The article analyzes changes in attitudes to and interpretations of Russian 'greatpowerness' (velikoderzhavnost') between the years of 2000 and 2014, that is to say during President Putin’s period of rule. The concept of Russia as the great power was changing during this time in two respects: first, there was an increasing reticence of self-assessments; second, we observe prioritization of protecting the country’s own, mostly regional, interests as opposed to expansion which would be characteristic of a great power. Moreover, this period clearly demonstrates contradictions and dangers, engendered in the process of losing self-perception as that of the great power. The readiness of Russian political elite to part bit by bit with the status of the great power and to go to the status of a regional power is combined (as the events around Ukraine have shown) with unwillingness to sustain the new status of the country with the help of the capabilities of a soft power. Lack of these, as well as of the skills in their use, and finally, a desire to raise the rating of trust in the government with the help of “a small victorious war” have formed the basis for the aggressive upsurge towards Ukraine. In the absence of serious hard and soft capabilities, the splashes of aggressiveness in Russian foreign policy and of anti-Western sentiments in domestic political life are unlikely to have any lasting effect. They are able, however, to generate extremely negative long-term consequences for the country.

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published in 2009 (NSS 2020), The Military Doctrine of the RF 2010 (MD, 2010), and V. Putin’s and D. Medvedev’s speeches and articles. The views of the public were taken from the databases of Levada-Center, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (WCiom), the Foundation for Public Opinion (FOM), and the World Values Survey project (WVS).

The paper consists of three parts: the first part is devoted to theoretical aspects of the concept of a great power, namely to its four main structural components (status, power capabilities, set of images and set of roles); the second deals with the dynamics of Russia’s self-perception at the official level, and the third part – with the dynamics of Russia’s self-perception in the public opinion of the country.

1. Structural components of the concept of a “great power”

In its most general form, the concept of a great power adopted by Russian/Soviet and post-Soviet political culture is largely consistent with the interpretation of the term proposed by Max Weber in the 1920s, which has since been broadly accepted. For Weber “the great powers, usually ascribe to themselves and usurp an interest in political and economic processes over … the whole surface of the planet” and “are held to have a responsibility of their own for the way in which power and prestige are distributed between their own and foreign polities” (Weber, 1946, pp. 161, 172).

This definition is well suited for theoretical reasoning, but for an empirical analysis it is too general and thus has to be operationalized. For the purpose of this study, we argue that the concept of a great power consists of a set of four interconnected structural components: the status of a country, its power capabilities, its set of images and its set of roles.

Let us now specify the semantic contours of these four components, which will be used to analyze the dynamics of Russia’s self-perception in the international system.

1.1. Status

“Status” denotes the position of a country on an international “honor/prestige” scale. The concern is not with prestige in general, but with a specific sort of “honor/prestige” which Weber once called “power-oriented prestige” (Weber, 1946, p. 160) and which nowadays — taking into consideration the growing importance and popularity of the concept of a soft power — would rather be called “power- and influence-oriented prestige”. The status of a great power refers to a country’s position at the top of the scale.

The dependency of a country on its resources, its sets of images and roles, is discussed in almost all works dedicated to the problem of status in international relations. The influence of status on the other three components of the concept of a great power gets much less attention. Meanwhile, such influence — especially in the case of great powers — exists and adds self-contained political significance to the status in both the eyes of the elite and public at large (Linton, 1936; Sabrin, 1968, p. 546; Turner, 1968, p. 555; Weber, 1946, p. 180).

In addition, the great power status provides its citizens with positive individual and collective self-esteem and, therefore, is an important factor in shaping and affecting national identity (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990; Mercer, 1995, p. 242; Westle, 2011, p. 1132) and unity. This last circumstance makes it extremely attractive for authorities as a tool of domestic policy.

1.2. Power resources/capabilities

Diversity in a country’s power resources leads to different taxonomies. For this study, the most interesting grouping seems to be Nye’s distinction between hard and soft power resources. This grouping allows us to better discern the “facial features” of the country and to clarify in which of the two foreign policy genres its potential is higher: suppression or attraction (Nye, 2008, p. 29, 2011, p. 19). The set of a country’s hard power resources most often includes the elements outlined by Waltz (1979, p. 131): the size of its population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence.

The soft power resources of a country are more intangible and may therefore be more numerous. Research studies and existing soft power indexes give an idea of the main groups of these resources: the quality of a country’s political institutions (government fairness and accountability; public trust in government; low level of social inequality, and others); the quality of its economy (competitiveness, attractiveness of its goods and services, capability for innovation, low level of corruption and of shadow economy; good investment climate and so on); human development (health, education, reputation for competence); national character (for example, openness, friendliness); national morale; the extent of a country’s cultural appeal (national heritage and contemporary culture; influence of the national language throughout the world); quality, reputation and attractiveness of a country’s system of education; attractiveness of a country to live and to work in (structure of migration, low level of brain drain); a country’s commitment to global issues (democracy, justice, poverty, environment, and others); the strength of a country’s diplomatic network; the effectiveness of a country’s leaders on the global stage, and other resources.

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1 Their differences will be discussed later.
2 Similar interpretations of the term ‘great power’ can be found in most English-language and Russian dictionaries and encyclopedias.
It is important to keep in mind that while speaking about status, images and roles we are dealing with concepts which in Herrmann et al.'s terminology belong to the area of “perceived” phenomena (Herrmann et al., 1997, p. 403; Waltz, 1979, p. 98). Resources per se do not automatically belong here. To be turned into capabilities, country's resources have to be “legitimized” through domestic and external evaluations of their relative strength/importance in comparison with the resources of other countries.

1.3. Set of images

Following Boulding (1959, pp. 120–121), “image” will be understood here as “the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure” of a country/nation and of “its international environment”, thus influencing its behavior. Let us consider five characteristics of the set of images which are most important for this study:

- Images depict objects in a figurative style, as opposed to an analytical one, and thus tend to be value-oriented and multi-semantic. Among other things, images can be filled with new understandings of roles.
- The cognitive content and emotional intensity of a country's image may change over time, reflecting the country's life cycle regarding this or that status. The main phases of the life cycle of a great powers, using Volgy et al.'s (2010) terminology, are the “underachiever phase” (when the country is entering the status), the “consistent phase” (when the country maintains the status with cognitive and emotional image characteristics being more or less stable), and the “overachiever phase” (loss/weakening of the previously positive image/image degeneration” – that is, cognitive image characteristics are becoming petty, and emotional characteristics are enfeebling). One of the indicators of the image “degeneration” process is its evolution towards a mirror image (Bronfenbrenner, 1961), revealing a disturbance in the mechanisms of identity formation based on the country's own culture and a replacement of these mechanisms by imitative ones. This weakening of identity can turn into a process of negative identity formation (Buchanan, 1968, p. 58; Erikson, 1968, pp. 61–62).
- Image has a time dimension. It can emphasize an object's characteristics from the past, the present or the future. Weber, when writing about the time dimension of status, stresses that orientation towards the past or present is typical of positively privileged status groups, while orientation towards the future is common among negatively privileged strata (Weber, 1946, p. 190). Later Boulding (1959, p. 122) argued that a reliance on the past is of paramount importance for image formation. If these statements are correct, the orientation to the future can indicate either the country's dissatisfaction with its current status or the absence of a reliable basis for a desirable image of the past, as well as an aspiration to compensate such an absence with attractive pictures of the future, which can be easily drawn by PR-specialists.
- A set of images can include different levels of generalization – from highly generalized images (overall images, “meta/super-constructions”), being part of worldview and ideological beliefs (Herrmann et al., 1997, pp. 403–404), to “fractional” ones, reflecting various specific traits of the country and its external surroundings.
- A set of images can contain contradicting components. In this respect it does not differ from a set of roles, so possible role conflicts/incompatibilities, pointed out by Cantir and Kaarbo (2012, pp. 8–19), Holsti (1970, pp. 235, 302, 303, 306–308) and Merton (1968, pp. 431–434), are also applicable to images. In the case of a great power, contradictions in the set of images, as well as in the set of roles, seem to be not only an unavoidable but also a necessary condition of status retention. Such incompatibility reflects conflicting demands of numerous competing domestic and foreign interest groups, different factions of public opinion, political parties, mass movements, as well as contradictions between new socio-economic needs and traditional policies. Finally, it may be caused by shifts in the socio-economic and political system of a country – owing to different paces of change in different parts of the system, and to different social, economic, and political obligations of policymakers.

1.4. Set of roles

Following Merton (1968, pp. 422–434), we will use the term “set of roles” to refer to a collection of expected behavior patterns associated with the status of a country. The “set of roles” for a great power refers to “a broad but typical range of diplomatic behaviors and attitudes”, “a crude summation of the general orientation of the government towards the external environment”, or “the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules, actions” (Holsti, 1970, pp. 233, 234, 245) associated with the status of a great power. In our analysis we will deal only with the roles combining the traits of “role-conception” (Holst)/“role expectation” (Sarbin) and “role-action” (Sarbin).

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4 The term “set”, offered by Merton (1968, pp. 422–440) for analyzing roles, seems to be applicable for image research as well.

5 Similar image interpretation are provided by Cottam (1977), Deutsch and Merritt (1965), Herrmann et al. (1997), Herrmann (2003), Scott (1965).

6 For example, a supplier of armament to Third World countries can be described in image language as a supporter of military struggle against imperialism/for freedom and democracy etc.

7 A classic example of filling an old image with new roles can be found in Koestler's “Darkness at Noon”, which main character Rubashov, an old Bolshevik, explains to Belgian dockers that Soviet oil supply to fascist regimes [new role] is a condition to support “the Country of the Revolution” [old image] (Koestler, 1941, pp. 37, 39).
1.4.1. Role conception (role expectation)

For Holsti “role conception” means a set of potential behavior performances, conceived by policymakers one-sidedly, as opposed to “role performance,” that is, the actual “foreign policy behavior of governments” (Holsti, 1970, pp. 245–246). In order to distinguish between these two aspects of role-activities Sarbin uses the terms “role expectation” and “role enactment” (Sabrin, 1968, pp. 546–547).

We limit this analysis to the potential role activity due to the fact that this very activity is a part of a country’s self-perception, which is the focus of our study.

1.4.2. Role-action

According to Sarbin, “if viewed as actions, role expectations are codified as in a job description: the occupant is expected, for instance, to call the roll, open the window, secure the doors. If viewed as qualities, role expectations are codified in adjectival terms; for example, the occupant is expected to be warm, friendly, outgoing, sincere, and cautious” (ibid., p. 547).

The exclusion of role qualities from the study is necessary to differentiate roles and images. The role-qualities, reflecting emotionally charged and iconic types of object perception and containing value-based interpretations of behavior, turn out to be practically identical with the images described above. Therefore, to avoid confusion, the term “role” is used here only in relation to role-actions. A set of roles, consisting of the potential role-actions, can be presented as a set of expected behavioral strategies and activities formulated in a language close to the language of political decisions — in contrast to the language of images — that is to say in a much more analytical than figurative style.

Despite this difference between roles and images, similarities can also be seen. For example, both can be subject to different levels of generalization as well as conflicting positions. As a generalized characteristic of a country’s role-activities one can use a combination of three indicators/positions on the three following scales:

“Rivalry—Competition—Collaboration Scale”. The interpretation of the term “rivalry” is borrowed from Vasquez (1996, pp. 532–533), who defines it as a “relationship characterized by extreme competition,” one of the main features being “psychological hostility” that naturally arises “from persistent disagreement”.

“Social Creativity — Social Conformism Scale”. The term “social creativity” is borrowed from Westle, who defines it as an activity aiming at changing the rules of the game: the dimension of comparison, the evaluation of compared attributes and others (Westle, 2011, p. 1135). “Social conformity” is used here as an antonym of “social creativity”.

“Expansion—Isolation Scale” (according to Weber)/“Activity—Passivity Scale” (according to Holsti). Weber (1946, p. 161) wrote: “for general reasons of ‘power dynamics’ per se, the great powers are very often expansive powers; that is, they are associations aiming at expanding the territories of their respective political communities by use or the threat of force or both. Great powers, however, are not necessarily and not always oriented towards expansion” and can “quite deliberately” limit their “political expansion for the sake of isolation”. Holsti (1970, pp. 283–288) proposes roles typology (active-passive roles) corresponding to Weber’s types of power dynamics of the great powers, as well as one of the possible ways to quantify the ratio of active and passive roles in the policy of a country, and thus specify the position of the country on this scale.


2.1. Official views on the Country’s status

The abandonment of the term “great power” is the main conspicuous change of the period under analysis. Official documents published after 2006 never use this term.⁸

It was Putin who during the first term of his presidency initiated the waiving use of the term “great power” when referring to Russia. This was a response to the negative reaction of Western politicians and experts to the appearance of the term “energy superpower” in Russian media. In late December 2005, Putin was speaking at a meeting of RF Security Council about the necessity for Russia to become a leader of world energy and an “initiator” and “trend-setter” in energy innovations and new technologies, as well as a frontrunner in the field of research for the preservation of resources (Putin, 2005). A representative of the Kremlin-friendly public relations community Dmitriy Orlov capitalized on this speech by coining the term “energy superpower” and announcing it to be the “new strategy of Russian development, proclaimed by Vladimir Putin” (Orlov, 2006). However, this term was promoted only by a small number of Orlov’s colleagues in the public relations arena; most energy experts were far more cautious (RES, 2006). Meanwhile, Western customers of Russian energy supplies felt alarmed, viewing it as an expression of Russia’s intention to put Western Europe under its control (Spiegel, 2006; Wall Street Journal, 2006; Washington Post, 2006). As a result, Putin — for whom, at least that time, pragmatism in the relations with others (Westle, 2011, p. 1135).

Footnotes:
³⁸ According to this understanding of the roles, the roles identified by Holsti (1970, p. 276) as “revolution-liberator”, “liberator supporter”, “defender of faith”, “developer” and so on, would rather represent images.
foreign partners apparently gained the importance of an ideological construct — abandoned this neologism eight months after it had appeared, along with the traditional nomenclature of a great power.10

However, the desire to appease Western consumers of Russian energy resources was not the sole cause to reject the term, and its less frequent use can be found much earlier, almost since the beginning of Putin's presidency, at least in official documents,11 and especially in the programs of federal TV and radio channels (see Fig. 1).

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the limited use of the terminology in 1999–2013 — that is, before the open phase of Ukrainian crisis (the annexation of Crimea, a support of separatists in the South-East Ukraine) — could be the desire, quite reasonable in PR logic, to eliminate the conflict between Russia’s claims to the status of a great power, in spite of the obvious deficit in hard and soft capabilities,12 and the position of Western elite who believe that this weakness deprives Russia of that status (Trenin, 2006, pp. 218—299). This type of “perceptions conflict” strongly exacerbates negative assessments of the position of the country seeking status in the international system (Bryant, 1982, p. 377).

The political elite of the Yeltsin era also understood the vulnerability of the country’s capabilities. Yet they were unable to abandon the term ‘great power’,13 partly because of the elite’s political romanticism and partly because they did not want to recognize the connection between the fall of the USSR and Russia’s loss of its greatpowerness. Putin’s elite, much more pragmatic that time and not associating themselves with the process completed by the disintegration of the USSR, could afford to be more flexible in their verbal behavior. They tried to temper (if not to eliminate) this conflict in perception and minimize the negative consequences for the country by rejecting the controversial term. In 2014, the use of the term ‘great power’ increased significantly, but did not reach the level of 1999. There is no simple explanation here of why. Perhaps one of the reasons of such ‘caution’ in the use of this term was a reluctance to scare the neighbors, particularly Belorussia and Kazakhstan, where Russia’s actions towards Ukraine were taken, mildly speaking, somewhat nervously. We confine ourselves here to these vague remarks. A detailed analysis of Russian propaganda at that period of time deserves special research, clearly going beyond the scope of this paper.

2.2. Power capabilities of the country

Official evaluations of the country’s hard and soft power capabilities are contradictory, and their generalized, optimistic estimations go hand in hand with concrete estimates that are much more critical.

2.2.1. Generalized evaluations

It is affirmed that Russia “has significant potentials and resources in all areas of life”, “for ensuring itself a worthy place in the world”; that “Russia objectively continues to play an important role in global processes by virtue of its considerable economic, scientific, technological and military potentials and its unique strategic location on the Eurasian continent”; that Russia is a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, and a member of “a whole range of influential international organizations, regional structures, and mechanisms for inter-state dialogue and cooperation”; and that it has “rich cultural traditions”. The importance of soft power capabilities in order to secure the country’s dignified position in the world is specifically emphasized.14

2.2.2. More concrete evaluations of particular capabilities

2.2.2.1. Hard power capabilities. Major traits.

**Human potential** Low life expectancy, low levels of health among the population (as a result of, for instance, increased alcohol and drug abuse), the prospect of a significant reduction in population of working age and an increase of the percentage of elderly people; brain-drain; shortage of qualified personnel; “non-competitiveness of the elite”.15

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10. During the meeting with the participants of the third International Discussion Club “Valdai” (September 9, 2006) Putin said: “I would prefer to move away from the terminology of the past. Superpower was the word we used during the Cold War. The idea of “powerness”, “suppowerness.” Why should we keep using them now? ... if you’ve noticed, I have never referred to Russia as an energy superpower, ... We do not need any kind of superpower status. What’s more, I think that this status, this idea, is being deliberately stirred up in the public awareness and in the media as an attempt to revive echoes of the “evil Soviet Union” and to portray today’s Russia in this light, and this is something I consider unacceptable” (Valdai, 2006).

11. The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation 2000 (NSC, 2000) as well as The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2000 (FPC, 2000) repeat the “pre-Putin” NSC 1997 formula almost verbatim: Russia is “a great power and one of the influential centers of a forming multipolar world” (NSC, 2000, Div. II); (FPC, 2000, Div. I). Some modifications of the 1997 document can, however, be evidenced in NSC 2000. The statement: “the development of equal partnership with the other great powers — the centers of economic and military might” is dropped from the list of main components of the country’s directions in foreign policy; the need to “ensure the safety of its great cultural wealth” loses the specification “great” and turns into the need of “the preservation of the cultural wealth of all the peoples of Russia ...” (NSC, 1997, Div. I IV; NSC, 2000, Div. IV).

12. Evaluations of Russia’s resources/capabilities problems in official documents during Putin’s period of rule see below.

13. “The conviction of most Russian ruling establishments that Russia has to be viewed as a great power remained unchanged during the 1990s. Lukin (Russian ambassador to the USA in 1992—1993) ironically commented on this position: “Call Russia a great power, and then do what you want” (Trenin, 2006, pp. 231—234).


Armed forces Discrepancy between the “resource support for the Armed Forces and for other branches of troops; and the tasks of their organizational building, development and use”\textsuperscript{16}; significant lagging behind of the Russian defense-industrial complex compared to most developed countries in terms of technology and investment.\textsuperscript{17}

Primary resources “The growing strategic risk of exhaustion of the country’s most important mineral resources” (NSS 2020, Div. IV).

Economics “Malformed” structure of the economy: “raw materials export model does not ensure the development of human potential and the required rate of economic growth”, “the backlog in the production of high-tech and highly processed products”, poor infrastructure (transport, energy, water); most integrated structures are globally non-competitive, lowly capitalized and unstably profitable (NSC, 2000, Div. IV; NSS 2020, Div. IV; Putin, 2012b,c,h; SLTSED 2020, Div. II).

2.2.2.2. Soft power capabilities.

Level of corruption Systemic corruption prevailed even in the armed forces and the defense-industrial complex (NSC, 2000, Div. III; NSS 2020; Putin, 2012b,c,f; SLTSED 2020, Div. II). The fight against corruption is not only of legal but of political nature (NSC, 2000, Div. III). “The results of anti-corruption struggle are inadequate to its scale” (SPOCP, 2013).

Business High risks for entrepreneurial activity (due to corruption, administrative barriers, insufficient protection of property rights, and others), underdeveloped corporate culture, weak self-organization and self-regulation in business, low level of competition in a number of market segments (SLTSED 2020, Div. II; Putin, 2012c).

Innovation Weak innovation activity, the development of cutting-edge technologies is lagging behind, insufficient coordination of education, science, and business. Insufficient involvement of Big Business in innovative projects, and in Research & Development (NSC, 2000, Div. III; NSS 2020, Div. IV; Putin, 2012c; SLTSED 2020, Div. II).

Inequality Deep social stratification, high level of regional disparity, inadmissible level of income differentiation — as a source of social tension (NSC, 2000, Div. III; SLTSED 2020, Div. II; Putin, 2012c).

\textsuperscript{16} Precise wording: “One of the main tasks of military planning is: 
\ldots (c) to achieve an accordance between resources support for the Armed Forces and other troops and the tasks of their organizational building, development, and use” (MD, 2010, Div. III).

\textsuperscript{17} (NSC, 2000, Div. III). According to Putin “[the most developed countries] invest tens of times more into defense [than Russia does], and “the domestic Defense-Military Complex has omitted several modernization cycles”. (Putin, 2008, 2012f,g).
Quality of Education Out-of-date programs and teaching methods in secondary schools, which thereby cease to function as a social lift (instead, they reproduce and cement social differentiation). Non-competitiveness, low prestige and low quality of higher education; the existence of “a large number of higher education institutions, including the state ones, which directly violate the right to get decent knowledge; discrepancy between the structure of government funded higher education and the real needs of labor market (Putin, 2012c).

Government accountability, government effectiveness Low government effectiveness; poor quality of public administration; unequivocal punitive bias of the judicial system; poor quality of democratic institutions (Medvedev, 2013; Putin, 2012d,h; SLTSED 2020, Div. II).

Foreign investment The investment attractiveness of Russia is lower than that of competitor countries, especially regarding long-term investments (Putin, 2012c).

Environmental awareness and action These include: worsening of ecological situation in the country; poor ecological legislation (Medvedev, 2008a; Putin, 2011; NSC, 2000, Div. III).

2.3. Set of images

2.3.1. Image of the country

The rejection of the epithet “great power” is by no means an expression of a fading desire to see Russia as a great country. It is just that the explicit claim to the status of a great power has been replaced by an implicit one — through an image containing attributes of greatness.18 Meanwhile, the image of a great power in its scale and emotional richness as presented in official documents of the Putin period, is the most reticent in the line of growingly restrained images of Soviet and post-Soviet times. Some recovery of the rhetoric during the late Yeltsin period and in Putin’s time in comparison with Gorbachev’s presidency demonstrates the oscillatory nature of the downward trend of the image dynamics: the image-formulas of the Putin period reflect the tendency to limit the use of superlatives while describing Russia. The only feature the superlative continues to be applied to is the size of the territory — “the largest Eurasian power” (FPC, 2000, Div. II; FPC, 2008, Div. II). In all other representations the country ceases to be the “best” and becomes “one of the” best: “one of the world’s economic powers”, the country having “the status of a mighty economic power”, the country with a “centuries-old history and rich cultural traditions” and so on (NSC, 2000, Div. I; SLTSED 2020, Div. I).

Herewith, the emphasis is laid upon the future and not upon the present position of Russia. When referring to the future, the country is presented as “one of the world leading powers of the XXI century, getting top-rank positions in the global economic competition, firmly ensuring its national security and human rights of its citizens”, the country belonging to “the leading five countries in terms of GDP level”; being “one of the world leaders in technological progress, quality of life, and influence over global affairs” (NSS 2020, Div. I; SLTSED 2020, Div. I, V).

It should be noted that the omission of the word “great” in relation to Russia in official documents on foreign policy by no means excludes using it in a less official context for home consumption. It is suffice to turn to some speeches of Putin and Medvedev, where they used the terms “a great nation”, “great culture”, “a great country”, “the great motherland”, “great Russia” (Medvedev, 2010; Putin, 2013, 2014a,b), and once - in Putin’s speech — “a great power”, though not as a characteristic of today’s Russia, but of the country created by “our fathers and grandfathers” (2014c).

2.3.2. Image of international system

The official image of the international system is similar to that of the country’s capabilities: optimistic general pronouncements about the international situation come along with a growing concern over the state of affairs at the concrete level of description.

2.3.2.1. Generalized statements. In Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 the global situation was characterized by the “growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world, dominated, in terms of economy and power, by the United States” that “challenges and threats Russian national interests” (FPC, 2000, Div. II). In the Concept of 2013 the evaluation of the situation becomes less dismal. The main characteristic of international relations is described here as “the formation of a polycentric international system” which takes place against the background of “reducing the possibility of the historical West to dominate the world economy and politics”, and of dispersing “the world’s strength and development potential, of its shift to the East, especially the Asian-Pacific region” (FPC, 2013, Div. II). This situation is said to create opportunities to improve Russia’s position in the world.

2.3.2.2. More concrete statements

- The number of negative characteristics of the world political system mentioned in FPC 2013 reached 30 in comparison to 14 in FPC 2000.
- Principles of interaction with the outer world declared by FPC 2013 have become more defensive in comparison with FPC 2000. “Maximum transparency” disappears from the list of the principles of foreign policy and is replaced by just

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18 In Westle’s terms this transformation could be described as using social creativity in a strategy of the country’s political identity formation (Westle, 2011, p. 1135).
“openness”; “mutually beneficial pragmatism” turns into just “pragmatism”, supplemented by “independence” and by the foreign policy course being “determined by the national interests”.19

- In 2008—2014 the notion of the main military threat was clearly set. In Russia’s National Security Concept of 2000 the list of international threats was headed by “the striving of particular states and intergovernmental associations to belittle the role of existing mechanisms for ensuring international security, above all the United Nations and the OSCE” (NSC, 2000, Div. III). In 2008 Putin said that the world had entered a new arms race; that NATO countries required Russian unilateral enforcement of agreements; that NATO was approaching Russia’s borders, and that there was no constructive response to Russia’s concerns (Putin, 2008). In the National Security Strategy published in 2009 the first position on the list of military threats was occupied by “the policies of a number of leading foreign countries, directed at achieving absolute superiority in the military sphere” — arms, missile defense system, and others. The Military Doctrine 2010 fixed the attention on “the pursuit to endow the NATO force potential with global functions, carried out in violation of the norms of international law, and to move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation, using among other things the Bloc expansion” (MD, 2010, Div. II).

An important impetus to increasing official concern over the international climate described above is of domestic origin: the weakening of one of the key soft power capacities, namely, public trust in the government and its policy. A steady decline of confidence in the federal government — specifically in Putin’s — can be observed from 2008 and up to February 2014, that is, up to annexation of Crimea. After that the situation has radically changed. Both ratings have risen sharply and almost reached the level of 2008 (see Fig. 2).

To appreciate the significance of the confidence factor one should take into account that in the system formed during Putin’s period of rule there were no formal institutions that could function as a built-in political stabilizer and that the population’s confidence in Putin was and still is the only serious political stabilizer of this system. The weakening of this stabilizer is a powerful factor that induces authorities to rally the population by using an extremely enduring Cold War stereotype: the perception of the West, and of the U.S. in particular, as the source of danger.20 Before 2014 the efforts to revive these stereotypes were relatively moderate and therefore not effective enough. Events in Ukraine (expulsion of Yanukovych, and a clearly formulated resolution to become a part of the EU) have given rise to a sharp increase in Russian anti-Western propaganda and deliberately rough style of political behavior: annexation of Crimea, a threat of military intervention in Ukraine, support of separatists in the south-east of the country. However it is quite possible that this combination of words and deeds was not purposely conceived as a tool to increase trust in Putin and his policy, but was — at least initially — no more than an emotional reaction of the ruling group and especially of Putin to “the loss of Ukraine”. But howbeit, it turned out to be very effective. To what extent its effect is stable is still to be seen.

Finally, a glance at the recent past renders the current situation a bit less dramatic. For sure, currently it is not the “honey-moon” period comparable to Yeltsin’s era, when the Russian president was referring to the heads of all the leading states as “friends.” But neither it has reached the height of the Cold War, when the West was presented in the USSR as evil incarnation.21 The current depiction of leading Western countries is somewhere in between these poles and looks like cold pragmatism rather than Cold War — “partners whose interests don’t always coincide, and sometimes are opposite.”22

2.4. Set of roles

In the long run, the official concept of Russia’s role-playing activities is clearly changing from a setting based on Russia’s rivalry with the major powers of the world to a setting based on competition and cooperation. Under Putin competition — if assessed according to the “Expansion–Isolation”/“Activity–Passivity” scale — is increasingly shifting towards “Isolation/Passivity”. Sometimes the “Return of Crimea”, support of “anti-Kiev” forces, unprecedentedly intensive and hostile anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda in the government media are regarded as indicators of radical changes in Russia’s set of roles. But all these things, no matter how impressive they are, should not be misleading. It is not a turn to an expansion strategy of a great power but rather a splash fight to protect “the last frontiers” of an overachiever (in Volgy’s terms) deprived of soft power capabilities. The point is that Ukraine’s reorientation to the West is regarded by the Russian political leadership as a blow, undermining at least two of its key foreign policy settings: (a) the strengthening of the dominant position of Russia

19 According to FPC (2000, Div. II), Russian foreign policy “is based on consistency and predictability, on mutually advantageous pragmatism. This policy is maximally transparent; it takes into consideration the legitimate interests of other states and is aimed at seeking joint decisions”. According to FPC (2013, Div. I), the country’s foreign policy should be based on “respect for independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, multi-vector approach, predictability and non-confrontational protection of national interests”.

20 The negative evolution of the image of the West’s in foreign policy documents is reinforced by legislative initiatives, focused on the fight against “foreign agents” from among disloyal NGOs, the expansion of the concept of high treason, the limitation of orphan adoption by foreigners, and others.

21 Here is one of the many USA characteristics popular in the USSR in the early 1950s, that is, at the height of the Cold War: “American “scientists”-cannibals offer all kinds of projects and means to annihilate the working population of the globe” (Stepanian, 1950, p. 272). Outstanding is that in this sentence the word scientists is quoted, while the word cannibals is not.

22 One of Putin’s evaluations of the interest-conflict between Russia and Western WTO members well conveys this style: “Our partners are all very intelligent, fine-looking and educated people, who know how to speak gallantly and to lay out their position civilly. It always sounds convictional, liberal, and market-like; but to make them agree to step even 1 mm back is impossible, unless we are ready to sacrifice the minimum of a half-meter of our own interests” (Putin, 2013).
in the CIS countries, including Russian position at the Black Sea, and (b) the protection of the domestic political situation from Western influence. These settings are discussed below.

Russia’s set of roles as identified in official documents of the Putin period is similar to the view of the country’s capabilities and to its image in the international system. The breadth and optimism of generalized statements coexists with the reticence in the wording of more concrete positions.

In the government’s declared generalized statements (all of them were expressed before the Ukrainian crisis and thus do not reflect new realities) the Russian role set is coherent with the position of a prosperous great power, which increases its influence on the world system. This involves “actively promoting international peace and universal security and stability for the purpose of establishing a just and democratic system of international relations”; “facilitating the development of a constructive dialogue and partnership relations between civilizations”; promoting the “development of a positive, well-balanced and unifying international agenda and the settlement of global and regional problems” (FPC, 2013, Div. I, II).

Meanwhile, on a more concrete and practical level, politics are concentrated not so much on an expansion of “the great power” but on protecting the country’s own (mostly regional) interests. The most important tools of this “defensive” task solving (inasmuch as they can be reconstructed from the content of Foreign Policy Concept 2013) are:

- The strengthening of the dominant position of Russia in the CIS countries; that is in the region of its traditional influence, in the immediate vicinity of the country’s borders.
- The protection of the domestic political situation from Western influence.
- The ensuring of the continuation of a veto-player role in the world system (the only possible position of equality with the more powerful countries).

2.4.1. Strengthening the dominant position in the CIS countries

Russia’s attention to the CIS countries has increased substantially since 2000 and has brought them to the fore on the list of Russian foreign policy priorities. In Part IV of the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept (“Regional priorities”), 12 percent of the text is dedicated to the CIS countries. This share has increased to 22 percent in the corresponding part of the Foreign Policy Concept 2013. Consequently, the CIS countries are the most copiously represented in this part of the document, moving the EU countries to the second place (the share of the text dedicated to the latter in the 2013 document in comparison to the document of 2000 has decreased from 28 to 19 percent). Herewith, an emphasis on the integration in the CIS has grown substantially. In 2000 the integration was mentioned only twice and not quite optimistically (first — as the different-speed and different-level integration in the framework of the CIS; and second by referring to the union with Belarus: “the highest, at this stage, form of integration of two sovereign states”). By 2013 the number of integration references has increased to eight, and the statements have become significantly more promising: “great capacity for integration in various spheres”, “intensification” and “further development” of the integration processes in the economic, political and defensive spheres, “the transformation of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union” with the transformation of the latter into a “model of association open to other states”.

2.4.2. Protection of the domestic political situation from the influence of the West

The main source of concern for the Russian political elite was the language formally adopted by the UN in 2005 regarding the “responsibility to protect.” A comparison of the Foreign Policy Concepts of 2000 and 2013 gives an idea of the amount of concern this caused.

- In the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept a danger of “interference in internal affairs” was mentioned only once, and in most general terms. The 2013 Concept mentions it seven times and in a much more detailed manner: 25
- In 2000 Russia was intending “to win respect for human rights and freedoms around the world on the basis of respecting the norms of international law”. In 2013 the country was going to complete the same task through “an equal and constructive international dialogue with due regard for the ethnic, cultural and historical characteristics of each state” [italics are added — MU].
- In 2000 the passage of the Foreign Policy Concept dedicated to the human rights issue was entitled “Human rights and international relations”. In the document from 2013 the title of that same passage was changed whereby human rights moved to the second place (“International Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights”), and the intention proclaimed in 2000 “to continue bringing legislation of the Russian Federation in conformity with Russia’s international obligations” disappeared from the text.

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23 The term “veto player” is used here according to Tsebelis (2002).
24 “The attempts to belittle the role of a sovereign state as the fundamental element of international relations generate a threat of arbitrary interference in internal affairs.”
25 This problem is mentioned in the context of the “destructive” use of “soft power”, human rights concepts, the “responsibility to protect” principle, and the development of information and communication technologies. Non-interference is seen as one of the most important conditions for the stability of international relations; it has been affirmed that the relations with the U.S. should be based on this principle, that the U.S. is expected to follow this principle in its “actions in the international arena”, and that Russia will be building its own policy in the Middle East and North Africa according to this principle.
In the passage “The Rule of Law in International Relations” (appeared only in CFP 2013) about 65 percent of the text is devoted to efforts against the “revision of generally accepted norms of international law”, “arbitrary interpretation” of international legal norms and principles, such as “respect for the sovereignty of states and their territorial integrity and the right of peoples to self-determination”, as well as to ensuring the effectiveness of the use of a veto in the UN Security Council.

The theoretical basis of defense against the “responsibility to protect” — an antithesis of cultural universalism — is an appeal to the “civilization,” used to legitimize states’ own interpretation of human rights. While the Foreign Policy Concept 2000 did not contain this factor, it is mentioned 14 times in the concept of 2013.26

2.4.3. Securing Russian veto

The term “veto player role”, taken from the language of game theory, translates into the language of foreign “multi-vector policy” implemented in a situation of “decentralization of the global system of governance” or establishing a “polycentric model of the world, reflecting the world’s diversity and variety” (FPC, 2013, Div. II). The text of the Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 gives some reasons to consider the following lines of activities as the main ways to solve these problems: building up asymmetrical relations with the EU and the USA; participation in each and any influential international organization, providing the possibility to play on contradictions and disagreements between traditional and new — “Western” and “Eastern” – world centers of political, economic and military power; active exploitation of possibilities provided by the status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council (veto power).

- FPC 2013 orients the country towards “genuine Russia-EU integration” — no clause like this existed in FPC 2000 or in CLTSED 2020. Another change in the Russia-EU relations proposed by FPC 2013 is the absence of special sections dedicated to the Baltic and East European countries as found in FPC 2000. Apparently, the competition with the EU for influence over the former “socialist camp” territories is a thing of the past, and Russia now sees these countries as a genuine part of the

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26 Mentioned among others are: the growth of the “cultural and civilizational diversity of the world”, “the increased emphasis on civilizational identity” as “the reverse side of the globalization processes”, the necessity “to intensify efforts to forge partnership of cultures, religions and civilizations in order to ensure a harmonious development of mankind”, the necessity of “collective leadership by the major states of the world which, in turn, should be representative in geographical and civilizational terms” for “ensuring sustainable manageability of global development”.
integrated Europe. In respect to the relations with the USA, no kind of integration is mentioned while a deep interest to “strengthen ties in all areas … based on the principles of equality, non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for each other’s interests” is emphasized in every possible way. Aside from objective factors that perplex Russia–US relations in comparison with the relations between Russia and the EU, the asymmetry of the role sets in relation with the two “halves” of the Western world demonstrates an aspiration — wide-spread in contemporary international politics — to play upon contrarieties existing between the participants of the political process.

- According to FPC 2013, Russia is expected to establish collaboration with the APEC, ASEAN, BRICS, BSEC, CBSS, EU, G8, G20, RIC, SCO, SCM, and others in the framework of the “active development of relations with leading … alliances throughout the world”. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov said that Russia’s participation in “international alignments and organizations” is oriented towards “increasing the effectiveness of these multifaceted formats’ input into strengthening global governance” (Lavrov, 2013).
- The importance to preserve the status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a veto power is emphasized in practically every Russian foreign-policy document and does not require further comments.

3. Public opinion

The range of opinions in Russian society largely resembles the official positions and is sometimes more optimistic about Russian future as a great power. This is not surprising, given the fact that, firstly, the overwhelming majority of Russians are not interested in politics and receive information from the federal TV-channels that are stringently controlled by the state, and, secondly, public confidence in these news outlets continues to be great.27 The majority of Russians, therefore, uncritically accept the information-clichés translated by the pro-government mass media,28 which are inclined to smooth over problems and to embellish official information.

3.1. Status of the country

When it comes to judging Russia’s status in the world, public opinion is a little more optimistic than views expressed in official documents. In 2008–2011 the share of Russians considering their country a great power or a country having all necessary attributes of such was quite large: 45—60 percent (FOM, 2008, p. 3; PO, 2011, p. 20). By 2014 the opinion has become even more prevalent and has reached roughly 55—65 percent of Russians (FOM.ru; Levada-Center Archive, March 2014). The growth was triggered most likely by the events in Ukraine. According to the Levada-Center, in March 2014 about 80 percent of Russians believed that “the joining of Crimea to Russia suggests that Russia is returning to its traditional role of a great power and asserts its interests in the post-Soviet space” (Levada-Center Archive; March 2014).

3.2. Power capabilities

3.2.1. Hard power capabilities

The sole component of hard power capabilities, more or less thoroughly assessed through public opinion polls, is military power. The attitude towards the army in Russian society generally corresponds to “world standards”. According to World Values Survey (WVS), in the second half of the 2000s the share of Russians having “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the national armed forces was equal to 67 percent (as compared to 67 percent for the 15 most-developed countries, 60 percent for 10 West-European countries, and 82 percent for the USA).29 In April 2014 about 50 percent of Russians believed that “the joining of Crimea to Russia suggests that Russia is returning to its traditional role of a great power and asserts its interests in the post-Soviet space” (Levada-Center Archive; March 2014).

3.2.2. Soft power capabilities

These assessments are much more detailed than those of hard power capabilities, but are for the most part negative. Russia’s capabilities to influence international relations are evaluated controversially. According to the Levada-Center, the share of respondents believing that Russia has a “very strong” or “rather strong” influence on international affairs increased

27 According to the Levada-Center, in 1997–2011 the share of Russians interested in politics “largely” and “to a large extent” fluctuated between 8 and 15 percent, and of those interested “to a largest extent” — between 1 and 5 percent (PO, 2011, p. 34). In March 2014 the share of Russians who expressed their strong willingness to actively participate in politics was equal to 2 per cent, the share of whose “somewhat ready” to actively participate in politics reached 17 percent, while the share of respondents preferring not to be involved in politics was 75 percent, 70 percent of whom were not interested in politics for one reason or another (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014). According to the report of FOM.ru, in 2011–2013 television was the main source of news information for 89–92 percent of Russians. According to WCIOM.ru, 88 percent of Russian citizens receive political information from the Federal TV, and the share of those trusting TV equaled 77 percent in 2012.
28 In other words, the prevailing type of perception of media-messages in Russia today is the “dominant code” (Hall, 1980) — that is, recipients uncritically assimilate the very meanings the message-producers want them to perceive.
29 The 15 most developed countries are: Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Netherland, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. The 10 most developed West-European countries: Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Netherland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Calculations are based on World Values Surveys Databank.
from 51 percent in 2003 to 57 percent in 2007, and to 69 percent in 2010 (HSE JESDA). But in April 2014 the percentage of those thinking that over the last two years the position of Russia in the international arena has become better and of those saying that it has become worse was almost equal: 37 against 33 percent (Levada-Center Archive, April 2014).

Meanwhile, FOM in 2012 witnessed a decrease in the number of Russians who believe that the country’s influence in the world has declined: from 60 percent in 2008 to 48 percent in 2012. But in 2014 it declared that in 2004–2014 the share of those believing that Russia “in its decisions acts on its own and does not depend on the leading Western countries”, has increased from 33 to 52 percent, while the share of the supporters of the opposite opinion has declined from 54 to 33 percent (FOM.ru).

Russia’s capabilities to make living and investment in the country attractive. As claimed by the Levada-Center, in 2008 more than three-quarters of Russians were dissatisfied with the level of corruption and the quality of education, and about 80 percent were concerned about “what is happening now in the country in the field of ethics and morality” (HSE JESDA). In 2011, answering the question about the changes that had been taking place in society during the previous 12 years, more than half of the respondents reported a decline in the following fields: morals and everyday culture (63 percent), system of education, health-care, transport, housing services and utilities (61 percent); social security (53 percent), life safety and legal protection (51 percent) (PO, 2011, p. 18). In 2013, 80 percent of Russians called the level of corruption in Russia “high” (FOM.ru).

In March 2014 the share of those thinking that “the theft and corruption in the country’s leadership” are now more than it was 10–12 years ago is equal to 32 percent of respondents, compared to 7 percent of people holding the opposite opinion. The share of respondents believing that the situation has not changed was about 53 percent. Just the same distribution of positions was registered in the assessments of the impact of bureaucracy on the country: over the last 10–12 years it has increased — 32 percent, decreased — 7 percent, unchanged — 53 percent (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

The assessments of the living standard are far from being positive. In February 2014 the respondents of the Levada-Center pointed out as the most pressing problems of the country: price increase (69 percent), poverty (51 percent) and growth of unemployment (33 percent). The assessments of the living standard dynamics suggest that Russians do not see any notable changes in this area. The share of respondents who believe that over the past two years the living standards of Russians have improved was equal to 28 percent against 32 percent saying that the standards have lowered, and 38 percent claim that they have not changed.

In the assessments of business conditions and the brain drain problem the share of those noting either improvement or worsening of the situation was roughly the same and equal to 54–57 percent (Levada-Center Archive, April 2014).

Against the backdrop of such assessments one can see a sharp increase in public confidence in Putin and his government’s policy. According to FOM, during December 2013—February 2014 the percentage of Russians satisfied and dissatisfied with the “actions of the government in the last month” was almost equal (about 48 and 45 percent), but in June 2014 the portion of the dissatisfied fell down to 29 percent, and that of the satisfied increased up to 64 percent. The growth of public trust in Putin and his policy according to the Levada-Center is shown in Fig. 2.

We assume that these startling rapid changes in the attitude of the public towards Putin and the Kremlin leadership as a whole can be accounted for by the psychological effect of a “small victorious war” in Crimea, that is, the reaction to a “medicine” which is much more dangerous than effective.

The main danger here is that a support like that is based on the burst of aggressive emotions and thus requires a more or less constant aggressive actions against external and/or internal enemies. But campaigns of that sort are at best very resource-demanding and at worst utterly destructive. Taking into account the fact that today Russian resource capabilities are quite low (Urnov, 2014), the strategy of aggressive rally can lead quite quickly to tragic consequences for the country.

3.3. Set of images

In Russian public opinion descriptive and normative characteristics of the country’s images essentially differ from one another. The descriptive vision, reflecting an actual situation, primarily focuses on hard power capabilities. The normative one, revealing what people want to see (what Russia has to be like in their opinion), focuses on the soft power potentials of the country.

3.3.1. Image of the country

The descriptive component of the country’s image can be seen in the structure of the responses to open questions proposed by FOM in 2008. Approximately three-quarters of all responses referred to capabilities that can be attributed to the hard or soft power of the country. 60 percent were about hard power (25 percent about Russia’s military power and 20 percent about the “vast territory” of the country and its natural resources).

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30 Those respondents who claimed that “modern Russia can/cannot be considered as a great power” were asked to explain their position (FOM, 2008).
31 The remaining 25 percent of the responses are either statements like Russia “was, is, and will be a great power” or meaningless answers (“difficult to say”). The criteria of ascribing the answers to hard or soft power capabilities were taken from McClory (2011, pp. 28–34), Morgenthau (1993, pp. 113–180), and Waltz (1979, p. 131).
32 Calculations are based on (FOM, 2008, pp. 3–7).
The normative component can be seen in the respondents' answers to the questions “which attributes/qualities define a great power?” and “what kind of Russia they need” (see Table 1).

As seen from Table 1, in 2001–2012 “comfort” (soft power) was about three times more popular than “might” (hard power).

In March 2014, answering the question “What is vital now to provide Russia with a worthy place among the most developed countries?”, 60 percent of Russians pointed out “a sustainable economic development through the use of new technologies and the growth of labor productivity”; 15 percent — “a raise of living standard at least up to the European average level”; 12 percent — “more export revenues from oil, gas and other raw materials”, and only 8 percent indicated, “not to restrain expense for strengthening our military power” (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

In these questions “comfort” and “might” were not in opposition to one another: more “might” did not mean less “comfort” or vice versa. When such an opposition was implemented into the questions, the number of “might” followers was somewhat lower. In 2003–2011, in answering the Levada-Center’s question: “What kind of Russia do you prefer to see: a) The country with a high living standard, even if it is not one of the strongest countries in the world or b) The great power which other countries respect and are somewhat scared of?” the ratio of the first and the second positions was more or less steadily equal to 6:4 (PO, 2011, p.20). In 2014, this ratio became equal to 1:1 (48:48 percent) (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014). Only when respondents are deprived of any such alternative and have to approve or disapprove the idea of restoring the greatness of the country, based primarily on its armed forces, this idea gets the majority’s support. In 2011 the share of “definitely yes” and “rather yes” answers to the question “Do you support the opinion that Russia should reestablish its status of a great empire?” was equal to 78 percent, with 40 percent of those answering “definitely yes” (PO, 2011, p. 21).

The Russian population’s preference for greatpowerness based on soft power is not a result of current social dissatisfaction.

The roots of the problem go deeper. This choice demonstrates a steady tendency of the consciousness became notable as early as in the Brezhnev era (Grushin, 2006, pp. 611–691; Urnov, 1982). Apparently, the displacement of the “warrior ethics” by the “welfare rather than glory” principle — the tendency that, according to Nye (2003, p. 5), is typical of post-industrial modern democratic societies - can be observed in Russia. This tendency affects Russian public opinion; the traditional and significant for the realism/neo-realism criterion of a great power - “strength for war”) is being replaced by “strength for peace and well-being” criterion. Consequently, Russians express their preference of greatness as based on soft, rather than on hard power. The imperial character of Russian mass consciousness — which Levada (1993, p. 21) and his colleagues considered among the fundamental patterns of the Homo Sovieticus political consciousness — is weakening dramatically.

At present, the observed tendency formed quite a strong syndrome of “individualist paternalism”: a combination of extreme individualism and equally extreme paternalistic expectations of the role of the state. In everyday language it can be expressed as follows: I owe society and the state nothing, but society and the state are bound to guarantee my well-being (Urnov, 2012a,b). According to the WVS, in 2006 Russia vs. the U.S had twice as many firm supporters of income inequality (49 percent vs. 25 percent) and by three times—in the number of firm supporters of the opinion that “the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for” (60 percent vs. 20 percent). In 2002–2012, in choosing between two “principles of social order” — priority of individual interests vs. priority of state interests — the vote ratio was steadily 7:3 in favor of the former position (PO, 2012, p. 27). Herewith, the denial of the priority of state interests by no means implied denial to press demands on the state; on the contrary, it was accompanied by a growth in such demands. Between 1989 and 2012 the share of Russians believing that they cannot demand anything from the state, because “our state gave us everything” or because “our country is now the kind of state which needs our help, even if it will cost us sacrifice” went down from 42 to five percent; meanwhile, the share of those believing that “we can demand more” from the state or that “we should make the state serve our interests” increased from 36 to 53 percent (ibid., p. 41).

The presence of the “welfare rather than glory” principle in Russian mass consciousness can be seen even against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis. In April 2014, under a massive anti-Ukrainian propaganda in government media and a prevalence of mass belief that joining Crimea means a regaining of Russia’s position of a great power, the idea of a legitimacy of the Russian troops entering Crimea and other regions of Ukraine was supported only by half of Russian respondents (54 percent, including 19 percent of “definitely yes” and 35 percent of “rather yes” support). The ratio of people ready to “personally bear the cost of joining Crimea” was significantly lower: 5 percent of “fully ready”, and 12 percent of “largely ready” against 30 percent of “not ready at all”, 29 percent of “not quite ready” and 24 percent making various empty statements (Levada-Center Archive, April 2014). These figures relate to the specific situation in Ukraine. Meanwhile, in the questions, which do not indicate any particular country but refer “in general” to countries violating the rights of Russians, positions of Russian respondents are much less warlike than in the case of Ukraine. Answering such a question, proposed by Levada-Center in April 2014, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (about 75 percent) preferred that for these

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33 “The test of a power is then the test of strength for war” (Taylor, 1954, p. xxiv). According to Modelski, a great/major power “must be capable of winning a major war” (Modelski, 1972, p. 149).

34 Calculations are based on data of WVS databank. For more details see Urnov (2012b, p. 208).
Table 1
The popularity of the idea of a great power and the vision of the country’s greatness in Russian public opinion (2001–2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the statements better corresponds with your vision of the country’s greatness?</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The greatness of the country is based on its leading position in the world, the size of its territory, and the ruling position of my people on its own land</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greatness of the country depends on how its people live, their living standards, equality of rights and opportunities for all its nationalities — these things define the leading position of the country in the world</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of Russia do you need? A mighty military power where the superiority of the state’s interests, its prestige and status in the world have a preponderant position.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A country comfortable for living, where human interests, prosperity and development opportunities hold the first place</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LEVADA.ru.

countries Russia should use peaceful means (economic and political pressure and sanctions) and only 8 percent said that Russia should use its troops (Levada-Center Archive, April 2014).

3.3.2. Image of international system

A typical feature of today’s Russian mass consciousness, linking it with the official worldview, is a growing anxiety in assessments of Russia’s relations with the outside world. The share of Russians believing that contemporary Russia has enemies increased from 40 percent in the 1990s to around 70 percent in 2000s. The share of those believing in the existence of “a military threat to Russia from other countries” has also increased: in 2000–2006 its average was 43 percent; in 2007–2013 it slightly exceeded 50 percent (PO, 2012, pp. 198, 201). In March 2014, 35 percent of Russian respondents admitted that they are always or often beset by fear of a new World War, and 47 percent believed that a new Cold War is a great threat to Russia (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

This growing anxiety is to a considerable extent the result of the strengthening of Russians’ negative perception of the West as a whole, and, first and foremost, of the U.S., the only country that more than half of the Russians (about 60 percent) consider stronger than Russia in military terms (Levada-Center poll of 2002 – HSE JESDA). According to the Levada-Center, the index of the Russians’ attitude towards the U.S. (difference between positive and negative assessments) has decreased from 30 percent in 2000–2006 to 10 percent in 2007–2012. The share of Russians seeing the U.S. among the “countries most hostile to Russia” has increased from 23 percent in 2005 to 35 percent in 2012, while the portion of respondents referring to the U.S. as to a friend/ally of Russia has dropped from 11 to 2 percent. The share of those claiming that the “Russian government should pursue rapprochement with the U.S. in the near future” has declined from 24 percent in 2012 to 14 percent in March 2014 (PO, 2012, pp. 200, 207; Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

The prevailing opinion is that mass media is the main factor in the growth of an anti-American mood. This is correct. As mentioned above, most Russians are inclined to consume TV and radio broadcasts uncritically. Yet, it has to be taken into account that in 1998–2013 not the growth of anti-American but the drop of pro-American mass media publications was observed (see Fig. 3).

Thus, the negativism was growing not due to criticism but due to a declining favorable attitude in respect to the U.S. We are inclined to consider this an evidence of strength of anti-American stereotypes, deeply rooted in the generations of Russians prior to Gorbachev’s perestroika and “coming back to life” or revived when the pressure of positive information weakened.

In 2014 the situation in Russian mass media changed. That year, in Russian federal TV and radio broadcasts there was a sharp increase in the number of message presenting the USA as a source of provocations, an imperialist, anti-Russian force threatening Russia, etc. In April 2014 the flow of such messages peaked (their number was 30 times higher than in January). As a result, the index of public attitudes towards the United States has fallen from 10 in 2013 to −21 in March and to −56 in July 2014 (Levada-Center Archive, March, July 2014). Later the flow of negative publications somewhat weakened but still remained much stronger than at the beginning of the year: in May and June the number of negative messages about the USA was 14 and 12 times higher, respectively, than in January.35

The attitude of Russians towards the European Union has also become more negative. In 2003–2006 the index of the attitude towards the European Union — calculated by the Levada-Center in the same year as the index of the attitude towards the USA — was around 55. In 2007–2012 it was at approximately 45. In March 2014 it became negative, equal to −4, and in July 2014 it reached −33 (Levada-Center Archive, March, July 2014).

Replying to the question: “How the majority of developed countries are looking at Russia today?”, 3 percent of respondents said that these countries see Russia “as a friend”, 26 percent — “as a partner”, 40 percent — “as a competitor” and 16 percent — “as an enemy” (ibid.)

35 Quantitative characteristics of the Russian federal media information flow in 2014 were kindly calculated for us by A. Smolyanski, a CEO of the Information Agency Integrum World Wide with the use of the Intergrum information service, and we express him our profound gratitude for this friendly assistance.
There was also a decrease in the number of Russians who considered certain West European countries friendly: for Germany the drop was from 23 to 17 percent; for France from 13 to 9 percent; and for UK it remained at the low level of 5 to 3 percent between 2005 and 2012 (PO, 2012, pp. 200, 207, 210).

The negative attitude towards the West was growing together with the popularity of the opinion that Russia “should not pay attention to Western criticism”. In 2007–2012 the support of this opinion grew from 38 to 50 percent (ibid., p. 202). In 2013–2014 this question was not asked, but taking into account the dynamics of indexes of the attitude towards the USA and EU, this position also became worse than before. The proliferation of these positions was facilitated by the weakness of Russians’ European identity. According to the Levada-Center, in the 1990s and 2000s the share of Russians considering themselves a “European people belonging to the history and culture of European society” did not exceed one-third of the respondents (HSE JESDA). In FOM inquiry of 2013, about 60 percent of respondents claimed that Russian and European values and culture “differ significantly” (FOM.ru).

3.4. Set of roles

In this sphere the growing negativism towards the West manifested itself by the decreasing popularity of the idea of integrating Russia into “Western” organizational structures. The share of firm supporters of Russia joining the EU has dropped from 23 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2012. In 2002–2012 the percentage of those thinking that a friendlier relationship with NATO “agrees with the interests of Russia” declined from 48 to 25. At the same time the share of those considering it necessary to “confront NATO enlargement, to create defensive unions counterbalancing NATO” has increased from 14 to 23 percent, and the share of respondents preferring “nonparticipation in any military alliances” increased from 22 to 36 percent (PO, 2012, pp. 209, 210). In March 2014 the share of Russians believing that Russia had reason to fear the NATO countries, was equal to 62 percent (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

Such moods have also affected Russian’s attitude towards the WTO; from 2002 to 2012 the share of respondents who believed that joining this organization “agrees with Russian interests” dropped from 53 to 38 percent (PO, 2012, p. 211). Meanwhile, the growing rejection of “institutionalized” integration in the Western world took place against the background of a high and stable popularity of the idea that Russia should “strengthen mutually beneficial relations with Western countries”. From 1999 to 2012 the share of those supporting this opinion demonstrated very weak oscillations and on average hovered around 70 percent (ibid., p. 202). However, in 2014 the situation seems to be changing. In March 2014 the share of respondents, who think that for Russian economy it would be better “to strengthen ties with China, India and other large developing countries”, was equal to 46 percent versus 23 percent who believe it was preferable “to strengthen ties with the developed Western economies, such as the G8 countries”, and 19 percent assumed that Russia would better serve as a “bridge” between these two groups of countries (Levada-Center Archive, March 2014).

Fig. 3. Messages of Federal TV and radio treating the US as an enemy or a friend. (Percentage in total number of messages transmitted by 35 Federal TV and Radio Channels.) “USA-friend” – messages linking the USA with the following concepts: friend, ally, partner, help, trust, cooperation, security. “USA-Enemy” – messages linking the USA with the following concepts: enemy, adversary, conflict, aggression, pressure, lack of confidence, danger. Source: INTEGRUM.
4. Conclusions

The period of 2000–2014, that is the period of Putin’s presidency, is extremely interesting from the theoretical and practical points of view. The concept of Russia as a great power has been changing during this period in two respects: first, there is an increasing reticence of self-assessments; second, we observe the prioritization of protecting the country’s own, mostly regional, interests compared to the expansion of a great power. Moreover, this period conclusively demonstrates contradictions and dangers engendered in the process of losing self-perception as that of a great power. Russian official documents, examined above, indicate the readiness of the country’s political elite to part bit by bit with the status of a great power and to go to the status of a regional power.

At the same time, the events around Ukraine have shown that Russian political elite is not ready to sustain the emerging new status of the country with the help of the capabilities of a soft power. Several causes of such lack of readiness exist and there is no doubt that some traces of cultural inertia can be found here. The present political elite of Russia was raised within Soviet imperial political culture, where the hard power was considered as the main, if not the only, real factor in international politics, while the soft power was perceived at best as a complementary component and at worst as a PR-decoration. Furthermore, in this culture there existed a deeply rooted look at Soviet republics (now — the so-called post-Soviet space, or CIS) as the younger brothers of Great Russia. But the problem does not boil down to the cultural traditions only. The other, and perhaps more important cause is that the formation, accumulation and use of the capabilities of a soft power in the country today require deep political and economic reforms — democratization of political life, active struggle against corruption, and others — the changes that may threaten the present political elite with the loss of power. The fear of the elite to lose power is, in our view, the main factor destroying the already small resource basis of soft power in Russia.\footnote{We do not exclude the 2008–2012 period when Putin was a prime minister, because his policies both in internal and external affairs continued thought with some minor Medvedev’s modifications.}

Lack of soft power capabilities, as well as of the skills to use them, and a desire to raise the rating of trust in the government with the help of a “small victorious war” have formed the basis for the aggressive upsurge towards Ukraine. The emergence of such upsurges, which — before the Ukrainian crisis — seemed, at least to the author of this paper, highly improbable, represents one of the most important lessons of the crisis, and it has to be taken into account while analyzing political processes in any low-institutionalized society.

The second equally important lesson of the Ukrainian crisis is the relative ease of recovery of anti-Western stereotypes in Russian mass consciousness and the effectiveness of their use to maintain the government’s popularity.

In the absence of serious hard and soft capabilities, the splashes of aggressiveness in the foreign policy and of anti-Western sentiments in domestic political life are unlikely to have any lasting effect. However, they are able to generate extremely negative long-term consequences for the country. In the international relations it is the loss of confidence in Russia on the part of other countries, the growth of the country’s isolation and technological backwardness, and thus the loss of prospects for modernization, not to mention the growing economic and political dependence on China. In domestic policy it is an aggravation of the struggle within the political elite that does not guarantee a “democratic alternative’s” victory, but significantly increases the risk of nationalism and growth of xenophobia \cite{Urnov, 2005, pp. 52–53; Urnov, 2012b, pp. 221–223}, territorial separatism, and thus an accelerated destruction of the Russian national identity. By “territorial separatism” we mean massive reorientation of personal and group identity from the country to one’s own region — to “little homeland” (territory of inhabitance), and thus a gradual destruction (or at least weakening) of the feeling of common belonging. This process is now quite visible in Tatarstan, Siberia, the Far East and North Caucasus \cite{Allenova, 2011; Doushin and Sagalaev, 2008; Gerasimenko, 2012; Putilov, 2012; Tourovska, 2012}. It is impossible to say at the moment whether these dynamics can be halted, whereby Russia can survive as an integrated country in its current borders.

Taking into account the fact that Russia is a nuclear power and has plenty of hazardous production facilities on its territory, it is important not to underestimate these dynamics.

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\footnote{We do not exclude the 2008–2012 period when Putin was a prime minister, because his policies both in internal and external affairs continued thought with some minor Medvedev’s modifications.}

\footnote{Here we deliberately do not touch upon purely personal and psychological aspects of the Kremlin’s decision-making regarding Ukraine, although these aspects are certainly important.}