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RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS AND EURASIA

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF RUSSIA'S ROLE IN EURASIAN INTEGRATION

Throughout history, Eurasia has been central to relations between Europe and Asia. It has been the crossroads of civilisations, contributing to the cultural and ethnic hybridity of the region. However, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and later the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, Eurasia lost its geostrategic importance in the US led liberal world order. In the 1920s, a group of Russian émigrés described the cultural and ethnic ties among the communities living across the vast Eurasian steppes as Eurasianism. Eurasianists divide the world into two opposing forces with Eurasianism including Russia and the European states favouring integration with it and Atlanticism including the US and European countries supporting an American led Atlantic order. Today, Russia is an important revisionist power in Eurasia, with huge stakes in the global order and the capability to help forge new relationships in the region.

SHAHZADA RAHIM ABBAS

INTRODUCTION

Eurasia has its own cultural and political uniqueness in historical discourse and as a purely geographical concept refers to the idea of a hybrid continent territorially stretching across Europe and Asia. (Mark Bassin,

“Classical’ Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity”, *Ab Imperio*, no2, 2003, pp257–66) On the greater Eurasian landmass, Turkey and Russia are the transcontinental countries with anthropological and imperial histories as regional powers. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey embraced the Westernisation project and lost its Eurasian centrality. (Yang Cheng, “The Eurasian Moment in Global Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Great Power Strategies for Regional Integration” in Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa (Eds), *Eurasian Integration: The View from Within*, New York: Routledge, 2015, pp274–90) With the ascension of the Bolsheviks in 1917, Russia maintained its Eurasian spirit in the form of the Soviet Union, creating an economic and political hybridity with the countries of Europe and Asia.

(Karen Barkley and Mark von Hagen (Eds), *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires*, New York:

Westview Press, 1997) For various historians, the victory of communism saved the country’s cultural uniqueness from the Ottoman fate. Arnold J Toynbee in his work *A Study of History* asserts that Russia by embracing communism in 1917 saved its civilisation from being “arrested” by alien forces. According to him, Russia with its Orthodox Christianity identifies its cultural and ethnic genesis with Asia. Like the Sinic civilisation that experienced the full

cycle of the alternating rhythm of “yin and yang”, Russia in the course of history has also undergone a period of “transfiguration and detachment”. The “yin–yang” state is a particular form of general movement of “withdrawal and return” also known as “schism and palingenesia”. The word palingenesia is a Greek term meaning “recurrence or rebirth”. In a broader context, it refers to the “wheel of existence”, which Buddhist philosophy takes for granted, seeking a break by a withdrawal into *nirvana*. If *nirvana* does not end with actual rebirth then it diffuses into a supra-mundane state.

Since, the fall of the Soviet Union, several Russian intellectuals have been obsessed with revisionism to reclaim the historically derived distinctive nature of the Russian nation on the Eurasian landmass. Early Eurasianists formulated a different worldview about the country’s identity on the Eurasian landmass by emphasising a Russian civilisation as distinct from Western civilisation. (Peter J

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Katzenstein and Nicole Weygandt, "Mapping Eurasia in an Open World: How the Insularity of Russia's Geopolitical and Civilisational Approaches Limits its Foreign Policies", *Perspectives on Politics*, vol15, no2, 2017, pp428–42) They developed the idea in the context of a conflict of civilisations, as most Western historians regarded Russia as part of Western civilisation. However, for Slavophiles, Russia was a part of Slavic civilisation with its cultural and ethnic genesis in Asia. (Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) Today, neo-Eurasianists have widened this paradigm by placing Russia in the broader civilisational context of cultural and ethnic hybridity between Eurasian communities and Russian Slavs. (Bassin, 2003, *ibid*) For them, Russia is both Slavic and non-Slavic and includes multiple ethnic groups such as Celts, Mongols, Scandinavians and Turks. (Victor A Shnirelman, "Myths of Descent: Views of the Remote Past, as Reflected in School Textbooks in Contemporary Russia", *Public Archaeology*, vol3, no1, 2003, pp33–51)

Eurasianists have also navigated Russian civilisation along certain ideological and philosophical paradigms by reiterating its ethno-cultural uniqueness in a modified geopolitical narrative. (Katzenstein and Weygandt, *ibid*) The discourse of a separate Russian culture and morality first emerged in 1848, when revolutions swept across the European continent except in Russia. (Alexander Lukin, "Russia between East and West", *Medjunarodni Problemi/International Problems*, vol55, no2, 2003, pp159–85) Russian diplomat and poet Fyodor Tyutchev (1803–73), in *Revolution and Russia* divided Europe between two ideological forces. He emphasised the geographical specificity of Russia and predicted a battle between a degenerate Europe and Russia in the future. For Tyutchev, the ideological battle was to be in the political and religious domains and would decide the fate of the human realm for centuries to come. (Nikolaï Berdiâev, *The Russian Idea*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979) That is, the ideological struggle between revolutionary Europe and Russia was to be in the cosmic dimension and would determine the eschatological outcome. In this cosmic struggle, Russia would represent the realm of Christianity and Europe with its revolutionary fervour the anti-Christ. (Mikhail Suslov, "Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol53, no5, 2012, pp575–95) Europe's degeneracy in the wake of revolutions provided a clear narrative to Slavophiles to assert Russia's superiority over Europe.

The discourse of Russian civilisational and cultural supremacy was not confined to Slavophiles. Even pro-Western Russian intellectuals such as Alexander Herzen expressed disenchantment with revolution from Europe. For him, the wave of revolutions across the continent represented the degeneration of European modernity and civilisation. According to Herzen, Europe had

destroyed itself while Russia needed to choose its own path to save the realm of humanity. (Shlomo Avineri, "A Note: Moses Hess on Alexander Herzen's Vision of Russia's Future Emancipatory Role in European History", *Government and Opposition*, vol18, no4, 1983, pp482–90) At the beginning of the twentieth century, Western historian Oswald Spengler also predicted the decline of Western civilisation and a looming cosmic ideological confrontation. (Georg G Iggers, "The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment", *The American Historical Review*, vol71, no1, 1965, pp1–17) In his work, *The Decline of the West* Spengler used the philological approach to deconstruct the modernity of the West and warned of an impending confrontation across the civilisational domain. According to him, the West with its pseudo-modernity had lost its moral and cultural identity by morphing into morbid materialism. Thus, decline was the fate of Europe, just as it had been for other civilisations such as the Eskimo, Greek and Roman. Russia as an offshoot of Eastern Orthodox Christendom refused to accept Western modernity. The self-identification of the Muscovites was based on the dictum "as chosen by God to protect the true faith after the fall of Constantinople and eventually build a world empire around that true faith". Thus, while the democracy and industrialisation of the West failed to bring Russia under its yoke, the posture of Orthodox Christendom in Russia also rigidly opposed Western "enlightened" civilisation.

Later, communism in Russia acted as a "zealot" or "proselyte" and successfully kept the country away from the West based on ideological differences. (Arnold J Toynbee and DC Somervell, *A Study of History: Volume I: Abridgement of Volumes I–VI*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) Communism nurtured an anti-Western attitude among the people. As an ideology, it clashed with Western capitalism and resisted attempts to integrate Russia into Western society. (Yana Hashamova, *Pride and Panic: Russian Imagination of the West in Post-Soviet Film*, Bristol: Intellect, 2007) In contemporary discourse, in the post-Soviet era, Eurasianists have developed a similar counter ideology to compete with the

Oswald Spengler used the philological approach to deconstruct the modernity of the West and warned of an impending confrontation across the civilisational domain. According to him, the West with its pseudo-modernity had lost its moral and cultural identity by morphing into morbid materialism. Thus, decline was the fate of Europe, just as it had been for other civilisations such as the Eskimo, Greek and Roman.

United States of America (US) led Atlantic order. (Heikki Patomäki and Christer Pursiainen, “Western Models and the ‘Russian Idea’: Beyond ‘Inside/Outside’ in Discourses on Civil Society”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol28, no1, 1999, pp53–77) For neo-Eurasianists, the US is the Carthage of the twenty-first century, which must be destroyed to rescue humanity from civilisational collapse. The following sections analyse contemporary Russia’s role in the reintegration of the post-Soviet space through a neo-Eurasianist geopolitical approach, which provides the ideological justification for Russia as a multiethnic state. The geopolitical theories of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman and Karl Haushofer have influenced the geostrategic thinking of Russian neo-Eurasianists. The geopolitical doctrines of the early twentieth century such as the Heartland Theory and Rimland Thesis remain important for Eurasianists in developing the Russian school of geopolitics. The dynamics of current Russian foreign policy in the light of present day geopolitics are also examined with a focus on Russia’s presumptive vocation as a Eurasian hegemonic saviour, striving to mend the broken geographical and spiritual ties with other nations in the Eurasian region.

THE REBIRTH OF EURASIANISM

As a strategic country on the vast Eurasian landmass, Russia’s geopolitical thinking has always vacillated between Europe and Asia. (Deborah W Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, “Russia says No: Power, Status and Emotions in Foreign Policy”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol47, nos3–4, 2014, pp269–79) Since the fall of the Soviet Union, domestic politics have been hampered by conflicts between communists, Eurasianists and Westerners. The fall of communism gave birth to political nostalgia, propelling Eurasianists to dominate the Russian political scene. (Andrei P Tsygankov, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia’s Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Breakup”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol36, no1, 2003, pp101–27) Eurasianists advocate the reintegration of the post-Soviet space with Russia to restore its geographical and geopolitical uniqueness in the greater Eurasian region. (Petr Savitsky, “Geopolitical and Geographical Foundations of Eurasianism (1933)”, *Geopolitika*, 2007, pp235–42 and online at <https://eurasianist-archive.com>) With the fall of communism, Eurasianism also became a popular discourse across the post-Soviet space especially in Central Asia. (Peter JS Duncan, “Westernism, Eurasianism and Pragmatism: The Foreign Policies of the Post-Soviet States, 1991–2001” in Wendy Slater and Andrew Wilson (Eds), *The Legacy of the Soviet Union*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp228–53)

The history of the concept of Eurasia dates back to the rule of Peter the Great

who won the war against Sweden and incorporated large European territories into imperial Russia. The geographical addition on the western frontier added to the uniqueness of Russia as a strategic multicultural flat land between Europe and Asia. (Tsygankov, 2003, *ibid*) In the nineteenth century, Russian scholar Nikolai Danilevsky (1822–85) introduced the word Eurasia as a vast unique geographical space, separate from both Europe and Asia. He expanded the geographical realm of Eurasia by elevating its territorial horizons to include the mountain ranges of the Alps, the Caucasus and the Himalayas as well as the vast external water bodies that form the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Danilevsky also declared the inner waters of the Baltic, Black and Caspian seas as strategic parts of inner Eurasia inherently determining its geographical uniqueness. (Mark Entin and Ekaterina Entina, “The New Role of Russia in the Greater Eurasia”, *Strategic Analysis*, vol40, no6, 2016, pp590–603) As a political concept, Eurasia refers to

a geopolitical ideology of the territorial and spiritual connection between the communities across the vast steppes of Europe and Asia. (Bassin, 2003, *ibid*) In this regard, some Eurasianists believe that the cultural and religious ties between the Eastern Slavs, Turanian and Turkic communities are essential elements of Russian history. (Shnirelman, *ibid*) This interconnection was articulated ideologically by Russian historian and Eurasianist Lev Gumilev who considered Eurasia as a synthesis of European and Asian principles. For Gumilev, the Eurasian civilisation was the product of centuries old harmony and interconnections among diverse Eurasian communities. (Bassin, 2003, *ibid*)

The early Eurasian thinkers perceived the term Eurasia as the core of the centuries old hybrid continent, neither Europe nor Asia but representing the centre of the world due to ancient interconnections between East European, Siberian, Caucasian and Central Asian communities. (Graham Smith, “The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol24, no4, 1999, pp481–94) For them Eurasia was a unifier, a true “middle” of the world, representing a strong connection between the European and Asian peripheries

The early Eurasian thinkers perceived the term Eurasia as the core of the centuries old hybrid continent, neither Europe nor Asia but representing the centre of the world, a unifier, a true “middle” of the world, representing a strong connection between the European and Asian peripheries of the old world—a true symbol of classical legacy.

of the old world—a true symbol of classical legacy. (Savitsky, *ibid*) Eurasian identity was indivisible or unbreakable as it was inherently and naturally an integrated entity. (Igor Torbakov, “A Parting of Ways: The Kremlin Leadership and Russia’s New Generation Nationalist Thinkers”, *Demokratizatsiya*, vol23, no4, 2015, pp427–57) Russia’s geopolitical position on the vast Eurasian landmass forces it to reclaim the realm of Eurasian civilisation, as the Eurasianism of the Russian civilisation provides a basis for new intercivilisational international relations. (Bassin, 2003, *ibid*) The Eurasian nature of Russia is also a symbol of strength, representing a civilisational diversity necessary for the geopolitical stability of the Eurasian region. (Marlène Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism: An Imperial Version of Russian Nationalism”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, vol32, no1, 2004, pp115–36)

After the collapse of Soviet communism, neo-Eurasianists gained significant political influence in domestic politics. Their anti-Western attitude led them to advocate a complete detachment from the West to maintain the Eurasian identity. (Duncan, *ibid*) Neo-Eurasianists have broadened the theoretical domain of Eurasianism based on the theory of ethno-genesis by asserting a Russian identity in the anthropological discourse of Indo-European identity. (Mark Bassin, “The Emergence of Ethno-Geopolitics in Post-Soviet Russia”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol50, no2, 2009, pp131–49) In the 1990s, Aleksandr Dugin became a well-known face of the Russian Eurasian project who advocated the creation of a “supra-national empire” in which ethnic Russians would occupy a privileged position. (Laruelle, 2004, *ibid*) For Dugin, there was a shared identity between Russia and the countries of East Europe and Central Asia and the geographic unity of the Eurasian continent was a symbol of centuries old political reality. To achieve Dugin’s dream, Russia needed to ensure strategic balancing in the Eurasian region by keeping Chinese and Iranian influence at bay. Dugin called China a dangerous neighbour and proposed Russia create a buffer zone around Tibet, Mongolia, Xinxiang and Manchuria to keep China away from Russian borders. (Şener Aktürk, “The Fourth Style of Politics: Eurasianism as a Pro-Russian Rethinking of Turkey’s Geopolitical Identity”, *Turkish Studies*, vol16, no1, 2015, pp54–79) Similarly, Iran also has huge stakes in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Russia’s south) and Dugin advocated that Russia forge a grand alliance with Turania to establish a buffer zone between itself and the Islamic south. Neo-Eurasianism embraces nationalist politics and proposes a new type of sovereignty within the Russian Federation for the various nationalities in the post-Soviet space. (Andrei P Tsygankov, “Finding a Civilisational Idea: The ‘West’, ‘Eurasia’ and the ‘Euro-East’ in Russia’s Foreign Policy”, *Geopolitics*, vol12, no3, 2007, pp375–99) Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Eurasianists have

advocated an anti-Western policy and urged government officials not to be dependent on Western economic and military assistance. (Smith, *ibid*)

THE FOUNDATIONS OF RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS

The Great Game of the nineteenth century between the British and Russian empires for control of the Eurasian heartland gave birth to its geopolitical discourse. (Ronald Hyam, “The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy 1763–1963”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol27, no2, 1999, pp27–52)

Geographers were the first to speculate about the geopolitical significance of the Eurasian region. British geographer Halford Mackinder called the Eurasian heartland the geographical pivot of the world and warned the British Empire about imperial Russia’s strategic outreach for warm waters. For Mackinder, whoever controlled East Europe would command the heartland, whoever controlled the heartland would command the world island and whoever controlled the world island would command the world. In his famous study *The Geographical Pivot of History* published in 1902, Mackinder warned about Russian ambitions in the

Eurasian heartland, which would make it the strongest land power on Earth. His paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society warned the British crown about Russian control of Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. He used the term “geographical pivot” to describe the buffer zone between the Russian and British empires and included the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Mackinder argued that if Russia reached Afghanistan a direct confrontation could ensue with the British Empire in India. Two major geopolitical concepts later evolved from Mackinder’s hypothesis—the implications of the concept of

For Halford Mackinder, whoever controlled East Europe would command the heartland, whoever controlled the heartland would command the world island and whoever controlled the world island would command the world. In the wake of the Second World War, Mackinder broadened his analysis by claiming that if the Soviet Union appeared as the vanquisher of Germany, it would become the biggest land power. The heartland would make the Russian army an invincible garrison on the globe.

the Great Game and the warm waters narrative. In the wake of the Second World War, Mackinder broadened his analysis by claiming that if the Soviet Union appeared as the vanquisher of Germany, it would become the biggest land power with a strategically defensible position. The heartland as the biggest natural fortress on Earth would make the Russian army an invincible garrison on the globe. (Tuğçe Varol Sevim, “Eurasian Union: A Utopia, a Dream or Coming Reality”, *Eurasian Journal of Business and Economics*, vol6, no12, 2013, pp43–62)

The domain of geopolitics deals with the strategic location of a country and its associated capabilities, opportunities and resources. The geopolitics of a state accounts for the struggle for power in the global system by the projection of capabilities through statecraft and available resources. Geopolitics is the worldview developed by a state for self-positioning and self-projection in the international system as a stakeholder. (Virginie Mamadouh and Gertjan Dijkink, “Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse”, *Geopolitics*, vol11, no3, 2006, pp349–66) Swedish political scientist Johan Rudolf Kjellén coined the term *geopolitik*, later transformed and developed by German geographers Frederick Ratzel and Karl Haushofer. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the discourse of geopolitics was broadened by Mackinder and the American geographer Nicholas Spykman. (Atsuko Watanabe, “Greater East Asia Geopolitics and its Geopolitical Imagination of a Borderless World: A Neglected Tradition”, *Political Geography*, vol67, 2018, pp23–31) Later, with the onset of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the US, American geostrategists like Zbigniew Brzezinski adopted and adapted the term “geopolitics”. (Alexandros Petersen, *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011)

American geographer Nicholas Spykman pioneered the Rimland Theory by modifying Mackinder’s Heartland Theory, which was limited to the domain of land based imperial control and dominance. Mackinder had illustrated the geographical relationship between two neighbouring continents Europe and Asia. He saw it as a single continent, a continuous landmass with ice-girths in the north and water-girths in the south covering an area of twenty-one million square miles. Spykman modified Mackinder’s thesis with his rimland dictum of “who controls the rimland rules Eurasia and who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world”. (Robert D Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, New York: Random House, 2013) Rimland refers to the vast rich resources and inner sea-lanes or strategic trade routes in the peripheral areas of the Eurasian continent. Spykman projected the importance of the Eurasian rimland for maritime hegemony in the world. For him, although the Atlanticists relied on sea power, if they failed to control the Eurasian rimland, they would lose the war against Russia. Thus, Spykman

saw the coastal areas of West, South, Southeast and East Asia as strategically significant for controlling Eurasia and a means of keeping an eye on the land power of Russia. (Colin S Gray, “Nicholas John Spykman, the Balance of Power and International Order”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol38, no6, 2015, pp873–97)

For Mackinder, Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia formed the “pivot” area around which the fate of empires would rely—what he called the heartland. As a founder of modern geopolitics, Mackinder summarised the discipline of geopolitics as “man and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls”. (Geoffrey Sloan, “Sir Halford J Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol22, nos2–3, 1999, pp15–38) Likewise, Alfred Thayer Mahan’s Blue Water Theory

in the late nineteenth–early twentieth century had declared the sea as the “commons” of civilisations and stated that naval power was a decisive factor in global politics. For Mahan, “whoever controls the oceans, rules the destinies of the world” and therefore for him the Indian and Pacific oceans were important geopolitical arenas. (Kaplan, *ibid*) He anticipated the Indian Ocean to be the epicentre of the geopolitical competition between major powers. Mahan also coined the term Middle

East by emphasising the sea-lanes between Arabia and India as significant for naval strategy, maritime security and imperial hegemony. Mahan’s Blue Waters Theory was adapted as the Domino Theory in the 1950s and became part of the US’s containment strategy during the Cold War. The theory projected the expansion of communism through a domino effect in other nations of the Asia–Pacific, threatening US maritime hegemony in the Pacific Ocean.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, these geopolitical theories compelled Russia to reiterate its geopolitical position as a Eurasian power. Dugin laid the foundations of Russian geopolitics through his work *The Foundation of Geopolitics*, taught in Russian military schools today. (Alan Ingram, “Aleksandr Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-Fascism in Post-Soviet Russia”, *Political Geography*, vol20, no8, 2001, pp1029–51) The geopolitical treatise has political and strategic significance for Russian foreign policy as with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country suffered from political nostalgia for a prolonged

The fall of the Soviet Union forced foreign policy circles to devise a new multivector approach to reintegration. The Russian geopolitical vision of a Eurasian Union represented a new regionalisation process as a barrier to the influx of external powers in the post-Soviet space—a clear example being China’s peaceful rise in Central Asia.

period of time. For Dugin, the New Great Game had already begun with new geopolitical players at the heart of Eurasia—a strategic threat to Russia’s sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. (John B Dunlop, “Aleksandr Dugin’s Foundation of Geopolitics”, *Demokratizatsiya*, vol12, no1, 2004) Russia’s Eurasian identity came under severe threat from new alliances formed in the greater Eurasian region. (Jacob W Kipp, “Aleksandr Dugin and the Ideology of National Revival: Geopolitics, Eurasianism and the Conservative Revolution”, *European Security*, vol11, no3, 2002, pp91–125) Dugin proposed a Eurasia-centric foreign policy to reinvigorate Russian influence in the post-Soviet space through a series of economic and political collaborative agreements.

The main objective of Russian geopolitics has been to advance the process of economic integration of the post-Soviet space from the Baltic Sea to the Yellow Sea. The new economic conditions and collapse of Soviet security infrastructure pushed Russian leadership to reshape the geographic security of Eurasia. (Mikhail A Molchanov, *Regionalisation from Above: Russia’s Asia “Vector” and the State led Regionalism in Eurasia*, 2009, online at <https://www.researchgate.net>) In addition, the dawn of the twenty-first century marked a new era of regionalism across the globe with multidimensional interstate integration across cultural, economic, political and security spheres. The fall of the Soviet Union forced foreign policy circles to devise a new multivector approach to reintegration. (Maria Lagutina, “Eurasian Economic Union Foundation: Issues of Global Regionalisation”, *Eurasia Border Review*, vol5, no1, 2014, pp95–111) The new regionalism was influenced by the rising development and security concerns of major powers in the surrounding regions. (Shaun Breslin, Christopher W Hughes, Nicola Phillips and Ben Rosamond (Eds), *New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy: Theories and Cases*, London: Routledge, 2002) Thus, the Russian geopolitical vision of a Eurasian Union represented a new regionalisation process as a barrier to the influx of external powers in the post-Soviet space—a clear example being China’s peaceful rise in Central Asia. (Marcin Kaczmarek, “Non-Western Visions of Regionalism: China’s New Silk Road and Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union”, *International Affairs*, vol93, no6, 2017, pp1357–76)

RUSSIA AND EURASIAN INTEGRATION

The fall of the Soviet Union marked a new beginning in three major sub-Eurasian regions. After the dissolution, Russia emerged as the largest and most stable state among the newly independent post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The catastrophic Soviet disintegration also engendered major economic problems for the newly independent states. (Evgeny Vinokurov and Alexander Libman, *Eurasian Integration Challenges of Transcontinental Regionalism*, London: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2014) Facing dire economic challenges, the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Interstate Economic Committee, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and a set of new trade agreements were intended to ensure an initial peaceful breakup with a fair distribution of assets. Along with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan supported the creation of the commonwealth and other regional projects with neo-regionalism aspirations. (Richard Sakwa and Mark Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States 1991–98: Stagnation and Survival", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol51, no3, 1999, pp379–415) The term neo-regionalism came into global discourse after the fall of the Soviet Union, describing a new pattern of regional integration across administrative, cultural, economic and political spheres. Russia's Eurasian project with a neo-Eurasianist foreign policy aims at achieving neo-regionalisation in the greater Eurasian area in the form of a Eurasian Union, a Eurasian Economic Union and a Eurasian Customs Union.

The creation of a Eurasian Union manifest the collective vision of the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan who saw the reintegration of the post-Soviet space as indispensable for security. For them, Eurasia is the historical space of Russia and its peripheries and their geographical and sociocultural unity. (S Frederick Starr and Svante E Cornell (Eds), *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm, 2014, online at <https://isdip.eu>) The concept of an intergovernmental and supranational entity encompassing the Russian Federation and the countries in the post-Soviet space demonstrated a clear agenda for a neo-regionalisation process. The initial proposal for the establishment of a Eurasian Union came from the former President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev who perceived the integration project as a gradual process across economic, humanitarian and political spheres. (James Kilner, "Kazakhstan Welcomes Putin's Eurasian Union Concept", *The Telegraph*, 6 October 2011, online at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk>) According to American Eurasianism expert Marlène Laruelle, (*Eurasia, Eurasianism, Eurasian Union: Terminological Gaps and Overlaps*, Ponars Eurasia, Policy Memo 366, July 2015, online at <http://www.ponarseurasia.org>) there is a close overlap between

With China's announcement of its Belt and Road Initiative, Russia looked to it for a trustworthy partner to build new economic ties across Eurasia. The Chinese initiative comprises major economic and logistics projects for the twenty-first century. The New Great Game envisages China's growing influence in the Central Asian region as a strategic threat for Russia, which needs to be counterbalanced with shared geopolitical interests.

a Eurasian Union and the ideology of neo-Eurasianism as the latter provides the ideological foundations for the Eurasian project. For Laruelle, the geographical and geopolitical aspects of the term Eurasia are closely associated with the term Euraziski, which refers to a person of mixed European and Asian descent. She has highlighted the special relationship between Eurasia, Russian Eurasianism and the Eurasian Union project.

Since 2000, Russia has played an active role in Eurasian integration with support from Belarus and Kazakhstan. The vision for a Eurasian Union dominated the Russian political scene during the 2012 presidential elections, when Vladimir Putin and his United Russia Party formally announced their support for the integration project. (Starr and Cornell, *ibid*) The announcement was welcomed in Kazakhstan as Nazarbayev had always personally supported closer economic integration of the post-Soviet countries with Russia. (Kilner, *ibid*) The proposal for the Eurasian Union was made in 1996, when the Treaty on Deepening Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Areas came into force through a multilateral dialogue between the representatives of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. (Paul Pryce, "Putin's Third Term: The Triumph of Eurasianism", *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol13, no1, 2013)

Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin ("A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making", *Izvestia*, 3 October 2011, online at <https://russiaeu.ru>) has always supported close cooperation between Europe and Asia, with the aim of creating a common economic space with the European Union and Eurasian Economic Union, like Mikhail Gorbachev before him. Putin has advanced the concept of a greater European community from Lisbon to Vladivostok stretching along a common economic and political space. The idea of greater Eurasia was also speculated upon by German geopolitical scientist Karl Haushofer who in the wake of World War Two called for a geopolitical bloc between the Soviet Union, Germany and Japan against the Anglo-Saxon marine civilisation. A similar idea was also contemplated by French President Charles de Gaulle in the 1950s when he called for the creation of a greater European Community from "the Atlantic to the Urals". (Anatoly Tsvytk, "Greater Europe' or 'Greater Eurasia': In Search of New Ideas for the Eurasian Integration", *RUDN Journal of Sociology*, vol18, no2, 2018, pp262–70) The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) expansion eastwards soon became a major hurdle in Russia–European Union cooperation. On several occasions, Russian foreign policy circles urged Europe not to breach the trust between the two by supporting NATO's expansion. ("Was NATO's Eastward Expansion a Broken Promise", *Offiziere.ch*, 28 December 2018, online at <https://www.offiziere.ch>)

With China's announcement of its Belt and Road Initiative, Russia looked

to it for a trustworthy partner to build new economic ties across Eurasia. The Chinese initiative comprises major economic and logistics projects for the twenty-first century such as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Route. (Tsvyk, *ibid*) These are vast sprawling transport and logistics networks across Eurasia and include airports, gas and oil pipelines, highways and railway lines. In 2017, the Eurasian Economic Union Commission listed some priority projects in cooperation with the Chinese initiative including upgrading existing routes and the construction of new logistics centres. (Denis A Degterev, Li Yan and Alexandra A Trusova, "Russian and Chinese Systems of Development Cooperation: A Comparative Analysis", *Vestnik RUDN International Relations*, vol17, no4, 2017, pp824–38) Due to geostrategic challenges posed by NATO and its European supporters, Russia has turned towards greater Eurasia or the common economic space between Europe, the Eurasian Economic Union countries and Asia. (Peter Havlik, *The Silk Road: Challenges for the European Union and Eurasia*, Wiener Institut für

Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche, 1 December 2015, online at <https://wiiw.ac.at>) Moreover, the New Great Game envisages China's growing influence in the Central Asian region as a strategic threat for Russia, which needs to be counterbalanced with shared geopolitical interests. (Petar Kurečić, "The New Great Game: Rivalry of Geostrategies and Geoeconomies in Central Asia", *Hrvatski Geografski Glasnik/Croatian Geographical Bulletin*, vol72, no1, 2010, pp21–46)

Thus, the Eurasian economic integration project is a multidimensional attempt by Russia and its close allies in the Eurasian region to establish a new association by erecting common institutions and norms. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to new geopolitical uncertainties and compelled Russia to find alternative ways to promote its interests in the Eurasian region. (Alexander Lukin and Vladimir Yakunin, "Eurasian Integration and the Development of Asiatic Russia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol9, no2, 2018, pp100–13) Accordingly, the Russian initiatives of a Eurasian Union and the Eurasian Economic Union are aimed at the reintegration of the post-Soviet space with Russia. Several Russian Eurasian projects through a "soft" balancing strategy are endeavouring to counter the Atlanticists influence in the Eurasian region and project a new "soft" image of Russia as a superpower.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary Russian foreign policy is based on the economic challenges and existential security threats facing the state. The Russian initiative of Eurasian integration has found support amongst several countries in the post-Soviet space. The *modus operandi* is multidimensional and contemporary Russian geopolitics favours détente as the country attempts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space of Central Asia and Eastern Europe across economic, humanitarian and political spheres. Since 2000, Russia has played an active role through various economic initiatives such as the Eurasian Customs Union, the Eurasian Development Bank and the Eurasian Economic Union. Pro-Russian regimes in East Europe and Central Asia today face various domestic problems. For instance Belarus, which is suffering from dire economic challenges, is still ruled by the pro-Russia strongman Alexander Lukashenko, whose regime has been criticised by the West for its undemocratic rule. Despite this, Lukashenko has struck a new deal with Russia on gas pipelines. Kazakhstan too is an important ally of Russia in the Central Asian region. It has always supported the Eurasian project and is a key state in the Russian sphere of influence. However, it too is facing economic and political challenges that could disrupt the pace of Eurasian integration. Nevertheless, Russia continues to play an important role in Eurasian integration. The Eurasian Union seems to be evolving and for it, the trajectory of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space is pertinent. Thus, Russia's multivectoral foreign policy approach aims to build new economic and security architecture for the integration of the post-Soviet space. ❧