

Towards the Rise of Eurasia

Competing Geopolitical Narratives and Responses



Géza Salamin
Péter Klemensits



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Responses**

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Foreword from the Publisher

At the beginning of the 21st century, the unity of Europe and Asia took on a new meaning. Eurasian thinking, which has a long tradition in geography and especially in geopolitics, has become invaluable for understanding current economic and political trends and the changing dynamics of international relations. The notion of Eurasia is expressed in different narratives in different countries. The aim of this book is to reveal the diverse geopolitical narratives that are crystallizing in political processes and discourses in various countries. The volume contains studies by experts in geopolitics, geography, and international relations who have made significant academic effort to reveal and understand the (re)emerging Eurasian narratives of different countries. The Institute of International, Political and Regional Studies at Corvinus University is strongly committed to exploring current developments in geopolitics, thereby contributing to their better understanding. This publication is also aimed at supporting university education at the BA, MA, and especially the PhD level. We believe that the newest volume in the series 'Corvinus Geographia, Geopolitica, Geoeconomia' will be of interest to a wide audience – in addition to those interested in geopolitics, it will appeal to those who seek to understand the international relations of the 21st century.

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The Role of Geopolitical Narratives in Foreign Political Thinking and the Rise of Eurasia – Introduction

Géza Salamin¹ – Péter Klemensits²

The geopolitical significance of Eurasia

From the perspective of physical geography, Eurasia means the supercontinent formed by Europe and Asia, which, in geological terms, qualifies as a single continent. In spite of political, economic, and cultural heterogeneity, the concept of Eurasia acquired great significance in geopolitics from the start, and in the twentieth century it fundamentally influenced the geostrategic approach of individual great powers, too. Starting from the 2000s, the significance of the region increased even more, which is why we can now talk about signs of emergence of a Eurasian age in which economic, political, and military power seems to be shifting to the East, while the Atlantic Ocean region might lose weight in the future. As Parag Khanna, the outstanding geopolitical expert, predicted, the world is becoming Asian (Khanna, 2019). In parallel with this, a new world order with multiple centres is evolving, in which connectivity and complexity give new meaning to the union of Europe and Asia, and the twenty-first century may be the century of Eurasia. Robert D. Kaplan claims that globalisation, technological development, and geography make Eurasia a changeable and shapeable but specific unit, with financial, commercial, and infrastructural relations that are becoming more and more dominant, while smaller but geopolitically relevant regions are losing some of their significance (Kaplan, 2018). Examining the Chinese Belt and Road (BRI) Initiative, Peter Frankopan writes about the emergence of a Eurasian supercontinent (Frankopan, 2018). In Bruno Maçães' view, we are witnessing the development of a new world map, and in this process – with the weakening of the global power of the USA – the rise of Asian countries will tip the scales in favour of the East, creating a new entity that extends from Lisbon to Jakarta, called Eurasia. Among the centres of power on this supercontinent, China is playing the most important role, as owing to the BRI, and with the creation

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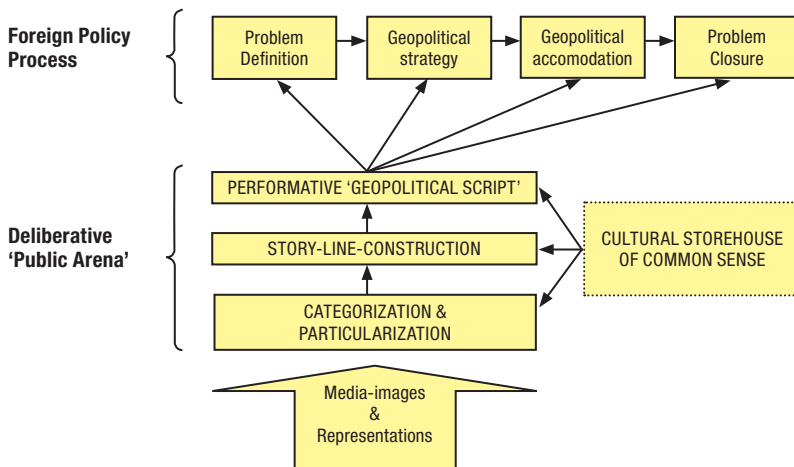
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of land and sea transport s, the country is working on the establishment of a new global economic system with China at its centre (Mações, 2018). Kent E. Calder is of the opinion that, after the Cold War, East Asia became the centre of economic growth, and the transformation of geopolitical relations and the re-connection of Europe and Asia foresee the birth of a new supercontinent based on the Europe-China partnership. In the early twenty-first century, the development of bonds within Eurasia accelerated significantly, and one of the key elements of that process is the rise of China and the implementation of the BRI initiated by it. In addition, the logistics and IT revolution, the political and economic transformation of Europe, Russia, and South-East Asia, as well as the geoeconomic ambitions of India and Iran, play key roles in this story (Calder, 2019). Such a rise of Eurasia projects a possible future that might offer various opportunities and challenges for great powers and smaller countries alike, thus the examination of this concept from a geopolitical perspective is timelier than ever, as it is in our common interest to get to know the changing world order and the related national strategies and foreign policies of individual states.

Approaches and methods

In line with the conclusions and forecasts of geopolitical experts, in the past few years the governments of multiple great powers have openly supported the creation of Eurasia as a political and economic entity. The best-known concept is probably the Belt and Road Initiative of China, but we could also mention Russia's plan for a Eurasian Union, and of course it is worth paying attention to the narratives of the European Union, India, and middle-level powers like Kazakhstan, and even smaller states such as Hungary, too. The Eurasia-related strategy of the United States, the only superpower in the world, also demands our attention, as it can be basically considered a counter-narrative. The objective of the present collection of studies is to examine all these geopolitical narratives regarding Eurasia and the counter-narratives created in response using a uniform theoretical framework. Our book, following critical geopolitical traditions, attempts to present the narratives that compete with each other, the theoretical framework for which is provided by Gearóid Ótuathail's study entitled *'Theorizing practical geopolitical reasoning: the case of the United States' response to the war in Bosnia'*, published in *Political Geography*, 2002, No. 5. In this publication, Ó Tuathail examines the geopolitical narrative of the United States, as developed in connection with the war in Bosnia, by using practical geopolitical arguments to explain how foreign policy makers use international crises to shape narratives according to their own interests – and how they produce strategies to manage the related challenges and create the conditions for solving problems. In this examination, mass media, as the conduit of messages ("*scripts*") constructed by foreign policy elites, plays a key role. In the author's definition "a

geopolitical script refers to the directions and manner in which foreign policy leaders perform geopolitics in public, to the political strategies of coping that leaders develop in order to navigate through certain foreign policy challenges and crises” (Ó Tuathail, 2002, p. 609). Overall, the study outlines a methodological approach consisting of four parts for the analysis of the practical geopolitical arguments of foreign policy elites. This approach consists of (1) the definition of the foreign policy problem (what can be regarded as a part of a political challenge; how can we define the given problem; what is the significance for the state/nation?); (2) the definition of ‘geopolitical strategy’; (which is basically formulated through the high-level negotiations of influential players); (3) the further ‘fine-tuning’ and accommodation of the strategy (when decision-makers make an attempt to reconcile the interests, fears, and political needs of stakeholders); and (4) the closing of the problem – i.e., the solution of the identified problem and the specific political steps taken for this purpose (problem closure does not always mean actually solving a problem – often only its postponing in the hope that the problem will decline in significance with time without actual intervention) (Ó Tuathail, 2002, p. 622). The creation of scripts and the process of applying geopolitical arguments by political elites can be depicted graphically:



Following the introduction and the first chapter, the book’s authors describe the individual Eurasian scripts and their effects on the four (or less, as applicable) elements listed above according to the theoretical framework. The basis of the study from a methodological perspective is leaders’ speeches broadcast through mass media, and the analysis of official documents.

Chapter summaries

In Chapter 1 of the book, Péter Klemensits describes the role played by Eurasia in classic geopolitical theories: namely, he addresses what the differences are between the related concepts contained in individual trends, and which concepts ultimately still influence the geopolitical strategies of states. From the representatives of the social Darwinist school we become acquainted with the works of Friedrich Ratzel and Johan Rudolf Kjellén in more detail; in the latter case, we basically see an analysis of Eurasian power relations from a German perspective. As a follower of the geostrategic school, Alfred Thayer Mahan, in concentrating on the interests of the United States, highlights the significance and the basics of maritime power. It is, however, definitely Sir Halford John Mackinder who is the focus of the study, and whose concept of the Heartland later strongly influenced the thoughts of other theoretical scholars too. Although Mackinder's views have changed over time owing to events in world politics, the pivot area/Heartland idea, as well as the central role of Russia, can be considered stable points – looking at the issue from the perspective of the British Empire, of course. In the case of Karl Ernst Haushofer, who developed the concept of pan-regions, the desirable dominance of the role of Germany over Europe and Africa is emphasized. Nicholas J. Spykman's views basically influenced the Cold War strategy of the USA, thus the Rimland thesis is also described in detail. Finally, in addition to the ideas of classic thinkers, this chapter discusses the strategies of the twenty-first century, too, in which Eurasian concepts can be interpreted only with full knowledge of the above-described principles.

In the next chapter of the book, Nuno Morgado examines Russian Neo-Eurasianism, starting from the hypothesis that, in scientific terms, the latter cannot be considered a geopolitical approach, but should be qualified rather as an ideology and a geostrategic plan of global dimensions. In ideological terms, Neo-Eurasianism can be interpreted as an “*amalgam of incoherent ideological streams*” that promotes the strategic plan of creating a Eurasian empire under Russian leadership and the complete restructuring of the international system. The author evaluates the theoretical and practical work of Alexander Dugin in this light, considering him rather an ideologist than a geopolitical scholar, and one who spreads propaganda guided by political objectives. The ‘multipolar world’ represented by Neo-Eurasianists actually supposes the creation of an authoritarian “*oligarchic-global order*”. In order to facilitate the interpretation of Neo-Eurasianism, Morgado compares it with the ideas of the Eurasianists, Westernizers, and Slavophiles, and then describes how the roots go back to imperialism and revolutionary thinking. In order to implement the new oligarchic-global order, its supporters were in favour of cooperation with the enemies of the USA, the strengthening of Eurasian integration, and the establishment of strong alliances. According to Morgado's conclusion, Neo-Eurasianism cannot be considered a geopolitical school, as it does not wish to objectively in-

interpret political reality, but rather pursues policy-making by using geopolitical theories and methods to achieve the desired goal: a new world order.

In Chapter 3, István Szilágyi reviews the development of Russia's Eurasian narrative after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in which Russia indicated the desire to restore its imperial status in the light of Neo-Eurasianism, and to create unity within the Eurasian supercontinent. In its foreign policy strategy, the government led by Vladimir Putin defined the objective of creating "*a multipolar and multilateral international system based on the concept of Eurasianism*". Russia has become a genuine structure-creating power through its participation in international forms of cooperation. On the other hand, in the early 2010s the Russian leadership had the objective of creating a Greater Europe that spanned from Lisbon to Vladivostok, but, by 2014, because of changes in global conditions – primarily the increase in the role of China – they committed themselves to the creation of the Greater Eurasian partnership, which has a significant economic and security dimension. The study discusses in detail the importance of the China-Russia strategic partnership, which cannot be considered an alliance, but – building on mutual interests – still ensures "*the maintenance of the image of political dominance and strategic leadership in the post-soviet region*" for Russia, and the spread of its influence to further regions. As the author claims, global processes nowadays clearly indicate the "*dominance and the stronger influence of the Greater Eurasian Partnership*", which means that the China-Russia partnership versus the USA and the geopolitical narrative behind this will play a determining role in the twenty-first century, too.

In Chapter 4, through analysing the speeches of the Chinese head of state and other official documents and tracing the practical arguments of critical geopolitics, Viktor Eszterhai seeks to present the Belt and Road Initiative as a Chinese geopolitical strategic alternative. In the course of this, he identifies all the changes in the environment which have led to the creation of that strategic alternative, reviews the key features of the 'strategy', and finally discusses all the steps taken by the Chinese leadership for its practical implementation. The American 'pivot' concept played a key role in the launch of the initiative, because Chinese leadership – although focusing on peaceful growth and avoiding conflict – definitely needed to put an end to their country being enclosed by the USA. Because of the power of America, Beijing created the BRI primarily as an economic strategy, the main objective of which is to deepen globalisation and connectivity, mainly between Europe and Asia, but which has no specific geopolitical objectives. The study points out that the BRI is actually only a vaguely defined framework that should be filled with content by the affected interest groups (which are at war with each other, too). The most important interest groups are the party, the army, provincial leadership, state-owned companies, and the People's Bank of China and the major financial centres. Eszterhai concludes that the BRI is not "a coherent foreign policy strategy with clear content and objectives and scope in space

and time”; it is rather a schematic vision and framework that can be modified by the affected countries according to their own interests.

In Chapter 5, László Csicsmann explains India’s global power ambitions in Eurasia, weighing challenges and opportunities. The author emphasizes that, in spite of the fact that international research primarily focuses on the importance of East Asia, India has become a player in the global landscape owing to its size, economic growth, and military ability. For political, security, and economic reasons, Eurasia – the strip of land running from Central Asia to the Western part of China – is of high priority for India, especially in the new world order that has emerged after the Cold War, when the establishment of relations with the Central Asian states has become of primary importance in relation to breaking away from South-Asia in political and economic terms. The Indian government’s ‘Extended Neighbourhood’ Concept emerged in the 2000s, concentrating on the area from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea. As Russia, the United States, and China also wish to enforce their interests, not only India, competition with the great powers generates both challenges and possibilities for New Delhi. India’s basic objective is to curb Chinese ambitions (i.e. the Belt and Road Initiative), although in addition to political and security problems, this affects the areas of transportation, trade connections, and energy security. The study points out that although the government of Narendra Modi – in relation to multilateral agreements, but additionally to this – cooperates closely with Russia, the United States, the Central Asian Republics, Japan, and the ASEAN countries in order to counterbalance China, it has not got the necessary funds, so it may be considered a competitor of China’s to a limited extent only.

In the study that comprises Chapter 6 Zoltán Gálík examines the system of relations of the European Union and the Eurasian region, placing the emphasis primarily on the EU’s common foreign and security policy and on results achieved with the common trade policy, concentrating on players with key geopolitical roles, the post-Soviet region, Russia, and China. As Gálík writes, in relation to the European Union, we cannot even talk about a uniform foreign relations policy, as this is strongly influenced by the different approaches of Member States. The Eurasian region has become more important for the Union in the past few years from a security policy perspective, too, but it is still economic relations that are determining for the world’s largest single market. As for the post-Soviet region, one of the key objectives of the EU is providing support for political, economic, and social reform processes. Regarding the Union’s policy regarding Eurasia, it is worth examining the strategic documents of the EU, which clearly express European views about the Eurasian Economic Union and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The latter projects, as the author says, “may open a new dimension of deepening economic relations, in addition to the infrastructure construction projects in the direction of the European Union”. However, leading states of the Union have ambivalent feelings about the initiative, as they are afraid of the threat of the establishment of Chinese y to

the detriment of European producers and service providers. It is an important message of the study that the foreign relations strategy of the Union should be open to new ideas, while it is also necessary to stick to maintaining the international order based on rules – but this would require united action by EU Member States.

In chapter 7, Zoltán Megyesi and Géza Salamin follow the development of Hungary's Eurasia narrative by analysing the content of Hungarian government statements and development policy strategies, then review the steps taken in relation to their practical implementation, as well as the system of external conditions. In response to economic problems experienced in the early 2000s, the Orbán Government that took office in 2010 committed itself to diversifying foreign relations and developing a foreign economy, as materialised in the policy of opening to Asian countries (the 'Eastern Opening'). This was coupled with a new geopolitical narrative, too, the essence of which is the promotion of Eurasian-scale cooperation between the East and the West, which in practice focuses on the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Pursuant to the new geopolitical narrative, Hungary is a gate and a bridge in East-West relations, and the objective is "a genuine Eastern opening instead of just trading". The Hungarian concept of Eurasia involves the countries of the post-Soviet region, and mention of Russia in most cases, but since the launch of the BRI, the narrative has increasingly focused on China. This can be observed in policy documents, too, while in practice it has been realised through two strategic investments – the Paks Power Plant, and the Budapest-Belgrade railway line. Naturally – as pointed out by the authors, too – Hungarian attempts will be fully successful only if they are facilitated by the relational systems of great powers – here considering mainly Germany-Russian-Chinese and Sino-American relations.

Chapter 8, written by Máté Szalai describes the geopolitical scripts created by European and Asian (especially Central Asian) small states about Eurasia. The author argues that these countries have not got their own Eurasian vision(s), as the region is too large for them in geographical terms; in addition, they show much more interest in neighbouring areas than in countries further away. However, the consequence is that they basically react to Russian and Chinese Eurasian concepts as they do to external narratives – according to their own political, economic, and security interests. As a consequence, they maintain subordinate positions in their relations with the two great powers, trying to accommodate their expectations, although they have the possibility to enforce their own objectives, too, albeit to different extents. In the light of their geopolitical positions, histories, and economic structures, they attempt to maneuver between Russian and Chinese power, while the objective is to minimise costs and maximise profits. In these attempts, they may select from various strategies, such as hedging, bandwagoning, and balancing. The pressure for cooperation and resistance is present in relations with Russia and China alike, but closer cooperation with China

promises greater yields in economic terms, and China does not attempt to enforce its political influence in the way Russia does. All in all, the success of the concept of Eurasia of the great powers greatly depends on the reactions of small countries, which is why it is probably very important to study them further.

In the last chapter of the book, Tamás Baranyi, explains the response of the American Indo-Pacific Concept to the Eurasian geopolitical discourse such as that it presents the appearance of the Indo-Pacific concept in American strategy, and its application in policy-making. The Asia policy of the United States was strongly influenced by the ‘China Challenge’ (the ‘China Threat’ concept since the 1990s), and the USA has acknowledged that China presents an increasing threat to its interests. The launch of the BRI in 2013 accelerated the process – which was also facilitated by the more assertive policy of Xi Jinping – although the Chinese initiative originally aimed at creating forms of cooperation and stability with regions next to China as a ‘geo-economic concept’. However, it is not clear at all how much the ‘Indo-Pacific’ idea can be considered a response to Chinese strategic thinking. In fact, ‘Indo-Pacific’ terminology was introduced in the 2000s by the allies of the USA – namely, by Japan and Australia in international political discourse. America adopted it only later, and from 2017 it became the basis of the Asia policy of the Trump administration. As the implementation of the new strategy mainly included steps in the area of security, it brought few results in economic terms and its strategic importance remained limited. The spread of COVID-19 intensified anti-China feelings, but the former concept has not been fine-tuned yet, and the interpretation of the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ still divides the USA and its regional allies.

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The role of Eurasia in the Classical Geopolitical Theories

*Péter Klemensits*¹

Abstract

The study of modern geopolitical narratives related to Eurasia is possible only through the knowledge of classical geopolitical theories. As the theoretical works of great predecessors such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sir Halford John Mackinder, and even Karl Ernst Haushofer, laid the groundwork for the later research and development of geopolitics, despite the fact that the system of international relations has changed significantly in the twenty-first century, classical geopolitical theories still have relevance today.

Therefore, through the presentation of the main theories, this study seeks to describe the role of Eurasia in classical geopolitical theories, the differences in the viewpoints of each trend, and, ultimately, the concepts that still influence the development of geopolitical strategies of nations.

Introduction

Any examination of modern geopolitical narratives related to Eurasia is only possible through the knowledge of classical geopolitical theories. Undoubtedly, the theoretical works of great classics such as those of Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sir Halford John Mackinder, and even Karl Ernst Haushofer, laid the foundations for the later research and development of geopolitics, while also attempting to define Eurasia and prove its strategic importance.

A detailed presentation of classical geopolitical ideas cannot be the aim of this study² due to its size constraints, for if nothing else, academic literature amounting to a library-full has in recent years been published on the topic, much of it undertaking to provide a thorough analysis of individual authors' achievements and works. Therefore, this article seeks to summarize the most important ideas by examining Eurasia's role as it is defined in classical theories, the differences in perceptions of this role in each trend, and the concepts that still influence the geopolitical strategies developed by nations today.

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² When mentioning the representatives of classical geopolitics, this study means the theoreticians described by Szilágyi (2018), of whom a presentation of works by authors less relevant to Eurasia (Paul Vidal de la Blache and Giulio Douhet) is omitted only.

The social Darwinist school, and the problem of great power and living space

Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), a German geographer and ethnographer, and founder of the German school of geopolitics, occupies a dominant position among the representatives of the trend of social Darwinism.³ Ratzel focused essentially on political-geographical research, and advocated the application of laws observed in science to society, emphasizing the existence of an organic state. In a work entitled *Politische Geographie* (Political Geography), published in 1897, he formulated the laws of state development,⁴ while focusing on the problem of the scarcity of land when discussing the struggle of individual states for living space. According to Ratzel, situation (*Lage*) and space (*Raum*) are extremely important factors in the existence of a great power, and the successful existence of a state may even lead to the establishment of world domination. In his view, the Great Powers included England, Russia, China, the United States, and Brazil. Like Mahan and Mackinder, he also reckoned with Russia's potential role as a world power due to its position on the Eurasian continent, which, however, it would only be able to achieve by controlling part of the world's seas, which presupposed its expansion towards the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Stogiannos, 2019). Moreover, in his study of space and the existence of great power, Ratzel primarily focused on the interests of the German Empire, while his theory of living space (*Lebensraum*) also supported Berlin's political aspirations. The essence of the idea is that "a given state, as a political being, considers the acquisition of areas vital for the maintenance and development of its life functions to be a basic need" (Szilágyi, 2018). In this sense, this proposition considers the annexation of smaller and weaker states by great powers as a natural process.⁵ In essence, the idea supports the creation of German dominance over Central and Eastern Europe. His forward-looking interpretation of international relations is evidenced by the fact that, in a book entitled *Political Geography*, he argued for the creation of European unity against the threat posed by Russia and the United States. According to the German geographer, the division of Europe must end, as the great empires will not shy away even from the political unification of continents. However, by unity Ratzel meant economic unity, primarily, for creating an appropriate counterpoint to the two great powers, thus anticipating the idea of a united Europe after World War II (Stogiannos, 2019).

³ The trend regards the state to be a kind of living organism that develops organically, as a result of which its boundaries may also change dynamically. According to representatives of this trend, geographical conditions determine the economic and social development of the state and its international relations.

⁴ The findings that Ratzel calls "laws" are more likely to be construed as generalizations of historical processes.

⁵ Contrary to later National Socialist interpretations, however, in Ratzel's space theory, intellectual and cultural content was the determining factor, not racial theory and aggressive conquest.

The father of geopolitics, Johan Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922), a Swedish political scientist and Ratzel's student, further developed many of Ratzel's ideas. He was the first to use the term geopolitics in a study published in the journal *Ymer* in 1899 (Chapman, 2011). In contrast to the rules and laws of political geography, the geopolitics he represented examined changing political entities and aspirations for power from a geographical perspective. Kjellén's main work *Staten som Lifform* (The State as a Life-Form) was published in 1916 and included his view of geopolitics. According to Ferenc Mezö, "[w]ith geopolitics, Kjellén examined the situation of the great powers and their natural features together with their political organization and aspirations for power" (Mezö, 2006 p. 31). The need for the economic independence of states was represented by the concept of "autarchy". Like Ratzel, Kjellén attached great importance to living space, as he was of the view that the struggle of the great powers for this could only be decided through war. Their ultimate goal was to gain world power status. In his opinion, the world powers included Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and Russia. Among the great powers were France, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Italy, and Japan (Zeleneva, 2017). According to Kjellén, Russia's power ambitions pose a serious threat not only to Sweden, but to the entire Mitteleuropa region, so the only solution would be to create, under German leadership, a Central European empire whose four cornerstones are represented by Dunquerque, Berlin, Riga and Baghdad, and whose axis is symbolized by the Berlin-Baghdad railway. In this way, Kjellén regarded the Middle East and northern Africa to be part of the German living space, in addition to the Baltics. And although the Eurasian superpower, Russia, might still be able to jeopardize German aspirations, on the eve of World War I he considered Great Britain to be the main enemy, who, as a naval power, would not tolerate German expansion. But since the British and French states had already entered a phase of decline, the German Empire could boldly undertake the inevitable confrontation (Parker, 2015).

Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Strategy of Sea Power

One of the most prominent figures in the school of geostrategy⁶ was the American rear admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914). As his biographer William E. Livezey put it:

Mahan was a geopolitical thinker long before that expression was coined; as espouser of sea power, Mahan was the precursor of Halford Mackinder, analyst exceptional of the forthcoming role of land power; as exponent of sea power,

⁶ The trend, which mostly reflects an Anglo-Saxon influence, basically examines the relationship between history and geography, and the geographical and regional aspects of strategic processes.

Mahan was the preceptor of Karl Haushofer, advocate extraordinary of depth in space, lebensraum and land empire. (Livezey, 1981, p. 316).

As a lecturer at the Naval War College, Mahan published a number of works – notably, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783*, and *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812*. In his works, the factors influencing the sea power of states included the following: geographical location; physical structure; territorial extent; population size; national character; and governmental and institutional characteristics. According to Mahan, the history of the rise of England proves that the geographical environment fundamentally influences whether a state can become a sea power, while national features (governmental characteristics and institutions) – i.e. democracy and meritocracy – allow the development of sea power in the case of favourable geographical conditions (Alexandros, 2011). According to the geopolitician, gaining control of the seas was of great importance, as naval powers are in a better position than land empires as they control maritime trade routes as a result of their resources, thus they may blockade their enemies and even destroy them in a decisive naval battle.⁷ This is why Mahan proposed that the United States create, like the British Empire had done, a “blue water navy”, and pursue an imperialist foreign policy. To this end, he supported the annexation of overseas territories (e.g., Hawaii, and the Philippines) to build the bases needed to protect American superpower interests and ensure control over choke-points.

Eurasia played a central role in Mahan’s global geostrategy. According to Francis P. Sempa: “[i]f, to Mahan, command of the sea was the most important factor in world politics, control of the power centres of the Eurasian landmass was a close second” (Mahan, 2003, p. 43). In a work entitled *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies*, published in 1900, he divided the world into a north, a south, and “*Debated and Debatable*” zones. He claimed that the area north of 40 degrees latitude was dominated by continental powers, while the tropical zone south of 30 degrees latitude was dominated by European and American naval powers. However, the main conflict zone is between 30 degrees to 40 degrees latitude (the Debated and Debatable Zone), where the Russian Empire faces British naval power (Mahan, 2003).⁸ Although Mahan regarded the British Empire as a rival to the United States, he argued in favour of British-American cooperation, primarily against Russian and Chinese expansion, in order to maintain a global balance of power. He even expected Germany and Japan to be allies, as they were also interested in thwarting Russian plans to acquire warm-sea

⁷ The theory of the decisive naval battle was refuted during World War II.

⁸ Mahan’s concept pre-empted Mackinder’s thoughts in advance in some respects, but made no mention of the Debatable Zone in his post-1900 works. For more details on the birth of the theory, see Walters (2000, 84-93).

ports. Mahan did not specify which region of Eurasia he considered to be the most important in strategic terms, although in anticipation of Mackinder's Heartland theory, he emphasized the importance of the Russian-dominated North and Central Asian territory. In his view, the greatest threat to peace was not only posed by the competition of European powers for the Asian and African colonies, but, in the long run, that industrializing Asia could also be a worthy competitor to Western civilization (Sumida, 2003). In a book, Mahan ranked Britain, the United States, and Japan among the naval powers, while Russia, France, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and Germany were classified as continental powers. Although he regarded China essentially as a land power, he believed that one day it could become a maritime power through its extensive coastline. In this regard, Mahan predicted the rise of China and its gaining ground in the international system that we experience today (Mahan, 2003).

Following the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Mahan's views also changed, and he no longer considered Russia the main source of danger to the Anglo-Saxon powers, but instead, before World War I, he warned of the dangers of German and Japanese conquest.⁹ Mahan recognized the paramount importance of the Balkans in the outbreak of the war. He thought that Germany had been forced to step in, and if it did not want to wait and then have no chance against the Franco-Russian alliance, the country had to attack. This essentially meant the adoption of the Schlieffen plan. He basically described the steps of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as self-defence, and interpreted the conflict that erupted as a local war (Tóth, 2009).

Sir Halford John Mackinder and Heartland Theory

Mahan's work undoubtedly had an impact on the emergence of further geopolitical theories, including Mackinder's "Pivot" concept, which later became known as the theory of the "Heartland". Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947) was a British geographer, politician, academic, founder of the Anglo-Saxon school of geopolitics, and one of the greatest figures in classical geopolitics, whose name is associated with such famous theories as the Pivot Area, the Heartland, the Midland Ocean, and Lenaland. In addition to being considered by many to be the father of geopolitics, his theories about the significance of Eurasia served as an important basis for post-World War II geostrategic thinking and power politics.

Mackinder gave a famous speech entitled "*The Geographical Pivot of History*" to the audience of the Royal Geographical Society on 25 January 1904. In his presentation, he

⁹ After 1910, Mahan believed that Germany could overtake the United States in the area of modern battle-ships (dreadnoughts) within a few years. And with this superiority, it could then set foot in Central and South America, regardless of the Monroe principle.

concluded that the 400-year-old Columbian era was over, and had been replaced by a post-Columbian era, characterized by the fact that the time of geographical discoveries was over, and a new closed international system was evolving in which individual great powers were able to gain benefits only to the detriment of each other (a zero-sum game).¹⁰ Mackinder did not deny Mahan's theory of the importance of naval power, but, in analysing historical events, he thought that in the new age "*the relationship between space and time had changed as a result of technical and technological development*" and the revolution in transport and transportation had also transformed the relationship between land powers and maritime powers (Szilágyi, 2011). As a result, land powers, above all Russia and Germany, had become more important than before, and the supremacy of sea powers was no longer self-evident.¹¹ Mobility, formerly the prerogative of naval fleets, had now become available to the continental empires through railways:

But trans-continental railways are now transmuting the conditions of land-power, and nowhere can they have such effect as in the closed heart-land of Euro-Asia, in vast areas of which neither timber nor accessible stone was available for road-making (Mackinder, 1904, p. 434).

The territory of the steppe, inhabited by former nomads, had now once again become a pivot region of world politics, inaccessible to maritime powers:

Russia replaces the Mongol Empire... In the world at large she occupies the central strategical position held by Germany in Europe. She can strike on all sides and be struck from all sides, save the north. The full development of her modern railway mobility is merely a matter of time. Nor is it likely that any possible social revolution will alter her essential relations to the great geographical limits of her existence. (Mackinder, 1904, p. 436).

The inner and outer crescents were located outside the pivot area:

Outside the pivot area, in a great inner crescent, are Germany, Austria, Turkey, India, and China, and in an outer crescent, Britain, South Africa, Australia, the United States, Canada, and Japan. In the present condition of the balance of power, the pivot state, Russia, is not equivalent to the peripheral states, and there

¹⁰ In the new closed international system, for the first time, the great powers had the opportunity to gain dominion over the whole world (Sloan 25).

¹¹ Mackinder formulated his conclusions taking into account the interests of the British Empire and the global balance of power.

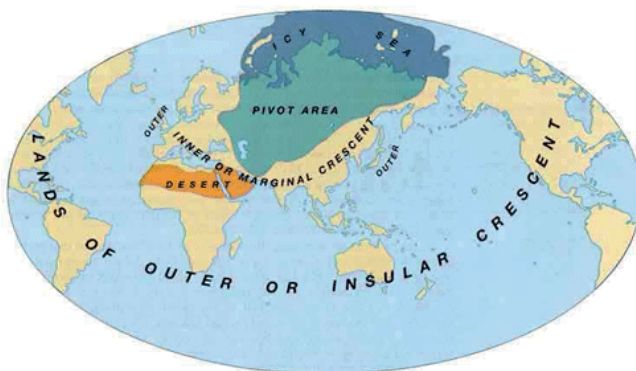
is room for an equipoise in France. The United States has recently become an eastern power, affecting the European balance not directly, but through Russia, and she will construct the Panama canal to make her Mississippi and Atlantic resources available in the Pacific. From this point of view the real divide between east and west is to be found in the Atlantic Ocean (Mackinder, 1904, p. 436).

The biggest threat, in Mackinder's view, would be an upset of the balance of power and for Russia to extend its influence to territories in the periphery, which could result in Russia's embarking on huge fleet construction. An even more alarming prospect would be for the tsar to enter into an alliance with the German emperor, since then German technical superiority, supplemented by Russian demographic advantages, would fundamentally upset the global balance of power, which could only be prevented by a British-French alliance (Heffernan, 2000). Mackinder, on the other hand, emphasized from the scientist's point of view that

[t]he actual balance of political power at any given time is, of course, the product, on the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment, and organization of the competing peoples.

In other words, if Russia weakened, then Germany, or even another power, could seek to occupy the pivot area (Mackinder, 1904, p. 437).

Map 1: Mackinder's Heartland theory



(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=mackinder+heartland&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go&ns0=1&ns6=1&ns12=1&ns14=1&ns100=1&ns106=1#/media/File:Map_Geopolitic_Mackinder.gif)

After the end of World War I, Mackinder modified his earlier views, which were finally embodied in a work entitled *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, published in 1919. After World War I, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Turkish Empire, the collapse of Germany, and the Bolshevik takeover of power in Russia completely changed international relations, thus giving Eastern Europe an important role. In Mackinder's perception, the former pivot area had expanded and was renamed the Heartland:

The Heartland, for the purposes of strategical thinking, includes the Baltic Sea, the navigable Middle and Lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet, and Mongolia. Within it, therefore, were Brandenburg-Prussia and Austria-Hungary, as well as Russia – a vast triple base of man-power, which was lacking to the horse-riders of history. The Heartland is the region to which, under modern conditions, sea-power can be refused access, though the western part of it lies without the region of Arctic and Continental drainage. There is one striking physical circumstance which knits it graphically together; the whole of it, even to the brink of the Persian Mountains overlooking torrid Mesopotamia, lies under snow in the winter time. (Mackinder, 1919, p. 141).

Mackinder considered the Heartland to be part of the World island, which also included the Eurasian continent and Africa, and the western border of Eurasia was the Sahara rather than the Mediterranean Sea region.

There is one ocean covering nine twelfths of the globe; there is one continent – The World Island – covering two twelfths of the globe; and there are many smaller islands, whereof North America and South America are, for effective purposes, two, which together cover the remaining one twelfths. (Mackinder, 1919, p. 146).

The Monsoon Coastland, which includes China, India, and Southeast Asia, is located south of the Tibetan Plateau, and the European Coastland is located on the western border of Europe. On the edge of the World Island, Germany, Austria, Turkey, and India form the inner or marginal crescent, while the British Islands, Japan, South Africa, America, and Australasia form the outer or insular crescent.

As the Baltic Sea may be closed by the continental power, he also considered its basin to be part of the Heartland. That the borders of Eastern Europe had been shifted towards the west is indicated by the fact that Germany, which may be reappraised either as an Eastern or as a Western power, tried to expand its influence to that region in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the First World War – thus the Brit-

ish and their allies had to work to prevent German dominance in the region (Parker, 2015). But Mackinder continued to reckon with the possibility of a German-Russian alliance, which is why he suggested to the Western allies that they create buffer states in Central and Eastern Europe that could form a separate pole against German and Russian expansion.¹² According to Mackinder, having Eastern Europe (a strategic addition) would also be crucial to gaining control of the Heartland – therefore, as his famous thesis claims, “*Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World*” (Mackinder, 1919, p. 194).

Mackinder’s views changed again over the next 20 years, as a result of changes in international relations. In July 1943, the journal *Foreign Affairs* published a piece of his writing called *The Round World and the Winning of the Peace*, which examined the features of the new world order after World War II. Rejecting his earlier theory, he now believed that domination over the Heartland was not the same as domination over the World Island, but at the same time he insisted that “*the concept of my Heartland [...] I have no hesitation in saying is more valid and useful today than it was either twenty or forty years ago*” (Mackinder 1943, p. 603). The concept of the Heartland itself also changed, which Mackinder identified at that time in the following way:

The Heartland is the northern part of and the interior of Euro-Asia. It extends from the Arctic coast down to the central deserts, and has as its western limits the broad isthmus between the Baltic and Black Seas. The concept does not admit of precise definition on the map for the reason that it is based on four separate aspects of physical geography, which are reinforcing one another, [and] are not exactly coincident. (Mackinder, 1943, pp. 597-598).

His main idea, however, was that

...the territory of the U.S.S.R. is equivalent to the Heartland, except in one direction. In order to demarcate that exception – a great one – let us draw a direct line, some 5,500 miles long, westward from Bering strait to Rumania. Three thousand miles from Bering strait that line will cross the Yenisei river, flowing northward from the borders of Mongolia to the Arctic ocean...

¹² In order to preserve peace, Mackinder supported federal systems based on equal rights and federalist regimes, and attached great importance to the League of Nations, continuing the fight against Bolshevism, and a just settlement of the Eastern Question, which shows that his realistic views are sometimes mixed with idealism.

and, according to Lenaland theory, “*Eastward of that great river lies a generally rugged country... this I shall call Lenaland, from its central feature, the great river Lena. This is not included in Heartland Russia*” (Mackinder, 1943, p. 598). In addition to being a strategically valuable core area, Lenaland is a resource-rich area whose ownership will bring significant benefits to the Soviet Union. According to Mackinder’s conclusion

...if the Soviet Union emerges from this war as a conqueror of Germany she must rank as the greatest land Power on the globe. Moreover, she will be the Power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth. For the first time in history it is manned by a garrison sufficient both in number and quality. (Mackinder, 1943, p. 601).

To counterbalance this centre of power, Mackinder envisioned the unification of naval powers, which meant the development of the Midland ocean theory. According to that theory, an alliance of Western Europe and North America – which anticipated later cooperation of NATO member states – would successfully hinder the expansion of the Soviet Union with its naval force, maintaining a balance of power (Sloan, 2003).

The impact of Mackinder’s geopolitical theories on posterity is not easy to summarize. According to István Szilágyi,

By examining and connecting three disciplines, geography, history, and international relations, and applying his interdisciplinary approach, he became one of the founders of the idea of the international system that developed after the Second World War (Szilágyi, 2018, p. 67).

As discussed later, his strategic concepts lost their significance in the twenty-first century, but they still significantly influence the geopolitical narratives of certain states.

Karl Ernst Haushofer: Theory of Lebensraum and Pan-Regions

Ratzel, Kjellén, Mahan, and Mackinder had a major impact on Karl Ernst Haushofer (1869-1946), the founder of the German school of geopolitics. The Major General and Professor of Geography gained important scientific merit primarily as a unifier of the social Darwinist trend and the geostrategic trend.¹³ He studied the relationship

¹³ Due to his connection to the Nazi leadership and the German strategy in World War II that distorted his theories, the geopolitics he represented became largely discredited after 1945.

between land power and sea power, not specifying their precedence; he put his theory of living space at the service of German imperial aspirations; and his pan-regional theory, which is built on Ratzel's concept of large states and Mackinder's Heartland theory, redefines the significance of Eurasia.

Haushofer's famous book, *Weltpolitik von Heute* (Geopolitics of Today), was published in 1931 and contains his main theoretical theorems, such as his attaching decisive importance for great powers to the extent of space controlled by a power, and the feasibility of economic self-sufficiency; therefore, with German prosperity in mind, he called for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles and the restoration of Germany's dominant position in Central Europe. Like Ratzel, he perceived boundaries as living organisms that are constantly changing, and he considered it a fundamental German interest to change boundaries that were considered unjust after 1919 (Petersen, 2011).

In a work entitled *Geopolitik der Pan-ideen* (Geopolitics of Pan-Ideas), published in 1931, he divided the world into four regions on the basis of living space, the pursuit of self-sufficiency, and influence as a world power. All of these regions meet the criteria of having sufficient resources, population, and a sea exit, which he claimed would ultimately lead to a balance between the great powers. Haushofer attached great importance to the struggle between the theories of pan regions, which takes the form of a struggle between the four leading powers, or regions of the world. In the Pan-American region, the United States is the leading power, and in the case of Pan-Europe, which includes Africa (Eurafrica), it is Germany. In the Pan-Russian region, leadership is concentrated in the hands of Russia, while in Panasia, it is concentrated in the hands of Japan. Peripheral satellite states are located next to each centre (Wong, 2018).

Like Mackinder, Haushofer considered the acquisition of the Heartland area to be essential, and for this he considered it necessary to build German dominance over Eastern Europe. A precondition for this was the creation of the Berlin-Rome axis, thus securing domination over Africa and the Mediterranean. Although this pan-region theory was also utilized by the Nazis during World War II, in reality Haushofer wanted to obtain living space, *Lebensraum*,¹⁴ less through military conquest than through alliances. An important part of this was the idea of a partnership with the Soviet Union.

Haushofer was also aware that the new world order could only be achieved against Great Britain and France, but he believed that the weakening of naval powers would provide an opportunity for the triumph of mainland Germany. In the Asia-Pacific region, he expected an outbreak of conflict between Russia, Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, and recommended that Germany support the latter power, as the fall of the British Empire could contribute to German dominance over Eurasia (Parker,

¹⁴ By *Lebensraum*, Haushofer meant the territory of Ukraine east of Central Europe and the Russian steppe.

2015). Subsequent interpretations questioned the reality of Haushofer's pan-region theory, as it would not have offered an actual strategic balance and it contradicted the classical Old World – New World geopolitical division of the world. Not incidentally, Haushofer himself was not unwaveringly convinced of his version of the truth – he considered addressing its feasibility to be an important issue for the future.

Nicholas J. Spykman and the thesis of the Rimland

Nicholas John Spykman (1893-1943), an American of Dutch descent and professor at Yale University, and one of the founders of the American school of realist foreign policy, is considered the “*godfather of containment*”. One of his most important works, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, was published in 1942. The basic idea of the work is that the role of individual states in the international order is decisively influenced by geographical factors, as these can be considered relatively permanent. As for federal systems and the balance of power, he believed that

[t]here are not many instances in history which show great and powerful states creating alliances and organizations to limit their own strength...The truth of the matter is that states are interested only in a balance which is in their favour. Not an equilibrium, but a generous margin is their objective.

Because of that,

[t]here is no possibility of action if one's strength is fully checked; there is a chance for a positive foreign policy only if there is a margin of force which can be freely used... The balance desired is the one which neutralizes other states, leaving the home state free to be the deciding force and the deciding voice. (Szilágyi, 1942, p. 23).

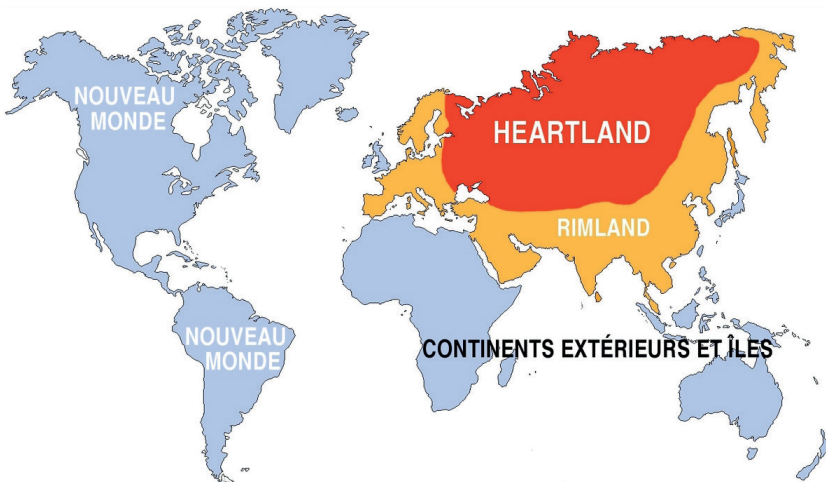
Spykman accepted Mackinder's thesis concerning the unity of the international system, and stressed that the post-war world would remain decentralized and the influence of the three zones of power (North America, Europe, and the Far East) would prevail.¹⁵ Rejecting isolationism, after the war he intended the USA to play an active role in peace and argued for creating a global balance of power led by the United States, which would include Germany, Japan, Russia, China, and Britain. He did not support

¹⁵ In his view, the Earth is made up of five island continents, of which Australia, Africa, and South America are in the Southern Hemisphere, while Eurasia and North America are in the Northern Hemisphere. The most favourable position is occupied by the latter.

the idea of European integration because, in his view, it would not serve the interests of the USA as it would weaken the latter's position in the Western world. However, he also rejected the creation of American-British hegemony, as it would provoke a counter-alliance of continental powers. A British-American coalition, however, would not be strong enough to rule the world and would even be defenceless against its opponents (Spykman, 1942).

Spykman's other major work, *The Geography of the Peace*, was published in 1944 and now included Rimland theory. Like Mackinder, Spykman divided the world into three parts: he retained the name Heartland for the Eurasian Central Region under Russian rule, but renamed the region Mackinder referred to as inner crescent to Rimland.¹⁶ The outer crescent was also renamed Offshore Islands and Continents. However, their strategic value had changed in line with the new world order. Although Spykman agreed with Mackinder that the Heartland was an unrivalled defensive fortress, he said it had already lost its importance due to its underdeveloped transportation infrastructure. In contrast, Rimland, which included the European coast, the Arabian-Middle Eastern desert, and the Asiatic monsoon lands, was claimed to act as an intermediate region; a buffer zone between continental and maritime powers.

Map 2: Spykman's Rimland Concept



(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?sort=relevance&search=spykman+rимland&title=Special:Search&profile=advanced&fulltext=1&advancedSearch-current=%7B%7D&ns0=1&ns6=1&ns12=1&ns14=1&ns100=1&ns106=1#/media/File:Ob_cf43ac_copy-of-spykman.jpg)

¹⁶ Spykman, unlike his predecessor, made a marked distinction between China and India

Having significant resources, these countries play a key role in maintaining continental power, making it more important for the naval powers to gain control over the Rimland.¹⁷ Therefore this changed Mackinder's thesis, according to Spykman, to "[w]ho controls the Rimland rules Eurasia, who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world" (Spykman, 1944, p. 43). In Spykman's view, the role of Eastern Europe had also decreased, while the importance of the European and Eurasian coasts had increased. Looking to the future, he anticipated the rise of Germany, India, and Japan from among the Rimland countries, while envisioning the advance of China as a dominant power in the Far East. Spykman's theory, together with that of George Kennan, was an important starting point for US containment policy during the Cold War, and the Rimland has not lost its significance since then, so his thoughts provide a lesson for geopoliticians and strategists even in the twenty-first century.

Some Other Classical Theories

Among the classical geopolitical thinkers, the views of Alexander de Seversky (1894-1974) and Roul Castex (1878-1968) about Eurasia are also worth reviewing. With the advent of an air force in the early twentieth century, the structure of power became three-dimensional. Among the air force theorists, Alexander de Seversky, a Russian-born aviation officer, engineer, inventor and businessman, stands out as a geopolitical thinker. His most important works are *Victory Through Air Power*, and *Key to Survival*, published in 1942 and 1950, respectively. According to Seversky, the strength of countries in the future will depend on their air force, and gaining control of airspace is paramount. In addition to the combined use of attack and defence, the civil sphere will also play a major role in future wars. With the interests of the USA in mind, he considered it necessary to use long-range bombers against the Soviet Union. He interpreted the clash of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres of the Old World and the New World as the struggle between the two powers for the control of "*the area of decision*" located in the Arctic region between zones of domination represented by US and Soviet airspace. In contrast to the importance of land and naval power, he emphasized the crucial role of the air force, while warning of the dominant role of northern Eurasia (Seversky, 1950). Although air power has now declined in importance, the region he called the area of decision is increasing in geostrategic importance as the Arctic ice melts.

The main work of French admiral Raoul Castex, a military theorist, is the five-volume *Théories stratégiques* (Strategic Theories), published between 1929 and 1935.

¹⁷ Spykman wrote more about the struggle between mixed sea power/land power alliances, rather than one between naval and continental powers (Mackinder), aimed at preventing the dominance of continental power over the Rimland.

Continuing with Mahan's idea, Castex argued in favour of involving a maritime connection, while reinterpreting the concepts of space and situation. The former was claimed to play a prominent role in defence, while the latter in expansion. Castex, who analysed the French colonial empire's geostrategic problems, developed the theory of geo-political blocking, the essence of which is that geographical location results in a geopolitical location that is advantageous to some states, known as a geo-blocking position. In the Eurasian region, Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, in particular, play a prominent role. Castex also predicted China's rise and its impending conflict with the West. As part his theory of continental subversive power, he primarily considered such countries to be subversive powers which threatened the balance of power in Europe, to be striving for hegemony, and having the appropriate demographic potential to conquer the continent. In the end, however, as a result of the unification of the naval powers, these countries would be defeated, one after the other, thus restoring the balance until another subversive power appeared on the scene (Szilágyi, 2018). Castex's ideas were deemed to be of major relevance during the Cold War in the shadow of the Soviet threat, but the above-mentioned concepts can still be considered relevant today.

The Classics and Eurasia in the twenty-first century

The findings of classical geopolitical theories on Eurasia are traceable, even after the turn of the millennium, in the works of contemporary geopoliticians, strategists, and analysts. This trend can also be observed in Europe, Russia, China, and even India, but the most prominent examples of this can clearly be found in the United States. Former secretary of state and national security adviser Henry Kissinger, using the views of Mackinder and Spykman after the Cold War, emphasized Russia's central role in Eurasia and considered the prevention of an alliance between Germany and Russia to be one of his main goals for the USA (Kissinger, 1994). Former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski also warned of the dominant role of the Eurasian meg-continent, and considered the main goal of US geostrategy to be preventing the unity of Eurasia, while he said that Europe, Russia, and China were the main players on the geostrategic chessboard (Brzezinski, 1997; Brzezinski 2000). In an article published in 2014, Walter Russell Mead wrote about the resurgence of the classical geopolitical struggle, and considered the unification of China, Russia, and Iran as particularly dangerous for the liberal world order and American power (Mead, 2014). One of the most prolific geopolitical experts, Colin Gray, who has written 30 books, also warns of the return of classical geopolitics, advising the USA to strike a balance between China and Russia as part of its Eurasian strategy (Gray, 2019). George Friedman, a political scientist and strategist, approaching events from an American perspective, reckons with the negative consequences of classical geopolitical rivalry in addition to

economic problems in relation to the crisis in Eurasia (Friedman, 2016). Regarding the new world order, many analysts – including bestselling author Robert D. Kaplan – discuss a new type of unity in Eurasia (thanks to China’s Belt and Road Initiative), while also identifying the dangers of the traditional geopolitical struggle (Kaplan, 2018). Of course, examples of the refutation of the above theories can also be found – suffice it to recall the thoughts of Princeton University professor John G. Ikenberry, who firmly rejects the return of classical geopolitics after the victory of the liberal world order, while considering the aspirations of China, Russia, and Iran as far from being a realistic source of danger to US interests (Ikenberry, 2014)

Conclusion

As discussed above, Eurasia occupies a central position in most classical geopolitical theories. Of course, theorists who perceive events differently have attributed varying degrees of importance to geography, space, the role of land, and continental power, while formulating different strategic goals in line with each nation’s foreign policy interests, although they have had similar views of the strategically most important region on the supercontinent. These theories have arisen in interaction with each other in space and time, thus influencing each other and determining the future development of geopolitics.

Although in the twenty-first century we find that the system of international relations has changed significantly, classical geopolitical theories are still of relevance today. Contemporary geopolitical theorists all return to the classics in some form, rejecting some of their theories, and further developing some others, thereby contributing to the birth of various national narratives. This is why the thoughts of Mackinder, Mahan, Haushofer, and Spykman have enormous lessons for us when we engage in a geopolitical study of Eurasia, and this statement is expected to remain true even for future generations.

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Envisioning an Empire: Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism as Geostrategic Culture

Nuno Morgado¹

Abstract

This chapter presents an overview of Neo-Eurasianism by testing the argument that Neo-Eurasianism is an *ideology* and a *geostrategic plan* of global dimensions. Ideologically, Neo-Eurasianism constitutes an amalgam of incoherent ideological streams that can be located in the leftist spectrum. Strategically, Neo-Eurasianism has the ambition of re-creating a Eurasian empire under Russian hegemony, with the final revolutionary mission of restructuring the entire international system. Whereas the official objective of Neo-Eurasianism is to produce a “*multipolar world*,” this research piece demonstrates that an oligarchic-global order is the real objective at stake. By shedding light upon the ideological and strategic aspects of Neo-Eurasianism, the chapter also explains the relations between Neo-Eurasianism and conceptions of Russian history, Christianity, Conservatism, and science (the geopolitical approach), having concluded that Neo-Eurasianism can be labeled an outcome of a revolutionary mentality.

Introduction

Neo-Eurasianism involves many facets. The Russian School of Geopolitics, the Fourth Political Theory, Theory of a Multipolar World, philosophy, totalitarian program – are some of these facets. This chapter, however, looks at Neo-Eurasianism exclusively as an *ideology* and a *strategic plan*. As it does so by looking at the subject through the lens of geopolitical studies, the realities of geography and identity consequently define its methodological range. In this context, the chapter finds its place in this book devoted to the study of the “*Rise of Eurasia*.”

The main objective of the chapter is to examine and sustain the argument that Neo-Eurasianism is not a geopolitical approach in the scientific sense, but an ideology

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and a geostrategic plan of global dimensions. To underpin this argument, the chapter is structured in three sections. The first section contextualizes Neo-Eurasianism, identifying it as a descendent of the Classical Eurasianists, and contrasts (Neo-)Eurasianist conceptions with two alternative conceptions of Russian history – Westernizers and Slavophiles. The second section sheds light upon some of the most relevant roots of Neo-Eurasianism, such as an imperialist and revolutionary mindset that twists Christianity, Conservatism, and geopolitical concepts in the name of strategic purposes. The third and last section discerns what those strategic purposes are by identifying the central mission of the Neo-Eurasianist ideology and strategic plan – the destruction of the “*unipolar world*” – by describing the objectives that converge in that mission – the creation of a multipolar world (explicit objective) and the subsequent idea that such a unipolar world is, actually, intended to build up an oligarchic-global order (deduced objective) – as well as by ascertaining the modalities of action required to reach those objectives – to accumulate the greatest number of enemies and opponents of the U.S.A, to work for Eurasian integration, and to encourage the foundation of “*great spaces*” and alliances between these and the Russian/Eurasian space.

The research questions “*what is Neo-Eurasianism?*” and “*what kind of world order directives does Neo-Eurasianism propose?*” (thus directly reacting to the research objective) are located on the general ground of neoclassical geopolitics and its theoretical principles as a theoretical-methodological approach (Morgado, 2020a, pp. 131-141). To answer the specific questions and to make observations about Neo-Eurasianism, the research uses a single case study operationalized, essentially, by controlled comparison in Section 1, thick description and analysis in Section 2, and a strategic planning framework in Section 3. Process tracing is also used. Among the most important operational concepts are ideology,² strategic culture,³ and strategic planning – the latter will be explained in Section 3.

Concerning the body of examined sources, the materials include books, articles, and scientific conference papers by recognized experts, having been selected through a monothematic guideline.

² Ideology refers to a set of logical ideas that aim to explain the world but, most of all, to change it in favor of the aspirations of a group, class, culture, state (Tannenwald, 2005, p. 15) – consequently, an ideology is normative, since it looks for a desirable dimension, i.e. *what should be*.

³ Strategic culture corresponds to “...*a set of inter-related beliefs, norms, and assumptions...*” that establish “...*what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices...*” (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 2016, p.67).

Conceptualizations of Russian History: Westernizers, Slavophiles, and “classical” Eurasianists. A Definition of Neo-Eurasianism.

Eurasianism can be perceived of as a conception of Russian history. For that reason, it is important to start with a resume of the main conceptions of Russian history: namely, of thinkers of the latter as Westernizers, Slavophiles, and Eurasianists. In the dialectic among those three conceptions, and by putting them under a comparative lens, one can better understand their main points and their influence – or lack thereof – on Neo-Eurasianism.

Westernizers

Pyotr Chaadaev (1793-1856) may be considered one of the first to have created one of the conceptions of Russian history addressed here.⁴ To Chaadaev, Russia suffered from a lack of History, meaning that Russia has made no contribution and undertaken no progressive thinking in the realm of universal values and the universal path. Furthermore, Russia lacked “*moral personality*” – Chaadaev argued (McNally & Tempest, 1991, pp. 21-22). This may be explained, among other reasons, by the fact that Russia essentially had no *Renaissance* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

As a partial solution to these flaws, Chaadaev advocated the rapprochement of Russia with the West and with the Catholic Church, to the detriment of the Orthodox Church. This was a primary mission, in his understanding. The West has a tradition of separation between the temporal and the spiritual powers, the application of which in Russia – to Chaadaev’s mind – was essential. All the same, it is substantially relevant to underline that the West that Chaadaev praised as worthy of being attached to was the West before the Protestant Reformation, and also before the French Revolution. That means that Chaadaev glorified Christendom and the *Ancien Régime*.

In the same way that Eurasianists would later oppose this pessimistic conception of Russian history and the normative goals thereby proposed, Neo-Eurasianists would also reject the ideas of the Westernizers.⁵

Slavophiles

A second conception of Russian history aggregates the Slavophiles. Advocates of this position were more heterogeneous than those of the Westernizers, and included diverse

⁴ To explore more about Chaadaev’s work *vide* Chaadaev (2020), McNally (1969), and McNally and Tempest (1991).

⁵ Yet, to Neo-Eurasianism the discussion occurs in the field of applied geopolitics, not the historical one. Dugin designated the Westernizers “*Atlantists*.”

thinkers such as Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-1860), Konstantin Aksakov (1817-1860), Ivan Aksakov (1823-1886), and Nikolay Danilevsky (1822-1885).

As common, transversal ideas, all the former authors mentioned that: (i) Westernizers had destroyed the Russian system (Peter the Great and Catherine the Great were accused of having damaged Russian history); (ii) the Tsar and autocratic rule were the best choices in terms of political structure for Russia; and (iii) all Slavophiles exalted “Russian rich culture” – i.e. ties with and heritage derived from Constantinople, connected naturally to what they called “*the true faith*” – the Orthodox Church [Православие].⁶

The idea that Russia preserved the legacy of the Emperor Justinian and the fusion between priesthood and imperial dignity may be accepted (Papkova, 2011). Nevertheless, that idea might only be applicable to a remote past, as after the existence of the atheistic Soviet Union perhaps the only core that would matter, with respect to the former heritage (from Constantinople to Moscow), would be the importance that the Bosphorus and Dardanelles strait have on the circulation of maritime Russian forces.

Among the Slavophiles, Danilevsky is particularly remarkable. He supported the contention that the “Russian peaceful character” (the purity and goodness of the Russian soul [народность]) was incompatible with the “*European aggressive character.*” Thus, he defended pan-Slavism materialized as a Slavic federation under Russian supremacy. In a stimulating exercise, Danilevsky tried to articulate a historical-cultural division of humankind using ten types of civilizations – an attempt that inevitably invites comparison to the thesis of Huntington’s “*Clash of Civilizations*” (2011).

In the end, to the Slavophiles, autocracy⁷ [Самодержавие] and orthodoxy [Православие] were the pillars of Russian history. Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891) tried to approximate Russia and Greece through the logic of Orthodoxy, proposing at the same time a rejection of the identification of Russia as a European country (Walicki, 1979). This idea positively moves within the Kremlin today, certainly caused by the influence of Neo-Eurasianism as a transfiguration of *classical* Eurasianism, as will be described next.

Classical Eurasianists

The third conception of Russian history would be the Eurasianist one.⁸ Laruelle wrote an excellent book about the historical and philosophical context of Eurasianism (2008).

⁶ For a basic reading about Slavophiles *vide* Copleston (2003).

⁷ To, for example, the Russian historian Nikolay Karamzin (1766-1826), autocracy was a necessity for Russia (Leatherbarrow & Derek Offord, 2010, p. 390).

⁸ For a basic reading about Eurasianism *vide* Shlapentokh (2007).

She described Eurasianism as a reaction of Russian expats to the October Revolution of 1917. Therefore, an intellectual product of a group of Russians who (albeit living in the West) refused the idea that Russia was a product of Western influence.⁹ Despite this, Laruelle assertively took notice of Western influence on (Neo-) Eurasianism; namely, through German philosophy (Laruelle, 2008, p. 31). In this way, Eurasianism was originally a movement that emerged from a context of crisis, in which disappointment with Russia was real, but, at the same time, in which genuine expectations about the future of Russia persisted.

In terms of the historical approach, Eurasianism pursued a particular perspective to understand Russian history (Laruelle, 2006a): (i) until 976, attempts to unite forest with steppe; (ii) from 976 to 1238, the struggle between forest and steppe; (iii) from 1238 to 1452, the victory of steppe over forest; (iv) from 1452 to 1696, the victory of forest over steppe; (v) from 1696 until now, the unification of forest and steppe. The connection between geography and history appeals to the roots of geopolitical reasoning. Two of the most well-known names in Eurasianism are certainly Prince N. Trubetzkoy (1890-1938) and Petr Savitsky (1895-1968).

Trubetzkoy, within the tradition of non-Western approaches (Schwarz, 2012), criticized Peter *the Great*, Catherine *the Great*, and the nineteenth-century Russian *Intelligentsia*, accusing them of structuring “*the artificial Russia*” (Trubetzkoy, 1991, p. 231). His preference was for Tatar power, which he identified as the vital element that shaped the Russian character.¹⁰ Trubetzkoy was totally persuaded, indeed, about the significance of Genghis Khan’s impact on Russia, in both cultural and (geo)political terms.¹¹ The point was that, to Trubetzkoy, Eurasia represented, geographically and anthropologically, an integral unity. Neo-Eurasianism continues directly with this line of reasoning.

Petr Savitsky agreed with these ideas as well. He created the notion of Russia as a “*specific geographic world*,” based on the “*geographical homogeneity*” of the country (fauna, flora, etc.) together with the racial mixture within the peoples of Eurasia (Laruelle, 2008, pp. 33-34).

In chronological terms, Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) represented the link between *classical* Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism.¹² His ideas of (i) opposition between Russia and Europe; (ii) a focus on Asian-Turkic peoples; (iii) determinism and Dar-

⁹ About this topic *vide* Chinyaeva (2001) and Vinkovetsky (1996).

¹⁰ Therefore, Trubetzkoy refused the idea that Russia was a continuation of Kievan Rus’ (Trubetzkoy, 1991, p.162).

¹¹ “[...] является неизбежным следствием исторической миссии России - государственной объединительницы Евразии, преемницы и наследницы Чингисхана” – transl. “[...] it is the inevitable consequence of the historic mission of Russia – a Eurasian unifying state, successor, and heir to Genghis Khan” (Trubetzkoy, 2020).

¹² For a basic reading about Gumilev *vide* Laruelle (2008, Chapter 2). For further information *vide* Gumilev (2020).

winism; (iv) Eurasia as a “totality”; (v) refusal to see Russia as extension of Kievan Rus’; (vi) and refusal of the universality of humankind, prolonged and strengthened the core(s) of *classical* Eurasianism and opened the space for the coming of a *Neo-Eurasianism*.

Despite this, it is also accurate to underline that Gumilev did not support all the ideas of *classical* Eurasianism. For example, he focused on biological determinism, rather than on geography or territory strictly, and he censured Islam. Amid the fact that (i) Gumilev enjoys the highest respect in Russia, thus there is little space for discussion (Laruelle, 2008, p. 51), and the fact that (ii) Neo-Eurasianism influences Russian politics, the widespread effects of both Eurasianist and Neo-Eurasianist phenomena in Russia – from philosophy and education to foreign policy conduct – may be deduced. If Gumilev paved the way to creating the influential position of Eurasianism in Russian politics, the idea that welds that influence and sits at its center is the idea of a *great space* as a single unit, an empire [Империя]. That idea is transversal to the Eurasianist conception as a whole – i.e., it also constitutes the foundations of Neo-Eurasianism as ideology, as will be explained.

Neo-Eurasianists

What exactly is *Neo-Eurasianism* about? The term “*Neo-Eurasianism*” can be used with multiple meanings: (i) as the “*Russian School of Geopolitics*” (based on the opposition Land vs. Sea, and the idea of Russia as Tellurocracy); (ii) as “*Fourth Political Theory*” (a “*Global Revolutionary Alliance*” or stance of “*Dissatisfied all over the world, unite!*” (Dugin, 2014a, pp.129-165)); (iii) as a “*Theory of the Multipolar World*” (global reaction against “*unipolar globalization*” [Dugin, 2014a, pp.42-45]); (iv) as “*Philosophy*” (structural analysis/hermeneutical tool) (Dugin, 2014a, pp.8-10); and (v) as a totalitarian political program (configuration of the structures of the state, along with the division [or concentration] of powers, economic and financial directives, social and religious aspects, etc.) (Dugin, 2001 and 2014a, pp. 59-70), among other meanings. From this point on, the profound complexity of the topic becomes evident. Therefore, in order to analyze Neo-Eurasianism (i.e. to decompose it into smaller parts for better understanding) the classification and justification of why Neo-Eurasianism is located under the umbrella of *ideology* should be accomplished.

The classification of Neo-Eurasianism as *ideology*, within the limits of the technical definition of the concept given in the introduction to this chapter, is supported by the following evidence: (i) Neo-Eurasianism constitutes a set of ideas that are aimed at changing the world, directly favoring a “*state*” – i.e., Russian *élites* (normativism); (ii) Neo-Eurasianism dissimulates reality, hiding elements important for the understanding of political reality (e.g. Dugin’s narrative about how “*capitalism*” ruined Russia in

the 1990s); and (iii) the crucial political and strategic step of Neo-Eurasianism is gathering the means of action to implement its ideas and reach its objectives. Besides this evidence, Dugin himself used the expression “*Eurasian ideology...*” (Dugin, 2014b, pp.37-38, 137, 163)¹³ countless times, or called upon his followers to action – “*...please join our Eurasian troops*” (Dugin, 2011) – leaving little space for doubt about this matter.

These facts help in perceiving Dugin as a political activist trying to shape politics, rather than a scientist. If this is so, Dugin can be seen as a sophist from the Aristotelian point of view. As once for the Ancient Greek sophists, also for Dugin: there is no essence of reality to be explored but only strategic objectives to be achieved. How to reach these objectives includes covering and mixing them with well-established geopolitical concepts and theories (as the research will investigate in Section 2), in a catch-all list of symbolic and rhetoric connections, which may impact the militant and the decision-maker, persuading them and moving them to action. When accused by Carvalho, his opponent in the academic debate *The U.S.A. and the New World Order*, of being a “*political agent*” instead of a “*scientific observer*” (Carvalho, 2011), Dugin called on Marx in his defense, stating that “*...ideology [is] the implicit basis for [...] science as such,*” adding that ideological neutrality is impossible (Dugin, 2011). This is the same as claiming that all human action is politically engaged action – the Marxist “*praxis,*” which makes no sense from a scientific point of view. Nevertheless, later in the debate, Dugin contradicted himself, affirming that at Moscow State University – when Dugin was still a professor there – he lectured impartially, not imposing his views on his students. How could Dugin have taught impartially if, as he claimed, “*neutrality is impossible*”?

If it is solidly established that Neo-Eurasianism is an ideology indeed, identifying the type of ideology Neo-Eurasianism is remains a challenging task. This chapter can only address the topic briefly, as the answer is highly complex and specifying the ideological nature of Neo-Eurasianism is not a priority for this study. It seems that Laruelle (2008, pp. 132,142) correctly identified Neo-Eurasianism as an intellectual phenomenon linked to the fascist ideology.¹⁴ However, a real problem exists *a priori* that perspective, taking into account the fact that fascism is a left-wing phenomenon, not a right-wing one.¹⁵ This problem continues with Umland, who has argued that Dugin is a far-right extremist (Umland, 2007) (Umland 2009; 2010). The idea

¹³ Even within the “*newly created*” Fourth Political Theory, which Dugin could have taken as a re-start of a serious theoretical approach, he insisted on using the term ideology again (Dugin, 2014, pp. 283-285).

¹⁴ Laruelle also quoted (2006b, p. 2) Eduard Limonov, who stated: “[Dugin is] “*the ‘Cyril and Methodius’ of fascism, since he brought Faith and knowledge about it to our country from the West.*”

¹⁵ Laruelle hit the target when she analyzed the position of Neo-Eurasianism with respect to political economy. She clearly pointed out that Dugin stands on the “*left*” (Laruelle, 2008, p.132).

of fascism as a “*right-wing ideology*” cannot, however, survive a logical test.¹⁶ To maintain distance from technical definitions and classifications, Dugin schematically talked about “*political theories*” [*sic*], stating that fascism has disappeared as an *ideology* – as he did in this interview (Nova Direita Cultural, 2012). On the other hand, Dugin mixed up conservatism with fascism (Dugin, 2014b, pp. 309-310), bogging down the discussion even further. Millerman pointed this out as well, although he did not accuse Dugin of this conflation, but blamed several researchers of Dugin for doing it (Millerman, 2020, pp. 5-6). Dugin spoke for himself: “*So we should strongly reject anticommunism as well as antifascism*” (Dugin, 2011), which is pretty much an anti-conservative position. Furthermore, there are other pieces of evidence to sustain the view that Dugin may be located on the leftist spectrum – as opposed to the right-wing conservative one.¹⁷ Within this frame of complexities, incoherence, and lack of unity, the researcher cannot consent to a strict identification of Dugin’s ideology with *socialism* and/or *fascism*. The amalgam of orthodox religion, Islam, communism, fascism, imperialism, esoterism, etc. does not result in any coherent ideology.¹⁸ In this way, locating Neo-Eurasianism on the ideological left seems to be the furthest this research can go in terms of ideological classification.

Two crucial results from this section must be underlined. The first: emphasis that it is the strategic purpose of seizing power and executing a political agenda that creates the unity of the Neo-Eurasianist project, whereas the ideological unity of the movement remains a secondary level of relevance.¹⁹ The second, note that if Neo-Eurasianism is classified as *ideology*, then the incompatibility of Neo-Eurasianism with

¹⁶ In any circumstances, revolution, statism, the eradication of social classes (egalitarianism), collectivism, anti-religious perspectives, progress, the creation of the perfect society, the renovation of Man, totalitarianism or control of the individual in all aspects of life (economy, culture, thinking, etc.), and in order to do so creating a big bureaucracy and multiplying statist institutions (i.e. concentration of power) are some of the characteristics of the left-wing, thus, of fascism. *Vide* the classic readings of Gentile & Mussolini (2020) and Drieu la Rochelle (1934) for more detail. These directives are obviously located on the extreme opposite side of right-wing ideologies and their values, concepts, or directives (e.g. transcendent order, conservatism, tradition and custom, limited state, social independent organization, individual freedom, private property, defense of religious and patriotic values against any radical transformation). *Vide*, among many other sources of right-wing thought, Maistre (2007), Kirk (2001), Scruton (2006), Scruton (2014). Finally, I have also elaborated on fascism as left-wing ideology elsewhere (Morgado, 2020b).

¹⁷ Examples of Dugin’s socialist quotes. (1) Author’s translation from the French: “*The proletariat will wake up. It will rebel. It will kill. Neither the police nor the false socialists will be able to hold it back. Its [the proletariat’s] mission in History is not over yet*” (Douguine, 2016, p. 216). (2) “*In social politics, Eurasianism leans towards the Left, towards the socialist position. One can note Eurasianism’s kinship with socialism... I personally like socialism...*” (Dugin, 2014b, p. 178).

¹⁸ [The Fourth Political Theory is] “*the national-bolshevism that represents the socialism without materialism, atheism, progressism [sic] and Modernism and the Third way theories without racism and nationalism*” (Dugin, 2011).

¹⁹ A quote of Antonio Gramsci is in order: “*Comrade Lenin has taught us that in order to defeat our class enemy, who is strong, who has many means and reserves at his disposal, we must exploit every crack in his front and we must use every possible ally, even if he is uncertain, vacillating or provisional*” (Gramsci, 2008).

the geopolitical approach is established, in the scientific terms that the latter has been developed elsewhere (Morgado 2019) (Morgado 2020a).

The Roots of Neo-Eurasianism: Empire and Revolution. The twisting of Christianity, Conservatism, and Geopolitics.

As an ideological amalgam, Neo-Eurasianism uses all those ideas that can support its primary purpose of seizing and concentrating power. By doing so, it inevitably intensifies the incoherence within its texts. To understand Neo-Eurasianism holistically, a huge bibliography divided into many spheres must be covered: (1) Slavophilism (Kireevsky, Khomiakov, Konstantin Aksakov and Ivan Aksakov, plus Danilevsky); (2) classical Eurasianism (Trubetzkoy, Savitsky, Gumilev); (3) the idea of the “mission of Russia”; (4) Traditionalism (René Guénon [1886-1951]); (5) Marxism-Leninism (Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Gramsci); (6) neo-paganism disguised as “Christianity”; (7) Islamism; (8) occultism and Satanism; (9) the “*German conservative revolution*” tied in somehow with “Prussian socialism” (Arthur Moeller van den Bruck [1876–1925], Edgar Julius Jung [1894–1934], and Hermann Rauschning [1887–1982]); and (10) geopolitical concepts and theories (Mackinder, Haushofer, Spykman, Huntington). Among other trends, all these domains comprise a broad, deep, and complex system of connections, the analysis of which goes far beyond the objectives of this chapter. In fact, the chapter aims to highlight mainly geopolitical aspects – i.e. matters with direct consequences for international politics – corresponding to both the mentioned delimitation of the field of geopolitical studies and also the limits of this book’s collective subject, Eurasia.

From the enormous volume of influences that Neo-Eurasianism has received, what matters thus for this chapter are those directly connected to geopolitical studies: (i) the imperial tradition of Russia from the geohistorical point of view, which covers the geopolitical factors space, position, and politico-military structures; (ii) the Orthodox Church and (iii) the “*Revolution*,” in terms of the psychosocial projection on the territory and politico-military structures geopolitical factors; and (iv) the misuse of geopolitical concepts and theories, mainly attached to the geopolitical factors space, position, circulation, resources, and also psychosocial projection on the territory. After this assignment, the study can proceed to the next section, in which exactly how Neo-Eurasianism intends to change the World Order will be analyzed.

The imperial tradition of Russia (Империя)

From the geohistorical point of view, identification of this core has two main implications (1) territorial, and (2) political. First, territorial, because in this context the idea of Empire is associated with the purpose of geographical expansion and a mixture of peoples (such as the praise of Orthodox Slavic and Muslim Turkic peoples²⁰). Second, political, because it is linked to the traditional autocratic organization of power in Russia.²¹ It seems needless to insist that both ideas fully inspire Neo-Eurasianism, which aspires to restore/maintain them as strong as possible. In terms of territory, for example, the CIS countries are not considered sovereign states by Neo-Eurasianism, as they are treated under the label of the “*internal politics*” of Russia – i.e., the Eurasian Union (Douguine, 2006, p. 29). Neo-Eurasianism defends the existence of a unity of culture and a historical destiny shared by Russians and all peoples from the post-Soviet space, together with the glorification of national diversity. However, this involves a national diversity with no chance of autonomy for the regions – an appropriated perspective existing to sustain a geographical extension and autocratic form of government.²²

The idea of the “*mission of Russia*” is linked to the tradition of the Empire. From the heritage of the Eastern Roman Empire to the creation of Multipolarity and the destruction of Western supremacy, Neo-Eurasianism claims that Russia has a mission to fulfill (Dugin, 2014a). This would constitute part of the “*uniqueness of Russia*” – an idea yet difficult to support, since regarding the influence of Theories and Philosophy there is no “*uniqueness of Russia*” due to the fact that the ideas come mainly from the West, as mentioned above. With respect to crucial geopolitical concepts, one cannot find anything with greater relevance produced by Russia. Nevertheless, that does not prevent Dugin from affirming that Eurasianists (Trubetzkoy, Savitsky and others) fought against “*the West*” (Dugin, 2011), a claim hard to understand when taking into account that, after Russia was taken over by the communists in 1917, those individuals chose, in fact, to live in the West. In spite of these facts, Dugin has insisted on the distinctiveness of Russian civilization (Douguine, 2006, pp. 45-46), i.e. has promoted cultural relativism, and even the crossing of dangerous moral borders.²³ The bottom

²⁰ In racial terms, Dugin’s Eurasia should result from the mixture of “‘whites’ ‘with yellows’” (Laruelle, 2008, p. 129). In political reality, however, there is a large dissonance. For example, the current massive repression suffered by the Crimean Tatars undertaken by Russian authorities disproves Eurasian goals (Dorman, 2016).

²¹ It is pertinent to note that the idea of “*empire*” refers to the tradition in general, and not to the specific Russian Empire proclaimed by Peter the Great in 1721. In fact, the tsarist empire is somehow rejected by Neo-Eurasianism due to its “*Western ideology*.”

²² “*Russia is inconceivable without an Empire*” (Дугин, 2000, pp. 193-213) – vide also Chapter 3 and part 4.

²³ “*We are a divine nation. Even our Crime is incomparably superior to some other’s virtue*” stated Dugin on the website Open Revolt (2011).

line has always been the absolute rejection of the West – i.e. the proclamation of an eternal incompatibility between Russia and the West, although the vast majority of Neo-Eurasianist ideas (as well as technology in Russia) are imported from the West. The relevance of the influence of the south on Russian identity, and consequently on Neo-Eurasianism, is covered in the next subsection.

The Russian Orthodox Church

Associated with the tradition of Imperial Russia (Империя) and with the history of the Orthodox Church and the notion of a “*heritage from the south*” – i.e. from Byzantium-Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire – is the myth of the “*Third Rome*.”²⁴ Although this is a highly controversial topic (after all, why could not the *capital* of the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nations have received the *grace* of being the Third Rome?), this myth continues, even today, to fuel the eastern custom of the amalgamation of the political with the spiritual sphere. An amalgamation that Neo-Eurasianism captures and twists for its purposes. In fact, Milhazes, a Portuguese journalist who is a specialist in Russian studies, has talked about a fusion of Politics and the Orthodox Church in Russia, affirming that Patriarch Kirill is one of Putin’s political hands (Milhazes, 2014)²⁵.

While to Slavophiles inspired by the “*heritage from the south*” the capital of Russia should be in Constantinople (Tzargrad), for Dugin the capital should be in Kazan instead, in line with classical Eurasianism and its direction towards the East (Dugin, 2020a). Despite the differences, in both cases of Slavophiles and (Neo-)Eurasianists exists the same inherent notion of a “*mission of Russia*.” This “*mission of Russia*” is a true core for Neo-Eurasianism. Using esoteric and metaphysical dimensions and references, Dugin has proclaimed that Russia has a mission to liberate peoples from the tyranny of the materialist West, promoting religious freedom.²⁶ The kind of “*Christianity*” that Dugin defends will be analyzed immediately below. Before that, however, Parvulesco constitutes an inescapable source on the topic of the “*mission*

²⁴ Among many other sources, *vide* Parry et al. (2001).

²⁵ Besides that reference, not only the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church with Russian politics *stricto sensu* are a key topic while studying Russian geopolitics – *vide* also Castex’s comments on Dostoyevsky (Castex, 1935, pp. 129-130) – but also the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy and the Russian secret services must be put under the spotlight. In this documentary (Arjakovsky, 2015), several scholars described and explained how the Russian Orthodox Church has been an instrument of the state since Stalin’s times. In this context, “the state” means the NKVD-KGB. Finally, Carvalho also argued that this state-of-things is extended to our days – i.e. that the Russian Orthodox Church is still used as instrument by the Russian intelligence community – *vide* Morgado (2017, part V).

²⁶ *The “Holy Russia” and the defense of Christian and family values. Vide* Vaissié (2016).

of Russia.”²⁷ To Parvulesco – who was very much aware of the matter of the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary by the Pope with all the bishops (Parvulesco, 2005, pp. 183-184), as was requested by Our Lady in Fatima in 1917 and later in Tuy – the Eurasianist project already represents the *Church of the End, the Kingdom of Mary* (Parvulesco, 2005, pp. 191-192). Therefore, one infers from Parvulesco’s pages that the consecration is already accomplished – something that does not correspond to the facts.²⁸ Parvulesco’s misguided viewpoint that the consecration is, indeed, accomplished appeared explicitly in his book to justify Russia as reborn, risen from the dead, a miracle, with a salvific mission (Parvulesco, 2005, p. 201).

In this context, the text continues to provide further empirical evidence of the manipulation of Christianity by Neo-Eurasianism. Dugin illustrated his *Christianity* in symbols: the Cross, together with the Sickle and the Hammer, “*all crowned with the Eternal Swastika*” (Douguine, 2006, p. 147). It is then reasonable to ask what kind of “*Christianity*” joins the Communist symbol and a symbol used by the Nazis with the Cross of Jesus Christ as the sign of salvation?

Moreover, Dugin has criticized the (*Modern and*) *Post-modern* West, but inconsistently appeals to (post-)structuralism (Dugin, 2011), a stream that includes post-modernism. It is then also reasonable to ask what kind of Christianity can accept perspectives that completely refuse the ontological argument that Reality was created by God at the beginning of times. The conclusion is then inescapable: there can be no compatibility between Neo-Eurasianism and Christianity; i.e. between a call for post-structuralism and the universal revealed Truth to which one’s soul and mind must adhere; a revealed Truth expressed in the Christian doctrine but most of all materialized in direct trust in the person-God Jesus Christ (and a special confidence in the Virgin Mary and the Saints for the Catholics and those of Orthodox faith).

Insisting on the matter of Dugin’s public defense of a false Christianity, one can refer to some ideas from an Orthodox Church report on Dugin.²⁹ Hence, it is not surprising

²⁷ Parvulesco was a friend of Dugin’s and a strong collaborator on the Eurasian Project. He repeatedly quoted Dugin in his book, and Dugin admitted a friendship relation with Parvulesco and mentioned him several times in his writings. For example, Dugin (2014b, p. 140) and a full section devoted to Parvulesco in Dugin’s *Foundations of Geopolitics*, Chapter 5, Part 2.

²⁸ About the request for the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary *vide* the “Text on the Request for the Consecration of Russia” (Irmã Lúcia, 2007, pp. 195-196). The consecration of Russia is not accomplished yet, Catholic authorities have been insisting. For a compilation of sources *vide* Morgado (2017, p. 132).

²⁹ (i) Dugin claims to be a disciple of René Guénon, who converted to Islam, thus Dugin is much closer to Islamic spheres than to the Orthodox Church; (ii) Dugin’s ideas of the *absolute* and *gnosticism* are visibly neo-pagan ideas, especially, while arguing that the “*Christianization of Russia enforced the pre-Christian native faith*”; (iii) Dugin’s comments to Nicean Credo made him fall in heresy; (iv) Dugin’s comments on the Holy Trinity made him a blasphemer; (v) Dugin dismissed Aleister Crowley’s Satanism; (vi) at the end the document concludes that Dugin ignores Orthodox true doctrine (Миссионерский отдел Московского Патриархата Русской Православной Церкви, 2002).

that Dugin divided Christianity into “*Atlanticist Christianity*” (Catholics, Protestants) and “*Eurasian Christianity*” (Orthodox). This perspective also demonstrated either a total incapacity of understanding the universal roots of Christianity, or the conscious twisting and submission of faith to strategic goals. In the next subsection the texts proceed to an analysis of the Neo-Eurasianist commitment to conservative values.

Conservatism vs. Revolution

The objective of this subsection is to concisely assess Dugin’s “*defense*” of conservatism. The research has already given hints and presented empirical evidence to sustain the argument that Dugin is aligned with radical socialism and/or fascism. Consequently, Dugin can be perceived as a revolutionary, which is the obverse of a conservative. The relevance of this exercise to the chapter is justified by the fact that the use of “*conservatism*” helps Dugin to shape a strategic movement that portrays a catch-all face to conservatives in order to stimulate them to eventually gather in support of Dugin’s movement. A final impact on the object of geopolitical studies is also at stake, since Dugin presents a project with the goal of re-structuring the entire international chessboard.

Neo-Eurasianism is revolutionary because it offers a totalitarian plan – meaning that it comprises a full program for the administrative system (federative), for demography (an increase in the “*Eurasian population*”), for education (indoctrination in Eurasianist principles), for information (total freedom of speech is rejected), for the economy (socialism), and of course, for the supreme political system, which is above everything else and controls everything else. After evaluating this program, the promises of freedom for society – namely, religious freedom (Dugin’s “*Christianity*” has already been dissected above) – seem fake. In addition, it is of note to remind the reader that National Bolshevism, which agglomerates the very foundations of Dugin’s political proposals, is a revolutionary ideology too.

In a book, Sedgwick tried to include Neo-Eurasianism within a “*traditionalist*” approach, in the sense of being “*against modernity*” (Sedgwick, 2004). This exercise was strongly criticized by scholars. In fact, it is impossible to accurately perceive Dugin as a conservative, also because he himself admitted to being “*partly post-modern*.” Any compatibility between conservatism and postmodernism is hard to infer. Dugin correctly defined conservatism as “*a positive attitude towards historical tradition*” (Dugin, 2014b, p.145). However, which traditions does he defend? If it is “*revolutionary tradition*,” this cannot be definitely regarded as a part of conservatism. Dugin has insisted on the “*Conservative Revolution*.”³⁰ However, those terms create a paradox,

³⁰ A label that incorrectly tries to gather many and different authors such as those mentioned, plus Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), Werner Sombart (1863–1941), Othmar Spann (1878–1950), Friedrich Hielscher (1902–1990), Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967).

since conservatism cannot be revolutionary. In fact, that controversial label joins *de facto* socialists – such as Werner Sombart or Ernst Niekisch – with anti-nazi conservative paladins – such as Ernst Jünger and Friedrich Hielscher. Consequently, that label does not seem convincing. Due to all the arguments presented until this point, Millerman’s study (2020) on Dugin as a conservative can be considered misguided.

The research has built the argument that confusing and contradictory ideas make up part of Neo-Eurasianist rethoric. As if this were not enough, Dugin has penetrated the domains of esoterism, and mysticism.³¹ The influence of René Guénon is the central topic here. However, there is no space in this chapter to analyze that matter. What is crucial, instead, are the connections that Dugin elaborated between mysticism and his attempt at a “*geopolitical approach*.”³² An attachment of geopolitical terms to religious terms (Douguine, 2006, p. 38) (“*sacred geography*” [Douguine, 2006, p. 105] and “sacred North, sacred South” [Douguine, 2006, p.114]), and the analysis of politics with mystical tirades (Dugin, 2014b, p. 130), are just some of the most disturbing points that may be mentioned. This latter aspect received major help from Parvulesco too (“*transcendental geopolitics*,” “*Vladimir Putin the predestined*” – and even making analogies between Putin and Jesus Christ [*Christos Pantokrator*] [Parvulesco, 2005, pp. 10, 224, 433.]). It is useless to state that these pieces of literature have toxic consequences, taking into account that they are obstacles to a thoughtful attempt at delimiting geopolitical studies as a scientific approach. However, they may well function for the success of political and strategic purposes.³³

(Mis)Using concepts of classical geopolitics

The fourth and last root of Neo-Eurasianism – essential for contextualizing the scope of this study – is the misuse of geopolitical concepts. This subsection makes a contribution to strengthening the characterization of Neo-Eurasianism as ideology. Although Dugin claimed to be scientifically objective in his lectures at university, he dismissed the positivist approach and the scientific method as such (Dugin, 2011). Naturally, this also affected how Dugin dealt with the tools of geopolitical studies, as will be demonstrated.

³¹ “...*absolute revolt – spiritual (traditionalist) and social (socialist)*” (Dugin, 2011). Mystic approaches or objectives are incompatible with a scientific geopolitical study.

³² “...*our common victory over the Beast, american-atlantist-liberal-globalist-capitalist-Post-Modern Beast*” (Dugin, 2011).

³³ A note on the Revolutionary Mentality seems to be in order to close this topic. As stated elsewhere (Morgado, 2017, p. 305), in explaining Carvalho’s formulation the Revolutionary Mentality is characterized by: (a) a radical belief that an ideal better world is possible (radical transformation of the society); (b) “*a mechanism of retroactive justification*” (inversion of the notion of time); and (c) duplicity or multiplicity of justifications and tactics for the concentration of power in order to get to that “*better world*” (no limits on political action).

Dugin traced the origin of the modern Russian school of geopolitics to the 1980s (2014a, p. 24). Still, the “school” (i.e. Neo-Eurasianism) – with its roots in “*the Slavophiles, Eurasianists...*” among other mentioned influences – was truly established only after 1991 (Dugin, 2015, pp. 84-85). This means after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, it is believed that the simultaneity of these events was not a coincidence. In this way, it was not a coincidence either that Dugin compared the origins of the Russian School of Geopolitics with the German School of Geopolitics, both having appeared as reactions to the power contractions of their states, as politically engaged, and as violating Aristotle’s dualism between the observer and the agent. Thus, the premise that Dugin does not understand geopolitical studies as a scientific approach is truly convincing.

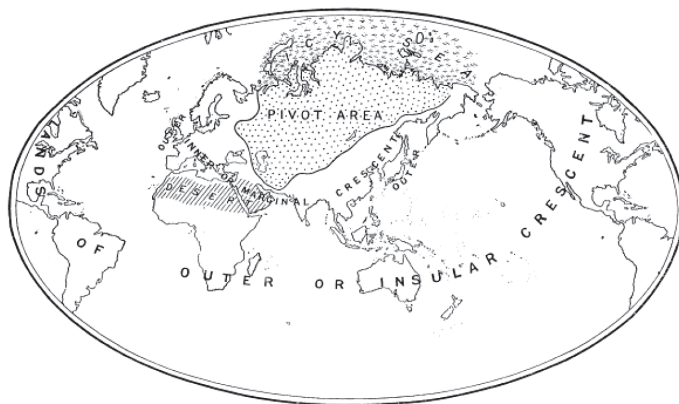
Although one of Dugin’s geopolitical benchmarks is that Russian geopolitics is impossible without the study of Russian society, Russian government, and Russian territory (Dugin, 2015, p. 1) (these are *de facto* geopolitical factors), the conflicting evidence that all geopolitical concepts were imported from the West remains.³⁴ The same West that Dugin claims to resist. Despite Dugin trying to link Neo-Eurasianism to classical Eurasianism as much as possible, the truth is that Neo-Eurasianism is the Russian product (in the Russian philosophical worldview) more influenced than perhaps anything else by Western ideas – with perhaps the exception of Petr Chaadaev. From the perspective of a real scientific study, this does not constitute a problem, as science has a universal methodology (which Dugin paradoxically denies). The problem lies, once again, with ideological and strategic directives that distort science for political and military purposes. In this context, Dugin has used the following geopolitical concepts and ideas: (1) Heartland; (2) Thalassopolitics and Telluropolitics (i.e. a “*clash of Sea vs. Land*”), and (3) Pan-Regions and Civilizations. The study will now address those three geopolitical concepts and subjects.

Mackinder’s Heartland concept is the pivotal concept in a theory that articulates a clash between “*Land*” on the one side and the “*Sea*” on the other (Mackinder, 1904). Looking at history through the lens of geography, Mackinder divided World History into three epochs – (i) Pre-Colombian; (ii) Colombian; and, (iii) Post-Colombian – and sustained that the “*Geographical Pivot of History*” or “*Pivot Area*” (later named “*Heartland*”) – an area impossible to access from the sea – is core to understanding the World’s power dynamics.³⁵

³⁴ “*We can accept them [Western geopolitical concepts] unreservedly*” (Dugin, 2015, p.3).

³⁵ *Ecce* Mackinder’s famous aphorism (Mackinder, 1919, p. 194):
“*Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;*
Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island (Eurasia);
Who rules the World-Island controls the World.”

Map 1: Mackinder's Heartland



(Source: Mackinder, 1904, p. 435)

Dugin grasped that these formulations are extremely useful and, consequently, that they must be taken as the common ground of Russian applied geopolitics. Therefore, Dugin established that Russia *is* the Heartland, Russia *is* a tellurocracy; i.e. a “*Civilization of Land*.”³⁶

As Mackinder was a representative of the sea power of that time – the British Empire – that was concerned with land power hegemony, Mackinder expressed the necessity of creating a *cordon sanitaire*, separating Germany from Russia – thus encouraging a proliferation of states from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. After World War I, that proliferation of Eastern European states was achieved, appearing on the map as the mentioned buffer zone between communist Russia and Weimar Germany.³⁷ Dugin had to invert the prescriptions – needless to state – since the ideological objectives were now Russian and not British. Yet Mackinder never offered a plan for World domination, as Dugin did. Mackinder only looked, *in extremis*, to contain a Land power from becoming a Sea power too.³⁸ While comparing this statement:

Pour nous l'Heartland, la “Terre du Milieu,” c'est le cœur de notre Empire, le centre de notre Grande Nation, le bloc continental Eurasiatique qui s'étend de l'atlantique au pacifique. (Douguine, 2006, p. 7) and Maps 2 and 1, one may infer that

³⁶ “...to acknowledge the essence of Russian history in the tellurocracy. The Russia is the Heartland, so Geopolitics-2 is the Russian cause. Thus, were laid the foundations of modern neo-Eurasianism” stated Dugin (2012).

An interesting topic of research is investigating how this assumption relates to the empirical evidence of Russian interest in the Arctic Ocean, and Russian naval doctrine in general.

³⁷ That buffer zone disappeared with the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

³⁸ That was the point of the Theory of Midland Ocean, a colligation of states [NATO] aimed at containing the continental [Soviet] bloc.

Dugin's ideological goals distort the borders of Mackinder's Heartland, revealing the clear expansionist purposes of Neo-Eurasianism.

Map 2: Dugin's Heartland



(Source: Дугин 2000, p. 17).

On this level, if Mackinder correctly identified the problematic objective of the Land power at stake constituting an extensive coastline and consequently becoming a Sea power too, *ergo*, the Russian geopolitical continuity of “expanding” to obtain access to warm seas is a problem to be analyzed. For example, Castex devoted all Part V of his Tome V to this problem: to the Russian struggle to get access to warm seas, identifying the geographical directions of that objective: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, through Persia, through India, and to the Far East (Castex, 1935, pp. 555-732). At this point, one is faced with a deep contradiction: if the Land power seeks to become Sea power, is it not logically compulsory that the clash Land *versus* Sea is provisory only, meaning that the clash needs necessarily to disappear at the moment that Land power becomes a Sea power as well?

A second set of concepts that Dugin takes from classical geopolitics to elaborate his ideas is the mentioned opposition between Land and Sea, between telluropolitics and thalassopolitics. In fact, one cannot understand Neo-Eurasianism if one ignores the *confrontation between maritime and territorial power* as a transversal element of the entire proposal of Dugin. As mentioned above, after identifying Russia with Tellurocracy and with the Heartland, Dugin moved to another premise: “...Russia is doomed conflict with the civilization of the Sea...” to (Dugin, 2015, p. 10).

The “civilization of the Sea” means the U.S.A. and its allies. Dugin distorted Mackinder, moving from an already controversial Land *versus* Sea opposition as “geopolitical dynamics” to drawing an incompatibility among land and sea “civilizations”

(Dugin, 2014b, p. 120). Apart from the fact that this approach overflows with determinism; and apart from the fact that all these arguments have ideological purposes, the approach itself is sometimes beyond logic and rationality. For example, Dugin's strange interpretations of history based on the clash Land vs. Sea (Dugin, 2019). The Manichean dualism Land vs. Sea is used by Dugin to divide everything: geopolitics, political systems, and military alliances *stricto sensu*, societies and nations, even religions, as mentioned. Dugin took a hypothesis of looking at geography through history, made it a universal truth, and then forced any aspect of reality to fit into that dualism. Dugin went as far as calling that dualism "... *the main geopolitical law...*" (Dugin, 2012).

Insisting on Mackinder's Land versus Sea opposition, Dugin made his argument labeling the West and the U.S.A. "thalassocracy," "Atlantists" ("*unipolarity-globalization-financial oligarchy-modernization-capitalism*"), and Eurasia, represented by Russia and China, as "*tellurocracy*" (militarism-sovereignty of state-traditional society[*crypto-socialism*]). While debating with Carvalho, Dugin had to react to Carvalho's hypothesis of a third globalist project identified as the Islamic bloc. In geographical terms, that globalist project would fit in Spykman's Rimland – "...*from the Maghreb through the Middle East to [...] Central Asia and further to Islamic societies of the Pacific.*" To adapt this new element raised by Carvalho to his dualism, Dugin stated that the Islamic bloc tends to incline towards Russia and China (Dugin, 2011). The conclusion is that Dugin's dualism always needed to prevail. Nonetheless, that idea of Islamic inclination towards Russia and China is extremely interesting taking into account (i) Carvalho's three globalist projects (Morgado, 2017), and (ii) the events of the Arab Spring, with the clear-cut efforts of President Obama's administration to destabilize and radicalize the area, promoting regimes and governments to oppose the U.S.A. and the West (e.g. Libya). Within the intricacies of Dugin's confusing arguments, the concept of Rimland becomes merely instrumental, while it seems that it should be the first line of importance. Without the Rimland concept, the explanation of (a) Russia's geopolitical continuity through obtaining access to open oceans, (b) the traditional interest of Russia in Constantinople (Castex, 1935, p. 144-145), (c) the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and (d) the events in eastern Ukraine, for example, remain incomplete.

In the mentioned group of geopolitical concepts and ideas, the third topic received notorious influence from both Haushofer and Huntington. Pan-regions – as well as the concept of *Großlebensformen* – were developed within the German School of Geopolitics. Dugin recaptured them with the "*four great spaces*" conception. However, perhaps the main prescription from Haushofer that Dugin seized for his purposes was an alliance between Germany and Russia, which not only eradicates Mackinder's buffer zone in Eastern Europe but also makes the German *Drang nach Osten* run up until its limits,

while joining the borders of the Russian lands. Concerning the notion of *Großlebensformen*, Dugin contended: “Geopolitically, Russia is something more than the Russian Federation in its current administrative borders [sic]” (Dugin, 2015, p. 11).

Consequently, it is not only the imperialistic goal of pursuing the inclusion of CIS countries that is perfectly identifiable – once more, expansionism connected to the traditional idea of Imperial Russia – but this purpose is also covered by the use of some aspects of Huntington’s thesis (2011).³⁹ Some aspects only indeed, because while the concept of “civilization” – great spaces with common cultural and religious bonds – serves Dugin, Western Civilization, as Huntington mapped it, would need to be broken up in Dugin’s project by separating Europe, or at least part of Europe (and Latin America) from North America. Dugin works to achieve that separation. Nevertheless, it is not simple to achieve this goal. The study of civilizations reveals that great political transformations, in terms of structure, do not happen by chance, and they are preceded by values and a certain culture. Examples of this can be found in the Empire of Alexander the Great and ancient Greek philosophy; in Feudalism and Papal supremacy; the solidification of European monarchies and the Renaissance movement; the French Revolution and *le siècle des Lumières*, etc.

Moving groups, peoples, and civilizations is part of the Neo-Eurasianist programed modalities of action. If Huntington predicted correctly that after the collapse of the Soviet Union Islam would become the biggest obstacle to the West, Huntington got it right in the sense that Dugin also wants to use Islam against the West. Russian-Iranian relations (with regard to the balance of powers and oil circulation in the region) are particularly significant in this maneuver.

In linking “civilization” with tellurocracy versus thalassocracy, Dugin has perceived Sea and Land as “geopolitical subjects” projected respectively on the West and the East. West and East are less seen as geographical locations than as “*blocs of civilizations*.” In this way, whereas to Dugin Land is hierarchy, order, the masculine principle, tradition; the West is chaos, dissolution, the feminine principle, and contemporaneity (Douguine, 2006, pp.172-173). Land is the civilization of socialism and the Sea is the civilization of liberalism (Douguine, 2006, p. 176).

³⁹ Brill paid significant attention to Huntington under a perspective of geocultural analysis, to conclude with criticism about monocausal analysis (Brill, 2008, p. 307).

Map 3: The West as target by Dugin



(Source: Дугин 2000, p. 217).

It seems important to repeat that this kind of generalization is not only abusive, at the least, but also becomes false. Dugin has put the focus on geography, on the geographical centrality of the Eurasian space, escaping from historical examination. In fact, while examining the history of Russia, either there was no “*state history*” (cf. Chaadaev), or there was loads of blood and piles of (millions of) murdered people (cf. Soviet History). To Dugin, it is better to ignore both of these for ideological reasons connected and committed to the success of the political project. Hence, Neo-Eurasianism represents an example of geography becoming an instrument of power in the worse forms denounced by *critical geopolitics* and, therefore, is something that *neoclassical geopolitics* must definitely exclude.

Analysis of the fundamental lines of Neo-Eurasianism as strategic plan (geostrategic and geoconjunctive)

After making the case and building the argument of Neo-Eurasianism as ideology, identifying its roots, providing evidence about how those roots have been distorted towards the primary goal of achieving power, the final research step of this chapter points out *what* Neo-Eurasianism presents as the “*ideal*” New World Order and *how* Neo-Eurasianism intends to implement the changes in order to reach that “*final stage*.”

It matters to underline, right from the beginning of this section, that the very first modality of action of Neo-Eurasianism as a strategic plan is to gather as much support as possible against the West and, most of all, against the U.S.A. (cf. Map 3). In this

way, Neo-Eurasianism fits perfectly into the domain of politics/ “*applied geopolitics*” – consequently, not into the scientific domain – since Neo-Eurasianism is characterized both as a geoconjunctive (as it aims to gather forces) and geostrategic (as it has a clearly defined enemy) plan (Morgado, 2017, pp. 48,54). Therefore, perceiving Neo-Eurasianism as a strategic plan, the research can decompose two phases of a strategic planning framework in Neo-Eurasianism. The first phase of strategic planning requires (1) analysis of the environment: (1.1) internal analysis; and, (1.2) external analysis. The second phase concerns (2) the formulation of the plan, which includes: (2.1) the definition of the mission; (2.2) the enumeration of objectives; (2.3) setting up modalities of action; and, (2.4) linking the plan to specific sectoral policies. These two phases can be clearly identified in Neo-Eurasianism, thus making it a strategic plan. The study will examine this matter in detail.⁴⁰

Phase 1 – Analysis of the environment according to Neo-Eurasianism

With respect to the analysis of (1.1) the internal environment, Dugin has been laconic. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Russia indeed has Great Power characteristics under the umbrella of geopolitical factors. It is the world's largest country in terms of land territory, an enormous energy power,⁴¹ has a relatively large population (roughly 144.5 million people), and had the eleventh largest GDP in 2018 (World Bank, 2020). Russia has great mineral wealth, which allows for the possibility of the reactivation of its military structures. Concerning the political structure, although including highly corrupt state agents (Transparency International, 2020), the Russian political structure is efficient in pursuing an assertive foreign policy, particularly towards the countries of the former Soviet space (e.g. CIS, CSTO, SCO, EEC, etc.). The fact that Russia holds a seat on the UN Security Council should also be remembered. Finally, the country has been at the top (#2) of the ranking of weaponry suppliers (Wezeman, 2020), and is ranked the second strongest military power in the World – a special reminder of its nuclear capabilities (Global FirePower, 2020).

Dugin has not analyzed or described these strengths (or weaknesses) in much detail. Instead, the analysis of (1.2) the external environment has absorbed much of Dugin's

⁴⁰ I have referred elsewhere (Morgado, 2017, p. 102) to the full methodological framework of the four phases of strategic planning: [i] analysis of the environment, [ii] formulation, [iii] operationalization, and [iv] evaluation and control. As stated, the latter two phases are not applied in this study.

⁴¹ Russia possesses one of world's most valuable mineral reserves, including major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, and other strategic minerals, reserves of rare earth elements, in addition to huge reserves of fresh water (e.g. Lake Baikal). Russia has the world's largest natural gas reserve, and the eighth largest crude oil reserve. Russia is second in the world in terms of gas production third as oil producer (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020).

efforts. In general, Dugin began his books, articles, interviews, conferences, and broadcasts by explaining his (and the Neo-Eurasianist) *Weltanschauung* built upon the following image – the U.S.A. (“*the American Empire*”) is collapsing, and the “*unipolar world*” will soon cease to exist. This “*American Empire*” or “*unipolarism*,” Dugin explained, comprises several dimensions: (1) as said, the World Order is unipolar and the U.S.A. is the core of this unipolarity; (2) this unipolarity is: (i) *geopolitical* – dominance of the globe by the U.S. imperialism that has established a “*kind of global dictatorship*”; (ii) *ideological* – “...based on Modernist and Post-Modernist values...”; and (iii) *spiritual* – it is “...*the kingdom of the Antichrist*” (Dugin, 2011). Consequently, Dugin calls it a “...*USA-centric global geopolitical field*...” that impacts several domains: (a) historically – the U.S. conception of Western civilization’s climax; (b) politically and ideologically – the spread of liberal democracy throughout the World; (c) economically – the U.S.A. expands its economy worldwide, uses military invasions to assist in that process, and that expansion is only limited by Chinese economic strength, and a monopoly on resources by Russia, Iran, and Venezuela (Dugin, 2011). In another source, Dugin further criticizes the West for: (i) anthropological individualism, (ii) a belief in progress, (iii) technological development, (iv) Euro-American centrism, (v) its free market economy, (vi) democracy as the rule of minorities (*sic*), (vii) the middle class as the only really existing social actor and universal norm, and (viii) one-world globalism (world citizenship) (Dugin, 2014b, p. 295). All these claims have been organized into a bloc of ideas to denounce the U.S.A.’s pursuit of “... *the promotion of ‘universal’ values reflecting the values of the Western world (liberal democracy, parliamentarism, free market, human rights and so on)*” (Dugin, 2011). *La haute bourgeoisie* is the dominant class, in this financial and industrial imperialism, imposing “...*a kind of ‘global imperial network’ operating on a planetary scale*” (Dugin, 2011). Finally, the U.S. maneuver towards “*world domination*” is accomplished at Russian expense (Dugin, 2014b, p.125) – this is a pivotal aspect.

Therefore, one arrives at Dugin’s picture of the World Order. To sum up: the West rules under U.S. command, and rules over a multitude of states – including Russia – that can barely resist this supremacy. The situation is thus unfair and should change as soon as possible, Dugin concludes. To cover all these assumptions with a “*scientific*” justification comes the misuse of the geopolitical approach (as explained above). In the pure Manichean division, Russia and its allies are identified with reactionary telluropolitics, and the U.S.A. and its allies, including NATO, with imperialist thalassopolitics. The highest respectability comes with Duginist moral standards: the West is “*evil*” and Eurasia is “*good*.”

Process tracing allows us to infer that Dugin’s analysis of the external environment, and his “*refusal of the West*,” as just mentioned, are mainly based on his repugnance of a single book: *The Open Society and Its Enemies* by Karl Popper. Dugin confirms this

(Douguine 2006, pp. 131-134; 2020b). Ignoring the fact that judging a whole civilization on a book only is nothing but a dishonest attitude (thus non-scientific), Dugin's biased perspective is moreover revealed in his recognizing an allegedly "*American imperialism*" (the free world, the crusade for democracy, Atlantic solidarity), but paying no attention to the opposing values that, also being part of the West, reject Dugin's picture. For example, aspects of Classic Greek philosophy, some Roman Law principles, Christianity itself; many political thinkers (e.g. de Maistre, Fortunato, Cortes, and Kirk), generals, philosophers; values expressed in all cultural dimensions, from architecture to music, painting, etc.

One of the biggest problems with Dugin's perspective lies in his definition of globalization. Dugin has confused his definitions, taking into account that he does not use an academic definition of "*unipolar world*" but uses the expression "*unipolar world*" to mean unilateralism in the sense that "*the U.S. does everything it wants.*" Hence, the intentions behind this attitude cannot be other than ideological. Furthermore, with the idea of supporting this hatred of the U.S.A., Dugin asked in the debate with Carvalho: "*But what about [the crimes of the] CIA, Bilderberg, Pentagon, neo-cons, PNAC, 'imperial grunts,' Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombing of Serbia?*" (Dugin, 2011).

To which Carvalho replied with simple statistics and geographical locations. First, statistics: "*between 1900 and 1987 the U.S.A. was directly or indirectly involved in 1,634,000 deaths (World Wars, Vietnam war, etc.)*," whilst between 1917 and 1987, 61,911,000 died in the USSR and between 1949 and 1987, 76,702,000 died in China.⁴² Second, location – whereas "*U.S. victims are spread over different military conflicts, the USSR and PRC murdered their own disarmed people*" (Carvalho, 2011).

After stating the core lines of Dugin's and the Neo-Eurasianist analysis of the environment, the point now is to proceed to *Phase 2*.

Phase 2 – Formulation of strategic plan according to Neo-Eurasianism

The formulation of a solid (2.1) mission guarantees the unity of the whole strategic plan. National survival, territorial integrity, and people's welfare represent the mission of the regular and efficient state. As for the official mission of Neo-Eurasianism, its supreme command can be recognized as the destruction of the "*unipolar world.*" Hypothetically, this mission should be accomplished through the creation of multipolarity – i.e. Russia is unable to create a unipolar order, and is unable to even sustain the

⁴² The data is from Rummel (1994). Updated on: <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>

old bipolar order, thus multipolarity is the only possible comfortable solution. Having presented his hatred for “*Roman-German Civilization*” and its “*universalism*” (Dugin, 2014a, p.18), Dugin recommends that Western hegemony must thus be exterminated. Dugin presented his “theses” interrelated with the mission as (Douguine, 2006, pp. 55-59): (a) the West needs to be saved; (b) Russia is a specific civilization that not only needs to be saved too, but also developed (against Americanization); (c) the Russian strategy should be strengthened (e.g. improving the Russian economy).

At this level appears the following doubt: is the destruction of the “unipolar World” the true Neo-Eurasianist mission, or does this mission embrace the destruction of the U.S.A. as a country too? KGB-trained scholar Panarin, also a proponent of a continental Eurasian bloc, formulated the hypothesis of the dismantling of the U.S.A., a prediction that was not confirmed by Panarin’s own deadline of 2010 (Scalea, 2009). However, the project (or aspiration) has not vanished, and neither was it repudiated.⁴³

Another doubt that should be raised within the delimitation of the Neo-Eurasianist mission (crystallized in H₂ and H₄ of a previous work [Morgado, 2017]) is the possibility that Neo-Eurasianism is chasing the goal of creating a gigantic New World Order that is not intended to be “*multipolar*” after all, but an oligarchic-global order. Therefore, an almost certain oligarchic-global order is at stake, because once the U.S.A. disappears from the rank of great powers, Russian-Chinese military power will truly rule the World. The expression “*Empire of the End*” (“*Empire Eurasiatique de la Fin*”), which *Parvulesco* used countless times, may allow one to deduce that the scenario of the “*oligarchic-global order*” is the one that prevails as the true goal of Neo-Eurasianism. In this way, Neo-Eurasianism would aim at replacing a supposed “*imperialism*” with a true imperialism. In the line of seeing Neo-Eurasianism as a globalist project, Laruelle also noted that whereas Dugin has insisted on the distinctiveness of “*Russian Civilization*,” he has not considered any incoherence between that assumption and the tactic of exporting the model to other areas of the World (Laruelle, 2008, p.120). Hence the model of resisting the “*American New World Order*” would rapidly become the “*Eurasian New World Order*,” as Neo-Eurasianism states that Eurasia’s concept corresponds to a global thought – thus is not only reserved to the Eurasian region. Hence Dugin’s interest in Brazil.

How is the Neo-Eurasianist mission divided? Certainly into (2.2) a list of objectives: (i) the official creation of “*multipolarity*” or great spaces within the international arena, which this study, based on all the above-mentioned premises, considers fake; the true objective being inferred as (ii) establishing Russia as major great power with

⁴³ The fact that Dugin keeps referring to the U.S.A. as *Carthago* might lead to the conclusion that the aim is, in fact, the annihilation of the U.S.A. Ancient Carthage was completely destroyed in 146 BC and its inhabitants were either killed or enslaved.

a very strong supremacy over the old Soviet space, to which is added a series of strong alliances with several countries – the mentioned oligarchic-global order.

The systematization of objective (i) follows the pattern of the official Neo-Eurasianist analysis of the environment, i.e. the foundations of the project are grounded on a rejection of Atlantism, NATO, and U.S.-led globalization. The main point is allegedly to raise a multipolar world of “*four great spaces*” headed by four director-states: Russia, Germany, Japan, and the U.S.A. Naturally, Russia would have the role of hegemonic power and have concrete plans for some countries (e.g. the secession of Turkey, Azerbaijan, or China and the absorption of Finland by Russia). The creation of this Multipolarity is based on a rejection of Universalism. That rejection of Universalism is consummated under – once again – ideological combat. While fighting for a “*multipolar world*” Dugin needs to reassure that hypothetically, those multipolar blocs will not have any superior moral authority over them. If in doing so Dugin needs to lay waste to the Ten Commandments (which in spite of having a Jewish-Christian origin are claimed to have ethical universal validity above everything else [including that of modern Western states]), Dugin does it without the slightest hesitation and with no bigger preoccupation.⁴⁴ Moreover, there is another major consequence, since while rejecting universalism, Dugin also throws away the scientific methodology that is universally recognized by academics. How Dugin affirms, at the same time, that he has pursued his research impartially and scientifically remains another contradiction in relation to the bulk of his views. Nonetheless, such contradictions do not disturb Dugin, and he marches towards a non-universalist Neo-Eurasian “*land patriotism*” (Douguine, 2006, p.19). The consequence of all these premises is evident: the focus falls less on creating the multipolar world than on creating a new post-soviet Eurasian bloc – the oligarchic-global order.⁴⁵

Whereas the mission and the objectives constitute the *what* is to be achieved, the (2.3) modalities of action compose the directives concerning *how* to accomplish the *what*. It has already been pointed out that gathering the greatest number of U.S. enemies and opponents is the Neo-Eurasianist main modality of action. Based on Leninist-Gramscian teachings, Dugin explains that he: “...*is radically against American hegemony and world domination. [He] [i]s against globalism and proposes the doctrine of multipolarity. [He] [i]s in favor of the common struggle of Russians, Muslims, Asians, and Latins against the countries of the Rich North*” (Dugin, 2011).

Movements against the U.S. world-leadership: (1) Global Caliphate and radical Islam; (2) neo-socialist movement (e.g. Venezuela, Bolivia, [Brazil]); Eurasian project, i.e. multipolarity “... *based on the principle of civilizations and great spaces*” (Dugin,

⁴⁴ *Vide* above the explanations about the understanding of Christianity by Dugin.

⁴⁵ In Dugin's own terms (2001): “*Eurasia as a planet.*”

2011). “...who challenge the present state of things – globalization and American imperialism are virtually friends and allies. Let our ideals be different but we have in common one very strong thing: the present reality that we hate” (Dugin, 2011).

Hence, a strong heterogeneity among numerous “*allies*” may be noted. The expression: Third Rome, Third Reich, Third International (Dugin, 2020b) may give a more precise idea of the incompatibility among the “*allies*” that are brought together solely on the grounds of a common hostility towards the U.S.A. and the West.

Dugin has presented modalities of action based on sophisticated techniques of subversion, destabilization, and disinformation masterminded by the Russian intelligence community (Morgado, 2017, pp. 308-335). In this sense, Dugin affirmed that only the army and the secret services possess a real sense of patriotism (Dugin, 2019). Dugin should certainly know that well, as his family origins have been linked to Russian *arcana imperii* for generations.⁴⁶ However, with regard to the armed forces, military operations play a relatively small role in Neo-Eurasianist modalities of action, while the use of resources (e.g. natural gas, and oil) is seen as a vital weapon for putting pressure on other states. In this respect, the modality of action should *in extremis* achieve the point of making all of Europe captive to Russian resources.

Hence, an aggressive and radical foreign policy conducted by secret services is the issue at stake, as a way of: (i) working for Eurasian integration; and (ii) encouraging the foundation of “*great spaces*” and alliances between them and Russia.

(i) Working for Eurasian integration is based, before anything else, on Russia’s position in the middle of the Eurasian land mass.⁴⁷ Russia should unify all “*Russian territories*” and find its true dimensions, Dugin assumed. It is interesting to note that the arguments for Eurasian integration are almost exclusively based on geography, thus employ an “*ahistorical discourse*” (Laruelle, 2008, p. 142). “*Almost,*” because of the preexisting revolutionary ideology. This ideological aspect calls upon the post-Soviet space to cooperate with Russia so that the U.S.A. and capitalism, thalassocracy, and the “*civilization of the Sea*” may be destroyed. In this sense, Neo-Eurasianism is a post-Soviet Russian expansionist ideology. In fact, the *Empire* [Империя] is one of the goals of Neo-Eurasianism⁴⁸ (cf. map 4). In a subchapter called “*The Three pillars of Putin,*” Dugin let the reader know that Neo-Eurasianism:

...is [about] the restoration of the Russian Empire and the USSR on new terms”;
that “the next necessary step is the abolition of the status of national republics”

⁴⁶ Dugin is a descendant of three generations of intelligence officers [KGB/GRU]. Some sources refer to the KGB and others the GRU, *vide* Douguine (2006, p. 11) and Grebennikova (n.d., p. 6).

⁴⁷ For a reading about Russia’s position from the geopolitical point of view, *vide* Romancov (2006).

⁴⁸ “*An Empire in Place of a National State*” (Dugin, 2014b, pp. 63-67).

(2014b, p.176); and that “Eurasianism contains answers to all questions: from housing and utilities reforms to healthcare. (2014b, p. 178).

As a result, it seems that there is little need to further discuss the imperialist objective and the totalitarian modality of action – they are clear and direct.

Map 4: Dugin's Eurasian Empire



(Source: Sykulsy 2013).

As Mahan taught, the economic strength of the naval powers is centered on their control of the oceans. Replying with Mackinder, Dugin reacted and proposed east-west and north-south land transport networks in Eurasia. Eurasia is not only composed of the whole former Soviet bloc (the exceptions are the Kuril Islands and Kaliningrad, which should be returned to Japan and Germany respectively, Dugin defended), but expansion, Dugin added, should comprise Manchuria, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia, as well as Orthodox countries in the Balkans (e.g. the integration of Moldova and Romania [Дугин, 2000, pp. 383-384]), and Central Asian countries, plus Ukraine and Belarus [Dugin, 2014a, pp. 51,53]).

Map 5: The western border of Dugin's Eurasia

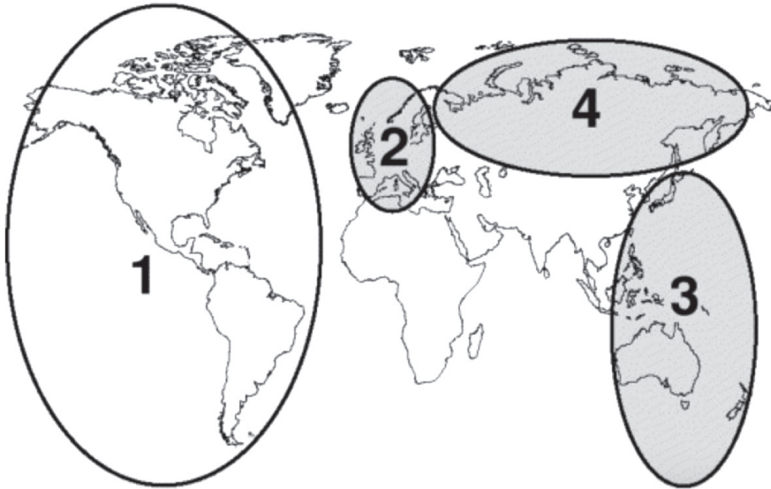


(Source: Ingram 2001).

In this context, the project of the Eurasian Union has been copying techniques from the European Union's integration process. However, and despite Dugin's statement that the EU is an integration success, Dugin did not present a Moscow-Brussels axis in Europe, but a Moscow-Berlin axis instead.

(ii) The foundation of "*great spaces*" and the bilateral alliances between them and Russia is another modality of action for Neo-Eurasianism. Counter to the basic fact that all peoples have their national interests, Dugin projected the construction of four "*great spaces*" (as once Haushofer's four pan-regions): (1) the American Continent (led by the U.S.A. [Monroe doctrine]); (2) Euro-Africa (headed by "*Central Europe*"); (3) a Russian Central-Asian zone (headed by Russia); and (4) a Pacific zone (headed by Japan) (Dugin, 2014a, pp. 47-49).

Map 6: Dugin's multipolar World Order (four zones)



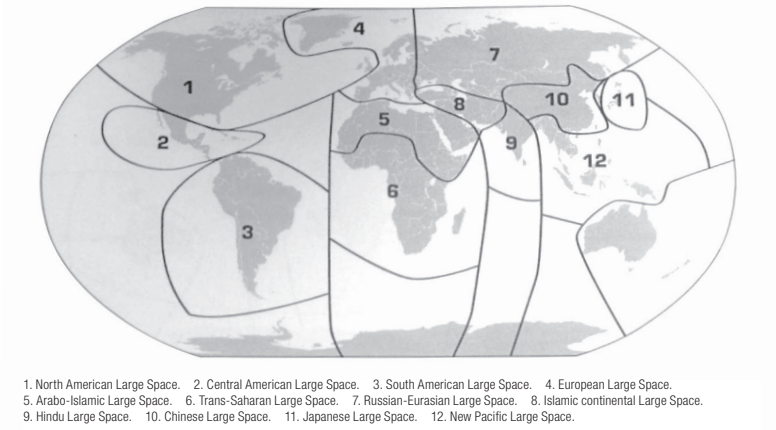
(Source: Ingram 2001).

Although Dugin has repeatedly referred to the Westphalian order, his idea of great spaces – borrowed from Ratzel, Haushofer, and Schmitt – is the antithesis of the Westphalian order, and the antithesis of the 1848 nation-state principle that largely triumphed in Europe after World War I.⁴⁹ To those four great spaces, Dugin added a series of blocs – for example, the European Union, Eurasian Union, Islamic Union, the South-American Union,⁵⁰ Chinese Union, the Indian Union, the Pan-Pacific Union, and the North-American great space, in which economic, military, and political partnership should prevail (Dugin, 2011; 2014a, p. 49).

⁴⁹ “Multipolarity does not coincide with the national model of world organization according to the logic of the Westphalian system” (Dugin, 2016a).

⁵⁰ The São Paulo Forum and the South American integration represent that political process (Morgado, 2017, pp. 254-282) (Morgado, 2018).

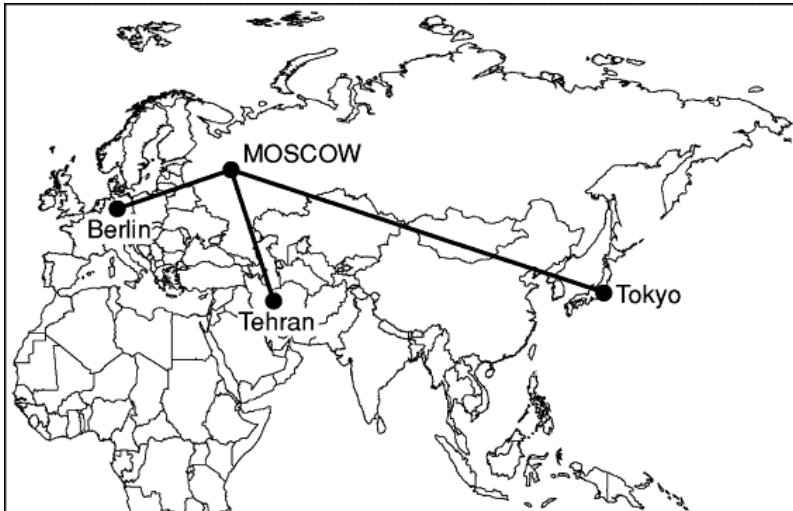
Map 7: Dugin's 'Multipolar World: Four Zones – Large Spaces'



(Source Dugin 2014a, p. 58).

Additionally, another core of the modality of action under study is comprised of the idea of establishing axes. Dugin presented three of them: the Moscow–Berlin Axis (Дугин, 2000, pp. 220-229), the Moscow–Tokyo Axis (Дугин, 2000, pp. 229-238), and the Moscow–Tehran Axis (Дугин, 2000, pp. 238-246).

Map 8: Three Axes



(Source Ingram 2001).

It is thus evident that the movement towards fulfilling the goal of obtaining access to warm waters endures. One of the greatest challenges to Russia is making an alliance with the Rimland states, or at least assuring their absolute neutrality. Building enough strength to face and defeat the U.S.A. requires the development of a powerful navy as well (Дугин, 2000, pp. 167-169, 174-175).

There are still some notes to make concerning Europe. First, the true center of gravity in world politics, wrote Parvulesco in 2005, is located in Europe, and relates to the revolutionary integration project between France and Germany (out of the European Union frame, noticeably) and its posterior liaison with Putin's Russia. In a sentence: a continental Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis against the U.S.A. (Parvulesco, 2005, p. 5-6, 217); i.e. a stable structure that could consolidate the short-lived opposition of the state leaders of France, Germany, and Russia to the War in Iraq led by the U.S.A. (Dugin, 2015, pp.109-111). Parvulesco further claimed that the whole project was already prepared for implementation in 2005. The only remaining puzzle piece that has been missing is "*the signal for the battle against the current élites*" in order to seize power (Parvulesco, 2005, p.245). Second, the mentioned Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis is to be a political, military, strategic, economic bloc, and, as explained, this continental bloc should be added to the Latin American and grand Japanese goals against the U.S.A. (Parvulesco, 2005, pp. 204-208). Ultimately, the priority of Neo-Eurasianism seems to be captivating Europe as a bloc to join Russia.⁵¹ Consequently, the scenario of the EU falling apart would damage the adhesion of Europe as a bloc to Russia.

⁵¹ Dugin's criticism of the U.S. General Breedlove, suggesting that it would be better for Europe to choose Russia instead of the USA provides confirming evidence (Dugin, 2016b).

Map 9: Moscow-Berlin-Paris axis



(Source Дугин 2000, p. 225).

Dugin's plans for both (i) Eurasian integration, and (ii) the foundation of "great spaces" and bilateral alliances include absorptions, disintegrations, and engagements. The paradigmatic case of absorption involves Finland, which Dugin aims to see integrated into Eurasia (Дугин, 2000, pp.316-318). Likewise, the countries between Germany and Russia would cease to represent a *cordon sanitaire* between the two "empires" (Дугин, 2000, pp.369-371). In respect of disintegration, Dugin expressed ideas about the "geopolitical decomposition of Ukraine" (Дугин, 2000, pp. 377-383). It is interesting to contrast the situation that, if, in philosophical terms, (Neo-)Eurasianism rejects the idea that Russia is the continuation of Kievan Rus' as a whole, in political terms, the consequence of this premise should be that Russia has little *philosophical legitimacy* to expand within the territory, and even less into the western part. Yet, as said, Neo-Eurasianism is a strategic plan, and not a scientific set of explanations.

Still within the disintegration pathway, China was also contemplated by Dugin's strategic plan. Dugin recognized a Chinese continental threat to Siberia (Douguine, 2006, p.27). With Russia's fragmentation, China would be in condition to occupy the Heart-

land, becoming a Land power and a Sea power, as Brazilian scholar Mello noted (1999, pp. 186-187). So, while stating that China has never been a threat to the U.S.A. in the Pacific Ocean (only Japan has), Parvulesco excluded China from the Eurasian project (2005, pp. 37,345-354). Like Dugin (Дугин, 2000, pp. 359-363), Parvulesco also admitted the fragmentation of the country. Parvulesco conceived of a dividing line creating two parts, with the Northern one being integrated into Eurasia (2005, p. 352).

After Moscow-Teheran, the Moscow-New Delhi axis is the most important axis of integration in the continental East, as Dugin informed us. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Dugin from planning the fragmentation of India into a new confederation (Dugin, 2014a, pp. 49-50) – mirroring intentions towards China.

Concerning fusions in the East, Afghanistan and Pakistan appear to be associated with the creation of an Islamic confederation loyal to Moscow and Teheran (Dugin, 2014a, p.49). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization plays a key role in this endeavor.

Still in the Islamic sphere, the Moscow-Ankara axis comes next. Turkey should engage with Russia and Iran, Dugin argued (Dugin, 2014a, p.50). Traditional Islam, Sufism, Shiism and Orthodox Christianity should join against Catholicism, Protestantism, and U.S.-sponsored radical Islamism (Laruelle, 2008, p. 118). *Ergo*, the importance of Iran and Syria for Russian foreign policy. In fact, if Dugin has been cautious dealing with Islamic threats inside Russia, he has not had any problem supporting more aggressive Islamist policies on the international chessboard – evidence of the revolutionary dialectics. The case of Dugin's support for Turkey, which has pursued dubious relations with the Islamic State, is paradigmatic.⁵²

As for other developing countries, Russia should stimulate integration projects among them under powers allied with Russia, Dugin clarified (Douguine, 2006, p. 28). Brazil and the South American integration fit into this puzzle. In the debate with Carvalho referred to earlier, Dugin compared Brazil to Russia as culturally mixed countries with a particular identity: “*metaphorically both are Eurasian countries*” Dugin declared. The objective is, unsurprisingly, to induce distancing in Brazil–U.S.

⁵² Dugin “supported rapprochement between Turkey and Russia and for that reason met with some of the Ergenekon suspects, Workers’ Party leader Doğu Perinçek and other Turkish nationalists included – because they supported the Eurasia idea and platform.” “They had an anti-American stance,” Dugin affirmed. “Anti-Americans want to ensure rapprochement between Turkey and Russia. In our meetings, they constantly mentioned their efforts to change the pro-Atlantic view prevalent in Turkey. Despite that, they did not have much information or knowledge about Russia. They simply wanted to secure support from countries other than the US. However, I have a broader vision of the Eurasian movement.” “I think that Turkey should be the most important strategic partner of Russia in the Middle East,” Dugin finalized (Akkan & Niyazbaev, 2008).

Furthermore, since the failed *coup* attempt on the 15 July 2016, Dugin has been even more strongly engaged with Turkish Eurasianists – supporting Erdogan’s purges, which opened space to be filled probably by Eurasianists – and urging Turkey to leave NATO and to approach Russia for military cooperation, which means a Moscow-Ankara Axis controlling the Black Sea (McKew, 2016) (Katchon Think Tank, 2016).

relations, which Dugin called “*independence*” (Dugin, 2011). Dugin’s premises about Brazil raise the question that if Brazil has a specific identity, as he assumed, how then can Brazil be merged in a South American *Großraum* without damaging the identity that Neo-Eurasianism declares it is aiming to protect? The answer seems to be sharp – that the priority is the construction of a South American greater space that can be instrumentalized by the Neo-Eurasianist strategic plan, towards the mission and the objectives duly identified, but certainly not towards supporting Brazil’s identity. In fact, Dugin prepared the mental terrain for planting his seeds (2011):

As far as I understand, Brazilian society and Brazilian culture are not fully Western and individualistic. (...) the main features of Brazilian cultural (critical) attitude towards USA. (...) Being critical in front of USA and the Western civilization as a whole, I find a lot of very charming (Eurasian) features in South and Central American societies.

“*It seems that Latin America is more and more inclined to choose the alternative, approaching the Eurasian and Arab camps (...)*” If more empirical evidence is needed, one has Dugin’s direct advice for “*the integration of Latin American countries into Central and South American Great Spaces...*” (2014a, p. 75).

Now bringing Parvulesco into the analysis again, as he also formulated plans concerning Latin America – which as Parvulesco called it, not incorrectly, *Roman America*. He specified that the region can be seen as a *gateway* [*tête de pont*] to the Eurasian Project and counter to the U.S.A., in the same way that China is a *gateway* to the *Great Eurasian continent* in favor of the U.S.A. (2005, p. 285). In this context, the *use* (in the Leninist-Gramscian sense) of South America by the Eurasian project is highly optimized by the South America integration maneuver. Parvulesco admitted this openly, revealing the unity in the Neo-Eurasianist modalities of action (2005, pp. 286-288). To this South American regional integration contribute a series of international organizations, among which the São Paulo Forum is certainly the most important (Morgado, 2017; 2018).

In summing up, Brazil has not been ignored by Neo-Eurasianism. Since at least 2011, Dugin has elaborated the importance of Brazil and South America in his strategic plans. As for the coherence of the approach, it is, again, limited. Whereas on the one hand Dugin promised a South America under U.S. control (Monroe doctrine) (cf. Map 6), on the other hand Dugin asserted that Brazilians should fight against the U.S.A. The explanation for this seems to be, once more, the revolutionary dialectics at work. Therefore, the tag Eurasian “*...temporary allies (Islamists, Latin American anti-colonialists, neo-socialists and ‘independentistas’ and so on)*” (Dugin, 2011) is a notorious milestone in the Neo-Eurasianist modalities of action towards its mission: the restructuring of the world order.

Phase 2 ends with (2.4) sectoral politics. Much could be explained at this level, but for the sake of brevity, only two aspects must be highlighted for their connection to geopolitical factors. First, Neo-Eurasianism, having the quality of a totalitarian ideology, provides a program for all human dimensions: from housing to health, passing by culture, religion, finance, and of course politics and economy. Second, the subject of police/the secret state service as the agent *par excellence* of Neo-Eurasianism. If doubts about the totalitarian and police-oppressive-state character of Neo-Eurasianism persist, Dugin's idea that the new Eurasian *élites* need to rotate from "*parallel hierarchies*" towards an *Oprichnina* (опричнина) – meaning to praise the formation of another secret service or a secret police body – may be borne in mind (Dugin, 2014b, pp. 183-187).

Conclusion

Based on the premises and tests herein, the research cannot but conclude that the original argument formulated in the introduction is valid and expresses the reality of the Neo-Eurasianist essence. Neo-Eurasianism does not constitute a geopolitical study that tries to explain political reality. It seeks, instead, to spread an ideological amalgam that, while using geopolitical concepts and methods, targets the shaping of a *New World Order*. That *New World Order* would naturally grant Russia a position of a major power, if not ideally the world power. Therefore, although Dugin elaborated his reasoning with geopolitical concepts and techniques, sometimes even quoting the results of accurate geopolitical studies, Dugin's approach has endured as non-scientific namely for two pivotal reasons: (a) through spreading ideological propaganda, Dugin is committed to political purposes, and (b) the mystical and eschatological dimension is far from verifiable using the scientific method. Concerning the issue (a), as Laruelle noted, to Dugin geopolitics needs to "*serve the state in which it is elaborated*" (Laruelle, 2008, p. 116). This is a major mistake in the context of geopolitical studies as a scientific discipline. In order to characterize a work as a geopolitical study, there can be no fundamental intent to shape politics. On the one hand there is the *scientific analysis* of political actions and, on the other, there is *ideology and propaganda* that has the objective of gathering forces or justifying political action. Ideology is incompatible with science. Science cannot hide arguments, thereby perverting the study of reality in the name of interests to be pursued. As Solovyev noted, Russian geopolitics is more a vocation than a science (2004). Finally, geopolitics as science must have a universal validity and not be confined to this or that state. Regarding the issue (b), by dissertating about the "*geopolitics of the Sacred*" any text loses scientific credibility. Dugin's anti-geopolitical approach also comprises the assumption of geography as a determinant. Geopolitical studies are grounded in possibilism. In addition, within the

environment of arts or poetry, the terms “*Eternal Rome*” and “*Eternal Carthago*” have their beauty. Manichean vision may, in those contexts, be admitted and appreciated. However, science does not admit these kinds of abusive considerations – even less an eschatological dimension, in which good and evil fight. Neo-Eurasianism shows, indeed, an apocalyptic face. Expressions such as “*l’Empire Eurasiatique de la Fin*” or “*Imperium Ultimium*” are jargon repeated numerous times – something that can be linked to the “*errors of Russia*” as predicted in Fátima. It is not a matter whether they are *true*, but the problem is, instead, the place and the milieu in which these sorts of considerations are included – the goals are ideological and strategic, as the chapter has demonstrated.

Hence, Dugin captured geopolitical concepts and doctrines, imposed them as a necessity, and created a strategic plan with clear objectives. The enemy was identified – the U.S.A. and the West – and the destruction of their “*hegemony*” in the World was crystallized as the mission. For Dugin, Russia’s security depends on the expansion of Russian borders towards the West and the South. Consequently, the main modality of action – a new global anti-U.S. (anti-West par extension) alliance – needs to help in that expansion too. Dugin accused the Americans of building a New World Order – this was the result of the study of Dugin’s analysis of the external environment. It is worth remembering, however, that it was Dugin who designed a plan for a New World Order. To Dugin, that New World Order should impose ways of life, promote oppressive control, end freedoms, and destroy countries. A typical totalitarian plan. For example, in his conclusion in the debate with Carvalho, often discussed in this research piece, Dugin did not examine Carvalho’s academic hypotheses and empirical tests. Instead, Dugin took his last chance to appeal for the joining of political forces against the U.S.A. The speech of the political agent.

One last word about the relevance of Neo-Eurasianism. The Czech Security Information Service reported in 2014 that the Kremlin is pursuing, *ipsis litteris*, a new “*structure in Europe drawing on the concept of the Comintern (the Communist International; the Third International) founded by the Soviet Union,*” and that Neo-Eurasianism provides the ideological guideline for that project (BIS, 2015). This reference does nothing but strengthen the pertinence of this study for the coming decades.

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Russia: The Greater Eurasian Partnership and the Eurasian Union

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Abstract

The Soviet Union ceased to exist on 25 December 1991. This meant the end of the bipolar world and the beginning of significant changes in international relations, and fundamentally affected the leeway of Russia on the international scene. Despite the break-up of the Soviet empire, the Russian political elite and the representatives of the Eurasianist and neo-Eurasianist geopolitical approach clearly stated that Moscow was not to fall into the trap of playing a regional role. Russia could only exist as a great power. It must achieve the union of Eurasia, a supercontinent in which Europe, as interpreted as the West, is merely an enclave.

The outlines of a multipolar and interdependent international order had already emerged after a decade. The significance of the Eurasian heartland grew in the emerging new international system. With the aim of regaining its once imperial status, Russia appeared on the stage as a representative of neo-Eurasianism. At the centre of the foreign policy strategy and geopolitical trend, hallmarked by president Putin's name, stands the establishment of a multipolar and multilateral international system based on the Eurasianist approach. Despite the structural weakness of its economy, due to its accession to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (1998), the foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (2001), and by participating in other international integrations, as well as through the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAUE), Russia has become a structure-establishing great power in the system of international relations.

A change in the foreign policy strategy of Moscow, involving turning to the East, took place in 2014. In endorsing the Belt and Road Initiative adopted by China, Russia gave up the concept of a Greater Europe and heralded the Greater Eurasia strategy, aimed at the establishment of a union of Europe and Asia stretching from Shanghai to Lisbon, and a Greater Eurasian Partnership to be concluded with China. The study undertakes an assessment of this process and the related narratives.

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Geopolitical changes and the place of Russia in the emerging multipolar international system

The Soviet Union ceased to exist on 25 December 1991. The resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev from the presidency meant an end to organized East-West conflict, the end of the bipolar world, and the beginning of significant changes to international relations. The break-up of the Soviet Union also brought about the cessation of the Central-Eastern-European alliance system belonging to the influential zone of Moscow, as well as its institutions (COMECON, the Warsaw Pact), and empire, and the transformation of 25.6 million Russians into ethnic minorities on the territory of the succession states. According to a 2005 statement by Russian president Vladimir Putin, this was the gravest geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century, and one which shook and affected the leeway of Russia on the international scene significantly (Sz. Bíró, 2019, 121-128). According to the Russian political elite and the representatives of the Eurasianist and neo-Eurasianist geopolitical approach, however, Moscow should not fall into the trap of playing a regional role, and Russia should only exist as a great power.² As the embodiment of the heartland and middle empire of the Eurasian region outlined by Sir John Halford Mackinder, it must play the role of a bridge between Europe and Asia. It must establish the union of Eurasia, called a supercontinent, in which Europe, interpreted as the West, is merely an enclave.³

For a short time – in a historical sense – after the Soviet Union ceased to exist, a single superpower, the United States of America, remained on stage. The outlines of a multipolar and interdependent international order, however, had already emerged a decade after the former events. The significance of the Eurasian heartland grew objectively (Szilágyi, 2019c). In March 2000, significant changes occurred in Russia, the heartland of Eurasia, and in the Commonwealth of Independent States. As a representative of neo-Eurasianism, Russia appeared on the scene with the aim of regaining its former imperial status. In the course of decision making, the leadership of the Kremlin made good use of the geopolitical analyses and writings of Alexander Dugin.⁴ Reorganizing its power and extending its political sovereignty to the majority of the territories lost by the Soviet Union – a region called the “*near-abroad*” by

² For details, see: Dugin, (2004); Dugin, (2012a); Dugin, (red) (2012b); Dugin, (2013); Dugin, (2014); Dugin, (2015a); Dugin, (2015b); Dugin, (2017).

³ “*We live in a rare period of history, in which the political and economic axis of the world is changing. This axis shifted to the West four-five centuries ago. Europe practically became the ruler of the entire world. ... The axis is shifting to the East now, so we know what it can mean for Asia.... The old habit of mentioning Europe and Asia as separate units will be replaced by the unavoidable phenomenon of Eurasia, the concept of a uniform political and economic space within twenty years*” (Maçães, 2018, p. 13, 69).

⁴ For details, see: Jovani Gil, (2014); Szilágyi, (2011); Szilágyi, (2015); Szilágyi, (2016); Szilágyi, (2018); Szilágyi, (2019a); Szilágyi, (2019b).

Russian analysts – Moscow, a member of the BRICS country group, started imperial politicking by announcing the “*Russian Monroe Doctrine*”. At the centre of the foreign policy strategy and geopolitical trend hallmarked by president Putin’s name stands the establishment of a multipolar and multilateral international system based on the Eurasianist approach. Due to its accession to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (1998), the foundation of the Sanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (2001),⁵ and its participation in other international forms of integration – and due to the announcement (2014) and the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAUE) (2015)⁶ – Russia has become a structure-establishing great power in the system of international relations, and an “*independent periphery*” in terms of the world economy and considering its economic development and weight.⁷

Map 1: The Eurasian Economic Union



(Source:<http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/Pages/default.aspx>)

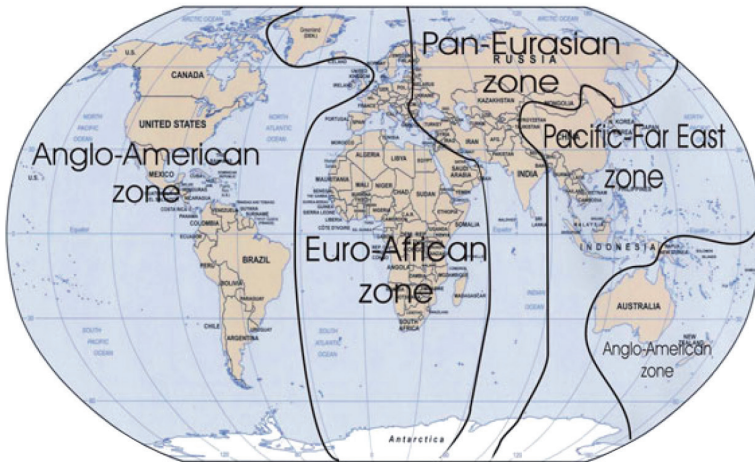
⁵ The members of the Sanghai Cooperation Organization are: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Observational status is held by: Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia.

⁶ The Eurasian Economic Union, designed to strengthen the international positions and influence of Moscow, was established in Astana on 29 May 2014 by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Armenia joined the organisation on 9 October 2014, while Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan indicated their intention to join in August 2015. This, however, was not arranged until the summer of 2020. EAEU officially began operating on 1 January 2015. The Eurasian Economic Union produced 3.2% of the world’s GDP, 3.7% of its industrial production, 3.7% of its exports, 3.2% of its imports, 14.6% of its crude oil production (top ranked in the world), 18.4% of its gas production (ranked second in the world), and 5.1% of its energy production (number four) in 2014, at the time of its foundation. The objective of EAEU is to implement the “*four liberties*”: goods, services, capital, and labour, a goal also pursued by the EU.

⁷ We use the expression because the superpower ambitions of Russia are overshadowed by the structural weaknesses of its economy and its exports, which are primarily based on raw material – primarily oil and gas – extraction. According to data from the World Economic Forum, similarly to Brazil and Italy, the country contributed to world GDP a mere 1.8%. Dmitri Trenin called the structure of the Russian economy the Achilles heel of the country’s superpower ambitions (Russia’s ‘pivot’, 2014, 39).

The Russian idea was to establish a four-pole world order that reminds one of the pan-regional theory of Karl Ernst Haushofer, to be established along the Moscow-Berlin, Moscow-Teheran, Moscow-Tokyo and – taking the Sanghai Cooperation Organization into account – the Moscow-Beijing axis of alliance.

Map 2: Four-pole multipolar world



(Source:<https://www.google.hu/search?q=map+of+Multipolar+World.Four+zones-four+poles&sa>) (Downloaded 30 May 2020)

The idea, which primarily serves the interests of Moscow – according to which Russia is attempting to transform the global economic system, and, by taking regional organisations and institutions under its own control, ensuring thus the long-term interests of the country and avoiding drifting into a marginal position (Russia’s “pivot” to Eurasia, 2014) – is, however, restricted and affected by several internal factors.

It is, on the one hand, restricted by the superpower status of the United States of America. On the other hand, it is also limited by China becoming a global superpower, the latter which is playing an increasingly significant role in the Eurasian region. Beijing has expanded and increased its influence in the Eurasian region not only via the Sanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

In 2013, the Chinese leadership announced The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which serves the purpose of increasing and enforcing its influence on world power (Péti, 2017). The BRI refers to the uniform system of cross-continent transport corridors implemented in the form of Arctic, sea, and land ‘silk roads’ (rail, road, air, and water), as well as the gas and oil pipelines joining and connecting energy services and systems.

Map 3: Silk road transport corridors



(Source: Silk Road Transport Corridors: Assessment of Trans-EAEU Freight Traffic Growth Potential. Saint Petersburg: EDB Centre for Integration Studies, 2018. p. 17)

These factors strengthen the world power positions of China in the Eurasian heartland – in Eurasia, Central Asia, and Europe, including the European Union – i.e., in the region stretching from Shanghai to Lisbon. Russian leadership has had to react to all these challenges, and to find an adequate answer and promising alternative in the form of a viable and flexible strategy, as well as the narrative to verify and legitimize it.

The answer of Russia: the announcement of the Greater Eurasian Partnership

In 2010, the Russian leadership still considered the establishment of an economic community and region, Greater Europe (stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok), to be its goal. The history of the initiative goes back to 1996. In the interest of reducing the weight of transatlantic relations, and of helping Russia to obtain developed technology and Western capital, President Boris Yeltsin proposed the tightening of relations with the leaders of the European Union (Kaczmarek, 2017; Tsvyk, 2018; Sharkhanova, and Garlick, 2020). In 2001, Romano Prodi, the then president of the European Commission, also supported the idea of a common European space. Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, also agreed with the concept and voiced his agreement at the EU-Italy summit held in 2005. In his opinion, the process began when the Berlin wall collapsed in 1989. In the 3 October 2011 issue of *Isvezia*, President Putin confirmed and further developed his thoughts about Greater Europe.

The Eurasian Union will be based on universal integration principles as an essential part of Greater Europa united by shared values of freedom, democracy and market laws. Russia and the EU agreed to form a common economic space and coordinate economic regulations without the establishment of supranational structures back in 2003. In line with this idea, we proposed setting up a harmonised community of economies stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok... Soon the Customs Union, and later the Eurasian Union, will join the dialogue with the EU. As a result, apart from bringing direct economic benefits, accession to the Eurasian Union will also help countries integrate into Europe sooner and from a stronger position. (Putin, 2011)

By this, Putin, emphasises Bruno Mações...

...only continued the traditional Russian geopolitics. He paid homage to his favourite theory, according to which the influence of Russia can only be extended to the whole of Europe and Asia if the two continents finally solidarize. Russia will always be too European for Asia and too Asian for Europe, however, the picture will change if we speak about Eurasia... The Russian ministry of foreign affairs announced changes lately. It deliberately replaced Vladivostok by Shanghai or even by Jakarta, the eastern most end of the new supercontinent in its strategic plans and official statements... On this vast territory Europe is no more than a peninsula on the periphery. This fact is present in both the Russian and the Chinese thinking without doubt. (Mações, 2018, p. 70)

The strategic direction of Russian foreign policy and the related narrative changed in 2014 due to the announcement of the already mentioned New Silk Road Economic Zone and the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Greater Europe concept was given up. In addition to the above, the war in Ukraine, the reoccupation of the Crimea, and the related Western programme of sanctions also played a role in this. According to Dmitri Trenin, Director of Carnegie Moscow Center,

2014 was a pivotal year for Russia's foreign policy. It was then that Moscow began moving away from its traditional focus on Europe and the Atlantic, with secondary attention to the former Soviet borderlands. The Ukraine crisis served as the coup de grâce for the two concepts that had guided Russian foreign policy since the break-up of the Soviet Union: integration into the wider West and reintegration of the former republics with Russia. (Trenin, 2017, p. 1)

The realization that the real danger, the real challenge, but at the same time the opportunity of economically catching up and development for Moscow and its allies was the People's Republic of China's appearance in Central Asia and within the sphere of influence of Russia. This contributed to the strategic change within the walls of the Kremlin. The fact could have been denied, although it was deemed better to face up to unavoidably occurring events. Two things were identified as necessary for this: Sharing power and establishing a partnership with China in order to establish influence, shared power, and condominium over the region in question (Rolland, 2019), and a new focus for Russian foreign policy – it was understood that the external economic strategy of Russia should be adapted to the newly changed circumstances.

Leadership in Moscow, the Valdai Discussion Club – the best-known Russian think-tank – and Carnegie Moscow Center (which engages in foreign policy analyses) agreed that the partnership, cooperation, and activity of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative complement each other efficiently. The harmonisation of joint projects was decided to be an appropriate basis for the operation of the greater Eurasian Partnership and the establishment of an economic area without customs frontiers. Russian ideas included the objective – and relied on the incremental advantage and benefit there of – of establishing a relationship or strengthening relationships with Iran, India, and South-East Asia through their involvement with EAEU and BRI, with the help of China: i.e., in addition to economic cooperation, Russia seeks to control the steps of Beijing.⁸

In was in these terms that Vladimir Putin announced the Greater Asia concept at the World Economic Forum in St. Petersburg in June 2016. This concept replaced the idea of a Greater Europe free trade and economic alliance stretching from Vladivostok to Lisbon, represented by the European Union and Russia-Eurasia.

In his opening speech, the Russian president emphasised that: “...*considering the prospect [of] more extensive Eurasian partnership involving the Eurasian Economic Union, in which countries such as China, Pakistan, Iran and India would also be included*” (Plenary Session of St. Petersburg, 2016).

This proposal of Putin's was substantiated by negotiations and pacts between Russia and the People's Republic of China in the period following 2013, and the agreements concluded in relation to the issue of a Greater Eurasian Partnership between the two countries in the Eurasian region. The first pact between Vladimir Putin and the Chinese president was signed in May 2015, when Xi Jinping visited Moscow on the

⁸ Naturally, Chinese leadership was and is aware of every element of Russian intentions. Despite this, the maintenance of the GEP and cooperation with Russia are in the utmost interest of leaders in Beijing. The opinion of Chinese researchers can be read in the issue of the Russian International Affairs Council published on 28 February 2020, entitled *Yunming Fang: From the Eurasian Economic Union to the Greater Eurasian Partnership: the View of Chinese Scholars on Eurasian Integration*.

occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the World War II. This pact concerned the establishment of relationships between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative (Köstem, 2019).

As a result of the events of between October 2016 and October 2017, China and the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union signed a cooperation agreement. The Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between China and the Eurasian Economic Union was signed in Astana in May 2018. This, as Dmitri Trenin writes, facilitated the continuous monitoring of Chinese influence by Russia.

The fundamental elements and institutional basis of this strategic form of cooperation – based on partnership and competition at the same time – are the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank-AIIB, and the integration organisations of the Eurasian region, such as the above-mentioned Sanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN) and the European Union. The “*integration of integrations*”, the “*community of common destiny*” (Sharkhanova, and Garlick, 2020) is completed by the Central Asian countries of India, Iran, Pakistan, and Vietnam “*entering the system*”.

All these facts and processes surrounding Greater Eurasia mean the strengthening of the great-power identity and narrative of Russia (Lewis, 2018) and they serve as potential source of danger, particularly in the case of the European Union (Eurasian Integration, 2016).

Map 4: Eurasia



(Source: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/northeast-eurasia-as-historical-center-exploration-of-a-joint-frontier/5486643>)

Greater Eurasian Partnership – on the way to implementation

The Greater Eurasian Partnership, based on the alliance between China and Russia, and common interests, is a significant step towards the establishment of a multicenter, multipolar, international system. Some Western analysts regard the formation as liable to be fragile and short-lived in a historical sense, as they believe that the competition for power over the new geopolitical region being born that stretches from Shanghai to Lisbon, and the asymmetry that exists between the power and interest enforcement capability of the two parties, will drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. Nadège Rolland, however, does not share this opinion. In a study of his published in the spring issue of the periodical *Survival*, he calls the relationship system between China and Russia a “*marriage of convenience*”, but one which is held together not only by short term and fragile interests.

For the moment, however, the evidence points to an increasingly deep condominium between the two powers. French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said that ‘love does not consist in looking at one another, but in looking together in the same direction.’ China and Russia are certainly looking together in the same direction with equal yearning towards Eurasia. Both powers perceive the Western presence on opposite sides of the Eurasian landmass – US alliances and presence in East Asia for China; NATO and the European Union’s normative power for Russia – as threatening to contain and ultimately undermine them. Both continental powers consider Eurasia their strategic backyard, and both have launched ambitious initiatives to strengthen their influence over the region: the Eurasian Economic Union and the Greater Eurasian Partnership for Russia, the Silk Road Economic Belt – the land component of the Belt and Road Initiative – for China. But their common focus does not mean they are necessarily competing against each other in this vast continental space. Rather, China and Russia share similar concerns about Eurasia’s political stability and security, and similar overall objectives regarding what a future regional order should look like. Chinese strategists are clear-eyed about Russia’s regional ambitions and pursuit of prestige, its concerns about China’s strategic intent, and its uneasiness with the growing power imbalance. At the same time, they are aware that Beijing’s own regional supremacy cannot be achieved if Russia is antagonised and stands in the way.... As one top Chinese diplomat put it, Eurasia is the main region where China must work hand in hand with Russia to ‘seek convergence and a balance of interests’ and align both countries’ Eurasian grand strategies. (Rolland, 2019, p. 7)

The Greater Eurasian Partnership, fated to a state of cooperation and moderate and temperate competition, contributes to the clearly communicable satisfaction of the requirements of the two cooperating countries that represent power poles. For the economically weaker Russia, it guarantees the maintenance of the image of political dominance and strategic leadership in the post-Soviet region and, on the other hand, it guarantees the extension of its influence to regions beyond those indicated. For China, it means the conversion of economic power into political power, and in the long term the recognition of its unquestionable economic leadership role, and capacity for stabilization. Moscow is fighting for the EU to recognise the Eurasian Economic Union, considered the tool of its economic influence, as an equal partner. With the New Silk Road and BRI, Beijing enters the stage both as investor and quasi-political-free neocolonialist power in terms of the Member States of the European Union.

An analysis published in the April 2008 issue of the *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, however, took the view that in relation to the duality of the harmonisation and subordination system of relations, the Russian-Chinese partnership is characterised more by subordination than integration.

In the long term perspective [sic], the Chinese initiative has the potential to 'swallow' the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union. In practical terms, the Russian project would become part of a broader Chinese vision for trans-regional cooperation. At the same time, China can be expected to continue exercising strategic self-restraint towards Russia and demonstrating 'respect' for Russian concepts such as 'Greater Eurasia', paying lip service to equality on both sides. (Kaczmarek, 2018, p. 7)

The two hegemonic powers of the Eurasian region examined in our study, however, are equally interested in engaging in coordinated action related to the Central Asian countries, while they also strive to maintain a balanced distance from them.

We have been aware since writings of Niccoló Machiavelli – or even for a longer time – that a strategic partnership is not equivalent to an equal alliance, even if it is called one. What unifies Russia and China in the case of GEP is nothing other than the rejection of the Atlantic liberal world order and values endorsed by the United States and Europe, and the intention of establishing a new international power structure. As the twenty-first century starts off, both countries feature a realistic approach to the theory of international affairs: they reject internal and external democratisation and the processes of democratisation, thereby absolutising the role of a strong state and state sovereignty. Internal conflicts in Central Asia resulting from rivalry can, however, weaken cooperation implemented within the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

With regard to the ambitions of the indicated countries of establishing a multipolar and multilateral international order, this has a significance that goes beyond Eurasia. Peaceful development, its influence, transformation, and the mutual solution of global issues requires a balanced environment between China, Russia, and the Western democracies based on mutual security and trust in the twenty-first century. The conditions of this are summarised by the authors of a book entitled *China, Russia and the twenty-first Century Global Geopolitics* as follows:

The stability and security of the international community will to a large extent depend on the capacity of Western democratic nations to work with Russia and China in managing the threats posed by non-state actors and shared non-traditional security challenges that transcend borders. In spite of differences over definitions of terrorism and violent extremism, there is room for greater cooperation among China, Russia, and the United States and its democratic allies in preventing further successes by terrorist groups. Moreover, although there are disagreements over Internet governance, all sides have an interest in limiting terrorist recruitment and indoctrination online and preventing terrorists and criminals from utilizing the Internet to organize and orchestrate acts of terrorism, violence, and other illegal activity. Enlisting the cooperation of both China and Russia to work with the United States and its democratic allies will be critical for effectively managing a host of nontraditional security issues such as environmental challenges and problems related to climate change, displacement and migration, and much more...no matter the outcome, the nature of the Chinese-Russian relationship will continue to fundamentally shape world order. (Bolt, & Cross, 2018, p. 301)

Changes in the relationship (i.e in cooperation and competition) between China and Russia therefore significantly define the changes in and characteristics of the international system. China regards Russia as one of the shortest and safest corridors leading to the European Union and part of the common customs territory. Beijing, however, is also striving for priority in the post-Soviet region and wants to prevent the Eurasian Economic Union from restricting economic expansion in relation to the two continents. However, EAEU is not a factor of key significance for China. China considers EAEU to be an important component of the Belt and Road Initiative and an element of adaptation and not competition from the point of view of institutionalising cooperation.

The director of Carnegie Moscow Center, Dmitri Trenin, shared similar thoughts about the Greater Eurasian Partnership. To a question asked in connection with the 2017 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and captured by the summit's title *Russia's Evolving Grand Eurasia Strategy: Will it work?* he replied "yes". In his

analysis, he presented how the road for Russia leads to Greater Eurasia following the unsuccessful Atlantic integration attempt. In addition to the strategic targets of Beijing, he explained how China and Russia found each other by entering Russian oil and gas fields,⁹ and by purchasing Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 anti-aircraft system from Moscow. For Russia, at the same time, this partnership means military, political, and economic access to Asia, and greater leeway and headway towards Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, Vietnam, and ASEAN (Trenin, 2017). The most important thing – according to Russian analyses – is that “...*the Eurasian centre can only be viable if China does not claim hegemonic status in the region*” (Dragneva, 2018, p. 14).

In addition to the states’ transatlantic businesses, other actors as well as international organisations of different types play a major role in establishing a multipolar and multilateral new world order, and in forming international relations.

At the time of writing the present study, there were three regional organisations playing a structure-creating role in the establishment of a multipolar world:

...the European Union (the largest economic bloc), the Eurasian Economic Union (the largest geographical bloc), and the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative of China (with the largest population). China, whose ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative includes Central Asian states, Russia, and Eastern European states, can become a partner for both the European Union and the EAEU. This would connect the EU and the EAEU with China in a new broader geopolitical framework ‘from Lisbon to Shanghai,’ create a ‘Big Eurasia’ with an active role for the European Union, the EAEU, and China, promote protectionist tendencies, stimulate interregional cooperation and lead to greater prosperity across the whole Eurasia. (Tsvyk, 2018, p. 262)

These regional organisations, however, are related to superpowers, superpower efforts, civilisation aspects, the interpretation of regionalism and global processes, and the endeavours of Russia and China to establish a new world order. Despite this “...*the concept of Greater Eurasia can be viewed as a consolidation of Russia’s new global strategy which may form the basis for its most important foreign policy priorities*” (Bordachev–Pyatachkova, 2018, p. 37). The authors, however, consider the expression Greater Eurasia to be more a metaphysical concept than an economic reality. They also, however, recognise that the concept is based on realistic factors and processes: the crisis of the Western world model, and the differing visions of the non-Western power centres related to regionalism and the international order. Using and reinter-

⁹ In a book titled *Gaz i geopolityika: sansz*, Rossziji Vjatseslav Motjasov examines the geopolitical significance of energy sources and gas pipeline systems for Russia.

preting the external and internal crescent concept of Bordachev and Pyatachkova, Mackinder, and Spykman's Rimland theory, they write about the heartland of integration and the surrounding peripheries in the case of Greater Eurasia – a geographical space consisting of concentric circles.

If we apply the logic of concentric circles in Eurasia, it can be divided geographically into a core and three peripheries. The core is Central Asia, Russia, China and Mongolia. Turkey, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Korea constitute a second Eurasian ring. Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East make up the peripheries. Maintenance of stability in the core, the involvement of the second ring and the absence of threats from the periphery [are] the task[s] for international cooperation in the field of security. (Bordachev–Pyatachkova, 2018, p. 40)

In addition to economic and political relations, the authors find issues related to the security of the macro region to be important, too. In terms of the latter's institutions, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), SCO, and BRICS – which all involve the relations of East and West – can play a role.

In analysing the position of the Moscow leadership related to Russia and the question of the world order, Western analysts took the speech of President Putin at the international security policy conference held in Munich in 2007 as a starting point. “Moreover, Russian stateofficials have sharply criticized the post-Cold War arrangements, making it clear that they want to revise or even up end the existing order” – they write (Götz–Merlen, 2019, p. 134).

Indeed, in addition to several other things, in his speech in Munich Vladimir Putin strongly emphasised that:

I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world (...) [T]he model itself is flawed, because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization... In connection with this I would allow myself to make one small remark. It is hardly necessary to incite us to do so. Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. (Kremlin, 2007)

When analysing the behaviour of Moscow leadership, the authors speculate about three possibilities. They speak about Russia following a revanchist, a defensive, or an isolationist strategy. They present the elements of these versions and their impact on the world order, the related Russian objectives, the driving forces of Russian politics, and the anticipated and potential responses of the West in detail (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Three Perspectives on Russia's world order policy

Perspective	Revanchist Russia	Defensive Russia	Isolationist Russia
What are Russia's main objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to overturn the Western-led liberal international order – to create a Tsarist-style empire on the territory of the former USSR – to promote conservative values in world politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to be treated as an equal by Western powers – to halt the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU – to defend 'state sovereignty' as a fundamental principle of international law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to stoke nationalism by creating crises with the West – to prevent the spread of democratic norms into the post-Soviet space – to divert the Russian public's attention from internal failures
What drives Russia's world order policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – imagined victimhood at the hands of the West – a deeply rooted imperial mindset of the Russian elite – Russia's authoritarian system of governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Western encroachment (both geopolitical and normative) – a hunt for great-power status and prestige – national security concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – regime insecurity – parochial interests of President Putin and his close associates
What should the West do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pursue a containment policy – roll back Russia's geopolitical advances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pursue an engagement policy – stop NATO and EU expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pursue constraint policy – impose targeted sanctions on President Putin's inner circle

(Source: Götz-Merlen, 2019, p. 142)

Russia, or Russia-Eurasia, however, is not only a geopolitical-power formation, or an economic zone with a territorial dimension, but also an entity in imperial form with civilizational features. The foundations of its ideas, its civilizational characteristics, organisational forms, historical mission and role were defined and specified by the Russian Eurasianists (Petr Savitsky, and Nikolai Trubetzkoy) and the Neo-Eurasianists (Lev Gumilyov and Aleksandr Dugin. (Szilágyi, I. 2015; 2016; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c).

“Russia’s Eurasianism forms a large umbrella construct that encompasses different types of Russian identities and multiple foreign policy schools of thought” – Katzenstein and Weygand write in their joint article (Katzenstein, and Weygand, 2017, p. 428). This has differing geopolitical and civilizational manifestations (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Aspects of Eurasianism

	Geopolitical	Civilizational
Source of Russian identity	Geography	History, culture, ethnicity
Determinants of territory	Eurasian landmass with Russia at center	Civilizational and racial borders
Russia's unique role	Mediator between East and West Leadership of Heartland	Integration of diverse peoples Alternative to West
Foreign policy objective	Great power status Multipolarity	Great power status Policentric system
Markers of great power status	Spheres of Influence, e.g. - Energy - Buffer zones - Sovereignty	Milieu Goals, e.g. - Civilizational discourse - Economic and cultural integration of Eurasian peoples
Russia's relation to other Eurasian countries	Multilateralism with Russian leadership	Multilateralism with Russian leadership
Russia's relation to other civilizations	Closed system Independent	Closed system Independent

(Source: Katzenstein–Weygandt, 2017, p. 432)

In the course of the empire building manifesting within the framework of Greater Eurasia, the Russian leadership consciously builds its elements according to the redefined narrative of the country and national identity. In its systems of argument, Putin's politics and guidelines mean returning to the historical roots – finding, rediscovering, and updating the Eurasian identity of Russia; the return of the prodigal son to the house of his father.

The need for Russia's Turn to the East is not dictated merely by current or potential political and economic considerations. There are much deeper and more crucial factors at work related to the matrix of the political system determined by the specific nature of the spatial organization of Russia's state and society. It is important to understand that despite the lengthy Petrine era of pro-Western orientation, the way back will not be a forced one, because it is the way back home, to its own self – to Russia's Eurasian identity. (Toward the Great Ocean... 2008, p. 24)

The empire embodying the concept system of Greater Eurasia is an open world, which anyone accepting its system of rules may join, and which embodies the criteria of a superpower typical of the twenty-first century.

These others recognize Russia as an important rather than a great power, despite its vast land mass, rich energy resources, and formidable arsenal of nuclear weapons. Geopolitically and civilizationally, Russia and Eurasia, like other polities, regions, and civilizations, are part of an encompassing global context.

Realigning map to territory so as to navigate successfully a turbulent regional and civilizational world in the twenty first century is a prerequisite –not only for Russia but also for all other great and would-be great powers and polities. (Katzenstein–Weygand, 2017, p. 436)

The Greater Russia construction consists of several elements and agendas. From an economic perspective it targets the diversification of Russian foreign trade. Among its primary targets is increasing participation in Asian markets and the investments flowing from them or to them within the framework of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. From this point of view, the Russian party pays special attention to the Russian Far East region.

The security dimension is also an important element of the Greater Eurasia concept. Moscow pays huge attention to the stability of post-soviet East Asian countries, the confining of Islamic terrorism, and the management of regional conflicts. Russia has launched a ten-year military modernization programme. It is able to use power to achieve its goals. It performs joint manoeuvres with China, and wants to restore the image of Russia as a credible military power.

The already mentioned ideological aspects also play a key role in the establishment and operation of Greater Eurasia. Despite the pragmatic nature of the foreign affairs of Putin, we have pointed out its ideological features that push the issues of national identity and superpower to the foreground in our previous analyses. In the 2017 report of the Valdai Discussion Club, Sergei Karaganov writes about the victory of Russia in the new concert of nations and explains his proposition that authoritarian, incomplete democracies rule better in the presently changing world than developed democracies. He explains this by saying that due to their centralised power structure and antidemocratic practices, the latter systems that are striving for positions as superpowers that show authoritarian features have greater leeway and autonomy in internal affairs than Western democracies. In the course of their foreign policy decision making, proponents of the former argue in a manipulative manner with opponents who attack them or disagree with them concerning issues of national sovereignty, the political and cultural freedom of choice of nations and countries, personal and national dignity, and post-modern or very traditional respect for human values. They deem themselves the protectors of the latter values, and reject any kind of criticism or proposals from abroad that could hinder or thwart their goals in the name of preserving state sovereignty (Karaganov, 2017). Has the emperor changed into new clothes in an age of injured democracies?¹⁰ (Lo, 2019). The question must thus be finally raised: is Greater Eurasia a regional or global pro-

¹⁰ Soto Carmona, (coord.), (2019): *La democracia herida. La tormenta perfecta*. Marcial Pons, Madrid

ject? Do the two leading powers that are cooperating to elaborate this strategy analyse regionalism and global changes identically, despite their common interests? The answer of Bobo Lo to the first question seems convincing. Namely, that:

Greater Eurasia, then, is at once a regional, extra-regional, and global project. It is regional in that it is a vehicle for promoting Russian interests and influence throughout the former Soviet Union. It is extra-regional in looking beyond these boundaries toward the Asia-Pacific, South Asia, and Europe. And it is global in that it envisages a recasting of the world order, from one dominated by the United States, to one in which Russia is a pivotal player – literally so since a Greater Eurasia-centered world would turn to the Russian axis. (Lo, 2019, p. 13)

There are differences between the Chinese and Russian standpoints regarding the interpretation of the scope of problems with regionalism and globalism. Both parties reject the international order established by the West and its universalism. The former, however, interpret the role of regionalism in the international system differently. By launching the New Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative, China is pursuing a future-oriented geoeconomic type of functional regionalism based on economic influence. It is not interested in the institutionalisation of processes and projects – it is committed to flexible and open cooperation. China envisages the strengthening of its global power position in this manner. However, it acts differently in the case of the countries in its direct vicinity. It also uses military tools aggressively in the South China Sea.

Regionalism represented by Russia has historic and spatial features. It is primarily directed at the retention and restoration of the latter's previous influence in the post-Soviet region, and it tries to hinder the entrance of other actors. The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union serves for its expansion, including the exclusion of other parties, but also by assisting with seizing the necessary and lacking sources of modernisation in alliance with China and through Chinese investment. *“What China and Russia have in common is their belief that regional projects will upgrade their status in world politics, provide them with a means to limit the presence of other actors and fit into domestic narratives of restoring greatness” (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 1359-1360).*

Greater Eurasian Partnership: Prospects and Conclusion

The announcement of the Greater Asia strategy and the establishment of the Greater Eurasian Partnership alliance is a consequence of changes of historic significance in the system of international relations. It indicates the closure and questioning of a

ten-year era of solitary superpower status, and a world order and values based on the hegemony and one-sided dominance of the United States, following the cessation of the bipolar world. The People's Republic of China represents a specific world concept, set of values, and authoritarian-type political system and has become a global power. Russia, representing the Eurasian heartland, has found its political and military self. In terms of its orientation, it has turned to the East –i.e. to the region of Asia. It is representing and attempting to increase its economic interests by establishing the Asian Economic Union and joining other integration organisations. It is an objective fact that the military, economic, political, and security-policy-related weight of the Eurasian region – the Eurasian supercontinent – has grown. This, as well as the Greater Eurasian Partnership, increases the weight and leeway of Russia in the system of international relations.

The change in the foreign policy and superpower strategy of Russia, however, does not mean that Moscow will finally turn away from the European and especially the Central-Eastern European region, considered its traditional sphere of interest. Russia cannot afford to do this because the NATO forces that are considered the foundation of the Western defence system are concentrated there, and the European Union, an integrationist system, operates in this region too, also gathering in the Central-Eastern European countries. Cooperation with the region plays an important role in Russian foreign policy both globally and regionally. The interest-based selective relationship system established with the countries of the region appears to be a new element. It offers several comparative advantages to the countries situated there, among them Hungary. Additionally, the relationship with Russia contributes to strengthening relationships with China, the other superpower in the Greater Eurasian Partnership. The two are contingent upon each other, as our region also plays a role in the world strategy of the Beijing government.

It must also be seen clearly that the changes of the twenty-first century suggest the superiority of and an increase in the influence of the Eurasian continent and the Greater Eurasian Partnership, along with its related alliances, and the occurrence of other geopolitical shifts, changes of historical significance, and the strengthening of related narratives.

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The Belt and Road Initiative: Rewriting Eurasia with Chinese Characteristics

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Abstract

In 2013, the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, announced a large-scale vision for the future of Eurasia called the Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative has started to reshape our thinking about the relationship between Asia and Europe at a dramatic pace, creating a geopolitical narrative that is now a reference point for other countries as well. This study undertakes to deconstruct the Belt and Road Initiative by using the practical reasoning framework of critical geopolitics, and analysing the speeches of the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, as well as official documents. In the first step, changes in China's domestic and international environment that have led to the development of the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative are presented. The study then provides an overview of the content of the Belt and Road Initiative as a "*strategy*" and examines changes that have been made to it. Finally, the study identifies the steps taken by the Chinese leadership to put the Belt and Road Initiative into practice. The study concludes that while the Belt and Road Initiative seeks to provide a kind of strategic response to changes perceived as a challenge by the Chinese Communist Party in the environment of China, it cannot be defined as a coherent geopolitical strategy that results in clearly identifiable foreign policy action. The Belt and Road Initiative is a diffuse and sketchy narrative framework which may be filled in as determined by the interests and creativity of actors.

Introduction

In China, geopolitics has no longstanding tradition in academic life or in political discourse (Zhang, 2016). This is mainly due to the fact that geopolitics was discredited during World War II, as it provided arguments for Japanese expansion and aggression against China. Nevertheless, the Silk Road Economic Belt, announced by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan in September 2013, and the Maritime Silk Road, which he announced in the parliament

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building of Indonesia in October of the same year, collectively known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, *Yidai yilu*), has become the most significant geopolitical initiative of recent decades, having a significant impact on our thinking about Eurasia. Despite the fact that the content of the BRI has been challenged many times, more than a hundred countries and institutions have already indicated their intention to participate in the initiative, and more and more projects are being implemented under its auspices (People's Daily, 2019). On the one hand, the BRI is an indication of the significant power shift taking place in world politics and at the practical level of global economic processes. On the other hand, the initiative has become a geopolitical narrative that serves as the most important reference point for rethinking relations between Asia and Europe, while actively shaping specific political, economic, cultural, and other forms of cooperation. There are hardly any players in the international arena who have not expressed their opinions about the BRI, a fact that clearly illustrates its importance. As a result of the BRI, planning processes related to Eurasia are in focus again (e.g., in the European Union), but the BRI has also induced significant backlash and counter narratives by countries that identify themselves as having counter-interests (e.g., the United States).

This study, following the traditions of practical geopolitical reasoning of critical geopolitics, attempts to deconstruct the BRI (Dodds–Atkinson, 2000; Ó Tuathail–Dalby, 1998). The strategy of BRI stems from the geopolitical script of the Chinese leadership, which aims to engage in the globalization process while ensuring economic growth in China and thus legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). According to Gearóid Ó Tuathail's definition, "*a geopolitical script refers to the directions and manner in which foreign policy leaders perform geopolitics in public, to the political strategies of coping that leaders develop in order to navigate through certain foreign policy challenges and crises*" (Ó Tuathail, 2002, p. 609). Based on the model of Ó Tuathail (2002), the study focuses on the following specific stages. First, it examines changes in China's environment that may have prompted the Chinese elite to formulate the BRI. Second, the study attempts to deconstruct the content of the BRI as a problem-solving strategy. Third, it examines changes taking place in Chinese communications about BRI, which can be articulated as a result of interactions with domestic and foreign audiences. In the final step, the study identifies the main steps resulting from the vision being put into practice. This investigation is based on an analysis of speeches made by Xi Jinping and other senior decision-makers and official documents, such as the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce (NDRC, 2015).

What was the motivation for creating the BRI?

Geopolitical discourses related to practical geopolitical reasoning not only represent visions that help us restructure our thinking about space, but they also play a role in solving problems (Ó Tuathail, 2002). In the first step, therefore, the problems and circumstances that have led to the elaboration of a strategy of responding and the announcement of the BRI must be determined. After the Cold War, China pursued a so-called low-profile foreign policy and followed international rules, mainly of American origin (Yu, 2017; Eszterhai, 2018). Successive Chinese governments have traditionally sought to divert attention from the country's growing power so that it is not considered to be a challenge by its international environment, most notably the United States (Chen–Wang, 2011). Therefore, the USA played a key role, as it supported the widest possible form of cooperation between the two states as part of its engagement strategy. Second, after the reform and opening up that was announced in 1978, China became integrated into international life through the sea, primarily, while the concept of Eurasia did not exist in essence for China, and its relationships with Russia and Central Asian countries, laden with historical conflict, remained far from intense. The fact that the Chinese government has by now come up with such a large-scale vision featuring such a new orientation certainly means that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had experienced dramatic changes in the environment of China by the early 2010s which were perceived as potentially threatening their interests.

As a result of China's reform and opening up policy, in place since 1978, the country's foreign economic interests (investments abroad, trade interests, its citizens living in other countries, etc.) required it to maintain good relations with its neighbours (Liu, 2003). In line with this approach, China was already referring to the old Silk Road before the BRI came into existence, though not very emphatically, in its relations with Central Asian countries. The Old Silk Road – as a historical image connecting the major economic centres and thriving Central Asian trading cities – was already present in China's foreign policy discourse as an example of peaceful, harmonious intercultural coexistence. The "*spirit of Silk Road*" used in China's rhetoric also appeared later, after the announcement of the BRI, as a reference to "*peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit*" (NDRC, 2015). However, after the economic crisis of 2007, globalization-related trends failed to meet the expectations of the CCP leadership:

"The underlying impact of the international financial crisis keeps emerging; the world economy is recovering slowly, and global development is uneven; the international trade and investment landscape and rules for multilateral trade and investment are undergoing major adjustments; and countries still face big challenges to their development" (NDRC, 2015).

As the Chinese elite assessed it, the effects of the crisis meant that many developing countries were hit by significant capital constraints, which reduced their stability (Xi, 2014) – and countries that were more developed were unable, and less and less willing, to play their formerly dominant role in the global economy, due to their own internal problems. The possibility of a slowdown in globalization posed a danger to the Chinese elite – namely, that the CCP’s source of legitimacy stemming from economic growth could be shaken. This was primarily true in relation to the “*two centenary goals*”, which also received great emphasis in Xi Jinping’s policy (*Liang ge yibai nian*) (Xi, 2019b). The first goal is to create a society that generates moderate prosperity by the centenary of the founding of the CCP in 2021, and the second is to complete the creation of a modern and socialist welfare society by the centenary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 2049. However, assessing the consequences of the crisis, the Chinese elite recognized that the country was more successfully overcoming the impact than US and Western powers were – a fact that required China to play a more active role in international economic processes in some respects (Wang, 2013). The announcement of the BRI was certainly influenced by the proposal of Lin Yifu, a former chief economist at the World Bank, that the experience of the US Marshall Plan should be examined in relation to making efficient use of foreign exchange reserves abroad (Ling, 2015). As with the Marshall Plan, investing in foreign infrastructure is also beneficial from the perspective of excessive domestic production capacities. Economist Xu Shanda also argued for a Chinese Marshall Plan that, beyond Lin’s proposals, could significantly support the process of the internationalization of the Chinese currency, the Renminbi (RMB) (Ling, 2015). Like Lin, one of China’s leading economists, Wu Jinglian, pointed out that only foreign investment made by China could help avoid overcapacity, wasting of resources, high housing prices, local debt, and other problems currently affecting the Chinese economy, most of which are derived from the fact that the Chinese government was able to prevent a crisis only through a large-scale economic stimulus programme (Huang, 2017). Finally, the BRI’s announcement was also shaped by a proposal from Zheng Yongnian, a Chinese-born political scientist from Singapore, that investing in underdeveloped regions such as Central Asia could only be beneficial for China as it would strengthen the latter’s potential and future commodity- and capital export markets. China could thus find an alternative to its traditional markets, such as the USA, the EU, or Japan, which are less and less capable of producing dynamic growth, for demographic reasons (Huo, 2015).

The other major change affecting policymakers in China’s environment is related to the new foreign policy directive, the “*Pivot to Asia*” announced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in October 2011. The Pivot brought about a turn in US foreign policy as the United States thereby committed to maintaining the East Asia status quo, as well as its own regional leadership. The Pivot was essentially a geopolitical

strategy encompassing military, political, and economic goals designed to counterbalance China's ambitions. In the framework of the Pivot, the USA strengthened its ties with its allies in the region and began redeploying a significant portion of its military potential to the East Asian region. In parallel, the USA announced their intention to establish the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would have meant a free trade zone in the region that deliberately omitted China (Zhang, 2015). China was in a delicate position: in order to continue its rise, it still needed a peaceful international environment and to avoid conflict with the USA, but it had to break out of its position of being encircled. This assessment of the situation was of significant relevance on a historical scale as well, and must have influenced Chinese decision-makers. According to traditional Chinese thinking, the country was originally surrounded by rings of barbaric peoples; later, China was surrounded by a ring of Western powers, and then in the first half of the Cold War by the US system of alliances. These circumstances were reinforced by the outbreak of "colour revolutions" in the early 2000s, the US presence in Afghanistan, complemented by the Pivot strategy, which all sent a message to the Chinese leadership that the USA was strategically encircling the country (Nathan–Scobell, 2012). Thus, one of the most depressing foreign policy tasks of the Beijing leadership became the elimination of this "encircled" status (Pantucci–Lain, 2016). As China would have needed a stronger naval power to curb the increased US presence in its traditional sphere of interest in East and South-East Asia, China had to look for new opportunities. The BRI boosted a new foreign policy direction: Eurasia. The proposal of Wang Jisi, dean of the School of International Relations at Peking University, provided important ammunition for setting new strategic directions. Wang said that China needs to coordinate its land and maritime capacities due to its competition with the US. While continuing its rivalry as a great power with the United States and Japan in East Asia, it must expand its influence westwards (on the mainland). Wang Jisi, in his so-called "Westward Movement" diplomatic strategy, argued that the opening of the domestic market and the development of a domestic economy must go hand in hand (Wang, 2014). Wang's dual proposal is reflected in the simultaneous presence of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Sea Silk Road" within the BRI.

Based on all this, the script adopted by the CCP leadership may have been as follows: the process of globalization is stalling, which could undermine the political legitimacy supported by economic growth. The right response to the changes taking place in China's environment may be for it to take the lead in representing its interests more effectively in international affairs. All this was helped by the fact that the financial crisis of 2007 culminated in Western countries calling into question the Western-type development model, and leaving more room for alternative paths. China, in light of the successes of its past economic development, can take steps to actively shape its environment (Yu, 2017), so now is the time for China to leave its low-profile

foreign policy behind. This did not mean that the Chinese leadership underestimated the USA. The USA continued to pose a serious military threat, with its strategic ring limiting China's efforts. Thus, the solution was offered by a new strategy, underpinned by economic (and to a lesser extent, soft power) instruments. Accordingly, China had to continue to open up, but also had to play an active role in shaping current processes (Xi, 2019a).

BRI as a strategic response

The BRI is intended to provide a kind of strategic response to the problems that have been outlined. The design of the BRI is the result of the CCP's highest level of planning. Thus, as the next step in the study, the BRI as a strategy is presented. The BRI is defined in official documents in the following way:

“The Belt and Road Initiative is a way for win-win cooperation that promotes common development and prosperity and a road towards peace and friendship by enhancing mutual understanding and trust, and strengthening all-round exchanges [...] to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all dimensional, multitiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries” (NDRC, 2015).

Based on the quote, the BRI can be identified as a large-scale vision that is aimed at significantly deepening the connection between Asia, Europe, and Africa. With all this, China's official goal is to change the way of thinking that has evolved about the relationship between the three continents in the *“Spirit of the Silk Road”* by outlining a future that responds to the financial crisis of year 2007, while simultaneously showing a way out for other countries (Xi, 2014), and responds to Asia's economic challenges that threaten its growth. To illustrate the latter, the Chinese government has often referred to a study published by the Asian Development Bank (Bhattacharyay, 2010), which found that the amount of funds required for infrastructure development in Asia annually is close to US \$800 billion. The Chinese narrative, therefore, emphasized that its initiative, which is supported by the latter claim of an independent and highly respected organization, is not an end in itself. The vision, therefore, belongs not only to China, but to all its participants – a kind of public good. Referring to this, the Chinese government therefore refused from the outset to refer to the BRI as China's geopolitical strategy, as it has no geopolitical goals in the classical sense (Wang, 2018). According to the official wording, it is an initiative which, under the approach of the

Chinese leadership, means a call to action for the common good. An initiative open to anyone who seeks to build relationships constructively between the three continents (NDRC, 2015).

However, the vision noticeably goes beyond that. The BRI promises to Asian and European countries that, in referring to the role of the former Silk Road, it will restore the former economic, political, and cultural “*historical*” role of Eurasia, in which the major regions of the supercontinent will once again play a more important role than they fulfil within the US-centred international order. How can this be achieved, according to the BRI? By deepening globalization and interconnection. As the official document puts it:

“[i]t is aimed at promoting orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets; encouraging the countries along the Belt and Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out broader and more in-depth regional cooperation of higher standards; and jointly creating an open, inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all “(NDRC, 2015).

The initiative, therefore, focuses on connectivity. Official government documents highlight five ways to achieve this:

- The first way is political coordination, which means coordinating the policies of individual national, regional, and international institutions.
- The second way is by using hard infrastructure, which consists of connecting new and existing road, rail, oil and gas pipelines and fibre-optic networks, complemented by interoperable industrial parks, logistics centres, and seaports, and by rewriting the traditional economic relations between the production centres, markets, and sources of raw materials of this vast region.
- The third way is to ensure barrier-free trade, which initially means reducing bureaucratic barriers to trade, but also extending free trade areas in the longer term.
- The fourth element is financial integration, which is aimed at harmonizing and co-regulating financial services and the exchange of currencies in the regions concerned.
- Finally, strengthening human relations, with a strong emphasis on cooperation in the fields of culture, research and development, by providing scholarship opportunities and exchange programmes for students, experts, researchers, and by supporting tourism, etc. (NDRC, 2015).

The BRI would therefore involve providing guidance to, and the necessary framework for, deepening the mentioned interconnectivities inter-regionally. Although the Chinese leadership never mentions this in official speeches and documents, obviously

the BRI would create a complex network based on connectivity within which China itself would be the main focus. Mention of China's centrality (Denisov, 2020), while obvious due to its economic and commercial superiority, is intentionally avoided in official communications, certainly with the aim of not alienating other states. In this way, China may achieve a leading role within Eurasia by involving neighbouring regions and stabilizing its international environment. However, China's centrality in the network would mean that the USA loses its central role in globalization in areas that have been important pillars of US power (e.g., the role of the USD as the global currency, the control of trade lines, control over information flow, etc.).

The definition of "*place*" is central to geopolitical reasoning. In identifying levels, decision-makers traditionally designate the location of the subject of their narrative (Ó Tuathail, 2002). Geopolitical reasoning thus always involves categorization according to geographical scale, and a form of reasoning in which the local level is related to the global. The BRI is special in this respect as it typically has a local, regional, or global relevance simultaneously, and the separation and relationship between levels is not clear. The BRI is often identified by foreign and Chinese experts, as well as the media, with Central Asia, to which China is connected through its western provinces. The fact that Xi Jinping announced the initiative in Kazakhstan undoubtedly played a key role in all this. Caravan roads appearing in the desert are often used to symbolize and refer to the former Silk Road, which created the wealthy trading cities of Central Asia. Actually, the strength of the analogy of the old Silk Road at the local level lies in the fact that the financial and cultural wealth of Central Asia was based on the interconnection of the great Eurasian centres. The peculiarity of BRI, however, is that a dedicated "*BRI project*" may be located "*anywhere*". Chinese leaders often refer to the BRI as being open to any country, city, company, etc., so it can be interpreted locally anywhere in the world.

Furthermore, the BRI is undoubtedly also of regional importance. Its regional nature can best be interpreted in the "*channels*" of the BRI at the level of the so-called economic corridors. Official documents highlight six mainland corridors: the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor, the Central Asia West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and finally, the China Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (NDRC, 2015). The physical projects of the BRI are concentrated in these economic corridors, through which the Chinese government seeks to resolve bottlenecks in communication channels between regions.

By definition, the latter want to reconnect regions that, although geographically adjacent, have only limited contact with each other due to the maritime-focused world economy. This does not mean turning away from the sea, as is shown by the fact that the twenty-first century Sea Silk Road is an important part of the program, but the strengthening of new land connections undoubtedly plays a key role in the idea. BRI

consciously reflects the global scale. Official communications about the BRI make it clear that, due to its inclusive nature, the initiative is open to any country in the world, be it in North or South America. Nonetheless, the definition also makes the following clear: this is not an initiative for all continents – the focus is on rewriting the relationship between Europe, Asia, and Africa (but the role of Africa is also given much less emphasis than the first two regions). The dominant focus of the BRI is clearly Eurasia:

“The Belt and Road run[s] through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and develop[ed] the European economic circle at the other, and encompassing countries with huge potential for economic development” (NDRC, 2015).

That priority is given to connecting Europe and Asia obviously comes from the fact that the initiative may deepen cooperation between two of the three major centres of the global economy – the European Union and East Asia. Africa, which is underdeveloped but undergoing a demographic explosion, is primarily only potentially important. In this way, the BRI becomes mainly a Eurasian narrative, although this is intentionally not emphasized by the Chinese government. Leaving it obscure who is *not* part of the initiative is clearly intended to prevent the USA from identifying itself as a clear target, and to ensuring that there is no justification for the USA to take action against China’s goals. The importance of Eurasia in Western classical geopolitical thinking cannot be overemphasized. The Chinese leadership always rejects the assumption that the BRI is related to China’s aspirations for hegemony, although the goal of uniting Eurasia, based on classical (Mackinder’s) geopolitical perceptions, inevitably means gaining dominance over Eurasia, as well as obtaining global leadership (Fallon, 2015).

In summary, therefore, the BRI as a strategy is as follows: in an age of multipolarity and globalization, China recommends that the countries of Eurasia strengthen their integrity. On the one hand, this would make economic cooperation in the Eurasian area more effective, thus creating conditions for further economic growth in China. On the other hand, it would give a greater international role to a China-led Eurasia, reducing the USA’s global leadership. In this, two birds may be killed with one stone because the strategy responds to both of the challenges that triggered the initiation of the BRI.

Geopolitical accommodation

Domestic interest groups, institutional structures, domestic and foreign public opinion, as well as experts and expert groups play an important role in further fine-tuning geopolitical strategies (Ó Tuathail–Agnew, 1992; Ó Tuathail, 2002). The goal of the

BRI has become the subject of heated debate abroad due to its strategic nature and lack of spatial and temporal framework, but radically different interpretations of the BRI have also come to light within China (Yu, 2018).

Domestic source of accommodation

Of course, numerous interest groups exert their influence in China in relation to filling the abstract objectives of the initiative with content, therefore the BRI may be identified as an “*umbrella*” or “*container*” project that unites domestic interests (Yu, 2016). This is because the formation of Chinese foreign policy is in reality far from concentrated as much in the hands of top management as the international public assumes – instead, the process is fragmented and decentralized (Jones–Zeng, 2019). The foreign policy formation process is determined by entanglement between the party-state apparatus and interest groups among their allies in society, and their struggle for central resources, but not to Xi Jinping in one person or the narrowest circle of leadership. Interest groups are becoming increasingly international, attributable to their ever-strengthening foreign relations. The BRI is therefore certainly a framework which has been left vague – partly intentionally, partly out of coercion – so interest groups may fill it with content. For all these reasons, the BRI shows both the picture of a centralized strategy on the one hand, and of an outline vision on the other. The former is indicated by the fact that the BRI is defined at the central level. The initiative is strongly tied to the person of President Xi. However, the BRI is not a strategy in the strict sense of the word because it has no centrally defined goal, and there is no timeframe allocated to it (Li–Hilmola, 2019).

What key interests can be identified in relation to the initiative? Above all, it must serve the main purpose of the CCP, which is to preserve its power. The party can achieve this mainly by continuing to sustain economic growth, complemented by relatively high employment levels (Yu, 2018). Viewed from the perspective of this endeavour, the BRI goes hand in hand with numerous domestic policy-focused goals. Above all, it fits well with the goals of the “*Two Centenaries*” (as mentioned above), due to its dual focus on restoring China’s former strength and international role. The Two Centenary goals can be achieved if the government successfully carries out the structural transformation of the Chinese economy, in which the primary sources of growth are research, and development and consumption. One of the conditions for this is that the industrial sector produces products with as much added value as possible. Due to rising wages and tighter regulations, China is moving towards innovation-driven, high-quality industrial production, in support of which the Chinese government has announced the programme of smart industrial production – a modernization programme that focuses on the integration of information technology and production (Made in China 2025). Second, the BRI is linked to the campaign aimed at the de-

velopment of the western and central provinces of China referred to as “*Go West*”, and also known as the “*Great Western Development*” (GWD) campaign. Launched in 1999-2000, the campaign aims to develop China’s western provinces by encouraging cross-border infrastructure, and trade and investment relations with neighbouring states. According to some voices, BRI is essentially an “*international version*” or “*extension*” of the GWD initiative (Feng, 2015). The Chinese government believes that an improvement in economic opportunities would reduce the backwardness of the country’s interior and western provinces compared to the eastern regions by contributing to a reduction in social tension, and a weakening of religious extremism, terrorism, and separatism in minority areas (the “*three bad ones*” in Chinese terminology).

Second, the BRI also fits well with the interests of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) (Swaine, 2015; Jones–Zheng, 2019; Li, 2020). Indeed, growth in international interests generates good reason for protecting them, so increasing spending on the army is easily justified. The military strives to diversify the country’s energy and raw material transportation routes. As a result of the dynamic economic growth of recent decades, China has been forced to import more and more raw materials, which are transported mainly by sea. One of the most significant imports is oil, 70-80% of which currently reaches the country through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, which is the subject of territorial dispute, making the country extremely vulnerable strategically. Under the BRI, China is seeking to implement infrastructure that covers multiple regions and transportation routes, which in turn imposes multiple tasks on the military. Finally, the BRI framework provides an opportunity for the military to “*go out*” and increase its international role, to conduct joint military exercises, and to develop new platforms for information sharing (Li, 2020).

Provinces with significant autonomy and their leaders also play an important role in defining and achieving BRI goals. While in 2013 only 14 provinces were invited by the CCP to the BRI symposium, today most provinces are connected to the initiative in some form (Jones–Zheng, 2019).

State-owned companies also play an important role in shaping the BRI because it is they who actually implement most economic projects. Their main goal is to make a profit, and typically they are usually not dependent on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but it is rather the Ministry of Commerce that represents their interests. For these companies, BRI primarily means new markets, orders, and reference work, of course. From the perspective of the goals of state-owned enterprises, it was an important development that, due to declining foreign imports as a result of the financial crisis in 2008, China’s economic growth could only be sustained by the government introducing a large-scale economic stimulus package that created overcapacity at companies involved in infrastructure development and the real estate sector. While the government cannot completely avoid a socially painful cut in these capacities, the BRI helps

China to outsource at least some of them abroad. The former companies often decide not to pursue China's foreign policy interests because of their own profit-seeking, a statement even more true of private companies (Jones, 2018).

The BRI supports the internationalization of the Chinese Renminbi (RMB), in which the main interest groups include the People's Bank of China and major financial centres such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Shenzhen (Gruin, 2017; Jones, 2019). The central bank of China – i.e. the People's Bank of China – seeks to enter into foreign exchange agreements with the states involved in the implementation of the BRI, which agreements are expected to increase the importance of the Chinese currency in trading transactions with them. In the longer term, states are expected to increasingly use the RMB as their reserve currency. Concerning its infrastructure-related investments abroad, China is also expected to finance projects by making loans in RMB (at least in part) to increase its international role. Nor can the importance for the Chinese financial sector be underestimated of the fact that BRI projects offer excellent investment opportunities. In recent decades, a huge trade surplus has accumulated as a result of the export-driven economic model, and now, under the umbrella of the BRI, China is allowed to diversify investment through projects that promise higher returns than traditional portfolios of – predominantly US – government securities.

Unsurprisingly, these political-economic actors are in fierce competition with each other and are lobbying to influence the central content of the BRI as much as possible. Because of this, the content of the BRI remains vague and incoherent, with goals that are difficult to articulate. The BRI is thus a vision whose content is not defined by the central government. It is therefore not accurate to refer to it as a strategy in the traditional sense.

External source of accommodation

As the interpretation of the BRI is not only shaped by the interest groups earlier presented, China must take foreign criticism about BRI as an international vision very seriously. One of the most important changes to the BRI was the change in its name, which is certainly a kind of response to external criticism. While the first variant of the name was One Belt One Road, by 2015 it had already changed to the Belt and Road Initiative. According to some opinions, this is due to the misunderstanding of numerous people who sought to identify the latter “*one road*” somewhere in space. The new name clarifies the position that the zone essentially refers to the Eurasian Economic Area itself.

- China has also had to respond from the outset to criticisms that the BRI is merely China's superpower-related aspiration of transforming the international order and expanding its influence (Zheng, 2018). The BRI was seen by the international environment as a kind of Marshall Plan aimed at expanding the former's political influence through economic means, although from the outset,

the Chinese leadership refused the idea of viewing the BRI as this. Although the basis of the analogy is clear, the Chinese leadership emphasizes two important differences. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, for example, dismissed the allegation in 2014, describing the BRI as: “*the product of inclusive cooperation, not a tool of geopolitics, and must not be viewed with an outdated Cold War mentality*”. First, the BRI has no ideological purpose, as opposed to the Marshall Plan, which was also tasked with spreading liberalism. Second, unlike the Marshall Plan, it is not directed against another great power. Therefore, since the announcement of the BRI China has emphasized its inclusive nature.

- In Chinese rhetoric, care has been taken from the outset to identify the BRI as a “*common cause*”. Of the related principles, its openness and win-win nature have been emphasized since then (NDRC, 2015; Xi, 2019a). This also responds to the often-voiced accusation that through the BRI China is providing large-scale loans to other states to get them into a debt trap, which China can use (by taking advantage of their dependent position) to enforce its political will. In addition, most projects are claimed to be “*plus a white elephant*” – meaning investments that the state does not even need. The Second Belt and Road Forum provided an opportunity for the Chinese government to respond to such growing external criticism. In his speech, Xi Jinping not only denied the allegations, but, in referring to the problems, tried to convince his audience that the Chinese government understood the criticisms and was ready to change. Due to the “*people-centred approach*”, the Chinese leadership suggested that the Chinese government will pay more attention to supporting local interests. In addition to large, state-level government projects, in the future the BRI will place greater emphasis on local-level relationships (educational programs, tourism, scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation).
- During the second Belt and Road Forum, President Xi also mentioned that in the future the BRI will focus on quality. This is clearly a reference to European and Japanese criticisms about the (lack of) development of quality infrastructure. To this end, the Chinese president promised greater transparency and stricter scrutiny of Chinese companies and officials. All this reflects the central government’s view that the fact that individual Chinese interest groups undermine state goals and negatively affect the international perception of the BRI is a problem. References to sustainability also reinforce the need for a qualitative approach. In relation to this, China has launched a major campaign under the auspices of the “*Green BRI Centre*”, which is also tasked with strengthening China’s environmentally conscious image abroad. At the second Belt and Road Forum, the Chinese government also had to respond to criticisms that the BRI does not operate on the principle of reciprocity. While China expects more

openness from the world, it itself refuses to grant this to others. In his speech, Xi indicated that he would open up the Chinese market more, and promised to treat foreign companies on an equal footing with their domestic counterparts.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on BRI's vision. China has strongly promoted the concept of the "*Health Silk Road*" by providing Chinese health-care equipment, grants, and knowledge to the countries participating in the BRI.

The BRI has undergone significant transformation since its announcement in 2013. Whereas in the past phrases such as continued globalization, shared economic development, and the principle of mutual benefits were the related buzzwords, by the end of the 2010s these had been supplemented by the principles of quality, sustainability, transparency, and reciprocity. These clearly show the impact of external actors on the ongoing evolution and implementation of the strategy.

Putting the BRI into practice

Finally, the last question about the BRI is how the geopolitical script shapes foreign policy. The BRI, as discussed earlier, is not a foreign policy doctrine in the traditional sense, but rather a discursive narrative describing how China is involving Eurasian countries (Dadabaev, 2018). Because of this, the BRI does not have an ultimate goal, and the related steps do not reveal excessive planning either (numerous initiatives operate in parallel). However, due to its comprehensive and all-encompassing nature, the BRI appears everywhere in China's external discourse and practice – so much so that it is almost intertwined with China's foreign policy (Rolland, 2019), and indeed provides a practical framework for at least some of it. Xi Jinping defined this duality as a "*strategic vision*" that needs to be pragmatic, and may be easily put into practice (Xi, 2018). The key steps needed to put this vision into practice are as follows: establishing a dedicated planning unit in the Chinese decision-making structure, setting up international political forums and political institutions, developing an appropriate financial structure and a legal institutional system, and the projects themselves, of course.

Establishing a domestic policy decision-making structure

The planning and implementation of the BRI has been institutionalized into Chinese domestic policy in recent years. The BRI was first incorporated into the Constitution of the CCP in October 2017, and then into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in March 2018. The Leading Small Group was set up in 2015. The State Council has been given the power to oversee all BRI-related activities. The office for day-to-day affairs and liaison with relevant ministries has been transferred to the National

Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). BRI senior small groups have been set up in the relevant ministries and provinces in China to support the implementation of the BRI and the process of putting central instructions into practice. Like the central group, ministerial and provincial groups meet regularly and are made up of representatives of a number of relevant government bodies responsible for the development of the BRI. Guidance for the bodies concerned is provided by area-specific (education, agriculture, environment, etc.) white papers.

Political institutional system

The most important role in the international political institutional system is the biennial Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The Chinese government thereby provides the highest-level platform for states and international organizations, broken down by topic, creating roundtable-like coordination for the BRI.

Financial system

An important condition for putting the BRI into practice is the establishment of a system of financial institutions. Officially, the Chinese government has never stated how much the planned budget for the BRI will be, certainly because of the complex and difficult-to-delineate nature of the initiative. First, Xi Jinping proposed setting up a new development bank in late 2013 to implement the BRI. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) began operations with capital of \$100 billion in January 2016. The AIIB typically co-finances BRI-labelled projects, together with other multinational development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. In October 2014, the Chinese government announced that it would invest \$40 billion setting up a “*Silk Road Fund*” to finance BRI projects. From 2015, state-owned so-called “*policy banks*” – in particular, the China Development Bank and the Exim Bank of China – also started to provide international loans for projects. Finally, China’s major commercial banks, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the Agricultural Bank of China, the Bank of China, and the China Construction Bank, have also been actively involved in financing projects.

Legal system

Concrete steps have also been taken to set up the legal framework. In 2018, China set up the China International Commercial Court (CICC), which is dedicated to settling cross-border trade disputes, above all in relation to the BRI. The task of the specific political framework is to ensure the implementation of the BRI and to support the implementation of related projects.

Projects

The physical realization of BRI is indicated by projects. Essentially, any foreign project initiated by any public or private company or institution can receive a BRI flag. Projects fondly mentioned by Chinese media are typically related to the development of infrastructure in the transport, energy, IT and communications sectors, but of course they are much broader – they can include essentially anything. Characteristically, several projects that now run under the BRI name were already operational before the announcement of the BRI.

Conclusion

The study of the BRI supports the investigation of the foreign-policy-shaping role of geopolitical scripts. Using practical geopolitical reasoning, four levels of BRI can be identified based on the literature (Ó Tuathail, 2002). The changes taking place in the geopolitical space that require a strategic response are clear, as is how the BRI is intended to address them. Additionally, the BRI-shaping power of internal interest groups and the external space is also clear, as is how the script becomes a guiding point of reference for Chinese foreign policy action.

This study has pointed out that due to internal tensions because of interests, the BRI cannot function as a strictly geopolitical strategy because the role of these diffuse interests can be clearly identified in its implementation. The BRI is therefore not a well-defined and coherent foreign policy strategy with a clear content and purpose, and spatial and temporal scope. Rather, it is an outline vision and framework that will be filled in with real content by decentralized and internationalized actors, rather than the Chinese “*state*”. The strength of BRI lies in the fact that everyone who is involved can add their own content. This generates innovation and competition, but also results in continual distortions of the central BRI guidelines. The fact that the directives are filled with content through a bottom-up process, and that the CCP’s most important source of legitimacy is economic success at the moment, means that the BRI will continue to be economically focused. This is true even if the BRI raises a number of security policy issues. – And several things follow from this: on the one hand, that meaningful connections under the umbrella of the BRI can only be achieved at the local and company level. China and the states participating in the BRI can only provide the framework. On the Chinese side, these have developed in recent years. On the other hand, in relation to the BRI, states that want to construct a narrative against it will only be successful if they also focus on economic relations and sub-state levels. Although the BRI is still seen by the outside world primarily as China’s great geopolitical strategy, from our perspective about Eurasia in the longer term, the BRI may

be more interesting because of its facilitating effects. External actors' own Eurasian narratives can be easily linked to the BRI.

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India's claims for global power in Eurasia – The issue of India and Eurasian connectivity

László Csicsmann¹

Abstract

International research usually focuses on the relevance of East Asia, but due to the size of its population, its economic growth, and the development of its military capabilities, India by now can also be considered a global player. Eurasia is a priority for India for political, security, and economic reasons, since in order to break out politically and economically from South Asia, establishing a connection with Central Asian countries has become a priority.

The purpose of the study is to present all those challenges and opportunities which have emerged for India in the Eurasian region from the 1990s until the present time. According to the conclusion of the study, although in order to counterbalance China the Indian government closely cooperates with Russia, the USA, Central Asian countries, Japan, and the ASEAN countries, in addition to its involvement in multilateral conventions, the country does not have the necessary funds, therefore it can be considered a competitor of China only to a limited extent.

Introduction

In his latest book, Indian-American researcher Parag Khanna argues that, in the twenty-first century, the hegemony of the United States will be replaced by the hegemony of Asia. In his interpretation, Asia cannot be narrowed down to the Far East, or only China, but in this transformation of the world order powers such as Japan, Russia, and India are also playing a significant role. In view of the numbers, the leading role of the Asian continent is an undeniable fact: the greatest proportion of humankind – approximately five billion people – live in Asia, along with two-thirds of the megacities of the world, and also eight of the ten largest armies (Khanna, 2019). With regard to infrastructural projects, it is an undeniable fact that the China-driven Belt and Road Initiative deserves the most attention.

Analyses related to Asia and Asianism usually focus on East Asia, and polemicize about the issue of the Chinese development model. However, primarily as a result of its

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population (currently the second most populous state in the world), its pace of economic growth (outperforming Chinese growth in recent years), its nuclear armaments, and the development of its military capabilities, India has entered the global space. By Asianism we mean a political narrative that builds on a path different from that of European/Western development, using different political and social arrangements, which makes the Asian region the focus of global development. Analyses of Asianism also neglect India, only referring to the fact that the political system of the South Asian state – “*the most populous democratic state in the world*” – differs significantly from the Chinese-type authoritarian development model. The above-described issue became prominent in the international legal debate about Asian values in the early 1990s. At the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Western states accused China of legitimising a model of non-democratic development by stressing cultural relativism – namely, “*Asian values*” (Sen, 2003). It is an undeniable fact that if the roles of India and China in the world economy are compared, the South Asian state is at a significant disadvantage.

Until the end of the Cold War, India followed the model laid down by Nehru, which was based mainly on autarchic economic development and the significant participation of the state, the basis of which was the principle of positive neutrality in foreign policy. However, the end of the bipolar world order posed significant challenges to India, but the new world order also offered many opportunities for the South Asian state. In the early 1990s, India underwent major economic opening up under the Congress Party government of Narasimha Rao, which included – among other elements – economic liberalisation measures, partial privatisation, and the economic recovery of the private sector, in order to ensure that the South Asian state could leave behind the economic crisis that emerged in the early 1990s. Becoming a global player in the new world order is one of the fundamental objectives of Indian foreign policy, which has two important goals: the further development and deployment of nuclear weapons, and becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. While the objectives of Indian foreign policy changed in the 1990s, the issue of positive neutrality continued to be crucial. Due to political, security, and economic considerations, the Eurasian region is a top priority for India (Mansingh, 1997). This study attempts to provide a brief overview of the challenges and opportunities which have emerged for India in the Eurasian region from the 1990s to the present.

From neighbourhood policy to the concept of the ‘extended’ neighbourhood

In Indian thinking, Eurasia is usually understood to mean the strip of land ranging from Central Asia to the western part of China, which mostly implies a geographical definition of the region. In the Cold War years, there were particularly good relations

between India and the Soviet Union, and in the 1950s Nehru established excellent personal relations with Soviet party secretary Khrushchev. In India's foreign policy – in the spirit of a policy of positive neutrality – it led the movement of non-aligned nations in Belgrade in 1961, which involved officially proclaiming equal distance from the superpowers. In August 1971, before the outbreak of the Third Indo-Pakistani War, India concluded a 20-year bilateral cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union, which was India's strategic partner and major arms supplier until its disintegration in 1991.

During the Cold War years, the strategic power relations of South Asia were determined by five powers: India, Pakistan, the Soviet Union, China, and the United States. While Pakistan was clearly oriented towards the United States, relations between New Delhi and Washington developed in an ambivalent manner. The relationship between India and China was normalised until the 1959 border conflict and the subsequent 1962 war. After the war, but especially since the early 1970s, the normalisation of USA-China relations has emerged as a major security challenge for India.

The above processes are being reorganised due to the new world order, which is leading to fundamental changes for India. Breaking out of the South Asian region in connection with its economic and political objectives, and establishing trading, transport, and political relations as widely as possible will become strategic priorities. In this regard, it is of particular importance to India to establish relations with the Central Asian republics that became independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. India can also provide a connection to Central Europe through Central Asia. These very processes prompted the development of the concept of the “*extended neighbourhood*” as a foreign policy priority in Indian geopolitical thinking in the early 2000s.

The Cold War foreign policy of India was mostly isolation, with the main focus being on the South Asian region, or so-called immediate neighbourhood. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was founded in Dhaka in 1985 during the presidency of Rajiv Gandhi, and was aimed at deepening economic and political relations. The formation of the SAARC was accelerated by the intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan 1979. Eight states from the region are full members of the SAARC, and it also has observer members, such as China.

In the 1990s, several Indian prime ministers emphasised the importance of the immediate neighbourhood of India. The main hurdle the SAARC must overcome in order to become a real form of collaboration is the unresolved conflict between India and Pakistan, which has prevented the deepening of relations. In the late 1990s, the concept of “*extended neighbourhood*” appeared in the lexicon of Indian foreign policy, as distinguished from the concept of “*immediate neighbourhood*”. In 2004, the Foreign Minister of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) argued that it was essential for the global role of India to extend beyond the South Asian region. The extended neighbourhood includes a vast area from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea, which is the very area we may de-

fine as Eurasia (Scott, 2009). The interests of several great powers overlap in this extended neighbourhood, since in addition to India, Russia, the United States, and China are the most important states which are competing with each other in this region.

The main challenge for India in the Eurasian region is the Chinese Silk Road on land – the BRI that connects East and West. China is a challenge for India both politically and economically, since China's influence has appeared directly in the immediate neighbourhood of India, and – according to Indian perceptions – China is deliberately surrounding the South Asian state. Part of this strategy involves Sino-Pakistani cooperation in the form of the CPEC, which involves significant infrastructural investment, from the deep-sea port of Gwadar to the northern border of Pakistan. A particularly sore spot for India is Chinese penetration in Sri Lanka, where China (in 2017) was given a 99-year lease in exchange for undertaking the construction work associated with the Hambantota port. The latter generated significant controversy in the economic literature, with some arguing that China is deliberately forcing its partners into a debt trap within the framework of the BRI project. However, the other side of the coin is the fact that a significant part of Sri Lankan debt is owed to Western European states. Ensuring the security of the port of Hambantota is still the responsibility of Sri Lanka, and China has not established a military base there (Kumar, 2017).

China has been inclined to build economic, political, and military relations from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca since the 1990s, after its demand for raw materials grew significantly. This is the route through which oil tankers travel from the Middle Eastern region or the African continent to East Asia (the concept of the Maritime Silk Road). The east-west direction of the maritime and land silk roads interferes with the global aspirations of India. Naturally, another part of the issue is that there are signs of cooperation in India-China relations – for example, India also has a significant share of BRI projects and seeks to improve economic relations.

While India does maintain excellent relations with Russia, it also wants to diversify its dependence on the latter country which developed in the 1990s, especially in the field of military modernisation. All these goals are in line with the Indian approach, which adheres to the principle of positive neutrality in foreign policy, even after the collapse of the Cold-War-era international system.

Several specific projects can be emphasised regarding India's attempt to counterbalance Chinese aspirations in the region. For instance, the issue of energy security, which is mainly manifest in the planning and construction of gas pipelines. Another example might be the planning of the *International North-South Transit Corridor* (INSTC), which would connect transport and trading routes, and which would cut directly across Chinese east-west connection routes. The present study elaborates three topics primarily: in addition to political-security issues, the issue of transport and trade connections, and the challenge of energy security from the Indian perspective.

Political, security and strategic issues

The Eurasian activity of India has decisive political and strategic elements as well. As mentioned earlier, the political and strategic relations of the region are determined by four powers: the United States, India, Russia and China, and middle-ranking power players such as Turkey and Iran. From India's point of view, signs of cooperation and confrontation are visible. India strives for good relations in accordance with Indian foreign policy that promotes a spirit of positive neutrality. There are signs of cooperation in the region in the following areas:

- *Avoiding radical Islam.* India, along with Russia and China, has been making efforts – especially since the 1990s – to exclude from its security environment and marginalise the spread of radical Islam. Avoiding the snowball effect of radical Islam which emerged in Pakistan became especially important, particularly as a result of the Afghan Civil War (1992–) and the subsequent takeover of Kabul by the Taliban regime in 1996. A relative consensus developed among the superpowers regarding this issue, which manifested in the provision of support to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. India has been playing an increasingly important role in reconstruction since its intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, but Indian interests are being severely infringed by radical groups supported by Pakistan, such as the Haqqani network. Fourteen per cent of the population of India is Muslim, and Salafism has traditionally had few followers since the time when India gained independence. However, due to various external and internal processes, especially the growing popularity of Hindu nationalism, support for Islamic radicalism is increasing among the Muslim population of India. In terms of the security perception of India, the Mumbai Massacre in November 2008 can be considered a defining episode, and one that analysts see as the 9/11 terrorist attack of South Asia (Rao, 2008). Since the election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in 2014, the ideology and slogans of Hindu nationalism have been dominant in the foreign policy of India, attracting the attention of global jihadists. The Khorasan Network, which was formed by the Islamic State in 2014, is also active throughout South Asia and poses a significant challenge to the national security of India.
- *India is paying increasing attention to the Central Asian republics.* In the 1990s, the issue of the Central Asian region emerged primarily in connection with the cross-border activities of Pakistan and the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Central Asia is the crucial pillar of Modi's new foreign policy that unfolded in 2014, as New Delhi has announced the “*Connect Central Asia Policy*”, which is aimed at deepening economic and political ties with the region. In July 2015, Modi visited all five states and concluded agreements primarily in the field of

security, politics, and the economy. Counterbalancing Pakistan and China plays a very important role in India's Central Asia policy. Cooperation with Central Asia has bilateral and multilateral elements. The issue of defence cooperation is particularly prominent in bilateral relations. India has been carrying out joint military exercises with Kazakhstan since 2016, and it has developed close cooperation with Uzbekistan in connection with counter-terrorism. Cooperation extends to the nuclear industry as well, which is particularly important for India. India signed an agreement with Kazakhstan in 2015, according to which the Central Asian country will supply 5,000 tons of uranium to India by 2019 (Menon, 2019)

- One of the most important regional international organisations related to the multilateral Eurasian collaboration is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which was originally set up for the purpose of resolving border disputes that emerge in connection with the collapse of the Soviet Union. India, along with Pakistan, became a member of the SCO in 2017, by virtue of which the “*hegemon*” of the South Asian region joined Russia and China. As is commonly known, the SCO was created as a formal organisation in connection with the “*war on terror*” declared by the United States in particular, and its unspoken purpose was to counterbalance the regional influence of Washington. Interestingly, India is the only crucial member of the SCO to maintain a strategic partnership with the United States, especially since 2006. India's deep ties with Russia can also be highlighted. Although India has tried to diversify its arms purchases, Russia still plays a significant role to this day. For example, Russia has recently sold the same S400 system to India which it sold to NATO member Turkey (Hochart, 2019). Close India-Russia relations permitted New Delhi to announce the *Connect Central Asia* scheme. However, India's relations in the SCO are being significantly set back by the factors of China and Pakistan.

Trading and transport routes

The plan for the corridor – which ensures connecting the north and the south (IN-STC) – is crucial for India; it involves collaboration between India and Russia aimed at counterbalancing the Chinese BRI. The project began in 2000 with the tripartite agreement of India, Iran, and Russia, and currently has 13 members, including Syria. The transport route would connect Europe with South and Southeast Asia via maritime, land, and rail routes. Sanctions against Iran and international pressure significantly reduced the political feasibility of the plan in the 2000s, but the entry into force of the 2016 Iranian nuclear deal gave it another boost. While China is primarily thinking about building bilateral partnerships through the BRI in the Eurasian region,

India is concluding agreements specifically of a multilateral nature. The North-South Corridor is a strategic priority for India also because it represents a transport route that is an alternative to the Suez Canal, significantly reducing transport costs and time, thus contributing to the overall competitiveness of India. A good illustration of the latter is that delivery time between India and Finland via the Suez Canal is 45 days on average, which would be reduced to 21 days.

Part of the INTSC (International North-South Transport Corridor) plan includes development of the port of Chabahar in Iran, to be funded by India to the sum of approximately 500 million USD, which help counterbalance Chinese influence in Pakistan in connection with the port of Gwadar project. India and Iran signed a bilateral agreement in 2016, in the framework of which India is funding the renovation work of the port. Chabahar is a location of geostrategic importance, since it can connect India with Central Asia by sea and by road while bypassing Pakistan, and is more economically profitable as well (Sachdeva, 2016). For instance, India is increasingly engaging in economic and political activity in connection with Afghanistan, which usually affects Pakistani intentions. The 2016 agreement was eventually transformed into a tripartite agreement by involving Afghanistan, which Pakistan saw as a strategic challenge. It is a historical fact that the strategic depth of Pakistan is Afghanistan, in relation to which the former has a vested interest in the current government serving the interests of Islamabad. Currently, India is forced to conduct its trade relations with Afghanistan primarily through Pakistan. The plans of India and the INTSC are being upset mostly by the primary and secondary US sanctions announced by Trump against Iran. Numerous Middle Eastern states, most notably Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, are explicitly interested in isolating Iran, a situation which does not further the goals set by India. However, the foreign policy of the European Union (which seeks to maintain the Iranian nuclear agreement) improves the chances of implementing the INTSC.

It is taken as a swipe at India that in 2020 China signed up to a 25-year strategic agreement with Iran to invest 400 billion USD into infrastructure in the Middle Eastern state. Part of this includes the construction of a railway line between Chabahar and Zahedan on the Pakistani border, in relation to which activity – according to Iranian sources – India must be left out because it has not fulfilled its commitments to fund the project. In this sense, Iran is the geostrategically most important state for both the North-South aspirations of India and the East-West aspirations of China. One reason for the failure to fund could have been the strategy of the United States of putting maximum pressure on Iran and partners cooperating with Iran, which could put India at a particular disadvantage and provide favourable opportunities for China. For the time being, India has not lost Iran as a strategic ally, and in the medium term India has no interest in turning its back on the Middle Eastern state, which is the bridgehead of the connection to Turkey, Central Asia, and ultimately Europe.

India is also showing increasing interest in trade and transport in the form of links to the east. The so-called BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) was launched in 1997 by seven states in order to deepen economic and trade relations in the Bay of Bengal. The seven states also include Myanmar and Thailand, which shows that India is enforcing its extended neighbourhood toward Southeast Asia as well.

During the period leading up to the establishment of BIMSTEC, the Narasimha Rao government created the so-called “*Look East policy*” in the early 1990s, with the explicit aim of finding external support partners in connection with the economic reforms of India, especially related to the Little Tigers in Southeast Asia, where among other proponents the Indian colony helped deepen economic ties. BIMSTEC did not really function in actuality in the 2000s as India focused primarily on its conflict with Pakistan. However, during its second term, the Narendra Modi government revived the BIMSTEC initiative (from 2019), when Modi invited the heads of state and governments of the organisation to his inauguration ceremony. It may be recalled that five years earlier the heads of state and governments of the immediate neighbourhood (i.e. the SAARC) were also invited to the first inauguration ceremony. The reactivation of BIMSTEC is also related to the fact that the first Modi government announced the “*Act East policy*”, which emphasised the political importance of the Southeast Asian region, and above all, Thailand. In the framework of the “*Act East policy*”, India is involved in a strategic alliance with the anti-China Vietnam, and is strengthening its military and political ties with Japan. The United States explicitly urges that these steps be taken to counterbalance China, and President Trump is particularly satisfied by the tension in the India-China relationship. However, India is not interested at all in deepening tensions with China under pressure from the United States. The BIMSTEC is an Indian response to the efforts of China to come ever closer to Indian interests, with the 99-year contract for the port of Hambantota being a hallmark of the process. However, according to BIMSTEC analysts, the latter approach may work if India – like China – is able to invest substantial capital into development opportunities, otherwise BIMSTEC will not represent a real alternative to the BRI plans.

In addition to land routes, India wants to respond to China’s Maritime Silk Road plan as well. As part of this response, and especially since the early 2000s, India has carried out major modernisation of its navy, thereby making India visible in the Indian Ocean and in the Bay of Bengal. This is also related to the intention of the United States to counterbalance the maritime ambitions of China, which has a relatively underdeveloped navy. In 2014, India launched a comprehensive cultural program, the so-called “*Project Mausam*”, which was designed to help with establishing relations with 39 states along the Indian Ocean. The primary objective is to establish cultural heritage cooperation with the states thus concerned, but the project also provides an opportunity for India to steer cooperation in a political or military direction. This, however,

requires very significant financial resources. Naturally, the debate about China's debt trap can be brought up – namely, that the partners of China usually receive the desired consideration in exchange for a high-interest Chinese loan, in relation to which investment Chinese companies usually employ Chinese workers. India is unable to finance these types of loans to the extent that China is currently doing around the world. In this sense, the Mausam project is not a rival to the Silk Road aspirations of China, which envisions a much more complex Chinese foreign policy strategy.

Negotiations about the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – which began in 2018 and were abandoned by India in 2019 – are key to India's free trade agreements with the ASEAN region. The "*Act East policy*" announced by Modi envisaged specifically the expansion of trade relations with the region; however, India perceived the significant customs duty reduction to be granted on Chinese goods as a source of danger to Indian industry. The RCEP is a comprehensive economic partnership between ten ASEAN states and six countries that concluded a free trade agreement with the organisation, in which rather substantial opportunities were also formulated for India in connection with the goals announced by Modi (Csáki, 2020). However, for the past few years Modi has been practicing assertive diplomacy with China to clearly define the areas (e.g. border issues) in which the interests of New Delhi lie. In India, whose economy is fundamentally less export-driven, the strengthening of the middle class (which can induce significant domestic consumption), is the main issue. Accordingly, Modi announced the "*Make in India*" scheme in connection with the above issue, which favours the protection of domestic industry and suggests that India does not want to enable Chinese economic expansion indefinitely. Moreover, from the Indian point of view, the RCEP could also have enormous benefits if it leads to the deepening of relations with, for example, the otherwise allied Japan, or possibly Australia.

The pivot to Asia announced by the Obama administration and the "*Free and Open Indo-Pacific*" (FOIP) initiative announced during Trump's presidency in 2017 reinforce India's role in the region. India announced its policy of military modernisation (with a focus on the Indian Ocean region) as early as the early 2010s, which was aimed specifically at counterbalancing Chinese aspirations. India and Japan have developed close relations, especially since 2015, the reason for which is the geopolitical realisation that the same two oceans lap at the shores of the two states. India is paying increasing attention to the Indo-Pacific region in the spirit of Act East policy, as described earlier (Heiduk, 2020).

Energy security – pipeline diplomacy

Simultaneous with the economic opening of India, the issue of energy security has become a priority since the 1990s. By now, India has become one of the largest oil-consuming states in the world. As a result of the small share of domestic oil production,

this demand is met mainly by imports. In 2017, Indian oil consumption reached 4.4 million barrels per day, and this is expected to rise to 6 million barrels per day by 2024 (International Energy Agency, 2020). Between April and November 2019, India satisfied nearly 85 percent of its crude oil demand from imports, which constitutes very significant dependency and vulnerability (Ministry of Petroleum and Gas, 2019). More than two-thirds of crude oil imports originate in the Middle East, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates being the key players.

India has significant gas production capacity, but 43% of its annual consumption has to be imported. The foremost source of imports by far is Qatar, from where gas is shipped in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Gas is imported from 13 other countries as well, with the leading importers, aside from Qatar, being Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Australia.

India is not the only country that needs hydrocarbon imports: Pakistan does as well. The design and construction of two gas pipelines are on the agenda, which may also have a fundamentally significant effect on the political situation in the South Asian region. There are also two states close to India and Pakistan that have the most substantial gas reserves in the world. Turkmenistan has the sixth largest gas reserve in the world, but Iran has even larger reserves, making it the second largest source behind Russia. Iran not only has substantial reserves, but the pipeline path is significantly shorter from there than from Turkmenistan, which could affect construction costs and, last but not least, transit fees.

Plans for the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline date back to the mid-1990s. Iran and Pakistan signed the first agreement for its future implementation in 1995. However, no meaningful progress has been made for a long time, since there have been unprecedented tensions in Iran-USA relations, especially since 2002, the time of the nuclear crisis. A system of multilateral sanctions against Iran was also established in the early 2010s, especially during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, during which period the Middle Eastern state refused to negotiate. The situation was complicated even further by the signing of the so-called nuclear agreement by the United States and India in 2006, through which the relationship of the two states transformed into a close alliance. In the second half of the 2000s, especially during the Bush administration, Washington put significant pressure on New Delhi not to participate in the implementation of the IPI pipeline. India announced in 2009 that it did not intend to participate in the construction of the pipeline.

The concepts of a “*peace pipeline*” and pipeline diplomacy have appeared in the academic literature, suggesting that energy demand creates a kind of interdependence between India and Pakistan and hinting that steps will be taken towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, the IPI was the very reason for disputes – about the determination of the transit fee – and generated further tension between India and Pakistan.

In 2013, Iran and Pakistan agreed to start implementing the project, even without India. The United States put significant political pressure on Pakistan as well, but bilateral relations became quite chilly during this period, especially following the 2011 US action against Osama bin Laden, which Islamabad understood as a violation of the country's sovereignty. The Iranian section is essentially finished, but construction of the Pakistani section is still in progress. It is likely that pressure from the US plays a significant role in the fact that the pipeline is still not operational to this day. The nuclear agreement signed in 2016 by the P5 + 1 meant hope for the construction of the gas pipeline and led to visions of the integration of Iran in the region and the strengthening of economic relations. The historically positive cooperation between India and Iran was a cause for confidence. Iran is also a crucial state in relation to the oil imports of India. In 2018, however, President Trump announced the reintroduction of US sanctions and declared that the United States would withdraw from the nuclear agreement. Simultaneous with these measures, the United States introduced so-called secondary sanctions that also affect India and Pakistan, and ultimately the political feasibility of the IPI gas pipeline. In the current anti-Iran climate, there is little chance of it being realised. India is working primarily with Qatar to buy LNG. Perhaps it is not irrelevant to note that Qatar has become quite isolated in the Middle East since the 2018 crisis, considering that the Saudi accusations against Doha did indeed involve relations with Iran. However, both the US-Saudi-Israeli bloc and Iran are especially important in relation to the global aspirations of India.

In contrast to the troubled fate of the IPI, investment into the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline has been sustained. A four-party agreement on the construction of the gas pipeline was signed in Turkmenistan in 2015, but the idea of implementation emerged as early as in the 1990s. Events in Afghanistan – in particular, the US intervention in 2001, and the deteriorating security environment that followed – prevented further progress. The TAPI is 1,814 km long, with an investment cost in the range of 10 billion USD, and the pipeline is due to pass through Herat, Kandahar, reaching Quetta and Multan in Pakistan, ending in Punjab, India (Reyaz, 2018).

India has faced various dilemmas regarding the construction of the TAPI pipeline, which can be summarised as the following:

- The TAPI makes India very vulnerable to Pakistan. While Pakistan is more vulnerable to water issues (in connection with dam construction around the Indus River), the gas pipeline could easily balance out this situation, which is not in India's interest.
- According to Indian opinions, the TAPI is actually in China's interest as long as the Pakistani section can be connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is ultimately part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. India also fears that if the pipeline is built to the port of Gwadar in

Pakistan, then Pakistan could gain a strategic bridgehead in relation to the gas supply of Europe, and ultimately the Chinese position would improve.

- The advantage of TAPI for India is that the pipeline would significantly facilitate the diversification of gas supply and reduce dependence on the insecure Persian Gulf in particular.
- Another dilemma for India is the issue of determining a transit fee with Pakistan. The agreement signed in 2013 is not acceptable to India, and India is calling for its revision with reference to developments in world markets. However, it is concerning that Pakistan could potentially even use the issue of the transit charges as a political weapon. India and Pakistan would each receive 42 percent of the gas supplied by the TAPI pipeline.

Conclusion

It is shown above that India has been pursuing a very active Eurasian policy, especially since the inauguration of the Modi government (2014), the main goal of which – arising from India’s aspiration of become a global power – is to connect the South Asian state with the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, and Southeast and East Asia politically, economically, and in the field of the military. In this process, Chinese aspirations (above all, the BRI, announced in 2013) create opportunities but also pose challenges and are sources of danger. Especially since the Hindu nationalist turn, India has made independent investments into infrastructure (e.g. INSTC) which, on the one hand, counterbalance Chinese aspirations and, on the other, promote the economic and political opening of India.

In the Eurasian system of relations, India can rely on three powers to facilitate its economic and political goals: Russia, Japan, and the United States. Of the three systems of relations, Eurasian relations are supported most by Indian-Russian relations, but the dependence on arms imports that arose in the 1990s did not serve Indian interests, thus the latter country began to diversify its sources of supply. India continues to approach its system of relations through a policy of positive neutrality, and has been taking action more and more consciously in various directions during the Modi Administration. While the first Modi government (2014–2019) turned more towards the immediate neighbourhood, during the second term the idea of the extended neighbourhood came to the fore. Central Asia (*Connect Central Asia*) and South East Asia can be considered crucial elements of this. For example, India is consciously deepening its relations with Vietnam, which already takes an anti-China stance, while under the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, the India-Japan relationship has also reached a new level.

However, India’s aspirations are severely limited by its economic opportunities, despite its 6-8 percent economic growth. The size of the Indian “*Project Mausam*”

and of INSTC are dwarfed by the efforts of the Chinese Silk Road. It is true that academic debate about the debt trap highlights the limitations of Chinese opportunities. The plans of India, assuming that it acts not only in the South Asian region but in the extended neighbourhood, are considered less suspicious than the growing Chinese influence. As a democracy, India also has significant soft power in the Eurasian region.

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The European Union's System of External Relations with the Eurasian Region

Zoltán Gálik¹

Abstract

The relationship between the European Union and the Eurasian region is characterized by a diversity of political and economic arrangements. States geographically close to the Union are attracted to integration, which offers them preferential access to the single market in line with observing political conditionality agreed under association agreements. The EU is building relations with countries in regions which are further away, using looser trade policy instruments, ranging from development policy instruments and sectoral agreements to comprehensive free trade agreements. Taking advantage of its economic importance on the world market, the Union establishes relationships with the Eurasian region through a system of various bilateral and multilateral treaties, which cannot be regarded as a coherent approach. EU Member States' differing foreign policy preferences make it very difficult to develop joint initiatives. While the EU has the world's most extensive system of international agreements, a low level of progress has been achieved in establishing relations with the Eurasian region, despite the fact that the greatest turnover of world trade takes place between the two regions.

In the European Union's system of external relations, those with Eurasia have risen in significance significantly since the turn of the millennium. In terms of power politics, it would be difficult to identify a unified EU attitude towards the region, as the international economic, political, and cultural diversity of the region and its different levels of economic and social development have necessitated the elaboration of a multifaceted system of foreign relations. The development of European integration has brought with it an increase in the representation of a shared foreign policy approach within the international system, a significant part of which is now focused on the Eurasian region – a trend expected to further strengthen in the coming decade. For the Union, the framework of external relations with countries further away from the eastern border of the bloc is influenced by the plan of a Russia-led Eurasian Union, and the One Belt One Road initiative, represented by China.

However, it is important to distinguish between the (i) positions of the EU and Member States formulated at a political and strategic level, and (ii) specific action that

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has been taken, or is to be taken, under the Union's system of agreements. The former can be analysed at the level of strategies established within the framework of a single EU common foreign and security policy, and the latter along the lines of the implementation of treaties associated with external relations or the development of new systems of treaties. We often say of the European Union that it is a foreign economic giant, but a foreign political dwarf. The EU's relations with Eurasia also imply this duality, which often makes united action impossible.

Conceptual Basics

If one attempts to define a methodology for assessing the EU's system of Eurasian relations, two fundamental problems are encountered when specifying the two end-points of partnership relations. On the one hand, we need to define the framework of joint action by the Union and its Member States towards the region, and, on the other hand, we need to examine an extremely complex Eurasian region according to different perspectives and interest groups. None of this is an easy task, as over the past decades of EU integration the region has only gradually become the focus of attention, and only in the last decade has it become of strategic importance. To assess these relations, we must first recall the basic features of the system of external relations of the European integration project. The Union is not a state: it does not have the classical instruments of power politics. However, the development trajectory of integration has provided Member States with increasingly powerful instruments to represent their common foreign policy interests. Although the Common Foreign and Security Policy was not established until 1993, the European Economic Community began to lay the foundations for a common commercial policy after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which now serves the interests of the world's largest single market. When examining Eurasian relations, we must primarily analyse results and relations achieved through common commercial policy, as this is the area in which we find the institutions and mechanisms at the EU level that define bilateral and multilateral relations. Of course, the EU's common foreign and security policy should not be underestimated either, as its activities associated with the region represent an integral part of the system of relations, together with the activities of the European Foreign Service that was established after the Lisbon Treaty, which maintains day-to-day diplomatic relations with countries and international institutions in the region.

Defining the Eurasian area is a great challenge in itself, and it is not possible to speak of a unified foreign policy from the perspective of the European Union. Countries located in the area spanning the EU's immediate neighbourhood to the Pacific Ocean have built international agreements and foreign policy relations that differ in structure and objectives. Nor can we talk about a unified stance towards the region

among EU Member States. European regional powers often view with suspicion the plans of the Far East related to Europe. In other continents, such as in Africa and South America, the foreign economic interests of countries of the Eurasian region and the European Union have increasingly frequently crossed each other. From a geopolitical point of view, the analysis focuses on the three actors that determine foreign economic policy processes and broader foreign and security policy in the region: the European Union, the post-Soviet region, and China.

The three actors are driven by a desire for three different forms of economic integration and three profoundly different institutions with different legal-, economic-dependence-, and economic governance relations, and different visions concerning power policy. The European Union is a key economic player and influential agent in the international system, and its role in world politics is unquestionable. The Eurasian Union, initiated by Russia in the post-Soviet region, describes the desire for the creation of a single economic area in the region, copying the EU's economic development trajectory, while China's Belt and Road Initiative could connect two of the world's vast economic areas in line with China's growing role in world politics.

However, we must not forget the important factor that the Union's economic relations with other states and neighbouring areas of the region (Japan and South Korea, for example) have developed dynamically through non-preferential agreements over the last two decades, and by now exceed relations with states of the Eurasian region in terms of content.

Power-related Factors

Today, the European Union is the world's largest single market, with foreign economic relations interwoven with international relations. The presence of the EU is an unavoidable factor for Russia, the post-Soviet region, and for China, which influences the international order of the region through direct and indirect means of power. The post-millennium shift in power, which saw China's strengthening appearance and Russia's marked foreign policy role, required new responses from the Union, which itself has also been undergoing significant change. The Union, enlarged to twenty-eight Member States and then reduced to 27 Member States as a result of Brexit, ranks second among the latter three actors in terms of population with 447 million inhabitants – barely a third of China's population of nearly 1.4 billion, but significantly more than the nearly 280 million inhabitants of the post-Soviet region. The level of economic development of the Union (its gross national product per capita at purchasing power parity) is about four times that of China. In terms of total world economic output, that of the EU (16.0%), the United States (16.3%) and China (16.4%) were similar in 2017 (Eurostat, 2020).

With regard to the system of external relations, European integration, which has been developing dynamically since the Treaty of Rome, is by far outperforming integration in all other regions and countries in the world, with some 878 bilateral and 268 multilateral agreements – a fact made visible by its 15% share of world trade. The latter mainly involves trade in goods, with services representing only about a third of total turnover. Demographic trends show that by the turn of the century, in addition to Africa, the Eurasian region will maintain its current growth rate, and its importance in the world economy will increase in parallel.

In addition to its economic role, the Eurasian region is becoming increasingly important from a security policy perspective. In terms of defence spending, China's spending (\$252 billion in 2020) far exceeds that of the European Union's most developed Member States, as does its R&D spending (SIPRI, 2020), while Russia's defence spending, weapons development programmes, and military presence in conflict zones around the world represent a growing challenge for the Union. Since 2003, the European Security and Defence Policy has been based primarily on conflict management and peacekeeping developments and operations, while the programmes of Russia and China have also been modernized and developed in the areas of intervention and expeditionary capabilities. In the third decade of the 2000s, military capabilities at the EU level were not comparable to those of the two great powers in the region. EU Member States' capabilities, especially through NATO operations, indicate a more balanced picture, but the capability-expectations gap has widened steadily since the 1990s.

Basic Pillars of the Development of the System of Relations – Concentric Circles in EU-Eurasia Relations

The Eurasian region has gradually become a key factor in the EU's system of external relations. The *Birkelbach Report*, prepared in 1961, made a fundamental contribution to elaborating the system of conditions for external relations in early decades, promising closer relations for external countries with the Community on condition that they observe democratic principles shared by the Member States concerning integration. Community-level trade and political relations with the Eurasian region have been extremely limited for decades.

From the outset, the Union's trading system has been based on two fundamental pillars: preferential and non-preferential relations. The former have been available to countries with which the EU has a preferential relationship in an asymmetrical manner, especially in the area of access to the single market. The EU has established non-preferential relations with countries that are its competitors on the world market, or where

the EU is simply not interested in offering preferential treatment. The countries of the Eurasian region are subject to agreements of different importance and depth in relation to both preferential and non-preferential relations. The EU mostly concludes preferential agreements with countries that are territorially close to the EU, while establishing relations with more distant countries through a group of looser trade agreements.

In the decades following the founding of the EEC, instead of close relations that promised association with the Eurasian region, some markets were opened up to third parties to a limited extent through partnership and cooperation agreements. However, no comprehensive trade agreements have been concluded. Relations with the South-East Asian region were mainly organized on a multilateral basis through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which China joined, together with Japan and South Korea, in the form of ASEAN + 3, in 1997.

After the end of the Cold War, the European Union began to build intensive relations with the states of the post-Soviet region. Development and cooperation agreements were aimed at ensuring the stability of political and economic transition. EU funds have been provided to the post-Soviet states since the early 1990s through TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) and ODA (Official Development Assistance) programmes that promote infrastructure subsidies, energy cooperation, and economic reform. Following the enlargement in 2004, the EU's New Neighbourhood Policy, followed by the Eastern Partnership programme, provided a framework for moderate and highly asymmetrical relations.

EU External Relations with the post-Soviet Region

One of the most important and dynamic arenas of the European Union's Eurasian policy is its activity in relation to the Commonwealth of Independent States. The European Union is linked to the region through its New Neighbourhood Policy and, within this, its Eastern Partnership programme, but the EU has had to adapt to the economic, political, and military crises that have evolved in the last decade. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, one of the EU's most important goals has been to contribute to the stability of the region and to consciously influence the model of economic modernization. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), implemented since 2007, has operated in line with essentially the same political and economic considerations as the cooperation programmes under the Eastern Partnership initiative, launched in 2009. Key objectives of the former are to deepen the processes of political association and economic integration, intensify bilateral relations, and provide a multilateral framework for cooperation and political dialogue. In addition to ongoing technical consultations and biennial summits, more frequent ministerial-level meetings and thematic forums have also been organised.

Some of the main aims of building relations are supporting political, economic, and social reform processes, making preparations for negotiating new association agreements, establishing a full free trade system, and supporting institution-building programmes and visa liberalization, along with energy cooperation. With regard to policy reforms, institutional and administrative capacity has been created and adjusted, providing a framework for good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, building civil society, multicultural dialogue, and combating fraud, corruption, organized crime and terrorism.

Economic reforms, economic development, the development of a system of conditions for a market economy, intensified trade relations, and the approximation of legislation to EU regulations in areas of common interest have been the goals of the transition to a market economy that is aimed at achieving gradual economic integration. Target areas in the field of social reform have included integration, employment, non-discrimination, and the fight against poverty. Various sector-based cooperative activities have led to joint programmes being set up mainly in areas of common interest, such as the environment, sustainable development, energy, transport, telecommunications, health, food safety, education and training, and research and innovation. Cooperation has provided an opportunity to support local and regional development and the participation of institutional actors engaged in regional and sub-regional integration in Community programmes.

Qualitatively new external relations were promised due to the elaboration of a new generation of EU treaties and their signing with target countries (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) in the 2010s. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) is a special agreement of its kind. In an earlier period of integration, the European Community, and later the European Union, offered the opportunity to access its comprehensive market only to countries during the accession phase, but now the agreement grants this benefit to some target countries. It is also a novelty that, in addition to the free movement of goods, this new type of agreement also allows target countries to establish asymmetric relations by facilitating the flow of services and capital. Although the signing of the DCFTA does not, in principle, prevent countries from being members of other free trade areas, the agreement is not in line with the Eurasian Union's vision of a customs union. Signatory countries must harmonize their own standards with, and recognize, EU technical standards, and they must adapt to several EU regulatory systems. In many places, economic areas that awaited modernization were modernized under the EU system of conditions, and the unification of significantly different industrial and agricultural systems of standards has been achieved according to EU standards. Since the signing of the agreements, technical co-operation has been launched in several areas by creating the opportunity to increase legal harmonization, implement joint programmes in areas of co-operation, and facilitate access to markets.

Strategic Ideas in Eurasian Relations

Eurasian relations are difficult to assess when relying on the set of extremely diverse political expressions and discourses of the European Union and its Member States. The EU's strategy papers, however, give a much more nuanced picture of the bloc's commitment towards the region.

The European Common Foreign and Security Policy took shape in the Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force in 1993, and the Common Security and Defence Policy, which was established in 1999. The institutionalization of a common foreign policy was a slow and gradual process until the Treaty of Lisbon (1999), while the Union's influence in world politics grew steadily. However, this common foreign policy has made joint action important not only in terms of instruments, resources, and institutions, but also in terms of common core values, goals, and commitments. To this end, the Union had to develop a strategy for setting out a shared vision for its own institutions, decision-makers, and those who implement decisions, and to make clear the directions of the Union's role in world politics for third parties. The 'strategy culture' began to emerge during the institutionalization of foreign policy with the entry into force of the Treaty of Nice, and then accelerated following the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon and the establishment of the European External Action Service.

The first, and for a long time only, strategic document was the *European Security Strategy*, published in 2003, which did not contain a strategic vision for the region. The strategy can be regarded as a political creed rather than a real strategy, as it lacks all essential elements of strategy creation. A review drafted in 2008 did not substantively address the region either, only making brief reference to energy security in areas of Asia.

While security and defence policy still lacked a strategic vision, in the area of broader foreign policy goals, EU decision-makers introduced the concept of "*strategic partnership*". The academic literature is quite ambivalent about this concept, as strategic partnerships are observed primarily on a rhetorical level, and the EU's common foreign policy, and even more the common trade policy, were not directly affected by the classification of a country as a strategic partner. The Security Strategy of year 2003 mentioned Russia and China as countries from the Eurasian region, but did not analyse their situation and assigned no foreign policy goals or instruments for building relations with them (Renard, 2001). In addition to annual meetings with China since 1997, strategic dialogue commenced in 2010.

Changes in the EU's Eastern Partnership programme and in the agreements associated with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, and the extension of Association Agreements to include the post-Soviet region, have fundamentally changed relations with Russia. Moscow's intervention in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the

annexation of Crimea fundamentally rearranged European foreign relations towards the region. After 2014, Russia became the focus of the EU's sanctions policy and remained stuck there due to the non-implementation of the Minsk Agreement. Russia's increasing role in security policy (see Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria), and so-called "frozen conflicts" have increasingly exacerbated the situation with the European Union. Meanwhile, the extension of agreements related to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas between the Eurasian Union and the EU have also created conflict.

In 2013, China announced its One Belt One Road plan, and two years later the EU adopted the '*EU-China Connectivity Platform*' document, in which it regarded mutual co-operation as feasible in line with the observation of market rules and the adoption of international legal standards. The EU's response was delayed due to the fact that the One Belt One Road plan itself was in constant motion in the early years. In addition to developments in transport, the concept has been gradually extended to digitalisation and health areas ("*Digital Silk Road*", "*Health Silk Road*").

A significant milestone was the '*New China Strategy*' adopted by the European Parliament in 2016, which laid some milestones for building relations over a five-year term. The most important aspects of relation-building were the creation of conditions for reciprocal market access, the stated need to apply a level playing field, and to implement the framework conditions for sustainable development set out in international agreements (Elements for a new EU strategy on China, 2016). The document clearly articulates the fact that China's role is growing in the areas of trade, finance and investment, along with its military role. China's growing role in the capital market may be beneficial in the international system, but with regard to this the international community and China must work together to the maximum extent in adhering to the appropriate regulatory regimes. According to the European assessment, there has been a clear increase in China's influence and role in international development policy and climate policy, which could influence the EU's action on the international stage.

An important milestone for the coherent role of a unified EU foreign policy was the Global Strategy published in 2016, which is considered by many to be the foreign policy equivalent of the 2003 Security Strategy. In this document, the EU formulated its response to the One Belt One Road policy, covering the importance of trade- and investment-related activities, the need to ensure a level playing field, the issue of protecting intellectual property rights, the need for cooperation in high level technologies, and the continuation of dialogue concerning economic reforms, human rights, and climate change policies (EU Global Strategy, 2016, p. 38).

In 2018, the EU announced a new strategy (*Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy*) to provide a coherent response to the One Belt One Road

initiative. The Union itemized its own initiatives related to policies for political coordination, the development of transport infrastructure, barrier-free trade, the extension of financial integration, and the interconnection of the human sphere. In the area of policies for the budget period of 2021-2027, the Union intends to build rules-based economic relations, with comprehensive and sustainability considerations kept in mind. In the field of transport, the EU attaches great importance to the interconnection of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and to supporting the development of modular transport systems in the Eurasian region. Under the TEN-T project, development projects will be launched with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine. In rail transport, the technical and legal regulatory environment will be developed for the implementation of the EU-China railway line (East-West railway). The strategy includes also plans for development programmes for the region in the field of aviation and maritime transport. In addition to transport, the implementation of digital connectivity and energy connectivity are among the target areas. In the former area, the main target is the construction of a high-capacity internet backbone network (Digital4Development), while in the latter area, the main target is supporting the interconnection of electrical networks. The EU is also providing financial resources for this through relying on the Neighbourhood Investment Facility, (NIF), the Investment Facility for Central Asia (IFCA), and the Asia Investment Facility (AIF). Funding sources also include the European Fund for Sustainable Development, and the EU is also encouraging European financial institutions (which play a significant role in international funding) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to play a strategic and bold role by assuring the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) of its cooperation.

In addition to strategic-level changes, EU-China relations have been significantly strengthened through the EU-China Investment Agreement. The Agreement was concluded in principle by the leaders of the European Council, in December 2020, and it awaits the ratification of the European Parliament. Following a debate in the European Parliament in spring 2021, a resolution was adopted in May which said that because of the arbitrary sanctions imposed by Chinese authorities on European individuals and entities “*ratification talks for the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment justifiably frozen*”.

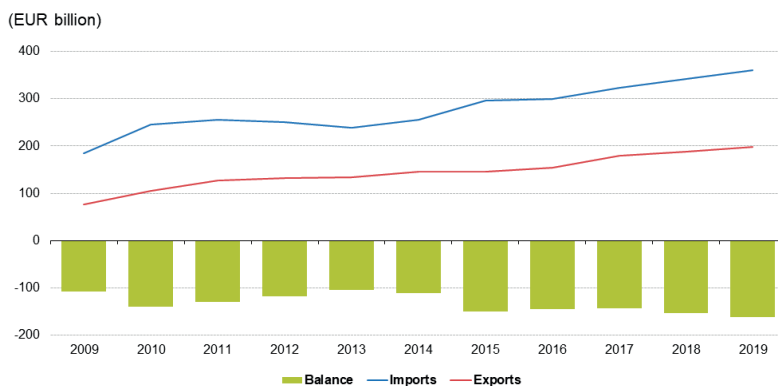
For the European Union, relations with third countries can exist at several levels, from cooperation agreements to association agreements. The first step is investment protection agreements, which provide a solid basis for subsequent complex trade agreements. Negotiations concerning an EU-China Investment Agreement began in 2013, mainly aimed at ensuring reciprocal market access and establishing a legal and enforcement framework for investment protection. Negotiations were concluded by December 2020 with the clarification of principles and the finalization of the agree-

ment (EU-China CAI, 2021). *The Comprehensive Agreement On Investment* significantly reflects the characteristics of the EU's non-preferential agreements undertaken with developed countries in terms of classic investment liberalization agreements, regulatory regimes, regulatory cooperation, sustainable development chapters, and dispute settlement mechanisms. For the Union, the key is ensuring market access in the manufacturing sector and protecting investments in the areas of health, air transport, and vehicle manufacturing. For China, investment in the EU is directed towards the West, South, and East, with Italy, Germany and France being the key partners in the West, Greece and Portugal in the South, and investments made in the East as part of the 16+1² formula. The agreement sets out key principles for the EU and China, such as the Union's maintaining the 'One-China' policy, and the importance of the EU's relationship with Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. In the agreement, the European Union attaches great importance to the further development of the Chinese financial system and its integration into the international financial regulatory system. The document provides insight into the further deepening of relations: the mutual acceptance of standards and regulatory systems and conformity assessment procedures foreshadows the elements contained in the non-preferential agreements of the Union.

However, the European Union and China still do not have a comprehensive free trade agreement, so trade in goods, financial and corporate services, intellectual property regulations, and public procurement markets are still not mutually open to them. The negotiated Investment Agreement also contains a number of trade-related provisions, but the possibility of a comprehensive trade agreement is still a distant prospect. Even without a free trade agreement, the two economic areas are handling the world's largest quantity of trade. In 2019, EU exports to and imports from markets in China were worth €198 billion and €362 billion, respectively, leaving a trade deficit of €164 billion. The asymmetry in trade relations is striking, but not surprising from the point of view of international economics, as the EU can finance a trade deficit as a result of its global economic position. There has been no significant breakthrough in the market for services yet. One explanation for this is that although there has been a major breakthrough in EU Member States' export of services since the early 1990s (pan-European GDP grew from 9.6% to 24.9%), the same has not yet happened in China (European Parliament, 2020, p. 18).

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Northern Macedonia, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Figure 1: EU trade in goods with China 2009-2018



(Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200320-1>)

In the member states of the Eurasian Union, the influence of the One Belt One Road policy has an indirect negative effect on the European Union's trade relations. While at the beginning of the last decade China traditionally played a role in the labour-intensive products market, and the EU played a role in supplying capital-intensive products to the Eurasian area, this distribution has recently changed dramatically. China is increasingly well-positioned in a growing number of capital-intensive sectors, squeezing European producers out of the areas of electronics, machinery, and nuclear technology (European Parliament, 2020, p. 18).

Classic Foreign Policy Role implemented through Multilateral Relations

Since the turn of the millennium, the main arena of multilateral relations between the European integration area and the Eurasian region has been forms of cooperation maintained with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In negotiations with the organization of the ASEAN + 3, the EU has focused its efforts on promoting free trade agreements. According to its strategic role, the EU supports regional economic and institutional integration and the compliance of ASEAN + 3 countries with international expectations and agreements in the area of the environment and by encouraging members to collaborate with civil society to protect social and employee rights.

The EU's goals include upholding the rights of vulnerable groups in societies and the rights of ethnic minorities and their access to resources. The plan for a free trade area formulated under the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) in 1992 was implemented by AFTA member states in 2020, ensuring that the integration works as

a single market, with the free movement of goods, services, and capital. ASEAN+3 formation members can join others at the level of the free trade area. In addition to economic cooperation, ASEAN relations are also aimed at security policy, development policy, climate protection, and socio-cultural relations. The large number of free trade agreements that exist in the region are accessible to the EU mainly through ASEAN, so fostering relations through this form of integration is of key importance.³

Areas of Collision of the Great Powers

The Eurasian Union – Modelled after European integration?

The integration initiative set up at the initiative of Russia would, according to the founder's intentions, follow very similar steps to the process of development and institutionalization of European integration. The phases of free trade area, customs union, single market, and monetary union have been implemented by the European Community over a period of decades, while Russia and the member states of the former Soviet Union began various forms of cooperation mainly in 2010. It would be a mistake to look for rivalry or to make an efficiency comparison between the two processes, as the creation of the Eurasian Union has been driven much more by power policy goals, and lags far behind the EU in terms of its maturity, institutional framework, and community-based legal system. However, the initiative may be a point of collision, as creating a single trading area will represent a barrier to Eurasian member states working with the EU. It is not participation in free trade that is the real obstacle, but rather the creation of a customs union. In the previous formation, member states were free to trade with the EU if an appropriate European agreement had been reached, while the latter formation represents a serious obstacle to cooperation, as, in addition to the existence of administrative barriers associated with the free-trade area, the arrangement is not feasible under international laws.

In relation to Eurasian Union member states' foreign trade, the European Union and Russia are in first place, with the former accounting for a share of about 30%. However, the level of economic openness is not similar. Russia plays a significant role in the EU's foreign trade,⁴ with other members accounting for less than one percent. The importance of the political nature of the project is best demonstrated by the fact that only 6% of Russian foreign trade is connected to the region (Perović, 2019, p. 52).

³ For details about this see: Masahiro Kawai Dean (2007). ASEAN+3 or ASEAN+6: Which Way Forward? WTO Conference. Geneva, Switzerland https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/region_e/con_sep07_e/kawai_wignaraja_e.pdf

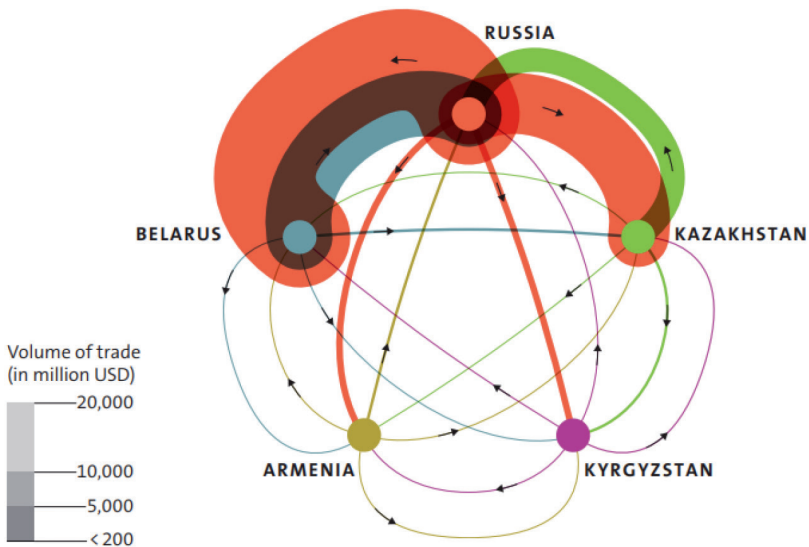
⁴ *In 2020, 4.1% of the EU's total exports went to Russia, while 5.6% of imports came from there.*

Figure 2: Economic ties between EAEU members I

CIS Country	Top trading partners (except Russia), 2012	Trade with Russia (% of foreign trade) for 2012
EEU countries		
Russia		
Belarus	EU – 29%, Ukraine – 8.5%	Russia – 47%
Kazakhstan	EU – 32%, China – 23%	Russia – 19%
Armenia	EU – 29%, China – 7.6%	Russia – 23%
Other post-Soviet states		
Ukraine	EU – 33%, China – 7%	Russia – 21%
Moldova	EU – 54%, Ukraine – 15%	Russia – 11.8%
Georgia	EU – 28%, Turkey – 12%, Azerbaijan – 8%	Russia – 6.7%
Azerbaijan	EU – 46%, Turkey – 7.1%	Russia – 6.3%
Kyrgyzstan	China – 51%, Kazakhstan – 7%, EU – 5.5%	Russia – 17%
Tajikistan	China – 36%, Turkey – 10%	Russia – 14%
Turkmenistan	China – 45%, EU – 12%, Turkey – 9%	Russia – 6.8%
Uzbekistan	US – 14%, China – 12%	Russia – 9.7%

(Source: Nicu Popescu (2014). Eurasian Union: the real, the imaginary and the likely, Chaillot Papers No 132, p. 11.)

Figure 3: Economic ties between EAEU members II



(Source: Eurasian Economic Commission)

For the time being, the idea of a Eurasian monetary union seems to be a distant goal. The Russian economy, which has been hit by international sanctions and is affected by macroeconomic imbalances, may not in the near future be attractive to other member states from the perspective of monetary integration. However, the plan for a single energy market certainly attracts the attention of European decision-makers. The interconnection of electricity networks is planned to take place by the beginning of 2020, and a unified management system will be created in the region through the interconnection of gas and oil pipelines (Perović, 2019, p. 53).

On the Road to Collision – One Belt One Road

The One Belt One Road policy announced by President of China Xi Jinping in 2013 is clearly aimed at increasing China's economic and political influence on the international stage. The initiative clashes with the projects and action taken in recent decades by the world's two leading economic powers, the European Union and the United States, in relation to building and maintaining the international order. Several cornerstones of the international order, which was developed after World War II and operated in a modified form after the end of the Cold War, are sensitive to the influence of the growth of Chinese involvement. China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. Its accession opened up the possibility of deepening relations. The EU immediately applied the most-favoured-nation principle to China, making it much easier for China to enter the European market. However, the EU remains concerned about the extent of strong state intervention in the economic system, the application of non-customs types of restrictions in the regulation of market access conditions, the existence of a strong state subsidy system, and the lack of protection of intellectual property rights.⁵

The One Belt One Road policy may open up a new dimension in the process of the deepening of economic relations, in addition to the infrastructural investments to be made into the European Union. We can also say that the intensification of economic relations may force the Union to review and modify its classic instruments of trade policy power towards partner countries. By classic, we mean association, partnership, and development agreements, which, as a result of 'road construction', may change the framework conditions of agreements that have already been concluded, and the system of conditions for future agreements. China's influence has grown not only at the strategic and theoretical level over the past decade, but through concrete investment agreements and flows of working capital. Telecommunication developments, road and railway developments, and energy investment in the developing countries of the Eur-

⁵ In 2020, half of the EU's anti-dumping proceedings (60 out of 120) were initiated against China.

asian region mark the path of economic modernization, just as the EU marks its path with deep and comprehensive free-trade agreements in the western area of the region. The “*Digital Silk Road*” programme in the field of information technology in countries of the region may create advantages in the areas of telecommunications, IT services, and artificial intelligence with which EU Member States cannot later catch up.

It is particularly important for the European Union that investments to be implemented in the “*intermediate area*” under the One Belt One Road programme do not exclude European investment in local markets by creating administrative or legal barriers to, or unfavourable conditions for, competition. The EU, together with the United States, is concerned about the possibility of target countries becoming indebted and, if this occurs, the level of their indebtedness to China; the appearance of Chinese companies (operated through the receipt of significant state aid) in development projects in target countries; and the spread of development undertaken in compliance with Chinese standards (Lew – Roghead, 2021). The political and economic conditionality built into classical trade policy instruments can be enforced much less, or not at all, after the appearance of China, as investment activities can now be implemented in target countries under similar or better conditions.

The level of indebtedness is regarded as significant in several countries, and some countries have fallen into debt traps in recent years. Kyrgyzstan’s and Mongolia’s indebtedness, as a proportion of gross domestic product, was 22.6% and 27.8%, respectively, which may even double as a result of pending investment (European Parliament, 2019).

Since 2013, the One Belt One Road programme has expanded significantly geographically and in terms of content, and has increasingly come to the attention of European economic and security policy analysts in both dimensions. The programme, which was aimed at the Eurasian region at its inception, has seen an increase in the role of South America, the continent of Africa, and in the area of European integration. Chinese products have increasingly become replacements rather than complementary items, making China a competitor on the international stage.

Significant Chinese investment has occurred in about two-thirds of all EU Member States (Hillman – Tippett, 2021) – from Portugal (the port of Sines) through Greece (Piraeus) to Hungary (the Budapest-Belgrade railway line). Chinese activity is also significant in one of the key areas of the new European Neighbourhood Policy – namely, in the Western Balkans (motorway investment in Montenegro). However, investments that have been made in the European Union are still not significant at the international level and are unevenly distributed. In 2012, these investments amounted to €12 billion, a 33% drop from the previous year, and only a fraction of the approximately \$3.6 trillion coming from the United States (Merics, 2019). The asymmetrical nature of such investment is of particular concern to the European Union. Following the

announcement of the One Belt One Road policy, Chinese working capital investment represented more than four times the value of European working capital investment in China (€35 billion and €8 billion, respectively) by 2016.

Large Member States of the Union that have a decisive role in common external relations have quite ambivalent perceptions of the One Belt One Road policy. Both French President Emmanuel Macron (Reuters, 2018) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (AFP, 2018) have reservations about the initiative, which is contributing to building Chinese hegemony to the detriment of European producers and service providers in the absence of a level playing field and the alignment of regulatory systems. Like the French and German positions, the United Kingdom, which exited the European integration project, also received the plan with reservation. At the same time, in 2019, Italy joined in the One Belt One Road initiative as the first influential EU Member State.

The confrontation is most pronounced in the field of the influence of high-level technology, in the telecommunications sector. Under pressure from the United States, several EU member states are delaying or suspending the deployment of China's Huawei 5G network devices in their national telecommunications networks. It was for this reason that the investment agreement, finalized in 2020 after more than seven years of negotiation, nearly failed at the last minute, when China threatened not to consider the agreement valid for companies in those European countries that were applying sanctions. The case is a good illustration of the growing influence of China in the world economy and the change in European bargaining positions.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the European Union's system of external relations is faced with two major challenges concerning the Eurasian region. China, which is developing into an economic superpower, and Russia, with its post-Soviet imperial vision, have embarked on a tough strategy-building process through the building up of the One Belt One Road and the Eurasian Union, respectively. It is indisputable that the importance of the Eurasian region in the world economy will increase in the coming decades, and the Union must adapt to this. At the same time, the EU's external relations strategy must be open to new ideas and also insist on the maintenance of a rules-based international order. Joint action by EU Member States is key to achieving this goal.

The common system of external relations has led to tremendous progress over the last decade from the perspective of the creation of non-preferential agreements with developed countries (Canada, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and the United Kingdom) or their negotiation (Australia), while also fundamentally renewing preferential relations through DCFTA agreements. However, for China and Russia, there is no

real “*model agreement*” that could be easily applied. The parties have a long way to progress from cooperation agreements through to the negotiation and conclusion of comprehensive trade agreements. As a result of the two initiatives, the European Union's system of external relations is becoming increasingly multi-layered, as it must offer attractive alternatives to target countries of the One Belt One Road initiative, while finding the right balance between China and Russia through bilateral diplomacy. Comprehensive trade agreements (to be developed in the future) may represent a new category within the EU's system of non-preferential agreements. Like the new generation of association agreements, these agreements must also include the political conditions that can uniformly represent the EU's system of foreign policy norms and objectives in the international order.

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Geopolitical narratives and strategies of small states in relation to the Eurasian discourse

Máté Szalai¹

Abstract

The article aims at unfolding the perception of the Eurasian geopolitical script according to small states. The author argues that the concept of Eurasia is not inherently present in the geopolitical reasoning of smaller states, which is why they only react to the Russian and Chinese narrative. Despite proclaiming equality and mutual development, the geopolitical script put forward by Moscow and Beijing gives the former a subordinate role in actual implementation. In this situation, small states predominantly accommodate to the rise of Eurasia in one of two ways, depending on their perception of the risks and opportunities associated with the related projects – i.e. risk contingency and profit-seeking. In this way, the concept of Eurasia is not internalized by small states as a geopolitical script, but viewed as a process consisting of both threats and opportunities.

Introduction

Just like geopolitical developments, narratives in international politics are predominantly shaped by great powers. Small states, due to their limited capacities and opportunities, usually lack the ability to impact the discursive sphere of political and economic relations. Ultimately, it is the powerful actors which “*create structures and control agendas*” (Long, p. 5). This observation is true of practical geopolitical reasoning and of our collective knowledge regarding geopolitics, which is not a surprise, given that the discipline itself emerged “*within the capitals of the Great Powers* – (Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 12). As Ó Tuathail (2002, p. 617) argues, most public policy issues (and also geopolitical situations) “*are characterized by competing storylines with less popular narratives marginalized politically and culturally*”, and it is easy to see that a narrative of a small state is less likely to overcome that of a great power.

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While it is evident that greater states have more leverage to advocate their own geopolitical narratives, small states are far from helpless in the process. Due to globalization and related developments, the leverage of the smaller and weaker members of the international community has widened in terms of their ability to shape international narratives (Ingebritsen 2016) – they are not forced to completely incorporate discourses and leave them unchanged.

This is true of the evolving Eurasian discourse advocated through the different projects of Russia and China. The two global powers have built up their narratives regarding this vast geopolitical sphere to realize their own interests in a region filled with small states. How the latter react to this endeavour is not self-evident – some might accept it, some might try to shape it according to their own needs, and some might attempt to reject it.

The aim of the article is to investigate the reaction of small states to the Russian and Chinese concept of Eurasia. The main argument outlined here is that most resource-scarce states of Europe and Asia inherently do not construct their environment as “*Eurasia*”; nevertheless, they do not explicitly reject the related projects of Moscow and Beijing but rather accommodate to them and try to capitalise on their evolution as much as possible. To demonstrate this observation, I first look into how small states fit into the Russian and Chinese Eurasian narrative, and then turn to the perception of this narrative by small states. Last, I describe the behavioural patterns that derive from such perceptions. The paper does not aim at presenting the narrative of each Eurasian small state individually, but rather at drawing a general picture of the status, narratives, and behavioural patterns of small states in the region.

In the study of narratives, it is very hard to define tangible definitions for concepts like “*Eurasia*” or “*small states*”, which is why I use them in a broad sense. Since the region has no universal delimitation and its borders vary depending on the narrative, I will try to enlarge my scope to basically all of Asia and Europe (except for the Middle East), while putting more emphasis on the members of the narrower Eurasian region (Central Asia). Nevertheless, the lack of a unified concept for the region hardens the conceptualisation of “*small states*” as well, since the usage of the term often includes a regional component (e.g. delimiting small size according to the regional average). Therefore, instead of a spatial definition, I will use social interactions as the framework for the study in the Eurasian sphere, thus the category of small states will include all states in the region which are not *regarded* as the primary or secondary powers in the region in material terms.²

² While a more explicit definition would have many merits, it would also cause problems as the narratives included in the study do not share a common conceptual framework either, and often lack proper definitions themselves. Therefore, the application of a strict definition would fail instantly as its applicability would be questionable at each step of the analysis.

Small states in the Russian and Chinese Eurasian storyline

The Russian narrative about Eurasia is derived from the imperial tradition of Russian and Soviet foreign policy thinking (Gleason, 2010, p. 28). By demolishing the borders between Europe and Asia, the expansion of the Russian empire – by absorbing territories and smaller nations – had no physical boundaries. Even if the term is used as a synonym for the post-Soviet sphere, it is still constructed in relation to the greatest state in the region, in which small nations and states “*could only be peripheries of some larger and more powerful centre*” (ibid).

Accordingly, in Russian foreign policy thinking small states have always been second-class members of the international community: leaders in Moscow usually base their calculation of the polarity in the international system by focusing on fellow great powers. According to Ian Bond, Russia “in practice divides the world between the great powers whose views matter and the small powers whose views do not” (Bond, 2015, p. 203). This view “*disregards international law or the rights of ‘smaller nations’ since they lack adequate military might and/or what the Kremlin calls ‘sovereignty’*” (Barbashin–Graef, 2019).

In this framework, the Eurasian projects of Russia are used to ensure its dominance over Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The expansion of Russian geopolitical influence is rooted in the idea that in order to be competitive in global politics, Moscow “*must impose Russia’s regional domination over smaller states* – (Mendras, 2015, p. 84). In the framework put forward by Ó Tuathail (2002), this notion plays a part in the geopolitical strategy of Moscow.

Despite considering the post-Soviet sphere to be a traditional zone of influence, the Russian geopolitical script about Eurasia considers the interests of small states as deserving of respect (Libman, 2017). Projects related to the geopolitical concept are usually viewed as voluntary forms of association, whose members’ liberty to choose their own political and economic future is ensured – in contrast to the approach of the European Union’s neighbourhood policy framework. This internal paradox manifests itself only in anxiety regarding the loyalty of participating smaller states toward such common projects (Malle et al., 2020, p. 566).

In general, the Chinese foreign policy discourse on small states (Boon–Ardy, 2017) is based on the principles of equality and mutual respect. These values originate from the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the normative basis of the foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China since the 1950s, according to which Beijing aims at building partnerships with equals “*regardless of their sizes or levels of development*”. In practice, China wants to build its relations with small states on the basis of shared development which supports both sides. Accordingly, the Chinese-Eurasian project,

the One-Belt-One-Road initiative, envisions bilateral relations as a win-win situation for both parties, despite size differences (Styan, 2020, p. 193).

Besides these proclamations, Chinese foreign policy involves several realist elements built on the inequality of states. First, despite the proclaimed notion of equality, Beijing does differentiate between greater and smaller powers. Chinese diplomats are aware of their power position vis-à-vis smaller states – as former minister of foreign affairs Yang Jiechi stated in 2010, – *China is a big country and other countries are small countries*” (Boon–Arady, 2017, p. 166). This is why they are not afraid to deal with small states collectively – such as the Central European states in the 16+1 format. While Beijing opposes the “bullying” of small states, a foreign ministry spokesperson also highlighted that they “should not make unreasonable demands” (ibid). Second, they also differentiate between small states of strategic importance like Qatar and Djibouti, and other, less valuable ones, and they focus more specifically on the former. This differentiation means that, from the Chinese perspective, size is not a master variable that determines the power and value of partners, but only one of the key attributes.

The lack of a genuine Eurasian identity among smaller states

From a theoretical perspective, one could easily make the assumption that smaller states dislike the Eurasian geopolitical storyline, and do not define the geopolitical problems they face within the Eurasian framework for two main reasons. First, the Eurasian region is too broad a construction of small states’ own regions. According to the general wisdom of small-state studies, the foreign policy of resource-scarce entities is regionally highly limited for two reasons. On the one hand, as David Vital (1967) – one of the most influential writers of the discipline – argued, the handicaps derived from smallness (including psychological and administrative, economic and defensive ones) lead to the limited number and size of diplomatic missions in larger states. This constraint drives the former to prioritize partners and regions much more sharply, and naturally they prefer countries which are geographically closer than ones further away. On the other hand, but connected to this argument, other writers also argue that it is not just the ability but also the interests of small states which are regionally limited. The smaller a state is, the less likely it is to have a vital stake in a conflict or development taking place in a distant region. Naturally, due to specific spillovers of contemporary conflicts – e.g. migration, the spread of terrorist networks, the proliferation of WMD – this statement is theoretically questionable; nevertheless, one can generally assume that Hungary had more interests in the Yugoslavian crisis or the Ukrainian civil war than in the Kashmir question, or in intra-Korean relations.

Based on the regionally limited nature of small-state foreign policy thinking, one can assume that small states define their regional environment as narrowly as is reasonably possible. Neither their interests nor their resources encourage them to look substantively beyond their imminent neighbourhood. This is why “*Eurasia*” does not play a role in the construction of space in the geopolitical storyline of events that take place in such neighbourhoods (as described by Ó Tuathail, 2002, pp. 610-611). Naturally, small states can participate in global politics, especially in the framework of international institutions, but these actions are usually intended to facilitate participation in global governance rather than aimed at solving international crises taking place far away from their borders.

Second, small states perceive the influence-seeking motivation behind the Russian and Chinese concept of Eurasia (Malle et al., 2020, p. 566), which they are naturally opposed to. States with limited material capacity are interested in an international system based on law, without the expansion-driven activities of great powers, since geopolitical struggles deriving from the latter phenomenon pose an existential threat to them.

Empirically, one can easily verify that small states of Europe and Asia do not locate themselves in “*Eurasia*” inherently, and do not consider the latter to be a homogeneous spatial sphere. National security documents (NSDs) construct the regional environment and differentiate other regions much more narrowly. When NSDs define the region in which the country is located, they usually frame this in terms of other spatial constructs. Central and Eastern European countries which have already joined Trans-Atlantic and European organizations usually locate themselves in this sphere explicitly, or firmly link their national security either to Europe or to European states and institutions.³

Others define their narrower environment as their primary region. For example, “*Georgia is a part of the Euro- and Euro-Atlantic space*” (National Security Concept of Georgia, 2018, p.3), and Armenia has a place in the “*European family*” (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, 2007, p. 12). Azerbaijan is “*located at the crossroads of the West and the East*” and “*embraced the positive elements of various civilizations*”, but when listing such cultural affiliations, the strategy only mentions “*European values*” and the “*Islamic world*” (National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 3). When talking about “*regional countries*”, Mongolian national security concepts refer to “*the Asia-Pacific region and East Asia, including North-East Asia*” (National Security Concept of Mongolia, 2020, p. 3).

Central Asia is also a more convenient and frequently referred to region for self-identification. The National Security Concept of Kyrgyzstan places the country

³ “*The national security of the Republic of Lithuania is part of indivisible security of NATO and the EU (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017); The Czech Republic’s security is inseparable from security in the Euro-Atlantic area*”.

firmly in the “*Central Asian region*” (Concept of the National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2012). The main NSD of Kazakhstan is not available, but upon approval of the strategy in 2020, the Secretary of the Security Council said that the strategy aims at the “*formation of the constructive and safe environment (...) and (...) the promotion of interests of Kazakhstan in Central Asian region and all over the world*” (Kazakhstan Business Magazine, 2020). The document containing the concept of the foreign policy of Turkmenistan for 2017-2023 is not available either, but after approval, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov summarized the main points of the strategy, which refers to Central Asia many times (and to the Caspian region too) as the country’s regional environment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 2017). On the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, it is stated that “*The main priority of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy is the region of Central Asia*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020).

In these documents, the concept of Eurasia is hardly present, except for a few mentions of the Eurasian Economic Union. One exception is the Republic of Tajikistan, whose foreign policy concept – while placing the country in Central Asia – proclaims the construction of an “*atmosphere of confidence throughout the Eurasian space*” as a goal. Nevertheless, Asia in some form (“*Asian sector*”, “*Asian continent*”) is also present in the text with more emphasis than Eurasia (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2020).

Reactions to the Eurasian geopolitical script

Due to the lack of a genuine Eurasian narrative represented by the small states of Europe and Asia, the Eurasian concept is perceived by the latter as a Russian and a Chinese geopolitical project – the answer to the “*what*” question in the geopolitical script they construct. Consequently, small states react to this external narrative according to the political, economic, and security values and interests they attach to Russia, China, and the intensifying competition between them.

The most important determinants of this process include geopolitical position, history, and economic structure. In a study, Vsevolod Samokhvalov (2016) differentiated between two groups of resource-scarce states based on their attitude toward the Eurasian concept. The “*Eurasian pragmatist*” group, which includes Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, pursue a pro-European policy rhetorically, while trying to build optimal relations with Russia as well. They try to avoid zero-sum interpretations of the European and Eurasian project through balancing or de-politization. The reason why this group seems more anti-Russian currently is only due to growing pressure from Moscow for the former to join integration frameworks. Such small states do not necessarily turn to Europe to balance Russian influence, but to China as well, mostly

in the One-Belt-One-Road framework. This attempt shows that the different Eurasian projects of Russia and China can easily balance each other out.

According to Samarnkhvalov, another group of countries from the “*Eurasian periphery*” (or “*non-aligners*”) can be constructed. This includes Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The main difference between the geopolitical environment of this Central Asian group and the former one is that European interests here are much more limited, while cultural proximity to Russia is also questionable. The latter decline to join either camp symbolically or economically due to their fear of being victims of Finlandization. In the last 25 years, they have tried to get away from the post-Soviet sphere and diversify their relations in the broader Eurasian region, which has practically meant approaching China, South Korea, or Turkey. For them, Eurasia represents the opportunity to diversify their political and economic relations.

Capitalizing on Eurasian projects

As the perception of the Russian and Chinese Eurasian project shows, it would be false to argue that smaller states are merely victims of imperial behaviour and cannot form coherent geopolitical strategies. When perceiving the intensification or great power rivalry or the growing interests of larger states in their environment, small states have always tried to manoeuvre among them and to capitalise on the changing status quo. Historiography and political science (e.g. Smith, 2000; Armstrong, 2013) have recently explored such tendencies in more depth, especially in relation to the Cold War setting, arguing that “*certain local actors (...) were not merely manipulated objects, but active subjects shaping, exacerbating, prolonging, or helping to terminate the Cold War at the local and even the global levels*” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 4). This mentality did not vanish – one can argue that in the post-unipolar age, it has become increasingly visible.

Smaller states of Eurasia can capitalise on the geopolitical projects of Russia and China easily. First, it is possible for those states which, due to their geopolitical location or economic system, cannot easily obtain benefits from cooperating with the two great powers, to participate and maximise their gains while minimizing the related costs. From this perspective, the Eurasian ambitions of Russia and China raise a question very similar to the concept of the integration dilemma (Haugevik–Rieker, 2017). The usual balancing between the benefits of integration and the high level of sovereignty secured by autonomy affects all states, while the dilemma is much more severe for small ones. While according to general wisdom smaller countries tend to favour integration over autonomy, in the case of the Russian and Chinese Eurasian project the question is more problematic due to the inequality between the members thereof, and the perceived pressure from the two powers to integrate.

In the case of the Eurasian Economic Union, the strategy of small states regarding participation is to secure the most benefit from integration in exchange for accepting the power position of Russia, while limiting the depth of cooperation. According to interviews conducted by Fabienne Bossuyt (2017, p. 3), the leaders of several small states (including Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus) perceive their subordinate role, but are willing to accept it in return for a security guarantee and the continuation of labour migration. Nevertheless, they block meaningful reforms or deepening integration – for example, in terms of logistical and communication-related cooperation (Malle et al., 2020, p. 566).

The dilemma is a little bit different when it comes to the Belt-and-Road Initiative. China does not exercise the same political and economic influence in participating countries as Russia seeks to, and its projects so far seem to be benefitting both sides. Central Asian countries, for example, benefit from growing trade relations and infrastructural development. According to Moody's, the initiative "*will predominantly benefit smaller states with relatively low per capita incomes, low investment rates, and financial constraints on their current account positions*" (Toktomushev, 2018, p. 79).

On the other hand, projects related to BRI serve the long-term interest of China more as they expose smaller markets to Chinese exports and investment, diminish local competitiveness, and foster credit and business expansion (Jaborov, 2018, p. 39-40). As these effects will only show their negative effects in the mid or long term, small states may be more willing to participate in the Chinese Eurasia project.

Besides maximizing the benefits of participation, small states can also benefit from Russian and Chinese Eurasian projects through hedging behaviour. For weaker states, the two traditional alignment strategies of bandwagoning or balancing against Moscow or Beijing are neither feasible nor rational – thus the former must choose an approach between the two extremes. This is behaviour which can be called hedging. Nevertheless, as Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2016, p. 502) points out in an investigation of weaker ASEAS states' alignment with China, hedging can take different forms (e.g. military, political, or economic hedging) – some of which is closer to bandwagoning, and some to balancing. According to Kuik, small states tend to choose between the two hedging options:

- *the returns-maximizing option*, which is closer to bandwagoning in relation to the rising power. In this case, the small state aims at maximizing profits related to the opportunities created by the rise or the dominance of the great power.
- *the risk-contingency option*, which is more similar to balancing against the rising power. In this case, the small state fears the rise of the new power and tries to decrease the risks and threats posed by the rising or dominant power without coming out as fully in opposition to its influence.

Jakub J. Grygiel and Mitchell Wess (2016, p. 112) observe similar behavioural patterns. According to these authors, several states in Asia and Europe (including Bulgaria, Thailand, Hungary, Malaysia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Taiwan, Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea) conduct some form of mixed strategy which includes various degrees of resistance to and cooperation with Russia and China. Among them, Bulgaria, Thailand, Hungary, and Malaysia see the most opportunities in relation to the growing influence of Moscow and Beijing – the latter can typically be located in the group of countries that have chosen the returns-maximizing option.

The narrative and action of the Hungarian government mirror this idea clearly. When talking about Eurasia (Hungarian Government, 2018), Prime Minister Viktor Orbán does not mean a new identity or the rise of a new region, but rather the new geopolitical constellation marked by the rise of China and the opportunities connected to it. In his words, Eurasia “*should be built*” by connecting Central Europe, the Balkans, and China. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, also emphasized the importance of creating a – *Eurasian free trade region*”, in which European countries and members of the BRI can trade freely among each other (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019).

Supporting interregional cooperation for the purpose of creating economic benefits has been part of the small state foreign policy toolkit for decades (Hanggi, 1998), especially on the Eurasian continent. In 1994, it was Singapore which proposed an interregional dialogue between East Asia and Europe, and while the idea was supported by the EU and ASEAN as well, the main advocates were small states such as New Zealand, Switzerland, Norway, and the Central European countries. Naturally, when proposed by one of their own, small states are less suspicious of such initiatives, but the profit-seeking behavioural logic remains the same if they do not feel threatened by the rising power.

Conclusion

Even if they are not the primary subjects of study, small states play a huge role in the implementation of the geopolitical script of Russia and China, framed in the Eurasia narrative. The success of the latter endeavours naturally depends on great power competition but also on the policies and strategies conducted by small states. This is why their behaviour needs to be more thoroughly analysed in the future.

As a result of the investigation of the role of small states in the Eurasian projects of Russia and China, and the latter’s reactions to them, one can arrive at three interlinked conclusions. First, Eurasia is not genuinely present in the construction of small states’ security-environment and problem-definition processes, therefore they only react to the

concept promoted by the greater powers. Second, while nominally small states play an equal role in the Russian and Chinese narrative according to their activities, their status is subordinate from the perspective of both powers. Third, the geopolitical strategy born as a reaction of small states to the Eurasian narrative depends on their geopolitical position, historical tendencies, and economic structure. They perceive the influence-seeking motivations of Moscow and Beijing, and participation in the projects raises the question of the integration dilemma. Fourth, behavioural patterns vary to some extent, as most resource-scarce states choose neither balancing nor bandwagoning, but rather a form of hedging. The two main options for them include risk-contingency and return-maximization, depending on the potential profits and threats attached to the rise of Russia and China. All of this means that leaders of small states will probably not internalize the concept of Eurasia as a cornerstone of their security environment, but rather as a development associated with both risks and opportunities.

While it was not within the scope of the investigation, one might assume that the Chinese Eurasia project is more competitive and more compatible with the geopolitical script of small states than the Russian one. As Russian dominance has been a historical phenomenon in the region, especially in Central Asia, growing Chinese influence is more profitable both in terms of risk-contingency and return-maximizing behaviour. That being said, the negative effects of the Chinese endeavour are yet to fully materialize, thus the balancing act regarding the evaluation of Russian and Chinese geopolitical scripts by small states is subject to change in the future.

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Hungary: The Link Catalysing the Eurasian Narrative

Zoltán Megyesi,¹ Géza Salamin²

Abstract

The Hungarian government that was elected in 2010 was faced with the failed convergence-related expectations associated with the Western economic model and external relations policy that had been adopted since the regime change, while the highly open economy of Hungary received a heavy blow due to the post-2008 stagnation of Western markets and investments. Due to this, as well as the eastward shift in global economic power, the Hungarian government became committed to an “*Eastern Opening*” policy – i.e., increasing exports to emerging Eastern markets, thereby departing from its Western reliance, and diversifying target markets. In the past decade, a geopolitical narrative that lies behind the foreign economic concept of the government steadily empowered since 2010 has crystallised around Eurasia. Based on the speeches, interviews, and event summaries of governmental actors, the narrative’s key message involves promoting cooperation between East and West, with a view to developing a single Eurasian Economic Space in a non-ideological manner that respects the political regimes of the Eastern states. The Eastern Opening has gradually emerged in government policies as well. Eastern relations and development opportunities began to be part of formal development strategies. The Hungarian government set out to actively pursue the policy of an Eastern Opening through its decisions and measures. However, the success of the policy will ultimately depend on the international environment and superpower relations. Hungary’s example shows the ability of a small country to recognise the importance of aligning with major trends and to build a conscious geopolitical strategy through the diversification of external relations, and its ambition to act as a bridge between East and West based on its geographical position.

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Introduction

Hungary is a relatively small country in Europe. It has a territory of less than 100,000 square kilometres and a population which, according to 2011 census data, has dropped below 10 million. In economic terms, Hungary belongs to the group of developed countries (UN, 2019), but based on key indicators of economic development it still lags significantly behind the most developed Western European/Euro-Atlantic countries; therefore putting it in the medium-developed, medium-income category would be more appropriate, despite the notable convergence dynamics observed over the past decade. Hungary has a highly open economy with above-average growth rates in times of global upturn and the threat of deeper recessions in times of global downturn compared to other European countries (Bod, 2019). Leaving behind its socialist past, the country became deeply involved in Euro-Atlantic integration and related alliances: Hungary has joined NATO (1999), the European Union (2004), and the OECD (1996), to name but a few.

The exact place of Hungary within Europe's regions depends mostly on the specific geopolitical perspective and viewpoint. Hungary is clearly categorised as a country situated in Central Europe, which also includes Germany, or more accurately, in Central and Eastern Europe, due to its macro-regional geographical situation. Viewed from the West, however, Hungary is generally simply perceived as being located in Eastern Europe, based mostly on its socialist past and the peripheral or semi-peripheral position of the region. The difference in categorisation can be bridged by the controversial concept of "*In-Between Europe*". In the simplest terms, In-Between Europe can be seen as a region located between Western Europe and Eastern Europe that stretches from Finland to Greece and comprises the small states, plus Poland and Ukraine, which are positioned between the territories of Germany and Russia. Due to its ethnic, religious, and cultural background and geopolitical context resulting from the post-World War I settlement, the region became a major conflict and buffer zone between the East and West (Nagy, 2014). This traditional role re-emerged with Russia's annexation of Crimea. The global balance of power, however, is changing. In addition to the U.S. as a global leader, Russia and the rapidly developing China appear to be the new centres of power. From this point of view, In-Between Europe, with Hungary representing a north-south midpoint, has the capacity to act as a bridge between the emerging East and the developed West, rather than being a geopolitical buffer zone due to its geographical location (Bernek, 2018b).

This paper seeks to identify and evaluate the Eurasian narrative based on: (1) an overview of Hungary's geopolitical heritage; (2) analyses of governmental communication relating to the Eastern Opening; (3) content analysis of development policy strategies (4). Furthermore the main steps taken to realize this narrative and its the relevant external conditions are also addressed.

Hungary: The Historical Hardships of a Small Country

Hungary has experienced fundamental geopolitical changes over the past century. The peace treaty that ended the First World War transformed Hungary's status from part of a dual monarchy to a small state. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and population, as well as its access to the sea and significant sources of raw materials. Strategically, it was reduced to occupying the interior lowlands of the Carpathian Basin, ending up with a sub-basin, small-country status, and borders practically impossible to defend in military terms. The diminished country, also one of WWI's losers, was left with very limited room for foreign policy manoeuvres and highly exposed to more populous countries and powers (Benyhe, 2018). Hungary was unable to prevent its subsequent involvement in WWII alongside Germany and came under Soviet control after the conflagration as a satellite state, essentially losing its foreign policy independence.

Being a country with traditional orientation towards the West – in both political and public perspective term – Hungary became part of the socialist Eastern Bloc for more than forty years in the bipolar Cold-War era, adopting a completely alien Stalinist dictatorship model. The regime built on political oppression, while an economic policy that completely ignored standards of living led to the 1956 revolution and War of Independence – in this, Hungary gained much sympathy from the West – but the latter was ultimately quashed by direct Soviet military intervention. The gradually evolving soft dictatorship after the revolution, also known as the *Goulash Communism* of the Kádár era, attempted to raise the standard of living as a means of self-legitimation; however, the inflexible socialist economic system, particularly after the 1973 oil price shock, essentially became dependent on external (primarily Western) loans, resulting in gradual indebtedness and near bankruptcy (Bod, 2019). By the time of regime change, it had become clear that Hungary's Eastern relations represented a serious obstacle to the country's development, which could only be removed by developing a closer relationship with the West. At the same time, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and the Warsaw Pact that determined military policy ceased to exist, leaving Hungary free to develop and pursue its own external and economic policies independently. The international environment changed simultaneously. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, the bipolarity of international relations came to an end, and the fall of the Socialist system ushered in Western liberal democracy and Pax Americana on a global scale. For Hungary, a small country with an open economy, the need to join the European Community became clear, without any real alternative. Naturally, this was also based on the ever-present need to belong to the West and a sense of European identity, though this was not always apparent

in mainstream political thinking. Therefore, a nationwide consensus about the need for Western integration as a national priority developed, with only the details of the concept giving rise to disagreement. Consequently, Hungarian interests after 1990 were shaped by a resurgence of European identity: the need for Western recognition, EU and NATO membership, and convergence with the developed economies (Kelemen, 2010). Hungary successfully accomplished these integration objectives within 15 years after the regime change.

Naturally, the transition from socialism to a Western market economy involved numerous hardships and social challenges. In the spirit of the radical changeover, Hungary's gross national product contracted by 20% in the first three years (Bod, 1995), along with an 18% decline in GDP and fall in employment of approximately 1.5 million (Hungarian Central Statistical Office/HCSO, 2010). Following the transformation-induced recession and decline, the convergence of Hungary's economy with Europe began following 1997. The focus of external trade shifted: the European Union became the most important partner of Hungary, with the majority of foreign investment originating in Western Europe. After that, due to its close ties with the EU, Hungary's development largely followed European and global economic cycles, with a steady average annual growth rate of approximately 4% (HCSO, 2010).

From 2002, however, household and sovereign debt, particularly in foreign currency, began to rise sharply, with the convergence process coming to a halt as a result of unsustainable debt and the attempted corrective measures of the government, eventually leaving Hungary lagging behind its direct competitors (Oblath, 2013). The 2008 economic crisis found Hungary in a state of structural imbalance, which ultimately led the country to borrow from the IMF (Miklós, 2013).

Within the European economic space, Hungary, along with Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, failed to noticeably improve its geoeconomic position. Based on the present authors' economic geographical analysis of macro-regional processes during the period 2000-2012 (Salamin, 2015), centre-periphery relations solidified in Europe, supported by various core-related dependencies (FDI, EU funds, threat of brain-drain effects). Despite moderate economic convergence, this factor remains the strongest dimension of the European split, albeit a social and quality-of-life dimension is increasingly opening up, with significant polarisation in internal regional relations. The persistent structural crisis and ensuing breakaway of Mediterranean Europe have intensified a sort of North-South divide in the European space, with Hungary increasingly integrated into the more successful macro-region (Salamin, 2015).

Overall, Hungary's convergence in the first two decades starting from 1990 can be primarily described as underperforming both in terms of initial potential, and in relation to benchmark countries (Oblath, 2013). However, fiscal reforms and monetary policy changes introduced since 2010 managed to put Hungary back on track

from 2013. Due to a number of turnarounds in economic policy, Hungary's development has approached that of Western Europe, with a successfully maintained balance (MNB, 2018), and in certain years the country has even achieved one of the highest growth rates in Europe.

The “Opening to the East” Policy: Emergence of the Eurasian Narrative

After the economic crisis, the Orbán government (elected in 2010) set a new economic policy direction involving the diversification of external relations and foreign economy – a departure from exclusively relying on the Western socio-economic model and relations – to put Hungary's economy back on a path of growth. The main direction of the foreign policy opening was defined as a focus on the emerging Eastern countries (Széll Kálmán Plan 2.0, 2012, p. 190), essentially known as the – Opening to the East – policy. A new geopolitical narrative from the Hungarian government, built around this policy, has gradually crystallised over the past decade, neatly summed up by the following statement of the prime minister.

“Strange as it may sound, here we are talking about building Eurasia. When it comes to the future of Europe, we always have three concepts on the table: the Eurasian, the Euro-American and the Euro-Arabian. There is much truth in each of them, but the economically novel and most attractive approach is undoubtedly the Eurasian one.”

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at a meeting with Chinese and Central and Eastern European central bank governors, 13 November 2018.

How did the Hungarian prime minister come to this conclusion? Which territories and countries are included under the umbrella of Eurasia? How does building Eurasia work in practice? To answer these questions and to more deeply analyse the evolution of the Eurasian narrative we need to look at the statements of Hungarian government actors relying on content analysis. Speeches, interviews, and event summaries with keywords including *Eurasia* and *Eurasian* that are accessible on the websites of the Hungarian government³ and the prime minister⁴ are appropriate sources. A search of the relevant period between October 2014 and June 2020 for these keywords returned

³ Hungarian Government website. Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu>

⁴ Website of Prime Minister Orbán Viktor. Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/>

58 results. Based on these texts, the geopolitical arguments of the Hungarian government concerning Eurasia can be summarised as follows:

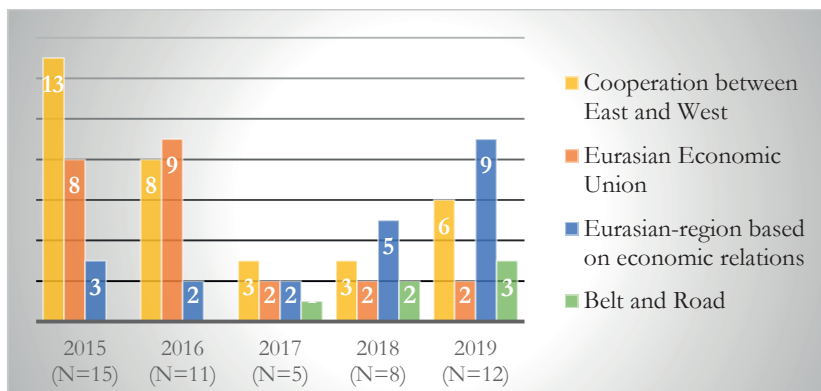
The new decade starting with 2010 brought fundamental changes in the international order and balance of power. With the 2008 crisis hitting the Euro-Atlantic / Western countries, as opposed to the rapid development of the East, the world's economic centre of power began to shift towards the Pacific region. The unipolar world order based on the global political and economic dominance of the United States and the Atlantic region appears to be giving way to a multipolar order with Russia and, primarily, China emerging as the new centres of power. In support of this, Atlantic relations and Europe became relatively less important in terms of U.S. geopolitical strategy during the first presidential term of the Obama administration, which took over in 2009 (until the Crimean crisis). In this regard, Central and Eastern European countries' disappointment with the initial foreign policy of the Obama administration eclipsed even that of the leading European countries (Bernek, 2018b). Based on this, we frame the hypothesis that the Orbán government concluded that the international environment of Hungary was about to transform fundamentally, making it necessary to modify the quasi-exclusivity of the Atlantic-based geopolitical narrative and to open towards the East, driven by the strategic interests of Hungary.

In addition to the changing foreign policy environment, Hungary's motivations were underpinned by internal socio-economic factors. On the one hand, convergence-related expectations concerning the neoliberal Western economic model and orientation – adopted almost criticism-free with the regime change – remained unfulfilled for much of society after the economic and financial crisis of the late 2000s, thus the likelihood of the eventual social acceptance of a partial eastward shift in foreign policy preferences increased (Bod, 2019). Nevertheless, besides pragmatic economic reasons, the “*Opening to the East*” policy is also supported by a unique factor: the existence of oriental features that are essential characteristics of Hungarian identity. Understanding of Hungarian prehistory and origins has led to an approach of so-called *Turanism* – a unique direction that focuses on *Turanian* relations (those with Turkish/ Altaic people). The ideology draws on geography, linguistics, and culture, and started becoming filled with political content between the two world wars (Bernek, 2018b).

Based on the analysed texts, the backbone of the geopolitical strategy of the Eurasian narrative that promises to address emerging problems is built on initiating cooperation between East and West. This idea appears in 36 out of the 58 texts – that is, well over half of them. Based on the latter narrative, with the post-2008 change and the emerging new world order, Western Europe and the European Union should depart from the former Cold-War logic and cooperate with the East within the framework of a Eurasian-scale partnership. This should be done in order to ensure European competitiveness and to help avoid another crisis similar to the one which occurred in 2008. Without taking this step, Europe will fall behind its global competitors.

This East-West cooperation began to materialise with the emergence of the concrete Eurasian economic concept of One Belt One Road, which focuses on the Eurasian region. Concrete reference to Eurasia as a single economic space and single market and the simultaneous mention of One Belt One Road became more frequent (Figure 1). As a side-line to the main message, the narrative extends to the necessity of initiating cooperation in a pragmatic and ideology-free way that disregards domestic policy issues – that is, by paying respect to the fundamentally different political structures of the Eastern countries. In this context, the intermediary role of Hungary is emphasised in both geographical and cultural terms: Hungary represents *a gateway or a bridge* in East-West relations, and is *seeking a real opening to the East, rather than only business opportunities*.

Figure 1: Key content of Hungary's Eurasian narrative between 2015 and 2019
(full years only)



(Source: Authors' edited version based on speeches, interviews, and event summaries available at the websites kormany.hu and miniszterelnok.hu)

The eastward form of cooperation to be developed and the geographical determination of Eurasia are at times less well defined – the latter is occasionally mentioned simply as a Eurasian space without specifying specific countries or groups of countries, or as a broad geographical area spanning *Lisbon to Vladivostok*. In terms of specific geographical content, the Eurasian Economic Union is the term that appears most often by the end of the period of study, with particular frequency in the context of establishing the EAEU, and the cold West-Russia relationship as a result of the Crimean crisis. Consequently, Russia is mentioned more often than any other country. However, in relation to the frequency of mention of other countries, it can be generally established that Hungary's Eurasian narrative is primarily focused on the post-Soviet region (Figure 2). This has slightly changed with the appearance of China in the narrative over the past two years since the launch of the One Belt One Road initiative.

Figure 2: Countries mentioned in the Eurasian narrative according to frequency of mention



(Source: Authors' edited version based on speeches, interviews, and event summaries available at the websites kormany.hu and miniszterelnok.hu)

Emergence of the Eastern Opening Policy and the Belt and Road Initiative in Development Policy Strategies

In addition to within political statements and discourse, the Eastern Opening narrative is also quantifiable in written strategies and schemes dedicated to policy intentions. In this chapter, we will evaluate the emergence and potential of Belt-and-Road-related cooperation, the latter also known as the New Silk Road, which represents the primary area of Eastern Opening based on the content of development policy documents related to investment control and management, and also relying on the results of earlier examination (Kocsis et. al, 2017).

After the regime change, the European Union always appeared as the main anchor point in Hungarian development policies, and this position intensified as a result of pre-accession assistance available from the mid-1990s and the post-2004 Cohesion

Policy framework. In the meanwhile, Hungary's assistance policy became eroded and linked to the aspirations of the European Union. China's Belt and Road Initiative represents an institutionalised system of development launched outside of Europe which may bring significant changes to Hungary in many ways.

Of the total of 46 national planning documents that were analysed, eleven had development-related content partly connected with the New Silk Road, although without specifically mentioning the name of the initiative. Next, we will present the current Hungarian situation analysis and development concepts that are most strongly associated with the themes of this initiative. Clearly, the issue is most strongly represented in the 2011 External Economic Strategy of Hungary (Ministry for National Economy, 2011), which essentially frames the policy of Opening to the East. According to this strategy, the eastward direction of export development is also important so that Hungarian businesses can profit further from the expansion of imports of dynamically developing economies (China, India and Russia) through export-related activity. In this regard, the strategy considers China's medical device manufacturing, agriculture and food industry, environment and water sector, alternative energy, and, in general, advanced manufacturing technology to be the most promising areas. Exporting services (e.g. animated films, design, fashion, tourism) to China and capital investment also appear as desirable. In the field of economic diplomacy, Hungary aspires to further improve economic relations through more extensive regional/provincial partnerships, with results anticipated by increasing exports to Russia, China, Turkey, and India.

The mission of the still effective National Development and Spatial Development Concept (NDSDC), adopted in 2014, was to integrate Hungary's development objectives and needs and to determine their territorial dimensions, with the direct aim of laying the foundation for the 2014-2020 planning and budget cycle (including the preparation of the Partnership Agreement and EU-assisted Operational Programmes). For the purpose of this analysis, the particular importance of the National Development and Spatial Development Concept is claimed due to the determination of the development objectives of Hungary until 2020, with a longer-term perspective provided until 2030. According to the NDSDC sub-chapter entitled 'Our Place on the World Map: From Buffer Zone to Central European Meeting Point', Hungary's geopolitical preferences should be determined in a way that reflects global changes and processes. This should be done in full awareness of the fact that the world's current political movements are being shaped by Asia's economic emergence, mostly driven by China and India, with the superpower the United States seeking to identify its future, and the integrating Europe losing its footing in search of the best way forward. In terms of third world countries, the NDSDC defines the objective of more proportional international trade and finance, channelling the expansion of the emerging countries toward the EU, and attracting investment. Thus, the geopolitical vision of the NDSDC underpins the role of Hungary as a meeting point due

to its geographical characteristics. According to the planning document's conception, Hungary, as a part of Europe, has the potential to become a Central European economic, commercial, transportation, and innovation hub that is recognisable at a world, economic, and European level, in contrast to its current buffer-zone status. Also, it could function as a gateway for the Western European innovation zone to the Asian economic force-field. According to the documents, it is therefore essential to create a commercial gateway region in Central Europe, particularly in the field of services, logistics, and innovation. The geographical diversification of the external economy appears as a strategic goal in the NDSDC, with a view to developing external economic relations outside the EU. The planning document considers increasing exports to (and moderating imports from) China as a favourable process, generally resulting in an improvement in the balance of trade.

The Wekerle Plan (Ministry for National Economy, 2012), which targeted the deeper economic integration of the Carpathian region, preceded the National Development and Spatial Development Concept, yet the two documents share many similar ideas. The Wekerle Plan highlights that, in terms of growth, the economic centre of gravity began to shift from Western to Central Europe after the global economic crisis, making it possible for the region to become a meeting point for innovation-driven North-West Europe and the dynamically developing labour-intensive Asia. The document describes this as an opportunity for Central and Eastern Europe to overcome its historical backwardness and to catch up with Western Europe as quickly as possible. The Wekerle Plan addressed the coordination and collaborative development of tourism in the Carpathian Basin, connecting China's tourism marketing efforts managed from Hungary with cross-border tourist destinations and the goal of promoting the tourism-related values of 16+1 countries for Chinese visitors.

As for the region's transportation system, the National Transport Infrastructure Development Strategy (Ministry of National Development, 2014) notes that the lack of rail track development in Hungary often increases the prominence of other, environmentally more burdensome modes of transport such as road transport, even on routes more heavily impacted by passenger traffic (Budapest–Hegyeshalom, Budapest–Kelebia, Budapest–Lökösháza, Budapest–Debrecen, Budapest–Miskolc, Budapest–Záhony). The busiest entry and exit transit points happen to be at the endpoints of these routes, therefore rail track development along these lines is considered highly important. The planning document mentions that the development of European and other more distant economic areas that are accessible via ports forecasts significant freight transport development for Hungary. Due to the geographical situation of Hungary, all this is inevitably related to the increasing importance of Eastern relations. The situation analysis of the National Transport Infrastructure Development Strategy points out that implementing railway development in line with the New Silk Road

project alone is hardly sufficient for the country's development. In fact, without the relevant well thought-out logistics developments carried out in international partnership it entails many disadvantages and potential risks. Similarly to the National Development and Spatial Development Concept, the situational analysis of the strategy also notes the favourable geographical situation and the resulting potential 'go-between' role of Hungary, emphasising that in transcontinental terms it can represent an essential gateway for Asian freight transportation.

The chapter of the National Energy Strategy 2030 (Ministry of National Development, 2012) on the energy dependence of the developed world dedicates a separate sub-chapter to the emergence of China and India in the global energy market. The strategy, richly interwoven with references to geopolitical issues, elaborates that, due to its export-oriented economy and growing energy imports, China is being forced to diversify resources and to ensure the safety of maritime transport routes as well as its energy imports through continental oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia. The document mentions that China's targeted renewable energy programme exists primarily due to the need to reduce energy import dependence, rather than handle climate-related issues. According to the strategy, the opening towards Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), a highly important element of China's energy and external policy strategy, is attributable to the strategic situation and the abundant natural resources of these countries (oil, natural gas, hydropower, non-ferrous and precious metal ores, including uranium). Based on the National Energy Strategy, China's increasing dominance in the region raises numerous geopolitical questions. The countries of Central Asia, which have merely drifted along with world economic processes for decades, could play a key role in deciding global energy policy issues in the near future as principal partners, clearly influenced by the "giant", China. The document specifically covers the need to adapt to the unfavourable processes induced by China's energy structure and energy production. Based on the scenarios, by 2035 China will be using twice as much coal for electricity generation as the most developed OECD countries. According to the strategy, considering the amount of (and growing demand for) energy carriers, Hungary will face one of two scenarios: a future based on intensifying international conflict, or increasing independence from global trends. To the latter end, the document identifies five potential options: energy saving, increasing reliance on renewable sources, the use of safe nuclear power, joining European energy markets, and developing agriculture bipolarity.⁵

The National Tourism Development Strategy 2014-2024 (Ministry for National Economy, 2014) calls for increased emphasis on eastern relations as part of Hungary's

⁵ Market-driven changeability in the use of biomass for food or fuel.

economic opening. According to the document, this strategy should be clearly enforced in tourism, as well as through strengthening Hungary's presence in more distant Eastern markets. In this context, strategically greater emphasis should be placed on rising demand in the Far East (China, South Korea, India, Japan, etc.), Russia, the CIS, Brazil, and the Persian Gulf region. In addition to increasing marketing activity, the eastward opening should also be manifested in the promotion of investment and the launch of new direct flights. Considering that Hungary alone would hardly be able to successfully pursue these marketing goals in the major Asian markets, regional cooperation (e.g. with neighbouring states, including the V4 countries) should be encouraged in the field of tourism as well.

The National Water Strategy (Ministry of Rural Development, 2013) that was developed in 2013 pointed out an interesting opportunity. Hungary has an economic policy that is open towards Asia, including China and the Arab states, among other regions. A common feature of these countries is their huge demand for infrastructure development, coupled with significant amount of capital but rather limited water resources, which require serious investment to promote their growth and satisfy domestic needs. Due to the extremely high cost of local water supply expansion, the latter seek to partially relocate production activities to other countries with more accessible water resources. According to the National Water Strategy, this provides an opportunity for Hungary to use foreign resources to implement advanced irrigation systems for crop production and developing animal husbandry and fully vertically integrated food sector could make it possible to compensate by means of creating finished products and to increase employment and contribute to economic development. Similar to the specific infrastructure development plans related to the New Silk Road project, this concept, though undoubtedly attractive, also involves risks. If the above-mentioned full-scale food sector is not or not sufficiently implemented, it could undermine the effectiveness and the efficiency of the whole system.

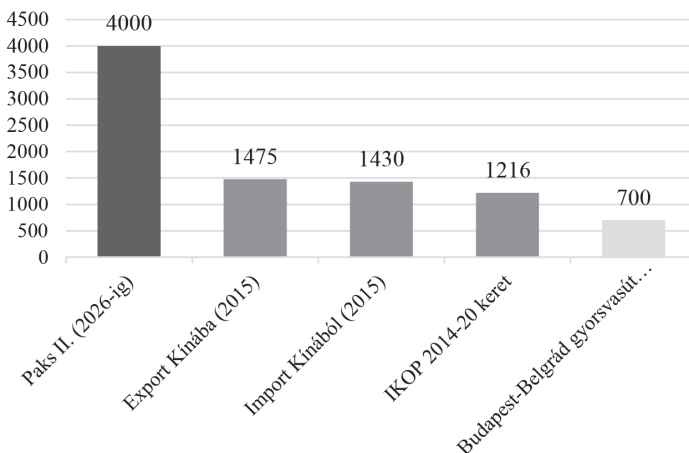
Compared with the national and sectoral documents, regional planning documents make less room for Silk-Road-related situation analysis and development concepts. An analysis of 22 planning documents shows that only the development-related documents of two border counties, Csongrád and Bács-Kiskun (the counties most affected by the Budapest-Belgrade railway investment) make any reference to the New Silk Road initiative, without specifically naming it.

The New Silk Road initiative represents a turning point for European and Hungarian development policies. This is true even though there is no specific impact to be discussed at present, and in fact, hardly any specific development concepts are known of, and even fewer projects have actually been started. Nevertheless, the former represents a turning point due to the fact that it has drawn attention to the development potential that exists outside of Europe and the Atlantic region – that is, beyond the sphere

of countries with a Western culture. Naturally, looking beyond Europe has always been a part of the international development programmes and neighbourhood policies of the EU and its Member States. However, these regions have failed to become major components of the development that influences Europe, and have received no mention in the context of powerful concepts and significant development resources. The New Silk Road initiative brings this era to an end.

It is essential to realise that China is no longer just a business and commercial partner (although it is one, with ever increasing significance), but an actor equipped with consciously created development and investment policies. The latter are now enacted not only in the vulnerable developing world (such as in Africa), but also in more developed countries, including Europe. Indeed, the amount of economic resources that China dedicates to this goal could soon approach the scale of public resources redistributed in Europe for development purposes (cf. Kocsis et al., 2017). The estimated cost of the project of constructing the Hungarian section of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line within the framework of the New Silk Road is HUF 500 to 700 billion, with over 80% of the investment based on a Chinese foreign exchange loan (Matura, 2016). The initiative fits in well with South-East European transport development efforts represented in EU transnational programmes, yet it has raised various concerns in the EU.

Figure 3: Estimated investment cost of the Hungarian section of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line in comparison with some key alternative figures (HUF billion)



(Source: Kocsis-Komjáthy-Péti-Salamin 2017)

* (Development of the Hungarian Nuclear Power Plant),

** The EU funded operational programme supporting transport development.

The Eurasian Narrative in Practice and its Geopolitical Perspective

The Hungarian government set out to build up the Eurasian relations presented in its communications with unprecedented intensity, thereby affecting other policies and areas beyond foreign policy and external economic policy matters.

Meetings between China and Hungary, considering the size of the latter, generally take place at the highest governmental level, involving Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, or Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó, and their counterparts President Xi Jinping⁶ or the minister of foreign affairs of China.⁷ The situation with Russia, the other Eurasian superpower, appears to be similar, with President Vladimir Putin visiting Hungary almost every year. In relation to the New Silk Road, Hungary is actively engaged in the 16+1 form of collaboration announced in Budapest in 2011, the goal of which is to strengthen relations and expand trade between CEE and China. This was marked, for example, by the opening of the China-CEEC Tourism Coordination Centre (TCC) in Budapest in May 2014 to promote the participating 17 countries as a single tourist destination in China's tourism market (KTK, 2016), and the opening of the first CEE-based office of the Chinese National Tourism Administration in Budapest in 2016 for promoting Chinese destinations in Europe.

Besides the government's involvement, the Hungarian central bank (MNB) has also played a role in implementing the Eurasian narrative,⁸ with a separate unit set up in 2016 to support the policy of the Eastern Opening, and to further expand the MNB's international relations and to strengthen ties with Asia. The MNB appears to be the only central bank in Central and Eastern Europe to have entered into a currency swap agreement with its counterpart in China. The central bank's Renminbi Programme and the Budapest Renminbi Initiative (launched in 2015) seek to increase the weight of China's currency in international settlements and to expand the scope of investment

⁶ PM Viktor Orbán in Beijing (2017). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/fotok/orban-viktor-pekingsben>; PM Viktor Orbán meeting the President of China (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/orban-viktor-a-kinai-allamfovel-targyalt>

⁷ Hungary's strategic interest is to remain China's number one partner in Central Europe (2018). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/hirek/ensz-kozgyules-szijjarto-magyarorszagnak-strategiai-erdeke-hogy-kina-elso-szamu-partnere-maradjon-kozep-europaban>

Hungarian-Chinese relations have reached an unprecedented level (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/hirek/soha-nem-voltak-olyan-jok-a-magyar-kinai-kapcsolatok-mint-most>

⁸ The Eastern relations of the MNB (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.mnb.hu/a-jegybank/informaciok-a-jegybankrol/nemzetkozi-kapcsolatok/az-mnb-keleti-kapcsolatai>

and financing sources for Hungary⁹ (for more details, see Erhart 2015). The first summit of the 16+1 central bank governors from the CEE countries and China was held on 9-10 November 2018 in Budapest, jointly organised by the MNB and the central bank of China.

Meanwhile, the Bank of China, set up a major European headquarters in Budapest. In economic and geoeconomic terms, this is beneficial due to the presence of the Bank and its frequent organisation of Russian transactions from Budapest (Brückner, 2019). In addition, the telecommunications giant Huawei has also established its largest European manufacturing and logistics centre in Hungary.

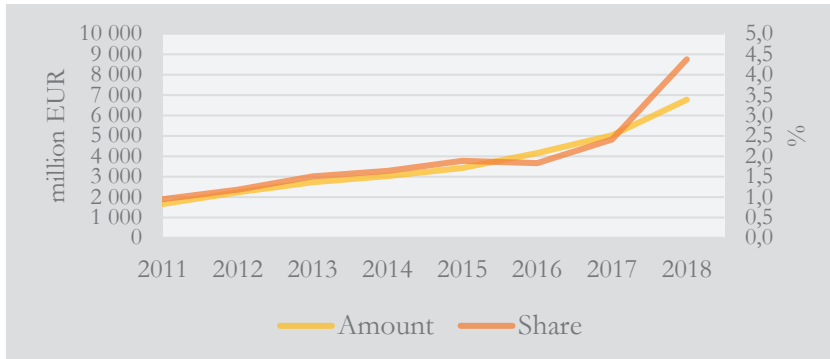
While this paper offers no evaluation of the economic impacts of the Eastern Opening policy, certain aspects should nevertheless be highlighted. The annual volume and share of Eurasian investments targeting Hungary have increased steadily. Compared to a share of 1% in 2011, the latter reached 4.5% in 2018, while the volume of investment tripled (Figure 4). Along with this increase, South Korea – for example – already replaced Germany as the main investor in Hungary in the first half of 2019.¹⁰ Chinese capital investments impact Hungary most among the CEE countries. As early as by 2010, 89 percent of China's investment capital targeting Central and Eastern Europe ended up in Hungary (Chen, 2012). In 2014, the volume of Chinese investment in Hungary reached USD 556 million – by far the largest amount in the region (Szunomár, 2015). This complements the volume of EU investment, which continues to represent approximately two-thirds of the total foreign direct investment received by Hungary.

However, several factors still hinder the coming to fruition of foreign trade ambitions. Despite significant efforts by Hungary, the aim of increasing the volume and share of exports to Eastern countries remains largely unfulfilled due to reasons that include sanctions related to Russia introduced after the Crimean crisis, which essentially halved the volume of trade with Russia.

⁹ Announcement of Magyar Nemzeti Bank (the Hungarian National Bank) regarding the launch of the central bank's Renminbi Programme (2015). Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <https://www.mnb.hu/sajtoszoba/sajtokozlomenyek/2015-evi-sajtokozlomenyek/mnb-kozlomeny-a-jegybanki-renminbi-program-jrp-meghirdeteserol>

¹⁰ Hungary interested in close cooperation between East and West. Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/hirek/magyarorszag-erdeke-hogy-kelet-es-nyugat-szorosan-egyuttmukodjon>

Figure 4: Foreign direct investment from the countries of Eurasia between 2011 and 2018



(Source: Authors' construction based on Magyar Nemzeti Bank (MNB) figures)

Considering geopolitical and practical factors, Hungary has definite advantages compared to its regional competitors in respect of developing partnerships with the two major Eurasian powers, Russia and China. Of the post-socialist EU Member States, the Czech Republic is geographically situated closest to the developed economies of Western Europe. It has traditionally had an advanced industrial sector, and, in general, it is one of the most developed post-socialist countries. However, in investment decisions the more supportive politics demonstrated by Hungary appears more rewarding than the Czech value critical approach (Buzna, 2019). Romania and – particularly – Poland are larger than Hungary, with a stronger pro-Atlantic orientation and closer alliances with the U.S., as well as a certain degree of Russophobia. In any case, Romania, although principally willing to cooperate (and even having agreed about several major strategic investments) with China, eventually withdrew from a plan for the extension of the Cernavodă nuclear power plant, a concrete project, due to pressure from the U.S (Brinză, 2019; Neesutu, 2020).

Ultimately, the Hungarian government seeks to enhance the related advantages through various gestures and strategic investments. In 2015, Hungary was the first EU Member State to sign up to the One Belt One Road strategy. In 2017, Hungary joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiated by China, and is prepared to negotiate full membership in the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB).¹¹ In addition, Hungary has observer status in the Turkic Council, a geopolitical organisation of Turkic-speaking Islamic countries. The European representation of the Turkic Council

¹¹ Hungary could join another investment bank (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/nemzetgazdasagi-miniszterium/hirek/ujabb-fejlesztési-bankhoz-csatlakozhat-magyarorszag>.

commenced in 2019 in Budapest.¹² The two examples that best demonstrate Hungary's strategic investments include the extension of the Paks nuclear power plant – of national economic importance – by *Rosatom* using a Russian loan, and the already mentioned Budapest-Belgrade railway line, with the involvement of Chinese loans and Chinese companies. As for the latter, the specific importance of the Hungarian railway line section is due to the fact that it would be the first Chinese railway construction project implemented in an EU Member State, thus could serve as a reference for further European infrastructure developments (Eszterhai, 2016).

The policy of the Eastern Opening also has its foundation in social perceptions. In regional comparison, Hungary is still characterised by a strong pro-Western attitude that is manifest in the positive evaluation of Western countries and institutions, as well as in Hungary's strong and pronounced Western orientation. The more general the nature of the 'East-West' dilemma, the more perceptibly the fundamentally Western orientation of Hungarian society appears. In 2017, almost eight times as many Hungarian respondents (39%) expressed a pro-Western sentiment than a pro-Eastern attitude (5%) (Krekó, 2018). However, almost half of Hungarians claim that they would take an "*in-between*" position regarding the East-West issue, which clearly indicates the traditional view of pursuing an autonomous policy, with the "*bridging*" role of Hungary.

In addition to governmental policies, the success of Hungary's Eastern Opening strategy is essentially dependent on six major power relations (Bernek, 2018a). The relationship between the United States and Russia in the immediate future is the most important of these. In a world order based on enmity between the Atlantic force-field and Russia, the West views Hungary's Eastern Opening policy as Hungary becoming increasingly allied to Moscow, and less reliable in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration and the system of alliances. This perception could change with the easing of tensions between the United States and Russia, and a lower level of hostility that more resembles the conditions that existed during the Cold War conflict. A positive change of direction in this regard was widely anticipated in relation to the Trump administration, yet it failed to materialise. This was mostly due to the fact that – in spite of presidential support for this policy – the American political elite, on the whole, is more interested in maintaining a certain level of Anti-Russian sentiment (Shapiro-Martirosyan, 2020). Therefore, it seems that irrespective of the identity of the U.S. president, no significant change in the relationship between these two superpowers can be expected.

In the evolving multipolar world order, the fundamental question is whether a new twenty-first-century Eurasian continent is about to emerge. Clearly, key to this is the nature of the economic and political alliance that is developing between Russia and

¹² Turkic Council Retrieved August 29, 2020 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkic_Council

China. For the time being, the relationship between Moscow and Beijing appears to be driven by specific issues rather than being an alliance based on shared interests. It is also recognisable in the choice of words in communication – these generally involve referring to “*privileged / strategic partnership*” rather than “*alliance*” (Buchanan, 2020). Deeper relations are hindered by numerous factors, including the partnership of Russia with India and Vietnam, both in conflict with China.¹³

One key to the global balance of power is maintaining a stable Euro-Atlantic alliance with strong US-European and NATO-EU relationships. Based on a historical analysis of the global power of the United States, it can be revealed that the Euro-Atlantic rift is due to certain global economic aspirations of the EU, and particularly the euro “*project*”, which threatens the dominance of the US dollar (Matolcsy, 2019). A strong alliance between the United States and Germany could have a stabilising effect on the whole of Europe, with the potential to indirectly strengthen the external relations of Hungary as well, including towards the East (Bernek, 2018a). However, US-German relations have visibly deteriorated since the era of the Trump administration, primarily due to Germany’s underperformance in relation to the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence¹⁴ and the trade deficit between the two countries,¹⁵ which was further escalated by the U.S. sanctions against Nord Stream 2 and the recent withdrawal of U.S. troops (Dempsey, 2020). In a symbolic expression of the crisis of confidence, the French president described NATO as “*brain dead*” and said that Europe should be a neutral power (de Weck, 2020). All this could indicate a Euro-Atlantic crisis, but the deterioration in relations could also be interpreted as Trump’s policy bringing bilateral relations and solutions into focus. A new U.S. president with a preference for multilateral alliances could lead to a change of direction yet again, while communications from the EU also suggest a willingness to normalise relations.¹⁶

The fundamental issue for Europe and the evolving Eurasian force-field is the Berlin-Moscow relationship. An alliance between Germany and Russia based on intensifying economic relations rather than political confrontation could be one key to the success of the Eastern Opening. In this respect, analyses of German-Russian relations in recent years provide a highly ambivalent picture. Economic cooperation, particu-

¹³ Putin’s skilful manoeuvring between China and India (2020). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://kitekinto.hu/2020/07/09/europan-kivul/putyin-ugyesen-lavirozik-kina-es-india-kozott/182529/>

¹⁴ Meeting the 2 percent NATO spending target would be very costly for Europe (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://kitekinto.hu/2019/02/15/gazdasag/az-europai-orszagoknak-nagyon-sokba-kerulne-a-2-szazalekos-nato-cel-elerese/168859/>

¹⁵ United States Census Bureau, Trade in Goods with Germany. Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4280.html>

¹⁶ Borrell: Transatlantic partnership need to be strengthened against China (2020). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://kitekinto.hu/2020/06/16/europan-kivul/borrell-meg-kell-erositeni-a-transzatlanti-partnerseget-kinaval-szemben/181790/>

larly in the field of energy, can be observed, as best demonstrated by the Nord Stream gas pipeline (Trenin, 2018). At the same time, political communications indicate entrenched confrontation relating to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine¹⁷ and cyberattacks from Russia.¹⁸ The question is: how long can this situation persist, and what direction will it take in the end?

Nevertheless, the evolution of the Eurasian force-field extends beyond German-Russian relations and is increasingly associated with the emergence of a new German-Russian-Chinese axis. Therefore, the future relationship between Germany and China and the consequent China policy of the European Union are other important questions. Similarly to the relationship with Russia, German-Chinese relations are also based on the desire to exploit economic potential, and are further enhanced by conflict with the United States (Barkin, 2020). This is clearly manifested in Germany's reluctance to impose sanctions in the technological war related to Huawei¹⁹ and to adopt a position in the Hong Kong political crisis (Karnitsching, 2020). This shows that while political conflict due to geographical proximity to Russia is inevitable, the situation is completely different with China, and relations can be based almost entirely on business. In any case, it is typical that EU Member States avoid confrontation with China in bilateral relations, which is therefore expressed only at a European level (Brattberg–Le Corre, 2020).

Meanwhile, the future relationship between the United States and China poses another important question. Donald Trump's recently introduced economic measures against China are currently intensifying the confrontation between the world's two largest economies. Also, China's future role in the global political arena is a further influencing factor. The extent to which the current confrontation can be viewed as a consequence of current U.S. government policy and therefore as a temporary phenomenon (Chen, 2020) – or rather as the beginning of a new cold war that fits into a historical trend (Dupont, 2020) – is difficult to judge. In any case, China with its One Belt One Road programme and international institutions has emerged as a contender, enhancing the latter narrative and signalling that this cold war would evolve on an economic-commercial-technological basis, rather than as political-military rivalry. In contrast, stronger cooperation between the U.S. and China would increasingly contribute to the emergence of the Pacific region as the world's economic centre of

¹⁷ Germany imposes strict conditions for lifting sanctions against Russia (2019). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://kitekinto.hu/2019/06/18/europai-ugyek/nemetorszag-szigoru-feltetelekhez-koti-az-oroszorszag-elleni-szankciok-feloldasat/172544/>

¹⁸ Germany calls for EU sanctions against Russia (2020). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-calls-for-eu-sanctions-against-russia/a-53783598>

¹⁹ Germany won't agree on 5G rules before summer break (2020). Retrieved August 29, 2020 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-huawei/germany-wont-agree-on-5g-rules-before-summer-break-idUSKBN23W2VW>

power. The normalisation of U.S.-China relations would be beneficial for Hungary, as it would provide a powerful background for economic cooperation with the countries of East and Southeast Asia.

Summary

Hungary's emergence as a small state a century ago brought about fundamental historical changes in the geopolitical situation of the country. Hungary became vulnerable to superpower conflicts and as an in-between European country fluctuates on the periphery of East and West, belonging to neither on the whole. Its recognition of the potential to become a geographically significant country with a bridging role between the emerging East and the developed Western Europe due to changes in the international balance of power is highly important.

Hungary's Western integration, starting with the collapse of the socialist system, failed to fulfil the convergence-related expectations of various groups in society, and centre-periphery patterns became fixed in the EU's economic and political space. Meanwhile, the 2008 crisis hit the open economy of Hungary with particular force. A decline in the Western appetite or capability for investment, and a decrease or stagnation in EU markets, quickly plunged Hungary's economy into recession and crisis. As the world's economic centre of power is shifting to East, the obvious solution is to increasingly seek business potential and markets in that region. The Orbán government that was elected in 2010 announced a strategy of opening to the East – i.e. of diversifying Hungary's external policy and exports, with a focus on the emerging East based on this understanding. Over the past ten years, a geopolitical narrative built around Eurasia has crystallised in the government's conception of foreign economy, with the key message of promoting cooperation between East and West to create a single Eurasian Economic Space. This goal is to be pursued in a pragmatic and ideology-free way, disregarding the fundamentally different political structures of the Eastern countries.

Hungary's Eurasian concept can be viewed as a national geopolitical strategy based on a geographical situation that recognises the twenty-first-century potential of a small country. However, the Eastern Opening policy – representing the focus of the latter – does not seek to demolish Western relations, but rather to diversify Hungary's foreign policy and economy, to catalyse East-West relations, and to pursue the ambition of becoming a gateway. In geographical terms, Hungary's Eurasia concept is rather flexible; the narrative is primarily focused on the post-Soviet states and Russia, although it has increasingly shifted to China since the announcement of the One Belt One Road concept. Evolving political intentions have begun to become visible in policies as well, with the One Belt One Road initiative and the Eurasian dimension in gen-

eral becoming increasingly recognisable in Hungary's high-level development policy planning documents (e.g. the NDSDC). Nevertheless, the Silk Road as a development policy alternative and potential path has not yet taken hold in territorial and sectoral development plans on a wider scale.

The Eastern Opening thus appears not only on a rhetorical and diplomatic level, but also in various governmental measures and economic decisions. Hungary is taking a particularly active role in turning the Eurasian narrative into reality. The Hungarian government seeks to deepen relations through intensive diplomacy and strategic business transactions. Two main projects include the extension of the Paks nuclear power plant, and the modernisation of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line, involving Russian and Chinese resources, respectively. As a result of such supportive policy demonstrated by Hungary, and as a prestige-related factor considering the size and weight of the latter country, the two Eurasian superpowers conduct frequent meetings with Hungarian governmental actors at the highest levels.

On the whole, based on the methodological approach of Gearóid ÓTuathail (2002), consisting of four elements, the Eurasian narrative of the Hungarian Government can be summarised as shown in the following table:

(1) Foreign policy problem	New world order, changing balance of power, Europe declining in importance, stagnating EU markets
(2) Geopolitical strategy	Eurasian-scale cooperation between Western-Europe and the East, <i>'free trade area from Lisbon to Vladivostok'</i> , diversification of Hungarian exports
(3) Fine-tuning and adjustment of strategy	Eastern Opening policy, <i>'Hungary represents a gateway, a bridge in East-West relations, seeking a real opening to the East, rather than business'</i>
(4) Conclusion of problem, concrete steps	Strategic partnership with Eurasian countries via strategic projects and high-level diplomatic activity, development of the bridge role is under way

In any case, it is safe to say that the policy of the Eastern Opening and the creation of a single Eurasian Economic Space will ultimately be determined by superpower relations and geopolitical interests. The international relations of the main centres of power are rather heterogeneous. The relationship of the formerly Trump-led United States with both Russia and China is problematic, and US-EU relations have reached a new low. (Since the finalisation of the chapter new president of the USA, Joe Biden has been inaugurated, though no significant changes can be experienced in these re-

lations.) The EU and Germany maintain ambivalent relations with Russia and China (i.e. mostly cooperative in economic terms, although involving continuing political and ideological confrontation). The question is which of the two elements will become dominant in future. These relationships could significantly influence the success of the Eurasian policy of the small state of Hungary. In any case, current superpower relations are strained to a degree that almost resembles the Cold War conflicts of the twentieth century.

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The Emergence of the Indo-Pacific Concept as a Response to the Eurasian discourse

Tamás Péter Baranyi¹

Abstract

This article aims to track the evolution of the term Indo-Pacific and its application in current American foreign-policy-making. It argues that the emergence of China, increasingly seen as a challenge to U.S. positions in the world economy and international politics, has given rise to different interpretations, of which the Indo-Pacific concept has become increasingly well established. First an economic term, it quickly picked up a more geopolitical definition as a response to similarly geopolitical formulations of a “*Eurasian*” strategy. American attempts at shaping policies according to this vision ultimately resulted in the spread of the Indo-Pacific concept across the region, which ultimately reinforced the validity of the term. Though interpreted differently by major countries, the United States managed to elevate “*Indo-Pacific*” to the forefront of the discourse. Currently, the Indo-Pacific outlook not only focuses and informs the American agenda vis-à-vis the Pacific region, but also plays a formative role in the geopolitical concepts of other regional powers. In a critical geopolitical framework, the prevalence of the term and the decisions it informs are a rapid example of how the imaginations of foreign policy elites eventually find their way to becoming major areas of the foreign policy agenda itself. This transformation of the Indo-Pacific concept from a tentative grouping to a solid basis for decision-making is a rapidly developing recent example of this process.

From China as Challenge to China as Threat

This article tries to reconstruct the development of the Indo-Pacific concept with an eye to the approach developed in the field of critical geopolitics. In an influential article, Gearoid Ó Tuathail argued in 2002 that mapping the geopolitical space is also a dramaturgical process. In this process, new realities inform media images and representations for categorization by actors according to an inventory provided by what he calls the cultural storehouse of common sense. All this results in an alternate “*storyline*” which essentially renders the new perceptions into a narrative framework. This framework,

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in turn, becomes a source of a geopolitical script (like strategic documents), ultimately informing new problem definitions, geopolitical strategies themselves, geopolitical accommodation to new situations, and finally, “*problem closure*” – i.e., in effect, the successful completion of this accommodation (Ó Tuathail, 2002). To put it simply, Ó Tuathail tried to create a typology of how new phenomena become dramatized in storylines which are embedded in a new mental mapping of the world and become items in the pool of actual foreign policy decisions. Without the need to agree with and accept most findings of critical geopolitics and its normative approach, this typology is very useful for seeing how discursive changes can lead to policy shifts.

From the 1990s onwards, the “*China Challenge*” has been unfolding in American foreign policy discourse in a multi-faceted way. Americans first became concerned with China’s growing economic prowess, then with its resuscitated regional ambitions, and finally with its geopolitical agenda. The first layer thus involved anxiety about China potentially overtaking the United States as the world’s biggest economy. Scholars even tried to pinpoint a date when the size of China’s economy would surpass that of the U.S. economy (China’s economic overtaking was famously described as *sorpasso* by Niall Ferguson; the wording was quite apt, as the statistical fact did not actually have a large impact on real events – similarly to how it also did not when it was applied to the Italian economy overtaking Britain’s in the late 1980s) (Misenheimer, 2019). Though the fact of the inevitable rise of the Asian country was not debated, interpretations of it varied: while John J. Mearsheimer talked about a new era of conflict, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called China a potential “*responsible stakeholder*” of the international order (Bowie, 2020). John Ikenberry believed that integrating China more deeply into world politics and the economy would provide for the internal liberalization of the country (Nardon, 2017). These hopes are today generally perceived as unfulfilled. The document *United States’ Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China*, published in April 2020, summarized this disappointment in the preface:

Since the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) established diplomatic relations in 1979, United States’ policy toward the PRC was largely premised on a hope that deepening engagement would spur fundamental economic and political opening in the PRC and lead to its emergence as a constructive and responsible global stakeholder, with a more open society. [...] The CCP has chosen instead to exploit the free and open rules based order and attempt to reshape the international system in its favour. [...] The CCP’s expanding use of economic, political, and military power to compel acquiescence from nation states harms vital American interests and undermines the sovereignty and dignity of countries and individuals around the world (White House, 2020).

This amounts to nothing less than an admission that the American presumption that more integration creates more democracy has not come true.

China's regional ambitions started to become apparent slightly later. Even though the Wolfowitz Doctrine (put forward as early as in 2002) that the United States may face the rise of hegemonic powers in the future against which Washington should act, it did not specify China. As recently as in 2005 there was near consensus of the foreign policy elite that China's rise was indeed peaceful (for an overview, see Dams-van der Putten, 2015), and Mearsheimer's thesis was heavily criticized, even as late as in 2014-2015 (cf. Snelder, 2015). However, China's regional ambitions were never quite secret, as the Asian country openly claims sovereignty over Taiwan, looks to the deeper integration of Hong Kong and Macau into the PRC, and has a set of maritime boundary disputes as well. However, assertive steps taken by China were often dismissed as posing no serious threat to U.S. interests (Austin, 2015). What causes deeper concern is instead the reasoning that China's growing assertiveness coupled with economic power could effectively create stepping stones for the superpower status of the country (Sullivan-Brands, 2020). However, the question whether China's regional ambitions are in fact threatening occupied only a secondary place in American public discourse throughout the 2000s, as enterprises in the Middle East and the War on Terror took precedence. The 2008 global financial crisis and the Obama Administration's determination to free the U.S. from Middle-Eastern entanglements created the environment in which the China Challenge could be placed at the forefront of American thinking (West, 2017). Obama, who once called himself the "*first Pacific President*", embarked on the "*pivot to Asia*" policy in an attempt to rebalance China's growing influence. Renewed ties with old allies (Australia, South Korea, Singapore, etc.), the establishment of new ties (Myanmar), the announcement of the Air-Sea Battle Doctrine to counter China, and the forging of the Trans-Pacific Partnership were all elements of policy (Ford, 2017). The overall approach did not reach its goal: the U.S. could not easily quit its wars in the Middle East, and did not manage to counter China, while Beijing started to see the whole American policy approach as a pincer movement. This was the time when the "*China Challenge*" was replaced by "*China Threat*" in discourse.

The third step in how China became seen as a threat relates to Beijing's 2013 formulation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI was partly an answer to some of the domestic issues of China, such as overcapacity in its infrastructure-building industry, and served as a showcase for Beijing's more outward-looking foreign policy. Still, originally the BRI was intended as a geo-economic concept that would bring a degree of stability and cooperation to the regions neighbouring China. Potential geopolitical aims were only accorded to the BRI sometime later, but American critics were always more vocal than Chinese strategists about the geopolitical dimension of

the BRI. Accordingly, American criticism was not confined to business technicalities, or the perceived corruption in BRI projects, but also included the criticism of “*buying influence*” and effectively building up a sphere of influence (Cavanna, 2019). As one keen-eyed analysis pointed out, the Americans were aware of this move as a precursor to global power status as it resembled their own (Sullivan–Brands, 2020). In fact, Anglo-American schools of geopolitics grew out of the perceived threat of “*continental consolidation*”: it was feared that Germany or Russia could consolidate huge land masses under their sway in the early twentieth century (Gaddis, 2018). The phenomenon gave rise, among other things, to the Mackinderian concept of the “*heartland*”. Some assessments pointed out that the 2008 financial crisis had reinstated the importance of greatness of both territory and population in international politics (James, 2011). This combination led to the notion that the Chinese are on the way to “*consolidating*” the Eurasian landmass. The perceived appropriation of Russia and China (Kaplan, 2019) is but one of the apexes of this outlook. Whether the rise of a “*Eurasian*” geopolitical concept was critical in the formulation of a new American policy discourse, it is without doubt that the latter gained impetus during the mid-2010s. Xi Jinping’s more decisive leadership, the BRI, and the sudden realization of geopolitical interests reaching beyond China’s economic entrepreneurship were central to the permanent switch from the “*China Challenge*” to the “*China Threat*”. It is thus not untenable to say that the rise of China slowly went from being perceived as an opportunity to a challenge, and then to threat from the 1990s to the late 2000s, and this is the new perception of reality that has given rise to a new geopolitical outlook.

What is still unclear, however, is the extent to which the emergence of the Indo-Pacific is indeed an “*answer*” to Chinese strategic thinking about Eurasia. As will be demonstrated, the Indo-Pacific concept is essentially reactive in nature, and one of its instigators is the Belt and Road Initiative. Evidence in geopolitical speech about the actual threat posed by the Eurasia concept, however, is scarce. Clearly, evidence has been produced to support this idea (Fallon, 2015, Cavanna, 2020, Kaplan, 2018), but strategic documents do not specify the concept. Some scholars even argue that through the BRI China can exert influence on the European Union in concert with its Eurasian scope (Eszterhai–Grimmel, 2020). Stephen Walt likened Chinese strategic attempts to a “*Chinese Monroe Doctrine*”, aimed at crowding out the Americans from the Asia-Pacific region (Pan, 2015). Given the essentially territorial (i.e. non-maritime) nature of the Monroe Doctrine, and thus its application to the Eurasian landmass, it is not an exaggeration to say that for some members of the American foreign policy elite, the China threat is essentially the “*anti-Monroe Doctrine*” posture of China in relation to the Eurasian landmass. This position clearly resonates with the thoughts of some of the most notable figures in Anglo-American geopolitics – such as Mackinder’s vision of the “*heartland*” and the importance Spykman attached to keeping the “*rimlands*”

safe. On the other hand, the BRI is often cited as a primary instigator but in the “*geopolitical script*” its approach is more often likened to “*unfair trade practices*” than to Eurasian geopolitical aspirations. The evidence is thus inconclusive as to whether the “*China threat*” is a “*Eurasian threat*” at the same time.

Origins of the Indo-Pacific conception

How emergent features of international politics created the need for a new geopolitical concept in the case of the Indo-Pacific is a textbook example of re-imagination of geographical space. What makes this particular case layered and more intricate is the fact that the term was coined by the foreign policy elites of other countries – in fact, regional countries. The term Indo-Pacific was first employed in the classic geopolitical works of Karl Haushofer, albeit in the sense of major geographical regions. Apart from in marine biology, it initially did not become a well-used term in academia (Pan, 2015). In 2011, the term resurfaced in an academic paper by maritime strategist Gurpreet S. Khurana, who argued that the Indo-Pacific region is a fundamentally compact one, stretching from the coasts of East Africa to those of East Asia (Khurana, 2007). According to Khurana, the concept actually emerged during discussions between Indian and Japanese scholars when they tried to assess the strengths and vulnerabilities of China in 2006. They found out that China’s economic lifeline – i.e. the energy supplies of the country – ran through the Indian Ocean, thus a strong Indian Navy could render Chinese activities more moderate (Kuo, 2018). This early formulation of the concept was maritime-focused and referred to the confluence of the two oceans and the security and economic implications thereof. The term was also used by Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in speech delivered to the Indian Parliament in late 2008. It was in these months that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Japan, India, Australia, and the United States was first convened. Even though it was by then unrelated to the development of the Indo-Pacific concept, after its re-establishment it took on a prevalent role in the formulation of policy. However, these early attempts faded away with governmental changes in 2008 in both Japan and Australia. The Australians have played a key role in the promotion of this concept: some argued that the Indo-Pacific is already a reality for a country whose shores are washed by both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, and thus the country’s security in fact relies on the joint fate of those basins. In the developing Australian framework, the term Indo-Pacific was not only more useful for describing the region, but, as Labour leader Kim Beazley stated, the latter “*is a critical part of the global commons*”. The expression Indo-Pacific effectively eclipsed the use of Asia-Pacific in the early 2010s, so much so that the influential Lowy Institute called the ascendancy of the term “*irresistible*”. The Indo-Pacific was named the defining framework for

Australian security in the National Security Document (Scott, 2018). In 2015, the Indian Maritime Security Strategy was also formulated around the geographical concept of the Indo-Pacific. Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo also embraced the Indo-Pacific concept and created a Japanese phrase: “*the free and open Indo-Pacific*”. The country formulated its “*Free and Open Indo-Pacific*” (FOIP) strategy in 2016. Even though it largely focused on exporting Japanese affluence throughout the whole region, the foreign policy elite admits that it was primarily a response to China’s BRI concept and the U.S. commitment to the region. However, in public speech, it is often claimed that the Japanese strategy does not actually compete with but rather completes the Belt and Road Initiative (Rossiter, 2018).

Originally sometimes also referred to as the “*Indo-Asia Pacific*” and mostly associated with maritime security and geo-economics, this outlook was gradually infused with geopolitical content. Khurana, who is credited with inventing the term, thus explained: “*The ‘Indo-Asia Pacific’ [concept] was necessary for the U.S. to maintain its relevance as a resident power in Asia. However, while the term had a sound geoeconomic rationale, President Donald Trump preferred to shorten it to ‘Indo-Pacific,’ ostensibly to focus on the security dimension of America’s geopolitical ends – primarily relating to China – that necessitated a more robust collaboration with U.S. allies and partners*” (Kuo, 2018). So how did the Americans embrace the idea? The adaptation of a more Asia-focused foreign policy agenda did not occur without the continuation of an underlying anti-China tone. Even the “*Pivot to Asia*” policy heralded by President Barack Obama was heavily imbued with an anti-China rhetoric – for example, when the President stated that he wanted the region to be moulded by countries “like us”, not countries like China (John Ford, 2017). In 2011, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke of the “*Indo-Pacific*” in connection with the Pivot strategy. Robert D. Kaplan, an influential member of the foreign policy elite and a proponent of the impact of geography, made a major contribution to spreading the idea that the Indian Ocean and the Pacific are fundamentally interconnected and essentially a single unit. The metaphor he employed, and also the title of one of his books, was *Monsoon*; i.e. a weather phenomenon that runs throughout the entire area of the Indo-Pacific (Pan, 2015). Although the term gained currency, it did not find its way into strategic documents (i.e., into the “*geopolitical script*”).

The year 2017 was when the U.S. administration fully embraced the idea of the Indo-Pacific region. For quite some time, throwaway remarks about the “*Indo-Pacific*” were seen as nothing more substantial than an attempt to woo New Delhi into more actively implementing pro-American politics in the region. However, in November 2017 President Trump delivered a speech at the APEC summit in Na Dang, Vietnam, in which he enshrined the “*free and open Indo-Pacific*” as the cornerstone of American Asia-policy. This speech was informed by the process of drafting a new

National Security Strategy in December 2017. According to the introductory parts of the document, “*China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests. China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor*” (NSS 2017, p. 25). The strategic paper then addresses the regions important to U.S. policy on an area-by-area basis, and the order seems to reflect the relative importance of the given regions. The Indo-Pacific comes first, then Europe, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, the Western Hemisphere, and then Africa. The chapter on the “*Indo-Pacific*” begins with a definition of the term and the origins of American commitment to the region:

A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region, a region which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States, represents the most populous and economically dynamic part of the world. The U.S. interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific extends back to the earliest days of our republic (NSS 2017, p. 46).

Then the major threats are defined as Chinese assertiveness (although the need to cooperate with the Asian country is also stressed), and the threat posed by the North Korean regime. America’s allies are also enumerated in the following order: South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand (without mentioning the quarrel between the two countries over antinuclear policies), and India. Then the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is specifically mentioned, then the Philippines and Thailand as important allies, and finally Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as “*growing security and economic partners*”. ASEAN and APEC are also called centrepieces of the Indo-Pacific architecture.

In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the communications that followed it, the discourse of foreign policy elites, and further strategic documents, there have been attempts to define the Indo-Pacific region and what a “*free and open Indo-Pacific*” entails for U.S. national security. Judging from these sources, the most important questions are still the boundaries of the region; the degree of inclusion of China; and what the words “*free*” and “*open*” mean. While neither policy-makers nor analysts agree on whether China is part of the region, it is generally accepted that the whole FOIP concept is designed to counter Chinese influence. “*Free*” in this context refers to each nation’s right to live without foreign interference, and internally, to respect and advance human rights. “*Open*” relates to free access to international waters by all actors in the region, as well as access to markets and fair and reciprocal trade (Heiduk–Wacker, 2020).

In the theoretical framework for this study, it is identified how the term Indo-Pacific, its dramaturgical process, and related mental mapping were essentially developed in the early 2010s. The once purely geographical term has gained significance in some influential regional nations, primarily to signify attempts to involve and integrate India into the framework. The strategic discourse of key American allies (Japan and Australia) and India has been influential in shaping American foreign policy discourse: in the framework of Ó Tuathail, this can best be understood as both media representations and the inventory of common sense and everyday parlance. Lacking a definition of the region, and with virtually no trickle down of the concept into everyday speech, the idea of the Indo-Pacific region was mostly informed by and developed in interaction with key U.S. allies from the region.

Making Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific

The next step in the given framework is seeing how a geopolitical concept that is becoming established is being translated into effective (geo)-political action. The forthcoming section is divided into three parts: a description of the actual political steps taken by Washington in concert with Indo-Pacific concepts; of the interplay of the U.S. and its allies that also uses this framework; and finally, of the disruptive or aggravating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in this “*geopolitical story-line*”.

Having been embedded in a geopolitical script, the concept of the “*Indo-Pacific*” has now started to be translated into strategy. These strategic steps have been thoroughly discussed in two further documents, one prepared by the Department of Defence in June 2019 called *The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, and in another published in November 2019 by the State Department under the title *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision (FOIP)*. In these documents, both military and political recommendations were defined for creating a genuine framework for the Indo-Pacific. As the DoD document’s title suggests, it concentrates on the preparedness of key U.S. allies in the region, namely Japan, South Korea, and Australia, while also focusing on expanding cooperation with other players, most notably, with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Notably, the longstanding debate between New Zealand and the United States regarding the free passage of American submarines in New Zealand waters is not addressed in those documents. The third pillar is essentially a response to regional grievances associated with the bilateral nature of American commitments: the U.S. now claims to be more willing to promote a “*networked region*” in which lines of connections of different measures and strength would link countries and tie them to U.S. commitments. No new multilateral structure will be evoked, however, so the U.S. will continue to rely on the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Sum-

mit (EAS) to promote a networked region. It is only the Lower Mekong Initiative that has been put under the label of FOIP (Heiduk–Wacker, 2020). As for the actual steps, some should be pointed out that support the Indo-Pacific framework (selling fighter jets to India, the proposed expansion of U.S. naval bases, and enhanced cooperation with India and Japan in the defence sector). Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also announced funds for promoting Indo-Pacific security to the sum of 300 million dollars, but analysts did not fail to point out the relative modesty of this sum in comparison to Chinese spending in the region (Scott, 2018). Economic cooperation and U.S. infrastructure projects have largely remained on paper to date. On the other hand, economic measures taken against China in the region have started to bring about results. The most important political development was the resuscitation of the moribund Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in 2017, in which Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States took part.

What remains unaddressed, however, is the fact that the United States – although admittedly part of the region – is geographically distant, and does not share one of the key features of the region: an asymmetrical form of semi-mutual dependence on Chinese economic power. This has led to a slight divergence of ideas in the interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept. Just as much as the Americans try to tailor the Indo-Pacific concept to their actual political needs, regional actors (Japan, Australia, India, the ASEAN, etc.) do the same. Actually, some of the latter did not even agree with the inclusion of the U.S. in the scope of the term. In a strict naval military interpretation, they see the region as stretching from the East Coast of Africa to the East Coast of the Asian mainland, or the West Pacific. There are serious Australian (Hurley, 2013, Morris, 2020) and Indian (Chacko, 2014; Kuo, 2018) examples of this phenomenon. Of course, this is not to say that the place of the Americans is not safe within this framework, but rather it underlines the fact that the region is by no means unequivocally defined in a geographical or even strategic sense. Further, some of the key members of the foreign policy elites of regional countries in the late 2010s adjusted their interpretation of the concept from a narrower focus on China-containment to a more inclusive, economy-centred outlook. This has been noted in the case of Japan (Heiduk–Wacker 2020) but also in Australia (Baranyi, 2020). ASEAN countries, following serious attempts at creating their own approach to the Indo-Pacific, finally agreed to publish a related document: *The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. However, this document rather enshrines the diversity and uniqueness of ASEAN countries' approaches, and in some ways even contradicts the vision of FOIP. It seems that regional players are tending to shift away from a containment interpretation to a regionalisation interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept (Calabrese, 2020) – although this may change in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis. Some scholars explicitly say that the military focus of the FOIP strategy is the most important barrier to forming a functional strategy, as most

countries in the region have economic stakes and some degree of shared interest with China (Shah, 2020). Such a relative divergence of interpretations turns an advantage into a setback in the end: the regional “*need*” for the Indo-Pacific framework that in the early 2010s informed and shaped the vision is now working against its consolidation as a strategy.

Thus, in spite of the publishing of a set of definitive strategic papers – essentially, the creation of a geopolitical script – the Indo-Pacific initiative thus remains underfunded and under defined. Even the strategies and connected policy steps thus far defined are rather located within this framework, not derived from it. There is no related multilateral body, and no structured cooperation on a broader basis – only the strengthening of existing alliances and some instigation to move in the same direction. To put it more aptly, so far the Indo-Pacific remains a “*retrospective umbrella term*”. This situation has not changed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, although the anti-China activities of the United States ramped up in late spring of 2020. One of the key changes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic was the sudden acceptance of anti-PRC rhetoric as a mainstream phenomenon. The latter not only included regular hints at Beijing’s responsibility for the outbreak of Covid-19, but also the instigation of an international inquiry into the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This was not only put forward by members of the American administration, the foreign policy elite, and the media; but also by the Australian government. The debate concerning the role and impartiality of the WHO also stood out: the American administration considered the WHO as having played a lukewarm role in terms of efforts to combat the virus in the early days, and as complicit in covering up cases in China. The American response – defunding the WHO – was deemed disproportionate by most European allies (Garrett, 2020). However, the inclusion of Taiwan in the WHO due to its successful handling of the outbreak was clearly another anti-PRC move, as Beijing has been struggling to deprive Taipei of its external markers of sovereignty. In short, the general rhetoric became more anti-China in the months after the Covid-19 outbreak. Part of this escalation was the idea put forth by President Trump about the G7 summit, originally planned to be held in September 2020. The idea (which later became known as the “*G11*”) proposed that the G7 countries be completed by four additional powers in the discussion: Russia, Australia, South Korea, and India. According to the rationale, it would be important to include these countries as they are responsible for a notable slice of the world economy, thus remedies cannot be found without their participation. However, China was not mentioned, despite the country’s undoubted relevance in terms of both global demography and economics. Some considered the whole idea of the G11 as a first step in an American strategy to forge a de facto anti-China bloc in the Indo-Pacific (McCarthy–Wu, 2020). Others point to the hurried and responsive nature of the steps taken after the outbreak of Covid-19, and one can generally agree about

the latter's uncoordinated and – most importantly – non-consensual nature: there is no consensus in the American foreign policy elite about involving these Indo-Pacific powers, and even less Russia.

Using the referent framework, this study has demonstrated how the concept of the Indo-Pacific was essentially a reaction to the perception of a new reality involving the emergence and growing assertiveness of China. The former was informed and interactively shaped by other regional powers to ultimately form a geopolitical script. The interplay between major stakeholders is now rather a liability than an asset, as it perpetuates the fluidity of the concept, while the latter remains underfunded. In the wording of the article referred to here, it is assumed that geopolitical “*fine-tuning*” has essentially been lacking in past years in relation to the Indo-Pacific concept. As much as the Indo-Pacific may serve as a “*retrospective umbrella*”, it does not command unified action in the wake of Covid-19 either. A divergence of orientations can be seen among the key proponents of FOIP – namely, between the security-driven Americans and the economy-driven regional powers (India, Australia, Japan, and the ASEAN). The aftermath of the recent accentuation of tension may lead to the militarization of the “*Indo-Pacific*”, but a more regionalized, economy-centred approach may also resurface.

Conclusion

How the term “*Indo-Pacific*” emerged and took shape is an excellent illustration of how a geographical concept becomes a geopolitical one, and how geopolitical imaginations and concept-building lead to real foreign policy orientations. Based on the referent article, it has been demonstrated how a new perception of reality emerged, which in this case involved the transformation of the perception of China as an opportunity into a challenge and threat. The inventory of media did not play a part in this: this role was rather played by key allies in the Pacific and their understanding of regional threats. Thus, departing from the original concept, the Indo-Pacific was rather informed by the strategic discourse of American allies. It then reinforced American planning, and found its way into strategic documents. By the end of 2017, the Indo-Pacific concept was firmly embedded into American strategic thinking.

Based on the evolving “*geopolitical script*”, the Indo-Pacific concept actually inspired political decisions: arms sales, heightened cooperation, military base enlargements, etc., but these largely remained associated with the military domain, and failed to be translated into economic measures. The former did illuminate the divergence of interests of regional powers, as they increasingly see the potential economic use of the term. So far, the Indo-Pacific concept is underdeveloped, underfunded, and overly focused on military issues and planning. This hampers the effectiveness of its use as

a strategy, even in relation to the Covid-19 crisis, which has clearly given impetus to U.S.-China strategic rivalry.

Whether the Indo-Pacific concept is indeed a “response” to the Eurasian concept of Chinese grand strategy, and particularly the overarching BRI framework, is less evident. The former has not transcended the strategic script, as it tends to concentrate on global issues (fair trade practices) and normative approaches (free access to sea routes). However, many influential members of the American foreign policy elite have pointed out the Eurasian scope of the BRI concept, and also that of Chinese grand strategy, and this geopolitical anxiety clearly informed the creation of the Indo-Pacific concept, at least in its American version. This dialectic of sea power and land power clearly resonates with the thoughts of Mackinder and Spykman, and is thus embedded in Anglo-American geopolitical traditions.

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Towards the Rise of Eurasia

Competing Geopolitical Narratives and Responses

At the beginning of the 21st century, the unity of Europe and Asia took on a new meaning, leading to an appreciation of Eurasian thinking – which has a long tradition in geopolitics –, allowing different narratives to be born in different countries. The aim of this volume is to present in detail the interconnected geopolitical narratives that are emerging in various countries. As a similar book that examines the image of Eurasia through narratives has not yet been published in the region, this publication can be seen as a ground-breaking step. This work contains studies by experts in geopolitics – both foreign and domestic specialists – that undoubtedly contribute to the development of geopolitical research in Central and Eastern Europe. With their help, the reader can get a comprehensive picture of how the great powers and smaller countries on the supercontinent (as well as in the United States) interpret Eurasia, what the main features are of each narrative, and which factors and processes are helping and hindering their implementation. The publisher of the volume, the Institute of International, Political and Regional Studies at Corvinus University, is strongly committed to exploring current developments in geopolitics, thereby contributing to their better understanding. The latest volume in the series ‘Corvinus Geographia, Geopolitica, Geoeconomia’ may be of interest to a wide audience. As well as being relevant to those interested in geopolitics, it will appeal to those who seek to understand the changing landscape of international relations of the 21st century.