

Russia and the Former Soviet Space

Russia and the Former Soviet Space:

Instrumentalizing Security, Legitimizing Intervention

Edited by

Vasile Rotaru and Miruna Troncotă

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FOREWORD

VASILE ROTARU AND MIRUNA TRONCOTĂ

The year 2014 marked a turning point in European history as it was the first time since the Second World War that a member of Council of Europe, OSCE, and UN Security Council changed the European borders by using a unilateral military intervention. The annexation of Crimea took the international community by surprise, and united the majority of the Western policymakers in condemning the Russian Federation for pursuing an aggressive foreign policy with illegitimate claims over the former Soviet space.

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow has not stopped seeing the former Soviet republics (with the exception of the Baltic States) as an area of “privileged interests”—understood as a *droit de regard* towards its former possessions. Moscow has expected its neighbours to comply with its strategic interests, despite their own wills and aspirations. At large, with a wide range of “sticks” and “carrots,” the Kremlin has succeeded in pursuing its goals in the former Soviet space. When the “carrots” (subsidized gas, financial help, etc.) were not effective, Moscow has not abstained from using the “sticks” (from trade boycotts and visas to covered or direct military intervention, and even annexation of a territory). Russia’s vivid interest in the area relies not only on historical nostalgia, but also on a security rationale inherited from and perpetuated by the Cold War, when any action of the West was perceived as a targeted threat for its own territory and the safety of its populations. Except for the Baltic States, the rapprochement of any other former Soviet republic towards a non-Russia controlled structure/block of states has been harshly sanctioned by the Kremlin. In light of this interpretation, the last element of proof is that of Ukraine, which recently lost a peninsula and gained a separatist war for trying to get closer to the EU and NATO.

In the last decade, the security argument has been successfully used by the Kremlin especially for the domestic justification of its aggressive actions in the neighbouring countries. The narrative of a “besieged

fortress” was constructed in the cases of the wars in Georgia and Ukraine¹ around NATO’s expansion to the East that made the Kremlin “nervous” (Karasin 2008) in 2008, and was “threatening” to “cardinally change the balance of forces in the Black Sea area” (Putin 2014) in 2014. These “worries” were meant to consolidate Russian citizens around the political leadership and to legitimize Russia’s *droit de regard* in the former Soviet space, defined in a “competition” with Western claims. However, beyond coalescing its own citizens, Moscow’s actions managed to consolidate Western chancelleries against the Kremlin’s strategies, perceived as both illegal and illegitimate.

Despite the Western condemnation of Russia’s actions in Georgia and Ukraine (see UN GA/11493), Moscow has tried to justify its deeds by appealing to a series of arguments centred especially around the (re)interpretation of Western narratives about breaching international norms and principles (e.g. the bombing of Belgrade in 1999). NATO’s intervention in the Kosovo war, together with the so-called “Kosovo precedent” (referring to its unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, which was further legitimized by the international community through the recognition of 115 UN member states), became a common reference point in the context of the Crimean referendum in particular. Within this intricate context and beyond the simplistic journalistic approach to the topic, as well as some partial academic analyses in the aftermath of the Crimea annexation, the present book will focus on different layers of Moscow’s legitimizing strategies, analysing them from different perspectives.

The crisis in Ukraine and Russia’s relations with the former Soviet space has been analysed by scholars in the last three years, for example: Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderland* (2015), Anders Aslund, *Ukraine—What Went Wrong and How to Fix It* (2015), Panagiota Manoli (ed.), *Aftermath of the Ukrainian Crisis* (2016), J. L. Black, Michael Johns, and Alanda Theriault, *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, the West and Russia* (2016), and Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: State and Nation Building* (2016). Within this academic debate, the present book aims to make a fresh contribution to the determinants of the current Russian foreign policy assertiveness. More precisely, it aims to address the ways in which the perceived security threats have been used by Russia to legitimize its interventions in the former Soviet space. We argue that the security dimension has been successfully used by the Kremlin in particular

¹ In November 2016, the International Criminal Court (ICC) Report on Preliminary Examination Activities stated that the situation within the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol in February to March 2014 amounted to an international armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

for the domestic justification of its aggressive actions in the neighbouring countries, and that the narrative of a “besieged fortress” was constructed in the cases of the Georgian War and the intervention in Ukraine.

Russia’s actions in Ukraine (the annexation of Crimea and the support for the separatist Donbas) posed both a conceptual and an empirical challenge to the field of international relations by problematizing and politicizing the issue of legality, contesting international norms, and reinterpreting the principle of self-determination in order to legitimize external intervention. The main speeches by President Putin in this context directed Russia’s narrative practices at several recurring legitimacy claims: unsettled international norms, the reinterpretation of history, and the reference to the West. These issues did not manifest solely in the Ukrainian crisis. Placing this topic on a larger, regional scale, the intention of the present volume is to raise a specific set of questions applicable to multiple case studies most visibly after 2008, such as: How does Russia explain its own actions in the former Soviet space? And how do the countries from the former Soviet space perceive the Russian influence?

This book aims to contribute to the contemporary academic debate by tackling the emerging challenges to the Eastern European security. As such, it aims to address more specifically the ways in which perceived security threats were used by Russia to legitimize its interventions in the former Soviet space. The main three sections of the book assume an interdisciplinary approach aimed at unpacking the diverse types of Russian efforts to exercise its power over the former Soviet space by challenging the international law in the post-Cold War European order.

One of the main features of the book is that it reflects the current developments of Russia’s actions and its impact on the former Soviet space from different academic perspectives. This includes a focus on various concepts such as orderism, the instrumentalization of soft and hard power, the limits of international law, the misused arguments of humanitarian intervention, the historical approach to the contested and much-debated concept of a “Hybrid War,” and innovative applications of analytic instruments in IR, such as foreign-policy analysis and narrative analysis. This study looks at Moscow’s strategies in the former Soviet space, the foreign policy of the two former Soviet states most challenged by Russia’s assertive policies: Georgia and Ukraine, and Moscow’s legitimization arguments for its actions in the former Soviet space. Written by authors from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany and the United Kingdom, the book also presents local, regional, and Western European perspectives on the analysed events.

Chapter one presents, as an introduction, a theoretical approach towards the concept of the “post-Soviet space.” Maria Lagutina argues that this area in the immediate vicinity of Russia does not correspond to the historical frameworks of the Soviet past and thus needs to be redefined. The author proposes the “Eurasian space” concept, which, in her opinion, could better define the region within the context of the ongoing regional economic integration and global regionalization. Lagutina also argues that the project of the Eurasian Economic Union goes beyond the framework of purely economic interests and acquires geopolitical and geostrategic significance for Russia.

The first section focuses on recent evolutions in Russia’s foreign policy, underlining the role of history and its ideological use for redefining Russia’s role in the immediate neighbourhood.

In chapter two, James Pearce analyses Russian foreign policy as a product of its past and further explores how the Putin foreign policy agenda relies on references to the past as a legitimization tool. The author considers that the use of history in Russia’s foreign policy has become an explicit and key component of Vladimir Putin’s administration and assesses how the historical narrative benefits the Putin agenda and justifies its actions. Pearce stresses that continuity from the old ways is perceived as adding to the credibility of the Kremlin’s chosen direction and rationalizes its necessitation.

Liliana Popescu argues in chapter three that a new mercurial ideology—“orderism”—can be linked to certain current interests of Russia in its foreign policy as well as to certain ideological roots of its conservative origin. As such, the author explores the ideological origins of orderism, looking at the ideas of earlier Russian thinkers in the twentieth century as well as contemporary ideologues like Igor Panarin, Alexandr Dugin, and Vladislav Surkov. Popescu analyses also the potential “traps” involved in orderism’s tenets and the functions performed by this ideology, which she considers as related to Russia’s changed positioning in the international arena as well as its domestic political interests.

Chapter four analyses the Russian Federation’s foreign policy on neighbouring countries through the prism of balancing hard and soft power capabilities. Danu Marin argues that Russia has stepped up its soft-power efforts and developed a new set of instruments to complement hard-power tools. The author claims that in order to synergize soft and hard power and connect domestic with foreign policy, Russia has utilized the friend and foe mechanism. This strategy, considers Marin, allows Moscow to divide international actors according to the “us-them” principle, and justify interventionist policies without having to worry about public opinion.

In chapter five, Ofer Fridman argues that even if the term *Gibridnaya Voyna* [Hybrid Warfare] has become very present within the context of the Ukrainian crisis, when its application has been much politicized leading to a mutual accusation by Russia and the West, the concept is heavily influenced by the narratives of the Cold War. The author considers that the idea of dismantling the political regime of the adversary from inside is conceptually rooted in the theories developed during the Soviet-Western post-war confrontation and that it is difficult to ignore the conceptual similarities between what Russian specialists call *Gibridnaya Voyna* and the theories of the Subversion War [*Myatezhevoyna*] and Information War.

The second section analyses Russia's relations with the former Soviet space with a particular focus on Georgia and Ukraine, the states most challenged by the Kremlin's strategic interests.

In chapter six, Armen Grygorian argues that Russia regards the former Soviet republics as a legitimate sphere of influence, respects their sovereignty only formally, and believes in its right to use economic and other tools to influence their foreign and security policies. The author also examines how Armenia's, Georgia's, Moldova's, and Ukraine's relations with Russia have been influenced by perceptions of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. The chapter looks more closely at the networks of proxy groups and their activities, as well as their effectiveness as a tool in justifying Russian actions in the post-Soviet area and beyond.

In chapter Seven, David Matsaberidze focuses on Russia's relations with Georgia. The study highlights which aspects of foreign-policy formation sources have been employed by (changing) political elites to legitimize their foreign-policy vision in the eyes of the population since Georgia gained independence in 1991. The formation of foreign-policy discourse is driven by elites who selectively evoke various values and cultural markers. This study assumes that (Georgian) political elites refer to concrete features like religion, culture (framing the collective identity of a nation), and history, considered as sources of the foreign policy, for the legitimization of pro-Western or pro-Russian foreign and domestic policy discourses in modern Georgia.

Ivanna Makitidze in chapter eight analyses the war in Donbas from the perspective of the theory of reflexive control, which implies that a stronger adversary makes the weaker actor voluntarily incline to the actions which are most advantageous to its objectives by shaping the adversary's perceptions of the situation decisively. The author argues that while denying its direct participation in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russia has actively pushed for the recognition of the "special status" for Donbas

to become the essential part of the legislation of Ukraine as well as to be legitimized by the elections. The chapter shows how this approach was applied by Russia since the beginning of the conflict, and evaluates the existing counteractions from the Ukrainian side as well.

The third section focuses on Russia's legitimization strategies, aiming to decode and problematize the rationale behind the used arguments.

In chapter nine, Vasile Rotaru aims to identify the main patterns of Russia's narrative of legitimization of the annexation of Crimea. After drawing attention to the theoretical problem regarding the legitimacy in international relations, the author decodes the Kremlin's arguments and looks at the way they have been developed and prioritized in Russia's official discourse after March 2014. Rotaru also argues that, while challenging the international legal order, Moscow's Crimea legitimization endeavours have a more concrete and profound impact on the former Soviet republics that share many similarities with Ukraine in terms of a "special relationship" with Russia, the presence of compatriots, existent/potential secessionist movements, or foreign policy orientations.

Chapter ten argues from the observation that, on several occasions, President Putin used the language of humanitarian interventionism to rebut criticism of Russia's involvement in Crimea. Miruna Troncotă analyses Russia's actions in Ukraine through the impact of "biopolitical" legitimizing narratives (understood as "mutations in the exercise of power") to justify interventionism and the need for control over territories and the management of the population through the use of national identities. The main argument presented in the chapter shows that Russia's foreign-policy claim (to protect Russian citizens abroad) is rooted in "biopolitics." The conclusions outline Russia's "biopolitical" efforts to exercise its power over the former Soviet space by challenging the language of international law and European order.

Oleksandr Zadorozhnii in chapter eleven analyses Russia's historical arguments for legitimization of the annexation of Crimea. The study focuses on the invocation of the past as a tool to justify questionable decisions in Russian policy since the collapse of the USSR and assesses Russia's actions in post-Soviet states, particularly Ukraine, in terms of the principles of international law and the norms of international treaties. A special emphasis is placed on the validity of the main historical and legal concepts that Russia is using to justify its actions in Crimea in 2014 and the characterization of the events under certain provisions of international law.

In the concluding chapter twelve, Konstanze Jüngling focuses on the possible instrumentalization of threat perception by the Russian Federation.

The author argues that the potential return of Russian foreign fighters from Syria is one of the main arguments employed by Russian officials to justify their military intervention in the war-torn state as well as an instrument of legitimization for Moscow's policies in North Caucasus. The chapter argues that political repression, domestic group conflict, the identification with a certain group, and social inequalities are potential drivers for the North Caucasian foreign fighter phenomenon. Jüngling draws attention to the fact that repression may provide an impetus for North Caucasians to join the ranks of jihadist militant groups, and this increases the risk of a violent backlash in North Caucasus and Russia.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

4GW: Fourth Generation Warfare
AIIB: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APR: Asia-Pacific Region
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BTC: *Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan* pipeline
CC: Central Committee
CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCE: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EEA: Eurasian Economic Area
EEAS: European External Action Service
EEU: Eurasian Economic Union
EU: European Union
EurAsEC: Eurasian Economic Community
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment
FSB: Russian Federal Security Service
G8: The Group of Eight
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GTEP: Georgian Trained and Equip Programme
GUAM: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova
ICC: International Criminal Court
ICISS: International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IDPs: Internally displaced persons
IK: Imarat Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate)
IR: International Relations
IS/ISIS: Islamic State
KPRF: Russian Communist Party
LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community
MERCOSUR: Southern Common Market
MFA: Minister of Foreign Affairs
MP: Member of Parliament
NAC: North Atlantic Council
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDI: National Democratic Institute
NGO: Non-governmental organization
NSC: National Security Concept

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OUN-UPA: Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Insurgent Army
P5: UN Security Council's five permanent members
QDA: Qualitative Document Analysis
R2P: Responsibility to protect
RIAC: Russian International Affairs Council
RSFSR: Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
RT: Russia Today
SBU: Security Service of Ukraine
SC: Supreme Council
SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
TRACECA: Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN: United Nations
UNGA: General Assembly of the United Nations
UNSC: United Nations Security Council
US/USA: United States of America
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VTsIOM: Russian Public Opinion Research Center
WWII: Second World War

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

THE EVOLUTION OF THE “POST-SOVIET SPACE” CONCEPT IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: FROM THE POST-SOVIET SPACE TO THE EURASIAN SPACE

MARIA LAGUTINA

Introduction

Following the USSR’s collapse, the post-Soviet space found itself on the outer periphery of the world’s “integrational space,” and was viewed as something of a “black hole” (Brzezinski 2008) on the map for an extended period of time. The main integrational structure created in the post-Soviet space in the early 1990s was the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was more reminiscent of a “civilized divorce” among the former USSR, rather than a truly effective regional structure. As early as the mid-1990s, however, the need became apparent for the creation of a qualitatively new integrational institution that would allow the countries in the region to interact more effectively and to emerge as a part of the world processes. At the heart of this project was the idea of Eurasian integration. The lack of a universal “integration paradigm” to conceptualize and forecast the sequence and pattern of integrational and disintegrational processes throughout the post-Soviet space creates certain difficulties in the theoretical analysis of the specific trends and changes that occurred in both the Greater Eurasian Space and the post-Soviet space.

This chapter will argue that the region referred to as the “post-Soviet space” in the modern day does not correspond to the historical frameworks of the Soviet past and needs new approaches for its definition. The paradoxical nature of the modern situation is intriguing; the USSR disappeared twenty-seven years ago; however, terminology wise, the academic community continues to refer to it by using such notions as

“post-Soviet,” “post-Socialist,” “post-imperial,” “postcolonial,” “former Soviet republics,” and so on. To this day, this “space” has still not formed its own, unique conceptual image, most often hiding behind the prefix “post.” Given this, there arises an objective need for a suitable conceptual understanding of the modern Eurasian space as one of the centres of the world system of the twenty-first century. The conceptual idea of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) offers the opportunity to go beyond the confines of “post-Sovietism” as a continental regionalism and to structure “Eurasianism” as global regionalism. It is precisely for this reason that the Eurasian post-Soviet space can be viewed as a unique “testing platform,” insofar as, on the one hand, it represents a striking example of the interrelatedness of integrational and disintegrational processes, and on the other, it is a phenomenon that has thus far lacked due theoretical elaboration in modern political science.

The Eurasian vector in Russia’s foreign and domestic policies has gradually become ever-more overriding since the second half of the 1990s due to strong support by former the Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. However, the integrational processes with Russia’s involvement in those years did not advance significantly. Following Vladimir Putin’s rise to power, Russia’s long-term strategy in contemporary Eurasia began to be thoroughly reasoned out. One of the first official statements regarding Russia’s Eurasian domain priority manifested itself in Putin’s speech at the APEC Business Summit in Shanghai, whereby the president pinpointed Russia as a “Eurasian country” (*Vistuplenie Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii V.V. Putina na Delovom sammite ATES 2001*). From then on, in Putin’s keynote articles and addresses, as well as the official foreign policy documents, Russia asserted itself as a Eurasian nation. Furthermore, this hypothesis was mirrored in practice during Putin’s second presidency, when a new integrational entity—the Eurasian Economic Union—was being set up. At present, within the EEU, Russia is one of the valiant integration forces to be contended with. The project of setting up the EEU has featured one of the most crucial integrational initiatives by Russia since the USSR’s collapse. Most recently, the development of integration processes as the most important direction of Russian foreign policy has been reflected in the latest edition of the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2016).” This connotes that:

Russia considers its key task of deepening and widening integration within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic for the purpose of stable development, comprehensive technological

modernization, cooperation and competitiveness of the economies of the member States and improving the living standards of their citizens. (Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2016).

Structurally, this chapter consists of three sections. In the first part, the author considers the first attempts to conceptualize the “post-Soviet space” phenomenon in Russian and Western literature. The second part represents the analysis of the concept of the “Eurasian space.” Finally, the third part is devoted to an analysis of the “Eurasian idea” as an integrational concept.

1. A Bunch of New Concepts for the Same Reality: “Post-Soviet space,” “Post-imperial” space, “Near Abroad,” and “The New Independent States”

Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, discussions about different approaches to the definition of the “new space” began in the expert community. Those theoretical debates (which are still ongoing) were based on the need for new understandings of Russia’s new geopolitical conditions.

One of the first efforts to conceptualize the phenomenon of the formation of the “new space” that emerged after the collapse of the USSR can be found in an article by A. Prazauskas (1992), who claimed that “the USSR had been replaced by a postcolonial space with problems, which are typical of transit economies.” This definition seems to be entirely ideological, as the emphasis is on the totalitarian regime of Soviet power. In the author’s opinion, this term quite comprehensively reflects the essence of the “cause and effect” of the unification of the people who were living in the former Soviet Union. The inhabitants of these areas were aware of the need for such unification to prevent the emergence of an unstable conflict zone that would exacerbate the social-economic performance of nations during that period.

From the point of view of Russian political scholars (e.g. Ya. Butakov, D. Furman), it would be more rational to define the post-Soviet space as “post-imperial.” Highlighting the territorial succession of the Soviet Union from the Russian Empire, which had united territories within Eurasia for centuries (Butakov 2011):

Virtually, it is not a post-Soviet, but rather a post-imperial space; it was built by the Russian Empire, and all those elements of the unity which remain there had been born by common history and sovereignty of all the

CIS and Baltic states to the Russian Empire and its successor—the USSR. (Furman 2005).

Furthermore, this definition may have an even broader sense, including the Central Asian and Eastern European countries of the “people’s democracy” and the Warsaw Treaty.

Later, driven by the integrational-disintegrational processes of the 1990s, as well as the gradual strengthening of the “Russian factor” in the development of the post-Soviet space, international political discourse began to reflect the notion that Russia was gradually regaining its status as a centre of power and strength for post-Soviet peoples. In particular, initially in the official Russian foreign policy documents (*Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii* 1993), and afterwards in the academic literature, the concepts and terms “near abroad” and “far abroad” began to be used (Khachaturov 2004). The “near abroad” term denoted the area of the former USSR republics within the foreign political orbit of Russia. From the viewpoint of Russian expert G. Guseynov, Russia had a historical-cultural, rather than geographic, sense (2005, 27). For their part, Western experts regarded this term negatively, construing the concept as a reflection of new Russia’s imperial ambitions concerning its nearest neighbours (Safire 1994). However, in the second decade of the 2000s, Russia began to pursue a more pragmatic policy towards its neighbours, and the term “near abroad” fell out of usage. Russia mainly focused on promoting the expansion of Russian capital, the projection of political influence, and the consolidation of a cultural presence in the new states. As D. Trenin (2012) notes, “the imperial idea was replaced by the concept of Russia as a great power.” It should be noted that important differences between these two ideas arise here: while the Empire, both Russian and Soviet, was more concerned about the support and development of the outlying regions and countries within its orbit than the prosperity of the mother country, a great power lays emphasis above all on strengthening its own might and international influence (Trenin 2012). In his latest book “*Post-Imperium: the Eurasian history*” (2011), Trenin views the Eurasian Union project from the perspective of Russia’s interest. From his viewpoint, for post-imperial Russia the role of donor for the former “marginal” areas is no longer acceptable. Therefore, democratic principles and pragmatic solutions lie at the heart of Russia’s sub-regional Eurasian strategy (Karaganov 2012).

During the same period, another notion of “the new independent states” entered the international political discourse, emphasizing “the political self-sufficiency of these countries, which had manifested itself in new regional entities, independent of CIS structures” (Kovalchuk 2015,

20). The independence of these countries from Russia is practically always emphasized, a trend that is clearly reflected in the establishment of the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) structure. This acronym went mainstream in expert communities and Western scholarly literature. One such example comes from former British Foreign Secretary D. Miliband, who claimed that the “post-Soviet space” concept had become obsolete:

I believe the Russians want to use the notion of the so-called “post-Soviet space” without coming to believe that the former USSR republics adjacent to Russia are independent nations with sovereign borders. I consider it unacceptable. Ukraine, Georgia and others are not the “post-Soviet space.” They are independent sovereign nations with their own right to territorial integrity. (Miliband 2008)

It is noteworthy that this term traditionally refers to the twelve former republics only, and does not include the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The same is the case for another similar term—the “CIS countries,” or the “Commonwealth countries.” In the opinion of Russian pundit Kovalchuk, these terms are used in scholarly literature for the analysis of the institutional multilateral interactions in the post-Soviet space (2015, 21). At the same time, they are taken into account as both CIS entities and other regional and sub-regional organizations.

Thus, despite the apparent variety in terminology with regards to the former Soviet space, the term “post-Soviet space” became entrenched as a fundamental notion in both Russian and foreign science. Nevertheless, during 2000–9 the concept of the “post-Soviet space” did not reflect the entire range of geopolitical events. An elaboration on a new conceptual framework was required. The so-called “civilizational approach” to determination of the space concerned is gradually becoming more popular in Russian political thought. According to this approach, the authors take note of the:

self-sufficiency of the Eurasian civilization regardless of its name: the Russian Empire, the USSR, the Eurasian Union and so on. The scholars underscore the historical, cultural, and economic bonds between the peoples and states on the basis of geopolitical (spatial) commonness and do not rule out the possibility of Eurasia’s restoration as a self-sustained power centre. (Tofan 2015, 45)

This viewpoint partly correlates with the thesis of classical Eurasianism, and at the same time in large part defines the conceptual backbone of modern Eurasian integration.

2. From “Post-Soviet space” to “Eurasian space”¹

Consensus in the modern day considers the term “Eurasian space” to be the most accurate. The next section will focus on the main arguments that support this claim. This term is designed to emphasize the new realities and essence of the ongoing integrational processes in order to pinpoint the current status of this space in appropriate terms. Furthermore, to the highest extent, this term allows us to characterize the new spatial contours of the Eurasian integrational field, which includes both the post-Soviet space and new segments of the region outside the former Soviet boundaries (Molchanov 2012). Thus, this concept tries to be more inclusive than others because it implies that the countries without a Soviet identity in their past but which are interested in promoting economic and commercial relations with the region are welcome in the modern Eurasian integrational processes (e.g. China, Egypt, India, Iran, and Vietnam).

Today, the notion of “Eurasia” appears to be one of the most popular terms in modern humanities. On the one hand, it bears evidence of the promising outlook of Eurasian ideas, and on the other the “Eurasia” concept is frequently the subject of political speculations. Nevertheless, incontestably, this historical term has gained wide usage due to the intensification of integrational processes in the space, which was formed from the debris of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the EEU. It is worth noting that, after gaining independence, the former Soviet republics were confronted with a serious issue: the search for a new (post-Soviet) identity. In this context, the attention of the majority was drawn to Eurasian ideas and the notion of Eurasia, which allowed them to pry themselves away from the Soviet legacy and the related stereotypes, which had been impeding integrational processes between the former Soviet republics for more than twenty years.

In the opinion of Professor E. Bagramov, in modern science this term is used in two main ways: with a geographic (a “supercontinent”) or a cultural (civilizational) sense (Bagramov n.d). At the same time, while the geographic determination of “Eurasia” presents no complexities for the understanding and interpretation of this term, in other fields it presents challenges and is often very vague in its definition. As such, from the perspective of the Russian economists E. Vinokurov and A. Libman:

¹ See in detail N. A. Vasilyeva and M. L. Lagutina, *The Russian Project of Eurasian Integration: Geopolitical Prospects* (Lanhan: Lexington Books, 2016).

broadly, in social sciences three “Eurasias” co-exist: “Eurasia as the post-Soviet space,” “Eurasia as a framework for the Eurasian ideology” and “Eurasia as Europe and Asia.” (2012, 12–15)

Thus, this chapter takes the view that approaches to the “Eurasia” phenomenon should not be confined to geography and history. At the very least, from the author’s point of view one can talk about Eurasia as a geopolitical concept as well as a Eurasian national identity and even an ideology, along with the integrational concept.

Thus, the historians and philosophers (for example, P. Savitskiy and L. Gumilev) equated the “Eurasia” notion to the “median part” of Eurasia, and namely Russia’s territory. For them, Russia appeared to be a distinct ethnographic world-cultural-historical type, occupying a “median” place between Europe and Asia. At the same time, in the opinion of the Eurasianists, the “locus” of the Eurasian culture encompasses only the culture of east-Slavic peoples (Danilevskiy 2003; Gumilev 2007). Representatives of classical Eurasianism determined the historical contours of Eurasia, which were considered by the neo-Eurasianist advocates to be set in stone, until recently:

Eurasia stretches from Hinggan to the Carpathians, from the south it is framed by the desert belt and the inaccessible Pamir, Tianshan and Himalayas, from the north by the Arctic Ocean, and from the West its boundary runs on the positive isotherm of January. (Valovaya 2010, 18)

Nevertheless, for the classical Eurasianists (for example N. Trubetskoy and P. Savitskiy), the notions of Europe and Asia were viewed more as geographic notions, denoting the so-called “geographic worlds,” or geographic spaces characterized by certain traits. From the Eurasianist viewpoint, Eurasia represents an exceptional world. Consequently, they conclude, it personifies a geographic unity, separate from Europe and Asia, a holistic developmental place or “geographic individual,” whereas Russia-Eurasia is seen as the core of the Old World (Savitskiy 1997, 297). The Eurasianists brought into the scientific discourse the term “Russia-Eurasia,” and put an emphasis on the continental nature of Russia itself, virtually denoting it as a separate civilization—the Eurasian civilization.

Their arguments claim that Eurasia’s geopolitical layout is unique: geographically, it is located in Europe and Asia, has access to four oceans, possesses formidable resource potential, and so on. Eventually, throughout history on Eurasia’s territory, the leading actors in world politics and history have clashed. In this regard, it would be expedient to recall the ideas of classical geopolitics of the twentieth century (H. Mackinder, F.

Ratzel, and K. Haushofer), which gave rise to the notion of the “Heartland,” which implies an immense space rich in the various resources of Eurasia. Mackinder’s ideas of Eurasia as a “median space” and key territory in world politics (in geostrategic terms) were later advanced by the American geopolitical thinker Nicholas Spykman, the German geographer Karl Haushofer (2001), as well as Donald Meinig (1956). Among the modern interpretations of the “Median space” notion, the definition by G. Parker is worth noting, as he defines the concept as “a compound space, including geographic, social and political features and relying on the generation of its own geopolitical field” (Parker 1998). Among the key traits of the “median space,” in his opinion, are the ability to retain its independence and act self-sufficiently. It is important to mention at this point that starting in the 1990s with the affirmation of the so-called “critical geopolitics” (O’Tuathail 1996), all those authors mentioned above (particularly H. Mackinder, F. Ratzel, K. Haushofer, and N. Spykman) are considered as exponents of “imperialist geopolitics.” Thus, for example, G. O’Tuathail, S. Dalby, and P. Routledge (2006) provide strong counterarguments for showing that those authors justified colonial thinking in geopolitics, in which the empire is the main source of power and the colonies should just follow the trend imposed by it. This thinking is no longer acceptable in the twenty-first-century geopolitical approach. According to critical geopolitics, not only should state activity be researched, but understanding what kind of “cultural myths” lie at the basis of the states is very important. Besides this, the representatives of this new geopolitics see the space as being of a “chaotic variety” that makes the existence of a multi-space world possible. Geographic unity is no longer a determining attribute. Rather, a functional principle is coming to the forefront that wants to move beyond an exclusive and straightforward geographical approach to identifying a region. The term “space” is favoured, as it is seen as being free of notions of territory and able to absorb the new features of a “region” that are not pegged to a territorial map. Space is the structure that constitutes a region in the course of a process of regionalization. In this way, a region can be defined as a coherent entity that is not rigidly confined to territorial constraints. This approach makes possible the existence of a common custom and economic space with Armenia, which became the EEU’s sole member without borders with the other member states.

The Eurasian geopolitical concept has found its expression in the works by modern Russian geopolitical thinkers as well (e.g. A. Irkhin and A. Dugin). As such, A. Dugin considers that “the very developmental place of Eurasia makes it a citadel of the strategic continental space”

(2002, 18), and moreover Russia is the centre of Eurasia, and as a consequence the core of the continental Eurasian bloc. According to A. Dugin, Russia, due to its geographic location and historical background, is the only player in world politics able to put forward and affirm an alternative to the existing world order. Apart from that, A. Dugin elaborated the notion of the “Eurasian Project”—a supranational union, combining the two notions—distinct traits of the original Russian civilization, and an idea of the unification of Eurasia’s peoples with common cultural and historical roots. The thrust of Dugin’s idea is that the Eurasian strategic bloc headed by Russia should be a global alternative and powerful counterbalance to globalization, which, in essence, “renounces Russia’s historical mission and the Russians” (Dugin 2002, 85). The basis of this bloc, in contrast to earlier forms of integration on the Eurasian territory, should be on geopolitical and geostrategic principles and the commonality of civilizational imperatives, rather than the economic system. Yet, while assessing this idea, it should be noted that although A. Dugin writes that the establishment of the Eurasian Union will be viewed as a “fulfilment of the Eurasian mission” (2002, 90), he does not specify his notions. For instance, he does not pinpoint the specific countries that should join the Eurasian Union, does not outline terms, and does not mention the real structure of the integrational entity.

From the viewpoint of the Ukrainian scholar A. Irkhin (2014), an active competitive struggle is breaking out among the United States, Russia, the European Union, and China for the dominant position in governing integrational trends within this space. Indeed, with its vast territory, rich resources, and huge population, Eurasia lures the interest of many leading world actors who are ready for yet another chess game on the Eurasian geopolitical board (Zb. Brzezinski 2008). Construed by the modern geopolitics thinkers, “Eurasia” is understood more widely by them than by the classicists of Eurasianism. In geographic terms, the modern Eurasian space in most cases coincides with the “post-Soviet space” (Vinokurov and Libman 2012, 15). In this case, both terms are regarded as synonyms; however, territorially, under such an interpretation, not all fifteen former Soviet republics are included in Eurasia. Only eleven of them are (excluding the Baltic countries and Georgia [which withdrew from the CIS]), and considering recent events, Ukraine’s status is presently questionable. The concept of “Eurasia” in this case is designed to have a new geopolitical meaning attached to the space that emerged twenty-seven years ago, having dropped the Soviet past. At present, it is evident that the “post-Soviet space” notion is not relevant and breeds

hazardous stereotypes among the world community, which at times puts up obstacles to the evolution of this region and its countries.

As far as the representatives of the Western geopolitical school are concerned, from the viewpoint of one group, “Eurasia” is a territory of the former USSR (Gleason 2010, 26–32). In this sense, the geopolitical idea of “Eurasia” has lost its reason for existence (Khanna 2008, 300). The unity of post-Soviet Eurasia was perceived to be utterly fragmentary as a result of stiff competition in the West with a much more powerful paradigm of Europe, and in the East and South with the economic and demographic might of China and India. On the other hand, according to the works by prominent American scholar Z. Brzezinski, after the collapse of the USSR, there is a perception in the eyes of Western experts that Eurasia regained world political significance as a “global chessboard” (Brzezinski 2008).

All points taken into account, the contemporary geopolitical concepts concerning the phenomenon of Eurasia fall under two main approaches: Eurasia-Russia (classical Eurasianism) and the Eurasia post-Soviet space (neo-Eurasianism).

3. The “Eurasian Idea” as an Integrational Concept in Russian Foreign Policy

Today, Eurasian integration is a crucial strand of Russia’s current foreign policy. Nevertheless, for quite a long time in Russia there was no distinct strategy with regards to its close neighbours in the post-Soviet Eurasian space. All statements by the Russian leadership on the precedence of the post-Soviet space in the foreign policy strategy of Russia were largely declarative. As an integrational idea, the Eurasian concept was suggested in 1994 by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, N. A. Nazarbayev, who virtually initiated the setting up of a new integrational entity—the Eurasian Union (Nazarbaev 1997). Thereby, the Kazakhstan leader expressed a will to retain the unity of countries that had coexisted for more than seventy years. This union was to be oriented towards inter-state cooperation and integration in the economic and humanitarian spheres, engaging the most mature countries in the region. The draft especially underscored the thesis that the rapprochement of those countries was to proceed from economic interests and the conduct of a joint development policy. The key principles for constructing the Eurasian Union were to become the following: equality, non-interference in the domestic affairs of each other, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of state borders. In addition, the document stated that