



<https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2337-2024-28-4-730-742>


EDN: HHTGZL

Research Article / Научная статья

## Legal regulation of national interests in Russia: Theory and practice

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**Abstract.** A thorough examination of governmental and legal processes holds significant relevance in the modern world characterized by constantly evolving global dynamics. Delving into diverse theoretical frameworks such as realistic, constructivist, and liberal perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of the essence of national interests and their legal governance. The objective is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework governing national interests in the Russian Federation, encompassing both theoretical aspects and practical implementation, and to provide recommendations for enhancing the legal system. The study employs various methodologies: the formal-logical method aids in analyzing legal norms and their interconnectedness; the systemic method enables a thorough exploration of international relations theories, their links to national interests; and the modeling method is utilized to forecast potential scenarios and evaluate their legal implications. The article draws the following conclusions: 1) The realist approach underscores the significance of state sovereignty and security. 2) Despite the prevailing realist paradigm in Russia, the liberal concept retains importance due to its emphasis on international cooperation, economic interdependence, and adherence to legal norms. 3) The constructivist theory remains relevant for its focus on the role of ideas, norms, and values in shaping national interests and adapting to evolving international circumstances. The amalgamation of realist, constructivist, and liberal approaches serves as a contemporary and highly sought-after tool for analyzing and comprehending intricate processes in the modern world.

**Key words:** national interests, realist theory, liberal theory, constructivist theory, strategic act, domestic policy, lawmaking

**Conflict of interest.** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Funding.** The research was conducted with the support of the grant from the Russian Science Foundation as part of the RNF project No. 23-28-01457 “Vectors of lawmaking development to realize Russia's national interests: challenges and opportunities”.

*Received: 26th August 2024*

*Accepted: 15th October 2024*

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**For citation:**

Alimova, D.R. (2024) Legal regulation of national interests in Russia: Theory and practice. *RUDN Journal of Law*. 28 (4), 730–742. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2337-2024-28-4-730-742>

## Правовое регулирование национальных интересов в России: теория и практика

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**Аннотация.** Комплексный анализ государственных и правовых процессов чрезвычайно важен в условиях современного мира и постоянно меняющихся глобальных условий. Изучение различных теоретических подходов – реалистического, конструктивистского и либерального – позволяет получать более объемное понимание содержания национальных интересов и их правового регулирования. Цель в осуществлении комплексного анализа правового регулирования национальных интересов в Российской Федерации, охватывающего как теоретические аспекты, так и практическую реализацию, и предоставление выводов для дальнейшего совершенствования правовой системы. Применены методы: формально-логический – для анализа правовых норм и их взаимосвязей, системный – для комплексного рассмотрения теорий международных отношений, места национальных интересов в них и факторов, влияющих на их реализацию, метод моделирования для прогнозирования возможных сценариев и оценивания их правовых последствий. Сформулированы следующие выводы: 1) реалистический подход подчеркивает важность суверенитета и безопасности государства; 2) либеральная концепция при всей текущей преобладании реалистической парадигмы в России сохраняет свою значимость благодаря своим идеям международного сотрудничества, экономической взаимозависимости и правовых норм; 3) конструктивистская теория актуальна благодаря акценту на значимость идей для процесса становления национальных интересов. Интеграция реалистических, конструктивистских и либеральных подходов эффективна и актуальна для анализа сложных процессов, характерных для современного контекста.

**Ключевые слова:** реалистическая теория, либеральная теория, конструктивистская теория, национальные интересы, стратегический акт, внутренняя политика, правотворчество

**Конфликт интересов.** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Финансирование.** Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда в рамках проекта РНФ № 23-28-01457 «Векторы развития правотворчества в целях реализации национальных интересов России: проблемы и перспективы».

*Поступила в редакцию: 26 августа 2024 г.*

*Принята к печати: 15 октября 2024 г.*

**Для цитирования:**

*Алимова Д.Р.* Правовое регулирование национальных интересов в России: теория и практика // RUDN Journal of Law. 2024. Т. 28. № 4. С. 730–742. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2337-2024-28-4-730-742>

## **Introduction**

National interests play a crucial role in shaping state's policies and strategic development. However, the exact meaning and content of this concept remain subject to ongoing debates among policymakers, scholars, and public figures. This uncertainty arises from the intricate and multifaceted nature of national interests, which are influenced by unique factors within each country, including historical events, cultural traditions, political and economic institutions, and geopolitical positioning. Understanding and articulating national interests necessitate a thorough analysis of these interconnected factors, their historical origins, and their current manifestations. By considering these aspects comprehensively, a deeper and more holistic comprehension of a state's international and domestic actions can be achieved.

Yu.G. Leschenko notes: "It is impossible to specifically explain the significance and content of national interests, as both their roots and the process of their synthesis are inherent in the history, traditions, and institutional structure of the country" (Leschenko, 2020: 2380).

In contemporary Russia, establishing and enacting legal mechanisms to safeguard national interests has become an imperative task. This article seeks to evaluate the existing legal framework for national interests within the context of prevalent theoretical concepts and to identify and substantiate pertinent challenges in this realm.

Within the examination of national interests, several dominant theories (concepts) are discernible, including the realist, liberal, and constructivist theories.

Furthermore, a detailed analysis will be conducted to explore the similarities and differences with these theoretical constructs and their manifestations within the legal framework for regulating national interests in the Russian Federation. The article aims to elucidate both the positive and negative aspects of this framework.

## **National Interests within the Realist Approach**

In the realist approach to international relations, the state is viewed as a convergence point for the interests of diverse social groups, essential for maintaining national unity (Drobot, 2014a:182). Hans Morgenthau, a prominent realist theorist, substantially developed the concept of national interests (Morgenthau, 1955:65), which continues to hold relevance and influence among global policymakers, as highlighted by researcher N.A. Antanovich (Antanovich & Dostanko, 2000).

Morgenthau posits that national interest aligns with constitutional principles such as general welfare and due process. The content of national interests, according to him, is shaped by nation's political traditions and broader cultural milieu, guiding its foreign policy formulation (Morgenthau, 1958: 65). Consequently, national interest

is not only foundational to foreign policy but also adaptable, reflecting the intricate tapestry of political, legal traditions, and cultural contexts within which it operates. The constitution, serving as the supreme law of the state, establishes fundamental principles and norms to safeguard national interests across various sectors. N.N. Komarova emphasizes that the constitutional embedding of national interests enhances their recognition as a paramount social value of the state, bestowing upon them the highest legal authority in shaping sectoral legal frameworks (Komarova, 2008: 65).

Within this framework, the state is regarded as the primary actor on the international stage, serving as the guardian and advocate of national interests. These interests predominantly encompass matters of security, economic prosperity, the preservation of sovereignty, and the safeguarding of cultural identity. National interests can be conceptualized as a set of objectives, priorities, and values designed to optimize the nation's security and well-being. They are dynamic and responsive to both internal and external challenges and threats, capable of evolving over time.

The idea of national interest, manifested in the form of state interest, entails the existence of specific priorities and strategies that determine both the foreign and domestic policies of the state. State interest is molded through an analysis of the opportunities and constraints faced by the country, considering historical, cultural, and economic factors that influence its position within the international system.

P.A. Tsygankov underscores that realism operates on the premise that international relations are anarchic, lacking a supreme authority, and asserts that the national interests of states underpin international relations, with their equilibrium being regulated by the balance of power among major powers (Tsygankov, 2004:121).

National interests represent a complex category manifested through a state's actions on the international stage. These actions encompass diplomatic initiatives, military strategies, economic policies, and other forms of influence. As the international system and global order evolve, states adjust their strategies to maintain or enhance their influence and ensure the well-being of their citizens.

Viewed through the lens of statehood, the concept of national interest is a pivotal element in the analysis of international relations. It helps elucidate the motives and actions of states, deepening the comprehension of international interactions and forecasting potential scenarios for global developments. Legal regulation issues within the realist approach are intricately linked to national interests, with legal norms and institutions serving as tools for implementing state strategy on the international stage.

National interests often determine the content and formats of international legal treaties, agreements, and conventions. States aim to establish legal mechanisms that uphold their sovereignty, security, and economic prosperity. For example, international legal norms in fields such as trade, security, and environmental protection are developed with consideration for the needs and interests of major players on the global stage. States utilize legal instruments to ensure adherence to their national

interests, actively engaging with international organizations like the UN and WTO, as well as in bilateral relations.

The realist approach posits that legal norms and institutions are not self-sufficient but operate within the context of power dynamics and state interests. The effectiveness of legal regulation largely hinges on the balance of power and the capabilities of system participants. Powerful states can leverage their influence to establish and uphold international legal norms that benefit them, while weaker states have to adapt to existing conditions.

Simultaneously, international law provides a platform for legitimizing state interests, constructing frameworks of predictability and stability, ultimately diminishing the level of conflict in international relations.

Therefore, within the realist approach, national interests are manifested in legal regulation through the active engagement of states in formulating, implementing, and upholding international legal norms and institutions aligned with their strategic objectives. This interaction plays a crucial role in maintaining global order and contributes to the predictable development of international events.

It is also noteworthy that in the Russian Federation, national interests have been addressed in the National Security Strategy, acknowledging at the state level the inherent connection between security concerns and national interests.

In the strategic planning documents of the Russian Federation, such as the National Security Strategy, foreign policy is delineated through the lens of national interests and security. This approach aligns with the realist concept, where national interests stand as the paramount objective of the state. Realism acknowledges the paramount significance of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, a notion clearly reflected in the Russian national security concept<sup>1</sup>.

Paragraph 25 of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation enumerates the national interests of the Russian Federation, including the preservation of the Russian populace, protection of the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, and the state and territorial, strengthening of national defense, maintenance of civil peace and concord, development of a secure information space, sustainable economic development on a new technological basis, protection of the environment, reinforcement of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, and maintenance of strategic stability. This selection of values as national interests aligns with the core tenets of realist theory, prioritizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state<sup>2</sup>.

The aforementioned paragraph of the Strategy epitomizes the core of realist theory, emphasizing the priorities of sovereignty and territorial. Additionally, Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation No. 809 dated November 9, 2022, “On the Approval of the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and

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<sup>1</sup> President of the Russian Federation (2021) Decree No. 400 dated 2 July, On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation, 5 July, No. 27 (Part II), Art. 5351. (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values”<sup>3</sup> directly references National Security Strategy in Section 12, stating “The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation assesses the situation in Russia and the world as requiring urgent measures to protect traditional values.” This provision underscores the vital importance of safeguarding cultural identity and traditional values in ensuring national security and sovereignty. Recognizing this task as critically important, the state aims to enact urgent measures to ensure internal stability and resilience in the face of global challenges and threats.

In 2016, the Information Security Doctrine presented a slightly different perspective on the priority national interests<sup>4</sup>. It is important to note that according to the priority in national information policy is the protection of the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens. The Doctrine also emphasizes that the primary task in advancing national interests lies in safeguarding the constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens, ensuring the sustainable socio-economic development of the country, and strengthening the national security of the Russian Federation. While these provisions may be viewed as declarative, they serve as an integrative concept that unifies all declared national interests into a coherent entity.

Significantly, this context places the protection of the constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens as the foremost priority in the realm of national interests in the information sphere. The text of the Doctrine also highlights that the ultimate goal of realizing national interests is to ensure the constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens, along with promoting stable socio-economic development and the national security of the Russian Federation. While these provisions are declarative in nature, they serve as a unifying link, encompassing all the stated national interests to be achieved.

Interestingly, a shift in focus is observed here: while human rights previously held a central position, the current emphasis is increasingly directed towards ensuring security. This shift reflects the current international and domestic political landscape, where the concept of national security is gaining paramount importance. Undoubtedly, the protection of constitutional rights and freedoms remains crucial, but it is increasingly viewed through the lens of safeguarding the state from external and internal threats.

This trend is evident not only in the discourse of state policy but also in specific legislative initiatives. The proliferation of laws targeting extremism, terrorism, cyber threats, and the increased scrutiny in the information sphere underscores the prioritization of security over other aspects of socio-political life (Ibragimova, 2022: 904). This shift is necessitated by escalating global challenges and threats, compelling both the state and society at large to collaborate closely.

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<sup>3</sup> President of the Russian Federation (2022) Presidential Decree No. 809, On the Approval of the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values. Russian Federation Collection of Legislation, 14 November, No. 46, Art. 7977.

<sup>4</sup> President of the Russian Federation (2016) Decree No. 646, On Approval of the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation. Collection of Laws of the Russian Federation, No. 50, Art. 7074.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that this shift in emphasis should not result in the violation of citizens' rights and freedoms. Instead, the effective preservation of a nation's sovereignty should be founded on a sustainable balance between security imperatives and the protection of human rights. Transparency and justification of implemented measures, adherence to international standards, and obtaining public consensus on their necessity play vital roles in this context.

The transition from human rights to security as the focal point in pursuing the national interests of the Russian Federation mirrors adaptive responses to contemporary challenges. Maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between these priorities remains essential to ensure the country's stable and sustainable progress.

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation and the Fundamentals of State Policy to Preserve and Strengthen Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values exemplify the pragmatic application of realist theory in governance. The realist perspective, prioritizing national interests, sovereignty, and internal stability, is methodically operationalized through a series of strategic directives, ensuring the enduring development and fortification of the state's standing on the global stage.

Consequently, national legal framework within this domain and the institutional configurations of the state demonstrate a commitment to fortifying sovereignty and upholding stability.

*National interests within the framework of liberal theory* in international relations are viewed through the lens of interaction, cooperation, and interdependence between states. In contrast to the realist approach, liberal theory interprets national interests more broadly, surpassing the traditional focus on security and sovereignty.

Renowned researchers such as Robert Keohane, an ardent critic of realist theory, have highlighted its primary inadequacy, stating “realism did not emphasize the role of domestic politics and international institutions sufficiently” (Keohane, 1999:442–443). Liberal theory focuses on the diversity of values and mechanisms that contribute to international stability and development. Economic interdependence between states reduces the likelihood of armed conflicts, as wars become more costly and entail negative consequences for all parties involved.

A key aspect of the liberal approach is the emphasis on cooperation through trade, investment, and other forms of economic interaction. Liberal theory contends that such interactions promote international stability and peace, as states become more vested in nurturing mutually beneficial relationships. In this manner, economic interdependence serves as a stabilizing force in international relations.

According to liberal theory, national interests focus on mutually advantageous cooperation, enabling states to concurrently pursue their objectives while fostering international stability. The theory also underscores the significance of soft power and diplomacy as tools to deepen international ties and advance national interests.

Hence, the liberal international relations theory furnishes a comprehensive perspective on national interests by broadening their comprehension in the context of cooperation, economic interdependence, and international law. These factors not only contribute to achieving domestic objectives, such as economic growth and democratization, but also reinforce international order and stability. As noted by S.A. Sidorov and V.A. Smolyakov, “the essence of Keohane’s ‘liberal institutionalism’ lies in acknowledging criticisms about premature conclusions regarding the weakening of the state. He demonstrated the potential for significant changes in the nature of international relations, while preserving the independence of states that cooperate within international institutions” (Sidorov & Smolyakov, 2023:107).

Therefore, despite the theoretical appeal of concepts in liberal international relations theory, their relevance within the context of modern Russia is limited. Decision-makers often adhere to approaches that oppose the liberal paradigm, focusing on national security, sovereignty, and a realistic understanding of international relations. In his work “Modern Russian State: Essays,” Professor N.A. Vlasenko rightly notes that “liberal values have not taken root easily and unequivocally in Russia, even at present,” emphasizing that these values have always faced challenges in establishing themselves” (Vlasenko, 2022:52)

G.A. Drobot highlights that “Russian liberalism is less popular in the academic community than political realism and faces more criticism in the educational and scientific circles. Despite this, its supporters show enviable enthusiasm in defending their ideas. This might be due to the political pragmatism of Russian scholars. Nonetheless, the time for the ideas of liberal post-classicism and moralistic idealism may still be forthcoming” (Drobot, 2014b:166–167).

However, it is worth noting that this does not imply a complete discrediting of liberal theory in the Russian context. Liberal ideas still find their adherents and generate discussions. Moreover, global integration processes, the development of interstate cooperation, and the need to adapt to international standards require periodic reference to elements of the liberal agenda.

At the same time, adapting liberal ideas to Russian conditions may require certain modifications and consideration of the specifics of national political culture, historical experience, and institutional structure. This may include developing hybrid theories, combining elements of liberalism and realism, as well as a more pragmatic approach to international relations that takes into account both idealistic and realistic considerations.

Despite the current prevalence and applicability of the realist paradigm in the context of modern Russia, the potential of liberal theory should not be entirely discounted. A comprehensive and adaptable approach will allow for more effective solutions to complex foreign policy tasks and maintain a balance between national interests and international cooperation.

*Constructivist theory* offers a unique perspective on national interests, based on the belief that these interests are not predetermined by objective factors such as geopolitics or economics, but are shaped through social interactions, identity, and culture (Pavlenko,



2015: 53-67). Within this framework, national interests are seen as the result of social constructs and collective norms rather than objective conditions.

Constructivists argue that the reality of international relations is formed not by objective conditions or material factors, but by social interactions and intersubjective understandings (Alekseeva, 2014: 4-21). In this context, national interests are viewed as the result of these social interactions.

National interests reflect the identity of the state, which is shaped through social discourse. Political elites, public opinion, and international partners all play significant roles in constructing these identities. These identities are not static and can transform over time, leading to the evolution of national interests. For example, a state previously focused on military power may reconsider its priorities and shift towards promoting human rights and environmental standards.

Constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of ideas, norms, and values in shaping national interests. In this context, international norms and standards play a key role in defining national priorities. For instance, if the fight against climate change becomes a dominant global norm, states adopt this as an integral part of their national interests.

Indeed, states may consider themselves part of a broader community and develop interests that stem from this affiliation. For instance, the European Union forms supranational interests that go beyond the individual national priorities of its members. The inclusion of principles of collective security and mutual assistance in national interests also illustrates this approach.

In this context, it is important to highlight the role of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS, as a regional organization, seeks to harmonize legal norms and bring together the legislations of its participants. The CIS Interparliamentary Assembly develops CIS model legislation, which consists of recommended bills that member states use for creating or improving national legal acts.

This mechanism enables CIS members to incorporate international norms and regional agreements into their legal frameworks, demonstrating their commitment to universally accepted standards and values. For example, the model law on combating terrorism (Bondurovsky, 2016) takes into account international standards in the field of counter-terrorism and adapts them to the specific conditions and needs of CIS member states, encouraging joint activities and the development of common security strategies.

Such interactions strengthen regional identity and create sustainable mechanisms for collective security, influencing the formation of national interests for individual member state. The focus on centralizing legislation in areas such as human rights, economic integration, and social development reflects the comprehensive approach of constructivist theory to understanding and realizing national interests.

The constructivist approach clearly demonstrates that national interests are not fixed; they change and evolve under the influence of international norms, values, and the collective order. The example of the CIS and the practice of applying model legislation illustrate how international standards are imposed on

national legal systems, stimulating the consolidation of efforts and the unification of legal approaches in the interest of achieving common security and development goals.

Moreover, constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of historical narratives and collective memory in shaping national interests. States often base their interests on historical experiences and events that they regard fundamental to their identity. For instance, recollections of past conflicts, alliances, or triumphs can significantly influence current strategic priorities.

According to the constructivist theory of international relations, national interests are viewed as dynamic and context-dependent phenomena shaped through social interactions, discourses, and collective norms. This suggests that national interests not solely determined by material factors but are also influenced by ideas, norms, and values that influence the behavior of states on the international arena.

The constructivist theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of law in international relations, where legal norms, as a sociocultural phenomena, play a pivotal role in shaping and evolving national interests.

Pavlenko O.V. highlights the significance of constructivism in analyzing international processes, stating that it offers new opportunities for examining the internal layers of foreign policy, its social and mental motivations” (Pavlenko, 2015: 66).

The constructivist theory of international relations is relevant in the context of modern Russia for several key aspects. First, the importance of ideas, norms, and values in shaping national interests is particularly salient for Russia. In the current geopolitical landscape, historical narratives play a crucial role in forming Russia's national interests. Memories of the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet Union, and other historical events significantly influence the country's current strategic and foreign policy priorities. These narratives are employed to reinforce national identity and garner public support.

Second, the constructivist theory underscores the dynamic and context-dependent nature of national interests, a concept highly relevant to modern Russia. In response to changing international conditions and internal challenges, Russia adjusts its interests and strategies to address new realities. For instance, economic sanctions prompt Russia to cultivate new economic partnerships and launch its own international projects.

Thus, the constructivist theory provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding and explaining current processes in Russian foreign and domestic policy. It elucidates how ideas, norms, and values influence the formation and transformation of Russia's national interests amid global challenges and changes.

### **Conclusion**

1. Realist, liberal, and constructivist theories represent different but complementary approaches to analyzing and understanding state-legal processes.

2. In strategic documents of the Russian Federation, such as the National Security Strategy, foreign policy is framed through the lens of national interests and

security. This aligns with the realist concept that prioritizes state sovereignty and territorial integrity.

3. Despite the dominance of the realist paradigm in contemporary Russia, liberal concepts remain attractive due to their ideas of cooperation, economic interdependence, and international law. Global integration processes and the need to adapt to international standards keep the liberal agenda relevant for discussion and debate. However, the successful application of liberal principles within the Russian context requires careful consideration of the specifics of the national political culture, historical experience, and institutional structure. This may necessitate the development of hybrid theories that combine elements of liberalism and realism, enabling more effective solutions to political and legal challenges. Therefore, while the realist paradigm is currently more prominent in the Russian context, liberal theory holds potential and should not be wholly dismissed.

4. The constructivist theory is particularly relevant for contemporary Russia due to its emphasis on the importance of ideas, norms, and values in shaping national interests and adapting to changing international conditions. In light of economic sanctions, Russia is actively developing new economic partnerships. Consequently, the constructivist approach offers a useful analytical tool for understanding the dynamism and contextual dependency of Russian foreign policy and strategic priorities.

5. Overall, it is important not only to consider traditional realist aspects of power and sovereignty but also to incorporate constructivist elements that involve the multifactorial nature of national interest formation, as well as liberal aspects of international cooperation and economic interdependence. By integrating these perspectives, a more comprehensive understanding of Russia's strategic approach can be achieved.

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