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# **The Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014**

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## **Declaration**

I, Olga Larsen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature

Date

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## **Abstract**

The Crimean annexation by Russia happened in 2014. It violated the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine as well as established international order between the states. Both domestic and external causes provoked the Crimean annexation. The main causes of the annexation that provoked it on the domestic level were diversity of regions, ethnic diversity, diversity of memories, beliefs and views between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, manipulations around the status of the Russian language, dual-state-building of Ukraine with a special status given to the Crimean Autonomic Republic, and the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol City. The main external causes were geopolitical controversy between the West and Russia, and applying diverse security concepts in a common dialogue between them. The annexation of Crimea is a dispute over geopolitics, not of international law. The thesis also explores how the state can react against the international system in the name of its national interest.

Keywords: The Crimean annexation, Russia, the Black Sea Fleet, NATO and the European Union expansion, Ukraine, the Ukrainian revolution, geopolitical controversy, security, diversity of regions, ethnic diversity of Ukraine.

## Introduction

Crimea is a peninsula in Eastern Europe with a rich history and state connections to different countries during the last several centuries. It is an area with both diverse population and religion, but also with an important geopolitical location with its access to the Black Sea. Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation in February/March 2014. Why did it happen and what are the causes of the Crimean annexation (CA)?

Over the last hundred years, Crimea has been part of four different countries: the Tsarist Russia, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation who annexed it at the end. So, was the CA a reunion of Russian territories with the Russian nation, or was it a clear and violent annexation of a neighbor's territory for purpose of satisfying Russia's own national interests? Several state transformations of Crimea made civilians of Crimea confused. The misunderstanding of what was legal and what was not explains the huge wish of Crimean civilians to participate in the referendum of March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014, which was organized by the Crimean Government with Russian military presence on the peninsula.

This paper will address the research question, *Why did the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 happen?*

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 happened because of both domestic and external causes. The external causes of the Crimean annexation were geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West, and applying diverse security concepts in a common dialogue between them. The domestic causes which also provoked the Crimean annexation were the diversity of regions, the ethnic diversity of Ukraine, diverse views, memories and beliefs of Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine, and manipulations around the status of the Russian language in Ukraine on the eve of the annexation.

Crimea is currently a key issue in the increasing tension between Russia and the West (the EU and NATO member states), as well as an issue of political disagreement between these actors. Ukraine, together with the West, claim that the Russian military invasion of Crimea was an act of aggression against Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity and international order. The CA involved international agreements such as the Budapest memorandum (1994) and the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (1997) (*'Dogovor o drygbe, sotrydnichestve I partnerstve megdy Rossiiskoi Federaciei i Ykrainoi'*), the Treaty between the Russian Federation and Ukraine about the Russian–Ukrainian state border (2003) (*'Dogovor megdy Rossiiskoi Federaciei I Ykrainoi o rossiisko-ykrainskoi gosydarstvennoi granice'*), and so on. On the other side, according to the Russian official statement, Crimea became a part of Russia according to national laws of both Crimea

and Russia. The Russian Federation and Crimea signed an agreement about the Crimean accession to Russia (2014) (*Dogovor o prisoedinenii Kryma k Rossiiskoy Federacii*), which made Crimea a federal subject of Russia in accordance to its national law. The reunion of Crimea with the Russian Federation was named by both governments as an act of reunion of historical territories and the Russian nation “in the name of justice and morality,” in response to the revolution in Kiev at that time (Kondrashov, 2015). To conclude, studying all causes can help to build a complete overview of the Crimean Annexation. Additionally, the goals of studying the CA are:

- ✓ to discover domestic and external causes of the CA;
- ✓ to understand why the state reacts against the system, when it contradicts national core goals and interests;
- ✓ to show that it was not a clear annexation of a neighbor's territory, but a complex phenomenon, which was provoked by external and domestic causes.

The thesis paper includes Abstract, Introduction, Methodology/Background, Main Discussion presented by ‘Causes of the Crimean Annexation by Russia in 2014’, Conclusion and References. The purpose of the work is to study the causes of the CA in order to get a complete view of the CA and to discover and analyze different views on why it happened.

Without threats such as the expansion of NATO and the EU near the state’s border with the Russian Federation, the Ukrainian revolution, and the newly established pro-Western government in Ukraine, Russia would not have responded by the annexing Crimea. For Russia it was important to keep its position in Crimea as well as over the Black Sea. Furthermore, without these domestic causes Crimea would not have supported illegal actions by the Russian Federation on the Peninsula. Ultimately, these factors are interconnected, and without both of them the CA would not have happened in 2014.

The significance of this study develops from discovering both domestic and external causes of the CA. This paper shows how the highlighting of all causes helps to understand why Crimea became *de-facto* Russian. It also presents ideas for potential further research about how to predict such events in the international arena, and how to solve them peacefully if such events have already happened.

In the end, the case of the CA is a good illustration of when a state can break international norms in the name of national core goals and interests. For Russia, it was strategically important to keep its influence and position in Crimea when Ukraine took a pro-Western side. Thus, this paper also illustrates how a state can act against the international system of rules, when it contradicts its national goals and core interests.



## **Methodology**

The Russian Federation violated established international order between the states as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine by annexing Crimea in 2014. There is a close correlation between the external and domestic causes that provoked the Crimean annexation, which made the Crimean annexation a complex issue that requires a complex approach to studying it.

The data collection method of this research was qualitative text analysis (Becker, Bryman & Ferguson, 2012). The Crimean annexation has been thoroughly discussed previously, and text analyses helped to review and to group all causes of the CA. Since Crimea stays *de-jure* a part of Ukraine, the causes presented as domestic and external are relative to Ukraine, not Russia.

The text sampling method was a purposive and strategic choice of books, academic articles, newspapers and speeches (mostly by statesmen). Also analysed were the biggest TV channels and mass media editions of Russia and Ukraine, and academic articles and books which explore the causes of the Crimean annexation.

Studying the causes of the Crimean annexation will help to understand Russia's motives and what provoked Russia to carry out the annexation, as well as to understand the motives of Crimeans who supported the illegal actions of Russia on the Peninsula during the annexation. A complex study of the causes of the CA will also help to predict similar events on the international arena.

## **Background**

The Crimean region was transformed from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1954. This was mostly explained by the territorial link of Crimea to Ukraine. The transition was held without providing a referendum, which would have determined the people's wishes regarding this transition. Later, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has existed as an independent state with Crimea as a part of it, although "Crimea was widely seen as a fracture line for ethnic, regional and even international conflict in the first half of the 1990s" (Sasse, 2002, p. 2).

The Crimean annexation preceded such events as NATO and the European Union expansion on the East, potential membership of Ukraine in those alliances, and the Ukrainian Revolution. The Revolution has split Ukraine into two sides: pro-Russian and pro-Western with diverse views of the Ukrainian future (including Crimea).

Crimea has close historical and cultural ties to Russia, and mostly ethnic Russians live on the Crimean Peninsula. The close ties of Russia and Crimea are exemplified by common

language, values, history, traditions and views. According to Bebler (2015), historically and psychologically Crimea is much closer to Russia than to other Soviet Republic states.

On the eve of the Crimean Annexation it is also relevant to highlight the 'triple transition' (Sasse, 2007) of Crimea. The fact that Crimea floated between Russia and Ukraine made Russia have some claims about Crimea possibly belonging to it. Also, the 'triple transition' 'left a shadow' and made civil Crimeans confused (Sasse, 2007). Thus, due to history, "some of these people are Soviet in the morning, Russian in the afternoon and Ukrainian in the evening" (Szporluk, 1998, p. 317). Transitions made ordinary people lack understanding around the difference between what was legal and illegal in the overtaking of power in Crimea.

Today Crimea is isolated from the whole world, except Russia. International financial services such as VISA and MasterCard do not work there, nor are there international organizations on the Peninsula. There are also no international investigations, except Russian. Economic sanctions against both Crimea and the Russian Federation are still in force, which provoked a financial crisis and the decline of the ruble. Additionally, the Russian Federation was suspended from the Group of Eight (G8) after the annexation of Crimea. In conclusion, today relations are the 'coldest' they have been since the Cold War between Russia and the West.

## **1. External causes of the Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014**

Ukraine, including Crimea, occupies a strategically important space between EU/NATO member states and the Russian Federation with its access to the Black Sea. Suspension of signing the Agreement of Political and Economic Cooperation between Ukraine and the EU by the current Ukrainian government in 2013 provoked mass demonstrations in Kiev and the subsequent overtaking of power by pro-Western political forces in Ukraine. Such a power shift from pro-Russian to pro-Western was not welcomed by Russia, and was declared violent and illegal.

Since Tsarist Russia until today, Crimea has been an important strategic territory due to geopolitics and its position in providing security for Russia. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia kept the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the Crimean Peninsula for security and geopolitical purposes. Russia taking control over Crimea can be explained by external causes such as diverse security perceptions of Russia and the West due to the Ukrainian Crisis (UC), as well as the geopolitical controversy between the West and the Russian Federation. External causes were closely linked to each other.

### **1.2. Diverse security perceptions of Russia and the West**

The first external cause of the Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014 was the diverse security perceptions of Russia and the West. Diverse security perceptions have played a vital role in the CA. By applying only their own perception to an explanation of the UC and the CA, both parties made the dialogue between them not only difficult, but almost impossible. Justifying only their own perception and not paying attention to the another, “each of them also viewed the other’s actions with suspicion by dismissing the other’s concerns and interests” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 281). Rieker & Gjerde (2015) also say that “making a serious effort to understand the other side’s point of view does not mean justifying or accepting that position” (p.1).

According to Sakwa (2015), there are also diverse perceptions and visions of what ‘Europe’ is. Diverse understandings of how to define ‘Europe’ have a close correlation with diverse security perceptions of the conflict around the UC and the CA. The West follows the idea of a “‘Wider Europe’ with the EU at its heart, but increasingly coterminous with the Euro-Atlantic security and political community” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 26). Meanwhile, Russia follows the idea of a ‘Greater Europe’, with “a vision of a continental Europe, stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, that has multiple centers, including Brussels, Moscow and Ankara, but with a common purpose of overcoming the divisions that have traditionally plagued the continent” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 26). Thus, diverse ideas of what ‘Europe’ should be created diverse

perceptions of how to provide security for each nation's regions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Europe started to develop security rules without involving Russia in the decisions (Mankoff, 2009). On the other hand, the new Russia started to develop a security strategy without Europe (Mankoff, 2009). There were some attempts at involving Russia into the process of building "a new European collective security mechanism, which could not function without Russia," but Russia wanted to have partnership on equal positions (Mankoff, 2009, p.165). In addition, after allowing membership for the post-Soviet states in 2004, alliances still had questions "about Russia's identity and role in Europe's security architecture" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 146).

Following the concept of a security community, the West saw providing security through the integration process "as a form of international cooperation" (Rieker & Gjerde, 2015, p.6), and the potential integration of Ukraine into the EU/NATO was also seen as a step forward for providing security in Europe. For Russia, the expansion of the EU/NATO was seen as a threat to Russia's security according to the Russian Security Concept, 2009. Even Yelsin, the first President of the Russian Federation, had spoken about the potential tension between Russia and NATO/EU states after their expansion on the East. Primakov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1996–1998 and the Prime Minister of Russia from 1998–1999, stayed with his idea that expansion of the EU and NATO on the East was "a big mistake, possibly the biggest mistake since the end of the Second World War," and asserted that "the expansion of NATO is not a military problem, it is a psychological one" (Mankoff, 2009, p.166-167). Even those who stayed in the Russian government to cooperate with the West made claims about the risks of the EU/NATO expansion on the East (Mankoff, 2009).

Security plays a vital role for Russia due to its foreign policy. Dealing with post-Soviet states, especially with Ukraine, was always one of the most important issues in the Russian security strategy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia tried to keep control over post-Soviet states in order not to lose its position on the international arena (Mankoff, 2009). The overtaking of power in Kiev during the Ukrainian Revolution and the shift from pro-Russian to pro-Western seemed to pose direct danger to the Russian Federation's security due to the loss of influence and control over their neighbour's country.

Russia "has never welcomed the growth of the NATO" (Sakwa, 2008, p. 257) and also criticized "the EU/NATO-based security system in Europe, arguing against new "lines of division" between nations with a common history" (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 282). Furthermore, Russia argues that the EU and NATO are in very close cooperation and "EU's foreign policy is linked to NATO" (Rieker & Gjerde, 2015, p. 2), and interprets Western foreign policy

towards Ukraine as a threat to Russian security. In addition, “Russia now finds Europe right on its borders of unstable states like Moldova and Ukraine, and continues to consider part of its own security zone” (Mankoff, 2009, p. 155).

In conclusion, providing security is one of the most important issues for the Russian government. The CA can be explained as a way of providing security near the Russian border, as well as over the Peninsula with the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (Bebler, 2015). For the sake of achieving security and protecting their interests on the Peninsula, the Russian government even tried in 2008 to give double citizenship to Crimeans, but the proposal was rejected by the Ukrainian government (Bebler, 2015). Also, in a 2008 NATO–Russia meeting over potential Ukrainian membership, Putin mentioned that said membership could make him absorb Eastern Europe and Crimea in order to keep Russian borders out of NATO control and provide their security and stability (Bebler, 2015). So, after 2008 Crimea became a disputed region, but in 2010 the situation was stabilized again with the newly-elected pro-Russian President of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich (Bebler, 2015). Thus, “Russia’s relations with Yanukovich’s Ukraine should be understood in terms of defending Russia’s security interests and advancing the newly defined system of values” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 291).

## **1.2. Geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West over Ukraine**

Diverse perceptions of how to provide security are closely linked to the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West over Ukraine. Thereby, “geopolitics suggests that geopolitical position is a key determinant of the policies a state pursues, especially in relation to its security and strategy, both at global and regional levels” (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2013, p. 534), and “geopolitics perspective helps to understand and explain international political behavior through geographical variables” (Evans & Newnham 1998, p. 235). A geopolitical controversy between states or a group of states is a clash of opposing geopolitical interests of those states. The West and the Russian Federation were involved in a geopolitical controversy (mostly seen this way by Russia, and later by the West), which ultimately provoked the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Thus, “the new epoch of confrontation” between the West and Russia began due to geopolitics (Karaganov, 2007, p. 23), and it “increased readiness and ability of revitalized Russia to uphold its interests” (Karaganov, 2007, p. 25). There were, on the other hand, some attempts to build relations between Russia and the West on equal terms. Thus, once Russia already followed the idea of cooperation with the West as equal partners, not as the West as major and Russia as minor (Sakwa, 2008).

**Table 1.** Russia’s Ukraine Policy (Tsygankov, 2015).

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>2004–2010.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The West orientation or ‘frozen ties’ between Russia and Ukraine</p>	<p>2004 – the Orange Revolution with the West support and defeat of pro-Russian candidate Yanukovich at the president elections of Ukraine;</p> <p>2004 – Russia saw a danger in Ukraine’s potential NATO membership;</p> <p>2006 – Russia: Ukraine’s and Georgia’s NATO membership can change geopolitical situation in the world;</p> <p>2008 – gas crisis and dispute between Ukraine and Russia;</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>2010–2013.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">‘Limited partnership’ between Russia and Ukraine with attempts to stay buffer zone between the EU/NATO and Russia</p>	<p>2010 – New presidential elections in Ukraine and “an anti-Kremlin government was replaced with Yanukovich that favoured stronger ties with Russia” (p. 284);</p> <p>2011– Russia’s official proposition to join the Eurasian Custom Union as an attempt to keep Ukraine under the Russian influence and control;</p> <p>2011– Ukraine’s attempt to become a buffer-zone between the EU/NATO and Russia;</p> <p>2013 – “The Ukrainian leadership reversed the previous NATO membership course and indicated a willingness to accommodate Russia in strengthening its presence in the Ukrainian economy” (p.284);</p> <p>2013 – “Yanukovych did not sell controlling shares of Naftogas to Gazprom and declined the Customs Union offer” (p.284);</p> <p>October 2013 – “in the hope of making Yanukovych change his mind, Putin went so far as to extend Ukraine another major discount in energy prices and pledged \$15 billion in aid” (p.284);</p> <p>November 2013 – at the EU summit in Vilnius Yanukovych suspend the process of signing an Association Agreement with the</p>

	EU;
<p><i>November 2013–March 2014.</i></p> <p>‘Confrontation’ between Russia and Ukraine because of Ukraine’s West-orientation</p>	<p>November 2013 – the Ukrainian Revolution lead by the pro-Western opposition in the height of the stage. Yanukovich “refused to accept the opposition’s conditions, and also declined to use force to restore the order” (p.285);</p> <p>February 20<sup>th</sup> 2014 – signing Agreement on settlement of political crisis in Ukraine between the current government in Ukraine and the opposition forces with representatives from Germany, Poland and Russia;</p> <p>February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014 – violent overthrow of the current government of Ukraine;</p> <p>End of February 2014 – the Russian military take control over Crimea;</p> <p>February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014 – Crimea and Russia refused to recognize the new government in Kiev and “blamed Western governments for the collapse of the compromise agreement” (p.285);</p> <p>March 16–18 – Referendum in Crimea, Declaration of the Crimean Independence and joining Russia;</p> <p>End of February until president election May 2014 – “institutional vacuum in the country” (p.285);</p>
<p><i>April 2014–present.</i></p> <p>An open conflict between Russia and Ukraine/The West</p>	<p>Sanctions; NATO–Russia Council are temporarily frozen; EU–Russia relations are temporarily frozen; Russia- Ukraine relations are in high tension;</p>

Through the prism of the Russian Foreign policy towards Ukraine (see Table 1), it is possible to observe how the geopolitical controversy regarding Ukraine developed between Russia and the West. In recent years political power in Ukraine has changed from the pro-

Western to the pro-Russian several times, as well as the direction of Ukraine's state course towards Russia or the West. The geopolitical controversy which provoked the annexation of Crimea started with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and finished with the overthrow of the pro-Russian government on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 during the Euromaidan.

Tsygankov (2015) starts his study of Russia's Ukraine policy and what provoked Russia to annex Crimea in 2014 with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. Indeed, the geopolitical controversy between the West and Russia began in 2004, with the controversy of pro-Russian and pro-Western candidates during the presidential vote. When Victor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian candidate, won, it resulted in mass demonstrations against perceived massive corruption during the vote as well as Yanukovich himself as a candidate (Karatnycky, 2005). In the end, the pro-Western candidate Victor Yushchenko became the President of Ukraine and stayed in the position until 2010 (Karatnycky, 2005). As noted in Table 1, being in 'frozen ties' with Ukraine and involved in controversy with the West during these years, Russia warned that inviting Ukraine into the EU and NATO alliances could potentially change the geopolitical situation.

When it came to the new presidential elections in Ukraine in 2010, the pro-Russian government took control over the state this time. Thus, the Russian government has tried several times to keep Ukraine under its sphere of influence and control. According to Tsygankov, Yanukovich seemed to Russia to be a guarantor of "strong ties" with Ukraine (2015, p.284), and Russia's relations towards Ukraine should be seen "in terms of defending Russia's security interests and advancing the newly defined system of values" (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 291). In addition to supporting the pro-Russian government in Ukraine, one of the attempts to by Russia to keep Ukraine under control was an official invitation in 2011 for Ukraine to join the Eurasian Custom Union instead of the partnership with the EU/NATO. Membership of Ukraine in the Eurasian Custom Union was supposed to provide a common custom territory and closer economic, as well as political, ties between Russia and Ukraine. This membership of Ukraine, in confrontation with the EU and NATO alliances, could also secure Russia's national interest in Ukraine (Tsygankov, 2015). Furthermore, "the more the EU presented Ukrainian membership in the organization as a "civilizational" choice, the more Putin and his associates viewed the Eurasian Union as a values-based community" (Tsygankov, 2015, p.291).

A last attempt to get Ukraine on Russia's side was made in October 2013 with an offer of \$15 billion in aid from Russia to Ukraine. In the end, Yanukovich's government was overthrown on February 22<sup>nd</sup> during the Euromaidan, and Russia 'lost' Ukraine to the pro-Western opposition and the West.



As long as Ukraine was “a state on the border between Russia and the West” (Mankoff, 2009, p. 246), it would have special meaning for Russia, due to geopolitics and its position providing security near Russia’s border. Nonetheless, being between Russia and the West, Ukraine tried to keep its position between them and “rather than following the example of Belarus and Kazakhstan, wanted to establish a special format of relationships with the organization that would allow it to continue its integration with the European Union” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 284).

Table 1 also illustrates why the annexation of Crimea did not happen previously, and what provoked Russia to do so in 2013/2014. Therefore, claims about a clear annexation of the neighbour territory become irrelevant. Thus, the annexation of Crimea happened when the dialogue between Ukraine, the West and Russia became impossible.

Without an external threat to Russia such as the expansion of NATO and the EU near the Russian border, the Ukrainian revolution and establishment of a pro-Western government, the Russian Federation would not have responded by annexing Crimea (Mearsheimer, 2014). The annexation of Crimea was not provoked by Russian aggression, rather it was Russia’s response to Western support of the ideas of the Ukrainian Revolution and the pro-Western opposition which then became the new pro-Western government (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The Ukrainian crisis had a close correlation with the geopolitical controversy between the West and the Russian Federation (Mearsheimer, 2014); Ukrainian crisis was a cause of the above-mentioned controversy.

The power shift on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 played a vital role in the Russian government’s decision to take control over Crimea. As long as Ukraine stayed ‘close’ to Russia with a pro-Russian president and gas interdependence, Russia was sure of its geopolitical position. Russia’s decision to take control of Crimea seemed like a last attempt to keep its influence over part of the post-Soviet space. As previously noted, Ukraine was already a territory under Russian interest, and “the collapse of pro-Russian government was the last straw” (Tsygankov, 2015, p.281).

As long as Russia keeps its focus on its national state interest in relations with other states (Sakwa, 2008 & Tsygankov, 2015), the West “may not like Moscow’s position, but it should understand the logic behind it” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 3). By annexing Crimea, Putin defended “independence and sovereignty in spiritual, ideological and foreign policy spheres as an integral part of our national character” (Putin, 2013). According to Russia’s view, the EU/NATO Partnership, which was proposed to Ukraine, “was a Trojan horse for getting them into NATO” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 290).

As noted, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia saw the expansion of the EU/NATO as a threat to its security interests (Tsygankov, 2015). Thus, according to Paragraph 17 of the Russia's Security Concept, "*the determining factor in relations with NATO is unacceptable for the Russian plans of promotion of the alliance's military infrastructure to its borders and attempts to impart global functions, which are contrary to international law*" (Putin, 2009). According to the President of the Russian Federation's claim in 2001, "*Russia do not consider NATO an enemy organization or view its existence as a tragedy, although we see no need for it. It was born as the antipode to the Warsaw Pact, as the antipode to the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. Now there is no Warsaw Pact, no Soviet Union, but NATO exists and is growing*" (Sakwa 2008, p. 257).

On the other hand, NATO was created in opposition to the Soviet Union, for defending their member-states from the "*Soviet shadow across Europe*" and providing "*individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law determined, and to stand together to safeguard their security*" (Rasmussen, 2014). Today several post-Soviet states are members of the EU/NATO, as well as all members of the the Warsaw Pact except Russia (Mankoff, 2009). Putin himself admitted Russian "geopolitical rationale for the annexation of Crimea," because of the possibility of "NATO's presence in close proximity to Russia's Southern borders, directly in front of the Russian house, on Russia's historic territories" (Bebler, 2015, p. 24). Also, a month after the annexation of Crimea, Putin said on 'The Direct Line' on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014:

We do have to follow the reality, and the reality is that NATO is expanding. NATO promised that they will not expand to the East after the fall of the Berlin Wall... Otherwise, they started to expand by taking control over our allies of the Warsaw Agreement and then over the post-Soviet Balkan states. I asked many times what was the sense of this? Did they think that someone could attack them? In this case, it is more than enough to make a deal about help (including military) for guaranteeing the security of these states. The answer was that it is not our case, and that people and countries have the right to choose how to handle their security. Yes, this is true. But it is also true, that they get closer and closer to our border and we get more questions. We have to do something back. We have to act!... By the way, our decision about Crimea was also made by such concerns. The first and the most important, of course, was to support Crimeans, but also the idea that Ukraine one day will become one day a member of NATO is not acceptable for us... And one day NATO military ships will base on the Russian city of military glory, Sevastopol. If NATO could come to Crimea, they could

create military installations against us. For us it has also a geopolitical meaning. Russia could have just a small part of the Black Sea, 450-600 km. For us this is very important region in the world. We had to act according to the situation. This is not a part of their defence, this is an attack. But still they say that above expansion is not against Russia. (Putin, 2014)

Thus, Putin confirmed the geopolitical meaning of the annexation of Crimea. The Russian government had seen the annexation of Crimea as a response to the new pro-Western government in Ukraine and their idea to continue negotiations about partnership with the EU/NATO during the geopolitical controversy between the West and Russia.

In opposition to Russian claims about NATO's promise to not grow to the East near the Russian border, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the ex-head of the Ministry of International affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1974–1992, said that there were no discussions around the issue (Bindenagel, 2014). Genscher claimed that at that time there were only discussions about East Germany, and that “This was never the subject of negotiations, and most certainly not a negotiation result” (Bindenagel, 2014). A statement by Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the President of the Soviet Union, followed the same idea: “Topic of ‘NATO expansion’ was not discussed...not brought up in those years” (Bindenagel, 2014). In the end, there is no data to show supportive evidence about NATO's promise to not expand on the East.

The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula during the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West is a good illustration of an instance where a state involved international norms in the name of protecting its own core national interests. By annexing Crimea, Russia broke several bilateral agreements which were signed with Ukraine, the Constitution of Ukraine, as well as the Budapest memorandum (1994). The Budapest memorandum was seen as a main guarantor of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity for giving up nuclear weapons left by the Soviet Union (Marxsen, 2014). By signing this agreement, Russia promised to “respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine” (Marxsen, 2014, p. 370). This agreement also provided assistance to Ukraine “in case of an aggression against Ukraine” (Marxsen, 2014 p. 370). When it came to protecting the interests of Russia, which were linked to Ukraine, Russia did not respond to aggression against Ukraine, but became an aggressor itself.

The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 could be seen as a warning sign about Russia's intention to protect its borders from the EU and NATO (Bebler, 2015). For many years Russia

had opposed the idea of Ukraine one day becoming a member of alliances, but “this position of Russia was regularly ignored” (Bebler, 2015, p. 23) Thus, according to Putin (2016), there had been attempts to warn the West about the consequences of Ukraine’s membership in these alliances:

Does it say that NATO have to give its membership to everyone? No. Need criteria and necessary conditions. If they could just wish to understand the situation, they could do it. But they did not. They wanted to reign. Just seat on the throne and reign. And what now? Now we are discussing the crisis. (Putin, 2016)

As previously highlighted, the idea of Crimea possibly belonging to the West was unacceptable for Russia due to its national interest, and “Russian elites never stopped believing that the Near Border was for Moscow a zone of special interest and responsibility” (Mankoff, 2009, p.294). Crimea has been an important geographical region for Russia since the Soviet times due to its access to the Black Sea and the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s position on the Peninsula (Sasse, 2007). Such geopolitical ambitions to keep control over the Crimean Peninsula come from the common past of Russia with the Soviet Union. So, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia kept control over the Peninsula due to its position on the Black Sea and by keeping the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet there (Mankoff, 2009). Russia has always shown worry around the expansion of alliances on the post-Soviet space, because of the fact that “NATO members began discussing the possibility of placing significant military assets on the territory of new states” (Mankoff, 2009, p. 171). Additionally, as long as there is controversy over political power in relation to the geographic space between the West and Russia, the territory of the Black Sea will have special meaning for Russia, due to the common access and control of states such as Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, all members of NATO.

By signing several agreements with Ukraine about the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory, Russia showed interest in keeping military bases on this peninsula and meant to have control over it. During the geopolitical controversy Russia could not risk its military base in Crimea while Ukraine was having negotiations about potential cooperation with the EU and NATO. Put simply, giving up its military position on the Crimean Peninsula for the sake of NATO was unacceptable to the Russian government. If Ukraine were to one day become a member of NATO, it would be hard to imagine there being two opposing military forces in one territory.

As previously noted, having control over the Black Sea always held a lot of meaning for Russia, and especially during the controversy over Ukraine. As long as NATO and the EU

also had access to the Black Sea, it was important for Russia to keep its position in Crimea in order to keep the balance on the Black Sea that had been maintained between the two forces before. The Russian Black Sea Fleet here played the role of “the primary strategic source of security” (Cross, 2015, p. 164). The desire to keep free access to the Black Sea via Crimea during the geopolitical controversy, as well as to keep a military base in Sevastopol City, provoked the annexation of this territory. Throughout history “the Black Sea has always served as a critical center for the mix of commerce and cultures of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and has been prone to regional conflict involving leading external powers” (Cross, 2015, p. 164).

Mearsheimer (2014) argues that it is wrong to blame only Russia for the military capture of the Peninsula. The CA can be also explained as an offensive reaction in the geopolitical controversy against losing influence on the post-Soviet area of Crimea, which has important meaning for the Russian Federation. According to Mearsheimer, Russia had “opposed the expansion of NATO and the EU since the collapse of the Soviet Union and it was unacceptable to turn its important neighbour into a Western bastion” (2014, p.1). Mearsheimer sees the annexation of Crimea as a clear protection of Russia’s core national interests in the geopolitical controversy with the West (2014). By playing with the national interests of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space, the West provoked Russia to annex Crimea, and the idea “of Ukraine’s membership in the alliance is a huge mistake” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 2).

According to NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, “Crimea has been annexed—borders have been changed by use of force—for the first time since the Second World War. And we see that Russia is destabilizing Ukraine” (Stoltenberg, 2015). NATO made no excuses for Russia intervening in a neighbour’s state and annexing part of its territory. According to Cross (2015), before the annexation of Crimea NATO saw Russia as a partner in keeping security for both of them. Thus, according to the NATO Strategic Concept of 2010, “NATO wanted to see a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia” and “NATO poses no threat to Russia,” and “a strong and constructive partnership based on mutual confidence, transparency, and predictability can best serve our security” (p. 156). After the CA, NATO and the EU member-states instated sanctions against Russia and Crimea, and the relationship between both parties was suspended.

NATO and the EU alliance reject the idea of the geopolitical controversy with Russia, and strongly claim that “Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine is in blatant breach of its international commitments and it is a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Dews, 2014). On April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, the foreign ministers of NATO voted for recognition

of the annexation of Crimea as illegal (Bebler, 2015). The CA has caused a ‘freezing’ of the Russia–NATO Council (Bebler, 2015).

While discussing the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West, it is also important to look at the role of Ukraine in this dispute. The controversy put Ukraine in a tricky situation that necessitated a choice between Russia or the West (Mearsheimer, 2014). Russia’s actions in Ukraine appeared as only an act of aggression against Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, without any reference to the geopolitical controversy between the two nations. Thus, for Ukrainian society, the act of Russian aggression was not accepted, and pushed Ukraine to continue negotiations about the EU/NATO membership as a measure of prevention against such aggression (Dunnet, 2014). The idea of defending their security interest by destroying it was not welcomed. According to the Ukraine Crisis Media Center, “Putin interests are not interests of Russia” and “Putin’s annexation of Crimea was not according to Russia’s actual security interests,” as it was presented by the Russian side (Dunnett, 2014, p.1). In the end, Ukraine stayed away from the idea of the controversy and maintains that “the CA has little to do with NATO or the West and Mearsheimer misjudge the West role on crisis” (Dunnet, 2014, p. 2).

Unfortunately, Ukraine has played the role of the victim in this geopolitical controversy. The controversy did not cover the interests of Ukraine as a sovereign and independent state; Ukraine would only get the advantages of being in a buffer zone position between the West and Russia as long it was a strategically very important state in Europe for both sides. Another question is, ‘Does Ukraine have the option to chose to remain a buffer zone and be neutral to the politics of the West and Russia?’ Maybe it would have been better to stay neutral and have contacts with both parties in order to prevent the geopolitical controversy over Ukraine. However, Ukraine was not ready to do so for many reasons, one of them being Russian control over many areas in Ukraine. Regardless, Ukraine showed which side it preferred and which way Ukraine would develop by signing the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement on March 21<sup>st</sup> and June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The Association Agreement is still under the EU-states ratification process. This Agreement also outlines the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the members.

As noted, after several attempts to keep Ukraine under its influence, the annexation of Crimea was the last thing Russia could do to avoid being ‘defeated’ by the West in Ukraine. Thus, according to Tsygankov, “the loss of influence in Ukraine would unquestionably mean a major geopolitical defeat for the Kremlin, and Putin is signalling to the outside world that

Russia remains capable of defending its position even if this leads to undermining Ukrainian statehood” (2015, p. 298).

On their side, the West could also predict that signing the agreement about the association with Ukraine might provoke controversy between them and Russia, but it could have been possible to agree about Ukraine. As long as “Russia and Ukraine share a long geographic border and Slavic culture, as well as having closely interdependent economies” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 281), it was wrong to start negotiations about their partnership with Ukraine without keeping in mind Russia’s interests in Ukraine. According to the Kiev Center of Political and Conflict Studies (2013), Ukraine was supposed to do major research to find out what kind of consequences Ukraine might suffer before signing the above-mentioned agreement. According to them, suspending signing of the agreement in 2013 was the right choice, because of Ukraine’s need to adapt its economy—which had been in close connection with Russia for such a long time—for this agreement.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the West provided sanctions for both Crimea and Russia and suspended EU/NATO–Russia relations. The division of Russia’s policy in Ukraine regarding the geopolitical controversy into four stages (see Table 1) showed how the relationships between the parties were compounded step by step, not suddenly.

The geopolitical controversy over Ukraine, which then provoked the annexation of Crimea, put other countries that were not involved in the controversy in an awkward situation. For these countries, cooperating with both Russia and the EU and NATO states became more difficult (e.g. BRICS). The majority of the United Nations’ members recognized the annexation of Crimea, as well as the illegal referendum in Crimea on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

In the end, Tsygankov was absolutely right in saying that “establishment of common rules of behaviour with respect to Ukraine and other states in Eurasia has been long overdue; and had Russia and the West agreed on such rules, the Euromaidan Revolution, the Russia–Ukraine confrontation, and the violence in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine might have been avoided” (2015 p. 298).

## **2. Domestic causes of the Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014**

Studying domestic causes is important to understand the complex explanation of the CA. Understanding how peace can be achieved and what provoked the conflict is possible by explaining the causes of the conflict (Waltz, n. d.). As highlighted before, there were two levels of causes, named as external and domestic, and both of them provoked the CA in the year 2014. Domestic causes are indirect and because of them, Crimeans supported Russia during her military invasion and the annexation of the Peninsula. This meant that the Crimean annexation was not a clear grab of a neighbour's territory, but an event where civilians supported the illegal actions of the other state.

Domestic causes of the CA on the interstate level were linked to each other as well. There was also a close connection arising across diverse regions with diverse ethnicities, languages, memories and beliefs (Sasse, 2007), diverse political views, and views of potential state development and cooperation (Cadier, 2014). Another domestic cause, which came from previous causes and in the end provoked the annexation, was an ethnic conflict between Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine, which made Crimeans "to look at the Russian direction" during the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014 (Kondrashov, 2015). The Russian Federation would not had support from Crimeans during the annexation without these domestic causes and the ethnic conflict in the state.

A legal dispute between Ukraine and Russia over Crimea, as well as gaps around the status of Crimea and the unclear right of Crimean self-determination, are also domestic causes of the annexation. For instance, Sergey Aksenov, the Prime Minister of Crimea, claimed that using the referendum as an instrument of the national will of Crimeans and as an instrument of the self-determination was legal (Anonymous, 2014). Such claims also made Crimeans confused. The unclear procedure of the self-determination made people to think that there was not an annexation, but that it was the Crimean's people own decision about the Crimean future.

### **2.1. Diversity of regions**

*"Domestically, the disparities between the different territorial components – their ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio- economic cleavages, historical memories and different political and foreign policy orientations – make Ukraine's single most important characteristic its construction as a state of regions".*

(Sasse, 2001, p. 69)

Diversity of regions in Ukraine presents the first domestic case of the Crimean annexation in 2014. Here diversity includes "different historical memories, traditions, languages, various ethnic, religious groups" (Sasse, 2001, p. 69) and these conditions "defining



Ukraine as a ‘state of regions’ (Sasse, 2007, p.1). After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine became an independent country – a ‘fabricated territory’ with the last integrated ‘piece’ into it, the Crimean region defined in 1954 (Sasse, 2007). Thus history ‘built’ as a unitary state as Ukraine, the most diverse republic of all post-Soviet Republics (Sasse, 2001). For example, diverse regions of Ukraine such as Zakarpatia, Crimea and Donbass have different historical and traditional approaches, as well as different views for their future because of a long history of difference between each other. However, the diversity of the region was not so obvious until the Euromaidan in 2013-2014. During the Euromaidan Ukraine was split on several points as Crimea, Eastern and Western Ukraine showed diverse points of view about to the potential state development. So, Ukraine was not a presenter of one united territory, and such diversity of regions was a direct route to conflict. It was only a question of time, when the different nationalities would stand for their interests and beliefs. Of course, this struggle combined with the Russian military invasion of Crimea.

Crimea had been a potential centre of instability in Ukraine because of the desire to be reunited with Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Sasse, 2007). Assignment of the autonomous status of the Crimean region in 1996 was an act to protect the state from potential national conflicts around the diversity between the regions and the population both in Ukraine and on the Crimean Peninsula (Sasse, 2007). There were several attempts to keep this region under control and keep it united with the rest of Ukraine on a different level of self-determination than other oblast<sup>1</sup> in Ukraine.

## **2.2. Ethnic diversity of Ukraine**

According to the Waltz’s ‘First Image’ (n. d.), the primary cause of the conflict is a human behaviour. In this case, the behaviour of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine, and the diversity between them, were causes of the Crimean annexation. Ethnic diversity between them provoked the CA in 2014. According to Waltz (n. d., p. 98) “other causes are secondary and have to be interpreted in the light of this first cause.” There were many other causes of the CA on the domestic level, but the main cause was the ethnic diversity behaviour of Russians and Ukrainians during the conflict.

The ethnic diversity of Ukraine comes from the diversity of the region and represents the next domestic cause of the CA. A report from Pew Research Center (2014) proves that ethnic diversity between Ukrainians and Russians has place to be in Ukraine. According to Bremmer (1994, p. 265), “if Western Ukraine could never become Russian, Crimea - at least in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Oblast’ means district in Ukrainian

the eyes of the Russians themselves – had never become Ukrainian.” Sasse’s ‘State of Regions’ (2001) presents the idea that the Crimean annexation could have been provoked because of diverse ethnicity, which is closely connected to diverse views and interests. Ethnic diversity built the ‘wall’ between Russians and Ukrainians before the military invasion by Russia into the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014.

Crimea has a long cultural and historical connection to the Russian Federation. Crimea stayed pro-Russian even after the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 (Salushev, 2014). Ethnic Russians in Crimea kept the Russian history, language and traditions on the peninsula, and maintained a strong sense of ‘Rodina’<sup>2</sup> to the Russian Federation (Bremmer, 1996). After several attempts of the Ukrainization of Crimea, Salushev (2014) claims it was not a surprise that ethnic Russians supported Russian actions on the peninsula in 2014. Thus, in the name of keeping Russian traditions, language and history, Russian actions in Crimea in 2014 received active support from the Russian population of Crimea.

The biggest national group of Crimea is Russian, while the biggest national group of Ukraine is Ukrainian. According to Svetlana Nikitina, the head of the Federal Statistics Service of the Population and Health Statistics Department, there were 2.3 million people living in the Crimean Federal Okryg<sup>3</sup> in 2016, and the biggest national group – 1.49 million people, or 68 % – are ethnic Russian, and 344,500 people (15,7%) are Ukrainians (Biyatov, 2015). The census states that there are 37.5 million (77,82 %) Ukrainians, and that there are 8.3 million Russians, only 17.28 % in Ukraine (The State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001). Such a difference in the population of Crimea versus the rest of Ukraine, could have provoked conflict directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it did not (Sasse, 2007). It did, however, happen during the critical period of Ukrainian history named the Euromaidan.

The ethnic conflict between Russians and Ukrainians had a latent character before the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014. According to the Pew Research Center, “73% of Ukrainians say ethnic conflict is a big problem in their country, including 40% who say it is a very big problem” (2014, p. 10). Ethnic diversity had become a “binary opposition between Russians and Ukrainians” (Hughes & Sasse, 2002, p. 70) and tensions between them were blurred until the Euromaidan. In ‘*The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*’, Sasse (2007) examined how and why such ethnic diversity could provoke a conflict between these nations in the future. Scientists predicted the transformation of the Crimean region into the Russian

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Motherland’ in Russian

<sup>3</sup> ‘District’ in Russian

Federation after the fall of the Soviet Union because of close historical and cultural connections, and because of the importance for Russia to have this region under control (Sasse, 2007).

### **2.3. Diverse views of Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine**

The ‘hot spot’ of the confrontation between Ukrainians and Crimean Russians occurred during the Euromaidan due to diverse views. Both groups had diverse views about the potential cooperation of Ukraine, which included Crimea at that time. The key idea of the Ukrainian Revolution was to continue negotiations with the EU and NATO (Pridham, 2014), while Crimea supported the idea of cooperation with Russia and membership in the Eurasian Custom Union (Kondrashov, 2015). Furthermore, the new ‘pro-Western’ government of Ukraine (after overtaking power in Kiev on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014) continued dialogue with the EU and NATO about Ukraine’s potential cooperation. The idea was unacceptable for Crimea as a pro-Russian region. At that time, ethnic Russians in Crimea and the Crimean Government strongly supported stopping dialogue with the EU and continuing to cooperate with the Russian Federation as before (Sevastopol, 2013). So, diverse views provoked Crimea to act in own interests, but also with support from the Russian Federation.

Crimea decided to stop cooperating with the Ukrainian Government on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2014 because of diverse political and economic views, and because the Crimean Government did not recognize the overtaking of power, which happened in Kiev on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 as legal (Sevastopol, 2013). Russians in Crimea were afraid of the new regime in Ukraine and its new priorities (Sevastopol, 2013). During this period, the Crimean and Ukrainian governments did not come to any agreement about common development of Ukraine and Crimea as one state.

There is a correlation between the two diverse nationalities and two diverse views of Crimean Russians and Ukrainians. Regarding the political belonging of Crimea to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Pew Research Center points out that “most Ukrainians have soured on Russia, with many saying Russia is having a negative influence in their country and that it is more important for Ukraine to have strong ties with the European Union” (2014, p. 14). In addition, “not including Crimea, a plurality of Ukrainians (43%) say it is more important to have strong ties with the EU instead of Russia” (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 14).

## Views about Russia and EU in Ukraine (including Crimea)

**Table 2.** % response to the survey question, “What kind of influence is \_\_ having on Ukraine (including Crimea)?” Data compiled from Pew Research Center Report (2014, p. 16).

	Good Influence	Bad Influence	Neither	Don't know
<b>The European Union</b>				
Western Ukraine	74	10	11	5
Crimea	3	89	7	1
<b>Russia</b>				
Western Ukraine	8	87	4	2
Crimea	92	3	4	1

According to a survey on the topic, there are diverse views on which state has a better influence on Ukraine (including Crimea) (see Table 2). Most of the population from Western Ukraine (74%) claim that the European Union has a good influence, while most of the Crimeans (89%) stay that the European Union has a bad influence on Ukraine (including Crimea) (Pew Research Center Report, 2014). On the other side, Russia has a bad influence on Ukraine according to most respondents from Western Ukraine (87 %), while most Crimeans (92 %) agree with the idea the Russian Federation has a good influence on it (Pew Research Center Report, 2014). To sum up, these diverse views of different regions in Ukraine played a significant role during the Euromaidan and then during the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Yanukovich, as a pro-Russian president of Ukraine, has been supported by Russians in Crimea, because of their common idea of a close economic and political cooperation with the Russian Federation (Sasse, 2007). Yanukovich's presidency in Ukraine was a guarantor of a close relationship with Russia. After the fall of his regime in the February 2014, Crimea refused to be controlled by Kiev with its illegal government by public and government opinion of Crimea. Previous votes in Ukraine showed how strong the Crimean pro-Russian position was. Signing an agreement with the EU meant that Ukraine would go out from under Russian influence, which Crimeans did not want.

By all means, Ukraine should follow the interests of its state, but it is also important to follow the interests of all its regions, but not just a part of them. And when it came to such strategic decisions as cooperation with the EU and NATO (i.e., with the West) or with the Eurasian Custom Union (i.e., with the Russian Federation), Ukraine was split in two again. For example, the presidential elections in 2004 had the same problem of the dual views of Eastern and Western Ukraine (Lenov, 2009). Such previous experience could have helped the nation to

find a common view that would follow the interests both of Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine (including Crimea), but it did not happen.

To conclude, western and central parts of Ukraine broke all ties to Russia by identifying themselves as a pro-Western region. This decision, which kept the course of integration with the European Union and signing the Economic and Political Agreement (The European Union, 2014), while Crimea stayed with its pro-Russian position, seemed unsuccessful for the whole country (Krotov, 2011). Ukraine, as a ‘state of regions,’ should have been familiar with the Russian nationality opinion, since Russians are the second largest nationality in Ukraine (Sasse, 2001). Furthermore, the Ukrainian Government did not hold a state referendum, which could have determined a political and economic course for Ukraine (Larsen, 2015). So, Ukraine had been ‘floating’ between the European Union and the Russian Federation since the Independence in 1991 (Anonymous, 2013), and “Ukraine with diverse regions and views had to find a peaceful compromise even before the Euromaidan” (Larsen, 2015, p. 5).

#### **2.4. Diverse memories and beliefs of Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine**

There are different memories and beliefs (symbols) of the ordinary population in Ukraine and Crimea. These memories are diverse because of previous state affiliations of Crimea and then Ukraine. Diverse memories and beliefs split Ukraine in two, and also provoked the CA on the domestic level.

While “symbols combine suggestive, emotional and political power” (Sasse, 2007, p.36), Crimea is a strong pro-Russian region due to common memories and symbols, especially from the World War II (WWII) times. The role and victory of Soviets in WWII are some of the most significant memories for Russians in Crimea. Such memories are vital for Crimeans as well as for all Russians to keep their history, and to remember their heroes and losses after WWII. On the other side, it is important for Ukraine to revive its own history without the Russian influence.

Perceptions of Stalin and Lenin are an example of the diversity between the beliefs of Ukrainians and Russians: in Russian history they are legendary people, but in Ukraine they are seen as enemies who destroyed Ukraine as an independent state and provided a communist model of state development. The new regime in Ukraine since 2014 proclaimed Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich, leaders of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Marples, 2006), as national heroes, while for Russians they are enemies who are responsible for crimes against the Soviet Army during WWII (Maksimenko, 2014). On the other hand, “Kiev presented the Stalin-organized mass starvation of Ukrainian peasants (known as Holodomor) not as a policy that

aimed to break those resisting Soviet collectivization, but as a genocide against Ukrainians as a nation” (Tsygankov, 2015, p. 289).

Diverse memories made people diverse in their understanding of who is a hero and who is an enemy. For Crimea, which was a part of the Russian Soviet Republic during WWII, Stepan Bandera will always be an enemy. Therefore, proclaiming him as a national hero was unacceptable for Crimea. To sum up, diverse histories, memories and symbols made people perceive their nation differently, which provoked the CA in 2014.

### **2.5. Manipulations around the status of Russian language in Ukraine (including Crimea)**

Before the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 there were manipulations around the regional status of Russian language in several regions of Ukraine including Crimea. Such manipulations also provoked the CA on the domestic level. According to Sasse (2001), “language is the predominant factor in Ukrainian politics and consists of two mutually exclusive categories” (p.71), and “language use has often been equated with the ethnic cleavage between Russians and Ukrainians” (p.73). In some regions such as Crimea, Odessa and Doneck oblast’ Russian language had an official regional status in 2014 (Salushev, 2014). According to the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, “an absolute majority of the Crimean population (97 %) uses Russian as a main language” (Russia Today, 2014b). After Euromaidan in 2014, the Ukrainian government cancelled the law, which gave Russian language and several other languages regional statuses (Informatsiyne upravlinnya aparata Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014). Such action by the Ukrainian government made it possible for the Russian government to start its company around defence of the status of Russian language in Crimea and ethnic Russians as minority in Ukraine.

There are different opinions in Western part Ukraine and Crimea about the status of Russian language (Pew Research Center, 2014). Whether or not to recognize equal positions for Russian and Ukrainian languages has been an open question in Ukraine for a long time. Thus, 66% of the population of Western Ukraine claim that Ukrainian has to be the only state-recognized language, while 74% of Crimeans think that the status should include both Russian and Ukrainian (Pew Research Center, 2014). Russian-only speakers in Ukraine have always held the position that both Ukrainian and Russian languages should have equal status, due to the common history of Russia and Ukraine during the Soviet times (Pew Research Center, 2014). After all, “many ethnic Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians in Crimea interpreted this ill-conceived law as a grim harbinger of what was to come in the future” (Salushev, 2014 p. 42). For Crimeans it was important to keep at least regional status of the Russian language

on the peninsula and to continue to speak in their native language; therefore, Russian action in Crimea was supported by ethnic Russians in Crimea.

To add, in opinion of Russians in Crimea the Ukrainian Government started to reform country from a wrong question. Ethnic Russians as a minority in Ukraine were afraid for their rights in Ukraine in the future with such active pro-western position of the Ukrainian Government. Russians as a majority nation of Crimea with close ties to the Russian Federation started active support of the Russian Government during the Crimean annexation in 2014 (Salushev, 2014).

## **2.6. The internal structure of Ukraine**

In accordance with Waltz's the Second Image 'International Conflict and the Internal Structure of States' (n. d., p. 97), there is a close correlation between the conflict over Crimea in 2014 and the internal structure of Ukraine. An inter-state system can prevent or provoke conflicts, such as what happened over the Crimean Peninsula. In this case, a weak state-building process of Ukraine as a unitary state provoked the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Waltz stays that human behaviour is a main cause of conflict, which here refers to the ethnic diversity of nations in Ukraine and their diverse views.

As noted, there are several domestic causes in Ukraine which together provoked the CA, and dispute around the formation of the Ukrainian government is also one of them. In many regions' opinion, Ukraine should be a federation for keeping the diverse regions and nations of Ukraine united (Sasse, 2007). In this case, a federation would give more self-determination to the different regions of Ukraine, and it means that even with previous questions about the status of the Russian language, its cancellation and manipulation could never come true.

Ukraine was a unified state, and "Ukrainians widely agree that their country should remain a single, unified state" (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 8). While on the other side, "Crimea is a clear exception" (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 8) with its status of autonomy, own government, and constitution. Ukraine has existed as an independent state since 1991 and the Crimean region was transformed into a 'new' state, the last one being formed in 1954 (Sasse, 2001). In addition, "the fact that Crimea remains the only region in Ukraine with a territorial autonomy status suggests that this asymmetric institutional arrangement must have been a significant factor of conflict-prevention" (Sasse, 2002, p. 2).

Federation as a form of territorial formation could help Ukraine to take into account the opinion of every region. For Ukraine, it is difficult to operate as a unified state by following only one view without acknowledging the others. Thus, viewing the central and western parts of Ukraine as in potential cooperation with the EU and NATO made Crimea *de-facto* Russian

as well.

A geographical and political centralization of power in Ukraine with the exception of the Crimean Autonomic Republic was already a mistake of the Ukrainian government in the state-building process. Thus, “the inherent tension between centralization and decentralization was inscribed in the constitution” (Sasse, 2001, p. 70) and the territorial composition of Ukraine with the Autonomic Republic made Ukraine *de-facto* a decentralized state. By giving autonomous status to the Crimean region in 1996, Ukraine tried to ‘keep’ Crimea in Ukraine (Sasse, 2001). “The dual state-building model” (Sasse, 2002, p. 2) was made to prevent a potential conflict around the formation of the Ukrainian government and the ethnic diversity of Ukrainians on the mainland and Russians on the Crimean Peninsula (Sasse, 2001). In conclusion, the choice of Ukraine to be a unified, centralized state (not a federation) in 1991 also provoke the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the Russian Federation because of the diversity of the Crimean region compared to other regions of Ukraine.

### **2.7. The status of the Crimean Autonomous Republic**

The status of Crimea as an Autonomous Republic with a special status for Sevastopol City also provoked the annexation of Crimea on the domestic level. Thus, “Crimea is a good case for the comparative study of conflict management and the role of institutions, and of autonomy arrangements in particular” (Sasse, 2002, p. 2). As highlighted before, the institutional arrangement of giving Crimea autonomous status and the possibility to have their own constitution was made to prevent a potential conflict over the Crimean Peninsula (Sasse, 2002), but at the same time such separateness from other regions of Ukraine provoked the annexation of the Peninsula. In addition, the CA happened because of the unclear legal designation of the autonomous rights of Crimea and Sevastopol.

The Crimean Republic had a president and a Constitutional Court until 1996. Then, Crimea got autonomous status because of an OSCE recommendation to prevent violent conflict at the time when Ukraine was promoted to be a member of the Council of Europe (Belitser, 2000). The status of Crimea was always “emerged as key issues both in domestic and international politics” (Sasse, 2001, p.73). So, “the political process behind the establishment of Crimean autonomy has been far more significant for conflict prevention than the actual institutional outcome which is politically weak, albeit symbolically significant” (Sasse, 2002, p. 1).

### **2.8. The Sevastopol City with the Russian Black Sea Fleet presence**

Along with the special status of Sevastopol, the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea at the moment of the CA also provoked the easy over-taking of power by the Russian



Federation in 2014. According to the Kharkiv Pact (or Kharkiv Accords) between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, both parties agreed that from 21 April 2010 until 2042 the presence of the Russian Military's Black Sea Fleet was admitted on Crimean Peninsula naval facilities (*Soglashenie megdy Ykrainoi i Rossiiskoi Federaciei po voprosam prebivaniya Chernomorskogo Flota Rossiiskoi Federacii na territorii Ykraiini*) (Verkhovna Rada, 2010). Also included in the Kharkiv Pact (which refers to the agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the status and conditions of the Russian Federation Black Sea Fleet's stay on Ukrainian territory, drafted 28 May 1997 and in force since 24 March, 1999) (*Soglashenie megdy Rossiiskoi Federaciei i Ykrainoi o statyse i ysloviyah prebivaniya Chernomorskogo Flota Rossiiskoi Federacii na territorii Ykraiini*) was an agreement by both parties regarding the total number of military staff allowed on the Peninsula at the same time (Chernomirdin & Lazarenko, 1999). Paragraph 4 of this agreement refers to Appendix 2 of the agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on parameters of division of the Black Fleet from May 28, 1997 (*Prilogenie 2 k Soglasheniy megdy Rossiiskoi Federaciei i Ykrainoi o parametrah pazdela Chernomorskogo Flota*), which says that Russia could have under 25,000 military personnel on peninsula at the same time at the moment of the accession/annexation, providing the referendum (Federal Assembly, 1997). In an interview on the subject, Putin said that there were no more than 25,000 military forces on the peninsula at the moment of the Crimean accession to the Russian Federation (Kondrashov, 2015). So, according to the agreements between both parties, Russia did not break the rules *de-jure*, but Russia did use its already present military staff for taking full control over the Peninsula.

Additionally, according to Svetlana Nikitina, the Head of Federal Population and Health Statistics Service of the Federal Department of Statistics, "the biggest population group of Crimea is Russian (65%) and there are 3031 or 81% Russians living currently in Sevastopol" (Biyatov, 2015). So, the ethnic composition of Sevastopol also drove this region to support Russia during the time of the annexation.

## **2.9. Crimean status referendum**

Previous parts of this paper have mentioned that "the Euromaidan tensed the situation in Ukraine to its limit" (Anonymous, 2015b). Thus, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2013, the Crimean Parliament sent a proposal asking to stabilize the situation and the public order in Ukraine and if needed to declare a state of emergency: "*Position of everyone has to be heard. Otherwise, it will look like their own opinion have only people, who are in Kiev currently. The Government has to not allow the anti constitutional way of revenge of bankrupt political forces professing an extreme nationalism in Ukraine. They are scoffing at the sacred feelings of the veterans of*

*the Great Patriotic War*” (Anonymous, 2015b). After several attempts at warning Kiev and public demonstrations in Simferopol, Sevastopol and other cities in Crimea, the Crimean government decided to stop communicating with Kiev and to hold a referendum for determining the status of Crimea (Sevastopol, 2013).

There is no doubt that this referendum was illegal according to Ukrainian and international norms (Marxsen, 2014), but it also provided the Russian military with support on the Peninsula. This referendum must be examined, because the results have shown the will of the majority of Crimeans. Because most Crimeans wished to become a part of the Russian Federation, the annexation of Crimea was held peacefully, without civil war or civil demonstrations against Russian control of the Peninsula. Certainly, the Crimean annexation happened with the support of the Crimean people. Thus, most Crimeans (91%) claim that “the referendum was free and fair and that the government in Kyiv ought to recognize the results of the vote” (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 7). On the other hand, 84% of Western Ukrainians say that “referendum was not free and fair, and Kyiv should reject the results” (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 9).

There are several reasons why most Crimeans voted for joining Russia: a long-term state connection until 1954, tensions around the status of the Russian language, diverse views, beliefs and so on, as well as a dual morality of Ukrainians, which were seen on the eve of the referendum. Such dual-morality explains the killing of policemen on the Euromaidan during fights, the result of orders sent by the Ukrainian Government from Crimea to protect the civil order in Ukraine and the current government (Kuba, 2014), while those who participated in demonstrations and were also killed got honorary titles as Heavenly Hundred Heroes of Ukraine afterwards. Additionally, when pro-Russian demonstrations in Odessa on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 resulted in 46 people being burned alive (Olhovskaya, 2014), Crimeans became even more sure of their choice to support Russia.

Fear played a vital role during the Crimean annexation and while the referendum was held. Civilians were under fear “for their memories, culture, language and views because of new pro-Western government” (Salushev, 2014, p. 41), and for what happened in Kiev at the same time.

When it comes to the legal perspective of organizing and managing the referendum, the Crimean government (with Russian support, of course) says that the referendum was legal and they had the power to manage it in accordance with paragraph 138, ‘Managing and providing local referendums’ (*Organizaciya i provedenie mestnih referendumov*), of the Ukrainian Constitution (Verkhovna Rada, 1996) and paragraph 18 part 7, ‘An appointment and holding

republic (local) referendums in accordance to matters about conducting the Autonomous Republic of Crimea' of the Crimean Constitution (*Naznachenie i provedenie resbyblikanskih referendumov po voprosam, otnesennim k vedeniy Avtonomnoi Respubliki Krym*) (Verkhovna Rada, 1998). Such claims from both the Crimean and the Russian governments made civil people confused, while in Kiev a violent over-taking of power had happened.

A significant role here was also played by nostalgia for Soviet times, due to how highly 'Sovietized' the Crimean Region was (Sasse, 2001). In the opinion of several respondents in the Russian documentary movie *Crimea. The Way Home*, "It was no annexation of Crimea in March 2014, this is Crimea has been annexed by Ukraine since its independence in 1991" and the referendum gave a them a chance to finally say what they wanted (Kondrashov, 2015). While many people gave their voice for succession with Russia due to the common Soviet past, other say that Putin used non-acquaintance of the population, common past and history for 'grabbing' Crimea (Orenstein, 2014).

As noted, creating a referendum (even without Russian support) was not legal in accordance to paragraph 73 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which claims that referendums due to territorial issues can be provided only on the whole Ukrainian territory (including Crimea) (Verkhovna Rada, 1996). Furthermore, paragraph 2 part 2 of the Constitution of Crimea states that if there are differences between the Crimean and Ukrainian Constitutions, the Ukrainian Constitution will always take priority (Verkhovna Rada, 1998).

Operating with the results of the Crimean referendum in 1991, the Crimean government said that its people's wishes would be heard this time. The referendum, which was held in January 1991 with the question, "Are you for the reunion of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as a subject of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and as a member of the Union Treaty?" got 93.26% positive answers (Anonymous, 2011). This meant that people wanted the reunion of Crimea with the Soviet Union, not with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as was provided afterwards (Anonymous, 2011). The collapse of the Soviet Union came almost a year later in December 1991, while the referendum was held in January 1991. At the end of it, Crimea became a part of independent Ukraine.

It was clear that the annexation had been hidden under the people's will and referendum. Otherwise, according to the results, the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Sevastopol City Council promoted the Crimean Autonomous Republic Declaration of Independence. Then, by Federal Law of the Russian Federation 'About the admission into the Russian Federation the Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol and proclaiming new subjects of the Russian Federation as the Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol (2014)' (*O prinatii v Rossiiskoy*

*Fedearciy Respubliki Krim i obrazovanii v sostave Rossiiskoi Federacii novih sub'ektov – Respubliki Krim i goroda federal'nogo znacheniya Sevastopolya, 2014)* and 'About an order of adoption into the Russian Federation and a formation of new subjects of the Russian Federation (2001) (*O poryadke prinyatiya v Rossiiskoy Fedearciy i obrazovaniya v ee sostave novogo sub'ekta Rossiiskoi Federacii, 2001*), Crimea and Sevastopol became part of the Russian Federation on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016.

In conclusion, on the eve of the Crimean annexation and the Crimean referendum, the Ukrainian government did not give enough attention to the worries of the Russian minority in Ukraine, who were mainly based in Crimea. There were no attempts to explain to Russians in Crimea that they were part of Ukraine. There were no open appeals to stay away from the Russian influence nor explanations of what was really going on in Kiev, nor any reassurance that Ukraine would always respect the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine due to the Peninsula's close historical ties with Russia.

## Conclusion

Relations between Russia, Ukraine and the West have been tense since the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Sanctions against Crimea and Russia provoked the financial crisis and the collapse of ruble in Russia. As a consequence of the annexation, NATO–Russia Council relations are temporary frozen as well as EU–Russia relations. Ukraine suspended cooperation agreements with Russia in many areas.

Thus, the CA involved Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity; this paper claims that it happened because of Russia’s protection of its national interest in the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West. The loss of control over Crimea could be a geopolitical defeat for Russia.

The CA was provoked by both domestic and external causes. The external causes provoked Russia to take control over Crimea, while domestic causes provided the support of Crimeans during the Russian annexation of the Peninsula. In summary, the annexation of Crimea is a complex issue, the studying of which has to account for both domestic and external causes.

The CA is a dispute over geopolitics, not of international law. Diverse security perceptions of Russia and the West and geopolitical controversy between them over Ukraine comprised the external causes of the CA. Since Tsarist Russia, Crimea has been an important strategic territory due to geopolitics, providing security for Russia. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia kept the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the Crimean Peninsula for security and geopolitical purposes.

Diverse security perceptions of Russia and the West made for diverse understandings of the annexation of Crimea by both parties. Diverse understandings of what ‘*security*’ is for both comes from diverse perceptions of how to define ‘*Europe*’ (Rieker & Gjerde, 2015). As long as Russia’s and the West’s interpretations of ‘*Europe*’ are different, there will also be diverse understandings of how to provide security in their regions. The West sees the way to security as one of a “‘*Wider Europe*’ with the EU at its heart, but increasingly coterminous with the Euro–Atlantic security and political community” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 26). Meanwhile, Russia follows the idea of a ‘*Greater Europe*’, where “a vision of a continental Europe, stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, that has multiple centers, including Brussels, Moscow and Ankara, but with a common purpose of overcoming the divisions that have traditionally plagued the continent” (Sakwa, 2015, p. 26).

Following the concept of a security community, the West was seen providing security by the integration process and “as a form of international cooperation” (Rieker & Gjerde, 2015,

p.6). The potential integration of Ukraine into the EU/NATO was also seen as a step forward for providing security in Europe, while for Russia the expansion of the EU/NATO was seen as a threat for Russia's security according to the Russian Security Concept of 2009.

Another external cause of the CA by Russia in 2014 was the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West over Ukraine. As long as Ukraine was "a state on the border between Russia and the West" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 246), it would always have special meaning for Russia due to geopolitics and its position providing security near Russia's border. This paper looked the development of the controversy between Russia and the West through Russian Foreign policy towards Ukraine. By identifying four stages in the relations between Russia and the Ukraine regarding the presence of the West in Ukraine, this paper covered the main events from the Orange Revolution to the overthrow of the pro-Russian government on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, which in the end provoked Russia to annex Crimea in order to protect its position during the controversy with the West. Additionally, this paper has examined the controversy by looking at Russian politics in Ukraine as divided into four stages, and showed how relationships between the parties were compounded step by step, not suddenly; this approach helps to understand why the CA did not happen prior to 2014.

The Russian government tried to keep control over Ukraine several times before annexing Crimea: from providing and supporting pro-Russian candidates in presidential elections both in 2004 and 2010, and inviting Ukraine to the Eurasian Custom Union instead of cooperating with the EU and NATO, to proposing discounts on gas or even offering money in the form of aid to Ukraine. Putin himself admitted "geopolitical rationale for the CA", because of the possibility of "NATO's presence in close proximity to Russia's Southern borders, directly in front of the Russian house, on Russia's historic territories" (Bebler, 2015, p. 24). The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula during the geopolitical controversy between Russia and the West was a good illustration of a state invoking international norms in the name of protecting its own core national interests. Crimea has been an important geographical region for Russia since the Soviet times due its access to the Black Sea, which allowed Russia to base its Black Sea Fleet on the Peninsula (Sasse, 2007). Russia's geopolitical ambitions to keep control over the Crimean Peninsula come from a common past with the Soviet Union.

The second part of the thesis covered causes of the CA from a domestic perspective. Domestic causes of the CA on the interstate level were linked to each other. There was a close connection arising across diverse regions with diverse ethnicities, languages, memories and beliefs (Sasse, 2007), diverse political views, and views of potential state development and cooperation (Cadier, 2014). The CA would not have happened without the ethnic conflict

between Russians and Ukrainians, which arose out of their diverse views of the future of Ukraine on the eve of the annexation.

The first domestic cause examined in this paper was the diversity of regions. Following Sasse's definition of Ukraine as "a state of regions" (2007, p.1), these diverse regions provoked a division of the country into several parts—Crimea and Eastern and Western Ukraine—with diverse points of view about potential state development.

The ethnic diversity of Ukraine, as the second domestic cause, has a close correlation with the diverse views, memories and beliefs of Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine. Such diversity provoked the CA, with Crimeans taking a pro-Russian stance about political and economic cooperation with Russia, as well as sharing common beliefs and memories with Russia and then with the new Ukraine. Such diversity provoked active support of Russian actions on the Peninsula by the ethnic Russians in Crimea.

Crimea and Ukraine had diverse views about the political and economic development of Ukraine including Crimea at the time of the annexation. Thus, when Kiev actively supported the idea of continuing dialogue about potential cooperation with the EU and NATO, Crimea still claimed to stay close with Russia and started to negotiate membership in the Eurasian Custom Union.

In addition, manipulations around the status of the Russian language in Ukraine made Crimeans confused on the eve of the annexation. Claims that the status of Russian as the regional language would be abolished by the new pro-Western government simply made people scared.

The internal structure of Ukraine as a unitary state with the exception of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was seen by the Ukrainian government as a predictor of potential conflicts around Crimea, but such diverse status from the other oblast' of Ukraine provoked the opposite: the CA. Additionally, the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet provoked easy over-taking of power by the Russian Federation in 2014.

While previous domestic causes provoked the CA, the Crimean status referendum has shown that most Crimeans wished to separate from Ukraine and become part of Russia. The results of the referendum showed the readiness of civilians to support the illegal actions of Russia for the sake of protecting their own interests. Ukraine's cooperation with Russia to include Crimea simply was seen by Crimeans as simply a guarantee of keeping close cultural and historical ties with Russia.

In summary, ethnicity (and associated beliefs) is one of the most powerful instruments for achieving state objectives. Under the calls about protection of common values and interests

of civil society, the state can manage its own interest on the specified territory. Ethnic Russians in Crimea truly believed in a fair reunion with Russia, while Russia just wanted to protect its state interests against the policy of the EU and NATO in Ukraine near the Russian border during the geopolitical controversy.

During the research process attempts were made to sample data about diverse explanations of the CA from both Russian and Western sides, as well as attempts to find an answer for the second potential RQ (*What are the different views on the Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014?*), but this became irrelevant. Russia's official view *de-facto* agreed with the annexing of Crimea as defence of Russian national interests in the geopolitical controversy with the West. Unclear attempts at explaining why the annexation was legal, as well as comparing the CA with the Kosovo precedent, only confirmed that the Russian Federation did break international rules in the name of their national interest. In accordance with Russia's state opinion, international society just has to approach it as another precedent on the international arena, with the reference to the close historical and cultural ties of Crimea with Russia.

Furthermore, this thesis did not address the domestic causes of the CA in the Russian Federation. Sure, there were some causes in Russia which played a part in provoking it to annex Crimea. Among them was a strong view of the Eurasianism in Russia's foreign policy, which says that Russia should pre-eminently "enhance its international standing" and protect its national interest (Morozova, 2009, p.667). Nor did the thesis paper cover the role of the Crimean Tatars as an ethnic minority of Crimea at the moment of the CA. Both the domestic causes in Russia which provoked it to annex Crimea, and the involvement of the Crimean Tatars in the conflict, are good topics for future research which could approach the CA from perspectives different than those presented in this paper.

Analysis of the domestic and the external causes of the CA can be a relevant basis for developing policy recommendations, because it shows the annexation as a complex issue, not just a clear grab of a neighbour's territory. The CA happened because of domestic and external causes, which explains why Russia reacted illegally in the name of protecting its national interest, and why civilians in Crimea supported these actions on the Peninsula. This basis could provide insight into how to deal with such situations on the international arena, as well as how to predict them.

According to Bebler (2015), there are several proposals as to how to deal with the CA. One approach would be to admit that there was a clear violation of Ukraine's territory and sovereignty, and to isolate Russia from international society. Another would be to admit that



NATO and the EU made a strategic mistake by involving Ukraine in the integration process.  
Third, a new referendum could be provided to Crimea under international supervision.

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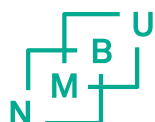
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