Russian policy towards post-Soviet Frozen conflicts

The lack of consistency in Russia's foreign policy towards the frozen conflicts concerning Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh

Image 1: *Map of conflicts in the post-Soviet area (Lachert, 2019).*

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Abstract

This case study examines Russia's inconsistent foreign policy towards four post-Soviet frozen conflicts by comparing two conflicting theoretical approaches on a system level. Russia's policy is labeled inconsistent because its approach to four frozen conflicts, namely the conflicts concerning Transnistria, Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, is very different despite the fact these conflict situations seem similar. The approaches that used are realism and social constructivism and they each provide different explanations for Russia's behavior. The former explains Russia's policies by security/power considerations, while the latter explains its policies by focusing on international norms, collective identity and social identity. In the empirical analysis, Russia's policy is summarized, then analyzed and categorized and in the end possible independent variables that explain the inconsistent policies are tested. After this extensive empirical analysis, sufficient empirical evidence is found to conclude that Russia's policies are primarily based on national interests but also partly on the interest of the de facto states. The differences in Russia's policies can be explained by on the one hand the geopolitical course of the parent state and on the other hand the acceptance of Russia's role as regional power within the de facto states. Therefore both realism and social constructivism are able to partly explain Russia's policies as well as the differences in its policies.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

1. Introduction

The end of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of many newly independent states that before had been part of the Soviet Union. However it also led to multiple violent types of post-Soviet conflicts. Some between sovereign post-Soviet states, some between governments of sovereign states and domestic actors and some between Russia and former Soviet states. These conflicts often concerned disputed territories and in multiple occasions eventually led to the emergence a special kind of entity within international relations called de facto, unrecognized or quasi states (Wolff, n.d.). These de facto states are state-like entities that, according to the Montevideo Convention that was signed in 1933, meet international guidelines to be a state, yet have failed to receive international recognition (Nguyen, 2019). In the current situation, most of these post-Soviet conflicts that revolve around disputed territories, have been labelled as 'frozen conflict'. That means that on the one hand formalized combat is halted, but the underlying causes of the conflict still exist without a permanent peace treaty or agreed upon political framework towards reconciliation (Nguyen, 2019). Within Frozen conflicts, actors involved are often in a kind of state of readiness/ preparedness to resume battle when they deem it necessary and therefore these conflicts have a relatively high chance of escalating into a violent conflict. This thesis focuses on the four main 'frozen conflicts' in the post-Soviet area that revolve around the de facto states; Transnistria, South-Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Transnistria is a region that is internationally recognized as a de jure part of Moldova, but de facto a small independent state. The Transnistria conflict also started after the end of the Soviet Union, when elites in Transnistria refused to recognize Moldova's sovereignty and wanted to be independent. Pro-Transnistrian and pro-Moldovan forces started fighting over the regions status in November 1990 (Nguyen, 2019). The Transnistrian forces, with Russian help, managed to drive the Moldovan forces out, which resulted in the establishment of effective control of the Transnistria region (Wolff, n.d.). A ceasefire in 1992 ended the war and in contrast to the other conflicts, there has been little violence since. But there is no significant progress towards a settlement since and therefore the conflict has remained unresolved/Frozen (Wolff, n.d.). Transnistria is currently only being recognized by other de facto states, but not recognized by a single United Nations member-state (Necsutu, 2019).

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are both de facto sovereign states that are internationally mostly recognized as de jure autonomous regions within the state of Georgia. Like the other conflicts, the conflicts concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia intensified after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Both regions fought wars of independence, partly in fear of the rising Georgian nationalism after the Soviet Union fell. As both South Ossetians and Abkhazians are ethnic minorities, the conflicts can also be regarded an ethnic conflict between these peoples and Georgians. In the early 1990,s, the wars resulted in the de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and a new post-Soviet 'frozen conflict'. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are both recognized by other de facto states and by a few other states. Abkhazia is recognized by Russia, Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Vanuatu (Pender, 2018). South Ossetia is recognized by the same countries as Abkhazia except Vanuatu (Foltz, 2019).

Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as the republic of Artsakh, is a disputed region in the southern Caucasus mountains. The region is internationally recognized as a de jure autonomous region within the state of Azerbaijan, but de facto controlled by the self-declared republic of Artsakh which is supported by Armenia (Klever, 2013). Azerbaijan has not exercised political authority over the region since the rise of the Karabakh movement in 1988 (Nguyen, 2019). After the Soviet Union dissolved, Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. Azerbaijan decided to militarily intervene which led to a full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh war ended in 1994 because of a Russian-brokered ceasefire. There are peace talks between the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia about the region's disputed status, led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, but it has so far been unsuccessful. Therefore the conflict about the region became a post-Soviet 'frozen conflict'. Nagorno-Karabakh is currently only being recognized by other de facto states, but not recognized by a single sovereign state (Klever, 2013).

1.1 puzzle

All four conflicts emerged in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, all became so called 'frozen conflicts', all conflicts revolve around de facto states and share Russia as the key exogenous actor. The involved states, but especially the de facto states are often highly dependent on Russia economically and military and having a good relationship with Russia is very important to them. There are more similarities between the cases but that will be further elaborated in the methods chapter. Russia vice versa, also has multiple interests in the de facto states as well as in the involved sovereign states within the former Soviet territory and these interests shape Russia's policies (Abushov, 2009). But Despite the fact that the frozen conflicts can be considered similar cases,

Russian foreign policy towards them varies a lot and is therefore seemingly inconsistent. This diversity and presumed inconsistency in Russia's policies towards these four seemingly similar cases is the subject of this thesis.

As the former imperial power and dominant regional power, Russia has been involved in both the de facto states and the parent at different levels and in many different ways (Rogstad, 2016). When assessing Russia's broad foreign policy from right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until now, it is possible to distinguish three different phases. The first phase (1992-1996), at a time of relative weakness for Russia, Russia's policies were focused at maintaining a political-military presence in the post-Soviet space. The second phase (1996-2003), can be described as a more co-operative and focused on resolving conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The third phase (2003-2020) is characterized by more assertive and coercive policies aimed at retaining former Soviet republics in Eastern Europe and well as the Caucasus within the Russian sphere of influence (Lachert, 2019). This foreign policy was also meant to prevent these states from becoming too closely connected to Western political and military structures (Lachert, 2019). This shows that Russia's main policy towards the former Soviet is fairly consistent. However, this does not apply to Russia's foreign policy towards the four frozen conflicts. When it comes to recognition for example, Russia decided to recognize the secessionist regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but not the secessionist regimes of Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. If one takes military support into consideration, the Russian army provided troops and military assistance to South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria but not to Nagorno-Karabakh. Economically, Russia supports Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia through trade, subsidies and by channelling investment to them (Lachert, 2019). Yet, its economic involvement with the republic in Nagorno-Karabakh is less extensive and more complex.

In this thesis, an attempt will be made to explain why Russia's policy is so different in four seemingly similar cases. In order to do so, three steps must be taken. First, Russia's policies from 1992 until 2020 need to be summarized. Second, Russia's policies from 1992 until 2020 need to be assessed and categorized into control focused or support focused policies. Third, possible reasons for Russia's inconsistent policies need to be tested. To help with the third step, the international relations approaches of realism and social constructivism will be used to try to explain why Russia's policies sometimes deviate. Both approaches will be used to explain Russia's behaviour on a system level instead of an intra-state level.

When using a constructivist point of view on a system level when analysing Russia's foreign policy, it is important to look at cultural commonalities between Russia and the four state actors involved in the four 'frozen conflicts'. Russia sees most of the former Soviet states as regions that should be

within the Russian sphere of influence. Because of a shared past, a shared culture and a feeling of kinship, Russia wants to have a good and intensive relationship with these states. Besides that, one might argue that there is also a kind of shared common culture of anarchy between Eastern and Western Europe, solidified in the OSCE agreements, that recognizes that there should be no territorial changes on the basis of violence anymore (Goertz, Diehl & Balas, 2016). Following this constructivist kind of reasoning, Russia should be striving for good relationships with all former Soviet states instead of supporting secessionist de facto states in their struggle for independence. At first glance the theory of constructivism cannot fully explain the inconsistencies in Russia's policies towards the 'frozen conflicts', but therefore it only strengthens the proposed puzzle.

Using a realist point of view on a system level when analysing Russia's foreign policy, means focussing on the balance of power. Russia wants to keep the former Soviet states within the Russian sphere of influence as much as possible because expanding its influence means expanding its power. That would imply that Russia wants to have influence and effective power over the four relevant former Soviet states. It also means they would try to block possible rapprochement of these countries towards the EU. Following this kind of reasoning, it is possible to understand why Russia would support regions within a state that want to be under the Russian sphere influence while the rest of the state wants to be within the EU's sphere of influence. Yet this realist reasoning still cannot explain why Russia would for example openly support Abkhazia and South Ossetia by recognizing them, while they don't do the same in the case of Transnistria. Like the constructivist view, the realist view at first glance only strengthens the puzzle but does not seem able to explain Russia's different policies in all four cases.

Following from the above mentioned puzzle, the research question is as follows; *Which approach, constructivism or realism, can best explain Russia's inconsistent foreign policy towards the four post-Soviet 'frozen conflicts'?*

To answer this research question, a comparative case study with a small n in the form of the Most Similar Systems Design will be conducted. This research design was chosen because Russian policy (dependent variable) towards four seemingly similar cases will be compared. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is theory testing. The two grand approaches are tested to assess whether it's possible to explain Russia's different policies with them, although at first sight they seem unable to. The aim of this design is finding independent variables that may explain the different policies of Russia. The method of data collection will be qualitative and mainly consist of literature research. The qualitative method of data analysis will be primarily the theory testing type of process tracing, with the aim of testing whether the constructivist or the realist approach can best explain the inconsistency in

Russia's policy towards the four similar cases. The time period this research will focus on is after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991/1992) until now (2020).

1.2 Societal relevance

The main characteristic of societal relevance is answering questions that society asks or to solve problems it faces. In this case, conducting this research provides more insight in Russian foreign policy towards a specific type of conflict situations. First of all this insight is relevant to all people directly involved in these frozen conflicts. Because even though these conflicts have gotten the label frozen, in some of them there are still people dying and getting injured on a yearly basis. With more insight in Russian motives, people can better decide whether they approve of this motives. A better understanding of Russian foreign policy is also relevant to the four states and four de facto states involved for the same reason as the directly involved individuals. Lastly, creating insight in Russian motives and foreign policy is also relevant and potentially beneficial for other actors with interests in the frozen conflicts regions like Turkey, Iran, the US and the EU. A deeper understanding of Russian motives allows them to respond accordingly and strategically.

1.3 scientific relevance

In the field of international relations there is always debate amongst scholars who support one of the grand theories of realism, liberalism or constructivism. Contrasting these grand theories and decide which theory can explain a certain phenomenon better has been done countless times in research conducted by IR scholars. Nevertheless, because of its specific topic and that fact that multiple cases are used makes this thesis' contribution scientifically relevant. First of all because most research done about these frozen conflict situations is very descriptive in nature. Often papers about frozen conflicts or one of the four cases give a detailed historical background and insight in how a certain conflict came to be. But there is not much research on this topic where researchers test theories like in this thesis. Second, there are also many studies that are policy oriented rather than scientific oriented. These studies are conducted to advise certain actors which policy to use towards these frozen conflicts. They are very different from this thesis, where an attempt is made to test two grand IR approaches as objectively as possible to explain an anomaly in practice. Third, despite there being much research conducted about the topic of frozen conflicts, there is not much research where a comparison is made between all four post-Soviet frozen conflicts. Finally, not much of the conducted research focused on one actors foreign policy. Yet, when one actor is by far the most important actor involved, it is scientifically relevant to create more insight in that actors policy and motives.

Therefore, despite the fact that there is much research done on this topic, this thesis is still very distinctive from previously conducted research and therefore scientifically relevant.

1.4 Outline

The structure of this master thesis after this introduction will look like this. First, there will be a chapter with the theoretical framework. Both approaches, constructivism and realism, and their possible explanations of why Russian policies towards post-Soviet frozen conflicts could differ will be discussed. Then there will be chapter about the methodology. In that chapter, the research design, the method of data collection and the method of data analysis will be discussed in-depth and the case selection will be justified. The study will also be operationalized and made measurable in the methodology chapter. In the chapter that follows, there is an short overview of the historical background that covers the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the four frozen conflict situations. In the empirical chapter, the findings of the empirical study will be given and the two approaches tested to determine which approach can better explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. In the final concluding chapter, the main research question will be answered and possibilities for further research are discussed.

Chapter 2

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents an elaboration of the concepts of de facto states and frozen conflicts. That is necessary because both concepts are complex and because their exact meaning is disputed. After that, the grand IR approaches of constructivism and realism will be discussed. First the main assumptions of both approaches will be summarized and then both approaches will be applied to possible explanations of a regional power's policies towards frozen conflicts. As made clear in the introductory chapter, both approaches have a completely different view on what could explain the differences in Russia's foreign policies. To be able to test both approaches, hypotheses with different independent variables will created for each of the approaches. The actual testing of which theoretical approach on a system level is better able to explain the inconsistent Russian policy towards the conflict situations will be discussed in the empirical chapter.

2.1 Frozen conflicts

The concept of frozen conflicts is complex. Most scholars use a definition that is based on the same core elements but with minor specific differences. According to Nguyen, a frozen conflict is a conflict where formalized combat is halted but the underlying causes of the conflict still exist without a permanent peace treaty or agreed upon political framework towards reconciliation (Nguyen, 2019). Because of the absence of such a treaty or framework, there is often a continued presence of (semi) ready armed forces in the region. A more or less similar definition comes from Smetana & Ludvik. According to them, frozen conflicts are situations in which war ended but stable peace did not materialize (Smetana & Ludvik, 2019). Morar also describes frozen conflicts as conflicts without a definitive solution, but adds two new elements to the definition: First, Morar states that frozen conflicts are always about a territorial dispute that involve de facto states: second, frozen conflicts have a high probability to 'defrost' and escalate into violent conflict (Morar, 2010). The reason for this higher chance of escalation according to Morar, is the fact that within a frozen conflict there are always actors who suffer from the status quo (Morar, 2010). Alice, Clancy and Nagle formulate the definition of frozen conflicts as a violent ethnical-political conflict about territory that resulted in the emerge of a de facto independent regime that is not recognized by the international community (Alice, Clancy & Nagle, 2009). Dov Lynch does not give a clear definition of his own, but claims that the whole frozen conflict metaphor is misleading because these conflicts are developing dynamically (Lynch, 2004). According to Legucka, a frozen conflict is a situation in which active armed conflict has

ended, but no possibility exists to solve the root cause of the conflict (Legucka, 2017). Legucka continues by saying that a characteristic feature of a frozen conflict is the formation of a de facto state that is supported by a stronger power from the outside and used as leverage in the outside actors foreign policy. This stronger power is often referred to as the patron state and that term will be used throughout this thesis. Legucka agrees with Lynch that the term frozen conflict sometimes does not fit because military confrontations, claiming lives on both sides, are still a regular occurrence (Legucka, 2017).

In this thesis the following definition will be used: "*A frozen conflict is a conflict surrounding a territorial dispute which involves a de facto state, where formalized combat is halted, underlying causes of the conflict still exist without a permanent peace treaty or agreed upon political framework, and where there is a relatively high chance of escalation into a violent conflict party because of the continued presence and readiness of armed forces*".

This definition combines elements from the above mentioned definitions and creates six conditions that have to be met for a conflict to be labelled as a frozen conflict. Despite the justified critique of some scholars that the term frozen conflict sometimes does not really fit reality, the term will be used in this thesis (legucka, 2017). Because minor skirmishes are not the same as formalized combat, frozen conflicts with occasional violence can still be called frozen conflicts. According to the definition that will be used in this thesis, a conflict must meet six criteria to be a frozen conflict:

1. The conflict has to be based upon a territorial dispute
2. A *de facto* independent state is involved in the conflict
3. Formalized combat is halted
4. Underlying causes of the conflict still exist without a permanent peace treaty or agreed upon political framework
5. There is a relatively high chance of escalation into a violent conflict
6. There is a continued presence and readiness of armed forces

In the area of the former Soviet Union, there are four conflicts that meet these five criteria and can therefore be properly labelled as frozen conflicts. These four conflicts are the conflicts surrounding South-Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, which will be the four cases assessed in this thesis.

2.2 De facto states

The classic definition of an entity that can be regarded as a sovereign state was set forth in the Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States in 1933 (Lynch, 2004). For an entity to be a state according to the Montevideo criteria, the entity needs a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Lynch, 2004). *De facto* states often meet the first three criteria and only pursue the last by pursuing international recognition. That means that despite the empirical qualifications of a de facto state, they cannot be a legal or legitimate state within the international society. Based on the Montevideo Convention you could therefore define a de facto state as a political entity that has a permanent population, a defined territory, as well as a government, and strives to have the capacity to enter into relations with other states by pursuing international recognition. According to international law, what distinguishes statehood from a type of personality is universality (Duncan, 2013). That means that all state entities share a determined set of rights, duties, powers and immunities which have been developed through practise and are regarded as an acceptable basis for international interaction (Duncan, 2013).

Most of the conceptions and definitions of de facto states are based upon the Montevideo criteria, but still there are some differences between them. According to Mylonas and Ahram, de facto states are political entities that possess control over territory but lack international recognition (Mylonas & Ahram, 2015). De Waal states that the term de facto states refers to a place that exercises internal sovereignty over its citizens but is not recognized by most of the world as the *de jure* legal authority in that territory (De Waal, 2018). Further de Waal also claims that a de facto state always broke away from a parent state that is internationally recognized and claims sovereignty over it (De Waal, 2018). Kolsto adds a time frame to the definition. According to Kolsto, for a political actor to qualify as a de facto or quasi state, it should meet three criteria (Legucka, 2017). First, its authorities must have control over the territory they claim. Second, they have to strive for international recognition as a state but not be recognized yet by the community of states. Recognition by one or a few states is not enough, because that means the de facto state can only enter diplomatic relations and sign bilateral agreements with those states and is still excluded from multilateral cooperation (Boczek, 2005). Third, they must successfully exercise authority over a territory for at least two years (Legucka, 2017). Scott Pegg's definition of the de facto state is: an organized political leadership, which has risen to power, receives popular support and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a specific territorial area, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time (Pegg, 1998).

In this thesis the following definition will be used: "*A de facto state is a political entity that is not recognized by most of the world (95%) as the de jure legal authority in that territory but that does strive for recognition and has a permanent population, a defined and controlled territory, and a government for at least two years.*

This definition is mainly based on the criteria for statehood from the Montevideo Convention but a time element and the striving for recognition were added. The term de facto state is not used by all scholars. Some use quasi states or proto-states to describe the same phenomenon. But in the further course of this master thesis, only the term de facto state will be used. According to the definition that will be used in this thesis, a de facto state must meet six criteria to be a de facto state. The political entity must:

1. have a permanent population
2. have a defined and controlled territory
3. have a government
4. meet the three criteria mentioned above for a significant period of time (2 years)
5. not be recognized by most of the world
6. strive for international recognition

In the area of the former Soviet Union, there are four entities (South-Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh) that meet all these criteria and are therefore de facto states. There are authors who claim that more political entities in the former Soviet-Union, like Crimea or the People's Republic of Donetsk, are de facto states. But in the methods chapter, there will be an explanation to why this is not the case based on this definition.

2.3 Realism

Realism is an approach within the rationalist view on international relations in the sense that realists believe there is an objective reality. It is an approach rather than a theory because it is more a general orientation and vision on international relations, rather than a coherent set of propositions and testable hypotheses (Shiping, n.d). There are many forms of realism that could be distinguished; structural realism, classical realism, neorealism, post-classical realism etcetera (Shiping. n.d.) These forms of realism also place different weight on different levels of analysis; system-level, state-level and individual-level. In this thesis, the focus will be on the realism approach at the structural level of analysis. At the start, there will be an elaboration of the core assumptions of the most general form of realism. Then, a division will be made between offensive and defensive realism and the approach will be applied to the topic of this thesis.

2.3.1 Realism core assumptions

Although realism is a broad approach towards international relations, there are main assumptions that together form the core of the approach. Realism perceives states as the most important actors within international politics. Because there is no sovereign political entity that rules states within this international system, there is a situation of anarchy in which states seek power and security as a primary goal (Nye & Welch, 2011). Therefore, a foreign policy is successful if the position of the state is protected or relatively strengthened (Waltz, 1979). Realists believe that when one state increases its security or power, security and power of other states tend to decrease, therefore creating a situation of continues competition and permanent mutual distrust between states (Mearsheimer, 1994). This situation makes it difficult for states to realize their common interests (Jervis, 1978). It also creates a situation whereby the survival of the state is the most important objective of foreign polices of states (Waltz, 1979). It also leads to states acting mainly in their self-interest (Gilpin, 2007).

According to Morgenthau's explanation of realism, power is the central concept within international politics and states' interests are defined in terms of power (Nye & welch, 2011). Within the international system, power relations and the so called balance of power are important (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). The core assumption of the balance of power theory is that the in distribution of capabilities there will be a (temporary) balance due to internal and external balancing behaviour (Waltz, 1979). Internal balancing is the fact that great powers will compete with each other to increase their military and technological capabilities, while external balancing entails that great powers will actively pursue the formation of alliance or intensify existing alliances in order to compete with each other (Waltz, 1979).

The implications of the balance of power are different according to different approaches within realism. Defensive realists would argue that shifting alliances and countervailing pressures make sure that no power or combination of powers will be allowed to grow so strong it can threaten the security of the rest (Frankel, 1996). Offensive realists would argue that because it is a zero sum game, states will always try to maximize their power relative to other states because only the most powerful states can ensure their own security (Frankel, 1996). In other words, offensive realism holds that anarchy creates a situation in which states have a strong incentive for expansion, whereas defensive realism argues states have a strong incentive of creating and enhancing alliances in order gain security. It is not true that balancing necessarily leads to war. Often there is prudence among states and they want to avoid actual conflict by maintaining the balance of power. Also, realism remains part of the rationalist view on international relations, and therefore states only pursue expansionist policies when the gains outweigh the costs.

Some authors claim that realists have a negative worldview because states that act on behalf of their own interest, cannot trust other state actors and therefore sometimes perform morally and ethical reprehensible acts or acts against international law (Schweller, 1997). This association with a negative worldview is also due to the fact the some realist authors claim that the very nature of international politics is conflictive and the fact that the foreign policy of states is focussed on maximizing their own power (Schweller, 1997).

2.3.2 Critique on rationalism/realism
Besides debates between different realist scholars, many scholars criticize the realist approach as a whole. Constructivists argue that rationalist theory is excessively materialistic and agent-centric (Hobson, 2000). Another point of constructivist critique is the fact that states are far more constrained than materialist theory acknowledges, because they are constrained by social and normative structures (Hobson, 2000). Some constructivist also argue that anarchy wrongly is a universal starting point because anarchy is what states make of it and the effect of anarchy may thus differ across different notions of it (Wendt, 1994). There is also critique from the perspective of other grand approaches/theories such as liberalism. Liberal scholars claim that realism should take intra state politics and non-state actors like the United Nations more into account. From liberalism, there is also the critique that the predictive power of realism is very limited. For example because realism failed to predict the falling apart of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Sometimes the explanatory power that realism has is also considered limited because there would be too many exceptions and inconsistencies that realism cannot explain. An example could be the democratic peace which claims that democracies are hesitant to engage in armed conflict with other

democracies. This theory has multiple exceptions, like young democracies which are far less hesitant to engage in armed conflict with other democracies. Finally, realism is sometimes being accused of the fact that it proposes **policies** that increase the chance of violent conflicts (Kegley, 1995).

2.3.3 Realism applied to the case

To apply a realist point of view on a system level to analyse Russia's foreign policy and policy motives, means assuming there is a delicate balance of power within the international system. This balance can exist on different levels. It can be global, regional or local but the balances of power on those different levels are always connected to each other. Realism also emphasises material interests and power of states and treats states as rational self-interested actors in international relations (Abushov, 2019). Following this kind of reasoning, a regional power will pursue that national interests when determining its foreign policy (Abushov, 2019). A regional power is a term that is used to describe a state that is dominating a certain geographical region in economic and military terms, and is able to exercise hegemonic influence in a region and considerable influence on the world scale (Lynch, 2010). The concept of a regional power will be used throughout this thesis, mainly to describe Russia. With this starting point it's possible to form a general expectation of what could determine Russia's policy towards the separate cases. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: If a regional power's foreign policy towards a de facto states that is part of a frozen conflict is focused on control (conditional support), then it primarily pursues its national interests.
This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that realism is better able to explain Russia's foreign policy. Therefore this hypotheses is used in step two of this research. The concept of control and how its measured will be elaborated on in the methodological chapter.

Building upon the assumption of the balance of power from an *offensive realist* position, Russia must assume the worst when it comes to intentions of other states (Tang 2010). That means that cooperation with other states would be difficult and risky and alliances are seen as temporary solutions. Therefore it is more likely that Russia would try to maximize their relative power and would have strong incentives for expansion of land or expand its sphere of influence in the eastern European region (Tang, 2010). The reason for this, is the fact that anarchy drives states to seek security and the best way toward security is to maximize the relative power of the state (Tang, 2010). Because a state can never be sure how much power is enough for its security, it will try to gain as much power as possible (Tang, 2010). In other words, maximizing relative power and seeking security can be treated as essentially equivalent according to offensive realism. Offensive realism does not assume there is any real danger associated with maximizing power. Following that reasoning, it

would mean that Russia wants to have more influence and effective power over the four relevant de facto states as well as their four "parent states". Parent states is a concept that is used to describe the states of which the de facto states are de jure still part, and it will be used throughout this thesis. Moldova is the parent state of Transnistria, Georgia the parent state of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia and Azerbaijan the parent state of Nagorno-Karabakh. Because parent states are often far more powerful than the de facto states, it is likely that Russia will want to exercise power and control over the parent states and that it will use the de facto states for this goal. Based on this kind of reasoning, one would expect that the differences in a regional power's policy towards de facto states that are part of frozen conflicts can be explained by the differences in relative power a regional power can potentially gain. Based on that, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

HA: the more relative power a regional power can potentially gain over the parent state, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state.

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that relative power and therefore offensive realism is better able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. Because this hypotheses is used in step three of this research, a letter was assigned to number the hypotheses instead of a number to prevent confusion.

From a *defensive realist* position, Russia must not assume the worst about the intentions that other states have. Following this reasoning, cooperation is possible and seen as a viable means of external self-help (Tang, 2010). Maximizing relative power on the contrary is not always a good means of external self-help and can even be counterproductive because of multiple reasons. When for example Russia becomes more powerful, it is possible that other states will see Russia as a threat and try to counterbalance. According to defensive realism, seeking security and maximizing relative power are different things and the first is not necessary to obtain the other. In other words, maximizing relative power may serve the ends of security but it also may not. Defensive realism recognizes other viable means of external self-help such as cooperation and forming alliances with other states (Tang, 2010). But the concern for relative gains makes cooperation sometimes, but not always, very difficult. If cooperation is not possible, for example if the parent state leans towards the European sphere of influence, Russia would likely try to block possible rapprochement from these countries towards the EU. Following that argument, it is likely that Russia will want to control the de facto states in order to use them to make sure the parent states join Russia in alliances and cooperation instead of Russia's competitors like the European Union (EU) or the United States (US). Based on this kind of defensive realist reasoning, the differences in a regional power's policy towards the de facto states can be explained by the differences in the alliance and cooperation policies of the parent states. Based on that, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

HB: The more the parent state tries to cooperate and form alliances with actors other than the regional power, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state.

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that cooperation and alliance policies and therefore defensive realism is better able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. Because this hypotheses is used in step three of this research, a letter was assigned to number the hypotheses instead of a number to prevent confusion.

2.4 Social constructivism

Social constructivism is a broad approach towards international relations that is based on the assumption that international politics is socially constructed (Wendt, 1999). That means that the structures of human association are primarily determined by shared ideas instead of material forces, and that the identities and interests of actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature (Wendt, 1999). It can in many ways be seen as the opposite of rationalist approaches such as realism (Hobson, 2000). It is an approach rather than a theory because it is more a general orientation and vision on international relations. Just like within realism, there are many forms of social constructivism that one can distinguish such as; society-centric constructivism, state-centric constructivism, radical constructivism and postmodernism (Hobson, 2000). In this thesis, the focus will be on constructivism on an international society-centric level instead of state or society-centric. First there will a elaboration of the core assumptions of the most general form of social constructivism and thereafter there will be more focus on social constructivism on the structural/system level.

2.4.1 Social constructivism main assumptions

Social constructivism is a relatively new approach in the field of IR, and it is intellectually drawn from the field of sociology (Nye & Welch, 2011). The social constructivist approach puts emphasis on the sharing of ideas and therefore on the "social" instead of on biology, technology or the environment like the opposing "materialist" view does. It also opposes the "individualist" view that social structures are reducible to individuals, by assuming that social structures are important (Wendt, 1999). In other words, actors, both individuals and states, do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared culture (Risse, 2004). And this social environment constitutes the individual and shared identities of actors (Risse, 2004).

When looking at international politics from a social constructivist point of view, international law, norms and institutions would govern the international system instead of the material interests and power like neorealists would argue. Therefore, social constructivist do not necessarily agree with the realist argument that the starting point of international politics is anarchic situation. Social constructivism perceives both state and non-state actors as a relevant and structural feature of the international system. Social constructivists belief that identities and interests of actors are the product of social interaction and are therefore subject to change. Social constructivists would argue that states are dependent on the international social system in which they are embedded and their identities are constructed by the international society (Wendt, 1999). Therefore, when analysing the international society, political culture, discourse and the social construction of identities and interests

matter (Risse, 2004). In other words, states' identities and interests are defined by the normative structure of international society (Finnemore, 1996). Within international society, two levels of structures of international society can be distinguished, the 'deep structure' and the 'surface structure' (Hobson, 2000). The deep structure contains many types of international norms which socialise states into following these behavioural patterns. The surface structure comprises international non-state actors and international organizations. These Actors are the agents that diffuse the norms of the deep structure and 'teach' states how to behave (Hobson, 2000). These two components of international society constitute the dependent variable of state behaviour. To summarize, that means that state policies are not the outcome of national interests like realists would argue, but are constituted by international society. Therefore it might even be the case that national policies fail to enhance power of the state or go against the power-interests of states (Hobson, 2000). According to this view, states come to accept the fact that there are limits on their sovereignty.

2.4.2 Critique on social constructivism

From the rationalist/realist approach, a frequently heard criticism is that social constructivism is too philosophical in nature and it is too difficult to really test and do empirical research based on this approach (Adler, 2013). Other scholars point out that because the approach is too abstract, and it does not provide empirical cases to prove the validity of the approach (Kaufmann & Pape, 1999). Other scholars criticize logical flaws in parts where various schools of methodology are adopted within the approach (Kratochwil, 2006). Despite the critique that it's difficult to use social constructivism to test and do empirical research, within this thesis an attempt is made to do just that.

2.4.3 Social Constructivism applied to the case

Social constructivism, in contrast to realism, assumes that the behavior of states is not always based on their self-interest. According to social constructivism, a state's behavior can for example also be explained on the basis of variables like identity, ideas and international norms. Because policies cannot only come forth out of self-interest, it is possible for a state to have a foreign policy that is more in the interest of another actor and focused on unconditional support for example. With this starting point it is possible to form a general expectation of what could determine Russia's policy towards the separate cases. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H2: If a regional power's policy towards a de facto state that is part of frozen conflict is focused on support (unconditional support), then it is not primarily focused on the self-interest of the regional power.

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that social constructivism is better able to explain Russia's foreign policy. Therefore this hypotheses is used in step two of this research. The concept of support and how its measured will be elaborated on in the methodological chapter.

When using a constructivist point of view on a system level when analysing Russia's foreign policy, the emphasis is on the ideational, cultural and discursive origins of national preferences as well as the socially constructed environment in which Russia operates. Constructivists argue that the identities of states are constructed through international norms, which in turn define that states particular interests (Hobson, 2000). And because norms can change, so can identities and interests and therefore state policies can change (Hobson, 2000). For constructivists, states are constrained by social normative structures and heavily influenced by international organisations and non-state actors that diffuse these norms (Finnemore, 1996). International non-state actors therefore play an important role in the creation of Russia's foreign policy. One international organisation that is particularly important in this case is the OSCE. In 1975, the OSCE included a ban on border adjustments by force in the Helsinki Final Act which was signed by 36 states including the USSR (Goertz, Diehl & Balas, 2016). Based on social constructivist reasoning, one would expect Russia to follow these set norms. Therefore, one would expect that Russia would abstain from using violence and abstain from supporting actors that use violence in their strife for independence. Based on this kind of reasoning, it is likely that the differences in a regional power's policies towards de facto states that are part of frozen conflicts can be explained by the differences in violence that de facto states used in their attempt to become a sovereign state. Based on that, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

HC: the more a de facto state's attempt to become independent fits with the existing international norms set by the OSCE, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state.

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that existing international norms and therefore social constructivism is better able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. Because this hypotheses is used in step three of this research, a letter was assigned to number the hypotheses instead of a number, to prevent confusion.

According to Wendt, on both domestic and systemic levels of analysis it also matters how a state defines itself in relation to other states (Wendt, 1994). This social identity of states consists of sets of meanings that a state attributes to itself while taking the perspective of other states (Wendt, 1994). These state identities stem partly from relations to international society. Therefore it is important to

assess how Russia sees its own role within the constructed international society. Russia, especially under the Putin administration, sees most of the former Soviet states as regions that should be within the Russian sphere of influence which is based on the borders of the former Soviet Union. But, it is not only important how Russia's sees itself but also if other states share this perception. The concept of a social identity is always reciprocal. Based on this kind of constructivist reasoning, one would expect that Russia's is more willing to support de facto states that share Russia's perception of itself as regional power. Following this argument, it is likely that the differences in a regional power's policies towards the de facto states can be explained by the differences in the acceptance that people within these de facto states have regarding Russia's role as regional power. Based on that, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

HD: *The more the population within de facto state's accept Russia's role as regional power, the more support the regional power will give to the de facto state.*

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that existing social identities and therefore social constructivism is better able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. Because this hypotheses is used in step three of this research, a letter was assigned to number the hypotheses instead of a number, to prevent confusion.

Wendt also states that something called a 'collective identity' between states is possible (Wendt, 1994). It refers to positive identification with the welfare of another state that is based socially constructed commonalities like similarities in culture, religion, language, norms, beliefs and history. This collective identity is a basis for mutual feelings of solidarity, community and loyalty between states and actors. Based upon this collective identity it is possible for different states to have more or less collective definitions of their interest (Wendt, 1994). A collective security system based on collective identity is very different from an alliance between states. Alliances are merely temporary coalitions of self-interested states in response to a specific threat, while in collective security systems states make long-term commitments to nonspecific threats. Because of this possibility to have collective identities, it is important to look at cultural commonalities between Russia and the four de facto states as well as the parent states involved in the four 'frozen conflicts'. It is necessary to look at both because there are triangular relationships between Russia and two other entities and those other entities are in conflict with each other. Based on this kind of reasoning, it is likely that the differences in a regional power's policies towards the de facto states can be explained by the differences in strength of the collective identity that the regional power and the states and de facto state share. Based on that, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

HE: *The weaker the collective identity between a regional power and the parent state is, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state.*

This hypotheses can, if its provisionally adopted, support the claim that existing collective identities and therefore social constructivism is better able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policy. Because this hypotheses is used in step three of this research, a letter was assigned to number the hypotheses instead of a number, to prevent confusion.

Chapter 3

3 Methodology

In this chapter the research design will be explained, the case selection will be accounted for and the hypotheses will be operationalized.

3.1 Research design

To answer the central research question of this thesis, a qualitative comparative case study will be conducted. The empirical part of this case study was divided into three main parts. In the first part, Russia's policies from 1992 until the timing of writing this thesis are summarized. The overview of Russia's policies will be given separately for each of the cases in three different time-frames. In the second part, the summarized policies will be assessed and categorized. There will be determined if Russian policies in the different time frames focused more on control or support. In the second part, two general hypotheses, that were stated in the previous chapter, will be tested. In the third part, possible reasons for Russia's inconsistent policies need to be assessed. In order to do so, two hypotheses were derived from the realism approach and three hypotheses were derived from the social constructivist approach. The aim of theses hypotheses is to test different independent variables and find out whether these variables can explain the differences in Russian policies. In the third part, five hypotheses with each a different independent variable will be tested. These hypotheses were also stated in the previous chapter.

The use of a case study has multiple advantages. One important advantage is the fact that case studies allow for both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data (Zainal, 2007). Another important advantage is that case studies often produce detailed data which help to explain the complexities of real-life situations which often cannot be captured by experimental or survey research (Zainal, 2007). The conducting case studies also received critique. One of the criticisms is that researchers sometimes allow biased views to influence the direction of the findings or has allowed equivocal evidence. Another point of critique is that case studies often provide very little basis for generalisation because they use a small number of cases (Zainal, 2007).

To be able to test Russia's policies, four different cases will be analyzed, namely; the conflicts concerning Transnistria, Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore this case study can be considered a small n case study. One of the most common approaches to small-N research problem in political science is the 'Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), which also will be used in this thesis. In this specific design, objects of research are chosen that are as similar as possible with the exception of the phenomenon that needs to be explained (Anckar, 2008). In this case the similar objects are the frozen conflicts and the phenomenon that needs to be explained are the differences

in Russia's foreign policy. The reason for choosing similar cases is to keep constant as many extraneous variables as possible, to get better and more trustworthy results (Anckar, 2008). In other words, many alternative explanations are already controlled for. The MSSD is particularly useful in researches that focus on a systemic level, like this thesis (Anckar, 2008). That's because MSSD's require a prior assumption about the level of systems the research is about, and once the design is formulated alternative levels of systems cannot be considered (Anckar, 2008).

MSSD also has flaws. One thing this design cannot overcome is the fact that it is impossible to create countries that meet the requirements for experimental designs. Also, an MSSD model will most likely suffer from the problem of having many variables and a small number of cases (Anckar, 2008). The small number of cases is due to the practical shortcoming of having a limited number of countries. Because of this limit, it will never be possible to keep constant all potential explanatory factors (Anckar, 2008).

A MSSD design is by definition a comparative case study, which is the most suitable option for this thesis because Russia's 'inconsistent' policy towards multiple cases needs to be compared to be able to claim whether Russia's policy is indeed inconsistent or not. Comparing multiple cases is also necessary to determine which theoretical approach is better in explaining Russia's foreign policy. A comparative cases study also makes it possible to analyse similarities, differences and patterns across multiple cases as well as to detect causal relationships. It also produces knowledge that is better suited to generalize. The advantage of conducting a small-N case study is that it is possible to examine a small number of cases in depth and that is what this thesis aims at.

3.1.1 Data collection

The data that is being collected within this thesis is sometimes qualitative and sometimes quantitative data. The data that is being gathered to assess whether Russia's foreign policies focus more on control or on support are for example mainly qualitative. But, to test some of the hypotheses in step three, it is better to use quantitative data. Qualitative data is very useful to gather more in-depth information about why Russia commits to certain policies, while quantitative data is very useful to analyze whether a certain independent variable can explain the difference in Russia's policies. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected by an extensive literature review. Therefore, in this thesis there will be only made use of secondary data. To increase the reliability of the research, there will be data source triangulation, to make sure that information is more or less the same within multiple data sources.

3.1.2 Data analysis

The method of analysis that is used in this thesis is process-tracing because it's the most suitable for this research. The essence of process-tracing is that it goes beyond merely identifying correlations between independent variables and outcomes, and really tries to unpack the causal relationship that underlies it (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Process-tracing is therefore focused on identifying the causal process. Currently, three different types of process tracing are distinguished: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining outcome. In this thesis, the theory testing type of process tracing will be used in step 2 to test which theory is better able to explain Russia's policies and in step 3 to test whether the constructivist or the realist approach can best explain the differences and inconsistencies in Russia's policies towards the four similar cases. With theory-testing process-tracing theories are deduced from the existing literature and then it is tested whether the data shows that the hypothesized causal mechanisms are present in a given case (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). The disadvantage of using theory-testing process-tracing is that one can never be sure whether the tested mechanism is the only cause of the outcome (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

3.2 Case selection

The four selected cases in this master thesis must comply to the definitions of frozen conflicts and de facto states that were set in the theoretical chapter. The cases have to meet all this criteria because this thesis is about that specific type of entities and conflicts. Further, Russia has to have a

relationship and a policy towards the entities and the entities must have been part of the Soviet union before.

3.2.1 De facto states and frozen conflicts

For entities to be a de facto state they have to comply to the six criteria set in the theoretical chapter. All four entities have a small but permanent population and therefore the first criterion is met. The second criterion is that the entities must have a defined and controlled territory. Having a defined territory is a difficult concept because the four entities of course claim an area of land that is also claimed by a state. Nevertheless, all four entities in practice effectively control a certain defined territory and therefore the second criteria is met. The third criterion is also met because all the entities have a government that is effectively ruling the territory. Effectively ruling means that there is a government which is de facto in control of the territory and enforces laws upon its citizens. Because meet the three criteria above for longer than 2 years, they also meet the fourth criterion. According to the fifth criterion, the entities must remain unrecognized as a state by at least 95% of the existing states. Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh are currently only being recognized by other unrecognized political entities but not by any states. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are recognized by 5 UN member states namely: Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Arguably there are 193 states in the world which means that roughly 2.6% of all states recognize both entities and 97,4 % does not. Because more than 95% of the states does not recognize both entities the fifth criterion is met in all four cases. The sixth criterion holds that entities do need to strive for international recognition. Currently all four entities are to a greater or lesser extent trying to obtain international recognition to support their strive for independence and statehood (Gerrits & Bader). Because all four entities meet all six criteria, the conclusion can be drawn that all four entities are de facto states.

Besides being de facto states, the entities must also meet the criteria of being frozen conflicts. Therefore they have to be involved in a territorial dispute. Abkhazia and South Ossetia meet this criterion because they have a territorial dispute with Georgia. Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh are involved in territorial disputes with Moldova and Azerbaijan, respectively. The second criterion was that in all four cases, a de facto state has to be involved in the conflict. As we saw in the above standing paragraph, Abkhazia, South-Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh are all de facto states. In all four cases formalized combat has stopped and there some kind of truce has since been in place. That formalized combat is halted does not mean the conflicts are not violent at all, because in some of the conflicts acts of violence on behalf of the territorial dispute are committed. Especially in the conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh where people die on annual basis (Abushov, 2009). But

because formalized combat is halted, all four cases still comply to the third criterion. So far none of the conflicts has an existing agreed upon peace treaty or can actually be seen as resolved and therefore all four cases meet this fourth part of the definition. The fact that these underlying problems are not solved and there is no lasting peace treaty yet, also means there is a relatively high chance of escalation into a violent conflict. How high this chance is varies for each case. The conflict about Transnistria for example is relatively peaceful, and for a long period of time there are very few acts of violence from both sides of this conflict (Rogstad, 2016). On the other hand, the frozen conflict about Nagorno-Karabakh produces far more violence and deaths (Abushov, 2019). Despite these differences, the fact remains that in all four cases situations are tense and there is a higher chance of escalation than in most unsolved disputes. The last criterion is that there is a continued presence and readiness of armed forces. In all four cases there are armed forces present and more or less ready for potential escalation of the conflict (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015).

Based on the definitions used in this thesis, the conclusion can be drawn that all four cases are de facto states as well as frozen conflicts. They had to be, for the theoretical puzzle to make sense and be relevant. These two concepts that all four cases share are also the most important similarities between the cases. Because both concepts are extensive and consist of multiple criteria that have to be met, it already proves that the four selected cases are very similar. However, the four case share even more similarities which will be outlined below.

3.2.2 Other similarities

First of all, all four entities were part of the Soviet Union and therefore have a shared history. Being part of the same state for such a long time also means that the four entities have some cultural similarities that arose from being part of the same communist state for a long period of time. An example of this their official language. In Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian is one of the official languages. Nagorno Karabakh is an exception, because Armenian is their only official language. Yet, the largest part of their population does also speak and understand Russian (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015). Another similarity, that is probably also a result from being part of the Soviet Union for a long time, is the fact that within all four entities ethnic Russians form the largest or second largest ethnic minority (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015). In Transnistria and South-Ossetia, ethnic Russians form the largest minority group within the entity. In Abkhazia and Nagorno-karabakh, ethnic Russians are the second largest minority (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015).

Other similarities between the four entities can be found in their form of government and their political systems. Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are semi presidential republics. That means that they have a chosen president as well as a prime-minister that both share some executive power. Nagorno Karabakh also was a semi presidential republic until recently, but is currently a presidential republic because the position of prime minister has been abolished (Karagiannis, 2014). As a political system, all four entities currently have a democratic multi-party system (Karagiannis, 2014). The composition of the economies of the four entities is very different. The economy of Transnistria is largely based on heavy industry while the economies of the other three entities are more based on agriculture. Both Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh also have a relatively large tourism sector and the other do not (Karagiannis, 2014). But what they do have in common is that their economies in one way or another are all largely dependent on Russia (Karagiannis, 2014). It concerns both selling and buying products as well as Russian investments within their territories (Karagiannis, 2014).

Finally, two last similarities between the four entities are the relative small size of their territory and the relative small size of their population. The claim that the four entities are relatively small is based on the one hand on the worldwide average country size of 533.000km2 and the average population size of 34.020.6000 people and the worldwide median of country size of 52.800km2 and the median of population size of 6.000.000 people. The correctness of all four numbers remains questionable because different authors have different views on which entities qualify as states. All entities except Transnistria have a population size far smaller than 500.000. Transnistria has approximately 505.000 inhabitants, Abkhazia 240.000, South Ossetia 30.000 and Nagorno-Karabakh 120.000 (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015). The sizes of the claimed territories are relatively small as well. Transnistria's territory is approximately 4163km2, Abkhazia's 8432km2, South Ossetia's territory is approximately 3900km2 and Nagorno-Karabakh's 4400km2 (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015). The actual size of Nagorno Karabakh remains debatable because the area that is currently occupied by Armenian forces is much bigger (O'Loughlin, Kolossov & Toal, 2015).

There is also one important difference between the four de facto states that in a more ideal situation should have been a similarity. This deviance is the fact that all de facto states share the Russian federation as patron state, while in the case Nagorno-Karabakh its patron state is Armenia. Yet, Russia is seen by some authors as patron state of Armenia and therefore indirectly of Nagorno-Karabakh (Abushov, 2019).

3.2.3 Are there other entities that meet the criteria?

To strengthen the central puzzle of this thesis, the de facto states need to be as similar as possible. Therefore this thesis only focusses on de facto states within the area of the former Soviet Union. However, there are authors who claim that within the territory of the former Soviet Union, there are more than four de facto states (Kasianenko, 2019). The autonomous republic of Crimea, the Donetsk people's republic and the Luhansk people's republic are the main three examples of territories that some authors claim are de facto states as well.

The case of Crimea in this thesis is not perceived as an de facto state. Crimea was annexed by Russia and as a result, never became a de facto state striving for independence or recognition. The Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) at first sight appear to be de very similar to the other four cases, but when examined closely, are not for multiple reasons. A first difference is that the DPR and the LPR lack the legitimacy that the other de facto states have. They have built de facto institutions, passing their own constitutions, creating courts and ministries, adopting their own flags and symbols, but they are much more artificial than in the other four de facto states (Kasianenko, 2019). This becomes evident when one for example examines the rapidly changing leadership of the DPR and the LPR or the criminalization of the area's. Sometimes leaders get assassinated or they are simply deposed and replaced by Russia. One of the most popular leaders of the DPR, Zakharchenko, was for example assassinated and to this day it remains unclear whether this assassination was politically motivated or could be merely attributed to criminals. Igor Plotnitsky, leader of the LPR, survived an assassination attempt but was later removed from his post by Moscow (Zadorozhny & Korotkyi, 2015). Another reason for the lack of legitimacy is the fact that Moscow also runs most military and financial affairs (Zadorozhny & Korotkyi, 2015). And actually running affairs is different than when Russia tries to control certain affairs. Because of this lack of legitimacy, it is argued that the DPR and LPR do not fully have control over their territory, which is one of the criteria they must meet to be a de facto state. Yet, with the support of Russia, most of the time some kind of government or form of leadership are in control of the defined territory. At least, Ukraine has no de facto control over both defined territories. Based on that, one could argue that the DPR and the LPR have a permanent population, a defined and controlled territory and a government and they have at for longer than two years. Both entities are also not recognized by any state in the world. Despite arguably meeting the first five criteria, both entities fail to meet the last because they are not actually striving for international recognition (Zadorozhny & Korotkyi, 2015). For example, Western states, organizations and media are often treated with hostility and there have been zero attempts to seek legitimacy in the west. Also, the leaders of the DPR and LPR do not actively seek much international engagement and are working only with a small range of actors. If an entity really wants

to become a state and actively strives for recognition then it won't ignore many states within the international community. Instead the entity would actively seek support all over the world and try to engage with other states often and intensive. Based on that reasoning, the DPR and LPR do not meet all requirements and are therefore not de facto states based on the set definition. What is also different between the DPR and the LPR and the other entities is that armed conflict is still every day's business. Even though fighting has reduced considerably since the second Minsk agreement, in 2018 there were still several hundred casualties, both military and civilian (Zadorozhny & Korotkyi, 2015). Adding to an overall death count that exceeds 10.000 people. Based on the set definition of a frozen conflict, only formalized combat needs to have stopped. However, with this amount of annual casualties and acts of violence from both sides of the conflict it is almost impossible to state that formalized combat has really halted. Therefore, the DPR and the LPR are not frozen conflicts according to the set definition even though they meet five out of six criteria. Because the DPR and the LPR are not de facto states and not frozen conflicts and those are the two most important similarities, they will not be analysed within this thesis.

In addition to meeting most criteria of being de facto states and frozen conflicts there are other similarities between the four relevant cases and the DPR and the LPR. First of all, both entities are economically dependent on Russia. It has been estimated that Russia was spending around 3 billion a year on funding for the DPR and LPR. Also, most businesses have given up on Ukraine and started looking at Russian markets (Zadorozhny & Korotkyi, 2015). Another aspect which is similar between the four cases and the DPR and the LPR is the fact that most of the population speaks Russian, because Russian is the lingua franca in both regions. In table 1, an overview of the similarities and deviations between the four de facto states and the DPR and LPR are given

Table 1: Overview of similarities and deviations between the four de facto states and the DPR and LPR.

Cases/similarities	Transnistria	Nagorno-Karabakh	South Ossetia	Abkhazia	Donetsk people's republic	Luhansk people's republic
De facto state	V	V	V	V	X	X
Part of a frozen conflict	V	V	V	V	X	X
Formerly part of the Soviet Union	V	V	V	V	V	V
Eastern orthodox Christianity as primary religion	V	X	V	V	V	V
Russian official language	V	X	V	V	V	V
Most of the	V	V	V	V	V	V

population speaks Russian						
Ethnic Russians largest or second largest minority within the entity	v	v	v	v	?	?
Semi presidential republic as form of government	v	x	v	v	v	v
Multi-party system as political system	v	v	v	v	?	?
Economy largely dependent on Russian economy	v	v	v	v	v	v
Population size far beneath average and median size	v	v	v	v	v	v
Territory size far beneath average and median size	v	v	v	v	v	v
Russia the "patron state" of the entity	v	x	v	v	v	v

3.3 Operationalisation

The dependent and independent variables have to be operationalised so that it's possible to measure them in the empirical chapter. The operationalisation of variables also makes it possible for other authors to repeat the research with the same or other cases. Because authors assign specific values to variables, the operationalisation process is always personal and based on choice and therefore cannot be seen as the only correct way to measure the specific variables. First ,the variables included in the hypotheses concerning the second step will be operationalised and afterwards the independent and dependent variables of the third step will be operationalised. In both sets of hypotheses, the main dependent variable is Russia's foreign policy towards the four frozen conflicts.

3.3.1 Operationalisation of the second step

For the second step of this thesis, the Russian foreign policy is divided into two main policy forms that arose from the theoretical approaches of realism and social constructivism. On the one hand there is the concept of control that fits within a realism perspective on foreign policy and on the other hand there is support that fits within the social constructivist perspective on foreign policy. The main difference between the two concepts is that control is based on conditional support and support is based on unconditional support. In other words, with a policy focused on control, Russia

supports the de facto state on behalf of their own national interests. With a policy focused on support Russia supports the parent state based not self-interest but on international norms, collective identity or social identity. In that case, Russia creates its foreign policy based on those things regardless of what is there to gain for Russia without directly wanting something in return for their support.

To be able to measure the hypotheses from the second step, the included dependent and independent variables need to be operationalised. In this case, the dependent variable national interest doesn't need to be operationalized because its not measured. If a regional power's policy is focused on control rather than support, the claim can be made that primary aim is self-interest and that realism is better able to explain its polices. If a regional power's policy is focused on support rather than on control, it proves that that the primary aim is the de facto states interest and Social Constructivism is better able to explain its policies. Of course, to decide whether a policy towards a de facto state is based on control or support, those two independent variables need to be operationalized and be measurable. Because foreign policy as a concept is too broad and comprehensive, it was divided into four different components that together form Russia's foreign policy. These components are its economic, military, political and legal policy. These components are the same for both the control concept and the support variable. The concept of politics is divided into domestic and foreign politics. In table 2 there will be an overview of how both concepts are operationalized.

Table 2: Overview of how independent variables control and support are operationalised

Hypotheses	Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Way of measuring
1 (realism)	Control	Legal	Recognition	Assess whether possible recognition by regional power was conditional
		Military	Troops on the ground	Assess whether there are troops from the regional power on the ground or not
		Economic	Economic dependency	Assess economic dependence on the regional power by looking at debts, and export to and import from the regional power to the de facto state
			Investment to control	Assess whether the regional power invests in the de facto state to gain control over important companies and strategic companies
			Economic measures against parent state	Assess whether the regional power took economic measures against the parent state to change its policies
		Political	Influence on	Assess whether the regional power tried to influence the geopolitical

			geopolitical policy of the parent state	course of the parent state
			Influence on political process of the de facto state	Assess whether the regional power tried to influence the political process within the de facto state
2 (social constructivism)	Support	Legal	Recognition	Assess whether possible recognition by regional power was unconditional
			Create support for recognition	Assess whether regional power tried to persuade other states to commit to recognition on behalf of the de facto state
		Military	Support from the Russian army	Assess whether regional power provided military equipment and vehicles without getting involved in the conflict
		Economic	Russian investments	Assess whether the regional power invests in the de facto state's civil society and in companies without taking them over
			Financial aid	Assess whether the regional power gives relatively unconditional financial aid in the form of subsidies
		Political	Geopolitical policy of the parent state	Assess whether the regional power let the parent state choose its geopolitical direction freely
			Local political process	Assess whether the regional power abstained from meddling in the de facto state's local political process

3.3.2 Operationalization of the third step

To be able to measure the hypotheses within the third step, the independent variables used in those hypotheses need to be operationalised as well. Within the realism view on foreign policy, a division was made between offensive realism and defensive realism including their own independent variables and within Social constructivism a division was made between three different independent variables. To be able to explain the differences in Russia's foreign policies, a total of five hypotheses were created to be able to decide which theory is better able to explain the differences in Russia's policies from 1992 until the time of writing . Two hypotheses that could, if provisionally adopted, support the claim that realism is better able to explain the differences in policies and three that could, if provisionally adopted, support the claim the social constructivism is better able to explain the differences in policies. For the dependent variables of control, and support the same meaning and operationalisation as before will be used. Therefore only the independent variables; relative

power, cooperation and alliances, existing international norms, the acceptance of the regional

power's role and collective identity need to be operationalised. In table 3 there will be an overview

of how all five concepts are measured.

Table 3: Overview of how independent variables from step 3 are operationalised.

Hypotheses	Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Way of measuring
1 (offensive realism)	Relative power	Economic power	A state's relative economic power compared to other states in the world	Using the article about national power rankings of countries by Białoskórski, Kiczma and Sułek (2019)
		Military power	A state's relative military power compared to the other states in the world	Using the article about national power rankings of countries by Białoskórski, Kiczma and Sułek (2019)
		Relative geopolitical power	A state's relative geopolitical power compared to the other states in the world	Using the article about national power rankings of countries by Białoskórski, Kiczma and Sułek (2019)
2 (defensive realism)	Cooperation and alliances	Alliances with 'the West'	Membership or attempted membership of NATO	Assess whether the relevant parent is member or wants to become a member of NATO
		Cooperation	Participating or attempt to participate in European association agreements	Assess whether the relevant parent state signed or wants to sing European association agreement
3 (social constructivism)	Structure of International norms	Norms set by the international community	Norms regarding sovereignty and territorial changes set by the OSCE	Assess norms set by the OSCE regarding state sovereignty and territorial changes
4 (social constructivism)	Collective identity	Political regime	Form of the current political regime	Assess whether Russia and the de facto state have similar political regimes
		Language	Official state languages	Assess whether Russia and the de facto state have similar official languages
		history	Shared history	Assess whether

				Russia and the de facto state have a shared history being part of the same state
		religion	Shared religion	Assess whether Russia and the de facto state have the same primary religion
5 (social constructivism)	Sphere of influence	Russian leadership	Trust in the Russian leadership by the population of the de facto states	Assess whether the population of the de facto state has trust in the Russian leadership
		dissolution of the Soviet Union. The question asked, was it a right or a wrong step?	Attitude of the population of de facto states to the dissolution of the Soviet Union	Assess whether the population of the de facto state regrets the dissolution of the Soviet Union

Chapter 4

4 Historical background

4.1 Transnistria

The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was created during World War Two by the union of a strip of land east of the river Dnjestr (Transnistria) and areas west of the Dnjestr (Rogstad, 2016). The MSSR was multi-ethnic consisting primarily of Romanian-speaking Moldovans 64,5%, Ukrainians 13.8% and Russians 13%. Specifically in Transnistria, Moldovans were also the largest population group namely 39.9% of the total population, but Ukrainians and Russians combined as Slavic speaking population group constituted the majority of 53.8% (Rogstad, 2016). Therefore in Transnistria, Russian was the dominant lingua franca (Rogstad, 2016). Transnistria also dominated the MSSR economically because the majority of industry was located there and politically because all the first secretaries of the republic's Communist Party came from the region. Besides, the majority of the Soviet 14th army was stationed in Transnistria with its headquarters in the regional capital Tiraspol (Rogstad, 2016). This imbalance within the MSSR contributed to the emergence of a privileged, Russian-speaking elite in Transnistria that had strong ties with the Soviet Union and Moscow (Rogstad, 2016).

In the second half of the 1980's, Gorbachev's reforms led to the emergence of a Moldovan national movement that gradually had more radical aims, including independence and possible re-unification with Romania. The reaction from the elite in Tiraspol was to aim for Transnistria's own right to autonomy from Moldova. Until 1992, the conflict escalated slowly. After election victories by the Popular Front of Modova, the Republic's Supreme Soviet declared Moldova to be a sovereign state within the Soviet Union in 1990 (Rogstad, 2016). Not long after that, an assembly in Tiraspol answered by declaring Transnistria a separate Soviet republic. In 1991, Moldova declared its full independence from the Soviet Union. Again Transnistria responded, this time they held a referendum in which a clear majority supported independence from Moldova and allegiance to the Soviet Union.

A few weeks later, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and Moldovan and other leaders established the commonwealth of independent states. At the same time, Transnistrian forces established control over police stations and other strategic points at the east side of the river Dnestr (Rogstad, 2016). They received arms and support from parts of the 14th army of which most soldiers came from the region or were Russian and Ukrainian volunteers (Rogstad, 2016). The conflict became a violent conflict when a Moldovan attack on the city of Bender, on the Dnestr's west bank was pushed back by Transnistrian forces with help of the Russian 14th army. In July 1992, Boris Jeltsin and Moldovan president Mircea Snegur signed a bilateral agreement to regulate the conflict. A security zone and a

peacekeeping force consisting of five Russian, three Moldovan and two Transnistrian battalions were introduced. Russia effectively had control over the peacekeeping force (Rogstad, 2016). This situation of a peacekeeping regime led to the conflict being "frozen".

4.2 Abkhazia

When Georgia was part of the Soviet Union it held the status of Soviet socialist republic (SSR), the highest administrative unit within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Within SSR Georgia, Abkhazia held the second highest status of autonomous Soviet socialist republics (ASSR). Abkhazia suffered considerably under Stalin's rule in the 1930's, its status was even reduced to that of an autonomous republic and it had to deal with suppression and discriminatory policies (Portier, datum). For example, the Abkhaz-language media were shut down and schools with curriculums in the Abkhaz language were abolished in favour of Russian or Georgian schools. Although these policies were reversed after the Stalin era, they left their imprint, the Russian language had for example become the lingua franca (Stylianos, 2019).

Already in 1978, because of the Georgian violation of right of the Abkhazian people, Abkhazian elites made a request for Abkhazia to secede from Georgia and Join Russia. In the late 1980's, when nationalism was spreading across Soviet territory, the old demand for the dismantling of Stalin's federal structures awoke in Abkhazia (Stylianos, 2019). Georgia's response was to take measures that consolidated Georgian power and influence in Abkhazia. Also, nationalist feeling in Georgia rose with the SSR's own hope for independence from Russian domination. In 1990, the Abkhaz leadership declared the state sovereignty of the Abkhazian SSR but the decision was declared invalid by the Georgian SSR the next day (Portier, datum). In 1991, Abkhazia effectively separated itself from Georgia's bid for independence by participating in the all-union referendum that was proposed by Gorbachev. That event was seen as a major catalyst of tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia.

In 1991 the Georgian independence movement succeeded and Georgia, including Abkhazia, broke away from the Soviet Union. Following Georgia's declaration of independence In 1992, the Abkhazians declared their desire to leave Georgia and remain part of the Soviet Union. Consultations between both parties were broken up quickly and afterwards the Georgian National Guard was sent into the region. After multiple violent confrontations between the Georgian army and Abkhazian troops, the Abkhazian troops defeated the Georgian forces and established control over the region. To definitively stop the violence, a permanent ceasefire was brokered in Moscow in 1994 (Portier, datum). This ceasefire worked relatively well and resulted in relative stability but hostilities continued. Meanwhile, Russia also deployed a large peacekeeping force in the region. No definitive political settlement was reached afterwards and therefore the conflict became a frozen conflict

4.3 South Ossetia

Within the SSR Georgia, South Ossetia was ranked as an autonomous oblast (Stylianos, 2019). North and South-Ossetia were artificially divided by Stalin to make sure that when unification of the two regions would ever take place, it would happen under the "protective wing" of Russia (Stylianos, 2019). Just as Abkhazia, South-Ossetia under the rule of Stalin had to deal with suppression and discriminatory policies.

As merely an autonomous oblast within SSR Georgia, South-Ossetia wanted more sovereignty and be an ASSR like Abkhazia. In 1989, the South Ossetian oblast council formally requested the Georgian SSR to grant the region the status of ASSR. Also, there was alleged linguistic discrimination against Georgians that lived in the region. This provoked further tensions between the Ossetian and Georgian community. In 1989, Georgians planned a march on the capital city of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali (Portier, datum). At the edge of the city they were stopped by Ossetians militia's and soldiers from the Soviet army and two days of violence followed. In 1990, because a South Ossetian political party was prohibited of participating in the Georgian elections, South Ossetia adopted a resolution where it declared itself as a democratic republic within the USSR and initiated their own elections (Portier, datum). The Georgian government annulled the elections and even abolished Ossetians status as autonomous oblast.

In 1991, armed conflict continued sporadically in South Ossetia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, The whole of SSR Georgia, including South Ossetia became a new independent state. Soon after, the South Ossetians participated in a referendum of South Ossetia from Georgia and unification with Russia. The Georgian government objected the resolution as it considered the referendum as a clear infringement on Georgia's territorial integrity. Shortly after these events, heavy fighting broke out between Ossetian and Georgian forces. In 1992 Russia helped broker a cease-fire agreement, including the instalment of Georgian, Russian and Ossetian peacekeeping forces. After the signing of this cease-fire agreement, South-Ossetia became a frozen conflict.

4.4 Nagorno-Karabakh

In its long history, Karabakh has been part of both Armenia and Azerbaijan several times (Portier, 2001). In 1921, an agreement was signed between representatives of SSR Armenia and leaders of the red army, that Karabakh should be part of Azeri territory once more. This decision led to a resurgence of the already existing dispute between SSR Armenia, SSR Azerbaijan and Soviet officials. A few months later, the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist party reversed that decision and

decreed that Karabakh belong to Soviet Armenia. Unsurprisingly, the Azerbaijani Communist party proved unwillingly to surrender Karabakh. Normally their unwillingness would not have mattered much but it had the support of the Commissariat of Nationality affairs that was headed by Stalin at that time (Portier, 2001). As a result, the matter was reconsidered twice in two days and in the end under pressure from Stalin, it was decided that Karabakh would remain within the borders of the Azerbaijan SSR. Therefore, despite earlier promises and despite the fact that within Karabakh most of the population is ethnic Armenian, the region became an autonomous oblast within SSR Azerbaijan.

Due to disagreement within Soviet Azerbaijan about the nature of the autonomy that was to be granted to Karabakh, another dispute arose. Not until 1922, a settlement was reached on Karabakh's status. The Karabakh region was split in two and only the mountainous part of Karabakh became an autonomous oblast within Soviet Azerbaijan. And because the Armenian population within Karabakh wanted to exclude as many Azerbaijani villages as possible, the agreed boundaries came to separate Nagorno-Karabakh completely from the Armenian SSR. The 'loss' of Nagorno Karabakh remained a sore for the Armenian people since that time, but the frustration didn't surface except for a few minor demonstrations (Portier, 2001).

In 1988, a group of delegates from the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast, adopted a resolution in order to transfer Karabakh from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. The Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani SSR logically denied the application but in response, the supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR approved Karabakh's proposal and asked the USSR government to resolve the matter. The USSR Supreme Soviet decided to leave Nagorno-Karabakh within the structure of Soviet Azerbaijan (Portier, 2001). When the Soviet Union began to collapse at the end of 1991, Azerbaijan and Armenia seceded from the Soviet Union. On 10 December 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh held its own referendum on independence and the vote of course overwhelmingly was in favour of sovereignty and independence from Azerbaijan. Not long after that, the conflict around the region of Nagorno-Karabakh escalated and became a full-scale war (council on foreign relations, 2019). In this conflict, Armenia succeeded in taking control of parts of Azerbaijan territory (Klever, 2013). Peace negotiations lead by the Organization for security and cooperation in Europe Minsk group, successfully brokered a ceasefire in 1994 (klever, 2013). Afterwards, the conflict became a frozen conflict.

Chapter 5

5 Data and analysis

5.1 Step 1: Russia's policy towards the four de facto states involved in post-Soviet frozen conflicts from 1992-2020

As the former imperial power and dominant regional power, Russia has been involved in both the de facto states and the parent at different levels and in many different ways (Rogstad, 2016). When looking at different periods in Russia's policy towards Transnistria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, it is possible to distinguish three different policy phases. The first phase (1992-1996), at a time of relative weakness for Russia, the frozen conflicts were an important policy instrument of manipulation and used as a tool to maintain political-military presence in the post-Soviet space and especially the Caucasus. Russian policy was assertive and characterized by military interests. The second phase of Russian policy (1996-2003), can be described as a more co-operative and focused on conflict resolution. The third and last face (2003-2020), the Russian policy became more assertive and coercive and also involves military, economic and political coercive measures (Rogstad, 2016). In the following paragraphs, the Russian policy towards Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in those three time frames will be assessed. The assessment of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia will be done in the same chapter because both de facto states are part of the same frozen conflict with the same parent state and therefore inextricably connected.

5.1.1 Russia´s policy towards Transnistria

5.1.1.1 (1992-1996)

In 1992, When Transnistrian forces established control over strategic points at the east side of the river Dnestr, they received arms and support from different units of the 14th Russian army. The Russian 14th army at that time consisted mainly of troops coming from the Transnistrian region (Rogstad, 2016). When the conflict became violent and forces were actually fighting, the Russian 14th army officially remained neutral but in practise helped the Transnistrian forces by contributing both troops and weapons (Rogstad, 2016). After the fighting stopped and a bilateral agreement was signed, peacekeeping forces consisting of five Russian, three Moldovan and two Transnistrian battalions kept peace and order in the conflict area. In practise, that meant that Russia had control over the peacekeeping force and by controlling this force was able to control Transnistria (Rogstad, 2016).

Because Moldova did not want Russian troops present on Moldovan soil, Tbilisi urged for a bilateral agreement about withdrawal. But, despite the signing of an bilateral agreement about withdrawal in

1994, the agreement was never ratified by Russia and the Russian troops did not leave. Yeltsin even pushed Moldova for consent for a permanent Russian military presence but the Moldovan government refused. In 1994, Russia argued that a withdrawal of Russian forces should only happen when a solution for the Transnistrian conflict in both parties interest was found. In other words, full troop withdrawal will only follow full conflict resolution.

To be sure of Transnistria's survival as a de facto state, Russia also supported Transnistria economically by sending economic subsidies such as pension payments for the population and unclaimed debts for gas deliveries. Also, Russian oligarchs have invested a lot in Transnistrian industry. Despite this economical support, Russia did not interfere much or respond to Moldova's or Transnistria's local or international politics in this time period. As the first Chechen war started in 1994, the number of peacekeeping battalions was cut and the 14th army reorganized, renamed and its staff reduced. With the military weakened by the Chechen war, the policy-making initiative in the post-Soviet space slowly shifted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and towards the aim to resolve post-Soviet conflicts (Rogstad, 2016).

5.1.1.2 (1996-2003)

Around 1996, international pressure on Russia to withdraw its troops increased (Rogstad, 2016). At the 1999 OSCE summit, Russia again committed itself to withdrawal of its troops and weapons from Moldova by the end of 2002. In this period Russia had much closer relations with Moldova and both countries even signed an agreement on military and economic cooperation in 1999. Also, a favourable price for the delivery of Russian gas was negotiated.

In 2003, Russia was very close to solving the question of Transnistria's status, and making it an autonomous region within a unified Moldova. They created a memorandum which proposed a unified Moldovan parliament including Transnistrian delegates with effective veto powers over a vast majority of legislation, and provided for a Russian peacekeeping presence until 2020. The memorandum was to be signed on 24 November 2003, but was called off by the Moldovan president, Voronin, the night before. His decision probably was due to both Western pressure and warnings about the peacekeeping clause and the emerging protests by civil society and the political opposition. The last-minute change of heart by Voronin brought an abrupt end to the more co-operative period in Russian-Moldovan policy and it created long-lasting bad blood between the Russian and Moldovan sides. Russian policy took a sharply assertive turn, involving military, economic and political measures (Rogstad, 2016).

5.1.1.3 (2003-2020)

After the failure of the memorandum, Russia suspended its troop withdrawal and installed import bans on Moldovan meat, fruit and vegetables and wines in 2005 and 2006. Especially the ban on wine was bad for the Moldovan economy as wine exports to Russia generated about 200 million USD a year for Moldova (Rogstad, 2016). In 2006 Gazprom, cut off Moldova's gas supply for two weeks before it negotiated a gradual price increase and a majority share in Moldova's national gas company Moldovagaz. Russian economic support for the Transnistrians also increased. Russia thus used its economic levers to pressure Moldova and introduced a new level of coercive policy. The coercive measures brought Voronin back to the table and Russia's import bans were partially lifted and its energy policy eased. In return, Moldova eased the blockade and import bans against Transnistria.

In 2010, after the third parliamentary election in Moldova, Russia unsuccessfully tried to broker a more pro-Russian coalition government. In addition to this failed brokering, Russia in 2013 again tried to influence the political process in Moldova by bribing Moldovan parliamentarians in an attempt to bring to bring the pro-European government down. In 2013, when the EU and Moldova were making progress with their planned Association Agreement, Russia reintroduced import bans on Moldovan wine and other products. Despite this economic pressure from Moscow and complaints from Russia and Transnistria, the Association Agreement was signed and ratified in 2013 (Rogstad, 2013).

Despite the fears of Western Europe and Moldova that Russia would annex Transnistria as it did Crimea, such fears have not come to pass (Rogstad, 2016). Moldova has remained relatively peaceful save for protests by both pro-European and pro-Russian protesters in 2015/2016. Even when the Ukrainian government build fortifications on the Transnistrian-Ukrainian border and Russian servicemen stationed in Transnistria were banned from Ukrainian territory, the Russian government only protested vocally (Rogstad, 2016).

In the present situation, despite bilateral and multilateral promises of withdrawal, around 1100/1200 Russian troops remain in the area as the Operational Group of Russian Forces (Rogstad, 2016). Russia refuses to withdraw the forces until resolution of the status question of Transnistria is achieved. The Russian policy concerning recognition did not change much in the three different time-periods. Several times, the Transnistrian parliament made public requests to Russian leaders and government officials for either accession to Russia or to be recognized as a sovereign state (Rogstad, 2016). But every time, Russia has shown no interest in recognizing Transnistria as an independent state or an inclination to annex Transnistria and make it a part of Russia. Russia even has consistently stated its

support for Moldova's territorial integrity. There is even a signed Treaty of Friendship between Russia and Moldova with a mention of Russia's commitment to solve the Transnistrian conflict while maintaining Moldova's territorial integrity. Instead of aiming at recognition or annexation, Russia calls for a "special status" for the Transnistrian region within Moldova (Rogstad, 2016). At this moment, economic interests also keeps playing an important role for Russia to want to maintain the status quo, because the region's grey zone status provides Transnistrian elite, Moldovan, Ukrainian, Romanian and especially Russian businessmen, politicians and organised criminal networks lucrative business opportunities.

5.1.2 Russian policy towards Abkhazia and South-Ossetia

5.1.2.1 (1992-1996)
Directly after the confrontation between Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian troops in 1992, Russia brokered a cease-fire agreement. The agreement was violated in 1993 which led the escalation of the conflict. After the escalation of the conflict, the United Nations (UN) officially approved Russia's mediation of the conflict and the deployment of Russian peacekeeping military units (Souleimanov, Abrahamyan & Aliyev 2016). The peacekeeping force was also made up of Georgian and North Ossetian battalions but it was under Russian command. The presence of Russian troops, was an important instrument for Russia to tighten its grip on Abkhazia and South Ossetia from 1992 onwards. It gave Russia broad scope of instruments for political manoeuvring, increasing influence and serving Russia's regional interests (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). It also provided Russia with the possibility of regular interference in the internal affairs of the conflicting side. Having the power to maintain the status quo in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the fact that Russian troops militarily controlled both regions made Georgia also dependent on Moscow (Souleimanov, et al.,2016). In this period, Russia also started providing financial aid to both de facto states with no explicit conditionality element from this period onwards (Gerrits & Bader, 2016).

5.1.2.2 (1996-2003)
In this period of time, Russia was mainly a mediator in the process of conflict resolution (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Russia tried to broker a peace agreement between Georgia and the de facto states but without any results. At the end of this period, with the peace negotiations leading nowhere, Russian policy slowly changed and became more aggressive and coercive.

Since 2002/2003, Russia imposed the so-called policy of passportization (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Passportization is a policy whereby Russian passports are distributed on massive scale to the populations of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia in order to make them officially Russian citizens. In that

way the security of these Russian citizens is suddenly the responsibility of the Russian Federation and therefore has to be assured by the Russian military that is deployed in that specific areas. This massive passport distribution was done without Georgia's permission. The local population of both de facto states happily accepted the passports because they could not travel because they often only had invalid Soviet passports and did not have Georgian passports because they did not recognize Georgian sovereignty. This passportization policy is on the on hand an attempt to coerce Georgia into abandoning its westward economic and political orientation and on the other hand provides Russia the possibility to claim sovereignty over these territories in the future (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Since 2003, Russia continued its passportization policy as a tool to apply pressure on Georgia and 'blackmail' them to abandon its path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

5.1.2.3 (2003-2020)

As the tensions between Georgia and its breakaway territories increased, it created the possibility for Russia's instrumental use of the de facto states with the aim of disrupting Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Besides the passportization policy and the Russian military build-up, both de facto states are also very dependent on Moscow concerning its economy and security. Because of this dependence its relatively easy for Russia to use both de facto states as tools within bigger strategic polices and aims.

In 2004, Russian-brokered peace talks between the two de facto states and Georgia came to a dead end. Russia's role in the conflict slowly changed from mediator to a direct party in the conflict. One of the main reasons for this return to assertive and coercive policies was the fact that Georgia had a strong desire to join NATO. Another reasons was the revival of the GUAM organization by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova in 2005 (Roogstad, 2016). The aim of this international organisation was to limit Russia's influence and political interference. Also the launch of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy in 2003, which included both Ukraine and Moldova, was seen as a threat. In response, Putin increasingly and assertively promoted Eurasian integration and also expended the military presence in both Abkhazia and South-Ossetia.

On august 4 2008, heavy mortar shelling on Georgian villages provoked Georgian president Saakashvili to order an assault on Tskhinvali (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Russia quickly responded by sending troops and invading Georgia on multiple fronts. In the following days, Russian forces took control of the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali and fighting spread to other parts of Georgia. The full-scale war lasted only 5 days, and after that a French-brokered cease-fire led to the withdrawal of most Russian forces. A Russian security and defence expert stated later that Moscow had planned

beforehand to trigger skirmishes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to provoke Georgia to get involved in a large-scale conflict (Felgenhauer, 2008). The aim of this provocation was to make sure Russia could militarily intervene and push Georgia away from the NATO membership track(Souleimanov, et al., 2016).

Following the signing of a cease fire agreement in 2008, Russia recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states and increased its financial aid to both regions. Russia also increased its military presence by constructing a number of new military facilities in both regions and a naval base in Abkhazia. Russian troops assist the local authorities by guarding their borders with Georgia, and in the case of Abkhazia also its Black Sea coast line.

Economic agreements signed in 2009 and 2010 promoted further economic integration between Russia and Abkhazia and South-Ossetia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Russia is virtually the only trading partner of South-Ossetia and by far the biggest trading partner of Abkhazia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Therefore, both de facto states have huge trade deficits .The only reason why both de facto states can afford their trade deficits is due to the financial aid coming from Russia. Besides economic support, Russian economic activity goes far beyond trade and investment. Important economic and infrastructural assets have been transferred to Russian ownership and control, especially in Abkhazia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Examples of this are the fact that Russian railways controls the railway network of Abkhazia, Russian companies control the development of Abkhaz sea infrastructure, Russia's largest oil company looks for oil off the Abkhaz coast and the Abkhazian and Russian electricity grid has been united. Russia is also responsible for pension payments and the social benefits that Russian passport owners in both region are entitled to. Citizens in both regions depend on Russian pensions and other social benefits that are much higher than could be afforded by the governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And since the passportization policy by Moscow, this group has been much larger than earlier.

Russia also continued to meddle in local elections in both de facto states. In 2011, during the presidential elections in South-Ossetia, the majority of votes in the first round was evenly split between a candidate seen as Moscow's favorite and an opposition candidate. When it seemed that that the opposition candidate would win, the results were annulled and new elections were scheduled for 2012. In the new elections, Moscow's favorite candidate was contested by four new candidates but still won the elections convincingly.

In 2014 and 2015, Russia signed new controversial integration treaties with respectively Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. Under the agreement, Russia and both de facto states declared that they will

establish a common defence and security space, allow free movement across the Russian-Abkhazian and the Russian-South-Ossetian borders, harmonise its legislation with Eurasian Union regulations, simplify the procedures for obtaining Russian citizenship, adjust its budget policies to the rules that apply in Russia and integrate their custom services (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). The signing of these deals also meant in practise that Russian, Abkhazian and South-Ossetian troops were merged together under Russian control, because although the command of these units is rotated in peacetime, it is appointed to Russia in wartime (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). then Abkhazian president Ankvab was not really in favour of signing the treaty and was viewed as being too independent by Moscow. Not long after the president stated his concerns, a coup, probably inspired by Moscow, replaced him with Raul Khajimba, a former KGB officer. A few months after the coup, the new Abkhazian Khajimba signed the Russian-Abkhazian treaty (Falkowski, 2014). In return for the signing of this treaty, president Putin promised that 200 million US dollars would be granted to Abkhazia in 2015 and the 2008 decision to recognize Abkhazia as an independent state would not be revoked. Russia also committed itself to intensify its efforts for the republic to be internationally recognized. Similar promises were made to the South-Ossetian government (Falkowski, 2014). The underlying short-term goal of this treaty was to place pressure on Georgia, in order to provoke a crises and disrupt or reverse Georgia's pro-western orientation. The long-term underlying goal of this action was to subordinate Georgia to Russia in geopolitical terms (Falkowski, 2014).

5.1.3 Russian policy towards Nagorno Karabakh

5.1.3.1 (1992-1996)
In 1992, a full-scale war erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan. During this conflict, Russia's policy was focused on providing military support to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Moscow viewed the conflict as a means of maintaining influence and presence in the South-Caucasus. It did not

support Azerbaijan because the Azerbaijani government ousted the existing Russian military bases in Azerbaijan, refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which was Russia's alternative for international cooperation between post-Soviet states in that time and Azerbaijan engaged in balancing against Russia with Turkey and the West (Abushov, 2019). Also, Turkeys preparedness to get involved in the conflict was perceived by Russia as an attempt by a NATO member to undermine Russia's influence as great power (Abushov, 2019).

In 1994, Azerbaijan joined the CIS which encouraged Moscow to broker a ceasefire between the two parties. When the Russian-brokered ceasefire was signed and ended the violent conflict in May 1994, Armenian forces had captured almost all of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as a few regions outside the enclave itself. The OSCE Minsk group, with Russia, the United States and France as co-chairs has since then been tasked with leading peace talks and mediating, but without much success. The ceasefire was broken multiple times to allow fighting along the line of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia has been the most crucial member of the OSCE Minsk group from the time it was established (Abushov, 2019). This leading role fits Russia's desire to dominate the conflict management and peace process as much as possible (Abushov, 2019).

5.1.3.2 (1996-2003)
Despite its role as mediator, relations between Moscow and Yerevan were good and Russia continued its military alliance with Armenia (Abushov, 2009). Partly because of this continued military support towards Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan refused to welcome Russian troops in Azerbaijan and refused to cooperate with Russia in the exploration of energy resources in the Caspian Sea (Abushov, 2009). In 1997 Russia transferred weapons to Armenia with a total worth of 1 billion US dollars. Two years later, in 1999, Azerbaijan found out about this arms deal and its relations with Russia worsened. In response, Azerbaijan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty and co-established GUAM with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova who also saw Russia as a potential threat in that time (Abushov, 1999).

5.1.3.3 (2003-2020)

From the early 2000s, Azerbaijan changed its strategic policy from balancing to bandwagoning. In other words, Azerbaijan was no longer opposing Russia and seeking allies to counter Russia's power but rather trying to align with the Russia federation (Abushov, 2019). Azerbaijan distanced itself from cooperation with NATO, followed Russia's discourse about the West's intrusion into the Post-Soviet

space, hinted at potential membership of the Eurasian Economic Union and even signed contracts with the Russian defence ministry for the purchase of strategic weapons with a total worth of 4 billion US dollars. Because this policy shift by Azerbaijan was successful, Russia's capabilities increased which lessened the importance of the conflict and the fact that the conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh was increasingly viewed as an obstacle to have closer relations with Azerbaijan (Abushov, 2019). According to some authors, during the difficult peace process Russia refrained from pressuring the conflict parties and from taking the lead in the process because it's not desirable for Russia to satisfy one party at the cost of the other and because it is believed in Russia that putting too much pressure on the conflict parties could alienate them from Russia. Alienating either of the two countries is also dangerous because a dissatisfied Armenia or Azerbaijan could choose to turn to the West (Abushov, 2019).

Nevertheless, there are also authors who argue that despite being careful, Russia also kept using the conflict as a policy instrument and would have only permitted an interim solution that could have satisfied Russia's interests as well. They argue that Russia has been openly playing both sides. On the one hand, Russia was Armenia's self-proclaimed ally, while on the other hand they kept providing arms to Azerbaijan (Di Franco, 2018). Also, Moscow's support to the peace process was only marginal and definitively not rushed (Abushov, 2019). Moreover, they state that the conflict remained an important cornerstone of Russia's strategic alliance with Armenia and source of pressure on Azerbaijan. Often the fact that Russia used the conflict to sell weapons to Azerbaijan and Armenia while functioning as one of three mediators in the Minsk process is emphasized (souleimanov, et al., 2016). Moscow also has confirmed its willingness and readiness to establish a military presence on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh (Abushov, 2019).

From 2010 to 2014, Azerbaijan received approximately 85% of its arms imports from Russia, making Russia the single largest provider of arms to Azerbaijan. Considering Azerbaijan's large military expenditure, Russia has no interest is losing this source of income. Russia defended this policy by claiming that controlling the flow of arms to both Armenia and Azerbaijan makes full-scale war less likely. If the conflict remains frozen, Russia will benefit economically from arms sales and from a growing political and economic dependence from both countries.

In 2016, the conflict escalated again into a full-scale war that some refer to as the April war. The Nagorno-Karabakh Defence Army backed by Armenian forces fought the Azerbaijani armed forces for four days. The scale of the military actions suggest that it was not entirely a spontaneous outburst but rather a carefully planned military operation to settle the Karabakh conflict. Although it remains unclear how much ground Armenia lost, they did loose occupied territory to Azerbaijan. On 5 April, a

ceasefire was signed by Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders in Moscow. After the April war, multiple Russian defence ministry officials openly confirmed Russia's commitment to Armenia's defence in the case of renewed hostilities.

In the present situation, Russia's policy is still ambivalent. Russia would support any peace, and it doesn't matter at who's initiative is its achieved, as long as it envisages Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh and the peace is not final (Abushov, 2019). Russia has no interest in a final peace because then Russia would not be able to manipulate the conflict anymore. In the current situation, despite Russia's role in the peace process, its actual influence over the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process is limited. Moscow does not offer financial and moral aid to Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia does not have direct contact with its leadership in Stepanakert and Russia does not have military forces stationed in its territory. Even Russia's levers over Armenia does not grant them much influence over Nagorno-Karabakh because Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have different views on the resolution of the conflict (Di Franco, 2018).

5.2 Step 2: Analysing what determines Russia's policy towards the four de facto states.

To be able to analyse Russia's policy towards the four de facto states, and determine whether it is based more on controlling or supporting the de facto state, an overview of its policy is created in three tables. These tables provide an overview of Russia's policies and the development of its policies on the bases of the concepts of control and support. Afterwards, the information that is provided by the tables is assessed.

5.2.1 Assessment of Russia's policies towards Transnistria

A conclusion that can be drawn from Russia's policy towards Transnistria from 1992 until now is that Russia does not care about Transnistria per se. The primary goal of Russia's policy has always been maintaining as much influence and control as possible over Moldova as a whole (Rogstad, 2016). Although, Russia developed close relations with different Moldovan government at times, they also consistently irritated Moldova by pushing for Moldovan acceptance of a Russian troop presence and by supporting Transnistria's bid for a special status within Moldova. Besides this political support, Russia has also contributed to Transnistria's survival as a de facto state through economic and military support (Rogstad, 2016). Nevertheless, Russia has never shown any real interest in recognizing Transnistria as an independent state or annexing the region and has consistently stated its support for Moldova's territorial integrity. As one can observe in table 4, Russia's unconditional support remained similar throughout the three time phases, and was focused primarily on economic support. Russia's control focused policy in the first phase was primarily focused on maintaining military and economic leverage with the aim of maintaining Russian influence over Moldova. In the second phase, this policy somewhat weakened and focus was on good relations with Moldova and the possibility of conflict resolution. But, in the third phase, under the Medvedev and Putin administrations Russia's policy was again focused heavily on control and Russia used a wide range of instruments to gain control. Russia used Transnistria to increase its control over Moldova as a whole. Russia often dealt directly with the Moldovan government in Chisinau, signing bilateral treaties, seeking consent for a permanent Russian military presence or a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict on Russian terms and pressuring the Moldovan towards choosing membership in the Eurasian integration projects instead of the European ones (Rogstad, 2016). Also, The fact that Russia cares little about Transnistria also means that the chance of both recognition or annexation of the de facto state is very unlikely because those actions could lead to Russia losing its leverage in the struggle for influence over Moldova and Moldovan politics(Rogstad, 2016). Based on this assessment of Russia's policy towards Transnistria, one can conclude that realism is better able to explain Russia's policy, especially in the last phase. Russia based most of its policy on increasing control, increasing influence and pursuing its national interests rather than supporting Transnistria's interests, by all available means. Therefore, for the case of Transnistria, the hypotheses that: *If a regional power's foreign policy towards a de facto states that is part of a frozen conflict is focused on control (conditional support), then it primarily pursues its national interests* is provisionally accepted.

Table 4: Summary of Russian policy towards Transnistria in terms of control and support

Variable/time phase	1992-1996	1996-2003	2003-2020
control			
Conditional Recognition	-	-	-
Troops on the ground	++	+	++
Economic dependency	++	++	++
Investment to control	-	-	+
Economic measures against parent state	-	-	++
Influence on geopolitical policy of the parent state	-	-	+
Influence on political process of the de facto state	-	-	+
Russian role in peace Negotiations focused on support of one side of the conflict			
Control total	**4**	**3**	**9**
Support			
Unconditional Recognition	-	-	-
Create support	-	-	-

for recognition			
Unconditional Support from the Russian army	-	-	-
Russian investments	++	++	++
Financial aid	++	++	++
Independent Geopolitical policy of the parent state	-	-	-
Independent local political process	-	-	-
Russian role in peace negotiations primarily as mediator			
Support total	**4**	**4**	**4**

5.2.2 Assessment of Russia's policies towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Just as In the case of Transnistria, Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is an important tool in the attempt to keep Georgia vulnerable in its relations with Moscow and to dismantle Georgia's reformed army (Souleimanov, et al., 2016). Abkhazia and South Ossetia are Russia's primary instruments to make Georgia's possible NATO membership impossible and to undermine the stability of the Georgian state. In other words, Russia mainly uses both de facto states as instruments in its coercive policy towards Georgia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). And that Russia's policy sometimes works is proven by the fact that Russia's military involvement in both de facto states is the biggest obstacle to Georgia gaining a serious prospect of NATO membership (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). The fact that Russia is able to use both de facto states as tools within a coercive policy aimed at Georgia is because their link to Russia is more deeply and extensively than between Russia and any other political entity in the region. This extreme linkage also results in the fact that Russia has stronger leverage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia than elsewhere in its neighbourhood (Gerrits &

Bader, 2016). Some authors even wonder if the term "de facto independent states" is still correct, because although Abkhazia and South-Ossetia are independent from Georgia, their dependent on Russia to an extent that is rarely observed between states that recognize each other's independence (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Especially Abkhazia's and South-Ossetia's economic and military dependence on Russia makes them vulnerable and has created a strong one-sided dependence. Russia's financial aid also creates a form of rent addiction because the aid is coming regardless of the de facto states productive capacities, but it shapes expectations regarding future income (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Without Russia's military and economic assistance, both de facto states would not survive for long. Besides the high probability of going bankrupt on the short-term, it would also be unlikely that they could hold back Georgian forces in a renewed military conflict. The fact that Russia is the only major power that recognizes them as independent states makes them even more dependent on Russia. As one can observe in table 5, Russia's policy in the first phase was primarily based on gaining control over the de facto states Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. To accomplish this, Moscow used a wide variety of tools varying from ensuring military presence in the regions, to meddling in local politics as well as trying to make them economically dependent. In the second phase Russia acted more as a mediator of the conflict and focused on conflict resolution and improving relations with georgia. In the third phase, Russia's policy shifted and became more aggressive and coercive and focused heavily on control as one can see in the table. Russia used this policy to gain control over both de facto states to an extent that one could argue they became protectorates of the Russian Federation (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). But its main focus was to pressure Georgia, to not go against Russia's regional interests. Based on this analysis of Russia's policy towards Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, it is possible to draw the conclusion that national interests primarily shaped Russia's policy towards this frozen conflict. Therefore, for the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the hypotheses that *If a regional power's foreign policy towards a de facto states that is part of a frozen conflict is focused on control (conditional support), then it primarily pursues its national interests* is provisionally accepted.

Table 5: Summary of Russian policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia in terms of control and support

Variable/time phase	1992-1996	1996-2003	2003-2020
control			
Conditional Recognition	-	-	++

Troops on the ground	+	+	++
Economic dependency	++	++	++
Investment to control	-	-	+
Economic measures against parent state	-	-	++
Influence on geopolitical policy of the parent state	+	+	+
Influence on political process of the de facto state	+	+	+
Russian role in peace Negotiations focused on support of one side of the conflict	+	-	+
Control total	6	5	11
Support			
Unconditional Recognition	-	-	-
Create support for recognition	-	-	-
Unconditional Support from the Russian army	-	-	-
Russian	++	++	++

investments			
Financial aid	++	++	++
Independent Geopolitical policy of the parent state	-	-	-
Independent local political process	-	-	-
Russian role in peace negotiations primarily as mediator	-	++	-
Support total	**2**	**6**	**4**

5.2.3 Assessment of Russia's policies towards Nagorno-Karabakh

As one can observe in table 1, Russia's approach to Nagorno-Karabakh diverges significantly from its policy to the other conflicts. That statement applies to all three time phases. It has carefully omitted to take a side in the conflict, instead selling itself as an honest broker in the peace talks (Di Franco, 2018). Russia also refrained from intensive military, economic and political meddling in Nagorno-Karabakh (Di Franco, 2018). Russia's policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh especially deviates from its policies to the other de facto states in the last time period. In the other cases, Russia's policy became far more focused on control rather than on support. In this case, Russia's policy remained more or less similar in the different time phases. The main difference between the first two phases and the last phase, is the fact that Russia's relations with Azerbaijan strongly improved because Azerbaijan changed its policy from balancing against Russia to bandwagoning with Russia. Russia's role therefore changed from clearly backing Armenia to a role that comes closer to a role as actual mediator.
This could point to Russia being afraid to loose either Armenia or Azerbaijan to the West or to Russia actually wanting to be mediator in this conflict instead of furthering the conflict on behalf of its own interests. In the first phase Russia's interests played an important role, Russia's policies towards Nagorno-Karabakh were shaped very much by its national interests. Russia used the situation and its position as leverage against both Armenia and Azerbaijan, to consolidate political-military and

economic presence in a region of importance to its own security (Abushov, 2019). Moscow, increased its military support for Armenia to force Azerbaijan to make concessions and return to Russia's economic and security sphere of influence (Cornell, 1997). Another reason to put pressure on Azerbaijan is because Russia wanted control over Azerbaijan oil riches. Moscow did not recognize Azerbaijan's right to exploit the Caspian shelf oil fields until a conclusive resolution about the shelfs status was reached (Cornell, 1997). Russia also wanted to maintain the status quo because it wants to maintain economic gains through trade deals with both states and because the Caucasus as a whole is has a strategic geographical position when it comes to oil and gas supplies. When the conflict would be resolved, it would be possible to create many more pipelines from the Caspian sea through the Caucasus, and the Eu's reliance on Russian energy would decrease. In other words, Russia's geopolitical importance and lever over Europe would be reduced (Di Franco, 2018). Despite Russia's use of Nagorno-Karabakh as leverage towards Armenia and especially Azerbaijan , Armenia has been viewed by Russia as itss most loyal and reliable ally in the post-Soviet space (Abushov, 2019). Many Russians as well as the Russian state even view Armenia as a very ancient nation and potentially the cradle of Christianity, and therefore have sympathy towards Armenia even though their primary religion is slightly different from Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Abushov, 2019). Russia does not completely separate religion and the state and has presented Orthodox Christianity as a central component in the identity of the Russian state. Because Armenia's primary church is viewed as a respectable old Christian religion and Azerbaijan's primary religion is the Islam, the shared religious identity has also partly shaped Russia's policies towards the conflict. Because of those sympathetic feelings, it is unlikely that Azerbaijan will substitute Armenia as an ally, even if Azerbaijan joins the Eurasian Union, hosts military bases within its territory and coordinates all its foreign policy with Russia (Abushov, 2019). The only possible reason for Russia to break its strategic relationship with Armenia is when Armenia "misbehaves" and turns to the West like Georgia did. Moscow does realize that its protection of Armenia costs them a good relation with Azerbaijan and to a lesser extent Turkey, and does injustice to Azerbaijan's bandwagoning policy. Moscow even perceives the protection and support of Armenian as a policy that serves Armenia's interests more than Russia's (Abushov, 2019). Based on this analysis of Russia's foreign policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh and the two involved states, it is not possible to conclude whether Realism or Social Constructivism is better able to explain Russia's behaviour, because both approaches can account for a part of Russia's policies. From a realism perspective one could argue that Russia uses the conflict as a source of leverage against both Azerbaijan and Armenia. Its aim is to ensure both states will not align with Western powers, and its strategic alliance with Armenia is maintained. Therefore one could argue that Russia acts to its own strategic interests and realism can explain its policies best. But, realism is not able to explain the ideational sources of Russian sympathy towards Armenia and

to a lesser extent Nagorno-Karabakh. social constructivism is also needed to explain the role of religious identity in Russia's behaviour towards this conflict. Therefore, to be able to explain Russia's policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both realism and social constructivism are needed, but neither hypotheses can be provisionally accepted.

Table 6: Summary of Russian policy towards Nagorno Karabakh in terms of control and support

Variable/time phase	1992-1996	1996-2003	2003-2020
control			
Conditional Recognition	-	-	-
Troops on the ground	-	-	-
Economic dependency	-	-	-
Investment to control	-	-	-
Economic measures against parent state(s)	-	-	-
Influence on geopolitical policy of the parent state(s)	++	+	++
Influence on political process of the de facto state	-	-	-
Russian role in peace Negotiations focused on support of one side of the conflict	+	+	-

Control total	3	2	2
Support			
Unconditional Recognition	-	-	-
Create support for recognition	-	-	-
Support from the Russian army	+	+	+
Russian investments	-	-	-
Financial aid	-	-	-
Independent Geopolitical policy of the parent state	-	-	-
Independent local political process	+	+	-
Russian role in peace negotiations primarily as mediator	-	-	++
Support total	2	2	2

5.3 Part 3: Explaining the differences in Russia's policies

In the case of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, realism seems perfectly able to explain Russia's policies. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, a combination of realism and social constructivism is needed to explain Russia's. Yet, the main question in this thesis aimed at explaining Russia's inconsistent behaviour and therefore focuses on the question why Russia's policies are different in four similar cases. Explaining why Russia's policies are what they are in the four cases is an important part of solving the puzzle, but the question why its policies differ between the four cases remains unanswered. For example, it has been made clear why Russia's policy towards Transnistria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia is primarily focused on control, but not why Russia decided to recognise Abkhazia

and South-Ossetia but not Transnistria. To assess whether it is possible to explain the differences in Russia's policies towards the four de facto states using realism and or social constructivism, five hypotheses are tested in the chapter below.

5.3.1 HA: the more relative power a regional power can potentially gain over the parent state, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state.

According to the hypotheses that is based on an offensive realist perspective, the regional power, in this case Russia, will exercise more control over a de facto state when there is more relative power to gain. Because the de facto states themselves are relatively small and not very powerful, Russia will want to use the de facto states as tools to gain power over the parent states. According to this kind of reasoning, Russia's control policy should be more extensive in the de facto states that have more powerful parent states. In table 7 there is an overview of the parent states relative economic, military and geopolitical power in 1992 and 2017 based on the article about national power rankings of countries by Białoskórski, Kiczma and Sułek (2019). The numbers show the states position on a specific area relative to other states in the world. Unfortunately, there was no data available about Moldova's power in 1992, but based on the other numbers and how they developed one can estimate that Moldova's power in 1992 would have been the lowest as well.

Table 7: overview of relative power of the four parent states

Sort of power/ state	1992			2017		
	Economic power position	Military power position	Geopolitical power position	Economic power position	Military power position	Geopolitical power position
Moldova	N/A	N/A	N/A	143	137	131
Georgia	104	85	81	124	98	104
Armenia	131	86	89	139	93	98
Azerbaijan	88	81	78	91	63	69

Based on the data in the table, one can conclude that in both 1992 and 2017, Azerbaijan had the most relative power of the four parent states. Especially in 2017, Azerbaijan was much stronger than the other parent states. Therefore, one would expect that Russia's policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh, in order to gain as much relative power as possible, scores the highest on the control variable relative to the other cases in both periods. Moreover, through controlling Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia also gains control over Armenia which only supports the expectation. Yet, Russia's policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh scores by far the lowest on control. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the difference in Russia's policies towards the similar cases cannot be explained by the amount of relative power Russia can gain in each case. The hypotheses that: *the more relative power a regional*

power can potentially gain over the parent state, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state is therefore provisionally rejected.

5.3.2 HB: The more the parent state tries to cooperate and form alliances with actors other than the regional power, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state.

According to the hypotheses that is based on an defensive realist perspective, the regional power, in this case Russia, will exercise more control over a de facto state when the parent states try to form alliances or cooperate with actors that Russia perceives as competitors. As one can observe in table 8, Georgia signed an association agreement and even aspires to join NATO (Grigoryan, n.d.). Moldova, struggles with the geopolitical tug-of-war between Russia and the EU. Nevertheless, Moldova did sign an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 (Grigoryan, n.d.). The EU and Armenia finalized negotiations about a Association Agreement in 2013. Yet, a few weeks later after negotiations with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, the Armenian president made a U-turn and announced that Armenia would join the Customs Union instead of signing the Association Agreement. The most plausible explanation of this turn is Russian pressure on Armenia (Grigoryan, n.d.)

Based on the overview in table 8, it is possible that Georgia is the parent state who 'turned to the West' the most. One can also conclude that Moldova is struggling to keep a balanced position between the two power blocks. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenia had aspirations to sign an Association Agreement with the EU and Azerbaijan was striving to join NATO. Yet, both states decided to turn to Russia. Based on this table in combination with the tables about control and support, one can conclude that Russia's policies towards de facto states of parent states that turned to the West the most (Georgia & Moldova) is focused heavily on control. While its policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh, whose parent states apply a bandwagoning strategy towards Russia, is more moderate and focused on support. The analyses of the text also already showed that often Russia used the de facto states to coerce and influence the policies of the parent states. Therefore, one can conclude that the hypotheses: *The more the parent state tries to cooperate and form alliances with actors other than the regional power, the more control the regional power will want to have over the de facto state* can indeed partly explain the differences in policies towards the frozen conflicts. Therefore this hypotheses is provisionally accepted.

Table 8: Overview of the parents state's cooperation and alliance policies

	Wanted/wants to sign Association	Signed Association Agreement with	Had/Has Aspiration to join NATO	Joined NATO

	Agreement with the EU	the EU		
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Moldova	Yes	Yes	No	No
Armenia	Yes	No	No	No
Azerbaijan	No	No	Yes	No

5.3.3 HC: the more a de facto state's attempt to become independent fits with the existing international norms set by the OSCE, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state.

In 1975, the OSCE included a ban on border adjustments by force in the Helsinki Final Act which was signed by 36 states including the USSR (Goertz, Diehl & Balas, 2016). Concerning the inviolability of frontiers, the Helsinki Final Act included the following; *The participating States regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all States in Europe and therefore they will refrain now and in the future from assaulting these frontiers. Accordingly, they will also refrain from any demand for, or act of, seizure and usurpation of part or all of the territory of any participating State* (Goertz, et al., 2016). During the breakup of the Soviet Union, The EU applied this norm in its policy and strongly supported the maintenance of existing boundaries. Various treaties between individual states literally contain the territorial integrity principle. Considering this ban on border adjustments by force, one would expect based on the hypotheses about international norms, that Russia will only support the de facto states that didn't use or used very little violence to become de facto states. In all four cases, violence was used by all de facto states in order to gain de facto control over their territories. In the cases of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, Russian troops even assisted from the start to help gain control and maintain control over the de facto states territory. Russia's actions go completely against the norms set by the OSCE regarding border adjustments by force as well as seizure and usurpation of part of the territory from participating states. Despite the fact that Russia goes against this rules does not necessarily mean it does not apply them in their policy towards the de facto states.

But, because all the de facto states attempts to create their own territory are based on violence and on usurpation of a part of the territory of participating states, Russia should not support any of them. Based on the assessment of Russia's policies from 1992-2020, one can conclude that Russia does support all de facto states in one way or another. Abkhazia's and South-Ossetia's attempt to gain independence from Georgia was heavily based on violence and military action and yet Russia decided to support them by recognizing them. That means that the conclusion can be drawn that the differences in Russia's policies cannot be explained by differences of the de facto states obedience to the international norms set by the OSCE. That means that the hypotheses that the more a de facto

state's attempt to become independent fits with the existing international norms set by the OSCE, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state can be provisionally rejected.

5.3.4 HD: The more the population within de facto state's accept Russia's role as regional power, the more support the regional power will give to the de facto state.

According to this hypotheses, Russia will give more support to the de facto states that are willing to be part of a sphere of influence where Russia is the supreme regional power. This willingness is measured by on the one hand looking at trust in Russian leadership and on the other hand its attitude towards the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The attitude towards the dissolution of the Soviet Union is relevant because within the Soviet Union, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic by far had the most power. That means that the assumption is that people with a negative attitude towards the dissolution of the Soviet union have more support for being part of the Russian sphere of influence.

In 2015, O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal conducted a research in which they collected 3281 surveys to be able to compare the attitudes of the populations in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh towards Russia (2015). In their data it is possible to observe that approximately 50% of the Abkhazian population, 75% of the South-Ossetian population, 70% of the Transnistrian population and 40% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population thinks that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a wrong step. What is also observable is that 70% of the Abkhazian population, 85% of the South-Ossetian population, 65% of the Transnistria population and 60% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population answered yes on the question whether they had trust in the Russian leadership (O'Loughlina et al., 2015). Based on this data, the conclusion can be drawn that the acceptance of being part of the Russian sphere of influence is the highest in South Ossetia and the lowest in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is not possible to really make a distinction between Abkhazia and Transnistria because they both score higher as well as lower than the other. Following the hypotheses, Russia should give more support South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria than it does to Nagorno-Karabakh. Based on the assessment of Russian policies it is possible to conclude that is true in all three time-periods. Therefore, the hypotheses that the more the de facto state accepts the being part of the regional power's, the more support the regional power will give to the de facto state is provisionally accepted.

5.3.5 HE: The weaker the collective identity between a regional power and the parent state is, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state.

According to this hypotheses, the weaker the collective identity between Russia and the parent state is, the more the regional power will support the de facto state. To be able to assess where there is the most collective identity, an overview was created in table 9.

Table 9: Overview of shared collective identity components between Russia and the parent states

State/identity component	Political regime	Official language	Shared history	Primary religion
Russia	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
Moldova	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
Transnistria	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
Georgia	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
Abkhazia	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
South-Ossetia	Semi-presidential republic	Russian	Shared Soviet Union history	Eastern Orthodox Christianity
Armenia	Semi-presidential republic	Armenian	Shared Soviet Union history	Armenian Apostolic Church
Azerbaijan	Semi-presidential republic	Azerbaijani	Shared Soviet Union history	Islamic
Nagorno-karabakh	Presidential republic	Armenian	Shared Soviet Union history	Armenian Apostolic Church

Based on the data about commonalities in this table, it is possible to conclude there is a stronger collective identity between Russia and Georgia and its de facto states and Russia and Moldova and its de facto states than between Russia and Armenia and especially Azerbaijan. In reality, the collective identity between Russia and Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh is stronger than it seems in table 9. Nagorno-Karabakh switched from a semi-presidential republic in 2017, most people of both populations speaks Russian and the Armenian Apostolic Church is highly valued by Russia. Also, Russia views Armenia and therefore indirectly Nagorno-Karabakh as its most loyal and reliable ally, and has feelings of sympathy towards Armenia (Abushov, 2019). Nevertheless, Russia's collective identity with Azerbaijan is by far the weakest. Yet, Russia does not provide much support for Nagorno-Karabakh. Also, based on this hypotheses one would expect that if Russia shares a stronger collective identity with parent states, its support for the de facto state's would be weaker. But, the opposite is true, despite the fact that Russia has strong collective identities with both Georgia and Moldova, it does provide more support towards Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Transnistria than it

does to Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the hypotheses that: *The weaker the collective identity between a regional power and the parent state is, the more support a regional power will give to the de facto state* is provisionally rejected.

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Chapter 6

</div>

6 Conclusion

Based on the empirical data of step 2, one can conclude that the de facto states Transnistria, Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh are primarily being used as tools to gain control and

influence over the de parent states Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In other words, the de facto states facilitate the use coercive diplomacies aimed at their parent states. Therefore, Russia tries to keep the de facto states alive with economic, political, military and legal support. This fits within Russia's grander policy which is focused on regaining influence in the post-Soviet area or "near abroad" (Falkowski, 2014). An important driver of Russian policy was Russia's perception that it was losing relative regional influence to the West. Russia used a wide variety of strategies to maintain or expend its control directly over the de facto state and therefore indirectly over the parent state. Russia tried to get military boots on the ground in all the conflict situations, Russia used coercive economic policies, Russia tried to influence the local politics within the de facto states and tried to adjust the geopolitical policies of the parent states. Russia even recognized the de facto states in order to stop Georgia's geopolitical 'turn to the West'. Based on those policies, one can conclude that Russia's overall goal in the former Soviet area is to strengthen its hegemonic position based on extensive political, economic and security ties, which link the neighbouring countries to Russia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). This ambition includes traditional security and power interests as the stabilisation of its borders and the capability to project its military powers into and beyond the region (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Therefore, the logical conclusion would be that Russia's foreign policies are based only on national interests and realism can explain Russia's policies best. Yet, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia's behaviour was different. In that frozen conflict, Russia's relationship with Armenia played an important role. Even though, Azerbaijan applied a bandwagoning strategy and tried to improve its relationship with Russia, Russia kept supporting Armenia. Using a realism approach this seems inexplicable because Azerbaijan is the stronger and wealthier state. Yet, Russia's shared identity with Armenia on the bases of history religion, and feelings of friendship made sure that Russia kept supporting Armenia and indirectly Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, one can conclude that Russia's policy towards the frozen conflicts can largely be explained by the realism approach, but social constructivism is necessary to an even larger part of Russia's foreign policies towards the frozen conflicts.

Despite that information of step two being crucial, the main goal of this thesis was to solve the empirical puzzle of why Russia's policies towards the frozen conflicts are different from one another while the situations are similar. Based on the empirical data of step 3 of the empirical research, three hypotheses were provisionally rejected. First, the data made clear that the difference cannot be explained by differences in relative power of the parent states, because Russia's policies towards the de facto state that were part of relatively weaker parent states were more elaborate and focused on control. Second, it also became clear that the differences in policies were not caused by the differences in how he de facto states tried to comply to international norms. None of the de facto

states actually complied to the international norms, and yet Russian policy varied a lot and Russia even recognized two de facto states. Added to that, Russia itself also did not follow the international norms set by the OSCE by for example recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia and invading Georgia. Third, it became apparent that the differences in policies can also not be explained by shared collective identities between Russia and the parent states. Russia tried to control de facto states that are part of parent states with whom Russia has strong collective identities, and Russia abstained from controlling a de facto state which is part of a parent state with whom Russia has e very weak collective identity.

There were also two independent variables that according to the gathered data in this thesis can both partly explain the differences in Russia's policies towards similar situations. The first is the geopolitical course of parent states in the form of cooperation and alliances. The gathered data proved that Russia's policies were very much a response on the geopolitical course of the parent states. When Georgia turned to the west, Russia responded by increasing its control policies towards Abkhazia and South-Ossetia in order to draw Georgia back to the Russian sphere of influence. In the case of Moldova this is also true. Moscow used the situation in Transnistria to prevent Moldova from turning to the EU and NATO. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, both states were focused on maintaining and increasing its good relations with Russia and therefore Russia's policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh was relatively moderate and not focused on control. That means that the geopolitical course of the parent state in the form of cooperation and alliances is well able to partly explain the differences in Russia's policies towards the frozen conflicts. The other independent variable that is able to partly explain Russia's foreign policies is the degree to which the de facto state's populations accept Russia's role as regional power. The gathered data proved that Russia provided more support to the de facto states of which the population accepted and approved of Russia's role as regional hegemon.

Because one of the accepted hypotheses is based on the realism approach and the other on the social constructivism approach, it is not possible to conclude which of these theories can explain the differences in Russia's policies towards the frozen conflicts the best. However, it is possible to conclude that the combination of both realism and social constructivism are able to at least partly explain why Russia's policies towards the similar frozen conflict situations are different.

6.1 Evaluation

This research was built upon the assumption that the four cases are similar. Yet, between states as well as de facto states there are of course always characteristics that are different. Each case has a specific context and dynamic. These differences can be problematic because it is possible that they explain the independent variable. In this thesis, that could be the case with for one of these characteristics, namely who the patron state is. Russia is the patron state of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, but Armenia is the patron state of Nagorno-Karabakh. The fact that Russia's policies towards Nagorno-Karabakh are far more moderate could be caused by the fact that Russia's role in this conflict is deviant. If that's the case it would imply that the cases or not similar enough to be able to conduct trustworthy tests of the hypotheses. Despite the possibility of this problem, the case was nevertheless included in the thesis because it met all requirements and if there are four suitable cases, one should include all four cases. Removing the case because it deviated on one point while it was similar on most other points including the most important, would have weakened the thesis. Focusing on one case could also have been an option, but than the possibility

Another possible issue is the fact that the used data was all secondary. Therefore, the research relies on interpretations of Russian actions by other authors. But, the alternative of for example interviewing important Russian government officials, is likely to be not practicable. Another possible problem is that really opening the black box of the aims of certain policies is almost impossible. Underlying motives for certain policies are often not expressed, and even when they are, one can never be sure that that which is stated is really the aim of a policy. Therefore one must always rely on the interpretations of certain policies and what motivated Russia to conduct these policies.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

Whether the findings of this research are generalizable and applicable to other regional power's policies towards frozen conflicts remains to be seen. Therefore, the used hypotheses could be tested on other cases like for example Kosovo, Northern Cyprus and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic republic and the regional power's the play an important role in those territorial conflicts. Another possibility for further research could be using different theories or approaches, to see whether they are also able to explain foreign policies towards frozen conflict. One could for example use the Liberalism approach and test whether pressure from domestic politics or international organisations have influence on the policy conducting of regional power's when it concern frozen conflicts.

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