conclude that sunk costs have played no role in this time slot.

Money played a large role throughout this time slot. Let me point for example to the official opening of the bilateral year, where hundreds of industrialists were present to make deals and sign agreements. Despite the enormous societal discussion on the human rights conflict with Russia, the economic program was not altered. The fact that the stage of the Scheepvaartmuseum was changed so that the officials could hear each other is typical in this case. It would have been a strong symbol if the organization had not changed the setting and made it impossible for Putin to speak to Rutte because of the noise from the demonstration. Another example of increasing returns is the lifting of the ban on veal. This was probably the effect of the many agricultural exhibitions that were visited by leading industrialists and governmental officials. During this half of the year, the 'merchant' truly was omnipresent.

But profit was not the only incentive leading Dutch foreign policy. There was also network externalities. The best example from this time slot is also the worst conflict that took place: the boarding of the Arctic Sunrise. During the first crucial, heated days of the conflict, the Dutch government decided to use the meetings of the bilateral year between high-ranked officials to resolve the matter. By doing so, they strengthened the bilateral year instead of downscaling or ending it. Another example was the disagreement around the Russian concert at the Museumplein in Amsterdam. Rather than detracting from the bilateral year, Amsterdam made it possible for the LGBT demonstrators to organize their own concert, which added another political-societal concert to the bilateral year. This was satisfactory to both the demonstrators and the Russian officials.

Despite the economic character, norms played a large role as well. There are a multitude of examples. Let me start with the opening of the bilateral year. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Timmermans eventually agreed to address the human rights issues in Russia. This would not have been the case had the Dutch government, the Dutch citizens and the nongovernmental organizations not considered the issue important. But I think that the notion of norms can be applied more broadly to the entire discussion around the LGBT rights. Different partners

called upon different organizers of different events of the bilateral year to make room for the human rights discussion in the program. The human rights issues had to be addressed, but within the program and through meetings with the Russians, rather than by yelling at the Russians from a distance.

Identity played a role as well. I already mentioned the merchant and pastor debate. The merchant represents a country hungry for money and economic prosperity, whereas the pastor tries to moralize the world in accordance with Dutch values. Both these identities were present in this time slot. The program of the bilateral year originally represented the merchant better, but because of public pressure, the pastor found its way into the program. The Netherlands started moralizing the talks with its Russian partners. It was up to the minister and his commission on the bilateral year to make sure the merchant and pastor balanced each other. In the end, I conclude that the Dutch identity of being both a merchant and a pastor influenced the continuation of the bilateral year.

This leaves open the role of standard operating procedures. In some ways, standard operating procedures proved to be influential, but in others it was not. Twice in the bilateral year a discussion broke out on how to deal with Russia's human rights violations. Both times Scheijen faced columnists in the media. But not a single new argument was used the second time. I think that here the influence of standard operating procedures was very clear. I already used the word 'repetition' throughout the discussion. Instead of analyzing the situation, those involved repeated their earlier arguments. I do not think that the commission explored other possibilities, but instead just acted in the same way as the first time.

On the other hand, there was the discussion around the Arctic Sunrise and its crew. The Netherlands turned to the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea for the first time, so this is clearly not standard operating procedure. The entire process was new and the Dutch officials clearly evaluated their choices. But they still chose to work within the framework of the bilateral year to resolve the situation.

Thus in this time slot we see a small change in which notions prove to be useful in explaining the continuation of the bilateral year. Sunk costs no longer played a role, whereas network externalities did. With the other notions the degree to which they were influential changed.

<b>Table 4.2</b> <b>Influence of notions</b>	<b>Preparation</b>	<b>April – September</b>	<b>October – November</b>
<b>Sunk costs</b>	Yes	No	
<b>Increasing returns</b>	Yes	Yes	
<b>Network externalities</b>	No	Yes	
<b>Norms</b>	Yes	Yes	
<b>Identity</b>	Yes	Yes	
<b>Standard operating procedures</b>	Yes	Yes	

### 4.3 Major incidents

#### 4.3.1 Events

This section will cover the final months of the bilateral year, in which the most severe events took place and the discussion of continuing the bilateral year was the toughest.<sup>3</sup> Up to this point, the discussion around the Greenpeace activists continued to occupy the media. But on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, a conflict emerged in The Hague. Neighbours of a Russian diplomat called the police to express their worries about the family of the diplomat. Apparently the drunk diplomat got into a brawl with his wife. Meanwhile the children were crying and screaming in the background. After the call by the concerned neighbours, who thought that the diplomat was beating up his children, police were dispatched to the diplomat's residence. The diplomat was D. Borodin, the second highest-ranking official of the Russian embassy in The Hague. When the police arrived at the scene they arrested Borodin, an infringement of the Treaty of Vienna, which states that all diplomats are inviolable. Eventually the police had to release Borodin because of this treaty.

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter will not be as chronological as the previous ones. Because of the amount of information, I will follow a more thematic approach.

To make the matter worse, Borodin had high contacts in the Kremlin, probably up to Putin himself. Borodin also released a tweet in which he stated that he was beaten up by Dutch police in front of his children (BBC, 2013). This all cumulated in Putin's live reaction on television all the way from Indonesia (BBC, 2013). Allegedly even the ambassador of the Russian embassy in The Hague learned about the arrest after Putin did (Interview 3). Putin demanded an investigation from the Netherlands and wanted the responsible police officers fired from the police force. This strong reaction might have something to do with Putin's humiliation when visiting Amsterdam at the opening of the bilateral year (Interview 3). This was the first time that the Russians had the opportunity to openly criticize the Netherlands. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs added fuel to the fire by spreading rumours about camouflaged men who arrested Borodin, talked about how the diplomat was violently beaten up, how it was a bad thing because it happened in the capital of international justice and how the Dutch officials remained silent (BBC, 2013). In addition, a member of the Russian parliament called for protests in front of the Dutch embassy in Moscow, which took place.

The slipperiness of the situation cannot be overstated. Borodin himself mentioned a new cold war in one of his tweets (BBC, 2013). Additionally, this all happened during the negotiations between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation over the Greenpeace activists. The Netherlands now had to defend itself from a bad international image and significant criticism. Dutch officials decided that an investigation should point out how this situation could have happened. Although the entire situation worsened the diplomatic relation between the two countries, in the end it did not lead to another debate around the bilateral year, because it was clear that the Netherlands was to blame.

But this was not the end of the rollercoaster that was the diplomatic relationship between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation. On the evening of October 14<sup>th</sup>, the second highest-ranking official of the Dutch embassy in Moscow fell victim to a crime. When O. Elderenbosch came home, he saw that the lights were not working. Two men dressed up as electricians were working on his floor and Elderenbosch asked them for help. Elderenbosch invited the two men into his apartment. But as soon as the trio entered the apartment, the two men closed the

door and got a hold of the Dutch diplomat. The diplomat was beaten up and tied to a chair. Afterwards the two men started vandalizing the apartment. The 'electricians' left a message on the mirror: "LGBT" before leaving Elderenbosch' apartment (Interview 3).

This event led to outrage all over the Netherlands, now that a public servant had fallen victim to violence. Not the least because of the timing of the situation, as people saw a connection between the arrest of Borodin in The Hague and this crime in Moscow. Some evidence even suggests that Russian officials were behind the attack (Interview 1; Interview 3). The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Timmermans called for calm and to await the investigation that the Russians agreed to conduct. Despite this, a discussion took place among government officials as one group demanded a strong reaction, whereas the other group advised prudence.

Within a few hours, news of the crime spread all over the world. the first Dutch politicians reacted by tweeting that the bilateral year should be put on hold or cancelled (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013G). On the initiative of Tweede Kamer, a debate took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, only three days after the incident (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013H). During this debate, it became clear that four parties (*D66*, *Partij voor de Dieren*, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* and the *Socialistische Partij*) wanted to cancel the Dutch-Russian Year. Other parties were more prudent, stating that only if the investigation proved that the Russian government was behind the attack should the bilateral year be cancelled. The remaining parties wanted to continue the bilateral year to safeguard the conversations that were taking place (Rijksoverheid, 2013F). They argued that if the government were to choose the 'nuclear option' of ending everything, the Netherlands would be worse off. Another argument was that the Dutch government should not put 30 billion Euros at stake, which represents the amount of trade between Russia and the Netherlands. A third option arose as a sort of compromise: making the program more sober and emphasizing the human rights dialogue even more. I find it stunning that this option was reconsidered, because it was already used in the debate in April before the start of the bilateral year, when the minister promised to make the program more sober and remove frills (Rijksoverheid, 2013C).

During the parliamentary debate, the minister seemed the most enthusiastic person of the debate about the program of the bilateral year. He argued strongly that the program should be continued. First, he stated that, given the recent incident, the entire debate was an emotional reaction and that politics should not be based on emotional reactions. A second argument was that the minister did not receive signs from representatives of businesses that the program should be abandoned. Regarding the cultural part of the program, the minister thought that it would contribute to Russian knowledge of the Dutch culture and therefore it was useful. Furthermore, the parts of the program concerning rules of law, healthcare and trade were important to the minister and he did not want to abandon them under any circumstances. Additionally, the minister argued that most of the events were private and that the Dutch government cannot forbid any private events. In his final argument, the minister told the members of parliament that he was not going to politicize the program of the bilateral year. Therefore, he too argued that any unnecessary frills should be removed from the program (Rijksoverheid, 2013F). But apparently nothing was changed, as there were no frills to begin with because of the program's focus on business and trade (Interview 1).

The national media joined the discussion as well. They also noticed the many incidents during the bilateral year and started questioning the program. At first, the media covered the debate of the politicians, whereas later they proceeded with the discussion on cancelling the bilateral year. According to some newspapers, the minister said that it was unwise to let the Dutch lion roar (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013I). The media also reported that it was not in the Dutch interest to cancel all talks with Russian partners (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013I). Meanwhile, some media attempted to lead the discussion by once again repeating the discussion between the columnists and Scheijen about a boycott (de Groene Amsterdammer, 2013). In the following days, however, others columnists wrote that the program should continue (de Gelderlander, 2013; Leewardier Courant, 2013). According to some columnists, it was important to deescalate the situation by staying in conversation. They also pointed to the economic interests of the program. Others argued that the cultural ties were not against the interest of any of the partners and therefore there was no reason to cancel the bilateral year.

Next to this rather abstract discussion on cancelling the program or removing the unnecessary frills, a more concrete discussion took place on whether or not the by then new king and queen should attend the official end of the program in Russia (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013J). Both countries had agreed that the Russian head of state was to open the program in the Netherlands and that the Dutch head of state was to end the program in the Russian Federation (Rijksoverheid, 2013F). This discussion took place because it was considered to be an important symbol for both the Netherlands and the Russian Federation (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013K; Interview 1). However, Rutte's government found that the Dutch king should not be part of a political discussion (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013L).

Despite this opinion, the king's visit became part of the discussion of the 17<sup>th</sup> of October (Rijksoverheid, 2013F). Because of the minister's prudence, the decision regarding the king's visit was moved to another debate that was to take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October. But a strange thing happened in those two weeks between the debates, as the visit of the king was no longer a part of the agenda of the discussion on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October. As a matter of fact, the planned visit of the king was even extended by a day and a meeting with Putin was added to the agenda (Rijksoverheid, 2013G; de Telegraaf, 2013). Although it might seem in hindsight as though the discussion was not taken seriously because of the extended visit, cancelling the visit of the king and queen was seriously withal considered (Interview 3). The change in attitude probably had to do with the de-escalation of the situation during the two weeks in between both debates as a result of extensive contact between the two governments. After the king's visit, the government was happy with its choice, as the visit helped further de-escalate the situation (NRC, 2013I). There was even a connection between the returning of the Greenpeace ship and the visit of the king (Interview 1; Interview 3).

Regarding the debate of the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, although most of the discussion focused on the settlement of the many incidents, the discussion on the bilateral year was continued. The first shocking fact was that out of the four political parties that wanted to cancel the bilateral year on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, only one party, D66, still did (Rijksoverheid, 2013G). Apparently the other three parties saw sufficient



diplomatic progress for them to change their attitude towards the bilateral year. The consensus during the debate seemed to be that the Dutch-Russian diplomatic relation was normalized and relaxed. Some representatives even spoke about a period of 'détente'. According to the minister, this détente meant that there were no more incidents<sup>4</sup> and that there was a constructive dialogue with the Russian government (Rijksoverheid, 2013G).

The D66 party still pushed for a cancellation of the program, as they wanted to frame themselves as the party most concerned with human rights (Interview 3). In a reply, the minister repeated some of his arguments to justify the continuation of the program: the Russians are an important trade partner, the bilateral year offers a major stimulation to the cultural society, the cultural ties between the two countries was intensified, the program offered opportunities to discuss the human rights situation, and the economic follow-up helped create a strong rule of law in Russia. The members of parliament seemed especially sensitive to the argument around human rights (Interview 1). Additionally, one of the Dutch Greenpeace activists called for a dialogue from her cell in Russia (Algemeen Dagblad, 2013). Given this repetition of arguments, I started questioning whether there truly ever was consideration of cancelling the bilateral year.

After analyzing multiple parliamentary debates throughout 2013, I found that during these debates little was said about the economic ties with Russia. They were mentioned during all these debates, but not in detail. But the newspapers in October presented a different image, as they did discuss the economic importance of the bilateral year and the bilateral relationship. In various newspapers, experts stated that the relationship between Russia and the Netherlands is based on economic ties (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013M). Later, the economic importance was used as an argument either in favour or against the continuation of the bilateral year, depending on whether the authors believed that Russia is an important economic partner or not (NRC, 2013J; Brabants Dagblad, 2013). Other newspapers mentioned that the economic ties were too important for the Netherlands to escalate

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<sup>4</sup> There was however a burglary in a Russian diplomatic building in The Hague on the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, but according to the police this was just a normal burglary and therefore it was not considered as a diplomatic incident.

the situation and therefore the Netherlands should show prudence (Nederlands Dagblad, 2013C; Dagblad de Limburger, 2013D).

The economic partners in both the Netherlands and in the Russian Federation were well aware of both the political discussion and the economic importance of the relationship. However, they did not expect an end to the bilateral year and therefore did not anticipate a cancellation of the planned events (Leeuwarder Courant, 2013B). The companies involved sometimes even ignored the diplomatic conflicts. For example, Shell was asked by Greenpeace to stop working with the Russian state-owned Gazprom because of the conflict around the Greenpeace arrest. Shell reacted by stating that the conflict was not its doing and therefore it planned to continue business as usual (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau ANP, 2013N). Shell's statement sparked political reaction from the leader of the green party GroenLinks, who called for companies to live up to their social responsibility (NRC, 2013K). Shell's reaction seems typical, as companies were more concerned about getting trade agreements than whether Putin was satisfied with the program (Interview 1).

This proves that businesses were benefiting from the bilateral year and that they likely told the minister not to end the bilateral year. Previously presented evidence already suggested that they did tell the minister this (Rijksoverheid, 2013F). This was all confirmed in news articles that were published after the official program of the bilateral year. For example, one newspaper wrote about how the conflicts never negatively influenced the different economic events (het Financieel Dagblad, 2013C). Even in 2014, when the discussion raged about the political representation of the Netherlands at the opening of the Winter Olympic Games in the Russian city of Sochi, news articles mentioned that the merchant seemed to have beaten the pastor (de Twentsche Courant Tubantia, 2014). In addition, even a Dutch minister who attended an economic exchange program wrote in his letter to parliament about how he lobbied to get certain bans lifted and about how many agreements he arranged (Rijksoverheid, 2013H).

One sector in particular proved to be influential, that of gas and energy. Throughout the entire year, 'gas' was mentioned multiple times, but not nearly as often as 'human rights' or 'LGBT'. But this does not accurately reflect its importance, as I shall try to demonstrate. Few news articles that I found addressed the gas

dependency as much as it deserved. Only near the end of the year did some articles address the issue (de Correspondent, 2013). But in the background the whole issue played a large and perhaps even decisive role. The Netherlands had its own gas supply in its ground for decades. But under the influence of global warming and ecological consciousness, the entire energy sector is in transition. The current economy based on exhaustible energies, e.g., gas and oil, has to make way for renewable energy, e.g., solar and wind power. The Netherlands expected that the role of gas would be crucial during this transition (Interview 3). Therefore, an immense project was undertaken, as the Netherlands wanted to become Europe's *gasrotonde*. Or in other words, the Netherlands wanted to be the transition port for Russian gas during the transitional phase (Interview 3; de Correspondent, 2013).

As part of this strategy, the partially state-owned company Gasunie and the Dutch government invested billions of Euros to live up to their dream of becoming the *gasrotonde*. Scheijen put it like this during his interview: "*The most important [factors in the decision to continue the bilateral year] are the deliveries of gas, that is in the end the reason for the Netherlands to stay in conversation with Russia. Without Russia there will be no gasrotonde*" (Interview 3). Gas, therefore, was the crucial factor in the decision to continue the bilateral year.

But apparently gas has always been important to the relationship between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation. There were trades of gas during the height of the Cold War, during the Dutch-Russian Year with all its incidents, during the Crisis of the Crimea and even after Dutch suspicion of Russian involvement in the downing of MH17 (Interview 3). Gas has always flowed from Russia into the Netherlands and it will probably continue doing so in the future (Interview 1). This gas dependency was even confirmed by newspapers a year after all these different crises (Vrij Nederland, 2014).

Why was the crucial role of gas never discussed in political debates? First, there is the role of the minister. The minister of Foreign Affairs knew about the Dutch dependency on Russian gas and the idea of the *gasrotonde*. However, he still decided to say nothing about it. This has probably to do with showing that gas was not as important to him as the human rights issues, which he kept on addressing during his speeches in parliament and the media (Interview 3). Leaving out the role

of gas and emphasizing the human rights issue was a sort of framing. Telling parliament that the Dutch-Russian Year would always continue because of the gas would have shown that the human rights issue was a farce (Interview 3), weakening his position as a social-democratic minister.

How then was it possible for the members of parliament to call for a cancellation of the bilateral year? Were they not aware of the role of gas? They were, and they also knew that the Dutch-Russian Year would always continue because of the gas dependency (Interview 3). The only reason for mentioning the human rights issue for the members of parliament was to show how human rights issues mattered to them (Interview 3). This farce was already mentioned during the heated days of October in some media (Dagblad de Limburger, 2013E).

Was there then no role left for the human rights dialogue? Many media wrote on the last day of the bilateral year that there was a balance between culture, human rights and economic events (Leeuwarder Courant, 2013C; Trouw, 2013). But given the political debates, one would think that there was plenty of room for human rights dialogues. This was even the case for the more local events (Interview 2). If I were to believe Amnesty International, the opposite is true. It claimed that there was marginal room for human rights discussion, except for the one on LGBT rights (Interview 1).

The entire debate around the continuation of the bilateral year reached the cultural partners too. But these partners had a rather convenient role as regards the political discussion. Most cultural partners stated that culture transcends politics. Therefore, they did not worry too much about the discussion or they simply thought that a cancellation would not affect them (Rotterdams Dagblad, 2013). In hindsight, it was argued by some media that culture transcends politics, for the diplomatic incidents did not affect the cultural events (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2013).

After 2013, the cultural sector looked back quite positively on the cooperation with the Russian Federation (de Stentor, 2014). But there were some concerns regarding the possibility of cancellation. For if the year was cancelled, many cultural partners would face costly charges that could potentially bankrupt them. Besides that, it would have been difficult to cancel events because of previously made commitments, because most events were private, and because it would make the

government look unreliable to its cultural partners (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). For example, the commission *Noord-Nederland-Rusland* was angry because of the discussion on cancelling the bilateral year (Interview 1). But inside the commission it was clear that the events would proceed as planned. However, the commission did remove frills and did not spend their entire budget (Interview 2). In the end, the cultural sector and their potential problems were of no influence on the decision to continue the bilateral year (Interview 3).

Despite arguments from opponents, the bilateral year continued. The king and queen of the Netherlands even visited Moscow at the end of the program with an extended agenda. Over 600 events were held in the fields of economics, culture, politics and society. Many agreements were signed between economic and cultural partners and many discussions took place regarding human rights issues and the diplomatic incidents. However, the long-term follow-up of the year was disappointing due to new incidents, e.g., the Ukraine crisis and the downing of MH17 (Interview 1). This can also be read in various media and in a letter of the minister to parliament about the evaluation of the bilateral year (Rijksoverheid, 2014B; NRC, 2014).

However, on a positive note, there was some follow-up, mainly in the cultural branch (Interview 1). In an accompanying document, sent with the ministerial letter to parliament, the commission evaluated the bilateral year like this: *"In general, we can state that 2013 led to many contacts between Dutch and Russian people: in the fields of culture, economy, science, military and many other fields. Only time will tell to what these contacts will lead to what really matters in the international environment (and to which the year was only a means): more cooperation, more exchange of knowledge and more understanding of each other"* (Rijksoverheid, 2014). The minister added that the year made it possible to have many conversations that helped deescalate the various incidents. Even the nongovernmental organizations gained opportunities they would otherwise not have had (Rijksoverheid, 2014B).

#### 4.3.2 Analysis

By the last two months of the bilateral year, most of the 600 events had already taken place. But thanks to a few serious incidents, the discussion on continuing the bilateral year had never been more severe. Although the year was continued, it had

nothing to do with previous investments or sunk costs. As in the previous time slot, this is probably because many events already took place and most partners already made some profit by then.

The biggest contributor to the decision must have been increasing returns. There is a great deal of evidence suggesting that the economic events were crucial to both the Dutch government and the companies involved. This was especially true in the energy sector given the dream of being the *gasrotonde* of Europe. Increasing returns contributed so much that any arguments in favour of cancelling the bilateral year were considered unimportant by some people. In my interviews, the involved public administrators admitted that they never considered a cancellation due to the trade in gas. Thus not only did increasing returns matter to the continuation of the bilateral year, it was decisive.

The notion of network externalities was influential as well, not as a goal but as a means to an end. By keeping the conversations going as planned, it was possible for the government and the many companies to negotiate agreements. If the Dutch government had cancelled the different events, there would not be as many agreements and the Netherlands would have risked appearing to be an unreliable partner. Such an image would cause future negative effects. This reliability also counts for the NGOs in the societal field and even for the cultural partners. As I stated, many cultural partners would face potential financial problems by a cancellation. But the network that contained the economic partners appears more important than the cultural and societal partners to the government.

The role of norms remained the same as in the previous time slots. I tried to demonstrate that the same discussions took place in this time slot as in the previous ones. However, the role of human rights was placed on the background. This time the role of norms was more concentrated around having conversations with the Russian government to resolve the diplomatic incidents. This was demonstrated by the detailed discussion around the visit of the king and queen to Moscow. According to Dutch norms, it was inappropriate to turn the king into a political tool. Therefore, not changing the program was the option most in line with the norms.

Another interesting notion for this time slot is that of identity. I discussed the two identities that mattered in the debate on continuing the bilateral year: the

merchant and the pastor. I think this time slot revealed that the minister tried to show that the Netherlands is both a pastor and a merchant; that the Netherlands wants to trade with other states, but is also concerned with morality. The Dutch government wanted to create an image of being a pastor as well as a merchant. But in reality, the Netherlands is a true merchant and it is not willing to put its money where its mouth is. There can be talk of morality and human rights, but only as long as it does not stand in the way of trade.

Standard operating procedures also contributed to the discussion of cancelling the bilateral year. Once again, mostly the same arguments were used in this time slot as in the previous ones. The only exception was the debate around the visit of the king and queen. The best evidence that suggests that standard operating procedures mattered was the removal of frills from the program. The minister already promised before the official program started to remove any unnecessary frills. He repeated this during the debates in October. While the commission was aware that there were no frills, the parliament was satisfied with this promise.

At first it would seem as though this time slot is a replica of the prior one, but it is not. I argue that the discussion around the dependency of gas clearly showed that only economics mattered. Any other arguments were only used to keep the image alive of the Dutch government as a moral one. Even the interviewers from the commission admitted that they never anticipated a cancellation. The merchant seems to have beaten the pastor, and that is why the lion did not roar.

For an overview of the influence of the different notions see Table 4.3.

<b>Table 4.3 Influence of notions</b>	<b>Preparation</b>	<b>April – September</b>	<b>October – November</b>
<b>Sunk costs</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Increasing returns</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Network externalities</b>	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Norms</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Identity</b>	Yes	Yes	No

<b>Standard operating procedures</b>	Yes	Yes	No
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## 5. Conclusion

In this last chapter I will present my conclusions regarding the research question, the implications of this research, the limitations of this research, and suggestions for future researches.

### 5.1 Conclusion and findings

The research question I tried to answer was: *Why did the Dutch government continue the Dutch-Russian Year despite Russia's provocations?* In order for me to answer these questions I used the following hypotheses deduced from rational choice institutionalism (RCI) and sociological institutionalism (SI) :

*RCI 1: Societal and/or public actors have already invested in a course of the government and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

*RCI 2: Societal and/or public actors anticipate increasing returns of a governmental policy and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

*RCI 3: Societal and/or public actors value a policy more when it is compatible with the policies of other countries and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

*SI 4: Societal and/or public actors and organizations act in accordance to norms they find important and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

*SI 5: Societal and/or public actors and organizations are constrained by the actions, which they believe fit their identity and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

*SI 6: Organizations create standard operating procedures which can be retained while alternative action is required and therefore a state might not change its foreign policy attitude.*

The evidence suggests that all six notions, and therefore both institutionalist approaches, can explain the outcome. However, I also tried to show that the

influence of the different notions on the continuation of the bilateral year fluctuates. I will now present the influence of the different notions on the continuation of the bilateral year and confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses.

The effect of sunk costs suggests that actors do not deviate from a previously chosen course because of already made investments. I showed that prior to the bilateral year and at the beginning of the bilateral year organizers and both economic and cultural partners were worried for their economic position because of the threatening cancellation of the Dutch-Russian Year and the investments they have made in the events. Hence these partners did not want a cancellation and might have lobbied for the continuation of the bilateral year. Sunk costs might thus have played a role if the government had truly thought of cancelling the bilateral year and was going to investigate the effects of cancelling the events. But the government never did consider cancelling the bilateral year. Therefore the policy makes most likely never reached the stage of considering the sunk costs of involved partners. Be that as it may, despite the fact that some actors communicated their worries of the potential losses, the government did not take the sunk costs of the different parents into consideration. Consequently I argue that the hypothesis was correct, but sunk costs did not play a major role in continuing the bilateral year.

The notion of increasing returns suggests that actors do not deviate from a policy because they expect economic benefits from that policy. Both important partners to the government, like major businesses, and the government itself were concerned with earning money from the bilateral year. A primary instrument for this was using the bilateral year to accomplish the dream of becoming the *gasrotonde*. Gas has always been transported from Russia to the Netherlands, even during the most severe crises. The Netherlands would like to maintain this in the future. But next to the *gasrotonde* did other branches of business benefit from the bilateral year as well and they might have lobbied to continue the bilateral year as well. On top of that did the Dutch government earn its share from the many events as well. To achieve this goal, the Netherlands agreed to the bilateral year and most of all it continued the bilateral year despite, for example, its diplomats being beaten, nongovernmental organizations being harassed and despite Russia's big mouth. Increasing returns, I argue, is thus a major mechanism in explaining the continuation

of the bilateral year.

The effect of network externalities describes how actors try to act in a compatible way with other actors, in order for them to interact with these actors they find important. Throughout the bilateral year many events were used for important partners to meet each other. I demonstrated multiple times that events of the bilateral year were used by the Netherlands to discuss human rights issues, whereas via other interactions the Russians might have made it impossible to discuss matters like human rights. Therefore the Netherlands discussed human rights in a compatible way, in order to spread their message. But I also tried to demonstrate that the Netherlands strategically used the bilateral year to resolve some of the conflicts that arose. Accordingly I argue that the hypothesis of network externalities should be confirmed and I think it played a major role in combination with the effect of increasing returns.

Norms help create preferences of actors. The Dutch government as the main actor of this research was constrained by some of its norms as regards to the discussion on the continuation of the bilateral year. Each time the human rights situation had to be addressed, this discussion happened because the minister thought such a human rights dialogue to be intrinsically important. And at one point, Minister Timmermans even spoke about spreading LGBT rights all over the world. And the continuing conversations between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation over the diplomatic conflicts are proof of a Dutch norm of talking with partners instead of fighting. Hence I argue that norms have been a useful mechanism of explaining the Dutch path-dependent behaviour on the subject of continuing the Dutch-Russian Year and this hypothesis is confirmed too.

Identities help shaping preferences, and even constraints, of actors too. Throughout the bilateral year two identities kept on popping up: the pastor and the merchant. Minister Timmermans needed to find a delicate balance between the two as either members of parliament, NGO's, or columnists criticized the minister of neglecting a preferred identity. On top of that the Netherlands wanted to present itself to the world as being concerned with international human rights issues. If the bilateral year could be employed to serve one of these identities, the Netherlands did employ the bilateral year to do so. Consequently I argue this hypothesis to be

confirmed as well.

A negative consequence of standard operating procedures in organizations is that sometimes organizations respond to different events in similar fashion. This also happened throughout the Dutch-Russian Year as similar arguments and debates took place, as if the same script was used over and over again. However, the diplomatic incidents became worse as the year went on. Therefore, the government was sometimes asked to respond in a different way, which it did. For example with the visit of the Dutch king and queen to Russia with regards to the Greenpeace crisis. I therefore believe that the policy makers truly analysed each conflict in a different way. Standard operating procedures were thus absent. Hence I disconfirm this hypothesis, whereas all other hypotheses are confirmed.

Both institutionalism theories thus managed to explain the outcome. Norms, network externalities, identities and increasing returns were all in play. But rational choice institutionalism did a far better job in this case than sociological institutionalism. Could the theory of sociological institutionalism alone have explained the continuation of the bilateral year? Clearly not, because of the economic interests. But could rational choice institutionalism have explained it alone? It might have, but I do not think so. By combining the two I made sure my horizon was broader and forced myself to look into more potential leads. Both theories mattered, but not equally so. One institutionalist approach does not necessarily exclude the other. Human thinking is not strictly either sociological or rational, but rather mixed, just like the reasons for continuing the bilateral year were mixed. A researcher would fall short if the focus is put on one theory alone.

However, I think that rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism can be applied as a hybrid theory. They do not necessarily reinforce each other and they both provide causal mechanisms independently from each other. Each of them covers a crucial part of human thinking: rationality and morality. Although both theories do not always matter equally, I think that this research showed that they can and should be applied together for the sake of completeness.

The program of the Dutch-Russian Year exemplified what cultural diplomacy is about: spreading one's culture to spread awareness and understanding of a political body. However, I started by stating that this theory lacked the causal mechanisms to

explain the continuation of cultural diplomacy in Dutch foreign policy. However, the two adopted institutionalist approaches could. But the research also showed that a much-heard complaint among scholars in the field of cultural diplomacy is justified, that politicians easily turn to the traditional tools of politics, like shaming or threatening each other with sanctions. Evidence clearly showed that culture transcends politics, but also that the Dutch government did not seem concerned about its cultural partners, who were rarely mentioned in debates. Therefore, I argue that cultural diplomacy is not a good tool for explaining the Dutch-Russian relationship and perhaps even for Dutch foreign policy in general.

One of the justifications of this research was that it could provide insights into Dutch priorities in its foreign policy regarding the Russian Federation. I have shown that gas and the energy sector play an enormous role. Norms and identities mattered too, but on a smaller scale. Interestingly, this research also showed that when politicians address norms, such as human rights issues, one must question whether it is their true intention. Other interests might be at play in the background and any commitments could be part of a strategy to achieve electoral gains, as was proved by different political parties of the political opposition.

## **5.2 Research limitations**

Although this case study provides plenty of conclusions regarding Dutch foreign policy, the theories of cultural diplomacy, path-dependency, institutionalism and the case itself, it is only a single case and therefore it is hard to generalize its findings. On top of that, a huge part of this research is based on the few conducted interviews. This potentially might bias the results of this research. More interviews would strengthen this research.

Another limitation is that of a biased perception. I might have been biased towards the presented evidence because I wanted the hypotheses to be confirmed. Hence it might be possible that readers of this research come to different conclusions on the basis of the same sources. In order to overcome these limitations I will present some suggestions for further research.

### 5.3 Suggestions for further research

I suggest that further research should conduct a cross-case comparison of the Dutch decision to continue their bilateral year with Russia with Great Britain's decision to alter its bilateral year with Russia in 2014 and Poland's cancellation of its planned bilateral year with Russia. By comparing the different cases, other mechanisms might be revealed. Another cross-case comparison could compare the Dutch-Russian Year of 2013 and the Dutch-Turkey Year of 2012, both of which encountered problems. It might prove or disprove the hypotheses of this case study for the Dutch-Turkey Year.

On top of that other scholars could use other sources regarding the Dutch-Russian Year. Perhaps I have overlooked some documents, articles, or prominent interviewees. Other sources might potentially lead to different conclusion regarding this case study.

In addition, research should be done on Dutch foreign policy to achieve general understanding of the priorities of the Dutch government in foreign affairs, as this single case study is not enough to do so. The same goes for cultural diplomacy, which requires more research to fully comprehend its role in political science, as this research raised questions about its ability to explain the world of politics. The possibility of a hybrid model of rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism requires more research as well, as in this research the possibility to mix them remained ambivalent.

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