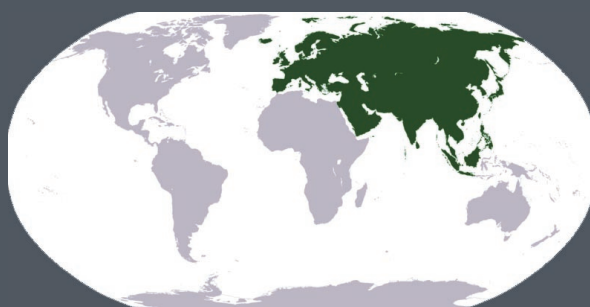


Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia

Collection of Articles



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Introduction

The present collection is based on the proceedings of the international conference “Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia”, organized by the Lithuanian Centre for Geopolitical Studies and Carnegie Moscow Center. This conference, that took place in Vilnius in February 2009, focused on the shifts that began to occur in the post-Soviet region in the aftermath of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war and during the global financial crisis. These shifts have affected virtually all aspects of inter-state relations: political, economic, security and humanitarian issues. All of them had a strong impact on the already existent tendencies in this region, and also gave impetus to new developments and processes both within states and in relations between them. The authors, representing different countries, try to offer their visions of only a few, albeit in their opinion most significant, issues that were discussed at the conference. At the same time, they are not limited by the discussions that took place in Vilnius, as they also refer to facts and events that took place after the conference. Their findings and conclusions can thus complement and broaden those discussions’ results. Obviously, national and geographic differences are reflected in the authors’ opinions on various processes that occur in the post-Soviet space. Perhaps such “optical” differences will help better realize the main goal of the present collection, namely to offer the reader a multidimensional view of the present trends in the region in their full complexity, with all their contradictions. This initiative was supported by the East East Beyond Borders Program of the Open Society Foundations.

Andrei Ryabov
(Russia)

Collective Security Issues in the Post-Soviet Space after the Russian-Georgian War in August 2008

The August 2008 Russian-Georgian War became a serious security challenge for the states of the former Soviet Union. The war showed the lack of reliable mechanisms to prevent armed inter-state conflicts in the region as well as sufficient tools to resolve them. The August War put post-Soviet states in front of a difficult dilemma: either to ensure their security with the help of global and regional actors outside of the post-Soviet space, which would inevitably lead to an aggravation of relations with Moscow, or try to reach an agreement with Russia, that still dominates the region militarily and politically. Apart from that, security challenges after the “five-day war” were perceived differently in various sub-regions of the post-Soviet space. The war provoked a much stronger reaction in the South Caucasus that is burdened by several inter-state and inter-ethnic conflicts. In this region security mechanisms were destroyed, and their re-establishment still seems unlikely. In contrast to the South Caucasus, the Central Asian states, Ukraine and Moldova enjoy more flexibility in their security policies.

The influence of the “five-day war” on the post-Soviet space should be also viewed in the context of major global and regional developments in the following years. Indeed, the global financial downturn that began in September 2008 severely restricted the foreign policy resources available to the global players: the United States and the European Union. These actors were politically active in the post-Soviet space, but the crisis forced them to priori-

tize their attention in favor of other regions and problems. The U.S. focused on the countries of the Middle East that are critically important to global security and national American interests. Due to the severe debt crisis, the EU had to concentrate on its internal problems.

Furthermore, the global financial crisis significantly aggravated the socio-economic situation in the post-Soviet states. Thus, many of them faced increasing social and political tensions. As it became more difficult to get assistance from the West, the role of Russia as a major donor and guarantor of stability for the local political regimes has increased. The election of Barack Obama in November 2008 and his administration's policy of 'resetting' the US-Russian relations also had a major impact on the situation in the former Soviet Union. It decreased the rivalry between Russia and the US that had reached its peak during the August war and effectively broadened Moscow's opportunities for a more active policy in the region. Finally, large-scale political changes that began in the Arab world in January 2011 - their direction and depth is still largely unclear - can lead to a serious revision of the policies of the US and its Western allies. Some analysts believe that the United States will be much more interested in preserving the status quo in the post-Soviet space since it would limit the uncontrolled growth of uncertainty in the world.

In the light of these factors this chapter attempts to assess security prospects in the post-Soviet region after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian War.

The change of the internationally recognized borders of Georgia after the Russian-Georgian War constitutes both a precedent and a main security challenge. In spite of the fact that Tbilisi had lost control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia long ago, the formal recognition of their independence by Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, created a pivotal change in the post-Soviet space. For local ruling elites it meant that the use of force might lead to a situation when a territory de facto uncontrolled by the central government could be recognized de jure as an independent state by a neighbouring country. The fact that Western attempts to persuade Russia to stick to the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan (that stipulated Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders) were unsuccessful, highlighted how existing international institutions and mechanisms are inefficient in solving this kind of issues.

In this situation the new order that originated in the South Caucasus after the August War, - establishing not only new borders, but also a new military and political role of the breakaway territories - can turn into a stable and enduring *status quo*. The new realities constituted a grave challenge to the ruling elites of the post-Soviet states. Most of these countries face problems of

separatism – both active and latent or potential - in their own territories. Their ruling regimes began to imagine how the “Georgian scenario” could apply to their own states. That is why post-Soviet states, including Russia’s closest allies and partners in such organizations as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), refused – like the great majority of the world’s countries - to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, this division with Moscow over the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not push the majority of post-Soviet states towards breaking or even reducing their cooperation with Russia in the security sphere.

We can list several reasons for that. First, post-war attempts to resolve the situation around Georgia showed that in case of an armed conflict between a former Soviet state and Russia the U.S. and its allies most likely cannot be relied upon in restoring the territorial integrity of that state. Second, even after the war, the political circles in Central Asia were still holding a view that Russia’s political and military power should not be exaggerated: Moscow would hardly have the resources to intervene in possible inter-state conflicts in this sub-region. Third, after the Georgian War, the ruling elites of several former Soviet states, having reasons to worry about the stability of their regimes, realized that continuing cooperation with Russia in the field of security they can rely on Russia’s military capabilities in case they have to defend their domestic rule.

This was evident in Kyrgyzstan during the 2010 spring – early summer political crisis that eventually led to the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. At the beginning of the crisis Bakiyev asked Russia to send troops to Kyrgyzstan to stabilize the situation. But Moscow had no intentions to rescue him. After Bakiyev’s overthrow, however, there was a real danger that the country will slip into a civil war and inter-ethnic conflict. In these circumstances, in June 2010 the interim President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbayeva asked Russia to send troops to Kyrgyzstan. But this request was denied.

After the August war, the main question was whether Moscow intended to further change the international order in the territory of the former USSR. This became a crucial condition for maintaining security cooperation of post-Soviet states with Russia. When the war ended many observers predicted that Russia would start to behave as a revisionist power at the international scene. However, Moscow soon made it clear that Russia had neither the desire nor the resources to pursue such an agenda. Objectively the preservation of the existing ruling regimes, that are close to the Russian one by their social and political nature, meets the strategic objectives of the Russian elite. This is one

of the fundamental principles of Russia's foreign policy towards the former Soviet republics. Actually, one of the reasons why Russia's relations with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili went sour from the start was that he positioned himself as a leader who wants to break away with the post-Soviet political tradition and to set his country along a clear pro-Western path of development. Obviously, this factor was not the only cause for the armed conflict with Russia, but it played a certain part in its prehistory.

Russia's desire to remain a status quo power in the post-Soviet space was clearly manifested by its behavior in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia is very interested in preserving constructive relations both with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia, which actively supports the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, is Russia's only military and political ally in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan is its most important subregional partner in the sphere of extraction, trade and transportation of oil and gas. In case of a new war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh Russia's influence in both countries and in the South Caucasus in general could be undermined. This is why Russia, a few months after the end of the War in Georgia, began to actively demonstrate its desire to prevent a resumption of armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

This was the main purpose of Russia's mediating efforts. On 2 November 2008, as a result of a meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the so-called "Moscow" (or "Meyendorf" – under the name of a residence of Russian Head of State outside of Moscow) Declaration of the Three Presidents was signed. According to the Declaration, Baku committed itself to settle the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh by peaceful means only. In the following years the Russian leadership, enjoying a close relationship with both sides, tried to maintain its role as the key mediator.¹ Overall, in the period of 2008-2011 under the mediation of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev five meetings were held between presidents Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia and Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan.

Therefore, in spite of a deep negative imprint left by the Russian-Georgian war and its consequences in the minds of post-Soviet states' ruling circles, their political elites, due to a number of reasons, were still interested in security cooperation with Moscow. Significantly, participants of the CSTO summit in September 2008, refusing to approve Russia's decision to recognize the

¹ Markedonov S. "Nagornyi-Karabakh: rossiyskoe posrednichestvo prodoljaetsya" [Nagorno-karabakh: Russian mediation continues]. *Novaya Politika*. Internet journal. 12 July 2011

independence of former Georgian autonomous regions, expressed support of its efforts “to facilitate peace and cooperation in the region”. Translating this statement from diplomatic to political language, we can regard it as de facto recognition of Russia’s unique role of a regional policeman by heads of post-Soviet states.

Having failed on the diplomatic front, Russia, nevertheless, tried to compensate for the foreign policy and image losses by increased activity in the field of security. Moscow made concentrated efforts to strengthen its key role in the security system of the post-Soviet space. Mechanisms of both bilateral and multilateral cooperation were used to pursue this goal. In terms of bilateral cooperation the main breakthrough was achieved in the Ukrainian direction.

Russia’s relations with Ukraine under President Viktor Yushchenko, who took course for integration with NATO and intended to close the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, remained strained. The situation began to change with the new President Viktor Yanukovich, who assumed office as the result of January 2010 presidential election. Facing an increasing shortage of economic resources as a result of the global economic crisis and the removal of Ukraine’s possible membership in NATO from the current political agenda for the foreseeable future, Yanukovich’s administration decided to normalize relations with Russia. Kiev came to the conclusion that in Ukraine’s national interests the extended lease of the base in Sevastopol, important for Russia as a matter of principle, should be exchanged for lowering the price of the Russian gas, critical for Ukrainian economy. In April 2010 the agreement was signed in Kharkov that prolonged the lease of Sevastopol for the Russian Naval base for 25 years until 2042.

Despite the fact that Armenia is a member of the CSTO, Moscow preferred to strengthen political and military relations with its only ally in the South Caucasus on a bilateral basis. During his visit to Yerevan in August 2010, President Medvedev signed a protocol that extended the lease of the military base in Gyumri to Russia until 2046. The document also stipulated an expansion of the role of this military base in ensuring national security of Armenia.

At the same time, Russia also made considerable efforts to strengthen the main collective security institution in the post-Soviet space - the CSTO. In February 2009 a decision was made to create a mobile Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF). Its purpose was not only to repulse external armed attacks on CSTO members, but also to counteract terrorist threats, drug trafficking, organized crime, and provide relief in case of natural and anthropogenic disas-

ters. At the same time, CSTO leaders noted that the CRRF will not be used “to solve inter-state bilateral political problems in relation to our partners in the CIS or neighbouring states”.²

At the same time, Moscow sought the West’s recognition and acknowledgement of its dominant role in ensuring security in the post-Soviet space. This proposal was articulated both in a straightforward way, when Russian leaders and senior officials declared the post-Soviet space as an “area of Russia’s vital interests,” and in a more indirect manner. In particular, at the October 2008 Evian World Policy Conference in France Dmitry Medvedev offered to sign a new European Security Treaty. The proposed treaty stipulated the idea that no country can have a monopoly in ensuring security.³ This concept was obviously directed against influence of the US and NATO – the military and political alliance that is viewed by the Western community as the backbone of the security system in the European continent. However, Russia’s claims to the post-Soviet region as a sphere of its vital interest and the idea of a new European Security Treaty were rejected by Western countries. For the West, NATO is the guarantor of collective security in Europe while concepts of “vital interests” are considered to be hopelessly obsolete.

Nevertheless, in the post-war years Russia was able to establish collaboration with Washington over security issues in the post-Soviet space, albeit by different channels – within the framework of the ‘reset’ policy. Moscow met the American request for transit of US military cargoes for operations in Afghanistan through the Russian territory. This route is the safest one for the Americans. Russia also signed into the international sanctions against Iran that the Western states insisted upon in response to Tehran’s unwillingness to cooperate with the international community on its nuclear program. For its part, the U.S. effectively abandoned attempts to contain Russia’s activity in the post-Soviet space. Some experts even suggested that Washington and Moscow reached a tacit agreement: the US would not counter Russia’s efforts to expand and strengthen its influence in this region, on the condition that the latter would refrain from using force.

In general, U.S. security policy in the post-Soviet region after the Russian-Georgian War was pursuing goals that were either subordinate to some global tasks or were supposed to create certain conditions for a more active American

² Quote from : “CSTO: ovetstvennaya bezopasnost” [CSTO: Responsible Security] Edited by Igor Yurgens. Moscow: Institute of Contemporary Development. 2011. p. 9

³ http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/10/08/2159_type82912type82914_207457.shtml

involvement in the region in a more distant future. Thus the Americans were still interested in the use of air bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that serve as transit points for the U.S. and French air forces for their operations in Afghanistan. Moscow has always been concerned about these bases. Several times it tried to convince the governments of Central Asian states to deny the U.S. the right to use their airfields for the purpose of military transportation. The most recent attempt of this kind was made in relation to Kyrgyzstan shortly after the overthrow of Bakiyev, when the country found itself in a difficult situation with a looming civil war and economic collapse.

Many Russian politicians and experts believe that in the future the U.S. will attempt to expand its presence in Central Asia and increase the number of its military bases that can help Washington to “contain the interests of three major powers (China, Russia and Iran) simultaneously. Its main target, however, is, most likely, China.”⁴ But Central Asian states are firmly adhering to the principle of multi-vector foreign policy that allows them to balance in between the interests of global powers. As a result, they turned a deaf ear to Russian proposals to reduce American military presence in this sub-region. At the same time, American political presence in Central Asia is hardly significant. A good example of this was American reaction to the political crisis in Kyrgyzstan in spring-summer 2010. The U.S. limited its involvement to diplomacy, which indicates that Russian fears of a possible Washington’s strategic plan for Central Asia are not justified.

After Ukraine was denied the Membership Action Plan at the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the policy of the U.S. and NATO towards Kiev began to focus on more narrow tasks. The aim was to preserve the hope among the Ukrainian elites that in the longer term NATO doors will remain open for them. Ukraine was offered annual target programs of cooperation with NATO. The U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Charter was signed in December 2008.

The new administration of Viktor Yanukovich, who replaced Viktor Yushchenko, weakened cooperation with the U.S. and NATO as it initially decided to strengthen relations with Russia. The Law on Foundations of Domestic and Foreign Policy, passed by the Ukrainian parliament in July 2010 confirmed Ukraine’s status of a non-aligned European state, and the question of a possible accession into NATO was removed from the agenda. However, as in the 2011 Kiev’s relations with Russia began to deteriorate, Ukraine intensified contacts with NATO once again. Yet, this does not give enough grounds

⁴ Panfilova, Viktoria. “Nato gotovit interventsii v Central’nyu Aziu” [Nato Prepares an Intervention into the Central Asia]. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*: 22 June 2011.

to believe that fluctuations in the Ukrainian policy can lead to drastic changes in the security system in this part of Europe in the coming years. Most likely, the administration of Viktor Yanukovich is trying to rectify the balance in Ukrainian foreign policy. This means the return to the policy that was pursued by the second President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma during his tenure from 1994 to 2004.

In an effort to avoid a new cycle of escalation in the South Caucasus, the Obama administration sharply reduced its political support to Georgia, unequivocally expressing its discontent with Mikhail Saakashvili's foreign policy. Even though the United States confirmed its position on the territorial integrity of Georgia, the amount of American military aid to Tbilisi was reduced to a minimum.

Thus, the situation with international relations and security in the post-Soviet space after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian War is characterized by several contradictory tendencies. On one hand, such factors as fear of the ruling authoritarian regimes to lose power in the context of a severe financial crisis and decline of the U.S. and EU's interest in the region pushed post-Soviet states to seek acceptable forms of cooperation and compromise with Russia on the security issues. This gave Moscow a certain advantage in its efforts to strengthen Russia's position of the regional leader, and to claim the role of an architect and the chief player in the post-Soviet system of collective security. This system was destroyed in the South Caucasus after the August War, but in other sub-regions Russia continued to act as a power supporting the *status quo*. Other global players were not able to offer the post-Soviet space an alternative, more attractive and, most importantly, more realistic scenario for a system of collective security. This situation could have created exclusive conditions for Russia to promote its own vision of the security system, relying on the CSTO and Moscow's military and political alliances with Belarus and Armenia. In reality, however, these qualitative shifts never occurred.

The aim to create a system of collective security in the post-Soviet space remains as distant as it was before the War in 2008. The main reason for this is that the authoritarian ruling regimes of the CIS countries consider participation in various collective security institutions strictly through the prism of their own selfish and often short-term interests, rather than as a problem that requires long-term collective efforts.

These motives are reflected in the internal difficulties that the CSTO faced in the post-war period. The first problem arises from concerns over a possible limitation of national sovereignty in the sphere of security policy. This is why Uzbekistan refused to participate in the creation of the CFFR.

Tashkent's position is that decisions to use this collective force should be made unanimously, not by a majority of votes, as it is stipulated in the founding documents of the CSTO. Uzbekistan also firmly believes that the CRRF units should not be deployed in other states if it contradicts the national law. In addition to the agreement on the creation of the CRRF, Tashkent refused to sign five other important decisions of the CSTO. All attempts by leaders of the member states to persuade Uzbekistan to participate in the CRRF were unsuccessful. As a result, Uzbekistan's participation in the CSTO became nominal. Policy-makers in a few post-Soviet states even suggest that Uzbekistan should be expelled from the organization.

Second, the ruling elites in some of the member states perceive this organization as an institution with police functions that must ensure their grip on power. For instance, this is the view of the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, who believes that potential aggressors will rather try to ignite social and political conflicts within the CSTO countries, rather than engage in a direct military attack.⁵ This position, however, was not shared by Russia and other CSTO member states. Moscow's disagreement, however, was mainly motivated by political, rather than normative considerations: Russia's leaders are displeased with Lukashenko's policies and have no desire to help him stay in power.

A different situation concerning a possible CSTO military intervention into a domestic political conflict occurred in summer 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, with a looming civil war and inter-ethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. At stake then was not the survival of a ruling regime, but the preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of the country. As mentioned earlier, the interim President of Kyrgyzstan, Roza Otunbayeva, asked President Medvedev to send troops to that Central Asian Republic. However in this case both Russia and the CSTO decided not to intervene militarily. Apparently, the reason was not only the desire to be faithful to the objectives of the CSTO statute but also the fear of Tashkent's stance: Uzbekistan does not participate in the CRRF, but its reaction to the deployment of foreign troops in areas with a high share of Uzbek population could be predictably quite painful.

At the same time, emphasizing commitment to the statutory objectives, CSTO still falls under the influence of conservative aspirations of its member states' ruling circles. Therefore, contrary to its purpose, in practice the CSTO begins to pay special attention to combating internal threats. In particular, at the informal CSTO Summit held in the capital of Kazakhstan Astana in August 2011, national leaders agreed to develop joint measures to counter cyber

⁵ <http://interfax.by/printable/news/belarus/97602>

and informational threats. In reality this decision was motivated by post-Soviet governments' growing concern that social networks and the Internet can be effectively used by protest groups to orchestrate the removal of their ruling regimes from power, as it happened in Tunisia and Egypt at the beginning of 2011. It remains to be seen how seriously the internal security bias can affect the policies of the CSTO.

Due to aforementioned problems Russia did not manage to transform the CSTO into a unified and efficient political-military organization, capable, as Kremlin strategists envisaged, to be a serious counterweight to NATO's influence in the North Eurasia. The CRRF is inferior to NATO's forces both in numbers and capabilities. Only small units usually participate in the CRRF's military exercises.

Bilateral military alliances are prone with certain problems as well. Endless economic and political conflicts between the Russian leadership and the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, for instance, complicated military cooperation between the two countries. Minsk, referring to Russia's discriminatory actions, for some time refused to sign the agreement on the creation of the CRRF.

The situation in the South Caucasus continues to be a serious security challenge too. Turkey's attempts to seize initiative and create a system of collective security in this sub-region after the Russian-Georgian war were unsuccessful. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform proposed by Ankara was rejected by other states.

As post-war developments have shown, a settlement between Russia and Georgia can be hardly expected in the foreseeable future. Moscow is ready to normalize relations with Georgia and discuss all issues except for the question of the recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tbilisi, in contrast, regards the discussion of restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized bodies as the prerequisite for any normalization. Meanwhile, intentions to join NATO remain the cornerstone of Georgian foreign policy. This, in turn, makes Russia consider Georgia a hostile state and keep this country's ruling elites in constant tension. In mid-summer 2011, American support of Georgia has become more active again. In July American Congress passed a resolution that recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as occupied Georgian territories.

Another important condition that would make a system of collective security in the South Caucasus possible is a normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. However no improvement here is possible without a progress in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. This was shown by the failure of the

attempt of the President of Turkey Abdullah Gul to solve the conflict by signing a bilateral protocol in Zurich in October 2009. As far as the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is concerned, the positions of the two sides are still diametrically opposite. Independence of Nagorno-Karabakh became the central question for the formation of Armenian statehood.⁶ For Baku the settlement is only possible through reintegration of this territory into the Republic of Azerbaijan. The rapidly changing balance of military forces in favor of Azerbaijan contributes to mounting tension and increases the possibility of a new military confrontation between the two countries.

After Russia refused to lower the prices for gas exports to Ukraine in 2011, the relations between the two countries in general and those in the sphere of security in particular cooled down.⁷ Ukraine began to prohibit the passage of Russian warships into the Azov Sea through Ukraine's territorial waters. The issue of control over the lighthouses and other hydrographic structures of the Black Sea Fleet, deployed in the Crimea, became acute again. According to some experts, if the situation will further deteriorate, Ukraine might pose the question of revising the agreement on the conditions of the Russian lease of the naval base in Sevastopol.

In other words, the security situation in the post-Soviet space remains volatile and uncertain, and is subject to many fluctuating external factors. It seems that in the coming years Russia will retain its role as the leading military and political power of the region. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Russia will be able to create a strong system of collective security even on the sub-regional level of Russian warships into the Azov Sea through Ukraine's territorial waters. The issue of control over the lighthouses and other hydrographic structures of the Black Sea Fleet, deployed in the Crimea, became acute again. According to some experts, if the situation will further deteriorate, Ukraine might pose the question of revising the agreement on the conditions of the Russian lease of the naval base in Sevastopol.

In other words, the security situation in the post-Soviet space remains volatile and uncertain, and is subject to many fluctuating external factors. It seems that in the coming years Russia will retain its role as the leading military and political power of the region. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Russia will be able to create a strong system of collective security even on the sub-regional level.

⁶ Alexander Iskandaryan. "Armenia Between Autocracy and Polyarchy". *Pro et Contra*. 15: 3-4. May-August 2011. p.20.

⁷ In return, Russia wanted to get control over the Ukrainian gas transport system.

Elmira Nogoibayeva
(Kyrgyzstan)

Central Asia: Parts with no common whole

A new region

The region known in Russian literally as “Middle Asia” during the Soviet period has changed not only its name but also its geographical borders on the maps. Without going into the terminological nuances, let me note simply that almost one hundred years after this region appeared, its political and geographical makeup have undergone a new transformation, only with the reconstruction initiative coming from a different great power this time. Yesterday’s “Middle Asia” with its “friendly republics” has become today’s “Central Asia.” A subsequent project proposed extending its borders to take in Mongolia, China’s Xinjiang Province, and Afghanistan, and calling the whole region “Greater Central Asia.”¹ However, this geographical picture does not reflect a new commonality among the countries that make it up. The region in its new composition is a deliberate political construct motivated by a common objective, as was the case a century earlier. But in practice, this new geographical construct is more just the set of different socio-political realities, policies, and aspirations of the different countries located in Eurasia’s center.

But for all the differing interpretations and approaches to defining the concept of “Central Asia,” this article follows the more traditional definition of it as the region composed of the five post-Soviet republics.

¹ S. F. Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4 (July/August 2005).

A single region?

Although these five former Soviet republics seem to share many similarities, Central Asia as it is today is an entity delineated in the middle of Eurasia in geographical terms only because common features in the establishment and development of the five new countries that form it have not yet emerged. The opposite is more true, with each of these countries in the process of developing its own sense of identity and giving shape to its own new ideological and foreign policy priorities. Turkmenistan is something of a regional “thing all of its own” – a country with an already well-established neutral and isolationist policy, closed off to the point where even the neighbors with whom it shares a common border have a hard time getting information on life there. Attempts to establish lines of direct communication with Turkmenistan meet with even greater obstacles. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan remain locked in perpetual rivalry for regional leadership under their equally perpetual strong and ambitious leaders, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov, who have both built authoritarian power hierarchies that serve as the tool by which they pursue their aims of maintaining and consolidating social stability. The region is also home to countries that are poor even by regional standards, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, for example. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan has gained the reputation of a “problem case” not just in the region but throughout the post-Soviet area as a whole. This is due to its political and revolutionary experiments that get its neighbors worried from time to time, causing them to seal themselves off from this “island of democracy,” literally and figuratively, by closing their borders.

Thus, despite the existing historical, political, and economic conditions and the potential opportunities for turning Central Asia into an integral region, in reality it remains just a desired political construct. The question of Central Asia as a player in international politics is usually raised by countries not directly connected to the region. Discussions in the Central Asian countries themselves have long since been more narrow and specific in nature, focusing above all on issues of ownership or security. Regional level discussions have been dominated of late by the distribution of water resources and prevention of “revolutionary tendencies” in their Kyrgyz variety of the “orange plague.” The result has been new initiatives to tighten control of virtual space, for example. Control is already tight as it is, but recent developments have seen a clear tendency towards a clampdown in some countries in the region.²

² D. Barinova, “Asimmetriya politicheskovo prostranstva interneta,” *Mezhdunarodniye protsessy*, vol.9, no.1 (25) (Jan.-April 2011); D. Barinova, “Metody analiza informatsionnoy suverennosti gosudarstva v natsionalnykh domenakh,” *Domneniye imena*, no.1 (April 2011): pp.22-25 (<http://www.dn.nic.ru/publications/dn2011/DN2011-1-Barinova.pdf>).

Water resources – a stumbling block or a policy tool?

Guaranteeing the supply of water has huge importance for the social and economic development of the region's countries. The distribution network used in the region was established as part of the GOELRO Project, one of the then Soviet Union's most ambitious undertakings, aimed at bringing electricity to the entire vast country. Since the Soviet Union's collapse, the network has become the source of disputes as the new countries try to ensure their economic resources and supplies, and it has even resulted in some serious tensions between them. These differences have been particularly visible in relations between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, because the water supply's main collection areas are in the mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and it was there that the big hydroelectric power stations and water reservoirs were built, such as the Toktogul Hydroelectric Power Station in Kyrgyzstan.

Water resource distribution is a problem for bilateral relations, especially between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan today, but it is also an issue related to other potential players' interest in seeking new levers of influence in the region. That was the interpretation that Kyrgyz analysts gave to the 2011 agreements on developing Kyrgyzstan's energy sector through Russian investment: "This is not so much about building power stations as such, as an attempt to use this work as a powerful tool for influencing the situation. This construction would give Russia control of Kyrgyzstan's energy sector and at the same time give it control over Uzbekistan."³

Lack of water resources is already one of Central Asia's biggest problems and will only grow with time. It creates major hurdles for rapprochement and normal relations between the region's countries and at the same time gives outside players a tool they can use to manipulate events. This is the case with the construction and launch of the Rogun Hydroelectric Power Station in Tajikistan. Dushanbe has long been arguing the need for this station, while Tashkent's position is that it could create an environmental disaster for the entire Amu-Darya River basin. Analysts think that other countries are also present in this dispute, but as outside players seeking to use decisions on the matter as a means of influencing Tajikistan's and Uzbekistan's policies in their own interests.⁴

³ Bogatyryov, "Tsentralnaya Azia – eto ne mesto integratsii i regionalizatsii, a mesto geopoliticheskovo razloma," Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Kyrgyzstan website (<http://www.uzbekistan.kg/ara2.php>).

⁴ See, for example: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1459822.html>.

State borders in the region are another big bone of contention. Although the countries have officially recognized borders and agreements, not all of the problems have been fully resolved yet. For example, around 15 percent of the 1,500-km border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has not been demarcated yet. Active negotiations continue between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on delimiting and demarcating the border between the two countries. Lengthy negotiations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan ended with the signing of a Kyrgyz-Uzbek memorandum on settling the legal foundations for delimiting the common border in the spring of 2011. The most problematic border area in the region is the Fergana Valley, which is divided between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and which is home to a number of ethnic enclaves, such as Tajik-populated Vorukh and Uzbek-populated Sokh and Shakhimardan in Kyrgyzstan. Not very many ethnic enclaves of this kind exist in the world today, but the problem is still very acute in the Fergana Valley, where the local people see it as the biggest threat to their security.

The Central Asian countries are constantly holding talks on possible parity-based territorial exchanges in order to reunite the ethnic enclaves with their “mother” countries, but with no success so far. Every year, especially during the spring and autumn irrigation seasons, disputes over borders and water resource distribution are more and more frequent. These are small-scale incidents, but the state of relations between the Central Asian countries is such that any banal dispute could grow into a conflict between states, and sadly, the region’s recent history has already seen just such cases.

The conflict zones

Security issues in Central Asia are most acute in the Caspian Sea area and the Fergana Valley. The Caspian Sea region is undergoing intensive militarization: the coastal countries are building up naval and coastguard fleets and fortified installations. There are still no legal principles mutually acceptable to all of the Caspian countries for dividing this, the world’s largest inland body of water. The region thus remains a risk zone for potential conflicts, given that it is home to large oil and gas deposits and important energy transit routes, and it concerns the interests not only of the region’s countries themselves but also of global players, including the U.S., China, and the European Union, all of which would like to have a hand in developing the region’s abundant natural resources.

The situation is also complicated in the Fergana Valley, which has so far presented the toughest knot of problems in the region. A multi-ethnic population, high population density and not enough fertile land, poverty, the Central

Asian countries' governments' inability to resolve the complex ethnic and territorial issues, and a host of other problems all create fertile soil for spreading extremist ideas and the emergence of radical movements in the area. These movements enter into direct conflict with the governments of the region's countries.

The economy, migration, and geopolitics

The unstable and unpredictable state of the Central Asian economies, especially those without significant oil and gas resources, hinders regional consolidation and the development of a sense of political and economic commonality between the countries. It makes it difficult to articulate and defend common economic interests and form a common market that would focus more on internal demand in the region's countries than on outside actors' interests. "Despite attempts to rebuild...economic development programmes, overall positive development in the economy has been achieved primarily through raw materials exports rather than through structural recovery in the economy," noted prominent Kyrgyz expert M. Imanaliyev.⁵ This situation is a major factor in another issue that plays a big part in shaping relations with Russia, namely, the migration issue.

The issue of migrants from Central Asia has now gone well beyond being just a social and economic matter and today covers a whole complicated range of problems that concern relations between the Central Asian countries and Russia at various levels. A vivid example of how the migration issue becomes a potent political tool was seen in the recent worsening of Russian-Tajik relations at the end of 2011. Relations between the two countries soured after a Tajik court sentenced Russian pilot V. Sadovnichy and his Estonian colleague A. Rudenko to eight and a half years in prison for smuggling and violating Tajikistan's airspace. Russia's chief public health officer, Gennady Onishchenko, reacted immediately by claiming that migrants from Tajikistan all too frequently carry dangerous diseases, and this served as the pretext for mass deportations of Tajik economic migrants from Russia. This measure had a big impact on Tajikistan's economy, which is heavily dependent on remittances from migrants. Tajikistan was forced to make concessions in the end and freed the pilots, after which Russia stopped deporting the migrants. The Russian authorities deny any link between the mass deportations of Tajik migrants and the trial of the Russian pilot and say that the whole thing was just a coincidence.

⁵ M. Imanaliyev, "Tsentralnaya Azia: vyzovy i otvety.," Bishkek, 2006 (<http://www.ipp.kg>).

Ideas and ideologies

Twenty years after the Soviet Union's collapse, the countries that emerged from its fold have preserved substantial parts of its social and political order, but at the same time, the role of traditionalism has also grown stronger. This trend is particularly visible in ideology and value systems, manifesting itself above all in a "return" of Islam. One cannot place Islam's growing role only in a regional context today. Even modern Europe has not managed to avoid serious problems of identity and is coming under ever greater pressure from Muslims in all spheres of social life, including norms and values. Islam in the Central Asian countries has its own specific features. All of the region's countries are secular. Over the last twenty years they have been searching for their own development road, including updating their cultural and historical heritage from the past, drawing primarily on the ideological components predating the Soviet era. Furthermore, like most young nations, the region's countries have not been able to avoid the broad use of myth making with regard to their own past, both at the ideological and the political levels.

As far as cultural and historical heritage goes, alongside Islam, the nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz have a much older tradition in the worship of Tengri (Heaven), which was the ancient religion of the Turkic and Mongol-speaking peoples of northern Eurasia. This older religion is freely discussed today in the region, but it is no longer placed in opposition to Islam, which remains the dominant religion and continues to strengthen its hold. As was the case a century earlier, ignorance of the Arabic language, a basic part of Islam, remains a stumbling block for the religion's consolidation in the region and makes it more of a ritual than a deeply ideological form of worship.

The Soviet-era legacy continues to play a big part in the way the region's countries' elites are formed. The high degree of paternalism that was typical of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, which is still widely represented in the political and bureaucratic elites of all five countries, continues to influence civil servants' behavioral models and holds back attempts to modernize public administration.

The common information and cultural space remaining from the Soviet era also plays a huge part. Russian language and culture give the Central Asian countries a bridge linking them to European culture and, more broadly, to Western culture, and remain an important factor in development today. The Russian-language media – TV, radio, and the press – make it possible to keep intact something of a common circle of interests, discussions, and agendas. But changes in some countries' linguistic policies and even alphabets indicate changing trends. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for example, have switched from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet, and discussions on this still continue

in Kazakhstan. The region's peoples increasingly prefer to speak their native language only. Russia has also encountered this problem: the migrants arriving there from Central Asia often have poor knowledge of Russian.

Central Asia's new elites increasingly prefer to get their education in Europe, the U.S. Turkey, China, and other countries, and this also has an impact on their political preferences and the way they see their countries' future. Along with the increasing role of religion, national state-building processes are also underway in Central Asia, accompanied by a rise of national-patriotic movements, which are quite readily embraced by the public. People educated in the West inject new values into political life, and thus it is that liberal ideas are also present in the Central Asian ideological spectrum, especially in Kyrgyzstan, which is the region's freest and most open country.

The ideological agendas that the global actors offer Central Asia differ in content and substance. The West proposes democratic values and equal laws, but in that respect the question of "local specificity and adaptation" still looms very large. China takes a consistent and rational line, seemingly not imposing any particular ideology, but at the same time working its way actively into the local markets through cross-border projects and interests and thus promoting its own development ideology. On the outside, all looks as though China needs nothing in the region except the chance to further mutual economic interests that take the form of what amounts to serious investment by Central Asian standards. Russia follows a similar line, but whether its territorial size makes it hard for it to be more subtle, or it simply lacks clear objectives, not to mention an overall strategy, it frequently manages to irritate the Central Asian peoples, who have not yet gotten over the post-imperial syndrome. "The Russians have no adequate and effective 'Russian Central Asian policy' that would be clear for Kazakhstan and the region's other countries. The USA has a clear policy – democracy, and China has a clear policy – social justice and economic non-imperial pragmatism (China's imperial vector is aimed towards the southeast and southwest)."⁶

In this context, it is worth noting the idea of Turkic unity, which is not new; some analysts have started to see it as an alternative to the Eurasian Union. The first summit of the Turkic-speaking Countries' Cooperation Council (Turkic Council) took place in Almaty on October 20-21, 2011, where the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey made a number of decisions, including giving the body official international organization status

⁶ A. Sobyenin, Round table documents "Tsentralnaya Azia v geopoliticheskykh protsessakh: yeyo nastoyashcheye i budushcheye," Moscow, 2011 (<http://www.csef.ru/pdf/1951.pff>).

and outlining priorities for trade and economic, cultural, and humanitarian integration between the participating countries. The initiative shows that not only do the U.S., Russia, and China take an interest in the region, but so do other increasingly strong players, among them Turkey, which is building very flexible economic and ideological relations with all five countries in the region. Iran is also active in the region and is especially successful in developing its relations with culturally and ethnically close Tajikistan. India and Pakistan are also building up their positions in the region. The Arab countries, for their part, are trying to actively spread Islam in the region and at the same time offer a wide range of economic proposals.

The region and integration projects

The two decades since the Soviet collapse have seen several attempts to unite the region within one of several international groupings. S. Starr's American initiative to establish "Greater Central Asia" had a certain political and economic sense to it, despite coming in for criticism in Eurasia itself. The concept was perceived as being born out of the emerging rivalry between Russia, the U.S., and China for influence in the Central Asian region. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev responded to the Greater Central Asia idea with a proposal to create a new Central Asian union, with the earlier Central Asian Cooperation grouping becoming integrated into the new Eurasian Economic Community.

New initiatives and integration projects appear in the region all the time. The big questions currently under discussion are the entry of some of the region's countries into the Customs Union, and Russian leader Vladimir Putin's proposal to establish the Eurasian Union. The old/new rhetoric of the authors of these various projects increasingly confirms the suspicion that neo-imperialism really is on the rise again, but actually carrying out these plans will not be simple, because the individual countries' nation-building process has gone too far now, even if they remain economically weak and vulnerable.

The fundamental problem with all of the reintegration models proposed today in Central Asia and throughout the post-Soviet region is that they look more like unions of the Soviet type. The CIS was supposed to manage the "divorce" between the former Soviet republics and build reliable post-conflict relations between them, but neither it nor subsequent integration organizations have been particularly successful in accomplishing these tasks and remain rather flimsy and passive structures. This was evident in their reaction to the interethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Even the CSTO – an organization specializing in security – did not have the capability needed to settle the

conflict. Paradoxically, NATO also follows “yesterday’s” communication style in its initiatives. Perhaps because its original aims and strategies still dominate, this genuinely powerful and “fearless” organization, like the majority of post-Soviet organizations, has not succeeded in changing and modernizing its format. It is hard to name a rational and effectively functioning modern institution today, whether in Central Asia or anywhere else in the post-Soviet area. Perhaps this is because the region’s countries are still going through the difficult process of self-determination. They variously attempt to make a leap forward and modernize in accordance with today’s development demands or return to old models, thinking for some reason that these models are best suited to the post-Soviet region’s countries.

*Dr. Vadim Volovoj
(Lithuania)*

Economy and Geography: Integration by Necessity

The USSR can be compared to a chocolate bar: each individual republic had clearly defined borders. Once the pieces broke apart, it is not enough to simply assemble them together in order to recreate the initial bar. This can be achieved only by melting and stamping the whole bar anew.

*Belgian geo-politician Jean Thiriart*¹

Although the Soviet Union was not a very effective economic system, due to the dominant role of the state, it was still a unified body. As a consequence, the disintegration of the USSR became not only a geopolitical, but, to a certain extent, also an economic disaster for many of its republics. Following independence, the new nation-states faced a stumbling challenge: develop separately within the context of rapidly crumbling economic ties between them.

Thus, the Baltic States decided to overcome this situation through a rapid economic liberalisation and a gradual reorientation towards the European market. Eventually this plan turned out to be successful since the Baltic States became members of the European Union. Undoubtedly, these states, especially Latvia and Lithuania, still face many economic difficulties triggered by the nature of the transition from the Soviet past and by the impact of the current global financial crisis. Nevertheless, the challenges do not hinder what institutionalised the radical break with the Soviet legacy - the membership in the EU. Energy dependency of the Baltic States on Russia is the only exception that makes the

¹ Quoted from: Dugin, Alexander. "Osnovy geopolitiki [The Foundations of Geopolitics]". Part 4, Chapter 2, Section 2.1: <http://www.arctogaia.com/public/osnovygeo>.

break with Soviet past less irrevocable. Recently, these states have been trying to overcome this dependency. For instance, there is a plan to replace the closed Iglanina nuclear power plant with a new one in Lithuania to be built jointly with Latvia, Estonia and Poland. Also, there are projects to build liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in Latvia and Lithuania. In other words, it is irrelevant and futile to discuss Baltic States in the framework of economic reintegration in the post-Soviet space. They have left it for good.

In contrast, a different situation has emerged in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Set up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the CIS was created to preserve the links and mechanisms of cooperation that could still be saved. However, it soon became clear that the Commonwealth is only a tool to assist a “civilized divorce” of the “sister republics” that formerly constituted a unified state. In 2005 Vladimir Putin described the historic role of the CIS in the same vein: “If someone was expecting some particular achievements from the CIS in, say, the economy, in political or military cooperation and so on, it is clear that this was not going to happen because it could not happen. The stated aims were one thing, but in reality the CIS was formed in order to make the Soviet Union’s collapse as civilised and smooth as possible and to minimise the economic and humanitarian losses it entailed, above all for people. I think the CIS was successful in reaching these objectives”.²

Today the role of the CIS is essentially limited to coordinating meetings and summits. In the past years, most agreements and documents signed at these meetings by heads of states were not fulfilled. Eventually this limitation became one of the main reasons why CIS leaders gradually lost their interest in such activities. As a result, CIS summits began to attract an increasingly smaller number of participants. In other words, the CIS did not become, and will not become, a strong unifying basis for close political and economic co-operation among the post-Soviet countries.

Likewise, the GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) platform for integration did not inspire positive prospects. Since its establishment many experts believed that its sole purpose was to lower Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space. However GUUAM did not stand the test of time. The majority of its members gradually lost interest in it; for instance, Uzbekistan seceded in 2005. Today its unifying potential, as in the case of the CIS, is almost exhausted. An expert from the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs Bakur Kvashilava at the Vilnius Conference “Projects and Prospects for

² Press Conference following Russian-Armenian Talks. 25 March 2005. http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2005/03/25/2234_type82914type82915_85953.shtml

Cooperation in Eurasia” rightfully noted that “since some forces did not want a complete disintegration of the USSR, they created the CIS. Yet, these were the forces that, undoubtedly, acted by inertia. Although other organizations, such as the GUUAM, were formed later, I believe that this organization began to lose its purpose as it also plagued by passivity and inertia’.³

There are currently several active organizations in the post-Soviet space. They unite those more in favour of integration, rather than the “integration sceptics”. Such organizations are: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC); the Common Economic Space (CES) and the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (CURBK). Since the CSTO is a military organization, it would not be relevant to discuss it within an economic context. At the same time, the topic of the Customs Union deserves special attention. Its analysis will reveal the nature of economic integration “by necessity” in the post-Soviet space.

Customs Union - participation desirable-mandatory

First of all, we have to understand how important the CURBK is for Russia, which is one of the initiators of the overall project. A comprehensive assessment of Russia’s foreign policy shows that it is mainly aimed at the reintegration of most of the former Soviet Union under Moscow’s authority. Given these circumstances, it is possible to argue that Russia considers the CURBK as a tool to achieve its geopolitical goals by “anchoring” the countries in question economically to itself. Likewise, it aims to contain the political and economic influence of China in Central Asia.⁴ This position can be regarded as imperial revanchism or defence of great power interests. However, different interpretations do not change the essence. Therefore, it is reasonable to accept Russia’s intentions as given and built the analysis upon this basis.

³ Reproduced from a record of the Vilnius conference “Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia”.

⁴ As was rightly noted by a Kazakh expert Konstantin Syroezhkin “You can talk with China on equal terms, but only when it recognizes the importance and strength of the partner in dialogue. As the Central Asian states and even Russia are unable to compete with China individually, there is a need to create mechanisms for them to join efforts. Even though necessary conditions are in place, political will and general awareness of the threats is necessary. In this sense, the formation of the Customs Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus is a significant step forward in curbing China’s appetites in the post-Soviet space”. Translated from Russian from Syroezhkin, Konstantin “Evolution of the Chinese Policy in Central Asia (from Early 1990s to the Present)” The Kazakh Institute for Strategic Studies. *Analytic*, 2010: 4, p. 33 <http://www.kisi.kz/img/docs/5050.pdf>

Apart from Russia, the Customs Union currently includes Kazakhstan and Belarus. Moscow also actively tries to persuade Ukraine to join the Union. Considering that the topic of this chapter is “integration by necessity”, Kazakhstan’s motives to participate in this project are not relevant to the argument. It is possible to assume that Astana, weighting the advantages and disadvantages, opted for political and economic rapprochement with Russia to avoid the current position of Belarus with a prospect of bowing to Moscow’s will anyway. Recent history, however, shows that Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev was positive about the projects of Eurasian integration from the start. In the first half of the 1990s there was a clear trend towards national isolation of the states of the former Soviet Union, and Yeltsin’s Russia was weak and unable to unite other states around itself. But even then the leader of Kazakhstan understood that this situation was temporary and continued to insist on Eurasian integration. Here it would be appropriate to quote what a Russian expert, Yuri Solozobov, said about the leaders of integration: “Undoubtedly this is Nursultan Nazarbayev. He was the first among world politicians who realized the vital importance of such integration. In spring 1994 during his visit to Great Britain he already expressed his conviction that “the current disunity will be replaced with an era of integration of the Eurasian states”. The Customs Union is one of the key ideas for integration put forward by the Kazakh leader. For many years the President of Kazakhstan devoted a lot of attention to the creation of such a Union.”⁵ Therefore, the fact that Kazakhstan is now one of Russia’s closest allies is a result of a deliberate choice, rather than the pressure of circumstances.

Moscow’s relations with Minsk and Kiev develop according to a different scenario. After its declaration of independence, Belarus continued to pursue close relations with Russia in various spheres. At the Vilnius Conference Belarusian expert Pavel Morozov claimed that “immediately after it got out of the Soviet system, Belarus began to build new integration ties with Russia. If you look at the centre of different mechanisms of integration with Russia - Belarus is involved in 90% of initiatives. (...) We have a Customs Union with Russia, open access to the Russian market, cheap energy, military and political cooperation, large subsidies and grants. Ordinary citizens feel the benefits of this integration on a daily basis, just as the people who live in the EU feel the benefits of the opportunity to travel and work in the countries that belong to

⁵ Solozobov, Yuri. “Ot tamojennogo soyuza k politicheskomu [From the Customs Union to Political One]”. 27 November 2009. <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article22182.htm>

this unified area. (...) However, sooner or later the question of geopolitical choice will arise (...).”⁶ It is difficult not to agree with such a prediction.

Notably, for a long time, the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko was cleverly misleading the Russian leadership. Belarus proclaimed a policy of integration and creation of a Union State with Russia. Nevertheless, in practice Minsk never took any action that would limit its economic and political independence or put its resources under the control of the neighboring power. In terms of Belarusian interests this tactic seemed justified. Belarus largely developed by capitalizing on the economic resources and preferences that were granted to it by Moscow. In return it only gave promises that at the last moment were not fulfilled under one pretext or another – like with the introduction of a single currency. However, Moscow became increasingly irritated with this practice and decided to use all means, especially in terms of energy subsidies, to pressure the uncompromising neighbor. (Most likely Lukashenko’s refusal to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia was the turning point). The goal was to make Belarus a *de facto* fully controlled country by depriving it of economic independence. In the future this policy may lead to the absorption of Belarus by Russia.

However, full integration with the “senior brother” contradicts the geopolitical and economic interests of Belarus. In view of its geographical position it is more beneficial for Belarus to take advantage of a simultaneous cooperation with Russia and the European Union. Yet in practice, due to a number of reasons, the realization of this prospect is unfeasible. It turned out that Belarus became too economically dependent on Russia, while Europe refused to cooperate with the authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko after the Presidential election in December 2010, when the Belarusian leader unleashed brutal repressions against the opposition. Facing the problem of diminishing and scarce resources, as well as EU sanctions, Lukashenko, in order to hold on to power, had to make major concessions to Moscow in terms of privatization of the major assets of national economy. Now it is only a matter of time for Russia to have the whole economic system of Belarus under its control. Indeed, Belarus is a prime example of integration “by necessity”. Although in theory there is a possibility of Lukashenko stepping down with a subsequent democratization of the country and its reorientation towards cooperation with the EU, today this scenario does not look like a realistic one. Belarus has already made its “forced choice”.

⁶ Reproduced from a record of the Vilnius conference “Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia”.

Russia's relations with Ukraine follow a different pattern. Moscow also wanted to involve Ukraine in the projects of integration in the post-Soviet space. However, as Ukraine is a bigger economy than Belarus, the result of these efforts is not obvious. Moreover, after independence Kiev tried to balance its foreign policy between Russia and the West. In this context the opinion of the Chairman of the Polish-Ukrainian Cooperation Fund PAUCI Jan Pieklo looks relevant: 'For Putin ... the acquisition of Ukraine for his plan to create a common economic space between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus is important. Without Ukraine, this political and economic project to create a counterweight to the EU would not make sense. Putin will use all possible means - from threatening to increase customs duties on Ukrainian goods to political pressure and promises to lower gas prices to reach this goal'.⁷

In May 2011, commenting on Ukraine's indecisiveness between economic (energy) cooperation with Russia on favourable terms and the proclaimed European path of development, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev remarked: 'You cannot sit on two chairs at once. You need to make a choice.'⁸ In other words, Russia's position regarding Ukraine is very clear: Moscow wants Kiev to join the Customs Union, or at least yield its gas transportation system to Gazprom, which would make Ukraine strategically dependent on Russia.

Such a prospect should make Kiev work closer with the EU. However, the situation on the European "direction" looks ambiguous as far as Ukraine's economic interests are concerned. A Free Trade Area (FTA) with the European Union will not bring Ukraine any real benefits. As Ukrainian industry is not competitive in Europe while the European market for agricultural products is oversaturated, the FTA will not produce any considerable increase in exports. Likewise, it will not give any real prospect of a EU membership, as the EU is not ready to consider Ukraine as a member in the foreseeable future and will not make any concessions in terms of economic privileges and preferences within the FTA. The Brussels position is that: either you do what we want, or we don't do anything at all. At the same time, striving to succeed in the West, Ukraine risks to lose the Russian market and cheap gas supplies. By entering the Customs Union, Ukraine will get both short and long-term benefits. As

⁷ "Ekspert: Vkluchenie Ukraini v Tamojennyi Souz stanet chasti'u predvibornogo proekta Putina [Expert: Ukraine's Inclusion into the Customs Union will Become a part of Putin's Election Campaign]", 19 April 2011, <http://belarus.regnum.ru/news/belarus/1396584.html>

⁸ News conference by President of Russia, 18 May 2011, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/2223#sel=216:150,216:163>

Vladimir Putin claimed, this step will allow Ukraine to receive additional income of \$6.5-9 billion a year (or 1.5-2% growth of GDP). For his part, the Executive Secretary of the Customs Union Commission, Sergey Glazyev calculated that Ukraine can get up to \$100 billion in the course of 10 years. Deputy Chairman of the Gazprom Board noted that only in terms of gas prices Kiev would save up to \$8 billion a year (tax-free oil would give further \$3 billion) if it joined the Customs Union.⁹ Apart from that, Russia, unlike the EU, needs the Ukrainian industry (military; aviation; shipbuilding, etc.). Cooperation in these sectors would help Moscow restore the old Soviet technological chains and make use of the Ukraine's industrial potential in its projects.

Finally, Russia is much closer than Europe to the Yanukovich administration in terms of mentality as well as managerial and behavioral attitudes. Jan Pieklo confirms this view: "Ukrainian leaders do not feel comfortable in the salons of Brussels, Paris, Berlin or London. They understand democracy and the rule of law in Russian, rather than European, terms".¹⁰

Ultimately, Ukraine faces a complex and contradictory situation: economic necessity pushes Kiev into Russia's arms, whereas the European civilizational choice is on the other side of the scale. At the same time, Ukraine, like Belarus, enjoys a favourable geographical position theoretically giving it excellent opportunities to have good partners both in the West and East. However, a difficult situation in domestic politics and sharp conflicts within the ruling elite did not always allow Ukrainian politicians to act accordingly. Viktor Yushchenko indeed tried to shift the country towards the West thus breaking the historical tradition of Ukraine's dependence on Russia. But he failed, and the country found itself on the brink of a civil war. For Yanukovich, who is no idealist, the task of re-election for the second term seems easier if he secures cheap supplies of gas to the Ukrainian economy. This logic will push him to seek an agreement with Moscow, most likely on Russian terms. However, it is still uncertain whether the majority of the Ukrainian elite as well as the population at large, that does not want to see the country subjugated to Russia, will agree with such a decision.

To sum up, it should also be noted that whatever this choice will be

⁹ "Putin otsenil dokhody Urkaini ot vstuplenia v Tamojennyi soyuz [Putin estimated Ukraine's revenues from joining the Customs Union]" 12 April 2011 <http://lenta.ru/news/2011/04/12/soyuz/> Kliuchkin, Anton. "Kogda nechego skazat' [When there is Nothing to Say]" 13 April 2011 <http://www.lenta.ru/articles/2011/04/13/soyuz/>.

¹⁰ Reproduced from a record of the Vilnius conference "Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia".

(even if favorable to Russia), the very model of political and economic integration of the post-Soviet space suggested by Russia, does not seem attractive and stable in the long term. As was highlighted by the Armenian expert at the Conference, Karen Bekaryan: “Russia did not do much in a constructive way in former Soviet republics, but its destructive energy let Russia preserve its influence in the whole region”.¹¹ Using various instruments Russia pressures states to join the projects of integration against their will, driving those who resist into a corner. This can be fully applied to the Customs Union. Will the union that was built largely by forced necessity instead of conscious choice be viable? The history of the USSR points to a negative answer.

Nevertheless, according to its leadership, Kyrgyzstan is willing to join voluntarily the Union. Tajikistan can also accede in the future. Except for Russia’s pressure, these two countries are driven to this choice by the dire internal economic and social situation. They assume integration will entail more benefits than damages. Bishkek and Dushanbe are aware of Moscow’s habit to dictate its own terms to partners, but it seems they still don’t mind that their independence will become limited. This is not surprising as there is a large number of migrant workers from these countries in Russia. Many of them stay there illegally. Russia can start deporting them any time which would worsen the already dire economic situation and increase social tensions both in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As China is no less (or even more) demanding to the Central Asian countries in providing loans and making investments than Russia, they cannot count on it as an alternative. Also, the civilizational difference as well as China’s reluctance to be responsible for the future of this region hinders further rapprochement.

Among the post-Soviet states there are also those who in principle do not accept Russian neo-imperial projects of economic integration. Nevertheless, even in these cases the situation is not that simple. That is why these “sceptics” should be considered more closely.

Those who stay aside

First of all in this context we should mention Georgia. After Mikhail Saakashvili came to power, the country began to clearly orient itself towards Euro-Atlantic integration, but this was not compatible with Moscow’s neo-imperial plans. The August 2008 War complicated the relations between the two countries for many years to come. Georgia now faces a difficult choice. At

¹¹ Ibid.

the Vilnius Conference, Karen Bekaryan noted that Georgia's "integration into Western bodies, especially NATO, would be much easier if it recognizes independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia".¹² Yet, Mikheil Saakashvili does not intend to give up the former autonomies, and the majority of the Georgians support him in this. This situation benefits Russia as it significantly complicates Georgia's entry into NATO. Apart from that, Saakashvili does not enjoy an absolute support among the population. Moscow seems to hope that sooner or later a more loyal politician will become the head of Georgia. Even in that instance, it is unlikely that Georgia will immediately shift its foreign policy priorities, but Russia, it seems, does not need it very much. Moscow would suffice with a less confrontational Georgia that will be easier to make concrete agreements with. In other words, a balanced behavior with no attempts to substantially injure Russia's interests in the region (i.e. in the energy field) would be a satisfactory condition. That is why the Kremlin will not likely try to force Georgia to participate in any projects of integration, since, in view of the current tension between the two countries, such a move would only exacerbate the situation. Therefore, Georgia will not face the Ukrainian kind of dilemma. It can still consider an economic rapprochement with Russia, as it in principle can be beneficial, though currently this scenario is unrealistic.

Moldova represents another example of a highly sceptical approach to Russia's integration projects. As in Georgia, the ruling liberal-democratic "Alliance for European Integration" sees the future of Moldova within the "Big Europe" and it strongly advocates Moldova's accession to the EU. The political situation in the country, however, remains uncertain due to the sharp confrontation between two political forces with a roughly equal influence: the coalition of liberal and democratic parties that comprise "The Alliance for European Integration" and the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM). As a result, since 2009 the Parliament is unable to elect the President of the Republic. Anyway, the conflict in Transnistria that cannot be resolved without Moscow's consent is the main issue that hinders Moldova's accession to the European Union. Russia, however, lost interest to the resolution of the conflict after Chisinau in 2003 rejected Moscow's proposal that would lead to federalization of Moldova (the so-called Kozak's plan). It seems that Russia wants to preserve the current state quo of uncertainty.

Moscow is not interested in Moldova's accession to the EU, and protraction with the resolution of the conflict in Transnistria is beneficial to it.

¹² Ibid.

Seemingly, in order to realize these goals Russia could have relied on the PCR. But during their stay in power (2001-2009) the Communists did not prove to be reliable partners. After the leader of Moldova Vladimir Voronin rejected the “Kozak’s plan”, tensions in bilateral relations repeatedly intensified and Chisinau tried to balance Moscow’s influence by a rapprochement with EU countries. However, recently, as Russia was not able to build constructive relations with the Alliance for European Integration, it began to view the PCR as the most acceptable partner in implementation of its goals. Therefore, it is possible that Moscow will again offer the PCR its assistance in conflict resolution in Transnistria in Moldova’s favour in return for Chisinau’s participation in the projects of economic integration that are put forward by Moscow. It seems that the communists are willing to accept such cooperation. As was pointed by Vladimir Voronin: “Today the situation is different. The project of the Customs Union is becoming a part of an implemented program in action. In this vein I would also add that the Customs Union does not have only economic effects, but the political ones too. It is absolutely clear that Moldova’s participation in this project, which is possible under certain conditions, will nearly automatically solve our problem in Transnistria that is a 90% customs problem”.¹³ Nevertheless, there is no solid guarantee that in case the PCR will come to power it will fulfil its promises. But even in these circumstances Russia will be able to preserve “the Transnistrian card”. In any case, the unrecognized Transnistria would be a good bargaining chip in Russia’s complicated diplomatic games and “swaps” with the European Union.

Uzbekistan is also a source of irritation for Russia as its current President Karimov tries to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy. In practice, however, this course looks more like an opportunistic ramble between Russia and the West. At the same time, Uzbekistan has a rather closed economic system which in fact made Tashkent suspend its membership in the EurAsEC that required greater liberalization in economic relations with other members. Uzbekistan’s accession to the Customs Union was not even considered. Nevertheless, sooner or later the country will have to implement economic reforms. In addition, the dire economic situation forces Uzbekistan to find ways for a constructive dialogue with Russia (many Uzbek migrants work in Russia, and Uzbek gas is exported via its territory). Without close cooperation with Russia and other states, Tashkent, in its desire to stay apart, will find

¹³ Voronin poobeshchal vstupit’ v Tamozhennyi Soyuz [Voronin Promised to join the Customs Union]. 28 September 2010 <http://dniester.ru/content/voronin-poobeshchal-rossii-vstupit-v-tamozhennyi-soyuz>

itself alone with mounting economic problems. This might lead the thirty-million country to a political, social and economic disaster. The current President became a hostage of the authoritarian regime that he created, so his actions can be understood. But the new President, due to objective reasons, will have to introduce a lot of changes. Gradual economic rapprochement with Russia in the context of internal reforms will not be the worst option then. Therefore, in the medium-term the possibility of Uzbekistan's accession to the Customs Union cannot be excluded.

Azerbaijan, due to its strategic reserves of energy is able to act as Belarus couldn't and Kazakhstan did not want to. In other words, Baku can afford an independent foreign policy while maintaining constructive and mutually beneficial relations both with Russia and the West. In general, Azerbaijan pursues a balanced policy. For example, it expressed its interest in the European Nabucco gas transit project while at the same time increasing its gas sales to Moscow – Russia's position is important in the resolution of the Karabakh issue. Azerbaijan's policy today resembles what Russia would like to have in the case of Georgia - a strategic balance of the foreign policy course with no sharp moves in either direction in the key economic, energy, and political spheres.

In the case of Armenia, there are objective obstacles to its inclusion in the projects of economic integration in the former Soviet Union. As was pointed by the Prime-Minister, Tigran Sargsyan: "It is meaningless for Armenia to join the Customs Union as it does not have a common border with its members. There is no international precedent of a customs union that was created with no common borders [among all its members], since the economic benefit that the country gets when goods cross the border with no customs control are then lost".¹⁴ But for Russia Armenia's membership in the Customs Union is not very important as it is already one of its closest allies, and is dependent on Moscow both in military-political and economic terms.

Finally, Turkmenistan since independence chose an essentially isolationist course and showed no interest in development of economic cooperation with neighboring countries. Ashgabat's officially proclaimed neutrality was designed to seal the political and economic closure of the country and its principal refusal to participate in any activities of regional organizations. Therefore, at this stage of Turkmenistan's development it is meaningless to consider any

¹⁴ "Prem'e Armenii razyasnil, pochemu dlya Armenii bessmyslenno vstupat' v Tamojenniy Soyuz [The Prime-Minister of Armenia explained why it is meaningless for Armenia to join the Customs Union]" 9 June 2011 <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/72111/>

involvement of the country in any integrationist projects. This is especially true in the light of gas relations between Ashgabat and Moscow that are not always smooth. Turkmenistan would like to diversify the gas exports between Russia, China and the European Union. So Russia for a start will have to put a lot of effort to ensure that Turkmen gas exports to the EU will not flow bypassing the Russian territory.¹⁵

At the moment Russia aims to promote a controlled integration of three key post-Soviet countries: Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine. Kazakhstan participates in these projects on its own initiative, while Belarus is rather doing it by necessity. Ukraine actively resists participation in integrationist projects having more resources for such a policy than Belarus. The attitude of other post-Soviet states varies. Some are trying to solve their own complicated internal social and economic problems, such as Kyrgyzstan, and, to a lesser extent, Tajikistan. Some hesitate because of fear to lose sovereignty, like Uzbekistan; some tie their future to other political and civilizational alternatives, like Georgia and Moldova.

The preparation of this material coincided with the start of a new integrationist project in the former Soviet Union, which seems crucial to Moscow's plans. At a meeting in Moscow on 18 November 2011, Presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus signed the documents on the creation of the Eurasian Union. The latter is supposed to be established on the basis of already existing organizations: EurAsEC; The Customs Union; the CES and the CSTO. The three heads of state agreed on the formation of a supranational authority - the Eurasian Economic Commission, in charge of building new institutions of the Union. It is yet difficult to predict the outcome of this project, but there are two possible scenarios. On the one hand, member-states might be able to take into account their mutual long-term interests and draw private businesses into the

¹⁵ The topic of energy cooperation of Central Asian states with Europe in the context of the Nabucco project is complex. No strategic decisions in this area are expected soon. However, in view of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' reaction, the fact that the EU agreed to start negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on building a gas pipeline that will deliver fuel to Europe through the Caspian sea is worth noting. "ES vstupil v peregovori o postavkakh po transkaspiskomu gazoprovodu [EU began negotiations on the Trans-Caspian pipeline]" 12 September 2011 <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2011/09/12/start/>; "MID RF udivilsia zhelaniu ES zanat'sya "peredelom Kaspiya [Russia's MFA is surprised by the EU's desire to re-distribute the Caspian sea]" 13 September 2011 <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2011/09/13/mid/>

integration processes. With time, this could lead to the emergence of a major interstate union in North Eurasia. On the other hand, the union might continue to develop only in bureaucratic terms and for the sake of opportunistic expediency of various power elites with elements of coercion against individual states. In this case the Union would most likely follow the path of many other integrationist projects that remained only on paper. Anyway, an intermediate possibility is highly improbable. In other words, there is no third way.

Olexiy Haran
(Ukraine)

Geography and economy: integration as a choice

After the break-up of the Soviet Union many Western and Russian analysts considered it possible that sooner or later the union of post-Soviet states would be restored in a new form. One of the main arguments was the interconnection between the economies of the former union republics (which was deliberately encouraged by Soviet policy) and especially their critical dependence on energy supply from Russia.

However, despite centuries of existence in one state, politics in former Soviet republics cannot be explained by neither simple references to history and culture (the ‘clash of civilizations’ approach) nor by economic dependence on Russia. It is the result of the correlation of political forces and the position of the elites.

The future of the CIS was seen in Moscow and some other capitals, first of all Kyiv, from opposite positions – as reintegration or ‘civilized divorce’, respectively. In post-Soviet situation independence of former union republics deeply transformed the status of what had previously been a provincial elite. Significant part of this elite was disturbed by the possibility of integrationist trends within the CIS which could lead to the creation of supranational structures and the restoration of Russian dominance in a new form.

Instead of integrationist economic projects, twenty years of the CIS existence were marked by reorientation toward other geopolitical players. Throughout 2000s, the export within CIS countries was about only 17-19% in the total CIS export. Import from the CIS countries decreased from 46% in 2000 to 26% in 2010 (see tables 1-2). Even for Russia, trade with the CIS countries comprised in 2010 only 14.6%, and its main trade partner is the EU – 49%.¹

From the Baltic to the Caucasus: choice between Russia and the EU

In the first half of 1990s, economic decline stimulated nostalgia for the Soviet Union. In 1994, Alexander Lukashenka won presidential campaign in Belarus on the slogans of restoration of the ties between former Union republics. In 1996, the treaty on creation of Community of Russia and Belarus was signed, in 1997 – Treaty on Union of two countries, and in 1999 on ‘Union State’.

In Ukraine, during 1994 election campaign Leonid Kuchma also referred several times to the ‘Eurasian space’ and actively capitalized on the idea of increasing cooperation with Russia, first of all in the economic sphere. Taking into account developments in Belarus, many experts expressed concerns of two countries turning ‘back to Eurasia’.

However, very soon after his election victory Kuchma began to solve the problems of strengthening the Ukrainian state better than the first President, Leonid Kravchuk, had done, restructuring Ukraine’s debt to Russia, weakening the separatist forces in Crimea, and signing in 1997 both the Treaty on Friendship with Russia and the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership with NATO.

Since Russian influence in Ukraine could limit the power of Ukraine’s elite, Kyiv flirted with ideas about supranational integrationist structures but in reality focused on developing bilateral relations within the CIS. Although one of the ‘founder countries’, Ukraine was formally not a member of the CIS as it did not ratify its Charter. Balancing between Russia and the West and pursuing so called ‘multi-vector policy’, Kuchma began to move cautiously towards the West.

While distancing themselves from their predecessor, whose policies were judged to be too ‘nationalistic’, the second generation of post-Soviet presidents (Kuchma in Ukraine, Aliiev in Azerbaijan, Lucinschi in Moldova, Shevardnadze in Georgia) continued to follow the logic of state-building.

¹ http://www.maxilog.su/infocenter/transport_news.php?ELEMENT_ID=784.

After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia in 1999, it became clear that the era of informal, personal relations between leaders of the CIS states and Yeltsin was over and that it would be much more difficult to get concessions from the tough and pragmatic Putin, especially in economic issues.

In 2000, within the CIS, five countries (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) formed Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). Ukraine decided only to have observer status in EurAsEC (the same did Moldova and Armenia). Kyiv stressed that the first step should be to reach free trade area within the CIS as the 1994 CIS free trade agreement has not been ratified by the Russian parliament (the 1993 Russian-Ukrainian free trade agreement works but with many exemptions).

In 2003, Ukraine formally supported the idea of the Single Economic Space with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan but again limited it to support for creating a free trade zone, but not the custom union, as this conflicted with its official aim to join the EU. It is also evident that emerged Ukrainian ‘oligarchs’ do not want to come under Moscow’s control again, as they would face competition from more powerful Russian business groups both within Ukraine and international markets where two countries often are competitors in the same economic niche.

Although Russia remains the main trading country for Ukraine, its part in the Ukrainian trade declined dramatically: from 47.5 % in 1994 to 23.05% in pre-crisis 2008. Exports to Russia fell from 37.4 % 1994 to 23.5% in 2008, and imports - from 58.1 % to 22.7%. But in absolute figures situation is different. Trade with Russia fell from \$17.8 billion in 1994 to \$11.7 bn in 2001 (so it happened under Kuchma), then increased in 2004 to \$17.7 bn, and in 2008 to \$35.2 bn. So, contrary to what Russian leaders say about Orange team which allegedly prevented cooperation with Russia, trade with Russia doubled from 2004 to 2008, Ukrainian export rose from \$5.9 bn to \$15.7 bn (that is in 2.7 times!) and import from \$11.8 bn to \$19.4 bn.²

At the same time, despite comparatively low “open” investments into Ukraine, Russian businesses actively use Ukrainian-registered firms to engage in tacit investments and influence. In this regard, the most sensitive for Ukraine in relations with Russia remains energy sphere. For example, as a result of first ‘gas war’ in winter 2006 Russia managed to prevent direct import of gas from Turkmenistan to Ukraine and to impose instead non-transparent Swiss-registered intermediary, RosUkrEnergo (RUE), where Gasprom had

² The data from official sites www.ukrstat.gov.ua and www.me.gov.ua

50% of shares. In winter 2009, the second ‘gas war’ happened: RUE was removed, but Russia, by stopping transit of gas to Europe via Ukraine, imposed on Ukraine very unfavorable gas contract.³

A paradoxical situation emerged in Moldova. Communists who were in power in 2001-2009 were trying to balance Russian influence, receive Western support and money and create incentives for Transnistria to remain in one state with Moldova. As a result, they officially proclaimed the aim to join the EU (Romania joined the EU in 2007 and served as a success story). In 2005, Moldova signed an action plan with the EU, in 2007, agreement on visa liberalization (even before that, many Moldovans got Romanian passports and de facto travelled easily to the EU). The course to join the EU is supported by 72% of the population, and more than 45 % of trade is with the EU (of other CIS countries, this figure could be compared only with Russia)⁴.

After elections in 2009-2010, new national-democratic government received ‘carrots’ from the EU: action plan for reaching visa free regime and the start of negotiations on association with the EU. There are signs that the EU may increase its interest to Moldova: after Freedom House moved Ukraine in 2010 from the category of ‘free’ country into ‘partially free’, Ukraine lost its first place in the CIS space in the ratings of democracy to Moldova.

Even in Belarus president Lukashenka understood full well that Russia did not treat him as an equal partner, the ‘Union State’ remained on paper and, the most importantly, Russian economic advance in Belarus threatens his power. At the same time, contrary to stereotypes Belarus is quite open to the West to which almost half of Belarusian export is oriented. 87.5 % of Belarusians under 30 years visited the EU countries. In 2009, there was 1 Schengen visa per 21 Belarusians, Moldova was on the 2nd place in the CIS (1 per 29), Ukraine on the 3^d (1 per 41 persons).⁵

Nevertheless, after 2010 presidential elections Lukashenka’s relations with the West deteriorated again and the threat of default of Belarus in spring 2011 gave Russia additional possibilities in attempts to get full control over gas transit system, oil refineries etc. There are signals that in this situation

³ The Russian media waged propaganda war against Ukraine. As a result, according to a poll conducted by the Russian Levada Center in early 2009, 62% of Russians viewed Ukraine negatively. Ukraine appeared third on the list of “unfriendly states” after the U.S. and Georgia.

⁴ *Pro et contra*, N 3-4, 2011, c. 60;

<http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ru&idc=168&id=3490>

⁵ *Pro et contra*, N 3-4, 2011, c. 32.

Lukashenka may start to resort to his standard tactics: partial release of political prisoners in exchange for economic support from the West.

In the Caucasus, it seems that three countries are moving in different directions. On the one side is Armenia whose choice is limited: scarce resources, lack of political and economic reforms, economic isolation because of the more than two decades of Karabakh conflict, and for the same reason no choice than to rely on Russian in security sphere and to join the 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security⁶. At the same time, Armenia limited its participation in the EurAsEC to observer status. Its export to the CIS countries comprised in 2010 less than 20% of total Armenian export, and import comprised 30%.

On the other side is Georgia which left all Russia-led organizations. Despite authoritarian trends under Saakashvili, Georgia is the only post-Soviet country (with the exception of Baltics) which reached successes in fighting corruption, police reform, removing bureaucratic obstacles for business development. Official aim to join both EU and NATO is supported by the majority of Georgians.

Somewhere in between Armenia and Georgia is oil-rich authoritarian Azerbaijan. Baku tried not to complicate relations with Russia. At the same time, it refrains from participation in Russia-led integration projects (both in economic and security sphere).

Georgia and Azerbaijan became members of GUUAM (including also Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Moldova), which emerged in 1997 (Uzbekistan left it in 2005, after coloured revolutions, hence the name of organization changed to GUAM, and since 2006 – “Organization for democracy and economic development – GUAM”). The basis for GUUAM was the idea to provide alternative to Russia sources of energy and its transportation routes from Caspian to Europe. Supported by the West, GUUAM was viewed by some analysts as an alternative grouping to the EurAsEC. Unsurprisingly, Moscow considered it anti-Russian. In 2001, GUUAM adopted a Charter. However, the energy corridor does not function yet, and the organization remains amorphous both economically and politically.⁷

⁶ In 2002, it was transformed into Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

⁷ Even less viable was Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) created with Western support in 2005 in Kyiv, in the aftermath of colored revolutions. It had ‘to unite democracies of Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian region’, and was founded by Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, three Baltic countries, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Romania. However, in Ukraine, crucial for CDC fate, Orange forces plunged into struggle for power instead of doing reforms, and this initiative appeared to be short-lived.

Analyzing what prevents profound economic modernization and democratization, Andrey Riabov suggests that a new reality, ‘post-Soviet capitalism’ has emerged. The interest of the elites in keeping stable their rule unites post-Soviet space, even despite the fact that different countries chose different geopolitical orientations. Recent geopolitical trends play to Moscow’s favor: concentration of the US on situation in Iran and Afghanistan and Obama’s ‘reset policy’; world economic crises; problems connected with EU expansion; and, the last but not the least, failures of colored revolutions to build stable democracies. So far, there is quite a lot of advantages for Moscow: economic and energy dependence on Russia; labor migration to Russia; role of Russian currency; visa-free regimes in the CIS; mutual recognition of university degrees; Russian as the language of inter-state communication at official level; role of Russian media in de-facto common informational space.⁸

On the other hand, EU expansion made it a serious player and magnet for the countries of the Western CIS. However, Brussels consistently avoided mentioning of a possibility for their accession. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), developed by the EU in 2004, put the countries of Western NIS in the same category as North African and Arab nations that are not eligible for EU membership.

In May 2009, in Prague, the EU initiated the Eastern Partnership which covers Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. At this point, the EU is negotiating Association Agreements with all of them (with the exception of Belarus)⁹. The EU has also launched a dialogue on visa-free regimes with Ukraine (Kyiv got an action plan for this in 2010) and Moldova, and on visa-facilitation agreements with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, it seems there is no direct link between democratization of these countries and ‘carrots’ of cooperation with the EU. It is clearly seen in the deterioration of Freedom House’s ratings (except for Moldova).¹⁰

⁸ Andrey Ryabov, ‘Raspadajushchayasia obshchnost’ ili tselostnyj region?’, *Pro et contra*, N 3-4, 2011, ñ. 13, 16-17.

⁹ It seems that these agreements will not resemble the “European association agreements” that the EU signed with many Central-East European states (from Poland to Romania in the first half of 1990s to the Western Balkans by the end of the 1990s), which offered an EU perspective for these states. Romania and Bulgaria at that stage, not to mention the turbulent Western Balkans, were in no better shape than Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. Thus, the EU’s decisions were shaped first of all by political, not economic, concerns.

¹⁰ Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson, ‘Turning presence into power: lessons from the eastern neighbourhood’, *ECFR’s policy brief*, 31, 2011, p.2.

The Eastern Partnership created negative reaction from Russia, although previously it formally had nothing against European integration and even against Ukraine's aim to join the EU (perhaps, because it was not realistic). Much more harsh reaction from Russia appeared when Ukraine started to move towards signing by the end of 2011 association agreement with EU. This agreement will establish, in particular, a deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA).

After becoming Ukraine's president in February 2010 Viktor Yanukovich, who used pro-Russian statements in the campaign, has made significant concessions to Russia in issues very sensitive to her. According to Kharkiv agreements in April 2010, Moscow decreased the price of natural gas sold to Ukraine by approximately one-third (by \$100 per 1000 cubic meters of gas) in exchange for leasing the Russian naval base in Sevastopol for an additional 25 years (after the present agreement expires in 2017) and for 5-year terms thereafter.¹¹

However, it did not meet early Russian expectations. Russia is also concerned that Yanukovich might slide into a new edition of "multi-vector" policy. Moscow declared that if Ukraine joins the Customs Union (initiated by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 2007, started to function in 2010) it will receive enhanced economic preferences, cheaper gas and refuse of Moscow to go on with 'Southern streamline' project¹². However, the Customs Union and DCFTA are not compatible, moreover, members of the CU are not members of the WTO (joined by Ukraine in 2008). Yanukovich declared that cooperation with the CU would be limited to the formula "3+1" (that is, without acquiring membership status in the CU). Moscow rejected it and mounted pressure on Ukraine: as alternative concessions, control over Ukraine's gas transit system or 'merger' of Naftogaz and Gazprom were suggested. All it shows that Mos-

¹¹ At the same time, these cost savings to Ukraine are converted into a write-off of a portion of Ukraine's debt to the Russian government. According to the agreement, Ukraine's debt is to be written off by 2042, and will have constituted payment for Russia's lease of the naval base. Moreover, the agreement has not changed a permanent formula for the price of gas as Yanukovich had requested, which means that the deduction is regulated by unilateral decision of the Russian government and its size can be unilaterally changed.

Other important concessions included: the July 2010 law on priorities of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies which declared "non-alignment" policy for Ukraine thus excluding NATO membership (a goal Kuchma proclaimed back in 2003). In the humanitarian sphere, Yanukovich rejected the view that Ukraine's 1933 Great Famine was genocide, thereby aligning himself to Russia's position.

¹² Together with already effective 'Northern streamline', it is supposed to help to bypass Ukraine's gas transit system. However, the prospect of the project is not clear yet.

cow is seriously afraid of Ukraine's moving closer to the EU and wants to keep strategic leverages on Kyiv.

Despite stereotypes of Russian elites, membership of post-Soviet states (the Baltics) in NATO and the EU makes them feel secure and helps promote mutually beneficial relations with Moscow. Russia even became the largest trade partner of Lithuania¹³. There is a potential kind of cooperation between them in the sphere of trans-European energy networks (i.e. using Mazeikiu oil refinery) and in guaranteeing transit routes between Europe and the countries of Central Asia via Russia and Baltic ports (including transit of NATO supplies of civilian goods to Afghanistan).

***Authoritarian regimes and geopolitical competition in Central Asia:
no alternative to integration with Russia?***¹⁴

During the Soviet era, economies of five Central Asian countries were heavily dependent on hidden subsidies from inter-republic trade and even more so on direct support from the USSR's central budget. Russia was the main donor in both cases. Direct subsidies effectively ended after 1994, and hidden trade subsidies decreased considerably.

Natural resources are spread very unevenly across the region. Mountainous Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have few mineral resources but control 70% of the water resources and the region's river flows. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rich in oil and gas, but lack water. In the Soviet era, these countries' key economic sectors were developed as a single regional system, with the production of electricity in Tajikistan, grain in Kazakhstan and cotton in other countries in the region. But these ties have now become international, and this has made the system's operation much more complicated.

The borders between the region's countries were also inherited from the USSR and are artificial in many respects. This leads to interethnic friction and tension between countries and even actual conflicts. Although the countries share a long common history and the same religion, ethnic and cultural differences go very deep nonetheless. Of all of the region's countries, it is Kazakhstan

¹³ In 2010, Russia's part comprised 24.6%. Next were Germany (10.4%), Poland (8.3%), and Latvia (7.8%) (rustrade.lt/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Vneshniya_torgovlya_2010.doc)

¹⁴ Based on the materials presented by Boris Frumkin at round table discussion "Projects and Prospects for Cooperation in Eurasia", Febr. 24-27, 2009, Vilnius.

now and then tries to initiate some kind of regional integration, but these attempts usually run up against Uzbekistan's resistance. Uzbekistan is right at the heart of Central Asia and would have the natural 'mission' of uniting the region, but it is something of a bone of contention instead.

The region is characterized by an authoritarian clan-based political system, a wide social and economic gap between the elite and the bulk of the population, and major differences between the living standards and way of life in rural and urban areas. It leads to the economic uncertainty and political instability of most of the region's countries and their relations among themselves and with the rest of the world.¹⁵

Social and political tensions create fertile soil for spreading Islamic fundamentalism in these formerly secular countries. While Russia is operating above all in the military and economic spheres, trying to give legitimacy to particular politicians and usually do not go 'top-down' into other social spheres, Islam, on the other hand, has proved very effective in filling the ideological vacuum after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Previously, Islamists operated through terrorist networks and organizations, but now it is operating increasingly in the social and financial spheres, at the grass roots level.

Russia's ties with the five Central Asian countries are developed at different levels and in different configurations: on bilateral and on a multilateral basis. All countries joined the CIS.¹⁶ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined Eurasian Economic Community.¹⁷ Russia actively use multilateral structures of the EurAsEC, such as the Eurasian Development Bank's work (including its Technical Assistance Fund); the EurAsEC Anti-Crisis Fund with \$10 billion (mostly contributed by Russia and Kazakhstan) for loans. Kazakhstan has become a member of the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization created in 2001 includes Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Moscow has become an ally for the Central Asian regimes in ensuring

¹⁵ Perhaps, the only exception is Kazakhstan, which is politically stable, internationally active and influential and showing steady economic growth (it is in the top 100 countries in terms of per capita GDP, unlike the other Central Asian countries). Interesting to note that Kazakhstan's cumulative investment in Russia is several times higher than Russia's cumulative investment in Kazakhstan.

¹⁶ In 2005 Turkmenistan declared that it will participate in its activity only as an 'associate member'.

¹⁷ In 2006 it was joined by Uzbekistan, but in 2008 it suspended its participation.

their survival and for countering potential external threats. This is why, the Central Asian countries, while developing new geopolitical cooperation vectors, at the same time maintain their traditional ties with Russia and enhance their military and political dimension, through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (of which 4 of the 5 countries are members¹⁸) and the CSTO Rapid Reaction Force (joined by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).

Russia is still the first or second largest foreign trade partner for most of these countries. The Central Asian countries now account for about half of Russia's trade with the CIS countries, and two-thirds of the Central Asian countries' trade within the CIS is with Russia. However, it is important to stress that for the time being creation of the Customs Union has not led to the boom of trade within the CU. In 2010, in Russian foreign trade Kazakhstan and Belarus comprised only 7%, while countries of Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation - 23%, and China - 9.5%.¹⁹

The start of the 2000s saw the arrival of other players from further afield in the Central Asian region, including global players, such as China, the EU and the U.S., and regional players, such as Turkey and Iran. They still lag behind Russia for the time being. This is due partly to the region's specific nature, and partly to the new players' particular interests. Central Asia offers a market with only limited potential. The five countries' total population is relatively small (two times smaller than in Russia, and only a third more than in Poland and the Baltic states) and poor (in four of the five countries 30-60% of the population lives below the poverty line). China and the EU are interested above all in securing oil and gas supplies for their own markets. Other sectors and the local consumer market are less attractive to them. The U.S. is interested in developing oil and gas transport routes from Central Asia to Europe, bypassing Russia, but above all, it is interested in using the territory of some of the region's countries for transit supplies to the NATO contingent in Afghanistan, and in weakening Russia's, China's and especially Iran's political influence in the region.

Unlike most of the new players from outside, Russia has long-established and diverse relations with all five countries in the region and has a broader range of common economic and political interests with them. But Russia does not want to be forced into being a donor and an arbiter in the

¹⁸ Turkmenistan declared neutrality. Uzbekistan was its member in 1992-199 and rejoined it in 2006 after Andijan riots.

¹⁹ http://www.maxilog.su/infocenter/transport_news.php?ELEMENT_ID=784

countries' disputes, with the risk of incurring their constant dissatisfaction. It wants to be a strategic investor and partner, coordinating decisions on important regional issues that concern Russia, too.

This concerns the energy sector above all. Competition between Russia and the new players is particularly visible in this area. The world economic crisis has slowed down projects to expand oil and gas supplies from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to Russia. At the same time, shifting the emphasis to energy supplies to China and attracting Chinese investment would give China the chance to gain control over a large part of Kazakhstan's and Turkmenistan's energy sectors, and this is something the local elites justifiably fear. The EU is too far away, and Iran's proposals are too heavily politicized.

Moscow, on the contrary, is interested in securing energy supplies for energy-intensive industry in the region in which Russia has investments (i.e. in non-ferrous metals), and in importing electricity for use in industry in the Urals and Siberia. Russia controls important pipelines for export of Central Asian gas. Ukraine would prefer to buy cheaper gas from Turkmenistan instead of the Russian one but the only possibility of transit so far is through Russia, so Moscow still can block these attempts.

Unlike the new players, Russia is interested not just in the mining and extraction sectors but also in the processing and manufacturing industry in the region. This concerns above all machine-building, including the automotive and aircraft manufacturing sectors, for example, for which a good technical and human resources base dating from the Soviet era still exists (in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and to some extent in Kyrgyzstan). Russia cannot offer any real innovative technology breakthroughs for now, but demand for this technology is not high yet anyway in the five Central Asian countries.

At the same time, Russia is a promising market for goods produced by the five countries' light industry and other sectors that are squeezed out of other markets by cheap Chinese goods. This also applies to the service sector, especially telecommunications and transport services. Central Asia's mobile telecommunications market, for example, is around 30% of the CIS mobile telecommunications market. While increasing number of students goes to the West, Muslim countries, and also China, Russia's educational services market remains attractive for the five countries. The choice in favor of Russia is also facilitated by the fact that knowledge of Russian language and culture remains quite strong in the region.

Russia, together with Kazakhstan, could help to resolve the food security problems in the region. Tajikistan, for example, manages to provide for only one-fifth of its food needs. It could restore the "green conveyor" that

functioned during the Soviet era, ensuring a supply of fruit and vegetables from Central Asia for itself in return for grain and mineral fertilizers.

Central Asian countries are hit by mass unemployment. Two-thirds of all labor migrants in Russia are from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia receives cheap labor, and these countries receive substantial revenues that are sent back home. For Tajikistan it is the main source of income for almost half of the country's households. What's more, many of these migrants learn a profession or acquire new skills in Russia. With time, this migration will become better regulated in terms of quality and quantity, depending on Russia's labor market needs, but it will remain high given the negative demographic trends in Russia. There are fears, however, that this could lead to the growth of drug trafficking and Islamic extremism to Russia.

While having these opportunities for integration in the region, there are as mentioned above, factors working against it:

- weak and corrupt economies of Central Asian states; the increasing role of radical Islam in the society;

- modern technologies and methods of management which would lead to profound modernization are mostly associated not with Russia, but with the West; on the other hand, Russia associates itself with support of authoritarian and corrupt regimes;

- conflicts between and within Central Asian countries and the risk (temptation) for outside players of being involved; and the struggle for spheres of influence.

All these seriously hinder integration processes in the region.

Conclusions

Economic, cultural, and historic ties, similarities of 'post-Soviet capitalism' and connected to it political and psychological affiliations unite ruling groups which are in power in post-Soviet space. At the same time, these groups would like to keep their independent status. As a result, some countries support integrationist trends (like Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, partly other Central Asian states, and to a certain extent Armenia) while others (Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, not to say of Georgia) prefer bilateral basis.

Since Putin came to power Russian policy in the region has become much more assertive. It is dictated by pragmatic, first of all economic issues (although symbolic actions which demonstrated 'leading Russian role' remain). Economic crisis of 2008-09 weakened post-Soviet states and provided some opportunities for Russia's advance in the region. But the attractiveness of Russia

for new societies is diminished as its own modernization so far is neither successful, nor democratic (and vice versa, for ruling elites the last point make easier to combine efforts against democratization). Anyway, geopolitically all the countries (including Russia) has moved a certain way in the direction of other centers of today's world. The choice of Ukraine in the coming years will be a serious marker in this competition. However, this competition should not be seen as zero-sum game in the world which is interdependent and which face common challenges.

Official CIS data (<http://www.cisstat.com/>)
(data on foreign trade of Uzbekistan was not presented, Georgia and Turkmenistan are not CIS members)

Appendix

Table 1.

Percentage of the export to the CIS and other countries in the total export of the CIS countries

	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 ¹
Azerbaijan							
CIS countries	13	21	15	18	3	8	9
other countries	87	79	85	82	97	92	91
Armenia							
CIS countries	24	19	22	31	31	19	19
other countries	76	81	78	69	69	81	81
Belarus							
CIS countries	60	44	44	46	44	44	55
other countries	40	56	56	54	56	56	45
Kazakhstan							
CIS countries	27	15	15	17	16	16	11
other countries	73	85	85	83	84	84	89
CIS countries	42	45	53	57	55	45	38
other countries	58	55	47	43	45	55	62
Moldova							
CIS countries	59	51	40	41	39	38	40
other countries	41	49	60	59	61	62	60
Russia							
CIS countries	13	14	14	15	15	15	14
other countries	87	86	86	85	85	85	86
Tajikistan							
CIS countries	48	20	13	16	16	21	13
other countries	52	80	87	84	84	79	87
Ukraine							
CIS countries	31	31	33	38	36	34	37
other countries	69	69	67	62	64	66	63
Total CIS							
CIS countries	19	17	17	19	18	19	18
other countries	81	83	83	81	82	81	82
¹ Jan.-Nov.							

Table 2.
Percentage of the import form the CIS and other countries in the total import of the CIS countries

	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 ¹
Azerbaijan							
CIS countries	32	34	40	33	33	30	31
other countries	68	66	60	67	67	70	69
Armenia							
CIS countries	20	29	32	33	30	31	30
other countries	80	71	68	67	70	69	70
Belarus							
CIS countries	70	67	65	66	66	64	59
other countries	30	33	35	34	34	36	41
Kazakhstan							
CIS countries	54	47	47	45	46	42	35
other countries	46	53	53	55	54	58	65
Kyrgyzstan							
CIS countries	54	57	51	55	54	56	54
other countries	46	43	49	45	46	44	46
Moldova							
CIS countries	33	39	38	36	35	35	32
other countries	67	61	62	64	65	65	68
Russia							
CIS countries	34	19	16	15	14	13	13
other countries	66	81	84	85	86	87	87
Tajikistan							
CIS countries	83	65	64	63	56	57	59
other countries	17	35	36	37	44	43	41
Ukraine							
CIS countries	58	47	45	42	39	43	44
other countries	42	53	55	58	61	57	56
Total CIS							
CIS countries	46	33	31	28	27	27	26
other countries	54	67	69	72	73	73	74
¹ Jan. - Nov.							

Grigorii Amnuel
(Russia)

Humanitarian issues in Post-Soviet space: origins and solutions

Inter-states humanitarian issues after the collapse of the Soviet Union can be understood only in the wider context of Soviet history. Indeed, the longer the Communist party was in power in a given country or Republic (in the Soviet era), the more complex and serious these problems became. Likewise, the methods by which countries were annexed by the USSR and the grave trials that their citizens had to go through during the Soviet period also shed light on humanitarian issues that today divide both peoples and states. Today the historical memory of these events has a striking impact on the political consciousness of different post-Soviet nations and on their attitudes towards Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union. For the Baltic states the question of whether to consider the Soviet rule as a period of occupation is of crucial importance. In Ukraine, the recognition of the Holodomor famine of 1932-1933 as a result of a deliberate policy of the Soviet state is a “litmus test” of attitude towards Russia. For Georgia the “overthrow of the independent left-wing government” of the Georgian Democratic Republic in 1921; the suppression of the August 1924 uprising; the “E-tools” used by the troops to disperse the April 9 1989 peaceful pro-democracy rally in Tbilisi, and, of course, the August 2008 war, all form a single chain of events. They contribute to shape a widespread desire amongst Georgian people to distance themselves from Russia, and to obtain security guarantees as a NATO member.

Other peoples and countries also have traumatic memories. Moldova and Transnistria face significant domestic political challenges concerning the

fundamental issues of statehood and new post-Soviet identity, which are both rooted in the Soviet past. Armenia and Azerbaijan still struggle to normalize their relations and are permanently on the brink of war. The sharp conflict between these two states in the South Caucasus is primarily a consequence of the territorial demarcation between them, drawn by the Soviet authorities. Problems triggered by Soviet ethnic and territorial demarcations are also acute in Central Asia. For instance, there are ethnic enclaves in the Fergana valley that are completely separated from their national states by the territory of neighboring countries. This situation increases the level of tension between countries in the region. The North Caucasus, facing numerous problems dating back to the Soviet era - administrative divisions between the republics; Stalin's deportation of entire peoples etc – has in fact turned into a combat zone of guerrilla warfare. The influence of the Soviet legacy also affects the internal political conflicts in Belarus.

Thus the post-Soviet space is afflicted with conflicts in many cases caused by the fact that not all new nation states accept the geographical borders that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A number of countries have grievances against Russia connected with the legacy of the former imperial center. This, actually, is quite typical for the interstate relations in a post-imperial space. On the other hand, for many citizens of Russia the loss of imperial grandeur is a source of constant irritation and complaints to the outside world. These recurrent sentiments that involve the belief that Russia is a permanently besieged fortress, surrounded by enemies, regularly manifest themselves both in politics and in the public opinion. Is it possible to overcome a paradigm of mutual grievances and phobias, to create conditions for normal relations based on trust and respect between peoples and states?

Undoubtedly, it is not possible to rewrite history. Modern states also cannot falsify it unilaterally, as in the era of globalization there are too many open sources of alternative information. No matter how much countries could try to hide or “sweeten” specific events, they would still fail. Only joint meticulous study, interpretations of national history taking into account the other side's views can yield positive results. The best success story of such an approach is represented by the reconciliation of Germany with France and Poland. Are post-Soviet states ready to follow this path? This is an open question, and from my point of view, so far there is no clear answer. Of course, in recent years some countries have established bilateral commissions to investigate controversial historic issues. There are also attempts to publish books and textbooks that reflect the positions of different states on historical problems. However, there are no reasons to think that mutual complaints and dis-

agreements are already solved, especially as practical policies are often at odds with the activities of historical commissions. Perhaps the positive aspect is that in many countries the society begins to understand that further falsification of history will only generate new problems.

The main contradictions in interpretations of common past are due to divergent assessments of historical events. For some, the collapse of the Soviet Union is still the greatest tragedy, a “geopolitical disaster”. For others, on the contrary, it is the turning point of history that allowed the national revival of many countries. Who is right? On one hand, the forced Sovietization is clearly a tragic chapter of history. On the other, it is hard to deny that in the framework of the USSR the union republics achieved notable success in socio-economic and cultural development. However, those who support this latter point of view do not even want to hear that many successes were achieved “in spite of”, rather than “because of” the policies of the totalitarian government. At the same time, the attempt to impose a single communist ideology that became a form of a pagan faith, and the total control of the society by the Party and its bodies was evil and only evil, as they brought only sufferings to the peoples of the Soviet Union. However, the descendants of those who committed the crimes, who are, of course, more numerous than the descendants of the victims, still disagree with this point - even in spite of the obvious facts. Many families retain the nostalgic memories of the “great idea” and its implementation in the Soviet history. Is it possible to get rid of such a worldview? I am sure not - just as it is not possible to root out any idea. There will always be people who will get attracted to ideas that were rejected under external influence. This is quite natural. The philosophical and sociological writings of the proponents of the communist concept of the world development have a right to exist just as much as those of the supporters of other theories and views. Different sides of development of the human society and of social and political thought are studied in schools and universities. As various ideas and concepts are presented in this process, they should all be objects of study. At the same time, an illusion should be labelled as such, a utopia called utopia and the misanthropic ideas and ideology should be called misanthropic. Thanks to the Nuremberg trials the world was able to come to a common assessment of the National-Socialist ideology. Unfortunately, due to objective and subjective reasons there was no similar process of analysis and condemnation regarding the communist ideology that dominated not only the vast territory of the USSR, but many countries at almost all continents of the world. . And it will hardly happen in the foreseeable future too. Moreover, at the universities and research institutions that are located in countries that luckily escaped the

experience of building “a society of universal happiness”, this ideology, interpreted and perceived in complete isolation from the real results of its practical implementation, finds new proponents who believe it is quite attractive. One can accuse the author of this paper in bias. Nevertheless, I believe that the experience of the USSR and many countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America that tried to follow the route laid out by communist leaders and ideologues and suffered enormously, testifies not only to the erroneous nature, but to the criminal essence of this model of development.

Is the international community ready to recognize this and draw a line under the assessment of the recent past and its consequences? Clearly not yet. It is even less realistic to hope for such an acknowledgement in the post-Soviet space. But without a de-Sovietization and de-Communization of human conscience and social values, including the development of a new outlook on history, it will be very difficult to resolve the humanitarian problems that currently divide many post-Soviet states. This goal will require a lot of time and effort. The solution should be based on a clear understanding of the stereotypes this type of consciousness is based on. In my opinion there are several of them.

The first stereotype is that before the Bolshevik revolution the majority of the population of the Russian empire did not prosper. It is hard to disagree with this statement. However, it is not true that after the revolution that majority started to live well. Stalin’s industrialization and collectivization cost the country tens of millions of lives. Whole industries in the USSR worked on the exploitation of GULAG prisoners as slave labour. Stalin’s Soviet Union by far exceeded tsarist Russia by the number of people who were repressed, interned, and exiled in camps. By the scale and the amount of forced labour shock-work “socialist building sites” like the Norilsk and Magnitogorsk metallurgical plants or the White Sea - Baltic Canal can only be compared with the construction of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 18th century and the railroad between Petersburg and Moscow in the middle of the 19th century. In other words, the implementation of the socialist experiment refuted the thesis of the official Soviet ideology that the new system provided the majority of the population with a better standard of living than capitalism did. Capitalist system was not “overtaken”, while the successes were achieved by great human sacrifice.

The second stereotype is that due to the advantages of the Soviet system the country won wars, including the biggest and the most destructive one in the human history - the Great Patriotic War. Wars were won indeed, but the question is how much did these victories cost. The Great Patriotic War has no

precedent in the history of Russia and other countries by the number of people collaborating with the enemy, fighting or working for the adversary. It was also never the case that the victor sacrificed so many more human lives than the defeated side. Never a victory, that was cherished so much by the people, has entailed a continuation of the policy of oppression and humiliation of the victorious nation. Moreover, this policy was spread to the states of Central and Eastern Europe that were liberated from Nazism. Figures and details can be disputed, but the general conclusion is obvious.

The third stereotype was that one of the main achievements of the USSR was friendship and harmony among its diverse peoples. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics consisted of 16, and then, after 1956, 15 union republics. Some of them (Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan) contained autonomous republics. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan also included autonomous regions that were formed on ethnic basis. National autonomous districts were established for minor ethnicities in the Far East, Far North and Siberia. All ethnicities in the Soviet Union were equal in rights. According to the official ideology they comprised a “new historical community” - the “Soviet people”. Different nationalities were given the type of statehood that corresponded to their size. The largest groups (so-called “socialist nations”) were allowed to establish Union republics; less numerous nationalities had autonomous republics and regions; indigenous ethnic groups of Siberia, the Far East and the Far North - national autonomous districts. Practically all nationalities were represented in the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Government and the Supreme Council.

All that is true. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was still a very centralized country, where all public policy issues were resolved by a very narrow circle of people that were members of the CPSU CC Politbureau. In practice neither the union, nor the autonomous republics, regions and national districts enjoyed any autonomy. Therefore, in case the country’s leadership deemed it politically or ideologically necessary, the rights of whole ethnicities were grossly violated. Thus, during the reign of Stalin, entire peoples and nations were declared enemies of the “Soviet motherland” and accused of mass collaboration with the Nazi invaders. The Volga Germans, Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, Ingrian Finns, Karachay, Balkar, Nogai, Meskhetian Turks were deported to Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

The national intelligentsia that the Stalinist leadership considered the bearer of nationalist-bourgeois ideas, was also a target of brutal repressions. In reality, the destruction of the national intelligentsia was aimed at rooting out the spiritual and cultural traditions of different peoples. These traditions

prevented them from becoming a completely controlled and loyal mass. Mass repressions aimed at “cleansing” the population of the “elements of hostile classes” were always primarily applied at the territories (the Baltic Republics; the Western Ukraine and Belarus; Bessarabia) that “voluntarily” joined the Soviet Union. This is evident from the statistics of the repressed people at the annexed territories in 1939-1940 and 1945-1947. It is probably not necessary to mention the Poles that were exterminated in the Katyn forest, as well as the prepared but not realized mass resettlement of Jews to the Far East in the early 1950s – the truth is too obvious already.

At the beginning of the Gorbachev’s perestroika it became clear that not all of these nations want to stay within the USSR. Others began to demand a superior status of statehood, indicating that they were deprived of rights. Some ethnic groups complained about the administrative division that was imposed on them by the Soviet rule. As a result, violent inter-ethnic conflicts broke out in many parts of the USSR. The myth about the friendship of peoples as the basis of the Soviet state collapsed.

The fourth stereotype is that an unprecedented technological progress was achieved in the country at the time of the Soviet Union. Probably it would be more appropriate to call it economic progress. Undoubtedly, in the course of the 50-70 years of Soviet power in different regions thousands of new factories were built and put into operation with shock-work labour. However, I believe that this was the result of a natural process of industrialization that would have occurred with greater or lower intensity with or without the Soviet system. In that case, enterprises fitting local conditions and needs would have emerged and developed. In the context of Soviet planned economy, however, creation of an industry was primarily conditioned by the political and military goals. Local interests were marginal. As a result, many enterprises were built at a distance from the sources of raw materials and without taking into account the shortage of local labour resources. As a result workers had to be brought from afar, which later, especially during the collapse of the USSR, became a source of conflict between the newcomers and the local population. Often these conflicts had an ethnic aspect. When the socialist system collapsed, many industries became separated from their resource base. Their further operation turned to be unprofitable. In truth it was not profitable in the Soviet time too, but state planning and acute deficit of goods made their operation possible. Such “trifles” as the preservation of the environment and workers’ comfort were not even considered. For example: according to the initial design of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, elaborated by foreign architects, the company town was to be located in a lake area, where prevailing winds would

have protected it from pollution. However the plan's implementation required additional expenditure, and the city was built right by the factory's walls. As a result the population of Magnitogorsk for 50 years was exposed to smoke emissions containing harmful contaminants.

The character of Soviet economy, and the technological progress it achieved, were determined primarily by military purposes. Even purely civilian enterprises like tractor or macaroni factories in practice often had a dual purpose, and could make both civilian and military products. As a result, the process of transition to a market economy after the collapse of the USSR was very painful. A significant part of the Soviet economy could not be reformed in principle.

The development of science and education was also affected by their subservience to the military tasks. Universities and research centres that trained specialists for the military-industrial complex and developed new types of military hardware enjoyed better funding and working conditions. Military departments at universities became an important component of higher education.

Largely due to chronic unprofitability of the consumer market enterprises, not a single ambitious project that addressed people's standard of living was realized in the USSR. The program that aimed to provide each family with a separate apartment failed. The project to create an affordable car, put forward by Khrushchev, remained a declaration. Huge costs, lack of market competition and the state's desire to make maximum profit drove the price of cars so high that an average family had to live in austerity and save money for 10 years to afford it. In addition, cars were not sold openly, so buyers had to use dubious – from the legal point of view - ways to make a purchase. Similar difficulties characterised buying other goods as well.

At the same time, successful and globally competitive enterprises operated in various regions of the country before they were annexed by the USSR. This is especially true of the areas that were forcibly sovietized in 1939 or later. Qualified engineers, technicians and workers worked there. Unfortunately, in the process of sovietization many of them were exterminated, repressed or had to flee abroad. This forced reduction of population resulted in the deteriorating quality of goods and huge migration flow from other Soviet republics that became a source of tension between local residents and the incoming workers. This situation was especially acute in the Baltic States. Therefore, the results of the technological progress and the economic development in the Soviet Union should not be overestimated. Real breakthroughs and major scientific and technological accomplishments were only achieved in the industries, in some way connected with the military. Even the space exploration

has to be attributed to the military industrial achievements of the country and its people. The launch of the first Sputnik and the first human journey into outer space caused a euphoric reaction in the society and increased the international prestige of the country, but the ordinary citizens of the Soviet Union did not benefit from these achievements. All manufacturing, science and technology were at service of the Soviet state's ambitious plans of global leadership. Interests of citizens played only a marginal, subordinate role in such a socio-economic system.

The list of stereotypes that the "neo-Soviet" type of mentality is based upon can be continued, but it would hardly add anything to the understanding of its nature. We should not expect any changes in Russia's policy towards the post-Soviet states after Vladimir Putin comes back to Kremlin. It is possible that Russia's policy will undergo some minor adjustments and ideological shifts, but its essence will remain the same. Russian leadership does not want to treat its neighbors as politically and internationally equal partners just as Soviet leaders did not want to do it in relation to the "fraternal socialist countries". Any divergence of interests or disagreement makes Moscow stressful. Such action is often perceived as a manifestation of "anti-Russian" policy of a certain state. Powerful propaganda campaigns are deployed in the media to order to make the public opinion share these views. In view of possible economic aid or security guarantees, rulers of some post-Soviet states and the population at large can be positive about developing links with Russia. This kind of relationship, however, does not seem adequate for Moscow. Russia tries to influence internal political processes in these states, giving them guidance and advice on how and what to do. Naturally, these efforts often lead to opposite results.

Moscow actively supports pro-Russian groups of influence in post-Soviet countries. However, as a rule when politicians that belong to these groups openly declare their "exclusive" connections with the Kremlin, it leads to a fast decrease in their popularity among the majority of their countries' population.

In its relations with post-Soviet states Moscow makes an active use of the so-called "anti-Russian" card. It exploits the topic of violations of rights of the Russian-speaking population in different countries. During these campaigns the media and politicians connected with Moscow actively instill into the Russian and international public opinion the idea of widespread hatred towards everything Russian and russophobia allegedly existing in these countries. These allegations, however, do not correspond to reality. These campaigns were especially fierce in relation to Latvia, Estonia and Georgia that are consecutively portrayed almost as the main enemies of Russia. Evidently, these accusations

are absurd; suffice to say that these 3 countries have a combined population of barely over 10 million, in comparison to Russia's 140 million. The apparent discrepancy, however, does not bother the government, the media and, consequently, the majority of the population, which still does not travel beyond their own regional centre and watches only the first and second channels of the national television. The only exception for these categories of the population are trips to Moscow and sometimes abroad organized by the government for members of pro-Kremlin youth movements. But one can hardly expect that these trips broaden the worldview of their participants.

The ideological pressure on Russian citizens is exacerbated by the active promotion of the Orthodox religion. Its role in the social life of the country is considerably exaggerated. The same tendency of artificial imposition of religion exists in predominantly Muslim regions of Russia. But in the country's central regions and biggest cities Islam is usually portrayed negatively by the media. The situation is aggravated by the unequal distribution of public funds between the ethnically Russian regions and the republics of the North Caucasus. This leads to mistrust and increased interethnic tensions .

Nationalistic phobias and prejudices begin to flourish in such an atmosphere. Radical nationalists become more active with such slogans as "Russia is for Russians!". Apparently, certain forces in the government are still willing to influence the society by manipulating the nationalists. However, as is evidenced by history, these manipulations are very dangerous not only for their masterminds, but also for the peoples that witness them. Nationalist, pro-fascist groups very quickly get out of control and become an independent destructive force. It seems that the Russian leadership began to understand this. The problem is that the nationalism genie is already out of the bottle and is having a life on its own.

Is it possible to solve humanitarian issues successfully in the relations between new nation states when their public mindset, most importantly in Russia, is dominated by neo-Soviet attitudes and stereotypes? The answer is positive, but long and tedious work is required. In Russia, people's mentality, not the external attributes of power, have to be changed. Such natural concepts as freedom, independence and tolerance are not valued by the Russian collective consciousness. Many Russian citizens still do not understand what these notions are and how they function. Even in the current era of mobile networks and the Internet, the Russian society at large is still not well informed about the global processes. Despite a large increase in the number of Russians travelling abroad, it still does not account for more than 20% of the country's population. This number also largely corresponds to people from big urban

areas and the border regions. Moreover, most Russians go to such holiday countries as Turkey, Thailand and Egypt, that cannot be considered leaders of world developments or exemplars in terms of the democratic standards. Other citizens are completely dependent on the electronic media, that is more engaged in propaganda rather than informing the public.

It is difficult to hope for a positive change in the country and its position in the world before the worldview of most Russians changes. Russians still remain hostages of stereotypes and phobias largely inherited from the previous epoch. The more Russia's development will follow the current trajectory with its claims for uniqueness and exceptionality, the wider will be the gulf of misunderstanding between Russians and the citizens of neighboring states. The free flow of information, cultural, educational and humanitarian exchanges, openness are key elements that will help to close this gap. History should be liberated of myths; culture should become apolitical and the media should cease being a subject of ideology. Real change in these spheres is what the attention should be focused on. Time and money should not be spared on this. If the mentality that perceives the world from the standpoint of a "besieged fortress" will win, progress will cost much more not only to Russia but to its neighbors in the post-Soviet space and in the world at large.

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