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Neo-Eurasianist Influences on Recent Russian Foreign Policy and Institutional Integration in Central Asia

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"Today, it is imperative to end this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected."[1]

—

Vladimir Putin on the Incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation, 2014

The year 2014 represented a historical break for Russian strategic and ideological thought as it intertwined foreign and domestic politics in a singular 'global mission'. The Crimean crisis has set a preliminary end to Russia's bumpy post-Soviet quest to befriend the West and assimilate itself to an Atlanticist agenda. While its consequences haven proven to be alienating for both sides, they simultaneously gave a push to Russia's national identity and great power discourse. The West's astonishment about a 'ruthless Kremlin' also stems from a general incapability to understand Moscow's motives and the ongoing distinction between a 'good' and 'bad' Russia – which only lead to further distancing.

"Soviet disintegration contributed to a sense of a cultural trauma, which produced a high degree of contestation in the geopolitical discourse of the contemporary Russia."[2] Following the disappointing years of rapprochement towards the West in the Yeltsin era and early years of the Putin administration, the Russian geopolitical vision has generally shifted from 'Greater Europe' ('*From Lisbon to Vladivostok*') towards 'Greater Eurasia' (*'From Murmansk to Shanghai'*). At first glance, this move seems in accordance with the political and ideological current of Eurasianism – which nevertheless presents a vast field of ideas and interpretations and foremost needs further structuring and subsequent back-checking. Ray Silvius argues that the historical memory present in Russia is central to understanding the Kremlin's policy actions: "Actors may mobilise concepts associated with previous social formations for the purposes of articulating and legitimating

[1] Putin, Vladimir: Address by the President of the Russian Federation. 18.03.2014.
[2] Tsygankov, Andrei: Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-up. In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, p. 103.

contemporary political and economic projects."[3] It is therefore necessary to examine the recent 'Eurasian Turn' of Russian foreign strategy regarding both its initial impact on societal discourse as well as its practical implementation in concrete policy examples.

This research paper aims to identify different potential types of influences of classical as well as modern Eurasianist ideology and strategy in the recent foreign policy orientation of the Russian Federation. It furthermore strives to point out whether these can be found in current Russian efforts towards Central Asian institutional integration.
It firstly assesses the current state of internal ideological concepts as well as external strategic thought of (Neo-)Eurasianism and the image of a 'Russian World' in Russian state and society by analyzing their influences on recent strategic communications and ideological discussions regarding societal and foreign policy (concentrated on Vladimir Putin and Aleksandr Dugin). Those findings are subsequently exemplified by an overview comparison of two practical policy case studies in Central Asia, in the form of Russia's political participation and geostrategic involvement in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
It can be assumed that the theoretical Eurasianist framework and its ideational impact on Russian internal political discourse might differ from the Kremlin's practical institutional foreign policy on the ground. Nevertheless, the essence of these discussions are thought to haven proven influential in Moscow's policymaking and the public portrayal thereof.

The chosen policy analysis possesses both theoretical and practical relevance for a better understanding of recent vector developments in Russian foreign policy as well as the geopolitical unfolding of the Central Asian region. Considering its given scope, this research paper does not cover closely adjacent topics such as Neo-Eurasianist personal ties to the European Far Right. Further limitations derive from the author's linguistic restrictions. As is the case with narrative and discourse analysis under constructivist aspects, language can either work as a mirror or as an interpretation of reality. While the following thoughts and ideas inevitably possess a certain degree of connection to practical politics, they are not to be understood as individual political statements of the author.

[3] Silvius, Ray: Understanding Eurasian Integration and Contestation in the Post-Soviet Conjuncture: Lessons from Geopolitical Economy and Critical Historicism. In: Desai, Radhika (ed.): Theoretical Engagements in Geopolitical Economy. Bingley 2015. p. 238.

2 Eurasianist Influences on Recent Russian Political Discourse

2.1 The Mainstreaming of Neo-Eurasianism and the Kremlin's Adaptation

Earlier internal crises and recently renewed instability in its neighbourhood have contributed to bringing Eurasianist discourse on the Russian political agenda and further radicalised some of its representatives – as seen in this quote by Aleksandr Dugin:

> *"The sovereignty of Ukraine represents such a negative phenomenon for Russian geopolitics […] Ukraine as an independent state with some territorial ambitions constitutes an enormous threat to the whole Eurasia, and without the solution of the Ukrainian problem, it is meaningless to talk about the continental geopolitics."*[4]

Dugin is by far the most famous advocate for the modern (right-wing)[5] school of Neo-Eurasianism. Since the fall of the USSR, he managed to switch path from marginalised neo-fascist mysticism to political influence as former adviser to the Duma chairman, former lecturer for the general staff of the armed forces or former professor at Moscow State University. Requested by the presidential administration, he also issued the textbook 'Social science for the citizens of the New Russia'.[6] Dugin's books have been sold in masses and may arguably be the most well-known geopolitical works in post-Soviet Russian society.

Classical Eurasianism derived from the works of various Russian intellectuals in the late nineteenth century. Eurasianists concluded that Eurasia – in contrast to Humboldt's definition of the connected continental landmass of Europe and Asia - was neither European nor Asian but rather a 'middle-continent' in between.[7] After the Bolshevik Revolution, many Eurasianists went into exile. While critical of Marxist dogma, they nevertheless supported the new imperial grandeur of Soviet Russia and set out to turn it

[4] Dugin, Aleksandr: *Osnovy Geopolitiki*. Moscow 1997. p. 348.
[5] Note: It is difficult to fully translate the traditional left-right party spectrum into current Russian politics. At least for Dugin, Eurasianism is neither right nor left.
[6] See: Naxera, Vladimír: The West, Globalisation and Pussy Riot. Portrayals of Russia and Eurasia's Enemies in the Work of Aleksandr G. Dugin. In: *CEJISS* I/2018, p. 122 and
Fetishcheva, Tatyana: Neo-Eurasianism: Russia's National Idea or a Dangerous Doctrine for the 21st Century?. Prague 2013. p. 30, 41.
[7] See: Savitskiy, Petr: The Eurasian Continent. Moscow 1997. p. 82.

into a 'true' Eurasian state.[8] With the rise of Stalin and his rejection of geopolitics as "bourgeois (pseudo)science"[9], most Eurasianist voices slowly decayed. Only Lev Gumilev secretly elaborated ethnological-geographical works until after the fall of the USSR. He differentiated the civilisational path of ethnic Russians from the general Slavic development of recent centuries as they had merged with Turkish-Tatars to create a new ethnos in an alliance of woods and steppe.[10]

Neo-Eurasianism cannot be seen as a direct successor of classical 19th/20th century Eurasianism but rather as an adaptation on same historic ground motives of the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union and the Tsarist Empire. "Today, Neo-Eurasianism is a philosophical and political movement that combines classical ideas of Eurasianism, Slavophilism and Radicalism as well as ideas of Imperial's path of Russia."[11]
Although Dugin and other prominent figures never attained any elected office ("*We are not fighting for power, but for influence on the power.*"[12]), revived Eurasianist discussions in the late 1990s motivated active politicians to deal with the issue. Until today, the Kremlin's official policy line can be termed as 'Pragmatic Eurasianism' which was mainly influenced by former Russian prime minister Yevgeny Primakov. Other modern schools of Eurasianist thought include 'left-wing' and 'liberal'/'democratic' Neo-Eurasianism but also 'Islamic Eurasianism'.[13]

While Eurasianist ideas have quickly become a mainstream ideology, "President Putin has merely used the pseudophilosophical rhetoric of the Eurasianists […][and] is not guided exclusively by the judgments of the Eurasianists, for Eurasianism does not constitute a single monolithic paradigm in Russian politics"[14] It is therefore essential to include in the following analysis a selection of the most important speeches and remarks

[8] See: Papava, Vladimer: The Eurasianism of Russian Anti-Westernism and the Concept of 'Central Caucaso-Asia'. In: *Russian Politics and Law* (51/6), p. 52.
[9] Skladanowski, Marcin: Russia's Mission in Aleksandr G. Dugin's Eyes: The Ideological Weaknesses of the Soviet Union and the Future Ideology of the Russian Federation. In: *TRAMES*, 2019, 23(73/68), 3. p. 310.
[10] See: Mileski, Toni: Identifying the new Eurasian orientation in modern Russian geopolitical thought. In: *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 2, December 2015. p. 178.
[11] Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 28.
[12] Dugin, Aleksandr: We do not fight for power. We fight for influence on the power. 11.10.2001.
[13] Papava, ibid., p. 58.
[14] Papava, ibid., p. 54 seq.

of the Russian president concerning Eurasia. Because – "The more successful Putin is at building this narrative, and the more it takes root within Russia, the more likely it will be to inform future action."[15]

Both the conceptual program of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism as well as the 'pragmatic' political Eurasianist influences on Russian politics and society serve the scope and purpose of this paper as they can be understood as both (civilizational) ideology and (geopolitical) strategy. Subsequently, the main analytical factors will be split up in two corresponding subchapters.

2.2 Ideological Concepts

> *"People were bored to death by the very notion of ideology after 70 years of communism. We hoped society would produce a new identity and ideology on its own. But this was wishful thinking."*[16]
>
> –
>
> Sergei Karaganov, Head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, Former Presidential Advisor to Yeltsin and Putin

Both classical Eurasianism as well as its neo-concepts evolved from internal chaos engrained in Russian historic memory – the Bolshevik Revolution and the fall of the USSR – and tried "to make sense of catastrophe […] by a euphoria arising from ruin"[17]. The abandonment of communism as a dogmatic state dictum left the newly founded federation in an ideological vacuum. While the Russian constitution rejects one single 'official' state ideology,[18] the various crises of the mid 1990s and 2000s showed a disintegrating country whose society was desperately looking for common meaning: President Yeltsin made the effort of commissioning academics to find a 'Russian idea'; his successor Putin described finding a cultural ideology as one of the most significant tasks for the new century.[19]

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[15] Roberts, ibid., p. 54.
[16] Karaganov, Sergei: Why do we need National Identity?. Valdai Club, 09. 09.2013.
[17] Matern, Frederick: The Discourse of Civilization in the Works of Russia's New Eurasianists: Lev Gumilev and Alexander Panarin. In: YCISS Post-Communist Studies Programme Research Paper Series. Paper Number 002, February 2007. p. 7.
[18] See: [n.a.]: The Constitution of the Russian Federation. 1993. Ch. 1, Art. 13, P. 1,2.
[19] See: Ziegler, Charles: Russia as a Nationalizing State: Rejecting the Western Liberal Order. In: *International Politics* No. 53, p. 559, 564.

The evident need for weltanschauung soon entered party politics. In this political climate, Eurasianism offered a perfect formula as it had always "tried to solve the Russian identity quest by exalting the oriental alterity."[20] Aleksandr Dugin first co-founded the public movement 'Eurasia', which later expanded to become the 'International Eurasianist Movement' incorporating the 'Eurasian Youth Union', and in 2002 formed the political 'Eurasia Party'. Further political influence was guaranteed through Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party, who used Neo-Eurasianism as an 'umbrella ideology' to reinvent the image of a Soviet empire from the Baltic Sea to China.[21] Dugin "came to the realization that as a nationalist, in the narrow ethnic Russian or Slavic sense, he would always remain an outsider. It appears that his move toward Eurasianism was based on his assessment of the popular conservative mood."[22]

2.2.1 Russia's Eurasian Identity Discussions

Russian presidents switched from declaring their country as 'European' or 'Asian' depending on the audience. Already Gorbachev had committed himself to both leading an Asian USSR and building a 'common European home'[23] – a strategy Putin picked up while also introducing Russia as a "Pacific power"[24]. From the geographical distinction of Eurasia as its own entity derives that 'Russia-Eurasia' exists separate from European 'Western' and Asian 'Eastern' civilisations and their values. Early Eurasianist Nikolai Trubetskoi stated that "*Russian people and people of the nations of the 'Russian world' are neither Europeans, nor Asians… we are not ashamed to admit that we are Eurasians*"[25].

As 'Eurasian' and 'Eurasianist' are both referred to as *evraziiskii*, Dugin first claimed direct influence on Putin as his 'shadow counsellor' when the president started referring

[20] Laruelle, Marlene: The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism: An Imperial Version of Russian Nationalism. In: *Nationalities Papers* (32/1), p. 116.
[21] See: Erşen, Emre: Neo-Eurasianism and Putin's 'Multipolarism' in Russian Foreign Policy. In: *Turkish Review of Eurasian Studies*. Annual 2004 – 4, p. 141 seq.
[22] Matern, ibid., p. 31.
[23] Rangsimaporn, Paradorn: Interpretations of Eurasianism: Justifying Russia's Role in East Asia. In: *Europe-Asia Studies* (58/3), p. 374.
[24] Putin, Vladimir: Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2014.
[25] Trubetskoi, Nikolai: Exodus to the East. Sofia 1921. VII.

to Russian identity as 'Eurasian' in 2000.[26] Nevertheless, Putin still characterised Russia as equally 'European-spirited' seven years later, when already close to half of the Russian population believed their country to be an independent civilisation and equated their homeland with Eurasia.[27] Nowadays, the president too has added the argument of Russia as a 'distinct civilisation' to his rhetorical repertoire.

"Dugin constructs Eurasian identity as voluntaristic […] [and not determined] by only geographical and topological contexts."[28] One has to consider his neo-fascist background and the '*Drang nach Osten*' concept in his early works. "The role of the Russian world then appears distinctly: it brings together advantages from its northern location (its racial identity), from the east (its cultural and religious choices), and from the south on an economic and political plan (alliance with the Third World against Westernization)."[29] This view whitewashes the fact that Central Asia was conquered by a Western-oriented tsar who simply exploited constant war among the smaller peoples in his neighbourhood. Charles Ziegler characterises this 'multi-ethnic' identity relationship as follows: "Russia's 'homeland nationalism,' […] clashes with the 'nationalizing nationalisms' of the newly independent former republics, since virtually by definition the latter nationalizing projects are held to deny full rights to Russians and their compatriots"[30].

2.2.2 The Civilisational Struggle in Moscow's Hybrid Exceptionalism

The Russian language honours the imperial nostalgia in society with its own word: 'Greatpowerness' (*Velikoderzhavnost*). In 2002, Putin stated that "'Russia is not claiming a Great Power status. It is a great power by virtue of its huge potential, its history and its culture […] Either Russia will be great or it will not be at all"[31].

[26] See: Clowes, Edith W.: Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity. Ithaca 2011. p. 46.
[27] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 42. and Papava, ibid., pp. 47, 51.
[28] Naxera, ibid., p. 127.
[29] Laruelle: Eurasianism, ibid., p. 131.
[30] Ziegler, ibid., p. 559.
[31] As cited in: Lewis, David G.: Eurasian Spaces in a New World Order: Großraum Thinking in Russian Foreign Policy. In: Conference Paper, 59th International Studies Association, San Francisco 2018. p.1seq.

Skladanowski notes that if Putin wanted to "'raise Russia from its knees' […] [and] realise the Russian mission in the world, [he had to] learn a lesson from the fate of the Soviet state; the lesson that is also an ideological one."[32] In 'Understanding Putin', Kari Roberts points out that the Kremlin's portrayal of Russian exceptionalism and resistance to the West stems from a constructed ideational narrative: "What can be constructed can also be deconstructed."[33] The 'Putin Doctrine' encompasses Russia as an exceptional civilisation that needs to defend the God-given 'global diversity', in the form of traditional (religious) values and its entitled geographical and cultural sphere of interest, against an overbearing Western liberalism.[34] This sense of messianism coincides with the concept of Moscow as a 'Third Rome'.[35] Bearing the legacies of both the Muscovy Uprising and the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia has to once more defend itself from foreign powers and promote its own image of the world. The 'Russian World' (*Russkiy Mir*) refers to a global space of traditional civilisational values and tries to include 'Russian Compatriots', beyond just Russophone communities.

At first glance, these nationalist concepts may seem very conflicting with the rather inclusive and multicultural image of 'Eurasia' but, as Laruelle notes, "it is a purely instrumental tool used when the Eurasian appeal fails: […] postponing the moment of choosing a national identity narrative and hoping to maintain the lowest common denominator without defining the level of inclusiveness and exclusiveness of Russia's nationhood."[36]

"In a sense, in the process of centralizing political power in Russia around himself, Putin has inadvertently contributed to the identity crisis which he now seeks to remedy through neo-Eurasianist policies and the further centralization of power."[37]

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[32] Skladanowski, ibid., p. 318.
[33] Roberts, Kari: Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse. In: *International Journal* (72/1), p. 47.
[34] Shevtsova, Lilia: The Maidan and Beyond: The Russia Factor. In: Journal of Democracy (25/3), p. 75.
[35] See: Naxera, ibid., p. 125.
[36] Laruelle, Marlene: The Ukrainian Crisis and its Impact on Transforming Russian Nationalism Landscape. In: Pikulicka-Wilczewska, Agnieszka; Sakwa, Richard (Eds.): Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives. p. 127.
[37] Pryce, Paul: Putin's Third Term: The Triumph of Eurasianism? In: *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* (13/1), p. 37.

The potentially destructive geopolitical implications of an increasing ethnicization of the Eurasian identity discourse is thus largely replaced by a much more abstract ideological confrontation that ties into the strategic component of Eurasianism.

Dugin refers to this global juxtaposition as *Endkampf* – a final and 'apocalyptic' civilisational clash between traditionalist and liberalist forces. This image was later adopted by the Russia Foreign Ministry: "*For the first time in modern history, global competition takes place on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development start to clash and compete against each other*"[38].

2.3 Geostrategic Implications

The national identity crisis did not only entail the question of '*What is Russia?*' but also '*Where is Russia?*'. Russian nationalists continue to struggle defining their country's political and cultural frontiers. Eurasianism on the other hand presented a tool to incorporate both imagined imperialism and factual realities on post-Soviet grounds.[39]

Geographical assumptions lead to geopolitical theorizing. In this sense, Neo-Eurasianism can be seen as a geographical ideology encompassing strategic ideas for both a subjective societal identity as well as objective foreign policy. As Naxera notes, "geopolitics became a kind of linking block between various ideological streams of thought and theoretical principles held by individuals with often highly differing ideas."[40] Especially Aleksandr Dugin's approach depicts a mixture of both imperialist and new world order geopolitics.

2.3.1 The Eurasian Heartland as an Insular *Großraum*

"Space and political ideas do not allow themselves to be separated from one another. For us, there are neither spaceless political ideas nor, reciprocally, spaces without ideas or principles of space without ideas."[41]

–

Carl Schmitt

[38] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. 2013.
[39] See: Dunlop, John: Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics. In: *Demokratizatsiya* (12/1): 41.
[40] Naxera, ibid., p. 120.
[41] Schmitt, Carl: Nomos of the Earth. Candor 2003. p. 87.

Dugin's 'imagined geography' found inspiration in the concept of *Raumsinn* ('spatial sense') introduced by Carl Schmitt. This especially includes political elites' perceptions of space which then evolve into practical foreign policy.[42] Schmitt's *Großräume* ('great spaces') supersede Westphalian sovereignty with multipolar and hegemonically dominated world regions.[43] Dugin divides the world in four civilisational spaces: America, Europe-Africa, Asia-Pacific and Eurasia. In Eurasia – "The Russian state competes over the still unsettled 'material' spatial terrain associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a collapse which has given rise to an equally unsettled 'ideational' and 'discursive' order."[44]

The clash of civilisations is said to sooner or later lead to an encirclement nexus in the Eurasian heartland. Here, Dugin is referencing Halford Mackinder who placed a 'Pivot Area' in the heart of the Eurasian continent. Whichever ascendant power would be able to control this region, would be able to control the whole 'World Island'. In a similar fashion, Russia's 'Asian Pivot' is supposed to bring back imperial greatness.

Simultaneously, the Kremlin promotes global insularism through its 'Sovereign Democracy'[45]. This concept of Russians defending their own version of democracy and fighting off imported foreign values was mainly brought forward by Vladislav Surkov, former Deputy Prime Minister, who was personally inspired by Dugin's ideas.[46]

Early on, the Putin administration progressed in creating 'multipolar' geopolitical statements and incentives, though first following different vectors: While supporting the 'War on Terror', a Russian-Chinese friendship treaty was signed. Moscow started playing the role of a conflict mediator but also supported unstable regimes. While then-President Medvedev in 2010 still formulated the need to realign Russia's alliances with Germany or France, the military doctrine of the same year already saw a central threat in other alliances advancing towards Russia's borders. Finally, in 2012, President Vladimir Putin officially announced the Eurasian vector for his country's developmental orientation.[47]

[42] See: Morgado, Nuno: Towards the New World Order? A Geopolitical Study of Neo-Eurasianism and Meridionalism. Prague 2017. p. 61.
[43] See: Lewis, ibid., p. 4.
[44] Silvius, ibid., p. 238.
[45] See: Naxera, ibid., p. 123.
[46] See: Mileski, ibid., p. 182.
[47] See: Antonovič, Marijuš: To what extent has Russia's Foreign Policy since 2000 been influenced by Eurasianism? In: *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 30, pp. 19 seq. and Fetishcheva, ibid., pp. 34, 47 seq.

2.3.2 Russian National Interest for a Greater Eurasian Security Regime

"If Austerlitz, and Borodino, Stalingrad and Kursk are really behind us then it is better not to march on Paris, as in 1814, or on Berlin in 1945, but directly to Vienna in 1815, to a new, future-oriented 'Concert of Nations'"[48]

–

Sergei Karaganov

After Aleksandr Dugin, the final civilisational conflict will roll out between a thalassocratic Eurasian Axis (Japan, Germany and Iran) and a tellurocratic Atlantic Axis (United States, United Kingdom – as well as originally Turkey and China). Possible allies for the land powers could be found in India and Pakistan, if protected from Western liberal globalism.[49] Here, Dugin differs from classical Eurasianism as it considered the whole conceptual 'West' as alien to Russia.[50] Discussions about possible strategic alliances are central to most modern Eurasianist political movements, such as the idea of an 'Islamic Axis' Moscow-Astana-Dushanbe-Tehran-Baghdad.[51]

In order for Russia to keep a stronghold in its geographical backyard and 'natural' sphere of interest, Dugin generally prefers multipolar asymmetric warfare as non-military means of influence and expansions, including disinformation and subversion of enemies and pressuring other countries into cooperation via a "tough, hard-headed use of Russia's gas, oil, and natural resource riches"[52]. The 'sovereign internet' represents an important digital shield against obstructing Western 'artificial forces'.

Vladimir Putin too connects a Greater Eurasian security regime with civilisational aspects: "*There is no need to create more threats to the world. Instead, let us sit down at the negotiating table and devise together a new and relevant system of international security and sustainable development for human civilisation.*"[53]

This is most applicable in the case of finding allies in Asia and forming spheres of influence and control where Atlanticist-led forces are rivalling. In his last presidential

[48] Karaganov, Sergei: '*God pobed. Shto dal'she?*'. In: *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, 16.01.2017.
[49] See: Naxera, ibid., p. 124 seq., 128.
[50] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 24.
[51] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 37.
[52] Dunlop, ibid.
[53] Putin, Vladimir: Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2018.

addresses, he emphasised Russia's partnership with China, India and Japan.[54] He added: "*Even if our views clash on some issues, we still remain partners because we must work together to respond to the most complex challenges, ensure global security, and build the future world*"[55].

Russia joined the East Asia Summit in 2010 and chaired the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 2012. The Russian navy jointly exercised with China, India and Japan. Russian military vessels have in the last years patrolled from the Artic Sea to the Horn of Africa and visited multiple important Asian ports, for example in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka.[56]

2.3.3 Central Asian Integration and the Chinese Role in Greater Eurasia

"Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia."[57]

–

Vladimir Putin, 2013

The previous discussion of ideological and strategic thoughts in post-Soviet Russian political discourse can unequivocally be concluded with the logic that "the national identity of Russia is incompatible with the freedom of neighboring countries […] Russia should prefer to have on its borders weak and vulnerable states that are readily susceptible to Russian influence"[58]. Aleksandr Dugin views neither the Russian Federation nor other post-Soviet successor states (except Armenia) as historically complete and geopolitically viable nations but rather as provisional parts of a continuing process in the region.[59] In order to progress with a new multipolar world order, Russia thus needs "symmetrically complementing countries […] [that] have something vital for Russia, while Russia has something extremely necessary for them."[60]

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[54] See: Putin, Vladimir: Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2019 and Putin: Federal Assembly 2016, ibid.
[55] Putin: Federal Assembly 2018, ibid.
[56] See: Muraviev, Alexey: Russia in the Indo-Pacific: A New Awakening?. In: CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2016, p. 22.
[57] Putin, Vladimir: Speech at the Valdai Group Plenary Meeting, 19.09.2013.
[58] Papava, ibid., p. 48.
[59] See: Dunlop, ibid.
[60] Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 45 seq.

Today's region of Central Asia has seen a recent revaluation in Russian foreign policy. The fall of the Soviet Union reversed a century-long Russian advance eastward, while at the same time a dominant Japan, a rising China and the aspiring Tiger States set off global Easternization. It was therefore logical for an economically weak Russian Federation to follow a new 'Pivot to Asia' and declare itself another 'Asian country' in the early 2000s. The Crimean Crisis pushed the Kremlin further towards 'Pragmatic' Eurasianism.

With the growing dominance of China in the region, some authors are already speaking of Central Asia as a "Sino-Russian Condominium"[61] in the making. Thus, the concept of a 'Greater Eurasian Partnership' including other Asian countries and integration initiatives, such as the New Silk Road, was put into frame as an explicitly "Russia-led idea"[62]. President Putin explained in 2016: "*This partnership can be regarded as a model for shaping a world order free from the domination of a single country, no matter how strong it is, and taking into account the interests of all countries in harmony.*"[63] Furthermore, in 2020, Putin explicitly did not rule out a possible future military alliance with Beijing: "*We have always assumed that our relations have reached such a level of interaction and trust that we generally do not need it, but in theory, it is quite possible to imagine this* [military alliance]. *How it will develop further, life will show. We do not set such a task for ourselves now, but in principle, we are not going to rule it out.*"[64]

Their mutual rhetoric about 'global harmony' and an 'equal partnership' of all civilisations as well as their fear of revolutions in their neighbourhoods and the common goal of keeping the existing regimes in Central Asia in power represent connecting elements between both leaderships. Nevertheless, Russia is struggling with keeping up its own image of China as a Eurasian 'co-leader' against the broadening global picture of Beijing as a possible soon-to-be Eurasian hegemon. Furthermore, their general worldviews differ as well: While Russia is rejecting the current world order as hegemonically Western-dominated and advocates 'Post-Westphalianism', Beijing as

[61] Lubina, Michał: Russia and China. A Political Marriage of Convenience. Leverkusen 2017. p. 233.
[62] Shakhanova, Gaziza; Garlick, Jeremy: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union: Exploring the "Greater Eurasian Partnership". In: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, May 2020, p. 3.
[63] Putin, Vladimir: Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 2016.
[64] [n.a.]: Vladimir Putin Says Ready For Military Alliance Between Russia and China To Counter NATO? In: The Eurasian Times, 23.10.2020.

main profiteer of the present constellation rather prefers 'Neo-Westphalianism'. This distinction includes their respective stance on (non-)interference.

From a Neo-Eurasianist standpoint, China presents itself as an intermediate power with a general multipolar orientation but not fully Russian-aligned interests and resources. Examples for this are Moscow's demographic disadvantage in Siberia and Beijing's relatively one-sided investment regime regarding the Russian economy.[65] In the Schmittian sense, China could therefore be seen as a *raumfremde Macht* ('spatial alien power'). Dugin's early works preferred Japan as Russia's Asian ally and even advocated to break up the 'sea power' China and incorporate Manchuria, Xinjiang and Tibet into a new Russian-Eurasian empire.[66] Although since then, he has changed his view and is now describing a Chinese civilisational dualism in which the tellurocratic Communist Party is defending thalassocratic coastal China.[67]

3 Eurasianist Influences on Regional Integration in Central Asia

> "They are flanked to the east by a rising great power (China); to the North by their former hegemon (Russia); to the south by a country collapsed in violent chaos (Afghanistan), a fundamental Islamic republic (Iran), and a fragile secular state in search of a greater regional role (Turkey). Along with these, a distant superpower seeks influence, if not dominance (US)."[68]

The case of Crimea has revealed more differentiated and critical reactions of former Soviet republics toward Russian foreign policy advances. Now, with somewhat of a clarification of the geopolitical fronts in Eastern Europe and a rising China, Central Asia

[65] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 46.
[66] See: Ingram, Alan: Alexander Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-Fascism in post-Soviet Russia. In: *Political Geography* No. 20, p. 1040.
[67] See: Laruelle, Marlene: When Eurasia Looks East. Is Eurasianism Sinophile or Sinophobe? In: Bassin, Mark; Pozo, Gonzalo (Eds.): The Politics of Eurasianism. Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy. Lanham 2017, p. 153.
[68] Minton-Beddoes, Zanny: A Survey of Central Asia. A Caspian Gamble: Pipeline Poker. In: *The Economist* 346/8054 (February 7, 1998).

can be expected to become "an undeclared battlespace for influence between Russia [plus China] and the West"[69].

The project overview of the Eurasia Party summarises the general Neo-Eurasianist goals regarding Eurasian integration: "Opposition to a unipolar globalization and assertion of a multipolar model […] system of strategic alliances; […] multi-vector politics […] Integration of other political and economic organizations in Eurasian space […] Preservation and development of Russian identity."[70] In the following, the discussed ideological and geostrategic aspects of Neo-Eurasianism and Pragmatic Eurasianism are applied to two Russian-influenced institutional integration projects in Central Asia.

3.1 The Eurasian Economic Union

3.1.1 The EAEU: Nazarbayev's Brainchild, Putin's Flagship?

"There is no talk of reforming the USSR in some form […] It would be naive to restore or copy what has been abandoned in the past, but close integration on the basis of new values, politics and economy is the order of the day."[71]

—

Vladimir Putin, 2011

The efforts towards Eurasian Integration in Central Asia over the last three decades have continuously brought little to no tangible outcomes and were even labelled as a "Groundhog Day of disappointments and illusions"[72]. Multiple organisations tried to fill up the post-Soviet space with some form of cohesive institutionalism, especially regarding economic cooperation. It came therefore rather surprising when Russian president Vladimir Putin expressed his approval for transforming the existing customs union of the Eurasian Economic Community into a 'full-fledged' Eurasian (Economic) Union during his 2012 presidential campaign. He later further laid out his vision of the future EAEU:

[69] Baizakova, Zhulduz; McDermott, Roger: Threat Perception in Central Asia in Response to Russia-Ukraine: Kazakhstan Will Not Be Next. In: NATO Defense College Research Paper No. 119, September 2015. p. 3.
[70] Basics of Eurasianism: 'Eurasia's' Party Project. Quoted in: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 45.
[71] Clover, Charles; Gorst, Isabel: Putin calls for new 'Eurasian Union'. In: *Financial Times*, 04.10.2011.
[72] Van der Togt, Tony; et. al.: From Competition to Compatibility. Striking a Eurasian Balance in EU-Russia Relations. The Hague 2015.

> "The topmost principles are equality, pragmatism and mutual respect, as well as the preservation of national identity and state sovereignty of its member countries. I am confident that strong cooperation will become a powerful source of development for all of the Eurasian Economic Union members."[73]

Meanwhile, Aleksandr Dugin advocates an institutional alternative to Atlanticism by "building east-west and north-south land transport networks; creating a Eurasian Economic Community and a Eurasian Energy Community; united systems of collective security; and representative structures"[74] that bring together Eurasia and its neighbouring civilisations under autonomous federalism with a localised autarch economy.[75]

In early 2014, only a few weeks after having lost the possibility of Ukrainian membership as the second-biggest post-Soviet state, the EAEU founding treaty was signed by the presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. It came into force on 1 January 2015. Armenia joined one day later, Kyrgyzstan in August. In 2020, Uzbekistan became an observer. With Tajikistan's economy being largely dependent on its northern neighbour's trade routes, it is likely that Dushanbe will sooner or later join the union as well.[76]
Former Kazakhstani president Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed his vision of a 'Eurasian States Union' already in 1994 but it proved immature for a time of continuing nationalist separation tendencies in the region. The Kazakhstani view of Eurasian integration always entailed a focus on economy and full political and monetary independence of all members. Therefore, two years before the union came into effect, "Nazarbayev urged the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council […] not 'to politicize the union we are creating' […]: 'As sovereign states, we are actively cooperating … without impinging on each other's interests.'"[77] This 'Economic Eurasianism' also influenced the EAEU's institutional naming process as Kazakhstan wanted to avoid any hints towards a full political union. Generally, observers attested the union a "tumultuous birth"[78] while others see continuing growing pains in the organisation's development. Historically, the union had a long way to go, although current developments are carried out quite fast.

[73] Putin: Federal Assembly 2014, ibid.
[74] Antonovič, ibid., p. 18.
[75] See: Clowes, ibid., p. 62.
[76] See: Hashimova, Umida: Will Tajikistan Ever Join the Eurasian Economic Union? In: *The Diplomat*, 10.08.2020.
[77] Baumann, Mario: Eurasianist Rhetoric in Russia and Kazakhstan. Negotiating Hegemony through Different Visions of Society. In: *Central Asia and the Caucasus* (20/1), p. 41.
[78] [n.a.]: The Tumultuous Birth of the Eurasian Economic Union. In: Stratfor Worldview, 31.12.2014.

3.1.2 Ideological Motives of Post-Soviet Supranational Cooperation

> "Russia's leaders see the country not only as a great power, but also as the leader of the post-Soviet space, and they are intent on shaping the collective memory of the entire region. In a speech delivered in December 2019, President Putin addressed the present CIS leaders as 'descendants of the Soviet Union'"[79]

One of the reasons for the EAEU's apparent success over its predecessors seems to be a recollection on cooperative mechanism that already worked during the USSR but had been largely abandoned for the last decades: "The real strength of Eurasianism is its ability to constitute a substitute ideology for 'Sovietism.'"[80]

In comparison to former post-Soviet organisations, the EAEU's supranational bodies function much more equalised as they allow for a balanced distribution of budget financing and more rights for smaller member states. It could therefore "come to represent the first truly supranational institution in the region's 20 years of post-Soviet reintegration attempts."[81] But, the fast pace of EAEU institutional integration is not only providing advantages as "these frequent changes made it impossible to evaluate or even measure any tangible results of the previous stage before the integration moved onto its next phase."[82] If the Eurasian Economic Union is supposed to be based upon earlier-on European integration, the involved national leaders also have to more strongly consider the slow democratic pace of supranational EU institutions forming and consensus building. Especially "Russia as a principal engine of Eurasian integration does not have a coherent, unified policy toward EAEU bodies […] such steps by Russia give other EAEU countries permission to disrespect Eurasian integration bodies."[83]

Aleksandr Dugin observed (at least until 2008) on a possible Eurasian Union that it would need to present a bridge between Eurasian and European integration as both developments are eyeing the same long-term goals.[84]

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[79] Kratochvíl, Petr; Shakhanova, Gaziza: The Patriotic Turn and Re-Building Russia's Historical Memory: Resisting the West, Leading the Post-Soviet East? In: *Problems of Post-Communism*(2020),p.1.
[80] Laruelle: Eurasianism, ibid., p. 119.
[81] Yesdauletova, Ardak; Yesdauletov, Aitmukhanbet: The Eurasian Union. Dynamics and Difficulties of the Post-Soviet Integration. In: *TRAMES* 18(68/63), p. 11.
[82] Yesdauletova, ibid., p. 8.
[83] Yeliseyeu, Andrei: The Eurasian Economic Union: Expectations, Challenges and Achievements. In: *GMF* 10/2019, p. 21.
[84] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 64 seq.

It is doubtful whether the general power structures of the region allow for a more balanced approach towards institutional cohesion of 'Eurasia'. While the European Union (until Brexit) was characterised by a triangular power balancing between Berlin, Paris and London which lead to finding compromises in different questions, Moscow always seems to have the last word – or at least a stronger voice – in EAEU negotiations.[85]

From the very beginning, the union was met with rather negative national attitudes towards Russia by politicians in future members states such as Armenian prime minister Pashinyan or former Kyrgyz president Atambayev. This created an image of Moscow as a stubborn and rather unreasonable partner to deal with.

The Kremlin is often characterised as an 'international oligarch' who is trying to buy geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space: Kyrgyzstan's EAEU membership cost Moscow an official 'bribe' of $1.2 billion accompanied by the threat of cutting back on Central Asian work migration to Russia, thus endangering remittances. Pressure was also put onto Armenia to not sign a deal with the European Union, as Russia would have otherwise likely ended discounted arm deals and weakened Yerevan's military.[86]

On the other hand, the Kremlin is overly focusing on flaws of the West which proves counterproductive to promoting own values in its neighbourhood. The lack of a central Moscow-Kyiv axis can also be attributed to a neglect of Ukraine's membership of both EAEU and EU in 2013, so that it had to be replaced by Kazakhstan which continues to block using the union for any political purposes.

Current Kazakhstani president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev too does not deem the EAEU's recent proposal for a strategic vision until 2025 as satisfactory. ""The harmonization and unification of legislation […] does not, in our view, meet the level of reasonable sufficiency," Tokayev said, adopting an oddly recondite turn of phrase once used to describe the Soviet nuclear deterrence posture."[87]

[85] See: Yesdauletova, ibid., p. 14.
[86] See: Stronski, Paul; Sokolosky, Richard: The Return of Global Russia. In: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2017).
[87] [n.a.]: Here's looking at EAEU #1: Blowing Hot and Cold. In: *Eurasianet*, 04.06.2020.

3.1.3 Strategic Union or Economic Disunion?

As much as the Eurasian Economic Union was sold as a common project, its outcomes are very different for each member country: "For Russia it is primarily support of V. Putin by patriotic movements. For Belarus it is an economic benefit. For Kazakhstan, creation of the Eurasian Union serves as salvation of the Chinese expansion."[88]

Russia's main motivation for the union's founding was a need to "replace the 'European choice'"[89] influenced by the previous Financial Crisis and the Western sanction regime. Furthermore, it was striving for a better monetary binding of an otherwise 'free-floating' Russian Rouble.[90] The post-2014 intra-EAEU trade nevertheless declined because of the sanctions. Currently, over two-thirds of the EAEU's exports are consisting of mineral (62.6%) and metal (9%) products, with Russia accounting for 4/5 of the union's total exports and 96% of internal trade. The union thus has a problematic dependency on Russian economic performance. To diversify their exports, EAEU members are eyeing to become a "conveyor belt of food to China"[91] which is currently deprived of agricultural products due to the U.S. trade war.[92] But "Russia has because of its own geopolitical dramas for years been slapping food import bans right and left […] it is questionable whether such a model is […] desirable for EAEU nations at the periphery."[93] Further deepening of economic cooperation, especially in the form of a common oil and gas market, constitutes a major burden for Russian foreign policy, as it would loose its main tool for hard power influence.

The Russian logic of keeping weak states at its borders contradicts the goal of economic growth within the EAEU framework. It therefore does not come as a surprise when members try to undermine the common institutions for national gains. Belarus' president Lukashenka demanded subjective national outcomes in exchange for his willingness to deepen the cooperation. In 2016, "Belarus, for example, applied a reduced rate of sales

[88] Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 68.
[89] Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 44.
[90] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 42.
[91] [n.a.]: Here's Looking at EAEU #2: Trading Places. In: *Eurasianet*, 02.07.2020.
[92] See: [n.a.]: Here's Looking at EAEU #2, ibid.
[93] [n.a.]: Here's Looking at EAEU #3: Whining and Dining. In: *Eurasianet*, 06.08.2020.

tax on certain goods produced domestically, but did not extend the same privilege to items imported from other bloc members."[94]

For Central Asia, Intra-EAEU migration plays the biggest role but simultaneously leads to brain drain in the region. The two members are meanwhile entangled in conflicts:

> "The Kyrgyz Economy Ministry on June 9 [2020] issued a statement to argue that Kazakhstan's administration of their shared border is in violation of requirements on the free movement of goods. […] Nur-Sultan, meanwhile, contends that Bishkek turns a blind eye to colossal amounts of smuggling from China and the mislabeling of cargo headed to the rest of the EAEU"[95]

"Even with coronavirus serving as a belated impetus to push through long-stalled reforms, the five members of the Eurasian Economic Union show limited willingness to help each other"[96]. A sense of community within the EAEU structures is lacking, while the developments of a borderless Eurasian space and common Eurasian identity are continuously hindered. With globalist economic incentives being played as the one main cooperation card and an institutional EU imitation strategy, the union rather seems like a part of Western universalism. Regional digressing from Moscow-bound constellations as well as the turning away of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia show the limits of Eurasian expansion and contradict the Russian *Raumsinn* of a homogenous post-Soviet space. Meanwhile, the organisation is turning towards more distant economic partners, such as Cuba and India. In the end, the EAEU has to figure out how to manage both political cooperation (Russian Eurasianism) and economic cohesion (Kazakhstani Eurasianism).

3.2 The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

3.2.1 The SCO: Securing Stability or Attacking Atlanticism?

In 1996, China established the 'Shanghai Five' with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to resolve border issues and build up confidence. Beijing stirred institutional development while a weakened, self-centred Russia under Boris Yeltsin was unable to

[94] [n.a.]: Here's Looking at EAEU #3, ibid.
[95] [n.a.]: Here's Looking at EAEU #2, ibid.
[96] Hess, Maximilian: Rubles in the Near Abroad: Eurasian Economic Disunion. In: *Eurasianet*, 06.05.2020.

give any impetus: "Had Moscow been more determined, able, and willing to invest money and political effort to build up the Shanghai Five, the organization would probably now be called the Almaty Cooperation Organization and dominated by Russia."[97]

The year 2001 saw the integration of Uzbekistan and the rebranding into the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' with the new aim of exercising not just regional but also global influence. A decisive factor in its development was the fear of Central Asian countries that geopolitical instability in next-door Afghanistan could spill over. At the same time, both Russia and China were suffering from Islamist terrorism on their grounds. The main goal of the organisation was therefore formulated as tackling the 'three evils' of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

With the expansion of the organisation's reach and a declining terrorist threat in the region, Russia and China started developing differing views of the group's future orientation: While Moscow was still favouring deeper security cooperation, Beijing wanted to rather focus on further economic cohesion of the region. Nevertheless, also China changed its approach on military involvement in Central Asia over the years, with a significant rise in multilateral trainings and exercises compared to the early 2000s when all performed manoeuvres had been bilateral.

> "In 2015, Tajik and Chinese special operations forces conducted joint counterterrorism drills at a mountain training center outside Dushanbe, marking the first time the MPS special operations forces conducted training exercises overseas. […] Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all took part in 2019, marking the first time their national guard units had trained with China on counterterrorism."[98]

Today, the SCO consists of eight members: China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Observer status was granted to Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia, while Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey are dialogue partners. Both neutral Turkmenistan as well as the organizations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the United Nations have been participating as guests in the past. Taken all together, the organization accounts for nearly half of the global population and

[97] Plater-Zyberk, Henry; Monaghan, Andrew: Strategic Implications of the Evolving Shanghai Security Cooperation. Carlisle 2014. p. 4.

[98] See: Jardine, Bradley; Lemon, Edward: In Russia's Shadow: China's Rising Security Presence in Central Asia. In: *Kennan Cable* No. 52, May 2020.

its economic power in 2018 equalled around 18% of the global GDP.[99] The SCO can therefore currently be viewed as the only 'true' Eurasian union that is including all major powers of the greater region.

3.2.2 Eurasian Security as a Mirror of Two Ideological Frenemies

> "Both China and Russia are nuclear great powers with structural positions within the international system; they are, in fact, important building blocks of that system. This means that the baseline of their behavior toward each other is dictated more by the trends of great power politics involving the system leader –the United States– unfolding at the systemic level than by regional interests or disputes."[100]

The 'Chinese Threat' discourse of the 1990s has largely vanished from Russian public policy discussions. With the ongoing withdrawal from and antagonising of the current global power system, a possible domination by Beijing portrays less of a danger for Moscow than internal interventions in the Kremlin's sphere of interest by the West. Experts state that the Sino-Russian relationship has never been as peaceful as now.[101] The public friendship was neither rocketed by allegations of Russians spying for China nor a lack of diplomatic support from Beijing for Russia's military actions in Georgia and Ukraine. The Sino-Russian relationship has thus been labelled as one of two 'asymmetric frenemies' in a soft alliance.

In the framework of Eurasianist thought, the question of Eurasian-Sinic civilizational compatibility (*Pax Sinica*) is playing a decisive role as does the general question. The early Eurasianist saw a Asian identity rather critical: "*We are untied from Asia in the last instance but we are Indo-Europeans, we have a strong dose of Turanism but we are Aryans, we ought to think and feel our Asianism but we ought not to confound ourselves with Asia.*"[102] And also Neo-Eurasianists like Dugin had their difficulties to accept China into their Eurasianist alliance thinking.

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[99] See: Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat: SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov's welcoming address to participants of the International Youth Entrepreneurship Forum, 29 April 2019, Qingdao.
[100] Korolev, Alexander: Beyond the Nominal and the Ad Hoc: The Substance and Drivers of China-Russia Military Cooperation. In: *Insight Turkey* (20/1), p. 27.
[101] See: Korolev, ibid., p. 28 seq.
[102] Nikitin, V. P.: *Perepiska s Aziatom Ivanovym*. In: *Evraziiskaja khronika* VI, 1926. p. 7.

China can be seen as a nationalist and mono-ethnic country (see Mao's 'Han Chauvinism') which is promoting its own individual global ascent, while Russia as a supranational and multi-ethnic 'Eurasian Empire' is focused on avoiding global descent. Many conflicts between the neighbours can be traced back to differences in ideological culture and political philosophy. One example is the way both countries are promoting loyalty from their strategic partners: While Beijing is relying on 'carrot' incentives, Moscow is much rather using the threatening 'stick' of punishment if cooperation is not happening in their sense.

After the fall of the USSR, Russians started wondering whether their country was still considered the 'Third Rome' or should rather be labelled as 'Third World'.[103] While presidents Putin and Xi undoubtedly seem like brothers in spirit because of their views on American hegemony and Western liberalism, their respective countries are on very different stages in their global history as great powers: Unlike the German Empire and Austro-Hungary in WW1, Beijing is trying to avoid a full-fledged formal alliance with Moscow in which it would sooner or later be "shackled to a corpse"[104]. Nevertheless – "China needs allies and it has no better options than Russia."[105]

3.2.3 Strategic Cooperation or Military Competition?

The COVID-19 crisis has been the latest highlight of Russian-Chinese competition in Central Asia, as both countries were involved in 'virus diplomacy' by sending experts as well as donating medical equipment and testing kits.[106] 2020 saw another rallying cry when China announced a '5+1' meeting framework with the Central Asian countries.

Beijing is increasingly challenging Moscow's hegemony relating to security and military issues in the region. Four years ago, China opened up a military base in Tajikistan. It scaled up its share of total arms exports to Central Asia in the last five years by 16.5%. It

[103] See: Clowes, ibid., p. 1.
[104] Lanteigne, ibid., p. 131.
[105] Makocki, Michal; Popescu, Nico: China and Russia: An Eastern Partnership in the Making?. Paris 2016. p. 10
[106] See: Jardine, ibid.

is estimated that Chinese weapon transfers have exceeded a volume of $700 million since 2000. In recent years, Beijing has overtaken Moscow as the main arms importer for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, while Russia remains largely unchallenged in the other three states. In the wake of this, the Chinese are copying popular Russian military equipment, such as airplanes and missile systems. Similar to the Russian procedure, these deals are mostly labelled as donations. Additional concessions are made for resource exchange which makes the purchases volatile to price and production fluctuations.[107]

Russian weapon exports to Central Asia have stayed constantly over 60% in the last ten years with China replacing other traders such as Turkey and France. Meanwhile, they have risen to India while arms trade with China has decreased.[108]

Nevertheless – "Russia has the competitive advantage. It maintains significant strategic facilities across the region, including 7,000 troops stationed in Tajikistan, an airbase in Kyrgyzstan, a cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, and various other radar stations and testing sites."[109] As the Russian Federation is only porously bordering Kazakhstan in Central Asia, Moscow is therefore fully dependent on military cooperation with Nur-Sultan in security issues (such as overflight rights) if a possible crisis would threaten to destabilize the region.[110] Furthermore, Moscow has allocated most of its advanced military arsenal west of the Ural and is therefore less flexible when it comes to military intervention in Central Asia.[111]

Regarding the public perception of the Central Asian population, Russia is the unchallenged hegemon in the region: 87% of Kyrgyz, 81% of Kazakhs and 78% of Tajiks see Moscow as a friendly and reliably helpful power with China accounting for 10%, 15% and 20% respectively. On the other hand, Beijing is largely seen as more threatening and unhelpful. Moscow is also leading by a large margin if it comes to from whom Central Asians wish to receive investments and technology.[112] Here, Russia's cultural, linguistic and economic soft power sets in.

[107] See: Jardine, ibid.
[108] See: Makocki; Popescu, ibid., p. 13.
[109] Jardine, ibid.
[110] See: Baizakova, ibid., p. 12 seq.
[111] See: Muraviev, ibid., p. 22.
[112] See: Laruelle, Marlene; Royce, Dylan: No Great Game: Central Asia's Public Opinions on Russia, China, and the U.S.. In: *Kennan Cable*, No. 56, August 2020.

Joint military exercises of Russia and China also include scenarios for the 'occupation of a region' and training resistance against possible colour revolutions.[113] This is rather contradicting to the Chinese position on Georgian and Ukrainian territorial integrity when Moscow tried to create facts on the ground after internal political developments.
The non-recognition of Crimea, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the lack of diplomatic support for Russian actions by the other SCO members (besides Kyrgyzstan) have been a major setback for Moscow which tried to rally the Shanghai Cooperation behind itself. The Russian perception of the group seems to be one of a reliable backing of its individual foreign policy. On the other hand, even the organisation's charter officially promotes the SCO as a 'non-alliance' that wants to prevent separatism. Therefore – "Moscow cannot rely upon the SCO either to endorse Russian foreign-policy aims or to reduce American and Western influence in the SCO region. The problem for Moscow in influencing the SCO is that while the former Soviet republics of Central Asia may be afraid of it, China is not."[114]

For many years, Russia showed a similar stance towards the Shanghai Cooperation as the EU had towards Chinese influence in Europe – controlling through cooperating. The Russian side already supported an own infrastructure strategy within the SCO framework since the mid-200s, but China instead went its own way with the Belt and Road Initiative. To counter its low leverage against Beijing's individual policy actions, the Kremlin has in the last years switched to supporting other regional groupings that exclude China, for example the Collective Security Treaty Organization.
China on the other hand continues to struggle with its foothold in Central Asia because of the core principal of non-interference. This was shown in Beijing's rather silent and bland response to the latest overthrow of the Kyrgyz government.[115]
Another unsolved issue remains the role of India inside the cooperation: Moscow initially saw New Delhi as a counterweight to Beijing but has not built upon this relationship while China and Pakistan are continuously using the ties inside the SCO to promote their

[113] See: Korolev, ibid., p. 35.
[114] Katz, Mark: Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Moscow's Lonely Road from Bishkek to Dushanbe. In: *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 32, No. 3. p. 187.
[115] See: Uljevic, Srdjan: Witnessing the Limits of Chinese Power in Kyrgyzstan. In: *Eurasianet*, 14.10.2020.

'special partnership'. This leaves India increasingly side-lined, especially in the context of recent border clashes in the Himalayas.[116]

Finally, the general aim of the organisation remains split between the two major actors in it: While Russia tries to use it for creating an external deterrence impact, China is rather focused on an internal consolidation impact of the group. Another distinct characteristic of Chinese diplomacy inside the group remains the fact that the SCO has thus far failed to produce any actual global impacts besides a strong rhetoric. The differences between Moscow and Beijing will therefore continue to weaken the SCO's global impact and leverage against other Western-promoted initiatives in the greater Eurasian region.

4 A Eurasian Russia Caught between East and West

> "From 'America First' to Brexit, from the rise of Hindutva in India to the China Dream, the geopolitical visions of the 21st century deliberately reduce the complexity of multilateral, globalized order to simplistic, reactionary and closed cultural and political spaces."[117]

The recent years have shown a new attraction of authoritarianism and alternative models to the Western status quo that include a questioning of Atlanticist 'universal' values. In a sense, Eurasianism represents an exception from other post-modern ideological developments around the globe. While its political background implications have to always be discussed, it should also be acknowledged that this school of thought might serve certain geopolitical approaches for an increasingly destabilising and regionalising world that could be taken upon by other currents.

Russia, as the previous case studies have shown, is pursuing a much more revived Neo-Eurasianist strategy towards the SCO, concerning the integration of India and the possible future integration of Iran and Turkey into the organisation. While the institutional build-up of the EAEU is taking shape rather fast in comparison to former attempts of post-

[116] See: Stobdan, Phunchok: China-India Tensions Put New Delhi at the Margins of the SCO. In: *The Diplomat*, 29.09.2020.
[117] Lewis, ibid., p. 14 seq.

Soviet regional integration, the sense of a real Eurasian community is failing with hard political and economic facts on the ground.

Nevertheless, Moscow's involvement in Ukraine or Syria fully constitutes a renouncement of Russian foreign policy with Eurasianist values.[118] Outside of the perceived Eurasian space, the Kremlin shows an increasingly reactionary strategy against civilizational ideology and strategic *Raumsinn* and a much more realist behaviour utilising global anarchy. Considering the subaltern dimension of Russia in its dependence on outside (Western) approval – Jeanne Wilson describes it as the "Russian tradition of preoccupation, and in fact, obsession with the West, as a foreign policy priority."[119] – one could discuss in how far Eurasianism is reactionary itself as it is mainly based upon external influences and a rejection of foreign concepts.[120]

As much as this paper has taken the approach of analysing the ideological and strategic aspects separately, the general anti-globalist stance of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism is inevitably colliding with the increasingly globalizing Central Asian integration. The latter's ideas of autarchy and expansion stand in contrast to omnipresent global interdependence. Graham Smith already noted in the late 1990s that "there are many possible Eurasias"[121] as Eurasianism entails different ideas and visions of the region and its future development. It will depend on the Russian people and their policymakers in which direction they want their new 'state idea' to be steered:

> "The real Eurasia (as represented by the regional economic body) and the imaginary Eurasia (as represented by Putin's vision of a geopolitical superbloc) are not necessarily mutually reinforcing. The former needs a measured, steady and calculated approach, and the latter is fuelled by grandiose and ideological ambitions."[122]

It is therefore decisive to question whom Eurasianist thought is trying to attract – the political elites or the common people.[123] From the Kremlin's perspective, the Eurasian idea is supposed to be the fundament to president Putin's political legacy.[124] While the

[118] See: Mileski, ibid., p. 183.
[119] Wilson, Jeanne: The Russian Pursuit of Regional Hegemony. In: *Rising Powers Quarterly* (2/1), p. 8.
[120] See: Mileski, ibid., p. 185.
[121] Smith, Graham: The masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism. In: *Trans Inst Br Geogr* NS 24, p. 492.
[122] Popescu; Nicu: Eurasian Union. The Real, the Imaginary and the Likely. Paris 2014. p. 19.
[123] See: Fetishcheva, ibid., p. 38.
[124] See: Pryce, ibid., p. 25 seq.

Kremlin leadership has - in the view of the Russian 'home crowd' - managed to uncouple its domestic politics from foreign policy, this does neither apply to its geographical neighbours nor to its other strategic partners. In the same logic, Russia has shown a "consistent incorporation of the 'Eurasian' problems into the subject-informative fabric of Russian social geography"[125].

Economic crisis and the connected fall of the Russian Rouble undoubtedly had a lasting impact on the political image of the Russian Federation in its near abroad. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown a certain leadership lethargy in Russia. Its long-term consequences will merge with other newly arising internal problems. Although Putin has played the 'national identity' card mainly for his own benefit and has largely silenced oppositional voices, the independence strive of Russia's own Turkic 'Eurasian' peoples remains unaddressed. "It is of no small importance to note that the purely Russian understanding of Eurasianism differs from its Turkic–Muslim understanding […] In particular, the Turkic and Muslim peoples of Russia consider only themselves a true embodiment of Eurasia."[126]
Furthermore, the Russian approach in Eurasian institutional cooperation (strikingly similar to the Chinese approach in Central and Eastern Europe) does not take into account the growing hostilities between Central Asian states when it comes to such issues like economy, migration and others. In this case, a more diverse culture-centred foreign policy approach to the Eurasian neighbours would be rather useful for Moscow.

While the Soviet Union has never acted as a 'Eurasian Empire' in the traditional sense, Moscow's foreign policy in Central Asia has in recent years shifted from an imperialist vector towards a post-state orientation. As Alexander Druzhinin fittingly summarized, the Kremlin's current acting towards both the EU and China rather solidifies a dualistic image of the Russian Federation as "an 'Asian periphery of Europe', but also as a 'European periphery of Asia'"[127]. Russia's future 'Eurasianness' will inevitably pin its perceived 'Greatpowerness' against its 'Asianness'. A positive and sustainable future outcome of

[125] Druzhinin, Alexander: Russia in Modern Eurasia: The Vision of a Russian Geographer. In: *Quaestiones Geographicae* (35/4), p. 73.
[126] Papava, ibid., p. 53.
[127] See: Druzhinin, ibid., p. 77.

Central Asian regional cohesion will depend on the willingness of other actors, like China and India, to be further involved in the institutional and identity shaping of this awakening world region.

In his book '*The End of Eurasia*', Dmitri Trenin remarked that "Russia stands on the boundary between the post-modern and modern and even pre-modern world. It must make its choice."[128] The Crimean Crisis and its geopolitical reverberations have pushed the Russian Federation towards a new 'Pivot to the East' – it remains to be seen whether Moscow has therewith chosen a postmodern development of a potential new global centre or rather a neo-medieval regression of a soon-to-be regional periphery.

[128] Trenin, Dmitri: The End of Eurasia. Washington D.C. 2002. p. 319.

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