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A Historical Analysis of the Failure of the Eurasian Economic Integration

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Abstract

Since the fall of the USSR, the development of the integration process has become a foreign policy priority of the former Soviet territory. However, Moscow has failed to achieve this goal: no established structure could lead to significant integration. This research provides a historical review of the Eurasian economic integration. Employing

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an analysis of the international agreements and treaties that were behind the activities of the Eurasian integration unions, we reveal the specific features of economic integration communities' evolution in the post-Soviet territory within the period from the Soviet Union collapse to the present date and assess their true fails and gains. The findings reveal that the Eurasian integration appears to have evolved mostly "on paper" in the form of various documents but has had no practical implementation. Its development was characterized by permanent cycles, which member countries attempted to overcome, establishing new integration entities. However, their interest gradually faded, making EAEU feel like the last attempt to implement a Eurasian integration processes.

Keywords: the Post-Soviet Space, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Russian Foreign Policy.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, comprehensive cooperation with the former Soviet republics has invariably been the top priority of Russian foreign policy. One of the major objectives of the Moscow administration in the post-Soviet space has been the promotion of integration processes that are designed to unite the newly independent states that surround Russia as a result of the ruin of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, after 30 years, Russia has not succeeded in establishing any structure that could integrate post-Soviet countries.

Therefore, Russian diplomacy has proved to be unable to meet one of the key objectives of the territory under consideration. What are the reasons for this, and is Eurasian economic integration possible in the way it is viewed in Russia? We will try to answer to these issues in this article.

The influence of the first ideological factor manifests itself in the conclusions that have been discussed by various experts. Thus, most Russian scholars magnify the significance of Eurasian integration,¹ while their Western counterparts² are sceptical about these achievements and are critical of them.

¹ Alexander Dynkin, Elena Telegina, and Gulnar Khalova, "Rol' Yevraziyskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soyuz v Formirovani Bol'shoy Yevrazii" [The Role of the Eurasian Economic Union in the Formation of Great Eurasia], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya [World Economy and International Relations]* LXII, no. 4 (2018): 5-24, DOI: 10.20542/0131-2227-2018-62-4-5-24 (accessed 21 June 2018); Ekaterina Shlapenko and Svetlana Stepanova, "Velikiy Shelkovyy Put' i Yevraziyskaya Integratsiya" [Great Silk Road and Eurasian Integration], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya [World Economy and International Relations]* LXII, no. 1 (2018): 43-52, DOI: 10.20542/0131-2227-2018-62-01-43-52 (http://doi.org/10.20542/0131_z-2227-2018-62-01-43-52).

² Laure Delcour, "Between the Eastern Partnership and Eurasian Integration: Explaining Post-Soviet Countries' Engagement in (Competing) Region-Building Projects," *Problems of Post-Communism* LXII, no. 6 (2015): 316-327, DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2015.1057075 (accessed 18 July 2018); Bruno S. Sergi, "Putin's and Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union: a Hybrid Half-economics and Half-political 'Janus Bifrons'," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* IX, no. 1 (2018): 52-60, DOI: 10.1016/j.euras.2017.12.005 (accessed 14 May

The influence of a second, psychological, factor is evident in the fact that researchers build up their assumptions based on their own impressions and their colleagues' statements, thereby missing a factual source base. Therefore, their works are overly emotional and often distort reality to some degree.³ It appears necessary to give an objective and unbiased assessment of the Eurasian economic integration unions that is free of any distortions.

The hypothesis of this research is that Eurasian economic integration has no future. In order to prove or challenge this statement we will address, in what follows, the following research tasks. Firstly, we will try to identify the main stages in the history of Eurasian economic integration development; secondly we will give the characteristics of each stage, determining the achievements and failures of Russian diplomacy in establishing Eurasian economic integration unions; thirdly we will point out the strengths and weaknesses of the unions under Moscow's patronage; and finally we will reveal the reasons behind the on-going failures in establishing Eurasian economic integration unions that are functioning in the economic sphere.

Eurasian economic integration implies integration processes in the economic sphere only of the post-Soviet territory, not across the entirety of Eurasia. This approach results from the perception of Eurasian integration by Russian authorities, expert and scientific communities, and the public at large.

2018); Richard Sakwa, "How the Eurasian Elites Envisage the Role of the EEU in Global Perspective," *European Politics & Society*, vol. XVII (2016): 4-22, DOI: 10.1080/23745118.2016.1171038 (accessed 11 August 2018); Hanna Smith, "Statecraft and Post-imperial Attractiveness: Eurasian integration and Russia as a Great Power," *Problems of Post-Communism* LXIII, no. 3 (2016): 171-182, DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2016.1145063 (accessed 15 April 2018); Jeanne Wilson, "The Eurasian Economic Union and China's Silk Road: Implications for the Russian-Chinese Relationship," *European Politics & Society* XVII (2016): 113-132, DOI: 10.1080/23745118.2016.1171288 (accessed 30 June 2018); Alena Vieira, "A Tale of Two Unions: Russia-Belarus Integration Experience and its Lessons for the Eurasian Economic Union," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32, no. 1 (2017): 41-53, DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2016.1211959 (accessed 20 September 2018); Anthony Rinna, "Yerevan's Choice: Armenia and its Integration into the Eurasian Customs Union," *Iran & the Caucasus* XVIII, no. 4 (2014): 395-404, DOI: 10.1163/1573384X-20140407 (accessed 30 May 2018); David Lane, "Post-socialist Regions in the World System," *European Politics & Society* XVII (2016): 46-66.

- ³ Ruslan Dzarasov, "The Global Crisis and Its Impact on the Eurasian Economic Union," *European Politics & Society* XVII (2016): 23-34, DOI: 10.1080/23745118.2016.1171272 (accessed 1 June 2018); Sean Roberts, "The Eurasian Economic Union: The Geopolitics of Authoritarian Cooperation," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* LVIII, no. 4 (2017): 418-441, DOI: 10.1080/15387216.2017.1415763 (accessed 15 June 2018); Sean Roberts and Ulrike Ziemer, "Explaining the Pattern of Russian Authoritarian Diffusion in Armenia," *East European Politics* XIV, no. 4 (2015): 21-42, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2018.1457525 (accessed 21 June 2018); Alexander Lukin, "Eurasian Integration and the Clash of Values," *Survival* LVI, no. 3 (2014): 43-60, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2014.920144 (accessed 21 June 2018).

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RUSLAN GABDRASHITOVICH SHAMGUNOV, LYUBOV ALEKSEEVNA BERDEGULOVA,
MILANA VLADIMIROVNA RAGULINA
“Post-Soviet integration” and “integration processes on the post-Soviet space”
were traditionally close in meaning, but were never synonymous concepts.

Methodology and empirical data

The methods used in the analysis include: an approach that evaluates the evolution of the idea of Eurasian economic integration and its applications providing a historical review ; a study of primary documents including international agreements and treaties behind the activities of the Eurasian integration unions; a statistical method, providing insight into economic activities of these unions; a historical approach, revealing common features and trends of Eurasian economic integration through accurate reconstruction of its real history; a comparative approach, enabling authors to make “vertical” and “horizontal” comparisons (in space and time); and an integrated view of the orientation and conclusions on the cyclic nature of European economic integration processes.

The theoretical basis of the research in question is provided by the realist paradigm of the theory of international relations. This theory focuses on the key role of nation states in modern international relations and their certain, sometimes contradicting, interests. Eurasian economic integration processes are considered through the analysis of foreign policy and interests pursued by member states of the Eurasian integration unions.

The primary data includes documents of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – the Alma-Ata Protocol, agreements establishing the CIS and the Economic Union, the CIS Statute, *Customs Union* of 1995–2000s Agreements on the Customs Union between Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Treaties on Deepening the Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Fields, on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space, Eurasian Economic Community, Common Economic Space 2003–2005, the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as integration projects by Nursultan Nazarbayev and Vladimir Putin.⁴

⁴ CIS, “Alma-Atinskaya Deklaratsiya” [Alma-Ata Protocol] signed on 21 December 1991, *Sodruzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1992): 15-16; CIS, “Soglasheniye o Sozdanii Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv” [Agreement Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States] signed on 8 December 1991, *Sodruzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1992): 6-8; CIS, “Dogovor o Sozdanii Ekonomicheskogo Soyuza” [Agreement Establishing the Economic Union] (signed on 24 September 1993 *Sodruzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government

The Evolution of Eurasian Integration

First steps on the way to Eurasian integration: ten years of missed opportunities

Despite the widespread opinion that the CIS was established as an integration union to substitute the USSR and was targeted at uniting former Soviet republics, the reality testifies to the opposite. The CIS had never had any functional mechanisms at its disposal that were aimed at real integration of member countries. It is noteworthy that there is no such term as “integration”

Information Bulletin I (1993): 20-30; CIS, “Ustav SNG” [The CIS Statute] signed on 22 January 1993, *Sodruzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1993): 17-29; EurAsEC, *Agreement on the Customs Union between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus of 6 January 1995*, accessed November 05, 2018, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/117>; “Soglasheniye Stran SNG o Tamozhennom Soyze” [Agreement of the CIS Countries on the Customs Union] signed on 20 January 1995, *Byulleten' Mezhdunarodnykh Dogovorov* [Bulletin of International Treaties] XVI (1995): 11-12; EurAsEC, *Treaty between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic on Increased Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Fields of 29 March 1996*, accessed November 05, 2018, <http://evrazes.com/docs/view/120>; Eurasian Economic Commission, *Agreement on the Customs Union and the Common Free Market Zone Dated February 26, 1999*, accessed December 05, 2018, http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/act/trade/catr/nontariff/Pages/Dogovor_26021999.aspx; EurAsEC, “Protokol o Prisoedinenii Respubliki Uzbekistam k Dogovoru ob Uchrezhdenii Evraziyskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soobshchestva” [Protocol on the Accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community] (signed on 25 January 2006), *Byulleten' Mezhdunarodnykh Dogovorov* [Bulletin of International Treaties] VI (2006): 5-6; EurAsEC, *Dogovor ob Uchrezhdenii Yevraziyskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soobshchestva ot 10 Oktyabrya 2000 Goda* [Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community signed on 10 October 2000], accessed December 15, 2018 <http://www.evrazes.com/print/docs/3>; President of Russia Official Website, *Kontseptsiya Formirovaniya Yedinogo Ekonomicheskogo Prostranstva* [Agreement and Concept establishing the Common Economic Space] signed on 19 September 2003, accessed December 14, 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/1716>; President of Russia Official Website, *Kontseptsiya Formirovaniya Yedinogo Ekonomicheskogo Prostranstva* [Agreement and Concept establishing the Common Economic Space] signed on 19 September 2003, accessed December 14, 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/1716>; EAEU, “Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union,” *EAEU Law Portal*, 29 May 2014, accessed March 05, 2018), https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/0043610/itia_05062014; Nursultan Nazarbayev, “O Sozdanii Yevraziyskogo Soyuza” [Draft Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Union of States], *Kazakhstanskaja Pravda* CXXXVI, no. June 7 (1994): 1-2; Vladimir Putin, “A New Integration Project for Eurasia: the Future Born Today,” *Izvestija* CLXXXIII, no. 4 October (2011): 1, accessed December 01, 2018, <https://www.rusemb.org.uk/press/246>; <https://iz.ru/news/502761>.

found in the first agreement establishing the CIS, which was signed on the 8th of December 1991,⁵ known as the *Belovezha Accords*, or in the *Alma-Ata Protocol* of 21 December 1991.⁶ In the CIS Statutes, signed on the 22nd of January 1993, “integration” is mentioned twice: as one of the CIS objectives (“comprehensive and balanced economic and social development of member states within the frameworks of common economic space, interstate cooperation and integration”) (art. 2), and as an operation guideline of the newly established organization (“development of mutually beneficial economic and technological cooperation, expanding integration processes”) (art. 3).⁷ However, the above-mentioned points are specified lastly, for accounting for their low significance with member states; CIS coordinating authorities are not entitled to any functions that would facilitate integration within this union.

In 1993, Russian authorities first considered reintegration of the post-Soviet republics to lead them out of the severe economic crisis. At that moment, after introducing a new national currency, the CIS started to fall apart. As a result, on the 24th of September 1993, leaders of eight out of the 11 CIS states (Armenia, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia, Tadjikistan, and Uzbekistan) signed the *Treaty on the Establishment of the Economic Union*, which should function parallel to the CIS, without being a member. Although evolution of integration processes between member states was not among the objectives of the new structure (art. 2), it was proclaimed as one of its fundamental principles (art. 4).⁸ Turkmenistan joined the *Economic Union Treaty* on December of the same year. Thereon, the development of the Union came to the end, since the member states failed to reach a consensus on working mechanisms of this community, set too contrasting tasks in foreign policy, and

⁵ CIS, “Soglasheniye o Sozdanii Sodrzhestva Nezavisimyykh Gosudarstv” [Agreement Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States] signed on 8 December 1991, *Sodrzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1992): 6-8.

⁶ CIS, “Alma-Atinskaya Deklaratsiya” [Alma-Ata Protocol] signed on 21 December 1991, *Sodrzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1992): 15-16.

⁷ CIS, “Ustav SNG” [The CIS Statute] signed on 22 January 1993, *Sodrzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1993): 17-29.

⁸ CIS, “Dogovor o Sozdanii Ekonomicheskogo Soyuzha” [Agreement Establishing the Economic Union] (signed on 24 September 1993) *Sodrzhestvo: Informatsionny Vestnik Soveta Glav Gosudarstv i Soveta Glav Pravitel'stv SNG* [The Commonwealth: CIS Council of Heads of State and Council of Heads of Government Information Bulletin] I (1993): 20-30.

feared excessive economic dependence on Russia, having partly lost their sovereignty.

After the failure of the Economic Union project, which was initiated by Russian president Boris Yeltsin and Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, the latter developed his own system of proposals for the prompt modernization of the CIS. In March 1994, Nazarbayev came forward with the idea of transforming the CIS into a more integrated alliance—the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In June 1994, he published the document titled *Project on the Formation of the Eurasian Union of States*.⁹ It stressed the idea of enriching the low-effectiveness of the CIS with a more powerful EAEU. The project highlighted the main objectives and principles of the new structure, as well as its structure and operating mechanisms. The priority missions that were assigned to it included comprehensive economic integration of member states and providing necessary conditions for their complex modernization. The EAEU was supposed to evolve into a state-like institution, with its own capital city, state symbols, and supranational bodies.

Obviously, Nazarbayev's proposal appeared topical enough and envisioned the transformation of the amorphous Commonwealth into a new regional organization that would be able to bring the relations between post-Soviet republics to a new effective level. Given the fact that by mid-1994 about half of the CIS countries were still prone to enhancing their contacts with Moscow and not all the ties were broken off, EAEU could turn into a viable alliance of states, including, besides Russia and Kazakhstan, such countries as Armenia, Belorussia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and, probably, "hesitating" Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

However, this failed to happen. Only two heads of states supported Nazarbayev's initiative: Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev and Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon. Russian authorities did not give any response to this initiative, thereby implying "no" in diplomatic terms. Moscow was reluctant to declare it openly. Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov even accused their Kazakh counterpart of populism, having criticized the suggested project as being an attempt to unite post-Soviet republics in a forced, rather than gradual way. Thus, the project of an economically determined Eurasian Union did not concretize.

Boris Yeltsin's administration's response to Nazarbayev's proposal was an alternative project of the Customs Union on the post-Soviet territory. The organization was supposed to ensure the initial level of economic integration for member states. At the first stage, the Moscow administration negotiated only with Minsk, thereby demonstrating to Alma-Aty that it would not tolerate any

⁹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, "O Sozdanii Yevraziyskogo Soyuz" [Draft Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Union of States], *Kazakhstanskaja Pravda* CXXXVI, no. June 7 (1994): 1-2.

breakthrough projects to be initiated by any country other than Russia itself. It is likely that Project Sapphir, which was successfully completed in November 1994 under Kazakh authorities, was the reason behind this. About 600 kg of highly enriched uranium acquired by Kazakhstan after the Soviet Union break-up was purchased by the USA in a highly confidential manner that was kept secret from Russia.

At any rate, on the 6th of January 1995, Russia and Belarus signed the *Agreement on the Customs Union*,¹⁰ aiming for a “Customs duo” – the first integration alliance with Moscow’s participation, functioning at a sub-regional level. Despite Yeltsin’s expectations, Nazarbayev did not show any resentment; on the contrary, on the 20th of January 1995, he joined the Customs Union, having enlarged it to become the “triple union.”¹¹ Thereon, Moscow authorized a gradual transition of the post-Soviet states to a “multi-speed integration”, wherein every country could independently determine optimal extent and spheres of interrelation with other states of the region, regardless of the Russian position. Moscow have previously strongly rejected this approach before, which would refuse financial assistance to the states, that were not actively participating in CIS activities

The Customs Union was rapidly developing in 1995–1999, even in the face of the economic crisis that hit the former Soviet Union republics in 1998, and the Russian August default of the same year. In 1996, Kyrgyzstan joined the Customs Union, followed by Tajikistan in 1999. The governing bodies of the Union developed and signed dozens of agreements, stipulating integration processes to reach a higher level – the level of a common economic space. The most significant of the agreements include: *The Treaty on Deepening Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Sphere* of 29 March 1996,¹² and the *Treaty on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space* of 26 February 1999.¹³

However, one insurmountable obstacle appeared before the union in question: it failed to provide practical implementation of the decisions taken, thus leaving the process of integration just at the level of intentions. While in the above-mentioned cases the responsibility for this was assigned to all post-

¹⁰ EurAsEC, *Agreement on the Customs Union between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus of 6 January 1995*, accessed October 12, 2018, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/117>.

¹¹ EurAsEC, *Agreement on the Customs Union of 20 January 1995*, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://evrazes.com/docs/view/118B>.

¹² EurAsEC, *Treaty between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic on Increased Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Fields of 29 March 1996*, accessed December 13, 2018, <http://evrazes.com/docs/view/120>.

¹³ EurAsEc, *Treaty on the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space of 26 February 1999*, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/128>.

Soviet republics, often preventing Russia from realizing its plans, the Customs Union format suggested deepening integration only between the states, oriented to rapprochement with Moscow. Therefore, setbacks of this alliance were basically caused by the reluctance and inability of Russia to carry out its duties. As a result, with the Presidency of Vladimir Putin in 2000, the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space had failed to be established.

The Eurasian Economic Community: only formal integration

Putin advocated for the transformation of the Customs Union into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) to draw the line under failures in Russian foreign policy under Boris Yeltsin's presidency and make the cooperation of the "Customs five" more official. The Eurasian Economic Community was established on the 10th of October 2000.¹⁴ Subsequently, the process of rapprochement between member states came to be called Eurasian, not post-Soviet integration, with the post-Soviet period of new independent states being considered as the decade of the 1990s. It is noteworthy that if Yeltsin denied the neo-Eurasian conception in many ways, because Nazarbayev was its active advocate, Putin, in contrast, felt free to openly support it, naming the Kazakh president as the author of many progressive ideas in this sphere. All this contributed to a more favourable climate for EurAsEC.

In 2000–2005 EurAsEC showed progressive development with positive trends. In contrast to the preceding years, Russian authorities were committed to filling the Union with specific content. The number of decisions taken by its institution decreased, but their practical implementation grew considerably. EurAsEC members expanded trade relations (the turnover between Russia and Belorussia increased from 9.3 to 15.8 billion dollars, between Russia and Kazakhstan from 4.4 to 9.7 billion dollars, between Russia and Kyrgyzstan from 191 to 544 million dollars, and between Russia and Tajikistan from 239 to 335 million dollars).¹⁵ A number of old economic relations were recovered and new ones were established, along with interregional cooperation. Labour mobility increased (Russian and Kazakh labour markets expanded recruitment from Belorussia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). In 2002, Ukraine and Moldova were granted observer status, while being very sceptical of any previous integration initiatives from Moscow.

¹⁴ EurAsEC, *Dogovor ob Uchrezhdenii Yevraziyskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soobshchestva ot 10 Oktyabrya 2000 Goda [Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community signed on 10 October 2000]*, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://www.evrases.com/print/docs/3>.

¹⁵ Russian Federal State Statistics Service, *Russia in Figures-2007: Statistical Handbook* (Moscow: Rosstat, 2007), 461, accessed November 27, 2018. http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b07_12/Main.htm.

Nevertheless, breakthrough results of the community were far from being so, even during that time frame. First, a major turnover increase between EurAsEC was related to the recovery of Russia and its partners after the crisis, ruining their economies for the past decade. In addition, global hydrocarbon prices rocketed during that time, while their trading was crucial in the turnover between Russia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan. Under these circumstances, neither could the range of traded goods be extended, nor could their trading balance be considerably improved.

Second, the share of EurAsEC countries in the total turnover of each member state was unlikely to go up (as it was with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), and even went down at worst (e.g. Russia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan). This was justified by the fact that most EurAsEC countries were rather more open to foreign markets than to their community partners (e.g., European Union states, Ukraine and China have traditionally been Russia's major trading partners, while its trade with other countries was rather limited and one-sided).

Third, the Russian government regarded EurAsEC as a transitional structure between the low-effective, pseudo-integrational communities of the 1990s and "true" integration projects, such as the Common Economic Space, and Economic Union of Member States. Therefore, Moscow did not consider it necessary to develop EurAsEC.

Fourth, Russian authorities hesitated about exactly which integration union of the post-Soviet territory was especially significant. For instance, in 2003–2004, Russia spared many efforts in order to establish a new integration alliance with Ukraine – the Common Economic Space (CES).¹⁶ This aspiration was conditioned by the desire of Moscow authorities to preserve their influence on Ukraine, its major economic partner and the country carrying out the main transit of Russian hydrocarbons to Europe. In order to engage Kiev in the Eurasian integration processes, Russia agreed to extend the boundaries of EurAsEC. By this, it is implied that EurAsEC and CES have always comprised three key states—Russia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan; Ukraine has not been an EurAsEC member, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not been CES members. In the course of its development, the CES would duplicate some EurAsEC functions, and even contradict it on some issues. However, Moscow was not jeopardized by such perspectives. This fact, together with the enthusiasm of Putin's administration in arranging the new alliance, showed to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that Russia does not consider them to be key partners and does not value their allied relations.

¹⁶ President of Russia Official Website, *Kontseptsiya Formirovaniya Yedinogo Ekonomicheskogo Prostranstva [Agreement and Concept establishing the Common Economic Space]*, signed on 19 September 2003, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/1716>.

Fifth, despite crucial changes in Russian diplomacy with the advent of Putin, Moscow could not escape accusations of “egoism” and “power supremacy” on the part of its partners.¹⁷ Such accusations often appeared to be well-grounded. For instance, foreign policy “deideologization”, as it was called in Russian diplomatic practice, implied Moscow’s attempts to get from its CIS partners (including those on EurAsEC) maximum advantages, political and economic concessions. Thus, Russian authorities refused to render economic and financial help to post-Soviet states, demanding that these states repay previous debts or transfer the ownership of their natural resources and industrial facilities of interest to Russian business. Economic pressure and even “trade wars” came into use by Russian diplomacy. In exchange for rendering economic preferences to its neighbours, Russia required unconditioned loyalty, and sometimes, even complete subordination to Russian interests.

These tendencies were especially noticeable with Russia–Belarus relations: while in December 1999, the countries viewed themselves as closest allies and even signed the *Treaty Establishing the Union State of Russia and Belarus*, in 2002 Russia demanded total or partial renunciation of sovereignty on the part of Belarus by transferring it to the bodies of the Union; having received point-blank refusal, Russia increased prices on the delivered natural gas. This led to a full-scale conflict in Russia—Belarus relations. Unfortunately, those were not isolated cases, and we wonder how this scenario could develop between military and political allies, members of several integration structures (besides EurAsEC, Russia and Belarus cooperate within the frameworks of *The Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO)). Though the question is likely to be left unanswered, Moscow’s acts towards Minsk led to the insecurity of EurAsEC partners. They clearly realized that being a partner of Russia does not guarantee any political or economic dividends. Thereby, their interest in developing Eurasian integration declined even more.

By all means, a rather high degree of dependence of EurAsEC members on Russia at that time did not allow them to refuse to participate in Eurasian integration processes. This view is justified by Uzbekistan joining EurAsEC by January 2006.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that since the Customs Union establishment, Tashkent gradually rejected participation in the work of this community, regarding it as a tool for strengthening Russian influence in Central Asia.

¹⁷ “Uzbekistan ne Khochet v Yedinoe Ekonomicheskoye Prostranstvo” [Uzbekistan Not to Join the Common Economic Space] (Unauthored), *Rosbalt Information Agency*, 5 December 2011, accessed December 11, 2018, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2011/12/05/920565.html>.

¹⁸ EurAsEC, “Protokol o Prisoedinenii Respubliki Uzbekistam k Dogovoru ob Uchrezhdenii Evraziyskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soobschestva” [Protocol on the Accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Treaty Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community] (signed on 25 January 2006), *Byulleten’ Mezhdunarodnykh Dogovorov* [Bulletin of International Treaties] VI (2006): 5-6.

However, after several disturbances, called “Andijan events,” in May 2005, in some regions of the Republic, Uzbekistan had no choice: Western countries’ calls for international investigation of the events, as well as sanctions imposed against Tashkent, threatened Uzbekistan with international isolation, and even overt extraneous interference in domestic affairs. This would have led to the collapse of Islam Kerimov’s authoritarian regime, and therefore Kerimov did not hesitate to bring his country under Russian protection.

It is noteworthy that Uzbekistan joining EurAsEC had ambiguous effects on this alliance. On the one hand, the community (CIS) was joined by the key member of the Central Asian region, and its role in global policy considerably exceeded the scales of its territory and economy. Given traditional pragmatism of Tashkent’s foreign policy, its joining EurAsEC proved relative effectiveness of this structure.

On the other hand, EurAsEC’s predecessor, the Customs Union, was initially established as the alliance of three most developed post-Soviet republics, sharing common views on the reforms carried out by them. With Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joining the Union, its structure started to blur, though leading countries could correct the existing imbalances by rendering full-scale assistance to Bishkek and Dushanbe. Uzbekistan joining EurAsEC completely ruined the inner balance of EurAsEC, as it was one of the poorest post-Soviet states with a population of over 25 million people, and had preserved government regulation of the economy. Thus, the community came to be split into the “core” of economically developed Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and the “periphery,” represented by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the latter making impossible the implementation of progressive projects within the whole community (establishing the full-fledged Customs Union and Common Economic Space).

Additionally, many EurAsEC members (Russia and Belarus, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) had substantive claims to each other. As a result, in 2006 EurAsEC started to plunge into crisis.

EurAsEC leaders had been searching for the ways out of this crisis for about a year. In October 2007, they declared their refusal to implement joint projects within the organization’s frameworks. As a result, the Customs Union was supposed to be established on the territory of three industrial republics—Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, while other countries were only keen to participate in the project. Legally, this decision enabled Moscow, Minsk, and Astana to negotiate over the Customs Union formation based on EurAsEC without establishing a new international unit. However, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan fell out of the alliance’s activities, losing interest in it.

In 2008–2009 EurAsEC faced some challenges that it failed to cope with. In August 2008, the organization did not express an official view on the Russian military operation against Georgia; during the Five-day War of 8–12

August, none of Russia's EurAsEC partners rendered it either any military or diplomatic assistance. (Subsequently, Russia managed to receive approval of its actions on the part of Belarus and Kazakhstan, with considerable pressure exerted on Minsk beforehand).

Then, at the end of 2008 and in early 2009, EurAsEC failed to adequately assess the scope of the global economic recession; as a result, no sensible measures were taken to assist member states with withstanding the looming storm. Under the crisis, almost all the joint projects within EurAsEC were suspended, and the organizations completely lost signs of being an integrated community.

Uzbekistan, which had not ratified most of the EurAsEC agreements by that time, announced a suspension of its participation in the alliance. Among the reasons, it named duplication of CIS functions by EurAsEC, and fierce disagreements on the preliminary requirements that were connected with joining it.

Meanwhile, the Customs Triplet, restored earlier, continued to carry out consultations on the formation of Customs Union and Common Economic Space based on EurAsEC. In November 2009, the presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed a package of agreements stipulating the introduction of a single customs tariff starting 1 January 2010, and the formation of common customs territory starting from 1 July 2010, to be fully implemented by 1 January 2012.

The process of establishing a Customs Union faced a number of obstacles on the way. Russia was most cautious, given that its market was systemically important in the new alliance. Kazakhstan went furthest in the implementation of the achieved agreements. Minsk associated perspectives of its participation to the Customs Union with general problems of Belarus–Russia relations, which were in deep decline. Nevertheless, the parties were able to meet the schedule of the Union formation, by introducing the new customs tariff in January 2010, and by forming a common customs territory in July 2010, introducing new legislation of the Common Economic Space in January 2012. Afterwards, the “Customs Triplet” went on to the next stage of Eurasian integration – the process of institutionalization of the Common Economic Space, scheduled for 1 January 2016.

Meanwhile, the Customs Union, as well as its predecessors, existed only on paper. The reasons were as follows: a wide range of seizures and limitations within the parties, falling out of the Customs Union proceedings; national interests prevailing over the union interests, resulting in inconsistent economic policy; regular destructive government interference into the market economy, characteristic of all member countries; a relatively low level of economic development of member countries, preventing them from taking advantage of the benefits from economic integration; and substantive controversies between the member states in oil, gas, and agriculture spheres,

regularly causing failures in the Customs Union and Common Economic Space functioning. Moreover, Russian authorities declared their path towards transforming the economic “core” of the EurAsEC into a more integrated structure – the Eurasian Union, thus causing strong resistance from Belarus and Kazakhstan. Consequently, political and ideological factors began to exercise a rather negative effect on the Customs Union work, which is detailed below.

The failure of The Eurasian Economic Union

Vladimir Putin presented the Prime Minister of the Russian Government the Eurasian Union reform project on The 3rd of October 2011 then.¹⁹ A formal reason was the forthcoming transition to a higher level of Eurasian integration (launching the Common Economic Space project with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan), but in a broader context, it was one of the principal guidelines of his political programme, developed for his participation in presidential election campaign in March 2012.

According to Vladimir Putin, the Eurasian Economic Union was to become an integration community that evolved from the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space. This union did not claim to be the “new Soviet Union”, nor did it confront other organizations in the post-Soviet space. The union’s objectives included enhancing economic and technological competitiveness of the member states and establishing a kind of geopolitical bridge between Europe and the Asia–Pacific region. The Eurasian Union was deemed to be a part of the common Big Europe, based on the universal integration principles and values of freedom, democracy, and market laws. The union was to develop gradually, without forcing Russian partners, and it was declared open for any countries concerned.²⁰

Putin’s project provoked a strong reaction within all the former USSR republics. The most detailed discussions took place in Russia and Kazakhstan, primarily at the expert community level. Other CIS leaders demonstrated restraint, apparently expecting specific steps from Moscow. Nevertheless, there were exceptions: the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, strictly stated that somewhere on the former USSR territory there are certain forces that are pursuing restoration of the former USSR empire, though in a new form.²¹ It was the first criticism addressed to Moscow since 2001.

¹⁹ Putin, “A New Integration Project,” 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Uzbekistan ne Khochet v Yedinoye Ekonomicheskoye Prostranstvo” [Uzbekistan Not to Join the Common Economic Space] (Unauthored), *Rosbalt Information Agency*, 5

In 2013–2014, major work on determining future Eurasian Union profiles took place. The idea of enhancing the integration processes of the “Customs Triplet” was not contested by the member states. Belarus’ and Kazakhstan’s leaders did not support the concept of a highly integrated alliance, as presented by Putin. The Russian president advocated for a political and economic alliance, uniting the most economically developed CIS republics and crediting them with extensive powers, which would in fact turn it into a state-similar institution. Putin’s counterparts were not so enthusiastic about close rapprochement with Moscow, considering it as a potential threat to their sovereignty. Kazakhstan appeared to be most tough about that; on April 25, 2013, Nazarbayev stated, “Russia is said to be assembling the Empire and building the new Soviet Union. It is absurd. I would like to state point-blank: Kazakhstan has gained independence for the first time in its history... and we are not going to give it away to anyone. In case any communities infringe on the sovereignty of our country, our Constitution, we will be prompt to leave this organization”.²² Belarus authorities kept silent, de facto demonstrating their support to Astana’s position. As a result, Russia had to face a coordinated opposition of both partners, but it had to address concerns separately with each of them. Under these circumstances, exercising any pressure on Astana and Minsk seemed both pointless and dangerous, jeopardizing allied relations between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and destroying integration communities on the post-Soviet territory, giving up the very idea of establishing a Eurasian Union. In 2014, Moscow authorities could no longer exercise any impact on their partners, due to the events in Ukraine.

It should be noted that the Ukrainian Crisis and the Crimean Spring are still insufficiently explored, and their analyses are usually politicized and strongly depend on the parties making judgements. Leaving aside ideology issues, it is clear that Belarus and Kazakhstan were particularly sensitive to Moscow’s policies towards Kiev and the loss of Crimea by Ukraine. Though the Lukashenko and Nazarbayev regimes had nothing to do with the forces having taken office in Ukraine, they were quite baffled by the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich, and Moscow’s interference in domestic affairs of its neighbour reinforced their innate fear of Russia. Obviously, they associated their countries with Ukraine. Many Russians lived in Belarus and Kazakhstan, and it appeared that renouncing territorial claims by Russia could be unilaterally revised. We

December 2011, accessed December 11, 2018, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2011/12/05/920565.html>.

²² Nursultan Nazarbayev, “Nazarbayev: Kazakhstan Vyydet iz Lyubogo Soyuzu v Sluchaye Ushchemleniya Nezavisimosti” [Kazakhstan to Withdraw from any union in case of infringement of independence: an interview], *Tengri News Information Agency*, 25 April 2013, accessed November 27, 2018, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/nazarbaev-kazakhstan-vyyidet-lyubogo-soyuzu-sluchae-232988/.

suppose the outcome with Ukraine was exceptional, and we definitely do not predict the same for other countries, but in spring 2014, Belarus and Kazakhstan clearly came out with their resistance to develop their integration relations with Moscow.

International tensions caused by the revolution upheavals in Ukraine also strongly affected the positions of Minsk and Astana. The parties clearly understood that the new political alliance with Moscow would drag them into opposition with Western countries, which were already aggravated by Crimea joining Russia. Such perspectives were an unwanted change, since it would have deprived them of the opportunity to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy.

Against this background, rumours started to spread about another wave of imminent economic crisis (the first wave overwhelmed the Russian economy in 2009–2010). It could arouse major problems for all the participants to the Customs Triplet, questioning the worth of even forming an economic union with Moscow. Therefore, Putin's integration project perspectives started to fade.

Kazakhstan reinforced its diplomatic pressure on Moscow, launching the discussion of the Eurasian integration principles in the mass media. Before signing the Eurasian Economic Union Agreement, Kazakhstan's foreign ministry first issued a statement on the future document's content. It underlined that due to the position of Astana, the future union will be purely an economic one, excluding from its scope issues of citizenship, foreign policy, inter-parliamentary cooperation, passport and visa service, and common border security.²³ The above, therefore, implied that Russia made serious concessions to Kazakhstan and Belarus and gave up on its former views of the essence of the alliance in question.

On May the 29th, 2014, the *Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) was signed by the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in Astana.²⁴ According to it, EAEU integration should not go beyond the frameworks of the trade and economic sphere, and political cooperation of member states should only serve the economic objectives of the community.

Officially, the parties estimated highly the conclusion of an agreement, stressing their satisfaction with the work and stating its significance and fruitful perspectives for economic development and improved well-being of the population. Enthusiasm on the part of Putin, Lukashenko, and Nazarbayev, as demonstrated to TV cameras, seemed rather exaggerated, since no progress had been made in Eurasian integration, and the pattern of member countries, stipulated by the EAEU Treaty, had little difference from the patterns of the Customs Union of 1995–2000 and EurAsEC. Putin's proposal, expressed in

²³ "EAES ne Ushchemit Natsional'nyye Interesy Kazakhstana" [EAEU Not to Harm Kazakhstan's National Interests], *Kazinform International News Agency*, 26 May 2014, accessed November 27, 2018, <https://www.inform.kz/rus/article/2661754>.

²⁴ *Dogovor o Yevraziyskom Ekonomicheskoy Soyuz* [*Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union*], Astana, 29 May 2014, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://base.garant.ru/70670880/>.

October 2011,²⁵ was realized in a distorted way, and a large-scale, highly integrated Eurasian Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan was replaced by its reduced variant.

Until the formal launch of the EAEU, which was scheduled for the 1st of January 2015, Eurasian economic integration was so heavily challenged that prospects of its further implementation were nearly jeopardized.

The major challenge was the imposing of mutual sanctions by Moscow and Western countries in August 2014, resulting in a negative impact on the economy of Russia. Partners of Moscow in the Customs Union escaped any pressure and had no reasons to reject interaction. This engendered a split of the Customs Union and restoration of barriers within it. Although Moscow considered these measures as necessary ones (otherwise the announced sanctions against Western countries would not be implemented), Astana and Minsk did not perceive them adequately. For instance, Belarus was able to provide supplies of the “banned” goods, imported from Western Europe; as a result, trout, salmon, and Belarusian seafood flooded Russia, despite Belarus being a landlocked country that has no basins for fish farming. Russian customers responded by restricting large cargo transmission through the Russia–Belarus border. As a result, in November 2014, the “trade war” was actually unleashed between the states.

Rouble denomination aggravated the situation, making Belarusian and Kazakh goods less profitable compared to Russian ones. Kazakhstan responded by developing measures to restrict Russian imports of certain agricultural products, automobiles, and construction materials. A new wave of economic crisis was triggered in Belarus and Kazakhstan due to its distinct economic independence from Russia, destabilizing both republics.

A conundrum had emerged in the still-forming Eurasian Economic Union by the end of 2014: instead of mutual support, the member states took pains to put spokes in each other’s wheels, harming each other. Subsequently, Russia started to lose its position in the post-Soviet territory and worldwide—so much so that Belarus and Kazakhstan were even able to block Russian initiatives.

All the above-mentioned forced Russia to advocate the expansion of EAEU by joining Armenia and Kyrgyzstan in order to strengthen Russian positions in the community. This approach absolutely contradicted initial views of the Russian authorities, who planned for gradual expansion of the union as states became ready to join the EAEU. In addition, this approach defied the logic of forming EAEU, suggesting integration of the most powerful economies on the post-Soviet territory. Thus, the EAEU repeated its predecessors’ mistakes, expanding its frameworks without any prerequisites.

²⁵ Putin, “A New Integration Project,” 1.

It is noteworthy that its partners did not object to the Russian position, and as early as the 2nd of January 2015, Armenia joined the EAEU, and Kyrgyzstan followed in August 2015. Syrian leaders announced their intention to join the community, arousing mixed reactions within the Russian mass media.

Meanwhile, negative tendencies grew within the EAEU in contrast to the flashy statements of its leaders about significant success of the alliance. The economic crisis in Russia came to have a long recession, and its turnover with EAEU partners impressively declined. Fall of global hydrocarbon prices disrupted the Kazakhstan economy, making its recovery very unlikely to happen anytime soon.

A new irritant of Russia–Kazakhstan relations appeared at the end of 2015. Following the 24th of November, when Turkish Air Forces shot down the Russian Sukhoi Su-24M warplane, conducting a military campaign in Syria, any contacts between Moscow and Ankara were completely frozen, and the countries found themselves on the brink of a conflict. For Kazakhstan, which had always viewed Turkey as a major partner and an ethnically, religiously, and culturally close state, the situation was rather painful. From then on, Astana had to balance relations both between Moscow and Western countries, and between Moscow and Ankara. Analogously with the Ukraine crisis, Russia did not coordinate its steps with Kazakhstan leaders and did not foresee the consequences of those steps for their partner. Obviously, it was a violation of the cooperation rules between the two states, and Moscow again proved itself as an unreliable partner for Astana.

The Kazakhstan government was very careful at first, offering itself as a mediator in settling relations between Turkey and Russia. However, Moscow neglected this offer, demanding official apologies, prosecution of the perpetrators, and damage compensation from Turkey. Astana started to run out of patience and on the 21st of December 2015, on the anniversary of CIS, Nazarbayev unequivocally stated that Moscow got entangled in disagreements with Western countries, in the Ukraine conflict, in the Syria military campaign, and in confrontation with Turkey. He proposed to Putin that they discuss “how to develop the Eurasian Union, when Transatlantic and Trans-Pacific partnerships are being established.”²⁶ In diplomatic terms this meant that if Russia would not address contradictions with Turkey, thereby ensuring the EAEU would remain community on paper, then Kazakhstan would be compelled to withdraw from the integration project, making its way by developing relations with the USA, EU countries, and China.

²⁶ President of Russia Official Website, *Meeting with President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev*, 21 December 2015, accessed November 27, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50982>.

Only in June 2016, when the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan officially apologized for shooting down the Russian warplane, were relations between Russia and Ankara re-established. This was to reduce tensions in the Russia–Kazakhstan relations, and revive cooperation within the EAEU frameworks. However, it never actually happened, since over the period of sanctions, Kazakhstan, together with other EAEU partners, reduced interaction with Moscow and replaced it with other partners.

Russian authorities clearly realized both these tendencies and that EAEU integration potential in its original form had been exhausted. Therefore, Moscow intensified its efforts in joining other participants. Consequently, in 2015–2017, Cambodia, Chile, China, Hungary, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, Peru, Singapore, South Korea, Serbia, and Tunis showed their interest in establishing relations with the EAEU. Russia launched negotiations on introducing the free trade zone between the EAEU and Thailand, Vietnam, and Iran (with Iran willing to join the community as a full member). The leaders of the community viewed intensification of the foreign relations as one of its most significant achievements, but the authors of this article doubt it. It should be noted that free trade zones between EAEU, the Middle East, and Far East countries complied neither with EAEU regional specifics, nor with its principles, as stipulated by the EAEU Statutes. This significant increase in the number of external partners resulted in the blurring of the EAEU mandates, and member states focused not on strengthening mutual cooperation, but on the relations with non-member countries. Under mutual sanctions of Russia and Western countries, economic disagreements between Moscow and its EAEU partners grew to be chronic, bringing the mechanisms of the Customs Union and Common Economic Space to failure.

In addition, the EAEU faced the problem of technological underdevelopment of the member states, threatening to turn this community into one which would facilitate rapprochement of the parties on the production and export of hydrocarbons, minerals, and agricultural products. Back in 2009–2010 the leaders of Belarus and Kazakhstan realized that it was unprofitable to purchase Western technologies from Russia, although it was customary before. As for Moscow, it found itself completely cut off from a number of Western technologies, due to the sanctions.

A reduction of contact between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in the sphere of science and education was the direct consequence of this situation. Since 2015–2016 the number of Belarusian and Kazakh students, magistrates and postgraduates in Russian universities has considerably dropped; instead, Belarusian and Kazakh young people headed for Western education establishments. The Russian language ceased to be the “window to the world”, and on the 26th of October 2017, Nazarbayev signed a decree about switching

from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet. Though Latin script in Kazakhstan was far from the Turkish one, the decision itself signified Astana drifting towards Ankara.

Changes in the attitudes of the Russian authorities to the EAEU were represented in a reduction of the number of conferences and publications on Eurasia, and its coverage was one-sided—Eurasian integration seemed to escape the scope of Russian priorities. During the presidential election campaign of 2018 in Russia, none of the candidates presented deepening the Eurasian economic integration as one of their priorities (precisely nobody even mentioned it). All the above justifies the claim that Moscow became absolutely disappointed with participation in EAEU, questioning viability of the community in the foreseeable future.

Conclusions

As we described above, the initial hypothesis was confirmed: all the Eurasian economic integration projects, implemented under Russian leadership since the collapse of the Soviet Union, turned to be either unsustainable, or existed only “on paper”, without any practical implementation of their decisions. The relevant conclusions were made based on the comparison of the goals and principles of these alliances, as they are indicated in their Statutes, and an analysis of their actual results.

Russian experts, considering integration processes of the “post-Soviet Eurasia” to be the least effective in the 1990s, are likely to be right. It was a trial-and-error period, rather than one of pursuing definite results. Later on, the groupings, which were established around Moscow, were not very fruitful in their activities. This tendency was particularly apparent in connection with political controversies growing between Russia and the West, and crisis tendencies subsequently rooted in the Russian economy. Despite being actively advocated in Russia that the Eurasian Economic Union was the climax of post-Soviet integration processes, we have to invalidate this conclusion. On the contrary, disintegration processes took place, leading the member states to a state of integration deadlock.

The practical value of the conclusions obtained in the course of this research consists of two major aspects. Firstly, the conclusions can help EAEU participants to reassess their foreign policy intentions and to clearly realize whether these joint integration initiatives comply with their own interests. Kazakhstan’s authorities seem to have started doing so, distancing themselves from Russia and decisively approaching China and Western countries. Uncertainty grows among EAEU countries, and in Russia too, aggravating the stagnation of this community. Secondly, countries concerned with further

implementation of the Eurasian integration projects should work out new principles, schedules, and mechanisms to protect their alliances from repeating crises. If the Eurasian economic integration continues to stick to its past approach to these agreements, its future is likely to be rather lamentable.

Over the three decades after the USSR breakdown, Eurasian economic integration has remained a project only on paper and an unrealistic illusion of the leaders who came up with the relevant initiatives and shaped the various integration structures. The development of the Eurasian economic integration was not linear, since its stages failed to logically follow one another. In contrast, it was of a cyclical nature, which could be represented as a sequence of repeating events. In the first place, it registered the theoretical reflection of the objectives and tasks the Eurasian integration is facing, and the justification of the need for its development. In the second place, this saw working out new principles, mechanisms of cooperation, and its institutional bases. Thirdly this meant establishing new integration alliances and fourthly expanding and deepening cooperation in the new communities mainly “on paper”, with a low level of practical implementation of the agreements between the member countries. In the fifth place, it included extending the number of participants and in the sixth place an inability of the integration communities to adapt to the new extended framework and an increase of crises tendencies. Finally, it meant rethinking the objectives and tasks of the Eurasian integration.

The elimination of some integration structures and establishment of others had both positive and negative consequences. The advantages include the invaluable experience that member countries received at every new stage of the Eurasian economic development, and they came to realize more clearly their interests and real opportunities under the implementation of various joint initiatives. The main disadvantage was the growing disappointment of the parties with their inability to develop full-scale interaction with each other. The last point proves to be the most significant one: in the course of time, both the political elite and publicity of the former Soviet republics became convinced that implementation of integration projects on the post-Soviet territory was unlikely, and even impossible. One also has to take into account that the parties did not hesitate to blame their nearest neighbours, former USSR republics, in all their failures. Russia would blame former USSR republics, and the latter in their turn would blame Russia. Mutual distrust grew between the countries, and they strived to replace their key foreign partners.

By now, the cyclical development of the Eurasian economic integration has exhausted itself: a new generation of citizens have come to grow up in the post-Soviet states, no longer viewing the world through the prism of common historical heritage. They are unlikely to be interested in their countries' participation in Eurasian integration projects. Accordingly, integration initiatives will no longer be relevant, due to the change of power in post-Soviet

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MILANA VLADIMIROVNA RAGULINA
republics, which had already happened in some places (Georgia, Moldova,
Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine), and is sure to happen in others. Thus,
integration projects are deprived of the long-term perspective.

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