

Edina Julianna Haiszky

NEO-EURASIANIST RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS AND THE NEW EMPIRE-BUILDING DISTRIBUTION RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS: “UTILITARIANISM OR WORLD POLITICS TANDEM?”

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ABSTRACT: Both the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China are defining and unique features on the world security map. The aim of this analysis is to review the main schools of Russian geopolitical thought, with a particular focus on neo-Eurasianism, and to take stock of the extent to which the ideological community with the PRC persists and the impact on the relationship of the two parties of the decline of Russian influence in the Central Asian region and the rise of China in the last year, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war and Russia’s turn to the West.

KEYWORDS: Moscow-Beijing axis, neo-Eurasianism, empire-building effort, strategic alliance, counterbalance, Russia, China, United States of America

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Edina Julianna Haiszky is an expert in international security and defence policy. She has special interest in the foreign and security policy of the Russian Federation and the European Union’ CFSP, as well as the relationship between two entities. She is currently working as a researcher and continues her research on Russia’s ambitions and programs in the outer space and the discussion about the formation of the EU army. Contact: edinahaiszky@gmail.com

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

The purpose of this analysis is to present the neo-Eurasianist school of thought that currently characterises Russia’s geopolitics through the view of the theoretical-political vision of Aleksandr Dugin and to start from this line of thought to answer the question “Is the Chinese-Russian relationship merely a utilitarian partnership or can it be considered a world political tandem?”

In the selection of my topic, I combined three themes of my interest – geopolitics, Russia and the strategic positioning of countries in the international environment – and formed them into a coherent whole. The relevance of the question is that Russia, due to its specific geographical and historical situation, has always developed its strategies along different lines of thought than either Western or Far Eastern countries. At the same time, precisely because of its aforementioned location, it possesses key territories and raw materials important for both Europe and Asia. Thus, I find it interesting to analyse the duality that has characterised the country for two and a half decades, from a new perspective that has so far been little examined from a security policy point of view in Hungary.

I begin my analysis with a brief description of the history of Russian geopolitical thought in order to provide an adequate theoretical basis, followed by a review of the main cornerstones and factors of the Russian-Chinese relations from the 90's to their current state, with special focus on the examination of the impact of the war (2022) in Ukraine.

AN INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS

For more than two and a half decades, the Russian Federation has been a special “spot” on the world security map, just as its predecessor, the Soviet Union, had been. The country combines both the old ‘imperial’ style of governance and approach – with a particular focus on empire-building – and the technical tools and advocacy mechanisms of the 21st century. This kind of duality is prominent also in Russian geopolitical thinking. Thus, the aim of this subsection is to present and isolate the views of the five main Russian geopolitical trends, which are Zapadnik (Westerniser), Slavophile, Marxist, Eurasianist, and Neo-Eurasianist.

Zapadniks

The Zapadnik (Westerniser) and the Slavophile tendencies, which reflect and represent two completely different schools of thought, first emerged in the 19th century as, in fact, opposites of each other.

The core of the Russian geopolitical movement, also known as the Zapadnik or Westerniser movement, was the intellectuals of St Petersburg, the Venice of the North¹. One of their main theses is that the Russian territories are lagging behind Western Europe and thus Russian history is nothing more than an attempt to overcome the disadvantage vis-à-vis the West. They point to Tsar Peter I as the cornerstone of Russian history, since it was his reign when the civilisational development of the Russian population began. It is interesting that this was seen as a guarantee of nothing less than a change in the authoritarian, patriarchal society of the time, the abolition of all political social systems associated with Asia, and the rethinking of Russian society in Western terms, in short, the abolition of Asiaticism.² The basis for this, in their view, was the dismantling of unchecked tsarist power and the establishment of a consensus-based system between the people and the ruler. Besides the above mentioned trend, the “Westerniser” tendency has been a decisive factor in the history and the way of geopolitical thinking of the modern Russian Federation as well, as many of the mistakes of the 1990s are still attributed to this approach.³

¹ Kaalem, J. “A Russian empire ‘from Dublin to Vladivostok’? The roots of Putin’s ultranationalism.” *Los Angeles Times*. 28.03.2022. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-03-28/putin-ultranationalism-ideology-russia-ukraine>

² Tsygankov, A. P. “Mastering space in Eurasia: Russia’s geopolitical thinking after the Soviet break-up.” *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 36/1., 101–127.

³ Tsygankov, A. P. *Russia’s foreign policy: Change and continuity in national identity*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)

Slavophiles

In contrast, the Slavophile movement emerged from the intellectual circles of Moscow as a counter-pole to the Westerners and included among its main representatives Nikolai Danilevsky⁴ and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The “Russian idea” was born under the influence of Schelling’s philosophy in the Slavophile ideology in the 1830-40s. He attributed to Russia a world-historical mission to save European civilization from the moral decadence of Western civilization (the emptying and formalization of Catholic and Protestant religiosity, egotistical individualism, materialism, increased social tensions due to the Industrial Revolution, the epistemological, absolutisation of rationalism, and the imposition of technical progress). Slavophiles saw Russian development as an alternative, peculiar path, which avoided the above-mentioned distortions and therefore had the potential for renewal. The most viable source of self-identity was derived from the Orthodox religion. They were based on Christian universalism, so their criticism of the West did not strike a hostile tone.⁵ The dimension of “Asianism” was missing from their vision. In their view, it was not the reforms of Tsar Peter I that were important since the social and political changes brought about by the various reforms were destroying the particular way of life that had developed in the Russian Empire. It was argued that spatiality played a prominent role in Russian geopolitical thinking: Russia could not be linked to Europe because of its specific location (the Asian territories of the empire), and Europeanism could not be integrated at all because of the specific Russian legal system and the Russian people’s spirit. The thinking they developed rejected complementarianism, as they attached importance to the trust between the tsar and the people and to the unquestionable authority and morality of the ruler. At the same time, they did not believe that the people’s participation was necessary in the management of a state with such a large population and territory, but rather that power should be concentrated in one hand.

Finally, though not least in importance, the ideology of pan-Slavism is also linked to the Slavophiles. It is an ideology that is still making its presence felt today and is also shaping the politics of our time.⁶ Pan-Slavism is nothing other than the ideology of an all-Slavic alliance under Russian leadership. This messianistic vision is very important in the history of Russian political thought. A number of Russian political authors, policymakers, and men of power – even today – think of this political aspiration as an indispensable element. According to most of them, there is no nation, no strong national identity, and it cannot exist without messianistic elements. It is important to recall that in the 1990’s there was a conservative geopolitical tendency as well, which was partly just neo-Eurasianist, with representatives such as Zhirinovskiy, Zyuganov, and Prokhanov, who were close to Dugin, but could be considered more anti-zapadnik or conservative. Contemporary thinkers believe that this consciousness has been lost in the European region. According to Danilevsky, mentioned above, the alliance of the Slavs and its inherent strength could stand up to the idea of a united Europe.⁷ This idea is at the core of Slavophile geopolitical thinking. Eastern

⁴ Zenkovszki, V. V.: *Russkie misliteli i Yevropa*. (Moscow: Respublica, 1997) 69–75.

⁵ Novikova, L. I.–Sizemskaja, I. Ny. “Vvedenie.” In: *Rossia mezhdru Yevropoi i Aziei: Yevraziski soblazn*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1993) 6–7.; Novikova, L. I.–Sizemskaja, I. Ny. *Russkaia filozofia istorii*. (Moscow: Magistr, 1997) 73–88.

⁶ Geese, G. “Pánszlávizmus az orosz és a szovjet külpolitikában, 1914–1991.” *Külügyi Szemle*, 7. évf. 1. szám, Budapest, 2008. 144–169.

⁷ “Russkaia filozofia.” *Malij entsiklopedicheski slovar*. (Moscow: Terra, 1994) 306.

Europe is a multi-ethnic and clearly Slavic-majority region, which, if unified (i.e. peacefully integrated), would give Russia a significant territorial and economic area. Moreover, the Slavic peoples and countries united under the banner of pan-Slavism would enjoy the full support of the Russian hegemon. We can also see that in this way, this emerging Eurasian state is not described as a threat, but as a kind of compensation, as a preservation of the status quo.⁸

Eurasianists

The Eurasianist Russian geopolitical thinking emerged in the 1920s, in the midst of the post-October Revolution emigration movements. Its centres were primarily in Sofia, Prague and Berlin. The ‘idea’ was born out of a meeting of minds between two young scholars. Linguist Nikolai Trubetzkoy, in his 1920 essay “Europe and Humanity,”⁹ expressed his view of the destructive influence of Western egoism, which he saw as a barrier to the self-fulfilment of the rest of the world’s peoples. In his view, civilisations can only be viable if they develop according to their own internal values. These ideas inspired the geographer and economist Pyotr Savitsky, whose 1921 work “Europe and Eurasia”¹⁰ reflected on what Trubetzkoy had said. His paper already contained all the essential elements of the later theory, since he interpreted Russia as a geographically and ethnically distinct world, neither part of Europe nor Asia, but a synthesis of the two. He declared that its culture was a common creation based on the values of the peoples living there, a counterpoint to Western civilisation.

The first collection of reflections on this trend was entitled “Exodus to the East”¹¹ (1921) and a year later “On the Road” (1922), and outlined the main features of the Eurasianist worldview:¹²

- pluralism (which recognises the diversity of cultures)
- anti-racist and anti-colonialist (rejecting the claim of superiority of all civilizations)
- anti-western (since the claim to universality in practice today derives from the Romano-Germanic world)
- conservative (which recognises the eternal values inherent in popular cultures, language, ethnos, tradition, etc.)
- imperial (since it considers that the ethnes of Eurasia can only develop their own identity in a powerful, strategically integrated form of “state-world” or “Eurasian Empire”)
- pro-Russian (which insists on the preservation, strengthening and revival of originality and Russian ethnic traditions)
- revolutionary (which calls for the rejection of ideologies previously popular in Russia, both Western and imported: liberalism, socialism, Marxism, and those specific to Russia: tsarism, reaction, order monarchy, etc.).

The core of Eurasianist thought, therefore, is to identify Russia as a specific ethnographic and cultural world: a heartland located in the middle between West and East, Europe and

⁸ Szilágyi, I. “Az orosz geopolitikai gondolkodás.” In: Geopolitikai szemle. Budapest, 2019.

⁹ Trubetskoi, N. *Istoria. Kultura, Yazik*. (Moscow: Progress, 1995)

¹⁰ Savitski, P. N. *Kontinent Yevrazia*. (Moscow: Agraf, 1997) 141–160.

¹¹ Trubetskoi, N. *Istoria. Kultura, Yazik*.

¹² Szilágyi, I. *Az orosz geopolitikai gondolkodás*.

Asia. And because of its special location, Russia has its own characteristics, which distinguish it from both continents and make it neither Eastern nor Western.

Their understanding is similar to the one of Sir John Halford Mackinder's 1904 lecture "Geography is the key to history,"¹³ in which he argued that the reasons for the different development of the West and the East are to be found in their different historical circumstances and their different civilisations. At the same time, Mackinder pointed out that the Eurasian region is a key area with Russia as its central state, and that its geographical determinacy has a major impact on the country seeking its path in political and cultural terms.

Neo-Eurasianists

The neo-Eurasianist movement emerged in the 1990s, triggered by changes in the region such as the end of the bipolar world order and the demise of the Soviet Union, as well as the creation of the CIS and the Russian Federation. Thus, the period 1992–1997 witnessed significant changes in the geopolitical thinking of the Russian political leadership.¹⁴

While there are no specific individuals who hold positions in the Kremlin or main institutions that can be directly labelled as ones having neo-Eurasianist thoughts, it is important to note that the Kremlin's official stance and policies can align with some aspects of Eurasianism. However, influential figures associated with the Russian government who have expressed views that align with elements of neo-Eurasianism can be highlighted.

For example, Dmitry Medvedev has held several high-ranking positions in the Russian government, including the post of President from 2008 to 2012 and Prime Minister from 2012 to 2020. Medvedev has been a proponent of Eurasian integration and played a key role in establishing the Eurasian Economic Union. He has emphasized the importance of economic cooperation and integration among countries in the Eurasian region, promoting closer ties with neighbouring states in several speeches at the World Economic Forums. For example in 2009, he mentioned the goal of building a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, emphasizing the idea of a Eurasian community with shared economic interests.

It is also important to mention Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia since 2004, who has an influential role in shaping Russia's foreign policy.¹⁵ While not explicitly espousing neo-Eurasianist ideology, Lavrov has been a strong advocate for regional integration and cooperation, particularly within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁶ His diplomatic efforts often prioritize maintaining stability and enhancing relationships with countries in the Eurasian space.

Thirdly, Valentina Matviyenko, the Chairwoman of the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, has been a prominent figure in Russian politics. While

¹³ Dodds, K. "Halford Mackinder and the 'Geographical Pivot of History': A Centennial Retrospective." *The Geographical Journal*, CVII. évf. 2004/4. 292–297.

¹⁴ Deák, A. *Az orosz külpolitikai gondolkodás története (1992–1997)*. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005)

¹⁵ Fox, T. "Eurasianism, History, and the Narrative Space: Why Russian Information Operations are so Effective." West Point Modern War Institute, 03.12.2018. <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/eurasianism-history-narrative-space-russian-information-operations-effective/>

¹⁶ "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions following a meeting of the SCO Foreign Ministers Council, Tashkent, 29 July 2022." *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. 29.07.2022. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1824510/

her views do not align exclusively with neo-Eurasianism, Matviyenko has been a vocal proponent of strengthening Russia's ties with neighbouring countries, including those in the Eurasian region.¹⁷ She has emphasized the importance of economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and strategic partnerships to promote stability and development in the region. The importance of Valentina Matviyenko in Russian politics is further demonstrated by the fact that she and her delegation visited China at the invitation of Zhao Leji, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China in June 2023.¹⁸

While neo-Eurasianism has influenced certain segments of Russian political thought, it is important to note that the direct impact of this ideology on Russian presidential speeches and joint Russian-Chinese statements may not be explicitly documented. However, there have been instances where certain themes and ideas aligning with neo-Eurasianist thinking have been present.

It is important to note that the concept of neo-Eurasianism is broad and can encompass various interpretations, that these individuals may not fully align with all aspects of the ideology, and they are not necessarily members of the Russian political leadership. Additionally, the Russian government's official stance and policies are shaped by a variety of factors, and it may not be accurate to attribute a single ideology to its leadership. Moreover, current and concrete examples of the followers of the Eurasianist movement are Sergey Glazyev¹⁹ or Ramzan Kadyrov. The former is an economist and politician who holds neo-Eurasianist views. He was an adviser to the President of Russia on regional economic integration and is known for his advocacy of closer economic cooperation among the countries of the Eurasian region. Glazyev is a supporter of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a regional organisation aimed at promoting economic integration among member states while Kadyrov – although known primarily for his role in Chechnya – has advocated a strong Russia and closer integration with other Eurasian countries.²⁰ He stressed the importance of preserving traditional values and cultural ties among countries in the region.

In the next chapters, I will discuss this in greater details and at greater length, since it is a key conceptual element of this analysis.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICAL THINKING AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian geopolitical thinking underwent significant shifts, characterized by several key features. First, there was a renewed emphasis on preserving Russia's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the loss of vast territories, Russian-speaking population, and geopolitical influence. The collapse of the Soviet Union shattered the common ideological

¹⁷ "Russia enjoys unconditional consensus about relations with China – upper house speaker." TASS. 10.07.2023. <https://tass.com/politics/1644743>

¹⁸ Xu, Y. "Russian Federation Council Speaker's China visit demonstrates continuity, stability of China-Russia relations." *Global Times*. 09.07.2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1294013.shtml>

¹⁹ Escobar, P. "Sergey Glazyev: 'The road to financial multipolarity will be long and rocky'". *The Cradle.co*. 13.03.2023. <https://new.thecradle.co/articles/sergey-glazyev-the-road-to-financial-multipolarity-will-be-long-and-rocky>

²⁰ Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz: "What the rise of Prigozhin and Kadyrov tell us about Russia." *Aljazeera*. 06.12.2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/12/6/what-the-rise-of-prigozhin-and-kadyrov-tells-us-about-russia>

framework that held the diverse Soviet republics together.²¹ In the second half of the 1990s, Russian foreign policy was marked by the Koziryev-doctrine²² of accepting the existence of a multipolar world order, and by the portrayal of the West as a traditional ally and Eastern Europe as a natural sphere of interest. The Primakov doctrine posits that a unipolar world dominated by the United States is unacceptable to Russia and offers that Russia should strive towards a multipolar world managed by a concert of major powers that can counterbalance the unilateral power of the U.S. Russia should both insist on its primacy in the post-Soviet space, lead integration in that region, and oppose NATO expansion.²³

Russia, as the largest successor state, embarked on a quest to redefine its national identity and reaffirm its sovereignty. The focus shifted towards re-establishing the Russian Federation as a strong and independent nation, seeking to protect its territorial integrity. Secondly, Russia sought to reassert itself as a major global power, advocating for a multipolar world order, and countering what it perceived as Western hegemony. Many in Russia saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as a period of humiliation and perceived encroachment by the West. This experience shaped a new mindset focused on countering Western influence and re-establishing Russia as a global power.²⁴ Russian geopolitical thinking, particularly under President Vladimir Putin, has been marked by a desire to challenge Western hegemony, assert Russia's interests, and prevent the expansion of NATO and Western institutions in Russia's periphery. Thirdly, a focus on the near abroad emerged, as Russia aimed to maintain influence in its immediate neighbourhood both through economic, political, military means, and reshaping regional dynamics by using Russian minorities in neighbouring countries as destabilising factors. Fourth, the concept of a "privileged sphere of influence" in the post-Soviet space gained prominence, with Russia seeking to establish its dominance and prevent the encroachment of Western powers in regions such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia.²⁵ The collapse left a power vacuum in Eurasia, prompting Russia to pursue closer regional integration. Geopolitical thinkers in Russia advocated for the above-mentioned concept of Eurasianism, which emphasized the unique cultural and historical ties between Russia, its neighbouring countries and the region. The geopolitical assertiveness is manifested in the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991, and the later formation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015 was the manifestations of Russia's efforts to maintain influence in the region²⁶. Finally, there was an alignment of geopolitical thinking with traditional values and the preservation of Rus-

²¹ Ostianova, N. *Changes in Russia's Approach Towards Central Asia*. (master thesis) (Olomouc: Palacky University of Olomouc, 2021) 23–40.

²² A concept, not officially, but named after the first Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Koziryev.

²³ Rumer, E. "The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 05.06.2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/06/05/primakov-not-gerasimov-doctrine-in-action-pub-79254>

²⁴ Myre, Greg: "How the Soviet Union's collapse explains the current Russia-Ukraine tension." *NPR*. 24.12.2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/24/1066861022/how-the-soviet-unions-collapse-explains-the-current-russia-ukraine-tension>

²⁵ Berls, E. R. Jr. "Strengthening Russia's Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and Its Neighbors: A Sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship?" *NTI*. 13.07.2021. <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-ii-russia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship/>

²⁶ Deriglazova, Larisa. "The Soviet Union's Demise As Seen by Today's Russians." Wilson Center. 09.12.2021. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/soviet-unions-demise-seen-todays-russians>

sian cultural and historical identity, which influenced policies regarding the protection of compatriots abroad and the promotion of conservative norms domestically.²⁷

Overall, the collapse of the Soviet Union fundamentally reshaped Russian geopolitical thinking. It triggered a search for national identity, an emphasis on regional integration, a focus on countering Western influence, a reliance on energy resources, and a more assertive approach on the global stage. These features reflect Russia's evolving geopolitical thinking in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, as it aimed to navigate the country's position in a changing global landscape, continued to shape Russia's geopolitical actions, and laid down the base for interactions with the international community nowadays.

ALEKSANDR DUGIN AND THE EMPIRE-BUILDING GEOPOLITICS OF THE NEO-EURASIANIST MOVEMENT

The name of Aleksandr Dugin may be familiar to those interested in Russia, geopolitics, or politics. The reason is that the gentleman is credited with the modernisation and fundamental reassessment of the Eurasianist school of thought in the 1990s, and thus with the emergence of the neo-Eurasianist geopolitical movement.²⁸ Dugin has written several books on the subject. His main work was published in 1997 under the title "The Foundations of Geopolitics", which can be considered as a "handbook for the creation of the Eurasian Empire."²⁹

Eurasianism can be defined as an ideology that holds that Russia and its "peripheries" are situated in the mid-ground between Europe and Asia. The country's distinctiveness originates from the fact that its culture is a "fusion" of Slavic and Turkic-Muslim peoples, but it is also believed that Russia should highlight its distinctly Asian attributes. Eurasianism rejects the view that Russia is on the periphery of Europe; on the contrary it interprets its geographical position as the basis for a kind of visionary "third way." "This theory has been appealing to many academics and policymakers of the international community because it offers an understanding of the collapse of the Soviet Union and restores Russia's troubled historical and political continuity: an alter-globalist philosophy of history, a new pragmatist articulation of "sovietism," a replacement for the explanatory global patterns of Marxism-Leninism, the expansionist geopolitical principles of Russia, and much more. To illustrate the analysis of the issue, I mention Marlene Laruelle's findings, who stated that the impact of the theory can be summarized in four major points:

- Through denouncing the dominance of Europe, the West, and capitalism as detrimental to humanity as a whole, there is a rejection of the "Atlanticist" control.
- The assertion is made that Russians and non-Russian populations within Russia, the former Soviet Union and certain parts of Asia, share a common cultural unity and historical fate.
- It is posited that the central geographic positioning of this Eurasian region inherently leads to an imperial style of political organization, and any attempts at secession are

²⁷ Tsygankov. "Mastering space in Eurasia."

²⁸ Lubov, S. and Gazdag, F. *Oroszország és Európa. Orosz geopolitikai szövegyűjtemény.* (Budapest: Zrínyi, 2004)

²⁹ *Oroszország és Európa. Geopolitikai szövegyűjtemény.* (Bazsó, M., trans.) (Budapest: Zrínyi, 2004) 333–376.

doomed to failure, leaving newly independent states with no alternative but to revert back to a unified political entity.

- There is a belief in the presence of cultural constants that provides deeper meaning to contemporary political events.³⁰

To complement the above mentioned, the basic idea behind Aleksandr Dugin's work on Russia today, the evolution of international relations and the Cold War is as follows: *"The break-up of the USSR was a triumph of the Atlantic strategic line that has accompanied us throughout the 20th century. The West is winning the Cold War in the East. Sea power has triumphed over heartland."*³¹ The underlying content of this is that the United States of America and its allies have encircled the giant Soviet state by seizing the so-called heartland. At the same time, the Soviets refused to cede their occupied territories in Eastern Europe, and this kind of double pressure eventually crushed the Soviet Union, thus ending the bipolar world order. Russia, cannot resign itself to this situation and aims to seek a reversal of the process and build a multipolar system. However, Dugin stresses that the new Eurasian continental bloc cannot be a reconstruction of the Warsaw Pact.³² It must be a cooperation covering the whole of Europe as far as the Atlantic, with the addition of a few priority sectors (India, Iran, Indochina) on the southern Eurasian coast, guaranteeing the neutrality of the former, but without taking these areas out of the control of Atlanticism.³³

The idea also means that Russia must first of all redefine its relationship with the four civilisations that surround it (Chinese, Islamic, Hindu, Latin-Germanic). A solid reference point also requires a Russian intellectual self-definition, which means that it is in the fundamental interest of the state to defend its originality – its Russian identity – at all costs, both from the Eastern and Western powers.³⁴ One important means of doing so is to federalise or to engage in the so-called Rimland (peripheral areas),³⁵ which is of key geostrategic importance, as mentioned above. This intermediate area has no real substance, but has a kind of 'mediating function' because its domination is one of the main stakes in the aforementioned cultural and civilisational struggle between the two. It is probably from this idea that today's well-known Russian aspiration to build a 'buffer zone' between Russia and NATO, to which many countries have fallen victim to a greater or lesser extent along the lines of the Baltic³⁶, Belarus, Poland, Georgia, Ukraine, could be derived³⁷. This would greatly contribute to the Russian empire-building process by access to the warm seas and thus to the

³⁰ Laruelle, M. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. (Washington, DC.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008)

³¹ Dugin, A. *Osnovi geopolitiki*. (Moscow: Arktogeia, 2000).

³² Fellows, G. S. *The Foundations of Aleksandr Dugin's Geopolitics: Montage Fascism an Eurasianism as Blowback*, Electronic Theses and Dissertations on the University of Denver, Denver, 2018.

³³ Dugin. *Osnovi geopolitiki*. 162.

³⁴ Linde, F. "The Civilizational Turn in Russian Political Discourse: From Pan-Europeanism to Civilizational Distinctiveness." *The Russian Review*. Vol. 75. 2016/4., 604–625.

³⁵ Dugin. *Osnovi geopolitiki*. 167.

³⁶ Galeotti, Mark: *The Baltic States as Targets and Levers: The Role of the Region in Russian Strategy*. Marshall Center, April 2019. <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/baltic-states-targets-and-levers-role-region-russian-strategy-0>

³⁷ Tabachnik. M. *"Defining the Nation in Russia's Buffer Zone: The Politics of Birthright Citizenship in Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia."* (dissertation) (Santa Cruz: University of Santa Cruz, 2017)

unification of sea power (SeaPower) and the Russian essentially land power (Heartland) in a Eurasian federal system.

The end goal, as envisioned by Dugin, is to create a situation where the Russian-dominated Eurasian territory enters into a strategic and later anti-American alliance with Central and South America, Africa, and parts of the Indonesian archipelago: Dugin sees the Global South in particular as a partner in this sense.³⁸ In order to do this, however, the countries of the Orthodox civilisation that forms the axis of Eurasia will have to redistribute the spheres of influence in Eastern Europe among themselves, in the Mackinderian sense while the countries of Central Europe, and the countries of the European West, which are likely allies of the anticontinental forces, should be repositioned between Germany and Russia, which form the axis of Europe.³⁹ Aleksandr Dugin sketched a quadripolar world model akin to Karl Ernst Haushoffer's concept of the pan-region as a result of the success of this process. This international system should be implemented along the Moscow-Tehran, Moscow-Tokyo, Moscow-Berlin and Moscow-Beijing alliance axes.⁴⁰

In conclusion, the Russian neo-Eurasian school of geopolitics believes that the Russian Federation has no choice but to follow the above-described path. The reason for this, as Dugin puts it – based on his own experience – is that RF has no state history in the narrow sense of the term – not including the Soviet Union – its borders are contingent, its cultural markers are confused, its political system is unstable, its economy is fragmented and its ethnic composition is mixed. The conglomerate is therefore only a product of the disintegration of a global world power and part of the overall picture. The most important thing is the determinacy of Russia's geopolitical thinking, which is a product of its specific geographical location and endowments.

A good example of this is the fact that since the 15th century Russia has essentially pursued a land or heartland geopolitics. In addition, the neo-Eurasian trend is also characterised by a geographic and geopolitical approach to social and political processes: the cornerstone of Russian geopolitics is the link between spatiality – the retention of influence over territories formerly under Russian sovereignty – and culture. In this context, one important point to note, according to Aleksandr Dugin, is that “Russian geopolitics is not simply the application of universal geopolitical laws to well-defined concrete circumstances.” The problem is that Russian geopolitics can only be studied in a meaningful way through a deep understanding of the characteristics of Russian society, through a joint study of the present and the past.⁴¹ While the other basic thesis is the quest for the Russian state's own way and the need to preserve its uniqueness at all costs. It is worth highlighting in Dugin's view that the key for Russia is to avoid the trap of regional power, since, as he puts it, it is “unthinkable

³⁸ Dugin envisaged a partition of Asia with Iran and Japan in the same way that he envisaged a partition of Europe with Germany.

³⁹ Speranskaya, N. “The Fourth Political Theory of the “Other Europe”. *Centre for Conservative Studies, Department of Sociology of International Relations, Department of Sociology*, 2013. 372–384. (in Russian)

⁴⁰ Botz-Bornstein, T. “Russia, Japan, China and the Resistance to Modernity: Eurasianism and Pan-Asianism Reconsidered”. *Center for Conservative Studies, Department of Sociology of International Relations, Faculty of Sociology*, 2013. 265–287. (in Russian)

⁴¹ Dugin, A. *Foundations of Geopolitics*. Moscow: Arktogetia, 1997. (in Russian)

without an empire”⁴² and amounts to national suicide.⁴³ This is evidenced by the country’s parallel efforts to establish unchallenged influence over ‘near abroad’ territories⁴⁴ – Belarusian elections, annexation of Crimea, cyber-attacks against the Baltic States, Russia’s coup d’état attempt allegations against Moldova in 2023⁴⁵ – and to play a region-shaping role at international level, for example with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015,⁴⁶ or the Collective Security Treaty Organization, established in 1992. It has also become a structuring power in the international relations system by building links with other international integrations: the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, joining the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, being the permanent member of the UN Security Council, where Russia most frequently applied its “veto power” on major issues such as preventing the strengthening of sanctions against North Korea in the first months of 2023.⁴⁷

In order to assess the relationship between Russia and China from this ideological point of view, it is interesting to look at Aleksandr Dugin’s perception of China. In his writings Dugin previously took an explicitly hostile tone and point of view towards China: he perceived the country as a formidable danger to Eurasia-Russia, verging on the Atlanticist factotum.⁴⁸ Dugin expressed concerns regarding the possibility of China making a future aggressive move towards the North, specifically targeting Kazakhstan and Eastern Siberia. In a section titled “The Fall of China,” Dugin explicitly cautions that China poses the greatest geopolitical threat to Russia from the southern direction. He argues that China endangers Russia’s interests both as a geopolitical stronghold for Atlanticism and as a nation with a concentrated population seeking to expand into unclaimed territories.⁴⁹ Due to the perceived risk that China poses to Russia’s vital geopolitical interests, Dugin argues for the dismantling of the People’s Republic of China. He emphasizes that when Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria are considered together, they form a security buffer for Russia. Dugin asserts that Eurasia-Russia must actively strive for the territorial disintegration, fragmentation, and political and administrative partitioning of China, as without Xinjiang and Tibet, China’s potential geopolitical advancement into Kazakhstan and Siberia would be thwarted. Additionally, the extensive postscript section added to the 1999 edition of “Foundations of Geopolitics” justifies a fundamentally anti-China tone. Aleksandr Dugin restates his conviction regarding the necessity for Eurasia-Russia to engage in the fragmentation of China. However, in a later interview conducted in late July

⁴² Dugin, A. *Last War of the World-Island. The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia*. London: Arktos Media Ltd. 2020, 1–12. (in Russian)

⁴³ Laruelle, M. *Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right*. Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center of Scholars. 2001.

⁴⁴ Huasheng, Z. “Russia and its Near Abroad: Challenges and Prospects”. Valdai Club. 09 March 2021. https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/rossiya-i-eye-blichnee-zarubezhe/?sphrase_id=642614 Accessed on 18 July 2023.

⁴⁵ Preussen, W. “Russia is planning coup in Moldova, says President Maia Sandu” Politico. 13 February 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/moldova-president-maia-sandu-russia-attack/> Accessed on 18 July, 2023.

⁴⁶ Ilyash, Gy. “Az Eurázsiai Gazdasági Unió és az Övezet és Út Kezdeményezés kölcsönhatásai Közép-Ázsiában”. *Külgügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet*, E- 2020/43. 2020. 1–16.

⁴⁷ Vladimir -Bugamina, E. “Geopolitics: Theory and Practice”. *Proszpekt*, 2021. 186–210.

⁴⁸ Mahjar-Barducci, A. “China, Russia, And The Creation Of A Multipolar World Order – A Russian Perspective” MEMRI, 5 October 2020. <https://www.memri.org/reports/china-russia-and-creation-multipolar-world-order-%E2%80%93-russian-perspective> Accessed on 30 July 2023.

⁴⁹ Dugin, A. *Foundations of Geopolitics*. Moscow: Arktogeia, 1997. (in Russian)

2001, Dugin slightly softened his stance, presumably in deference to Putin's declared position on China, albeit only to a limited extent.⁵⁰ He maintained his assertion that Russia's relationships with Japan, Iran, and India held greater importance and significance than its ties with China. The cooperation of the parties, organised along the lines of a common Eurasianist thinking, is evidenced by the fact that as "geopolitical compensation" for the loss of its northern regions – Dugin recommends – China should be offered development in a southern direction: Indochina (except Vietnam), the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia comprise China's appropriate sphere of dominance. China's current sphere of priority interests seems to revolve around various issues. These include maritime boundary disputes in the South China Sea, territorial disagreements concerning the Senkaku and Spratly Islands, as well as the construction of artificial islands.

In essence, I think it is important to note that Dugin described contemporary modern Russian geopolitics as a conservative, holistic, anthropological community-focused, idealistic, loyal and ascetic system of ideas that assumed the former balance of power of the bipolar system in a multipolar system. Dugin's ideas found resonance within certain think tanks and research institutions in Russia. For example, the Katchon think tank, founded by Dugin, promotes discussions on geopolitics, Eurasian integration, and traditional values. Other institutions, such as the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of the Population and the Centre for Strategic Research, have also engaged with neo-Eurasianist themes in their research and policy recommendations. It can also be said that the current Russian geopolitical thinking is characterised by a Eurasianist approach, with only a partial realisation of neo-Eurasianism, because the Russian political establishment as a whole does not fully adopt the ideas of Aleksandr Dugin, nor is it clear that Dugin is behind the political moves. It is important to understand that the influence of Dugin's ideas on Russian political leadership and decision-making may vary among individuals and over time. The impact of his specific ideas on specific policies or agreements may not always be explicitly documented or publicly attributed.

CHINA-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: "UTILITARIANISM OR GLOBAL POLITICAL TANDEM?"

Relations between Moscow and Beijing have never been so tight and close throughout history as they stand today. This growing proximity is the result of three decades of consistent efforts by the political leaderships of Russia and China to strengthen their mutual ties and enhance cooperation in various domains such as politics, military affairs, economy, and ideology. The relationship that has emerged can be described as an informal alliance, rooted in a deep conviction shared by the ruling elites of both countries regarding the fundamental alignment of their strategic interests and the ideological similarities between their authoritarian regimes. Consequently, this alliance goes beyond mere tactical expediency and is characterized by a genuine convergence of interests, even though internal tensions may still exist.

It has taken a relatively long time to go from the theory of Eurasianism to its practical realisation, because of changing forces in world politics and geopolitics. At the same time, the importance of Eurasia – not only for Russia – has increased significantly over the last 20 years, as it is one of the most populous and dynamically developing regions in the world

⁵⁰ Ostianová, N. "Changes in Russia's Approach Towards Central Asia". Thesis presented in fulfillment of master studies in Department of Political Science and European Studies, Palacky University of Olomouc. 2021.

and a potential counterweight to the US in the international system. We are therefore witnessing the emergence of a ‘Eurasian era’, with the economic, energy – and in some cases military – and power centres increasingly shifting eastwards. As a result of this trend, the idea of Eurasia began to look more and more like a viable option for many countries in the region in the 2000s.

In Russian politics, the Eurasian idea began to emerge at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, as relations with the West deteriorated⁵¹. The cause of that is that in the context of globalisation Russia is left with two paths: the first is semi-peripheral integration with China or the European Union. The second – which was the one finally chosen – was to create a Eurasian Empire or Union in the centre of Eurasia in accordance with Aleksandr Dugin’s approach. However, the question that still remains for the international community today is whether the Russian–Chinese relations that currently dominate the region extend only to the limits of utilitarianism or they comprise now a global political tandem. In the current chapter, I seek to answer this question first and foremost through an examination of the international cooperation and economic issues that currently define the relationship between the two sides the most.

Russian-Chinese relations from regime change to the present

The fact that Russia chose the latter option can be traced in a number of foreign policy concepts. In 2000, it explained its integration into the region in terms of the need for economic development in Siberia and the Russian Far East⁵². In 2008, it began to attach increasing importance to the region, i.a. by presenting the Sino-Russian relationship as a strategic partnership and a cornerstone of regional and global functionality.⁵³ In 2013 it called the Far East the fastest growing geopolitical region in the world.⁵⁴ The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation⁵⁵ did not specifically focus on China-Russia relations, but it highlighted the significance of deepening ties with strategic partners, including China. There are six key points related to China-Russia relations from the 2016 doctrine:

- Strategic Partnership: The Concept emphasized the strategic nature of the Russia-China relationship and referred to it as a “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination.” It stressed the importance of developing political dialogue, expanding trade and economic cooperation, and enhancing cultural and humanitarian exchanges.

⁵¹ Dugas, M. “Timeline of US-Russia Relations (1983-2020)”. *Russia Matters*. 17.12.2021. <https://www.russia-matters.org/facts/timeline-us-russia-relations-1983-2020> Accessed on 2 August 2023.

⁵² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Moscow: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2000. (in Russian)

⁵³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Moscow: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2008. (in Russian)

⁵⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Moscow: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2013. (in Russian)

⁵⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Moscow: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2016. (in Russian)

- Multipolar World Order: The doctrine emphasized the importance of creating a multipolar world order to ensure international stability and balance of power. It called for strengthening cooperation with countries like China to counterbalance what Russia perceived as the dominance of Western powers.
- Regional Cooperation: The Concept highlighted the need to promote regional cooperation and integration, particularly in Eurasia. It acknowledged the importance of initiatives like the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (part of China's Belt and Road Initiative) in fostering economic development and connectivity in the region.
- Security and Defence: The doctrine recognized the significance of maintaining regional and global security. It emphasized the importance of strategic stability, arms control, and international cooperation in countering common threats and challenges.
- Economic Cooperation: The Concept emphasized the importance of expanding economic cooperation with China, including trade, investment, and joint projects. It acknowledged China's role as a major economic partner, and stressed the need for deeper integration between the Russian and Chinese economies.
- International Organizations: The doctrine underscored the importance of strengthening collaboration with China within international organizations and forums such as the United Nations, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It highlighted the shared positions and coordinated efforts between Russia and China on various global issues.

The relationship between the two states was further strengthened by the Trump administration's open designation of Russia and China as strategic competitors from 2017 and then a trade war launched against them in 2018⁵⁶, which sent them a message that the US would do everything in its power to prevent their further rise. In June 2019, the Russian and Chinese heads of state announced that their relationship in the area of international strategic cooperation would evolve to an even higher level. Their joint declaration set out clear goals and directions: joint coordination in foreign policy actions, strategic support for each other, and joint defence of their security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independent development path. Their cooperation has thus reached a level that is both a response to the increasingly competitive nature of the behaviour of the US, but it also openly articulated their desire to transform the world order.

The above-mentioned points are further supported by the 2023 foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation, which attaches particular importance to the Eurasian region in achieving its strategic objectives⁵⁷. It aims at a comprehensive deepening of relations with friendly, sovereign global centres of power and development on the continent, which in principle coincide with Russian approaches to the future world order and concepts for solving key problems of world politics. In the context of the People's Republic of China, Russia's goals are broad and general: to further strengthen comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and focus on mutually beneficial cooperation and development in all

⁵⁶ Sutter, R. "How the United States Influences Russia-China Relations". *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 2018. 13/6. 1–5.

⁵⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Moscow: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2023. (in Russian)

fields, to enhance mutual assistance and cooperation in the international arena to ensure security, stability and sustainable development at global and regional levels, both in Eurasia and in other parts of the world⁵⁸.

However, in spite of these documents and the popular perception, the relationship between the parties has not always been so balanced⁵⁹. Sino-Russian (before that Soviet) relations go back centuries. During the period of imperialism, these countries were enemies of each other. A little later, communist ideology was able to put the two sides on a common platform, then geopolitical and realpolitik imperatives eventually overrode this artificial political cooperation. The formation of the present alliance started in the early 1990s, but its intensity has changed over time. It gained momentum whenever Moscow came into confrontation with the United States and weakened when Washington seemed willing to accommodate its geopolitical ambitions. As far as the relationship between the parties is concerned, I would like to highlight two documents that have laid the foundations for the current state of Sino-Russian relations. The first is the 1997 joint declaration of the leaders of the two countries on “a multipolar world and the international world order”⁶⁰. This not only rejected US hegemony, but also declared to the international community the presence of a new type of Sino-Russian relations with the outside world. Furthermore, a treaty on good neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation was signed in 2001.⁶¹ Since that date, we can speak of a strategic partnership between the two countries, which, as it happens, was renewed in June 2021 for a further five years.⁶² A significant turning point came in 2012, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) became an indispensable and irreplaceable partner for the Kremlin. This shift occurred after Moscow concluded that the primary goals of US policy towards Russia were to promote democratisation and regime change. The year 2012 also coincided with Xi Jinping’s takeover of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, which led to a more authoritarian domestic policy and a more assertive foreign policy stance.⁶³ Subsequently, Sino-Russian relations evolved into an informal alliance between 2012 and 2018, as both powers openly clashed with the United States and recognised the enduring and structural nature of this conflict.

Regarding Sino-Russian relations, the conceptual commonality of neo-Eurasian ideology was manifested in three major points: a shared approach to civilisation, attempts to reorient the dynamics of international politics in their own neighbourhood, and calling for the de-

⁵⁸ Sutter, R. “The Strategic Implications of Russia-China Relations: Regional Perspectives”. *Asia Policy*, 2018. 2018/1. 1–45.

⁵⁹ Yuan, J. “A Brief History of Sino-Soviet Union/Russia Political Relations from 1949 to 2019.” Russian International Affairs Council. <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/asian-kaleidoscope/a-brief-history-of-sino-soviet-union-russia-political-relations-from-1949-to-2019/> 25.11.2020. Accessed on 3 August 2023.

⁶⁰ United Nations Digital Library, Letter dated 97/05/15 from the Permanent Representatives of China and the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, 15 May 1997.

⁶¹ Wishnick, E. “Russia and China”. *Asian Survey*, 41/3. 2001. 797–821.

⁶² Reuters. “Russia, China extend friendship and cooperation treaty -Kremlin”. Reuters, 28 June 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/russia-china-extend-friendship-cooperation-treaty-kremlin-2021-06-28/> Accessed on 3 August 2023.

⁶³ Rudd, K. “The World According to Xi Jinping: What China’s Ideologue in Chief Really Believes”. *Foreign Affairs*. 10.10.2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/world-according-xi-jinping-china-ideologue-kevin-rudd> Accessed on 3 August 2023.

velopment of a multipolar international system in which the US is not the hegemonic power and can count itself among the major decision-makers⁶⁴.

- As an implementation of this kind of unity neither China nor Russia identify themselves as nations but as civilisations. The ruling elites of both states reject Western liberalism and the ideology of the global market. Instead, they see their countries as independent civilisations with their unique cultural values and political regimes. In the context of this common mindset of the parties, it is important to note that for a long time China was primarily regarded as a civilisational state. Then, over time, Vladimir Putin joined this approach and stated that Russia's status as a civilisational state was and would continue to prevent the country from "dissolving in this diverse world".⁶⁵ The prevalence of this approach is not only impacting global power distribution, but also reshaping post-Cold War geopolitics, moving away from liberal universalism towards a focus on cultural exceptionalism. In order to give a concrete example Xi Jinping has emphasized on numerous occasions the need for China's elites to revitalize Chinese civilization by energizing its cultural elements that transcend boundaries of time, space⁶⁶, and nationality while maintaining both enduring and contemporary significance. He specifically refers to the timeless allure of Confucian harmony, which the Communist state promotes domestically and internationally. In addition, Beijing's endeavours to assert control over Taiwan and the South China Sea are rooted in a vision of establishing a civilizational sphere of influence. Samuel Huntington anticipated the potential for confrontations between states of one civilization and states of another, but he did not foresee the rise of civilization states⁶⁷ (or "the one modern state – one civilization model") and its far-reaching consequences for the West and others. China's reversion to its historic global primacy could lead to its becoming the ideal type of civilisational state. Beijing today is known for its "four supers" and "one blend": super-large population; super-large territory; super-long traditions; and super-rich cultures. Each of these characteristics is a mixture of ancient and modern⁶⁸. In Russia, the presence of imperial consciousness and thinking is deeply ingrained in their current strategic planning, as expressed by Aleksandr Dugin's assertion that the country cannot exist without imperialism. However, while it is widely recognized as a defining aspect of their foreign policy, it is also considered highly risky, bordering on self-destruction. The Russo-Ukrainian war marked a turning point, with President Putin emphasizing

⁶⁴ Brands, H. "The Battle for Eurasia. China, Russia, and their autocratic friends are leading another epic clash over the world's largest landmass". *Foreign Policy*, 4. 6. 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/04/russia-china-us-geopolitics-eurasia-strategy/> Accessed on 3 August 2023.

⁶⁵ Reuters. "Putin appeals to Russians' patriotism on national day" *Reuters*. 12.6.2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-appeals-russians-patriotism-national-day-2023-06-12/> Accessed on 3 August 2023.

⁶⁶ Guangyuan, L. "China's pride in its own civilisation and respect for others is rooted in a belief in equality" *SCMP*. 25.04.2023. <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3218168/chinas-pride-its-own-civilisation-and-respect-others-rooted-belief-equality> Accessed on 3 August 2023.

⁶⁷ Orsi, D. "The 'Clash of Civilizations' and Realism in International Political Thought". *E-International Relations*. 15.4.2018. <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/04/15/the-clash-of-civilizations-and-realism-in-international-political-thought/> Accessed on 4 August 2023.

⁶⁸ Pabst, A. "China, Russia and the return of the civilisational state." *NewStatesman*. 8.6.2019. <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2019/05/china-russia-and-the-return-of-the-civilisational-state> Accessed on 4 August 2023.

Russia as an entire civilization with even greater intensity. The state is not just revered and worth sacrificing for, but is also viewed as a distinct and superior civilization, with a unique historical trajectory spanning a thousand years. Throughout this historical narrative, cultural traditions and values are transmitted across generations⁶⁹. The Russian civilization-state possesses its own revered figures, a pantheon of heroes that has remained unchanged from the Soviet era to the present, including Aleksandr Nevsky, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Joseph Stalin, Yuri Gagarin, and many others. Imperialism and colonialism are fundamental components of Putin's vision of civilization and are closely tied to warfare. This ideology is not novel; it directly draws inspiration from Stalinism, as well as earlier Eurasian and Slavophile narratives. War is depicted as a means to restore historical justice, as a form of defence and prevention, and as an act of liberation. Putin asserts that the territories of the empire "must be reclaimed and strengthened." In line with this perspective, over the past year, President Putin has repeatedly declared to the Russian people, through numerous speeches and statements, that the "special operation 2022" is a natural extension of the Great Patriotic War (known as World War II in Russia). Essentially, it is framed as an existential conflict between Russian civilization and the Western world⁷⁰.

- Besides this, the basis and origins of China-Russia cooperation are political, as both parties are calling for the development of a multipolar international system in which the US is not the hegemonic power and can count itself among the major decision-makers. At the same time, the economic, military and energy aspects of the relationship are becoming increasingly important. The diplomatic relationship between the two countries is thought-provoking and worthy of attention from the West, as there are currently nearly 400 agreements between them covering all areas of cooperation. In addition, a further hundred agreements have been concluded at regional level, and direct meetings at state leadership level are organised at least once a year. In a brief summary, the alliance between Russia and China is based on the similarity of their global strategic interests, in particular the fact that they both pursue an assertive foreign policy. By engaging in simultaneous activities, both countries aim to compel the United States of America to allocate its limited resources, thus enhancing Russia's position in Europe and China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the foundation of this alliance also builds on a hierarchical and socially Darwinian perspective of international relations, which is embraced by the ruling elites of both the Kremlin and Zhongnanhai.
- Another dimension of the parties' ideological community is the fact, that both country's attempts to reorient the dynamics of international politics were particularly visible in their own neighbourhood, as it is intuitively a logical concept that regional predominance should be an important element of the claim to great power status. China is putting forward territorial claims in the adjoining seas, carrying out a massive territorial settlement programme in the South China Sea, and strengthening its military

⁶⁹ Anchan, N. "Russia's war and the rhetoric of the 'civilisational state' in global politics". *The Loop by ECPR*. 17.08.2022. <https://www.google.com/search?q=samuel+huntington+and+civilizational+state&oq=samuel+huntington+and+civilizational+state&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i10i160l4.7811j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> Accessed on 4 August 2023.

⁷⁰ Pabst, A. "China, Russia and the return of the civilisational state." *NewStatesman*. 08.06.2019. <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2019/05/china-russia-and-the-return-of-the-civilisational-state> Accessed on 4 August 2023.

presence in the East China Sea, as well as intensifying political and military pressure on Japan over the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) islands⁷¹. On the other hand, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and opened a new stage of the conflict with Ukraine in 2022, by fomenting the war in eastern Ukraine. Besides these coercive measures, both states have put forward a complex set of initiatives that show how they believe international politics and cooperation should work in their respective regions: the New Silk Road Initiative and the above-mentioned New Eurasian and Eurasian Economic Union (EurSEC).

This kind of ideological community can be seen in some concrete examples, such as the Russian presidential speeches, the Joint Russian-Chinese Statements, or shared geopolitical perspectives.

As mentioned above, Russian presidents – including Vladimir Putin – have emphasized in their speeches the importance of regional cooperation and integration, which aligns with some aspects of neo-Eurasianist thought. For instance, in his speeches, Putin has highlighted the significance of Russia's partnerships with neighbouring countries and the Eurasian region as a whole. He has spoken about the need for economic integration, security cooperation, and the preservation of cultural ties in order to foster stability and development in the region.

Besides this, joint statements issued by Russia and China often focus on areas of cooperation and shared interests. While not explicitly attributed to neo-Eurasianism, these statements often highlight the importance of strategic partnerships, economic integration, and the development of the Eurasian region. For example, joint statements between the two countries have emphasized the alignment of their respective integration initiatives, such as the EAEU and China's Belt and Road Initiative, to enhance connectivity and cooperation in the Eurasian space.

Thirdly, as mentioned, Russia and China share certain geopolitical perspectives that resonate with elements of neo-Eurasianism. Both countries advocate for a multipolar world order, emphasize the importance of national sovereignty, and seek to counterbalance what they perceive as Western dominance. While these perspectives are not solely attributed to neo-Eurasianism, they do align with the broader notion of enhancing regional cooperation and influence in the Eurasian space. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that it is not plausible – despite the common points in Russian and Chinese external policies – that the complete implementation of the concept is in sight.

The impact of the past year on Sino-Russian relations

The relationship between Russia, China and the other countries of the Eurasian region is undeniably rooted in a history of shared identity: a desire to build a new ideology that would provide a sense of identity for their communities. In this respect, Russia can build a new, binding ideology for the Eurasians to reclaim the geographical and cultural sphere of the post-Soviet space. This is also reflected in the fact that since the beginning of Vladimir

⁷¹ Beckmann, R. *China's 'Island-Building' in the South China Sea: Implications for Regional Security*. Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, 2017.

Putin's presidency, the Euro-Asian ideology has received political and economic support from the government to create a large-scale integration project.⁷²

The outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 and the past year itself have led to a significant increase in intensity in the relationship between the two countries. This is illustrated, inter alia, by the Russian President's description of the relationship between the two countries at the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in February 2022: "Russia considers China as its most important strategic partner and like-minded friend. Moreover they see the Russian-Chinese relations as the – neo-Eurasianist – model for international relations in the 21st century"⁷³. The Chinese President stressed that the friendship between the two states is "without borders". It can also be seen as a similar relationship-building step, that Xi welcomed Dmitry Medvedev, leader of the ruling United Russia party, to Beijing in December, 2022. During his current visit to Moscow, Wang Ji was previously also met by Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.⁷⁴ In addition, the above-mentioned bilateral relationship-building meetings are continuing: on the 10th of July 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Valentina Matviyenko. President Xi noted that with the joint efforts of both sides, Sino-Russian relations have maintained a healthy and stable development momentum, and cooperation in various fields has shown steady progress. The Russian representative stated that the social basis and support for the generation-to-generation friendship between the two countries is growing stronger, and in order to further strengthen it, the Federation Council of the Russian Federation stands for deepening Russian-Chinese cooperation and is ready to intensify exchanges with the National People's Congress in order to provide legal guarantees for the implementation of the agreements between the two leaders⁷⁵.

In addition to the political and military dimensions, cooperation has also intensified in the form of projects and joint efforts in a number of other areas during the past few years, for example disinformation and railways development. These include a steadily growing effort by China to spend billions of dollars to spread pro-Russian propaganda in 2022. Mainly with a focus on the Global South, as well as the countries' increasing information warfare campaigns, within the context of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine – according to James Rubin, coordinator of the Center for Global Engagement, a US State Department agency created to "expose and counter" foreign propaganda and disinformation. Interestingly, to show the increasing intensity of the relationship: in the initial four months of 2022, there was a significant surge in retweets of Chinese diplomats by Russian sources compared to the same period in 2021. This increase was primarily driven by the amplification of Russian

⁷² Schmidt, M. "Is Putin Pursuing a Policy of Eurasianism?" *DEMOKRATIZATSIYA*, 13/1. 2005. 87–100.

⁷³ Putin, V. "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development". Official website of the President of Russia. 04.02.2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770> Accessed on 5 August 2023.

⁷⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Xi Jinping met with Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation Valentina Matviyenko". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 10.07.2023. Министерство иностранных дел Китайской Народной Республики (fmprc.gov.cn) Accessed on 7 August 2023.

⁷⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Xi Jinping met with Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation Valentina Matviyenko". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 10.07.2023. Министерство иностранных дел Китайской Народной Республики (fmprc.gov.cn) Accessed on 7 August 2023.

state media outlet RT, but it was also observed at diplomatic level. For instance, the Chinese embassy in Paris retweeted the Russian embassy in Paris multiple times, even on sensitive topics such as denying war crimes in Bucha. Likewise, we can observe a similar pattern in reverse, with Russian officials retweeting Chinese government officials and state media. From January to April 2022, Russian diplomats retweeted Chinese officials over 140 times, which is almost a tenfold increase compared to the same period in 2021. Interestingly, the most retweeted accounts in this case are not state media, but rather Chinese officials, particularly those associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs account. Besides the content that has a significant anti-American tone, there is also a noticeable convergence in messaging, particularly concerning the war in Ukraine. A prominent narrative revolves around portraying NATO as the aggressor in the war, which is further reinforced by adopting the Kremlin's viewpoint that NATO expansion is directly responsible for the conflict. While this talking point had some presence in Chinese messaging prior to the war, there has been a notable surge in its adoption since the conflict began. When examining the term "war" in the statements of Chinese officials that we monitor, it can be observed that, apart from China itself, which predominantly focuses on diplomatic declarations, the most frequently mentioned country in relation to war by Chinese officials in 2022 is the United States, rather than Ukraine or Russia. Surprisingly, the number of mentions of the United States is nearly double of that of Russia, specifically in tweets discussing the war.⁷⁶

The steadily strengthening nature of Russian-Chinese relations over the past decades is reflected in a number of joint declarations and projects. An example is the recent announcement made by Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Tan Kefei⁷⁷ – based on the speech of Xi Jinping – in March of 2023, that the armed forces of the People's Republic of China are ready to establish a higher level of cooperation with the Russian Federation in the field of strategic communication and coordination⁷⁸. In addition, the two countries are ready to work together to implement global security initiatives. Furthermore, military confidence building in the form of joint maritime and air patrols and exercises has also become a priority area. A recent high-profile instance of the latter is the Sino-Iranian-Russian joint naval exercise in the Gulf of Oman between 15th and 19th March, where the three nations sent forces including 12 ships, special operations and diving units, strengthening their navies' capability to carry out various tasks and further deepen the friendship and practical cooperation among the three countries⁷⁹. Another interesting example is the current railway project between China and Russia, known as the China-Russia High-Speed Rail (CRHSR) project, aimed at strengthening transportation infrastructure and connectivity between the two countries. The project involves the construction of a high-speed rail line spanning approximately 7,000 kilometres, connecting

⁷⁶ Wintour, P. "China spends billions on pro-Russia disinformation, US special envoy says". *The Guardian*. 28.02.2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/28/china-spends-billions-on-pro-russia-disinformation-us-special-envoy-says> Accessed on 6 August 2023.

⁷⁷ Kyiv Post. "Beijing to Cooperate with Russian Military in a Number of Areas - Chinese Defense Ministry". *Kyiv Post*. 30.03.2023. <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/15148> Accessed on 6 August 2023.

⁷⁸ Jinping, Xi. "Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development". *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, 2023. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202303/t20230320_11044359.html Accessed on 6 August 2023.

⁷⁹ AlJazeera. "China, Russia and Iran hold joint naval drills in Gulf of Oman". *AlJazeera*. 15.03.2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/15/china-russia-iran-hold-joint-naval-drills-in-gulf-of-oman> Accessed on 9 August 2023.

Beijing in China with Moscow in Russia. The primary goal of this project is to enhance bilateral trade and economic cooperation by facilitating faster and more efficient transportation of goods and people. By reducing travel time from several days to just a few hours, the CRHSR project seeks to boost economic ties, attract investment, and promote cultural exchanges between China and Russia. It demonstrates the balance of power between China and Russia, showcasing their ability to collaborate on major infrastructure projects, and project their influence on a global scale. It underscores the increasing importance of China as a key player in Eurasia and highlights Russia's willingness to cooperate and benefit from its neighbour's economic prowess. From a geopolitical perspective, the China-Russia High-Speed Rail project carries significant implications for both parties. Firstly, it strengthens the strategic partnership between China and Russia by deepening their economic integration and interdependence. Enhanced transportation links between the two countries contribute to the development of a Eurasian trade corridor, which can serve as an alternative to traditional sea routes, reducing dependence on maritime transport. This project also enhances China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as it expands China's reach into the heart of Eurasia and reinforces its economic influence in the region.⁸⁰

The continued strengthening of the relationship between the two sides is also reflected in the significant increase in the number of high-level bilateral meetings between the two countries. In February this year, in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin received Chinese State Councillor Vang Ji, a member of the Chinese Communist Party and head of the bureau of the Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Commission. On this occasion, the Russian side stated that relations between Russia and China are developing steadily and reaching new frontiers. In addition, the Russian head of state praised the contribution of cooperation between the two sides both in terms of stabilising the international situation and providing humanitarian aid. Vang Ji pointed out that Sino-Russian relations are steadily improving despite international pressure. Relations between Moscow and Beijing are not directed against third countries and are not subject to pressure from third parties. He said that the relationship is based on strong economic, political and cultural foundations, which also refers to the ideological community of neo-Eurasianism⁸¹.

In conclusion, in order to get a full picture of Russian-Chinese relations, it is essential to highlight a rather controversial situation. The "strategic partnership" and the "unprecedented level of relations" have been emphasised even when there were differences between the parties, but the parties are not entering into a real alliance.⁸² The primary reason for this is that sovereignty is such a priority for both countries that they are fully committed to one another. It is also important to stress that the People's Republic of China is committed to its own national objectives and is ready to implement joint projects even without Russia, as demonstrated by the agreements and declarations made by nine other states, including Argentina, Paki-

⁸⁰ Russia Briefing. "First Moscow Direct Freight Train Departs From Beijing". Russia Briefing, 26.03.2023. <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/first-moscow-direct-freight-train-departs-from-beijing.html/> Accessed on 9 August 2023.

⁸¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Russian President Vladimir Putin met with President Wang Yi of the People's Republic of China". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 22.02.2023. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030788.html Accessed on 10 August 2023.

⁸² Kim, P. "The Limits of the No-Limits Partnership: China and Russia Can't Be Split, but They Can Be Thwarted." Foreign Affairs. 28.02.2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/limits-of-a-no-limits-partnership-china-russia> Accessed on 10 August 2023.

stan and Saudi Arabia, on the establishment of the International Lunar Exploration Station. In addition to the sovereignty issue, the geographical proximity of the parties, their shared geostrategic interests and thus their conflicts of interests in the Central Asia region also play an important role. The power balance between Russia and China in the Central-Asian region is characterized by a complex interplay of interests and competition. For instance, in Central Asia, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to an increased economic influence through infrastructure projects, while Russia maintains political and security ties with these countries. In terms of energy resources, Russia has traditionally relied on Middle-Asian gas supplies to maintain influence over European markets, while China has been investing in energy infrastructure to secure resources for its own domestic needs. This competition for resources adds to the power dynamics between the two countries. In terms of security, both Russia and China have engaged in the Middle-Asia region. Russia has actively participated through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while China has provided assistance in border security and counterterrorism efforts. The diverging approaches and priorities of Russia and China in addressing security challenges further influence the power balance. Moreover, the region's proximity to Afghanistan and its security threats, including terrorism and drug trafficking, pose additional challenges that both countries seek to address. The evolving dynamics in the Middle-Asia region will continue to shape the power balance between Russia and China, affecting regional stability and broader global geopolitics. In addition, border conflicts, both historical and ongoing, play a crucial role in shaping the power balance in the Middle-Asia region. The most significant change at the moment might be that, while the Russo-Ukrainian war is diverting Russia's resources, capacities and attention to the West, Chinese influence – in areas considered to be its immediate and traditional sphere of interest of Russia – is steadily increasing.

This was demonstrated by the diplomatic milestone for Chinese President Xi Jinping in May this year. He invited the leaders of five Central Asian states to the city of Xian for their first-ever joint summit without the contribution of Russian politicians. Following the recent establishment of the China-Central Asia Summit, a surge in apprehension ensued. It can be said that Russia's influence in Central Asia has weakened due to the war in Ukraine, and China perceives an opportunity. This development, juxtaposed with the G7 meeting taking place simultaneously in Japan, is regarded as a contest for influence, referred to as "duelling summits." China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its growing economic partnerships with Central Asian nations have laid a solid foundation for cooperation in trade, infrastructure, and energy. The substantial financial support pledged at the China-Central Asia Summit, amounting to 26 billion yuan (approximately US\$3.8 billion), reflects a robust economic collaboration, further contributing to the prevailing unease. The apprehension is compounded by Russia's evident decline in power and influence following its invasion of Ukraine⁸³. Despite indications of increased cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), there has been no abrupt change in China's policy towards the region. China's objective is not to dominate Central Asia or fill a power vacuum. Instead, by strengthening ties with its neighbours, China appears primarily focused on maintaining stability on its western periphery. This, in turn, would create a buffer zone to effectively

⁸³ Hayley, A. "China's Xi unveils grand development plan for Central Asia". Reuters, 19.05.2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-xi-calls-stable-secure-central-asia-2023-05-19/> Accessed on 10 August 2023.

manage the persistent security challenges it faces in the Asia-Pacific region to the east. China's diplomatic priorities provide valuable insight into its ambitions in Central Asia. These countries became China's immediate neighbours after the collapse of the Soviet Union. China's diplomatic blueprint underscores the importance it assigns to "major powers, its periphery, developing countries, and multilateral platforms," with Central Asia playing a critical role in this framework. From Beijing's perspective, Central Asia and Russia represent the gaps in what they perceive as a US encirclement strategy⁸⁴. Initially, China's relations with Central Asian countries progressed slowly due to its focus on major powers and Southeast Asian neighbours. The lack of dynamic diplomatic mechanisms also hindered closer ties with Central Asian countries, despite security cooperation at the borders. Thus, the inauguration of the China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an, emphasized by President Xi Jinping, was a significant milestone on the ancient Silk Road, marking a crucial turning point. While China acknowledges the importance of its relationship with Central Asia, its larger focus is on the dynamics of its relationship with the United States. Washington has identified Beijing as a "strategic competitor" and is engaged in regional conflicts centred around the East and South China Seas, including Taiwan. Additionally, China views US initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Quad alliance involving Australia, Japan, and India, and the AUKUS partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom as efforts to encircle China, limiting its influence on the first island chain and obstructing access to the Indian and Pacific Oceans⁸⁵. From China's perspective, Central Asia and Russia represent vulnerabilities in this perceived US strategy. Despite the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021, China remains cautious of US involvement in Central Asia, as other powers may encourage "colour revolutions," which China sees as a threat to its interests, and Xi explicitly mentioned this term during his remarks at the China-Central Asia Summit. Concerns persist about the US Central Asia strategy unveiled by the Trump administration in 2020, which designated the pursuit of a "more stable and prosperous Central Asia" as a "primary strategic interest," allowing the region to pursue political, economic, and security interests with various partners on its own terms.⁸⁶ For China, the stability of the eastern region is of utmost importance. Simultaneously, building stronger relations with Central Asian states is integral to China's national security. Russia's conflict with Ukraine has introduced another layer of complexity, as China worries about potential US manoeuvres in the region.

Therefore, China's diplomacy in Central Asia should be understood within the context of evolving regional dynamics.⁸⁷ The resolution of past conflicts has helped stabilize the border areas and fostered greater cooperation, while alignment on regional issues like

⁸⁴ Kínai Társadalomtudományi Akadémia Xi Jinping Gondolatkutató Központ a szocializmusért kínai jellemzőkkel egy új korszakhoz: *Tudományos útmutató a nagyországok diplomáciájához kínai jellemzőkkel az új korszakban*, *Ostheory*, 12.09.2019. http://www.qstheory.cn/llwx/2019-09/12/c_1124988849.htm Accessed on 10 August 2023.

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Reality Check: Falsehoods in US Perceptions of China". Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 19.06.2022, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202206/t20220619_10706059.html Accessed on 10 August 2023.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the China-Central Asia Summit (Full Text)". Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 19.05.2023. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/zyxw/202305/t20230519_11079936.shtml Accessed on 10 August 2023.

⁸⁷ Umarov, T. "Is Russia Losing Its Grip on Central Asia?" *Foreign Affairs*. 30.06.2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/russia-losing-its-grip-central-asia> Accessed on 10 August 2023.

the South China Sea disputes highlights the level of collaboration and shared interests between the two countries. However, these conflicts also demonstrate the potential for tensions and competition that can arise, underscoring the delicate nature of the power balance between Russia and China in the region.⁸⁸

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND A CONCLUSION

In summation, both historical and civilizational processes have played a prominent role in the development of Russian foreign policy strategy and geopolitical thinking. Furthermore, each tendency also attaches great importance to spatiality and an autonomous Russian identity. This is reflected in the Zapadnik (Westerniser), Slavophile and Eurasianist schools of thought.

According to the neo-Eurasianist view, Russia is a great power, which is at the same time the Heartland of the world with its own specific characteristics. Its main characteristic is that it is a special ethnographic and cultural formation, situated between the West and the East. Its specific location means that it is neither part of Europe nor part of Asia, but embodies and represents a distinct Eurasian civilisation.

Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, has provided an excellent breeding ground for this by reorganising its power, extending its political sovereignty over large parts of the territory of the former Soviet republics and resuming imperial politics. The Russian political leadership has pursued a strategy of neo-Eurasianism and multipolarisation of the international system, which it has since pursued in its foreign policy. In this way, long-standing Russian geopolitical trends have been put at the service of expansionist realpolitik objectives. Particular emphasis is placed on the insights and ideas of the ‘Moscow School’, which is characterised by the name of Aleksandr Dugin, on Russia’s Eurasian identity, a new four-polar world order – in connection with which the current spheres of influence are redistributed – and US hegemony.

The influence of neo-Eurasianism in Russia can be observed in certain actions and policies undertaken by the Russian government. There are four major areas of examples of how the neo-Eurasianist movement’s impact can be traced in Russia’s actions: The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is a significant manifestation of neo-Eurasianist ideas in action. The EAEU, launched in 2015, is a regional integration project aimed at fostering economic cooperation among member states, including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It promotes the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour, as well as the coordination of economic policies. The creation of the EAEU aligns with the neo-Eurasianist vision of enhancing integration and cooperation among countries in the Eurasian region. Besides this, Russia’s approach to regional security and cooperation in the Eurasian space also reflects elements of neo-Eurasianist thinking. Russia has actively engaged in multilateral organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to promote stability and cooperation in the region. These efforts emphasize the importance of maintaining strong relationships and partnerships with neighbouring countries and aim to

⁸⁸ Silk Road Briefing. “China and Russia Preparing To Push The United States & European Union Out Of Central Asia”. Silk Road Briefing. 12.06.2023. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/06/12/china-and-russia-preparing-to-push-the-united-states-european-union-out-of-central-asia/> Accessed on 10 August 2023.

counter external influences that may threaten regional stability. The promotion of cultural and linguistic ties among countries in the Eurasian region is another aspect influenced by neo-Eurasianism. Russia has implemented policies to support the preservation and promotion of Russian language and culture in neighbouring countries. It has established Russian-language schools, cultural centres, and media outlets to foster cultural connections and maintain a sense of shared heritage among Eurasian nations. It is also important to mention that Russia's geopolitical engagements, particularly in its relations with countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, reflect elements of neo-Eurasianist thinking. The Russian government seeks to maintain influence and strategic presence in these regions, focusing on economic, political, and security cooperation. Russia provides military support, engages in bilateral agreements, and offers economic incentives to enhance its ties with these nations, aligning with the broader goal of strengthening the geopolitical position of the Eurasian region as a whole. These examples illustrate how the neo-Eurasianist movement's impact can be traced in Russia's actions and policies. It is important to note that these actions may not be driven solely by neo-Eurasianist ideology, but rather reflect a mix of geopolitical, economic, and strategic considerations.

The Russian Federation, in the name of its 'anti-West' narrative and as a counterweight to the deterioration of relations with European countries, has shown an increasing interest in the Far East over the last twenty years. China, as an inescapable player in the regional and global international community and a country with which it has had a varied history of relations, has been the subject of growing Russian interest. One reason for this is that Russia's location and recognition of its position as a great power has led it to seek to play the role of "balance of power" in relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

The answer to the question posed at the beginning of the study, "Can the Sino-Russian relationship be considered a purely utilitarian relationship or a global political tandem?" is, in my opinion, that it is currently a purely utilitarian relationship, with the PRC being the more dominant and effective party in asserting its interests. Furthermore, it is unlikely that there will be a complete establishing of the balance of power between the parties in the near future and a willingness to establish a truly global political tandem. In light of all this, can Russia's policy towards China and the Far East be considered successful? On the one hand, the attempt at Russian integration can be regarded incomplete because the countries concerned – with the possible exception of energy – have not responded adequately. In these circumstances, Russia's aim, which was to gain recognition of its status as a great power, was to replace its Western relations with the East and possibly improve the social and economic indicators of the Russian Far East. In this respect, Russia's role in the Far East does not meet these high expectations today and can hardly be expected to do so in the coming decade. However, if we look at this issue in terms of challenges or alternatives, the balance of Russian foreign policy seems rather more successful: it has managed to dynamically increase and integrate its trade relations with the region, and the penetration of the dominant Russian sector, energy, is underway, Moscow is showing unprecedented political activity in the region, and has so far managed to keep Beijing's penetration of Moscow's former spheres of influence on a peaceful track. Finally, in my view, it is hardly possible or worthwhile to announce any major Russian expansionist superpower programme in the region. The reason is that Russia has to reckon with 'factors' in the region, such as China or Japan, so it has no realistic chance of achieving clear economic dominance in the near future.

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