

Eurasian Union: A Utopia, a Dream or a Coming Reality?

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Abstract

Twenty years passed after the dissolution of the USSR and the re-birth of Russian Federation and Central Asian states in the world arena in such a unipolar world. Since the rise of Vladimir Putin to power Russia resists on unipolar system and sees that as a treat to its security. Hence, Kremlin perceives that the economic strength is the sine qua non for the future of Russia in order to sustain a Big Power status not only in its region but also in the world. In 2011, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan have achieved to form a Customs Union among them and invited all the states in the region to join the organization. There were thesis which mainly argued that Russia would no longer be a "power" in the Central Asia and could only be a regional power just in case of maintaining of its own unity. However, the circumstances have changed in the region accordingly Russian weight as a result of the new conjuncture. In 2012, Russia had a new presidential election and Putin returned to Kremlin as President himself. It has been understood from his words that Kremlin's new strategy to be focused on creating a Eurasian Union including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at the first stage. It is aimed to analyze in this study that whether this project could be successful and if so, what could be the impacts on world order in terms of competition between Russia, the United States and China also. And finally, what could be the result of such an organization for the Russia.

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1. Geopolitics as a Theory

Among many scholars geography is the most fundamental factor in history of international relations due to reason that many aspects could alter in a period of time such as population, culture, technology, or power capacity, unlike geography remains permanent. Geographical position of state entails itself to have opportunities, defense capabilities, and impose limitations on another entity. Accordingly, geography has an enormous impact on decision-making process of foreign policy of rulers for many centuries. In this context, geography has influenced the geopolitical orientation of countries in the direction of either land or sea power (Kupferberg and Sempa 2002: 11). In this respect, Tuathail suggests that geopolitics is a struggle for power by states with worldwide in order to reach power projection capabilities along with educate decision-makers about the struggle for power in world affairs and how to conduct statecraft and organize military resources to secure more power and influence for their state (Ó Tuathail 2011: 5-6). Geopolitical theory has arose through the works of Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, and Karl Haushofer, and developed by the Mohan (1840-1914), Mackinder (1861-1957), and Spykman (1893-1943), and finally redefined by the contemporary strategists such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Colin Gray (Collins and Walker 2000: 53), and Francis Fukuyama. The term of "geopolitics" was initially formalized by the Swedish lawyer Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922) who described geopolitics as "the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space (Cohen 2003: 11) and systematically developed and evolved as a doctrine of international relations by Karl Haushofer (1869-1941) (Teschke 2006: 327) who is known as the father of German geopolitics; "Geopolitics is the new national science of the state, ...a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography" (Cohen 2003: 11).

Great British geographer Halford Mackinder manifested that the importance of the threat that land power could pose to sea power at the beginning of twentieth century (Sloan 1999:26). In this context Mackinder portrayed two neighbor continents as one great continent, namely "Euro-Asia" by describing Euro-Asia as a "continuous land, ice-girth in the north, water-girt elsewhere, measuring twenty-one million square miles (Walton 2007: 5). His basic argument was that Heartland was in the most advantageous geopolitical location and suggested that the actor that dominates Heartland would possess the necessary geopolitical and economic potential to ultimate control of the World Island (Ismailov and Papava 2010: 85) by the words of "Who rules East Europe controls the heartland, Who rules the heartland commands the World-island, Who rules the World-Island commands the World" (Sloan 1999: 27). Likewise, British geographer pointed out that "geopolitics seek to establish national or imperial control over space and the resources, route ways, industrial capacity and population of the territory contains" (Gray 2004: 10). In accordance with his argument, during the World War II, Mackinder contributed that;

"All things considered, the conclusion is unavoidable that if the Soviet Union emerges from this war as conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land power on the globe. Moreover, she will be the power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth...For the first time in history it is manned by a garrison adequate to deny entry to the German invader" (Mackinder 1943: 601).

Another important figure in geopolitical theory is Nicholas Spykman who constituted the idea that whoever controls the Rimland (the peripheral areas of the Eurasian continent) rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destines of the world (see Ferguson 2007). Spykman highlighted that the Eurasian coastal lands (including Maritime Europe, the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and China) were the keys to world control because of their populations, their rich resources, and their use of interior sea lanes (Cohen 2003: 22). According to Spykman, as long as Atlantic forces do not seek to establish hegemony over the Eurasian Rimland, the Soviet Union will be the most effective continental base for the enforcement of peace (Gray 2004: 14). However, Polelle marked that during the World War II, Spykman believed that whole war should be understood by the American public as a struggle against joint German-Japanese control of the Rimland area and advocated cooperation between the Anglo-American powers and the Soviets in pursuit of the balance of power (Polelle 1999: 126). To put it another way Spykman believed that Heartland was nothing more than a geographic area open to cultural and civilizational impulses coming from the Rimland which was the key to world domination excluding Mackinder's role of Pivot area (Ismailov and Papava 2010: 89).

After the end of the World War II, when Soviet Union emerged as a both conventional and ideological challenger to the United States, Washington officials developed "the containment strategy" based on the roots of Heartland and Rimland theories (Samaddora 2002: 10). It was followed by another geopolitical doctrine which was called "the domino theory" in order to prevent Communist expansion to China and Southeast Asia, which then legitimized theory infrastructure of the Vietnam War (Watson 2002: 162). Zbigniew Brzezinski analyzed the new area in geopolitical terms in "The Grand Chessboard", published in 1997. In the book, his main aim was to structure a comprehensive and integrated US strategy for managing the vast Eurasian region (Binnendijk and Kugler 2006: 175-176). Most importantly, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Brzezinski suggested that the United States and Soviet Union were engaged in a duel over Eurasia and if the Soviet Union captured the peripheries of this landmass...it would not only win control of the vast human, economic, and military resources, but also gain access to the geostrategic approaches to the Western Hemisphere – the Atlantic and Pacific oceans (Fleron, Hoffmann, and Laird 1991: 330). Afterwards, Brzezinski endeavored to design a new geopolitical strategy for Washington by underlying the importance of Eurasia once more. In other words, Brzezinski argued

for Eurasia as the main focused of US geostrategy (Binnendijk and Kugler 2006: 175-176, see Brzezinski 1998).

2. Roots of Eurasianism

Initially, Eurasian idea was born out of the necessity to incorporate the territory won during his war with Charles XII of Sweden, Peter the Great decided to have a new geographic outline that would include the newly won territory, moving Russia's place on European maps of the day from the Asian continent into Europe (Schmidt 2005: 88). Furthermore, in the 19th century Nikolai Danilevsky (1822-1885), was the first to define Eurasia as a distinct geographic entity separated from both Europe and Asia. Danilevsky defined Eurasia "as the vast unbroken landmass bounded on its edges by the high mountain ranges of the Himalayas, Caucasus and Alps, and the large bodies of water to make up the Arctic, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans, and the Black, Mediterranean, and Caspian Seas" (Ibid.: 89).

Subsequently, Eurasian ideology has resurfaced in the early 1920s among Russian intellectual figures that immigrated to Western Europe after the October revolution and the civil war (Laurelle 2008: 33). Soviet émigrés in the 1920s who were Count Nikolai Trubetskoi (Bassin 2003: 257-267) and Petr Savitsky were accepted as the first self-conscious "Eurasianists". Geopolitical theorists such as Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mohan, and Karl Haushofer heavily influenced them, and aware of Russia's distinctiveness from Europe, they envisioned Russia as a sort of bridge between East and West, pursuing a spiritual and geopolitical "third way" (Kubicek 2004: 4). A decade later, Eurasianism tried to reflect the perceived need for Russia to emphasize its relative cultural and geopolitical independence, or "self standing" (Tsygankov 2003: 106). Concisely, earlier Eurasianists argued that the peoples of Soviet Union, be they Slav and Orthodox or Turkic and Muslim, had melded together over the centuries of Russian rule and now shared the particular characteristic which laid the basis for political unity (Duncan 2002: 6).

Concerning contemporary Eurasianism, Rangsimaporn divides Eurasianism into three groups as Pragmatic Eurasianism, Neo-Eurasianism, and Intercivilizational Eurasianism. He identifies President Putin as Pragmatic Eurasianist due to his balanced policy between East and West. So, according to pragmatic doctrine, Putin does not reject the importance of the West and Russia's cultural connection with Europe (Rangsimaporn 2006: 375-376). On the other hand Rangsimaporn suggests that Neo-Eurasianism is dealing with geopolitics rather than politics. And finally he claims that the idea of "civilizational" Eurasianist identity and geopolitical position of Russia as the foundation for Russia's economic development and integration in East Asia and in its political and strategic relations with the region (Rangsimaporn 2006: 376, 384). Alternatively, Shlapentokh suggests that Putin is pursuing "Neo-Eurasianist" approach. Shlapentokh indicates that; "While 'neo-Eurasianism' plays a variety of roles in rhetoric, Putin's Russia, its major role is clear: to provide ideological justification for Russia as a multi-ethnic state, one that is still pre-

modern in many ways (Shlapentokh 2007a)." Nevertheless, Titarenko suggests that; "...the Eurasian character of Russian civilization opens the possibility of new intercivilizational and international relations founded on the principles of co-development and mutual influence, allowing to solve the problems of ... preserving civilization diversity" (Lomonov 2005: 75-76).

According to Shlapentokh, during the first years of Putin, there were high hopes among Eurasianists that he would direct Russia through Eurasian way. Though, after the events of September 11, Putin preferred to pursue a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy. Simultaneously, Russia watched the expansion of US forces in its near abroad until 2005. As a turning point, in 2005, when US experienced a sudden geopolitical reversal in Central Asia, Russia has rushed to fill the geopolitical vacuum in the region and rapidly strengthening bilateral ties over the past years. Eurasianist accepts that as Russian diplomatic success in Central Asia and raised hopes that Putin's Kremlin will press a broad geopolitical offensive to push American forces out of Central Asia, entirely, and virtually eliminate Washington's influence in the region (Shlapentokh 2005).

Neo-Eurasianism, on the other hand, takes its inspiration from nationalist tradition and advocates a new form of sovereignty, both for the ethnic groups and nationalities of the Russian Federation and the peoples of the former Soviet Republics (Chaudet, Parmentier, and Pelopidas 2009: 49). Although Eurasianist position allowed underlining the disappointment felt towards Western cautiousness regarding to Moscow's adhesion to its institutions and the granting of massive financial aid. The slavophiles or neo-Eurasianists, on the other hand, were less interested in the national geopolitical situation than its profoundly unique or somewhat imperial character. They were against western assistance to interference and refused to adhere to its economic, political or military institutions (*Ibid.*: 54). Another contributor Szaszdi claims that all form of neo-Eurasianism advocate social and economic reform to drive the development of modernization of the Russian Federation, a goal linked to its notion of Russia as a strong and stable state. In addition, the use of military power is regarded as a legitimate instrument at the disposal of the Russian state for the achievement of foreign policy objectives (Szaszdi 2008: 16).

The two best-known doctrinaires of neo-Eurasianism to this day are Alexander S. Panarin (1940-2003) and Alexander G. Dugin (1962). Both thinkers hold the same beliefs:

"that there exists a cultural unity and a community of historical destiny that is shared by Russians and the peoples of the post-Soviet space, if not also by other peoples of Asia; that the geographic centrality of the so-called Eurasian space in the old continent entails an unavoidable political reality, namely, empire; and that there are cultural invariants which can explain the deeper meaning of contemporary political events" (Laurelle 2008: 37).

Dugin insists upon a categorically different basic definition, which identifies Eurasia in terms of neither a distinctive geographical region nor a singular civilization, but rather in terms of a political and ideological principle. The most important historical task of Eurasianism, he observes, is to provide the world with a common platform for the struggle against Atlanticism (Bassin 2008: 286). According to Shlapentokh, the earlier Eurasianists regarded Europe as the major geopolitical opponent of Russia or Eurasia. On the other hand, in contrast to early Eurasianists, Dugin did not regard West Europeans as the enemies, yet could be seen as an ally or at least as a neutral force. However, USA is seen as an emerging enemy of Eurasia (Shlapentokh 2007b: 106). Consequently, Neo-Eurasianism stands against American global hegemony in order to sustain the regional empires or multipolarity (Parmentier 2008: 9).

Another important point is that Eurasia is the main component of an old phenomenon that is called “Grand or Great Game”, a rivalry between two major colonial powers –the British and Russian empires- during the 19th century in order to control over the Central Eurasia. Today, the main characteristics of the “Great Game” remain with new players such as the United States and China. Furthermore, the latest version of the game is seen as to keep western powers, particularly the United States out of region (Torbakov 2001: 152) thanks to new imperial approach of Russia. Basic difference of neo-imperialism from classical imperialism is that neo-imperialism basically aims to tighten connection with the target state through economic aspects rather than using military power (Parenti 1995: 15).¹ It is a popular issue that emerged after the collapse of the USSR and even continues today whether does Russia pursuit a neo-imperial approach or not concerning to its “Near Abroad”² foreign policy.

For instance after the Georgian crisis in the summer of 2008, although some Western officials has contended that Russia's neo-imperialism and strategic expansionism remain illusory due to reason that interconnection between West through energy, trade, business and etc. (Bugajski 2008: 177), Bugajski claims that;

“Russia evolved into a neo-imperial project for two reasons. First aim is to restore its global stature against competition with the United States and secondly aims to predominate over those of smaller neighbors and European partners. Hence, in terms of Russian neo-imperialistic approach, there is no relying on traditional instruments such as military power (except use of force

¹ “Under neoimperialism, the flag stays home, while dollar goes everywhere.”

² Russia and the Near Abroad, Chapter 11,

http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205189938.pdf

Russia, was recognized as the legal inheritor of the Soviet Union's seat in the United Nations and other international organizations while the other 14 assumed sovereign status with a clean slate. The other states collectively are known as the Near Abroad. They constitute the territory comprised of the former republics of the Soviet Union. The term *Near Abroad* first emerged in Russian accounts of its relations with the other former republics of the Soviet Union.

against Georgia in 2008). Instead, Kremlin prefers to implement diplomatic, political, economic, and security tools for the target states" (Bugajski 2010: 15).

Another important figure in Russian politics Dmitri Trenin also frequently underlines that Russia, under Vladimir Putin's rule, follows a neo-imperialist ambitions in order to boost Russia's status in the world (Trenin 2004).

3. Steps through Eurasian Union

After the dissolution of the USSR, the newly independent republics have been involved in various organization in terms of economic, political, and security areas (Shadikhodjaev 2009: 555). Their main aim was to circumvent the side effects of new political situation and to dispose economic weaknesses. However, many post-Soviet republics secured hesitation to enjoy these new organizations led by Russia. According to former states, the new threat was a reveal of Russian hegemony in the region once more by promoting these organizations. Therefore, less than a decade after the independence, by the late 1990s, Central Asian states began to explore ways to balance their relations with Russia through bilateral relations with West particularly with the United States (Allison 2004: 464-68). On the other hand, first years of Yeltsin administration, Russia has much more involved with western approach more than Central Asia thanks to liberals strongly influenced Russian foreign policy and claimed that Russia should detach itself from the region. When Primakov appointed as Prime Minister in the middle of 1990s as a result of catastrophic economic conditions guided by West, eyes of Russian eagle turned to Central Asia and post-Soviet states at all. Afterwards, by the Presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia has strengthened its position with Central Asia and ended the uncertainty about its intentions (Buszynski 2005: 546). In a way to Eurasian Union, numerous attempts took place for regional integration and cooperation in post-Soviet Eurasia; the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO); the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC or EEC); the Single Economic Space (SES); the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Initiative (CAREC); the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO); The Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA); The Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), etc (Obydenkova 2001: 88).

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization formed by the majority of Soviet Republic in December 1991. First the leaders of the Soviet Republics of Belarus and Ukraine met in Belarus where they signed an agreement to establish CIS. Later, December 21, 1991, the leaders of the other eleven Soviet republics met in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and signed CIS Charter. As a result of this document, the USSR was resolved officially ended and it was stipulated that all signatory states of the charter were both sovereign and independent states. Main aim behind formation of CIS was to provide aid for newly independent former Soviet republics in the areas of foreign and economic fields (Peimani 2009: 295-297). Although, there were critics about CIS that the organization could not reach

development of regional cooperation between post-Soviet states and created divergence of interests and strategies of its former and current member states (Obydenkova 2001: 91), with its current eleven members, it keeps these states around one table.³

The Collective Security Treaty was signed on May 15, 1992, by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, in Tashkent as the first security document of the Central Asian states. Afterwards Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus also signed the treaty until the end of year 1993. The treaty confirmed the will of all participating states to abstain from the use of threat of force. The important point of the treaty was signatory states would not be able to join other military alliances and while an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all (Ibid.: 91), likewise NATO Article 5.⁴ On October 7, 2002, the six members of the Collective Security Treaty signed a charter in Chisinau, Moldova while expanding the organization and renaming it into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Ibid.: 91). Since its formation in 2002, CSTO has served not only to train Central Asian officers in Russian military academies but it also a framework for delivery of both Soviet-era and more modern military equipment to the Central Asian militaries at Russian internal prices (Frost 2009: 84). Weinstein claims that, "if anti-terrorism and suspicion of NATO brought CSTO powers together, the American invasion of Iraq firmly cemented CSTO relations on the basis of fear of American power (Weinstein 2007: 172). The purpose of the CSTO is to promote peace, strengthen international and regional security and stability, and ensure the collective defense of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states (Mowchan 2009: 1).

Besides security attempts, CIS has been initiator of some economic integration attempts. In this respect, the Economic Union Treaty was signed in 1993 to encourage economic integration among the members (Obydenkova 2001: 91).⁵ The other is the Customs Union initiative in 1994 that would entail free trade between Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan, with Tajikistan joining in 1999 (Sakwa 2008: 435). Hence, CIS integration towards a customs union has taken place in three directions within the CIS economic union; the Eurasian Economic

³ http://www.cisstat.com/eng/frame_about.htm; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (unofficial associate member), Ukraine (de facto participating), and Uzbekistan, 278 million person.

⁴ Article 5 of the Washington Treaty: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.", <http://www.nato.int/terrorism/five.htm>

⁵ "It states that [the Treaty was based on the necessity of formation of the common economic space on the principles of free movement of goods, services, workers, capitals; elaboration of concerned money and credit, tax, price, customs and foreign economic policies, rapprochement of the methods.]"

Community (EurAsEc) and the Single Economic Space (SES). According to the first agreement signed between the parties, an economic union would be established following the formation of a multilateral free trade association, a customs union, a common market and a currency union (Shadikhodjaev 2009: 555-556). Abdelal states that the three most committees re-integrationist states Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan established a trilateral Customs Union and invited all other CIS states to join which Kyrgyzstan did in 1996 and Tajikistan in 1999 (Abdelal 2001: 62). Moreover, in 1999 five countries agreed on the Treaty of Customs Union and Single Economic Space on the bases of completion of the formation of a Customs Union with a single customs territory and establishment, on the basis of the Customs Union, of a single economic space. When Vladimir Putin came to power, initiated the idea of a new economic structure that is called EurAsEc created by the five CIS customs union members in October 2000 and went into effect in April 2001 (Nygren 2008: 50).

EurAsEc was established in 2000 among Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan enjoyed in EurAsEc in 2006 but then suspended its membership at the end of 2008. Uzbekistan wanted to be outside of EurAsEc and to make bilateral trade deals with its neighbors based on most benefits of administration (Shepherd 2008). Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine also remain to have observes status. Its members account approximately 75% of all foreign commercial transactions occurring among the 12 members of the CIS. EurAsEc's main function is to promote economic and trade ties among countries that formed a unified economic system during the Soviet period (Weitz 2006: 9). Other than that main goal is to increase cooperation for creation of common energy market. For that purpose, the concept of formation of common energy market in countries of EurAsEc was approved in 2008.⁶ According to the concept of formation of common energy market, development of reforms in the field of energy, ensuring free transfer of energy sources, ensuring nondiscriminatory access to services of natural monopolies in the field of energy, conducting coherent policy for transit and transportation of energy sources, development of infrastructure of common energy market, joint development and effective use of energy capacity, covering needs of national economies in energy sources, ensuring energy security and information support to common energy market.⁷

The Central Asian Union (which became the Central Asian Economic Union, CAEC, in 1998), composed of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, was established in 1994 as an economic union. In December 1995 it decided to form a joint Council of Defense Ministers to consider issues of regional security and the coordination of military exercises, air defense and defense supplies. In December 2001 the CAEC was transformed by its members into the Central Asian Cooperation Organization

⁶ <http://eeasia.unescap.org/PDFs/Activities-of-EurAsEC-in-the-energy-sector.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

(CACO) and the CAEC Council of Ministers of Defense was dissolved, which further reduced the ability of the member states to develop any joint regional defense and security identity (Allison 2004: 473-474). Russia joined into this group in 2004. Russia's membership in CACO was simply a formality designed to augment a Russian-sponsored effort at economic integration, represented by EurAsEc. In fact, CACO was absorbed into the EurAsEc group in 2005, indication that Russia's admittance was only procedural, setting the stage for the merger of the two organizations. The EurAsEc structure provides much more influence for Russia than the country enjoyed as a member of CACO, and Russia hopes its commanding position in EurAsEc will allow it to play a leading role in the process of economic integration in Central Asia (Hanks 2010: 125).

4. Time for Eurasian Union

As a result of dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the Central Asian states emerged as interdependent republics, a debate on the prospects of regional cooperation has begun. More than twenty years past after their independence, yet the idea of advancement of relations on the political and economical level remains most part of the CIS region (Marin 2011: 1). Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev was the initiator of the formation of Eurasian Union at the beginning of year 1994. He predicted a multinational model that would aim at creating a unified state through various stages of a confederation and finally arriving at a union. In some many respects such as achievement of integration economically and creation of common economic space was inspired by the example of European Union (Sengupta 2009: 145). Nazarbayev's project has composed of three stages through path of Eurasian Union. The first one was economic, second humanitarian and the third provided guarantees of state security and defense (Exoterikon 1995: 111). The reason behind formation of new regional organization was again expressed by Kazakh President that closer integration between Central Asian states must be accomplished otherwise another superpower rivalry would dominate their region Sengupta 2009: 146).⁸ In this sense, Nazarbayev created the idea of "Eurasian bridge" which means geographic, cultural and historic affiliation to both Europe and Asia (Vinokurov 2010: 2).⁹

⁸ "President Nazarbayev: [We are again witnessing superpower rivalry for economic dominance in our region. We have to address correctly this new global and geo-economic challenge. We have a choice between remaining the supplies of raw materials to the global markets and waiting patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the Central Asian region.]"

⁹ "One of Nazarbayev's conceptual statements reads: "... I have formulated, and will continue to promote the idea of Eurasian unity which, I believe, has a strategic future... Kazakhstan alone cannot realize its great transit potential, nor can any other neighboring country do so. This should be done jointly, in close and mutually beneficial co-operation."

The project of Eurasian Union that was proposed by President of Kazakhstan suggested some principles and mechanisms for the formation of the Eurasian Union (Exoterikon 1995: 112)¹⁰;

- conducting national referenda or a decision by parliaments on the entry of countries to the Eurasian Union,
- signing an agreement by participating countries on the creation of the Eurasian Union on the basis of the principle of equality, non-interference in internal markets,
- respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and immunity and national borders,
- the Eurasian Union would not allow for associate membership therefore decision-making in the CIS would be carried out on the basis of a qualified majority of the fourth-fifths of the total number of the participant countries.

After declaring his candidacy for the 2012 presidential elections, Russia's Prime Minister Putin announced a "Eurasian Union" as the target plan of an enlarged integration process within the CIS region (*Ibid.*: 113). Putin's article came out a few days (4 October 2011 – *Izvestiya*) after the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw revealed the mutual prejudices of the EU and its Eastern Partners. Against this background, Putin's offer contains more tangible benefits for them than does the EU's (Marin 2011: 1). In his article, Prime Minister Putin expressed his desire to bring ex-Soviet states into a "Eurasian Union". He said that, "It would be naive to attempt to restore or copy something from the past. However, a stronger integration on a new political and economic basis and a new system of values is an imperative of our era" and essentially explained the new organization will be different than Soviet Union (Bryanski, Gleb 2011) which was welcomed by the Kazakhstan President (Kilner 2011). Putin was clear in one point that the objective is not to re-establish the Soviet Union, but rather to create a powerful supra national union" of sovereign states, which stands an equal footing with the USA and China as well as the major regional organizations (Holbach 2012: 1). It seems that although Eurasian Union has roots in terms of ideology and history, this time it has much more economic aspects. As a result some former Soviet Union countries, which were struggling economically since their independence day, could response positively to Prime Minister Putin's call (Leonard 2012).

In his historical article, Putin specifically called Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to be member of the union while mentioning that it is open to other CIS countries as well.¹¹ Additionally, there is no doubt that Kremlin's objective is to convince

¹⁰ "The following supranational bodies were proposed; Council of Heads of States and Heads of Governments of the Eurasian Union – the highest political body of the Eurasian Union, the highest consultative body was the Parliament of Eurasian Union – decisions of the Eurasian Union Parliament become effective after their ratification by parliaments of Eurasian Union countries."

¹¹ Eurasianet, "Eurasian Union Proposal Key Aspect of Putin's Expected Presidency", 7 October 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64282>

Ukraine for the membership of the Eurasian Union in a short term. For that reason, Eurasian Union project gives the signals of continuity of foreign policy of Putin during his first and second term of presidency. Kuchins and Zevelev also argued that Putin's return as President will not significantly alter the course of Moscow's foreign policy (Kuchins and Zevelev 2012: 147). According to Buszynski, at the beginning of Putin's first term Russia's strategy toward Central Asia developed in three directions:

1. new security and economic regional groupings were devised to integrate the region more closely with Russia and to prevent it from falling under American influence;
2. Russia's military presence was expanded to demonstrate a commitment to the region and a new base was established in Kyrgyzstan while plans were made for a greater presence in Tajikistan;
3. and Moscow attempted to strengthen relations with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to curtail their present inclination to search for Western security and economic support (Buszynski 2005: 550).

Prime Minister Putin stated in his article that the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space being established by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan will underlie a future Eurasian Union.¹² As a part of Putin's foreign policy of gaining superpower status, Russia must be economically strong. In this context, the new integration project introduced by Putin is predominantly presented in economic terms including joint industry, technology and energy policies among the member states, a common trade area, common currency, free movement across borders "like in European Union Schengen Zone" and partnership with the European Union (Holbach 2012: 2). The Customs Union of the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan is an integrated customs area that forms part of the Eurasian Economic Community and came into effect on 1 January 2010. It has a population of more than 165 million, a total GDP of 2 trillion \$ and a goods turnover of 900 billion \$ (Krotov 2012: 129). Custom barrier were lifted for cross-border trade among the three states in July 2011. Beginning from January 2012, the Customs Union turned into a Common Economic Space in which questions over the rules on competition transportation, agricultural subsidies and visa and migration policy started to jointly regulate by the member states (Holbach 2012: 2).¹³

¹² Ria Novosti, [Customs union, common economic space to underlie Eurasian union - Putin](#), 4 October 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20111004/167361651.html>, "A new Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making", Vladimir Putin, 4 October 2011, <http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/16622/>

¹³ "The Custom Union agreement between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan was reached on December 2009 and due to come into law July 1, 2010. Complication with Belarus resulted in a slight delay and it came into force on July 6, 2010, when all three countries finally ratified it...In a meeting on 18 November 2011, the Presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed a number of joint agreements and declarations on Eurasian economic integration."

Allison quotes to Dmitry Trofimov for the Russian policy on Central Asia as follows:

- stability in the region based on close partnerships with the regional states;
- unimpeded rights of transit across Central Asia to maintain partnership relations with China, India and Iran;
- the maintenance of a common economic space with Central Asia, which in the future could assist Russia's economic modernization;
- the use of the region's geostrategic potential for practical military needs and to preserve Russia's status as a world and regional power;
- and international recognition of Russia's leading role in the region (Allison 2004b: 283-284).

It should be noted that oil and gas resources of Caspian Sea and Central Asia are strategic for Russian foreign energy policy in order to dominate the region against American interference and continue its export surplus. Therefore, by creating an active regional organization with an headquarter similar to Brussels, Russia will play a significant role in designing the energy activities of the region. Russian energy companies will be the key actors in such a scenario basically Gazprom, Transneft, Rosneft, and Lukoil as a private company as well. Allison says that:

“a principal instrument at the disposal of Putin's government in extracting concessions in broader negotiations with Central Asian states has been Russia's monopoly control over the Transneft state pipeline system within Russia. Second, the semi-state controlled Russian monopoly Gazprom has played an increasingly significant foreign policy role as it has negotiated deals for the long-term supply of gas through its pipeline systems” (Ibid.: 290).

On October 26, 2011, President Nazarbayev outlined his vision of the Eurasian integration in *Izvestiya* with the title of “Eurasian Union: From the Conception to the History of the Future”¹⁴. He wrote that “the Eurasian Union is a mega-project on par with complex challenges of the present and the future” which has a chance to become “an integral part of the new global architecture being formed now under the influence of the most serious global financial and economic crisis in history” (Andreev 2012)¹⁵ The Kazakh President outlined five key components of his vision of such a Union. First, “the Eurasian Union should form the outset be set up as a competitive global economic grouping.” It is important that the Single Economic Space be “a territory of innovations and powerful technological breakthrough.” Second, “the Eurasian Union should be set up as a strong link joining together the Euro-Atlantic and the Asian areas of development.” In an

¹⁴ http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Custom%20Union%20Update%20July%202010_Moscow_Russian%20Federation_7-26-2010.pdf

¹⁵ Silk Road Economy & Business Report, Newsletter, 31 October 2011.

¹⁵ Astana Calling, Issue No.194, 28 October 2011, p.1, Lukashenko also wrote an article: “The Destiny of Our Integration” a view to which his peers across the post-Soviet space would readily subscribe: equal rights, respect for national sovereignty, and the inviolability of borders are the only plausible principles the integration may be built on.

economical sense, “we could become a bridge connecting dynamic economies of the EU, East, South-East and South Asia.” Third, “the Eurasian Union should be formed as a self-reliant regional financial grouping which would be a part of the global monetary and financial system.” According to Nazarbayev, “the creation of “a currency union within the Single Economic Space is a Rubicon, which, once passed, will bring us closer to a new level of integration similar to the current level seen in the European Union.” Fourth, “geo-economic and, in the future, geopolitical maturing of Eurasian integration should proceed exclusively along the evolutionary and voluntary path.” “No forms of artificial pressure on any countries are acceptable. Let us not forget that it took 40 years to set up a single European market,” the President wrote as he listed several initiatives in Eurasia that can be used a platform for further integration: the CIS (11 members), the Eurasian Economic Community (5 members), Collective Security Treaty Organization (7 members), Customs Union (3 members). The Kazakh leader also did not exclude the appearance of other grouping, such as, for example, the Central Asian Union. Fifth, “the establishment of the Eurasian Union is only possible on the basis of wide popular support.”¹⁶

Marin explains what might Eurasian Union means for Russia as (Marin 2011: 2);

Firstly, the fact that Russia might use the would-be Eurasian Union to tighten its grip on Caspian hydrocarbon resources would surely not result in more secure and diverse energy deliveries for EU countries.

Secondly, the values underpinning any Eurasian ideology are hardly compatible with European ideals of democracy. An integrated Eurasia would build on the Customs Union, which is currently a club of autocrats who would surely prosper under the auspices of a supranational body dominated by Putin.

Thirdly, the variable geometry of the proposed Union implies that breakaway entities such as Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia might take part in it. This would not only put additional constraints on Moldova and Georgia.

5. Conclusion

Belarus has been economically in trouble for many years and the project of Eurasian Union is like a lifejacket for Minsk and Lukashenko himself. In order to keep its power, Lukashenko refused to hear critics of Europe and tried to resist on Russian supremacy over pipelines. However, Lukashenko’s pipeline blackmail did not work and almost collapsed economically. While Belarus was stepping towards integration with Russia and Kazakhstan, Minsk began to get reward from Moscow. For instance, in the middle of year 2011, it was announced that Belarus would get

¹⁶ Astana Calling, Issue No.194, 28 October 2011, p.2

\$3-3.5 billion from the EurAsEc anti-crisis fund.¹⁷ Moreover at the end of year 2011, Belarus and Russia agreed on 2012-14 gas contracts. According to the new contract, Belarus will pay 164\$ per 1000 cubic meter for Russian gas in the first quarter of 2012 compared with an average price of 400\$ paid by European countries. Deal also included the increase of Gazprom's stake in Beltransgaz from 50 to 100%. As a result, Belarus won the cheap price for its budget and gave up its income from Belarus gas market.¹⁸ In terms of the energy relations between Russia and Kazakhstan, the biggest winner of a Eurasian Union may be Gazprom the world's largest natural gas company. A Eurasian Union could allow it to use Russia's regional influence to help it expand its interests into Kazakhstan, possibly by further entrenching itself with KazMunayGas, Kazakhstan's state-owned energy company¹⁹ as happened in Beltransgaz case.

Ukraine is probably the main objective for Russia to split Kiev from Western ties and strictly connect to its former friends. Energy card is frequently being used by Russia against Ukraine in order to demonstrate its power and manipulate Ukraine foreign and domestic policy. In this case, energy card is once more on the table and Russia is offering Ukraine to join Eurasian Union and in return get lower gas prices as in the case of Belarus (Olearchyk 2011). Furthermore, it is not clear that how long Ukraine will resist Russia's pressure because economy of Ukraine is vulnerable and having trouble to pay its natural gas debts to Kremlin. Thus, it could be expected that Ukraine would like to accept joining Eurasian Economic Union rather than joining Eurasian Union in a short term that resembles to Turkish case in European Union at some points.

While Eurasian Union seems to be evolving on one hand, on the other hand Russia leads to increase efficiency of EurAsEc by aiming to strengthen the infrastructure of the new Union. It is first announced that the preparations to sign the agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union must be completed by January 1, 2013, which Russian premier personally said on May 2011.²⁰ As a result of the October 2013 summit in Minsk between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, it was agreed to sign the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty in May 2014 that will become operational on 1 January 2015.²¹

¹⁷ Ria Novosti, "Belarus to Get \$3 bln Loan From EurAsEC – Premier", 19 May 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20110519/164117956.html>

¹⁸ Ria Novosti, Lukashenko says Beltransgaz sale to Gazprom 'very profitable' 23, December 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20111223/170444388.html>

¹⁹ Forbes, "Putin's Dream Of Eurasian Union Could Control World's Energy", 11 November 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2011/11/11/putins-dream-of-eurasian-union-could-control-worlds-energy/2/>

²⁰ Ria Novosti, "Putin says deal on Eurasian Economic Union must be ready by 2013", 19 May 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110519/164123753.html>

²¹ Belarusian Telegraph Agency, "Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan to sign Eurasian Economic Union Treaty in May 2014", 24 October 2013, <http://news.belta.by/en/news/politics?id=730616>

Therefore the new union will bring together Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These are the countries that would be the member of Eurasian Union at first possible expansion wave. The only country could be out of the Union or the prospective last member seems to be Turkmenistan as a result of its neutral foreign policy approach. Yet, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are also prospective candidates for Eurasian Union that was recognized as independent states in 2008 by Russia (Levy 2008). As a reward of being regionally recognized states, these small autonomous regions might prefer to join this new regional organization.

The biggest challenge in front of creating Eurasian Union is the authoritarian and dictatorial tendencies of these leaders. Comparing Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, Russia is the only example that changed its leader four times according to the election results. However, Kazakh leader Nazarbayev is in power for more than 20 years and Lukashenka is in power since 1994 (Goncharenko 2011). When we look at the other possible candidate states concerning Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Uzbek leader Kerimov and Tajik leader Rahmon have been ruling their country for more than 20 years, only Kyrgyzstan experienced some civil uprisings but finally reached to have elections. In other words, the change of leaders will determine the destiny of Eurasian Union because it is not clear that whether this is a policy of state or one man.

As a result, on behalf of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, the new regional organization is evolving in old Eurasia in terms of Mackinder's, Spykman's, and Brzezinski's theory. Once more it is time to recall, "who rules the Heartland command the World Island". Although Eurasian Union is an organization that aimed to be formed by equal partners, there is no doubt that Russia will lead the organization as Germany in European Union. According to the foreign policy of Russia's second and fourth President, Vladimir Putin, "if Russia does not improve economically and socially and not become a superpower again, then disappear from world history". (Varol Sevim 2012: 364) Thus, Eurasian Union is a significant project for Russia that was evolved through many other regional organizations such as CIS, Customs Union and CSTO as well. Although European Union has a lack of common security policy, Eurasian Union has a CSTO that declared that countries outside CSTO will only be able to establish bases on the territory of a member state with the consent of all member states. In other words, without official approval of all CSTO members, no other foreign military base could be settled in CSTO territories".²² Therefore economic and security bodies of the Eurasian Union is ready but political body has to wait for a while. Due to reason that many CIS countries have long-term leaders, there is a risk for Eurasian Union to lose momentum in case of change of leaders. If new leaders will continue to increase

²² Ria Novosti, "CSTO to Tighten Rules on Foreign Bases in Member States" 20 December 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20111220/170389283.html>

their relationship with Russia, then we may expect a new huge regional organization in this part of the world that would put American and Chinese power out of the region. And finally, Eurasian Union could serve for the rise of Russian Federation in the world scene, if it expands and creates a common economic space.

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