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8 From Central Asian Regional Integration to Eurasian Integration Space? The Changing Dynamics of Post-Soviet Regionalism

Introduction¹

This article stems from a dialogue between contemporary regionalism theories and empirical developments of Post-Soviet regionalism. Regionalism as a discipline has produced an impressive literature, both in volume and quality, on how to conceptualise regional processes and tendencies in different parts of the world. It has also been engaged in positioning frameworks of regional governance as an adequate alternative vision in the ongoing quest for world order. On the other hand, regional processes in post-Soviet space have also been quite voluminous. It can be said that Interstate relations in this new region of the world have had a regional dimension since the beginning. It hosts today several regional organisations which are examples of both working and failing regional institutions. As such, this region could provide a valuable contribution to regionalism studies. However, regionalism studies and post-Soviet studies have been evolving in relatively mutual ignorance for some time. One of the main reasons for that has been the dominance of the geopolitical prism and traditional balance of power approach to the study of the post-Soviet space (Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Tolipov, 2004). Bringing regionalism theories and the post-Soviet space closer would benefit both sides. Regionalism studies will have an opportunity to be tested by the post-Soviet experience. The latter could also contribute to elaborating new theoretical and methodological tools for regionalism studies. The post-Soviet space would also gain a lot from regionalism studies because the overwhelming focus on geopolitical tools and great game narrative are

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obstructing the analysis of many interesting regional processes. It is also perpetuating the power based approach and inhibiting any discussion on the normative premises of post-Soviet regionalism.

The first part of this article presents an analytical framework of regional order, which is build on contemporary regionalism studies. The second part starts with a brief account of how Central Asian regionalism was dealt with in the studied literature. The author then continues to re-evaluate contemporary post-Soviet regionalism by building on the concepts of the regional order framework outlined in the first part. In particular, he tries to highlight to what extent ideas about regional identity and regional order are experiencing significant shifts during the debate on Eurasian integration space. He also concludes by pointing to some elements which may push us to shift our focus from "Central Asian Regional Integration" to an "Eurasian Regional Order".

1. Regional Order: Analytical Framework for a Dynamic World of Regions

Regionalism as a Phenomenon and as a Discipline

In contemporary international scholarship, the focus on regional level stretches back to the post-War period which witnessed the initiation of different projects aiming at regional economic and security governance. The trajectories of regional initiatives were categorised into different waves according to their chronological and substantial occurrence². These projects became a basis for regionalism studies, a rich and theoretically innovating literature, situated at the crossroads of Law, International Relations and International Political Economy (Cerexhe, 2003, SFDI, 1976; Fawcett and Hurrell, 1995; Farrell, Hettne and Van Langenhove, 2005; Cooper, Hughes and De Lombaerde, 2008).

Regionalism was defined as "a state-led or states-led project designed to reorganise a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines" (Gamble and Payne, 1996). The main concepts for elaborating the account of this phenomenon were the concepts of regional integration and security community. Methodologically, these accounts were supported by a focus on quantitative analysis of economic and security interactions, flows and exchanges across borders (For early works, see: Balassa; Haas; Deutsch et al.). One of the prominent features of these studies was its reliance on European experience in order to produce generalisations and theories (De Lombaerde et al.). Regionalism studies have also known times of doubts, leading one of its main representatives to declare the obsolescence of regional integration theories (Haas, 1975).

² *On waves of economic regionalism, see: Mansfeld and Milner, 1999; on security regionalism, see: Fawcett in Kössler and Zimmek, 2008. On different periods of regionalism studies, see Acharya and Johnston, 2007.*

Since the end of Cold War, regionalism studies have been gaining interest once again. Recent scholarship on regionalism is trying to overcome the euro-centrism, by both questioning the tenets of the disciplines as well as by enlarging the focus to experiences of other regions of the world (De Lombaerde et al., forthcoming; Farrell and Langenhove, 2005; Acharya and Johnston, 2007). It has also been adopting more constructivist and qualitative approaches to the regional phenomenon. Contemporary regionalism studies consider regions as socially constructed phenomena. Regionalism processes are composed of different logics and rationalities (Hurrell, 2007). Regions should thus not be taken for granted. Terms like “region”, “security community”, and “regional integration” do not only refer to a static situation or an end result. They can also refer to a framework for studying the processes and tendencies leading to this situation (Acharya, 2000). Taking a dynamic and constructive view on regionalism enables the study of regionalist ideas and discourses, norms and institutions, historical and subjective dimensions of regions. The study of the possibility of constructing a region from within is an important focus. Regionalism scholarship sees endogenous factors as more important than exogenous factors. Endogenous region-building enables the possibility of a region without hegemonic construction (Acharya, 2007). The process leading to regional consolidation should not necessarily follow a unilinear progressive movement. There is no single pathway to successful regionalism. Neither should it always pursue the same objectives. The final objective, the desired end result of regionalism processes can vary and evolve over time and space (Van Langenhove and Marchesi, 2008).

Regionalism and Regional Order

The concept of order is defined as “a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values” (Bull, 1977) or as “a set of more or less coherent, more or less stable, principles, rules, practices, interiorised by concerned actors and the respect of which is guaranteed by a system of sanctions” (Moreau Defarges, 1998). As such it was usually analysed as a tripartite concept building on common references and values; an accepted distribution of positions and forces; and institutions (Moreau Defarges, 1998) or, on common interests; rules; and institutions (Bull, 1977). In regionalism studies, the question of regional order was studied as a mode of resolution of conflicts prevailing across different regions (Lake and Morgan, 1997) or for the consequences of different regional processes for world order and the relations between regionalism and the global scene (Gamble and Payne, 1996). Recent studies have tried to give more elaborate accounts of the regional order concept. Muthiah Alagappah and his colleagues have built on Hedley Bull’s concept of order to develop an analytical framework for international order. According to M. Alagappah, “international order is a formal and informal arrangement that sustains rule-governed interaction among sovereign states in their pursuit of individual and collective

goals" (Alagappah, 2003). Despite the use of the "international" adjective, this analytical framework has a regional flavour: it is applied to Asia. More recently, Amitav Acharya analysed how the states in a given region produce a regional order. Criticising pure outside-in approaches where weak states in one region acquiesce to regional designs coming from external powers, he identified several pathways through which regional order is produced endogenously (Acharya, 2007). Empirically, regional order perspective was used to study the south-east Asian and post-Soviet regions. Evelyn Goh studied Southeast Asian regional interactions based on a regional order approach: the study focused on 'the way in which interstate relations proceed along largely well known channels and patterns, which limit unpredictability and stabilise expectations between states'. In particular, it inquired 'how the roles and positions of states are negotiated' within regions (Goh, 2007). In the post-Soviet space, Andrei Kazantsev used a regional order concept to refer to a system connecting a set of states (Central Asian countries) to outside powers where the offer of regional order is initiated by outside actors (Kazantsev, 2008a).

Classical Agora Aspect of Institutions and Regionalism

The current situation of international order is creating an increasing interest in regionalism. The old order that commanded international politics throughout the second half of the 20th century was based on a bipolar foundation where two superpowers' conduct defined the state of world affairs. This situation came to an end with the end of Cold War and the dissolution of one of the two antagonising powers – the USSR. Since then, we have been living in a period qualified by some as an "interregnum". According to Georg Sorensen, an interregnum is a period where some elements of the old order still subsist, and we have yet to witness the emergence of a new stable order (Sorensen, 2006). The interregnum is not a satisfying status quo and is characterised by a quest for a new order. Regional organisations are playing an increasingly important role in this quest for order. The summits and meetings of regional organisations are creating opportunities for their members to discuss and formulate their visions on international and regional order and communicate them to the international community. Here, the classical agora aspect of regional institutions comes to the fore. Jan Klabbers observes that international organisations have always had two aspects: a managerial aspect and a classical agora aspect. The first embodied the vision of international organisations as centred on particular certain task, namely the management of common problems, which should lead to a better world. This 'management-oriented, functionalist and progressive' aspect has been predominant in the analysis of the phenomenon of international organisation. The second aspect is based on the vision of international institutions as 'a classical agora: a public realm in which international issues can be debated'. An international institution is seen as 'a fora where states can meet, exchange ideas, and discuss their

common future'. The two aspects of international organisations have always coexisted in a dialectical manner, both complementing and criticising each other (Klabbers, 2005).

The agora aspect of institutions is appearing prominently in regionalism studies, both from European and Asian perspectives. According to Amitav Acharya, the interesting thing about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is not its ability to create a management-oriented regional structure like the one existing in Europe. Rather, the ASEAN should be judged by the fact that it created a framework wherein Southeast Asian states have been able to come together to discuss both international and regional issues and to articulate their vision. It has permitted the debate of regional identities and regional order preferences (Acharya, 2000). In Europe, newly launched research programmes are studying the European institutions' perspectives to articulate new visions for both global and regional order, based on multilateral and normative premises (see: EU-GRASP and MERCURY projects). Normative debates within and around regional institutions thus help states to articulate their own vision of global and regional affairs, both by reflecting cultural and value diversity in the world, and by enabling normative change in international society (Hurrell, 2007).

Regionalism as an Institutionalised Quest for Order

These theoretical and empirical studies highlight the importance of ideas, principles and rules in producing and sustaining regional orders. In this perspective, regionalism can be seen as a set of institutionalised processes within the framework of which a quest for regional order is pursued³. Adopting the definition of regionalism as a quest for order implies to focus on ideas and representations concerning the identities and normative self-images of actors and regional organisations as well as on the discourse of regional belonging. It also underscores the diversity of norms and pathways leading to regional orders.

Telos and Regional Identity

Actual studies of regionalism highlight the complex and fluid nature of telos of regionalisms. Telos is used here to denote "an ideal end point of integration" to which should lead regional integration processes (Van Langenhove and Marchesi, 2008). Achieving economic integration within a set of states is not the only kind of end point pursued by regional initiatives. Assuring regional governance of public goods or attaining the status of an actor in

³ The term "institutions" in International Relations literature is used both to denote an international organisation (Schermers and Blokker, 2004) and a set of habits and practices shaped towards the realisation of common goals (Bull, 1977). In this article, "institution" is used in its first, restricted meaning referring to international organisation.

international relations is also increasingly figuring among the objectives of regionalisms (Van Langenhove and Marchesi, 2008). Highlighting these differences is important for the analysis and comparison of regional processes around the world. In particular, focusing on regionalisms as international actors necessitates an elaboration on the concept of regional identity. The latter helps to account for regional actors trying both to articulate their own image in the international realm and to make sense of the nature of their counterparts. A descriptive approach to regions, focusing on their physical, social or cultural features, is not adequate for the explanation of the dynamics of the influence level of regional actors. Physical features of regions should not be confused with the normative image regions elaborate and circulate for themselves (Paasi, 2009). These normative self images and the long term development strategies of regional organisations play an important role shaping and defining the nature and behaviour of regional institutions and their member states at domestic, regional and global levels (Acharya, 1997; Beeson and Jayasuriya, 1998; Beeson, 2005; Paasi, 2009). Focus on regional identity also stimulates substantial debate concerning the politics of inclusion and exclusion within regional frameworks as well as the discourse of regional (non-) belonging.

Norms and Pathways of Regional Order

The idea of order presumes that the behaviour of actors follows more or less stable rules and principles. An extensive part of the debate on regional order concerns the identification of major norms which should guide the behaviour of regional organisation's members both vis-à-vis each other and towards the outside world. Regionalism initiatives are often seen as frameworks which go beyond the logic of power and hegemony. They enable the building of relations among a particular set of states on the basis of principles of democracy and equality (Hettne, 2008). However, the need be certain of coherent collective action necessitates negotiations concerning the distribution of roles and responsibilities among these states. These negotiations also concern the pathways leading to desired regional order preferences. Depending on the nature of the task, on the capacities and normative political visions of member states, the outcomes of these negotiations carry some elements of more or less differentiated hierarchy (Lake, 2009; Goh, 2007). The presence of hierarchy poses the question of agency. In a hierarchical setting, who holds the agency? One group attributes the agency to powerful actors and sees weaker states as receivers of roles and beneficiaries of regional orders designed by major powers (Ikenberry, 2001; Lake, 2009). Others attribute weaker or smaller states with a greater agency role as these countries have the potential to resist, accommodate or even modify pressures originating from external powerful actors (Acharya, 2003; Acharya, 2007). The question of hierarchy is also closely linked to that authority and power. Does the hierarchical

standing of one powerful actor rest on power alone or whether its dominant position enjoys a greater or lesser degree of legitimacy and authority among other participating states (Acharya, 2007; Lake, 2009). Another important grouping of the literature concerns the pathways leading to regional order. The nature and the state of intraregional relations as well as prevailing principles of conduct across the region influences whether the quest for regional order proceeds along the lines of conflict, cooperation, or integration (Alagappah, 2003; Acharya, 2007).

2. Emerging Eurasian regional order: Dynamics of Post-Soviet Regionalism

Post-Soviet space is not an unexplored space to regionalism studies. This interest stems mainly from the creation of a number of regional organisations regrouping a number of post-Soviet republics. Among them are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the now defunct Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), GUAM (bringing together Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Single Economic Space project. These are institutional attempts to (re)strengthen economic and political integration among countries which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Post-Soviet countries are also involved in regional institution building with countries beyond the post-Soviet space. The most prominent example is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, bringing five post-Soviet states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and China together.

Discussions Around Central Asian Regional Integration

A substantial part of this regionalism debate is centred around the Central Asian region, which is defined as comprising five post-Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. From the early 1990s, when the leaders of above mentioned countries announced their intention to create a Central Asian regional integration institution, outside of the frameworks that included Russia or China, there have been substantial discussions around Central Asian regionalism. However, after a decade of political and academic discussions, the expected Central Asian Cooperation Organisation failed to take-off and subsequently disappeared. This led some observers of Central Asian regionalism to point to the existence of Central Asian “regional non-cooperation pathology” (Spechler, 2000). Combined with the description of “a region of almost triumphant authoritarianism” (Panarin, 2000), Central Asia thus seemed to be a regional space with thin chances of becoming an integral regional cluster of global governance. Following this assessment, subsequent studies increasingly focused on the involvement of external actors (mainly Russia, China, and USA)

as geopolitical contenders in Central Asian regional space and the impact of their relationships on the evolution of the region (Rumer et al., 2007; Flikke and Wilhelmsen, 2008). According to this perspective, the continuing existence of regional organisations other than CACO, namely the Eurasian Economic Community, Collective Security Treaty Organisation or Shanghai Cooperation Organisation does not contradict the idea of "non-cooperation pathology" of the Central Asian states because these regional structures are seen as lacking substance (Allison, 2008) and consisting of rhetoric for foreign policy purposes (Pomfret, 2009). They are also a function of the political alignments of Central Asian states with the great powers surrounding the region or their concerns for regime survival and protection (Allison, 2008; Collins, 2009). Russia and China are "other" to the Central Asian region (Tolipov, 2004) and these organisations are the products of outside-in agencies of external powers (Kazantsev, 2008a).

From Central Asian Regional Integration to Eurasian Regional Order?

Contrary to these affirmations, the thesis underlined by this article is that the existence of the EurAsEC and other organisations is a sign of more fundamental changes taking place in the level of 'regionness' and regional identity at the level of both post-Soviet and Central Asian spaces. Using the main elements of the regional order framework outlined in the first part, I will highlight some developments concerning identity, norms and pathways of post-Soviet regional order initiated by the creation and evolution of EurAsEC. The main idea is that the creation of EurAsEC has initiated a set of processes, sometimes referred to as the 'Eurasian integration space', which could lead to the emergence of new regional order in post-Soviet space. This regional order has not yet consolidated, but it is based on different ideas and underpinnings in comparison to other post-Soviet frameworks, like those of the CIS and Central Asia. Aside from the similarity of membership and geographical scope, Eurasian regional order is informed by the processes of the CIS and Central Asia, but it does not necessarily overlap with those two in all domains.

What is the Eurasian Integration Space?

First of all, there is a need for clarification of the term "Eurasian integration space" as these words can refer to different phenomena depending on the context. "Eurasian space" (Nazarbayev, 2009) or "Eurasian integration" (Vinokurov, 2008) is frequently used to denote political processes in post-Soviet space centred around the Eurasian Economic Community. As such it differs from the concept of wider Eurasian integration which is mainly used for establishing transcontinental linkages between infrastructure and transportation systems in the whole Eurasian continent (see for ex.: Emerson and Vinokurov, 2009). It is also distinct from "Eurasianist" discourses used

within identity debate for Russia of which the most passionate representative is Aleksandr Dugin. The latter has developed a complex geopolitical theory called “Eurasianism (Evraziystvo)” or “Neu-Eurasianism (Neo-Evraziystvo)”, the main idea of which is the quasi-eternal teleological confrontation between a Continental power (represented actually by Russia) and a Maritime power (represented by USA) (Shlapentokh, 2007; see also the personal website of Aleksandr Dugin www.dugin.ru). In this article the “Eurasian idea” is mentioned with respect to EurAsEC processes. Even if Dugin refers to EurAsEC as an instrument in geopolitical confrontation, his theses are not necessarily shared by the founders and participants of Eurasian Economic Community, which usually enjoy constructive relations with both Russia and the USA. Eurasianism for them stems from the need to build cooperative relationships rather than confrontation.

The Eurasian Economic Community and Central Asia

The Eurasian Economic Community has a clear mandate to create common customs borders among its member States (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan), to elaborate on a common foreign economic policy, tariffs and price policy and other mechanisms needed for common market. The treaty on the establishment of Eurasian Economic Community was signed on October 10, 2000 in Astana. The treaty is heir to the Treaty on the Customs Union, involving all five members of EurAsEC, which was initiated in 1995. EurAsEC’s Central Asian component is substantial (Kazantsev, 2008b). Three out of five EurAsEC member states are Central Asian states. Russia itself had adhered to the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation in 2004 which led to the dissolution of CACO within EurAsEC in 2005. Importantly, N. Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan, has been, perhaps, the most persistent and dynamic promoter of the idea of Eurasian integration since the early 1990s. It can be said that despite the similarities of causes of involvement of Belarus and Central Asian countries within Eurasian integration space, the dynamics of their involvement evolves rather independently. The future of each party’s involvement depends on their individual relations with Russia. Because of this, the involvement of Belarus will not be covered in this article. I will concentrate on Central Asian perspectives on Eurasian integration space⁴. Closer attention to discussions within and around EurAsEC helps us to highlight the main ideas and aspirations underwriting regional integration in post-Soviet space. It is also interesting to see which pathway post-Soviet integration is following.

⁴ *The same differentiation is operated concerning the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). CSTO is considered as having three distinct components united around Russia: Russia–Armenia; Russia–Belarus; and, Russia–Central Asia.*

Eurasian Integration Space: A New Dynamic Region in World Politics

One of the advantageous aspects of EurAsEC compared to other post-Soviet regionalisms probably lies in the fact that it was able to formulate a coherent and specific objective and to articulate a relatively benign image. It gradually became associated with a clear final objective: the creation of a common market, beginning with the Customs Union. In comparison, the Commonwealth of Independent States has never been able to strike a balance between aspirations and hopes on the one side, and the realities on the other side. Despite official affirmations that the CIS would lead one day to reintegration of post-Soviet space, observers rightfully point to incoherencies existing in it since its creation. First of all, right from its creation, the CIS was identified for what it is not, not for what it is (Tolipov, 1999). As early as in 1994, U. Kasenov was noting that the CIS was in fact designed as a 'mechanism for civilised divorce' (Kasenov, file with the author). This point of view was reflected by V. Putin's remarks saying that the CIS has never been associated with grand projects and it has been designed to alleviate the consequences of separation of post-Soviet republics. In this, the CIS has realised its mission (Knyazev in The Proceedings of Khojand conference, 2007). It has also been harbouring too many contradictory, even conflicting dyads within its framework (Russia–Georgia, Russia–Ukraine, Armenia–Azerbaijan); centrifugal subgroups (the so-called GU(U)AM countries); as well as states with a restrictive and rigid approach to the idea of efficient integration (Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). These factors could be at the origin of reputation the CIS processes has as an "ink on paper" integration (Libman, 2008).

As for the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), its earlier precedents started with strong rhetoric about regional integration, but the evolution of its name shows that its member states hesitated between cooperation and integration. Many projects are associated with the CACO and its predecessors. However, leaders have never been able to reach accord on priorities among these projects as well as the implementation of agreed projects (Institute for Public Policy, 2007). Another incoherency within CACO and which led to difficulties with defining attainable objectives was that it was associated with too many ideas like balancing Russia, attaining unity among Central Asia, integrating world markets, security in Afghanistan, and the problem of Aral. CACO was a regional organisation mostly concentrated on presidential summits. And, during the summits of CACO, economic issues were sidelined by discussions of security challenges or the problems with the environment and energy (see for example, the record of Dushanbe summit of CACO in October, 2002: Press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2002). It was not able to differentiate between objectives and to rank them. This has diverted the institutional resources of the organisation which were already very scarce. Moreover,

after almost 20 years of discussions around Central Asia, its image remains still associated with problems and negative depictions. Additionally, Central Asia and other denominations (Greater Central Asia, etc) are all closely linked to security externalities emerging from Afghanistan. An alternative concept used to define the region: Greater Central Asia was usually mixed with that of the Greater Middle East. In other words, the term 'Central Asia' has become a synonym of potential source of threat for major countries in the West (Kazantsev, 2008a: 111; see also Golunov, 2003).

EurAsEC differed from both of them. First of all, its creation despite the presence of other regional organisations with overlapping memberships (CIS, CACO, and SCO) was explained by the necessity for real integration (Primbetov, 2004). In avoiding the path towards inefficiency taken by its peers in the post-Soviet space, reducing the scope of integration aims was determined as one of the main factors determining the success of the Eurasian integration space (Cherkasov, 2006). EurAsEC also inherited (but in a more coherent way) the idea of multispeed integration from the CIS. The concept of multispeed integration has been used to describe the CIS. However, this concept does not describe correctly the presence of different sub-groupings within the CIS (Bremmer and Bailes, 1998). The CIS was not a framework consisting of multispeed integrationist groups, but it consisted of several centrifugal groups as well as conflicting dyads. In the case of EurAsEC, the multispeed concept is more relevant where Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan realistically harbour aspirations to join the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan created within EurAsEC framework whereas the latter group, at least officially, intends to help the former to realise this objective of adherence to the Customs Union. EurAsEC also combines aspirations to modernisation (Euro-component) with concerns of stability (-Asian component) preoccupying the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia. It has been promoted by Nazarbayev as "a very serious concept for the post-Soviet era" with "its logical sources in world practice" and which "will in the end win over the minds of the people". (Nazarbayev quoted in Brzezinski and Sullivan, 1997: 354) As a result, EurAsEC is considered as the most promising among the regional integrationist structures in Eurasia. A longside governmental efforts, several civil structures have been created to advance the Eurasian idea. The Eurasian club of scientists, Eurasian Media Forum, Eurasian Academy of Television and Radio, and Eurasian Association of Universities are meant to work towards the creation of a common information space and to develop the cultural-humanitarian dimension of Eurasian integration. The Eurasian Community is based on equality, voluntary participation (*dobrovolnost*) and pragmatism (Nazarbayev, 2009). Eurasian integration is real while Central Asian integration still remains a myth (Deutsche Welle, 2009).

Shifting Regional Identities of Post-Soviet Countries

The inconsistencies of the CIS and CACO mentioned above led to the consolidation of regional identities associated with these two organisations. The CIS is seen in the literature as an inapt organisation lacking any implementation. It has also been described, from the outset, as a Russian attempt to rebuild the Soviet Union. Declarations and opinions of Russian officials and analysts attributing imperial, neoimperial or hegemonic grand designs to post-Soviet Russia consolidated this perspective (Tsimburski, 1993; Chubais, 2003; Trenin, 2006; Shlapentokh, 2007). The other aspect of regional identity of the CIS is that it is associated with actual and latent conflicts (Armenia-Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, etc). The CACO has always been associated with the image of Central Asia as a region harbouring high conflict potential, or in the words of Z. Brzezinski, a candidate to become a "Eurasian Balkans" (Brzezinski, 1997). In the regionalism literature it was described as "a weak subcomplex of the Russian regional security complex" under high geopolitical pressure (Buzan and Wæver, 2003), or as a "preregional area in which the U.S. and Russia competes for influence" (see Björn Hettne in Telo, 2007). Both of these organisations were seen thus as incoherent blocks, lacking the opportunity to become regional and global actors, and embedded in a quasi-permanent conflicting and unstable environment.

EurAsEC suffers relatively less from these kind of stereotypes in world politics. The economies composing EurAsEC have all been registering dynamic economic performances (Kudrin's interview to *Izvestia*). From the perspective of Central Asian states, Eurasian integration space as finality represents a chance for modernisation and even Europeanisation. Some Kazakh representatives have clearly contrasted the modern and European nature of Eurasian integration to the underdeveloped and conflicting collection of 'stans' (see publications by the International Institute for Modern Politics of Kazakhstan www.iimp.kz). This helps them to craft an image of Eurasian duo, trio or quartets holding considerable assets which will permit them to become an important and influential bloc in world economy and also to aspire to become actors.

Who is "The Other" of Central Asian Countries?

A recent poll carried out by the Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM) inquired on the perceptions of friendliness vis-à-vis foreign countries among the populations of post-Soviet countries. According to its results, Russia was identified as friendly country by absolute majority of the population in Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan – 67%, Kyrgyzstan – 74%, Tajikistan – 89% and Uzbekistan – 74%. Major segments of populations had also favourable opinion concerning a union with Russia (WCIOM, 2008). This poll indicates that despite the Central Asian discourse, Russia is seen as a

part of the region. Another poll conducted among Central Asian experts tried to determine with which countries Central Asian states should develop regional projects. 50% of respondents identified regionalism with Russia (EurAsEC and CSTO) as a priority for countries of Central Asia in addition to exclusive Central Asian regionalism. Other regional groupings including China, Turkey or Muslim countries received 5% or less of experts' favourable opinions (Abdrakhmanova, file with the author). These findings highlight the need to question the established idea that Russia (and its promotion of Eurasianism) is considered as an external powerful element threatening the identity of the Central Asian region.

Kazakhstan does not consider itself an exclusively Central Asian country any more and increasingly asserts its Eurasian identity (Institute for Public Policy, 2007). Recent formulations emerging both from official and scholarly circles of Kazakhstan provide the following reading. Kazakhstan considers itself as a country bordering Central Asia, but not as a Central Asian state (Nazarbayeva, 2003). Central Asia is a region from which different kind of threats emanate that could eventually permeate Kazakhstan (Jukeev and Kasenova, 2007). The way to prevent this from happening is an orientation towards Europe (see programmes like Kazakhstan-2030, Path to Europe). For this, Kazakhstan needs Russia's support. The latter will also help Kazakhstan address the challenge of China (Jukeev and Kassenova, 2007). At the same time, Kazakhstan sees Central Asia as a platform where it can practice international leadership (Jukeev and Kasenova, 2007). According to observers, the will for regional leadership and the strategy to develop its international standing are the real motives behind Kazakhstan's recent proposals for Central Asian regional integration (Omarov, 2008). Thus, the 'Eurasian' label better describes Kazakhstan's position in the world than the 'Central Asia' denomination (see publications by the International Institute for Modern Politics of Kazakhstan www.iimp.kz). Moreover, Kazakhstan has played a key role in incorporating Eurasianism ideas to the debate over the Eurasian Economic Community (Kazantsev, 2008a: 48). This differentiation of Kazakhstan from Central Asia reminds one that the "Middle Asia and Kazakhstan" formula could still be relevant (For a similar conclusion, see Kazantsev, 2008a:50).

In Kyrgyzstan, Russia has a special place both in terms of economic, political interactions and in terms of the public imagination. Strategic interaction with Russia is identified as the main axis of foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan while the achievement of a common market with the EurAsEC framework is considered among the long term interests of the country (conception of the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan, available at www.ia-centr.ru). Importantly, Russia is considered having played important role in the formation of Kyrgyz statehood. Kyrgyz tribes first sought the help of Russia in countering the Djungar expansion from China's territory to Central Asian

territories in the 18th century which led to the establishment of the Russian protectorate over Kyrgyz lands. Later, when Tzar Russian domination was replaced by Soviet rule, a republican level administrative unit was created around Kyrgyz ethnics. According to Askar Akayev, the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, the creation of the Kyrgyz autonomous oblast within Russian Soviet republic 'prevented the ethnic assimilation (*pogloscheniye*) of Kyrgyz ethnics by other peoples' and became the basis for the independent Republic of Kyrgyzstan in the post-Soviet era. The Soviet period is also considered as an era of renaissance in the healthcare system, culture, education and science. Considering this, current geopolitical efforts to exclude Russia from the Central Asian region would be short-sighted and not respect the realities of the region (Akayev, 2003). Moreover, Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian country which still maintains, at an official level, the thesis of 'voluntary incorporation' of Kyrgyz ethnics to the Russian Empire during the 18–19th centuries (Kazantsev, 2008a).

The main attraction of the Eurasian integration concept for Tajikistan is twofold. The first reason is directly linked to questions of regional identity and belongingness. Tajik authors increasingly voice concerns about their country's uneasy and uncomfortable situation within an exclusively Central Asian framework (Abdulla, 2007). Beside Tajikistan's uneasy relationships with Uzbekistan, there are two more reasons of a more substantial nature for this stance. First, Tajikistan sees Central Asia in terms of "Turkestan" and cannot associate itself with this concept. Taking into account the wide circulation (sometimes with official support) of the 'genocide of Tajik ethnics by Uzbeks' thesis which sees the dynamics of Turkic peoples as a threat to its identity, this is a strong reason preventing Tajikistan's acceptance of the Central Asian regional identity (Masov and Djumaev, 1991). This perception led to the situation where it is Uzbekistan, not Russia as in the neighbouring countries, which plays the role of 'the other', that of the outside enemy (Khudoinazar, 2005; Kazantsev, 2008a). This constant preoccupation with the "ethnic security" of Tajiks largely predetermines Tajikistan's response to any further projects of Central Asian integration in a negative way (Regnum Agency, 2008). In parallel to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan also sees the Russian rule in Central Asia as the key factor which prevented the "real threat of physical destruction of Tajik people" (Masov, 2003). However, if the Soviet period is considered as a milestone in the history of Kyrgyz statehood, Tajikistan traces its statehood traditions to the Samanids state ruled by Tajik (Persian) elites which included some parts of Central Asia during the 9–10th centuries. According to Tajik historians, Central Asia had already established commercial relations with Kyiv Russia during the Samanide period, mainly due to exchanges between Russian and Tajik traders (Masov, 2003). The second reason leading to drawing Tajikistan closer to the Eurasianist idea is pragmatic. Tajikistan needs large scale

investments. However, due to the small scale of its national market and its disadvantageous geographic and geoeconomic position, as well as the civil war which shook the country early in the post-Soviet era, it was in a less advantageous position to attract foreign investments. Actually, none of its Central Asian neighbours can provide the needed capital. In this perspective, participation in Eurasian frameworks would help Tajikistan to address two issues at once: prevent itself from becoming a Tajik enclave in an overwhelmingly Turkic environment, and, secondly, to hope for Russian investments. These two factors are indeed being advanced as conditions of Tajikistan's active participation within the Eurasian integration space: Eurasian idea can be accepted by the Tajiks on the condition that it would not be limited to a Turco-Slavic Union and that Eurasianism would not consist of solely ideas and ideology but it would translate into real flows of investments and economic, technical and technological cooperation (Asadullayev, 2010).

Naturally, Russia's place in the imagination of other Central Asian countries outside the Eurasian integration project does not match the positive image Russia enjoys in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Turkmenistan has always been careful to not to irritate Russia but at the same time has remained outside Russian-dominated regional organisations. Russia is also attributed the image of coloniser and outside enemy (Kazantsev, 2008a). The case of the dynamics of relationships between Russia and Uzbekistan is more complex. In the early post-Soviet era, Uzbekistan was identified as a candidate to regional hegemony (Bzezinski, 1997; Bohr, 2004) and as a rival to Russia in Central Asia (Kazantsev, 2008a). On the other hand, Russia is identified as the coloniser in the Uzbek public imagination. However, these factors should be weighed in comparison with other more rational factors. Russia is not depicted in exclusively negative terms. Russia is a source of investments, a direction for Uzbek labour migration, and a security provider in Central Asia. The favourable attitude of Uzbekistan's population towards Russia and Russians was reported in previous paragraphs. The reasons for difficult relationships between two countries lie more in the mixture of identity and realist perspectives. Uzbekistan does not consider itself as Eurasian country. It has always claimed its Asian and Eastern identity. Secondly, for Uzbekistan, Russia is a definite outsider in Central Asia. The involvement of Russia in Central Asian structures is seen as an anomaly and a strike against Central Asian 'regionness' (Tolipov, 2005). Thirdly, Uzbekistan sees Central Asian regional politics in pure realist terms and holds to the balance of power politics. It considers itself a necessary balancer of Central Asian region. In the words of Uzbek analysts, "careful position of I. Karimov is dictated by one main factor: a will to keep balance in an interdependent regional security system. The role of balancer profits all parties" (Azizova and Khasanov, 2001; Khasanov, 2005). For this reason, the involvement of Russia should be balanced by cherishing relationships with other powers. At the same time, Russia could

play the role of an element for the balance of power. This accounts for the temporary adhesion of Uzbekistan into EurAsEC as well as the intention of Uzbekistan to invite U.S. representatives as observers to the SCO summit planned later this year in Tashkent.

Post-Soviet Perspectives on Sovereignty, Cooperation and Multilateralism

The difference between the active participants of integrationist projects (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and to some degree Tajikistan) and those who showed restrained reaction to regionalism projects (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) in the post-Soviet space in general and in Central Asia in particular was explained by either the personalities of the leaders of the republics or by the type of their regimes. However, a change of presidents in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in recent years did not introduce major corrections to positions of these countries vis-à-vis regional integration processes. On the other hand, recent observations point to increasing convergence of character between their political systems where the tendency towards strong presidential regimes is common to all Central Asian states (Torebayeva, 2009). What does account for the difference in approaches regarding regional cooperation and integration processes among them? The answer to this question may lie in subtle differences underlying the perspectives of these countries toward multilateralism combined with the presence of distinct perceptions regarding individual actors' positions within the regional order.

The choice between cooperation and integration pathways depends on the states' stance on the issue of sovereignty. Today, we have differentiated approaches to sovereignty among the countries in the Eurasian/Central Asian space. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan hold a strict and even rigid approach to sovereignty while Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have a more or less flexible approach. It was Uzbekistan who played an important role in transforming the Central Asian Economic Union into the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation thus confirming its accent on sovereignty. Uzbekistan repeatedly declared its position regarding international relations which, according to its representatives, can only be built on a basis of cooperation that would leave the state's sovereignty intact. According to Uzbekistan, the first priority in Central Asian relations in the post-Soviet space should be on ensuring sovereignty (Press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2002). Thus, Uzbekistan chooses internationalisation rather than regionalisation (Katzenstein, 2005) in its political relations with neighbours. This leads Uzbekistan to rely mostly on bilateral relations with individual great powers. If Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's choice to engage in multilateral frameworks with substantial effects on state sovereignty is more or less substantiated by their weak capacity and reliance on donors, Kazakhstan's choice towards flexible sovereignty

is interesting. Kazakhstan is a major economic and financial player in the region. It also has substantial military and technological capacity. However, they seem to be going beyond purely realist thinking and willing to participate in multilateral cooperation frameworks with incidences on sovereignty. Kazakh representatives often voice the opinion that “in the contemporary world, the role of international organisations (communities) is greater than ever and it is impossible to be sure of the future without strengthening multilateral relations” (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 2002). In the post-Soviet space, Kazakhstan adopted a proactive stance on the issues of integration from the beginning. It is actively involved in the development of the Customs Union within EurAsEC with supranational prerogatives.

Perceptions on Hegemony and Hierarchy in the Eurasian Regional Order

Russian hegemony is an established fact in the post-Soviet area. The success of post integration from the outset depended on two interrelated factors: to what extent other states were willing to accommodate Russian hegemony and to what extent Russia was willing to carry the burden of being the motor of modernisation for small post-Soviet countries. Despite affirmations to the contrary, Central Asian states do not just see Russia as a threat. As explained in previous sections, for them Russia is an opportunity to continue the modernisation process that began during the Soviet period. They also associate Russia with the development of statehood and sovereignty in their countries. Kazakhstan’s Eurasianism accords a special place to the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. Russia is considered as Kazakhstan’s key strategic partner and plays an essential role in fulfilling Kazakhstan’s long-term development projects. More precisely, close cooperation and interactions with Russia are needed to realise Kazakhstan’s aim of entering the ranks of fifty most competitive economies of the world (Asia Strategy). Kazakhstan’s “path to Europe” also passes through Russia. By orienting itself towards Europe, Kazakhstan also intends to push Russia in the same direction (Jukeyev and Kasenova, 2007). As a result, Kazakhstan and Russia are becoming ‘mutually bound’ countries within the frameworks of both EurAsEC and the Central Asian region (Asia Strategy, 2007). In the case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the positive image Russia plays in the (official) public imagination was noted in the section above. This factor, combined with the fact that Russia has until recently been the sole source of large scale investments and credit for these small states without natural resources, means that Russian hegemony is perceived less negatively. Both countries see Russia as the natural leader of Eurasia (Akayev, 2004; Asadullayev, 2010). As the small states in the region, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are more afraid of intraregional hegemony, in the example of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, than Russian hegemony (Bohr, 2004). It is the source of investment for economic development as well as the protective element against Uzbekistan and eventually Kazakhstan’s hegemony. These are two elements necessary for

maintaining the sovereign statehood of these countries. Does this transform Russian hegemony into a hierarchy with elements of authority and legitimacy in Eurasian integration space (Lake, 2009)? One can answer positively to this question with some reservations. If the Russian presence still holds more positive outcomes for Central Asian countries, this does not equal complete hierarchy for Russia in the region. Their position can be explained as follows: they choose to accommodate Russian hegemony, but this does not mean that their choice is dictated by Russia or by the absence of alternatives. As noted in the work of Kazantsev, the Central Asian space is being offered different regional order designs by several external powers. In particular, the emergence of a new regional order around China is quite possible in coming years (Galamova, 2007). Moreover, they can develop greater or lesser effective resistance to outside-in regional projects as was the case with the reactions by Central Asian republics to the Greater Central Asia project put forward by the USA. Additionally, in siding with Russia in its regionalist projects, they also help Russia to secure itself from threats. There is a rational economic aspect in siding with Russia as trading with this country is considered more advantageous for the growth and structure of economies of Central Asia than trading with China (Paramonov and Stokov, 2007). Uzbekistan's perspective here also differs from its neighbours. For Uzbekistan, Russia is an outsider in Central Asia. Russia's presence should be necessarily balanced by other powers. In case intraregional balancing becomes impossible, Uzbekistan is actively involved in different regional organisations thus trying to develop a policy of institutional balancing. Incidentally, Eurasianism in this context is identified as Russian hegemony by Uzbek analysts (Tolipov, 2006).

Russia and Kazakhstan: Integration Tandem or Two Distinct Integration Centres?

According to regionalism theories, integration is more likely to occur when there is "a benevolent leading country within the region seeking integration" which is ready both to be motor and provider of resources for the advancement of integrationist projects (Mattli, 1999). This role model can be claimed either by an individual country or a set of states which would constitute the integration core or integration centre within a given region. In the case of the Eurasian integration space, the combination of Russia and Kazakhstan tends to fit this condition. Russia and Kazakhstan are increasingly identified as the integration core within EurAsEC. Kazakhstan and its President are perhaps the most consistent and staunch supporters of regional integration in the post-Soviet area. N. Nazarbayev has always promoted the idea of closer integration with Russia, first of all, and with other CIS countries. Materialisation of these expectations has depended largely on Russia (Nazarbayev in Brzezinski and Sullivan, 1997: 178-181). During the early 1990s, Russia did not actively respond to Kazakh president's repeated calls to play the role of core of effective integration. However, the situation

has changed since the early 2000s when Russia started to rationalise and consolidate its Central Asian policy (Kazantsev, 2008b). Since then Russia and Kazakhstan have been active supporters of and participants in several post-Soviet regional projects. These two 'mutually bound' partners are showing willingness to "go along the path of integration" by initiating innovative integration projects (Nazarbayev, 2001). According to observers, the "stable partnership between Russia and Kazakhstan is actually acting as a motor for the Customs Union" recently initiated within the framework of EurAsEC (Regnum Agency, 2010). The role of Kazakhstan in Eurasian integration processes is not however limited to its status as a privileged partner of Russia. It is emerging as the second independent centre of regional integration and regionalisation across Eurasia (Vinokurov et al. 2010). As a result of favourable macroeconomic performances, notably based on economic liberalisation and high rate of FDI flows, Kazakhstan has transformed into a major economic and financial player in the post-Soviet space (Libman, 2008). This is, in turn, attracting large numbers of migrant workers to Kazakhstan from neighbouring countries (Vinokurov et al., 2010; Libman, Vinokurov, 2010).

Conclusions

One of the dominant features in literature on Central Asia is its outside-in approach as well as the fact that it attributes little or no agency to Central Asian states. An example of these is the work of Troitskiy and Kazantsev. If Troitskiy calls for regional concert between the U.S. and Russia to manage Central Asian affairs (Troitskiy, 2006), Kazantsev represents Central Asian politics as the efforts of foreign powers to either control the totality of the region or to grab some piece of it (Kazantsev, 2008a). The choice between the different models presented to Central Asian countries will be determined either by the volume of the power of the offering side or the historic-geographical features of Central Asian states. Left to themselves, Central Asian countries are attained by a regional non-cooperation pathology. There is a need to re-evaluate this approach in the light of previous discussions. There have been real breakthroughs in the case of EurAsEC. And, as can be seen from the discussion, not all of these efforts were realised under or due to Russian hegemony. Central Asian countries are willing and able to cooperate within the frameworks which fit their vision and political rationalities. However, what I discussed above shows that Central Asian countries articulate and exercise agency in their foreign policy choices with regard to regionalism projects. The fact that they advance different and sometimes divergent positions and ideas in these processes should not lead one to conclude to incoherence or the failure of Central Asia as a region. Another apparition of the agency of Central Asian countries lies in their exercise of choice between competing regional projects. In the case of Kazakhstan, and to a lesser degree in the case of Kyrgyzstan, conscious choice to orient towards long

term regional projects with Russia is the most evident. Tajikistan's choice is to some degree dictated by the fact that it cannot orient towards the Persian-speaking countries of Afghanistan and Iran. If this direction was more open, Tajikistan's orientation towards both Russia and Central Asia could be re-evaluated (Abdulla, 2007)

Secondly, how can we conceptualise the shift from Central Asian regional integration to the Eurasian regional order? What accounts for the merger of the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) with EurAsEC? Is it a change within the order or a change of the order itself (Alagappah, 2003)? There are two perspectives: if we consider the CIS framework still relevant then it can be viewed as a quality change within the order. But, if we consider that we go beyond the CIS perspective, then it could be interpreted as a change of the order. If we are to adhere to recent voices from analytical and policy-making circles about the necessities of going beyond 'post-Soviet' and related concepts, including the CIS, what we are witnessing today in the case of Eurasian integration space could well be announcing a change of the order and the emergence of new regional system.

First of all, these tendencies confirm that 'Central Asia' is not a static region with a set of weak states whose agency is predetermined by external factors exclusively. 'Central Asia' should rather be seen as a regional construct being constructed and de-constructed at the same time. As such, it coexists with other alternative concepts, in this case, the "Eurasian integration space". The choice before the concerned countries between these concepts is influenced not only by external factors but it is also conditioned by their ideas and perceptions regarding identity, norms and institutions. Positions of individual states can vary according to which concept is used for framing regional developments in the post-Soviet space. This can be observed in how to frame the Russian presence in these processes. Is Russian hegemony viewed in purely power-base and real political terms or is it associated with authority? There are also two perspectives: the Central Asian framework views Russia as an external hegemony while within the Eurasian framework Russian domination is coupled with authority. On the other hand, the 'Central Asia' perspective considers EurAsEC one of the contending external projects imposed on the small states of Central Asia. This conclusion however omits the substantial efforts by these small states to play an active, even proactive, role in the elaboration and development of EurAsEC. In order to avoid this caveat, there is a genuine need to frame some aspects of regional processes through a Eurasian regional order which acknowledges the internal aspects to Eurasian integration space developments.

Adopting a dynamic perspective helps to go beyond the static 'Central Asia' approach, to one which necessarily considers ongoing regional processes as full of incoherencies and pathologies. It also shows more understanding

and recognition to conscious choices of individual countries of the region in what regards visions of regional order, identity and pathways. The case of Uzbekistan helps to substantiate this idea. The lukewarm reactions by Uzbekistan to many regionalist ideas in the post-Soviet era, especially concerning the 'Central Asia' region were interpreted as a negative factor distorting Central Asian regionalism. As consequence, there is a tendency to try to involve Uzbekistan in regional projects built on principles which differ substantially from the political philosophy of Uzbek political elites. This is both undermining the efficiency of integration projects as well as introducing incoherency and uncertainty to regional processes. Firstly, this is interpreted by Uzbekistan and others as an attempt to maintain Russian hegemony. Secondly, Uzbekistan's political elite has always been sceptical toward organisational and integrationist ideas and methods (Sigov, 2009) and has constantly affirmed a bilateral approach in foreign policy (Saifullin, 2008).

These theses and arguments hence call for making a place for an "Eurasian integration space" in post-Soviet regionalism dynamics. Sticking to "Central Asian regional integration" does not help to account for the recent developments in the region. The Eurasian regional order should not be conflated with the sheer presence of Eurasian Economic Community. Regions and regional orders are not limited to regional organisations and cover wider ideas and perceptions concerning regional identity, norms and ideas. However, debates originated and elaborated around regional organisations could come to influence the evolution of regional identities and ideas. In the post-Soviet space, the creation and development of Eurasian Economic Community has initiated real debate and is leading to subtle shifts in what concerns regional identity and regional perceptions of post-Soviet and Central Asian countries.

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