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Research Paper

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Eurasianism as a geopolitical ideology

Geopolitical consequences of potential Russian Ukrainian Conflict¹

Abstract: *The paper covers the geopolitical issues and impacts of contemporary theoretical geopolitical approaches, specially formed in Russian Federations which is concentrated in Eurasian school. This geopolitical paradigm illustrates the theoretical and ideological influence in Russia which is forming a foreign and security policy focused on Ukraine. In this contribution, we are presenting analyze of the main ideas and principles of this geopolitical ideology in Russian policy and strategy today.*

Keywords: *geopolitics, Eurasians, conflict, strategy*

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„Suverenita ako faktor krízy liberálneho svetového poriadku“

Introduction

The term Eurasianism originated in the Russian „émigré“ community in the 1920s as a reaction to the defeat of the tsarist army in World War I and the defeat of the Russian White Army by the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, and the subsequent disintegration of Russia. (Arbatova, 2019). Eurasianism is a political movement in Russia that assumes that Russian civilization does not belong to the European or Asian category, but to the geopolitical concept of Eurasia. The movement originally supported the Bolshevik Revolution but not its stated goals of enacting communism, seeing the Soviet Union as a stepping stone on the way to creating a new national identity that would reflect the unique nature of Russia's geopolitical position. The movement experienced a minor revival after the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century. The movement argued and still argues, that Russian civilization does not belong in the European category, and that the October Revolution of the Bolsheviks was a necessary response to the rapid modernization of Russian society. The Eurasianists believed that the Soviet regime was capable of evolving into a new national, non-European orthodox Christian government that would throw off the initial mask of proletarian internationalism and militant atheism that the Eurasianists had fought against.

The Eurasianists criticized the anti-Bolshevik activities of organizations such as ROVS and believed that the energies of the émigré community would be better focused on preparing for this anticipated process of evolution. Their emigre opponents, in turn, argued that Eurasianists called for compromise with the Soviet regime and even supported it, while justifying its ruthless policies, such as the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church, as mere "transitional problems" that were the inevitable outcome of the revolutionary process.

The key leaders of the Eurasianists were Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Peter Savitsky, Peter Suvchinsky, D. S. Mirsky, Konstantin Chkheidze, Peter Arapov, and Sergei Efron. Philosopher Georges Florovsky was initially a supporter, but backed out of the organization, claiming that it was "asking the right questions" but "asking the wrong answers." Nikolai Berdyaev wrote that he could influence the Eurasianists' acceptance of the revolution as fact, but noted that several key Eurasianist principles were completely alien and hostile to him: they did not love freedom as he did, they were statist, they were hostile to Western culture in a way that Berdyaev was not, and they embraced Orthodoxy superficially.

In the émigré community, around the same time, several organizations of a similar spirit to the Eurasians, such as the pro-monarchist Mladorossi and the Smenovekhs, emerged.

Several Eurasianist members were hit by the Soviet provocation operation TREST, which organized a fake meeting of Eurasianists in Russia attended by Eurasianist leader P.N. Savitsky in 1926 (the previous series of trips had been made two years earlier by Eurasianist member P. Arapov). The exposure of TREST as a Soviet provocation dealt a serious moral blow to the Eurasians and discredited their public image. In 1929 the Eurasians stopped publishing their periodical and quickly disappeared from the community of Russian émigrés. (Sobolev, 2008)

One of the guiding principles of this geopolitical ideology is the idea of Greater Russia. It is a concept that in the past applied to the territories of the Moscow Principality, and later to Russia. It was the land from which the ethnic Russians originated and where the ethnogenesis of the Great Russians took place. The name supposedly derives from the Greek *Megálē Rhōssía*, which the Byzantines used for the northern part of the Rus lands. In 1654-1721, the word was adopted by the Russian tsars - their official title included the wording, "Ruler of All Russia: Great (Russia), Little (Ukraine) and White (Belarus)". Similarly, the terms *Velkorus* and *Velkorusi* were used by ethnographers and linguists in the 19th century, but have since fallen into disuse. (Chapman, 2007)

Contemporary geopolitical issues

One of the leading personalities of contemporary Eurasianism is undoubtedly Aleksandr Dugin. Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin, who is a philosopher, political analyst, and strategist, was the main organizer of the National Bolshevik Party, the National Bolshevik Front, and the Eurasia Party. He also served as an adviser to State Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznyov and to Sergei Naryshkin, a leading member of the ruling United Russia party. Dugin is the author of more than 30 books, including *Fundamentals of Geopolitics* (1997) and *The Fourth Political Theory* (2009).

(Isaev, 2005)

Alexander Dugin's geopolitical conception in agreement with many other geopoliticians, who also construct a bipolar geopolitical world order (H. J. Mackinder or N. J. Spykeman),

proposes a conflict scheme between two fundamentally antagonistic blocks. However, Dugin gives a different connotation to this confrontation and in this new conception would be thus meant to be an "apocalyptic conflict" between strictly hierarchical organized, authoritarian "Eurasian" continental powers that in a geographical context identifies with the Heartland topology, and liberal-democratic, capitalist "Atlantic" powers, which are situated in the factually equivalent to Spykeman's Rimland. In this context, then, Dugin also applies the terms thalassocracy and telurocracy, which, however, build on a strongly normative foundation. (Shekhovtsov, 2016)

"Neo-Eurasianism is the most sophisticated of the various conservative ideologies that emerged in Russia in the 1990s," says Marlene Laruelle, a researcher at Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, and a former fellow at the Wilson Center. Eurasianism can be defined as an ideology that affirms that Russia and its "periphery" occupy a middle position between Europe and Asia, that their specific features are related to their culture, which is a "mix" born of a fusion of Slavic and Turco-Muslim, and that Russia should specifically emphasize its Asian features. Eurasianism rejects the view that Russia is on the periphery of Europe, and instead interprets the country's geographical location as a reason for a kind of messianic "third way".

"This Eurasian doctrine has been attractive to many intellectuals and politicians because it offers an understanding of the collapse of the Soviet Union and restores Russia's troubled historical and political continuity," Laruellen said. On May 4, 2009, Kennan Institute discussion of her book Russian Eurasianism: The Ideology of Empire. Laruelle explored the expansion of Eurasianism beyond purely academic circles into a universal vision for Russia.

According to Laruellen, the flexibility of Eurasianism as an ideology explains its success, its diversity, and the breadth of its coverage. "It is a political doctrine in the strict sense, a theory of nation and ethnos, an alter-globalist philosophy of history, a new pragmatic formulation of 'sovietism,' a substitute for the global explanatory schemes of Marxism-Leninism. a set of expansive geopolitical principles for Russia, and much more," she said. Eurasianism is often claimed to be a science whose message about Russia does not depend on personal considerations, but is a methodical and objective analysis of Russian interests. It draws much of its success from its commitment to creating new academic disciplines such as geopolitics, cultural studies, conflict studies, ethnopsychology, and others. (Wilson center, 2008)

However, it is not only the geopolitical or foreign sphere that supports the idea of Eurasianism. Another institution that brings together the countries of the former Soviet Union, but in the economic sphere, is the Eurasian Economic Union. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an economic union of post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe, Western Asia, and Central Asia. The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union was signed on 29 May 2014 by the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia and entered into force on 1 January 2015. Treaties aiming at the accession of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to the Eurasian Economic Union were signed on 9 October and 23 December 2014. The Treaty of Accession of Armenia entered into force on 2 January 2015. The Treaty of Accession of Kyrgyzstan entered into force on 6 August 2015. Kyrgyzstan has been part of the EAEU since the date of its establishment as an acceding state.

The Eurasian Economic Union has an integrated single market with 184 million people and a gross domestic product exceeding 5 trillion international dollars. The EAEU promotes the free movement of goods and services and provides common policies in the macroeconomic sphere, transport, industry and agriculture, energy, foreign trade and investment, customs, technical regulation, competition, and antitrust regulation. Provisions for a single currency and greater integration are envisaged for the future. The Union operates through supranational and intergovernmental institutions. The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council is the Union's highest body, composed of the heads of state of the Member States. The second level of intergovernmental institutions is the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council (consisting of the Heads of Government of the Member States). The day-to-day work of the EAEU is carried out through the Eurasian Economic Commission, the executive body of the Union. There is also a judicial body - the EAEU Court of Justice.

The Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia (now the Eurasian Customs Union) was established on 1 January 2010. The priorities of the Customs Union were the elimination of intra-bloc tariffs, the creation of a common external customs policy, and the removal of non-tariff barriers. It was launched as a first step towards the creation of a broader single market inspired by the European Union to create an alliance among former Soviet states. Member states planned to continue economic integration and after July 2011 were to eliminate all customs borders between them.

On 1 January 2012, the three countries created the Eurasian Economic Area, which ensures the effective functioning of a single market for goods, services, capital, and labor and establishes

coherent industrial, transport, energy, and agricultural policies. The agreement included a roadmap for future integration and established a Eurasian Economic Commission (modeled on the European Commission). The Eurasian Economic Commission serves as the regulatory agency for the Eurasian Customs Union, the Single Economic Space, and the Eurasian Economic Union. (Eaunion, 2022)

Ukraine and its importance in the Eurasian strategy

Dugin's Inner Empire includes Ukraine, of course, and in *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, he writes that Ukraine should be annexed by Russia because "Ukraine as a state has no geopolitical significance, no special cultural import or universal significance, no geographical uniqueness, no ethnic exclusiveness, its particular territorial ambitions pose a huge danger to all of Eurasia, and without a solution to the Ukrainian problem, there is no point in talking about continental politics in general. Ukraine should not be allowed to remain independent unless it is a cordon sanitaire, which would be unacceptable." (Dugin, 1997, p. 377)

The first references to Ukraine based on Dugin's geopolitical theories appeared in the first half of the years 90. when Dugin was a co-founder of the National Bolshevik Party, which he founded together with the Russian ultra-nationalist avant-garde writer Eduard Limonov in 1993. The party's 1994 political program stated unequivocally that it did not regard either Russia's current borders or those of the post-Soviet states as fixed or uncontested. (Dugin, 2014)

But Ukraine has become a thorn in the side of the Russian Federation after the events of Euromaidan. Euromaidan was a wave of demonstrations that began in Ukraine on the night of 21 November 2013 with public protests on the Maidan of Independence in Kiev. The protests were sparked by the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union, opting instead for closer ties with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. The scale of the protests soon expanded to include calls for the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich and his government. The protests were fuelled by perceptions of widespread government corruption, abuse of power, and human rights abuses in Ukraine. Transparency International has described President Yanukovich as the best example of corruption in the world. The situation escalated after the violent dispersal of demonstrators on 30 November, which led to many more demonstrators joining in. The protests led to the 2014

Ukrainian Revolution, also known as the Revolution of Dignity. The subsequent overthrow of Yanukovich caused panic in the Kremlin. (rferl, 2014)

In February and March 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine. This event took place after the Revolution of Dignity and is part of the wider Russia-Ukraine conflict. On 22-23 February 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin convened an all-night meeting with the heads of the security services to discuss the extrication of ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. On 23 February, pro-Russian demonstrations took place in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, and on 27 February, masked Russian forces without insignia seized the Supreme Council (parliament) of Crimea, and captured strategic locations in Crimea, leading to the installation of the pro-Russian government of Sergei Aksyonov in Crimea, and the holding of a referendum on the status of Crimea and the declaration of Crimean independence on 16 March 2014. Russia formally incorporated Crimea as two Russian federal entities - the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol on 18 March 2014. This territory still belongs to the Russian Federation to this day. (Washington Post, 2014)

Another destabilizing element in Ukraine is the ongoing conflict in the Donbas. The war in the Donbas is an armed conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine, which is part of the Ukrainian crisis and the wider Russian-Ukrainian war. Since the beginning of March 2014, in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution and the Euromaidan movement, protests by Russian-backed anti-government separatist groups have taken place in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, collectively called the Donbas region. These demonstrations, which followed the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February-March 2014 and were part of a wider group of parallel protests in southern and eastern Ukraine, escalated into an armed conflict between separatist forces in the self-proclaimed Donetsk region, and Luhansk People's Republic (DPR and LPR, respectively) and the Ukrainian government. While the initial protests were largely an initial expression of dissatisfaction with the new Ukrainian government, Russia used them to launch a coordinated political and military campaign against Ukraine. Russian citizens led the separatist movement in Donetsk from April to August 2014 and were supported by volunteers and material from Russia. As the conflict escalated in May 2014, Russia used a "hybrid approach," deploying a combination of disinformation tactics, irregular fighters, regular Russian troops, and conventional military support to destabilize the Donbas region. According to the Ukrainian government, at the height of the conflict in the summer of 2014, Russian

paramilitary forces accounted for between 15 percent and 80 percent of the fighters. Ukraine launched a military counter-offensive against pro-Russian forces in April 2014 called "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO) from 2014 to 2018, when it was renamed "Joint Force Operation" (JFO). By the end of August 2014, this operation was able to significantly reduce the territory under the control of pro-Russian forces and came closer to regaining control of the Russian-Ukrainian border. In response, Russia abandoned its hybrid approach and launched a conventional invasion of the Donbas. Between 22 and 25 August 2014, Russian artillery, personnel, and what Russia called a "humanitarian convoy" crossed the Ukrainian-Russian border. The crossings occurred in areas under the control of pro-Russian forces, as well as in areas that were not under their control, such as the southeastern part of the Donetsk region near Novoazovsk. These events followed reported shelling of Ukrainian positions from the Russian side of the border during the previous month. The head of Ukraine's security service, Valentyn Nalyvaychenko, characterized the events of 22 August as a "direct invasion of Ukraine by Russia", while other Western and Ukrainian officials have described the events as a "covert invasion" of Ukraine by Russia. Russia's official position on the presence of Russian forces in Donbas is unclear: while official authorities have denied the presence of "regular armed forces" in Ukraine, they have confirmed the presence of "military specialists" on numerous occasions. As a result of the invasion, the DPR and LPR rebels have regained much of the territory they lost during the previous military offensive by the Ukrainian government. On 5 September 2014, Ukraine, Russia, the DPR, and the LPR signed a ceasefire agreement called the Minsk Protocol. Violations of the ceasefire on both sides have become common. Amid the consolidation of the line between rebel and government-controlled territory during the ceasefire, fighters took control of territories on the rebel side, leading to further destabilization. The ceasefire completely collapsed in January 2015, with heavy fighting resuming in the conflict zone, including at the Donetsk international airport and in Debaltseve. The parties agreed on a new ceasefire, called Minsk II, on 12 February 2015. Immediately after the signing of the agreement, separatist forces launched an offensive on Debaltseve, forcing Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the area. In the months following the fall of Debaltseve, minor skirmishes continued along the line of contact, but no territorial changes occurred. This stalemate led to the war being labeled a 'frozen conflict'. Nevertheless, the area remained a war zone, with dozens of soldiers and civilians killed every month. In 2017, an average of one Ukrainian soldier died in combat every three days, while the

number of Russian and separatist troops remaining in the region is estimated at 6,000 and 40,000 respectively. By the end of 2017, the OSCE observer mission accounted for approximately 30,000 individuals in military clothing who crossed from Russia into the Donbas at the two border crossings that were allowed to be monitored. (Kofman, 2017)

Energy diplomacy, which is one of the "levers" of Russian foreign policy, has also proved to be effective in Ukraine. The Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 projects are examples of this. Opponents see the pipeline as a move by Russia to bypass traditional transit countries (currently Ukraine, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Belarus, and Poland). Some transit countries fear that the Kremlin's long-term plan is to try to exert political influence on them by threatening their gas supplies without affecting supplies to Western Europe. The fact that Russia has refused to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty reinforces these concerns. Critics of Nord Stream argue that Europe could become dangerously dependent on Russian gas, especially as Russia could face problems meeting the surge in domestic as well as foreign demand. After several disputes between Russia and Ukraine over gas prices as well as foreign policy towards Eastern Europe, it has become clear that gas supplies from Russia can be used as a political tool.

A study by the Swedish Defence Research Agency, completed in March 2007, counted more than 55 incidents since 1991, most of which had "both political and economic foundations". In April 2006, Radosław Sikorski, the Polish defense minister, compared the project to the infamous Nazi-Soviet Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939. Edward Lucas, in his book *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, published in 2008, stated that "although Nord Stream's supporters insist that the project is purely commercial and straightforward, it would be easier to believe if it were more transparent." In a report published by the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in 2008, Norwegian researcher Bendik Solum Whist noted that Nord Stream AG was registered in Switzerland, "whose strict banking secrecy laws make the project less transparent than it would have been. if it was based in the EU". Second, the Russian energy sector "generally lacks transparency" and Gazprom "is no exception". (Solum, 2008)

Russia responded that the pipeline increases Europe's energy security and that the criticism is due to outrage over the loss of significant transit revenues as well as the loss of political influence that stems from the ability of transit countries to hold Russian gas supplies to Western Europe hostage to their local political agendas. It would reduce Russia's dependence on the transit countries as it would for the first time directly link Russia to Western Europe. According

to Gazprom, a direct link to Germany would reduce risks in gas transit zones, including the political risk of disrupting Russian gas exports to Western Europe. (Gazprom, 2006)

In 2021, relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine have reached a freezing point. The mobilization of troops on the border and the tense situation in the world have caused the world powers to try to find a solution. Although the Russian Federation has threatened to invade Ukraine many times, its main objective lies in the diplomatic rather than the military route. Therefore, it could be said that the proposals put forward by the Kremlin, such as guaranteeing Ukraine's neutrality (where Ukraine would be banned from joining NATO), removing NATO troops from the countries of Eastern Europe, may seem impossible to achieve, but it is much more substantial and beneficial for the Russian Federation than securing the eastern part of Ukraine. The guarantee of non-expansion of NATO is supposed to guarantee non-expansion of the Russian Federation. (Reuters, 2021)

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine is one of the best examples of geopolitical thinking. Throughout its duration, new facts are being uncovered, and the powers are learning from their diplomatic or even military mistakes.

In my thesis, I have discussed the history of Eurasian ideology, its leading exponents, such as Aleksandr Dugin, who is the most famous proponent of this geopolitical orientation nowadays. It was explained what the principles and objectives of Eurasianism consist of, which are undoubtedly the unification of the continent without recourse to chauvinistic nationalism.

This is precisely what Dugin and the Eurasianists are referring to with Ukraine. Statements about the coup in Kiev, rising neo-Nazism, or NATO moving closer to Russia's borders are in themselves indications that Russia cannot afford to lose geopolitics in Eastern Europe. That is why Ukraine's path to the EU or NATO is a confrontation between two worlds: The Western, European-liberal one, and the Eastern, Eurasian, and nationally conservative one.

For Eurasianists, as well as for the Russian government, Ukraine's entry into the Western sphere of influence would be a disaster, because it would not only affect Russia's position in the world in negative connotations, but also threaten the securing of the Russian-speaking territories

in the east, which are under Ukrainian administration, and bring Western civilization closer to the Eastern one.

All in all, one could argue that Eurasianism and its representatives have their goals sophisticatedly thought out, even if time and material do not play into their hands, it is a "grandiose" geopolitical ideology, which aims not only to return Ukraine to the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation but also to expand its cells in Europe, which will promote Eurasian ideas in the EU countries as well.

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