

## Putin's Third Term: The Triumph of Eurasianism?

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**Abstract:** *In the midst of the Russian Federation's 2012 presidential election, Vladimir Putin expressed his support for the establishment of a functioning Eurasian Union by 2015. This article attempts to demonstrate that this Eurasian push, taken in context together with a number of other policies and programs pursued by Putin and Dmitri Medvedev, reflects a shift in Russian identity politics towards neo-Eurasianism. In doing so, the potential weaknesses of neo-Eurasianism as an identity framework for the whole of Russian society will be highlighted, indicating that the further centralization of political authority with the core (Moscow) will only exacerbate grievances in the regions of the periphery.*

**Keywords:** *Russian Federation, Eurasianism, Eurasian Union, nationalism, Vladimir Putin*

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### Putin's Legacy

On March 4th, 2012, Vladimir Putin secured a third, non-consecutive term as President of the Russian Federation. Amid widespread reports of procedural irregularities at polling stations across the country, the Central Election Commission announced that Putin had secured 63.6% of the vote. His closest challenger in the final tally was the Communist Party's candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, who received only 17.2% of the vote. As such, Putin is likely to remain a dominant force in Russian politics until at least the conclusion of his latest presidential term in 2018. What impact might this third term have on prevailing narratives of Russian identity and the position of the Russian Federation in the world?

One theme that emerged in the course of the 2012 presidential election was the notion put forward by both Putin and his supporters in United Russia that a Eurasian Union be formed by the Russian Federation and a number of other post-Soviet states. Such a political and economic configuration in the region has been touted as a possible counterweight to the trans-Atlantic community – namely the European Union and the United States of America – on the world stage. Much has been made in particular of the remarks made by then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on October 4th, 2011, in which he called for the formation of this Eurasian Union in order to “...create real conditions to change the geopolitical and geo-economic configuration of the entire continent and have an undoubtedly positive global effect” (BBC, 2011a).

It will be argued here that this proposal for a Eurasian Union, as well as the attendant notion that Russian identity can be characterized as distinctly ‘Eurasian’, is intended as

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the basis for Putin's legacy. Accordingly, Putin's successful bid for a third presidential term represents the institutionalization of an increasingly coherent neo-Eurasianism as the dominant political ideology of the Russian Federation in the early 21st century, possibly de-pragmatizing relations between the Russian state and its neighbours as well as between the core and the periphery of Russian society. In order to demonstrate this, the sources of the Eurasian Union proposal will first be examined. Subsequently, the intellectual contributions of Alexander Dugin, Vladislav Surkov, and Sergei Karaganov to the contemporary narrative of Russian identity will be considered, highlighting how the ideational position of Russia has steadily shifted from an Atlanticist orientation to a Eurasian one since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

### **An Ever Closer Union?**

In seeking to understand the ramifications of Putin's increasingly Eurasianist slant, it is necessary to outline the origins of the October 2011 proposal for a Eurasian Union. The concept of such an organization – an intergovernmental or even supranational entity encompassing the Russian Federation and other states in the post-Soviet space – is indeed nothing new. Proposals for a Eurasian Union were initially made in 1994 by President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan (Kilner, 2011). According to Nazarbayev, the process of integration would not have the immediate effect of forming a supranational entity; rather, it would be a gradual process with perhaps even more ambitious aims than those pursued through the formation of the European Union. "This was visualized as a multinational model that would aim at creating a unified state through various stages of a confederation and finally arriving at a union" (Sengupta, 2009). Movement was later made to act upon this proposal in early 1996, when the Treaty on the Deepening of Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Field was signed into force by representatives of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Eventually, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan entered into cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Community that would later develop from the 1996 Treaty.

At this point in the concept's development, the Eurasian Union was very much a project of President Nazarbayev, rather than an expression of geopolitical ambition by any Russian leader. Upon the signing of the aforementioned 1996 Treaty, "the Kazakh president Nazabayev saw the treaty as a meaningful step in the realization of the idea of a Eurasian Community that he developed two years earlier" (Malfliet, 1998). This would not simply supplement the already existing agreements that formed the Commonwealth of Independent States, of which both Kazakhstan and Russia are a part, however. Rather, he seemed to perceive the 1996 Treaty as Eurasia's equivalent to the Maastricht Treaty, which transitioned the European Community to the European Union. In fact, when considering the prospects for this gradually developing institution, "he compared the newly formed Eurasian Union to the European Union and said that the treaty lays out a blueprint for the creation of a Community of Integrated States, whose territory will stretch from the Polish to the Chinese border" (Ibid).

It did not take long for dissent to emerge among the Central Asian states regarding the future of Nazarbayev's vision for the Eurasian Union. Even as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan entered into cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Community, Tajik and Uzbek leaders expressed considerable scepticism toward Nazarbayev's proposal, arguing that the post-Soviet space did not need a body separate from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in order to achieve integration. Rather, they argued, the CIS had greater potential as a vehicle for political and economic integration between the Russian Federation and its Central Asian neighbours (Alexandrov, 1999). As such, support for this form of integration soon dwindled and, aside from Nazarbayev, the only remaining proponent of integration outside the auspices of the CIS was President Alexander Lukashenko, who saw ambitious projects of integration like the Eurasian Union as a possible means of remedying the identity crisis with which independent Belarus had been confronted (Trenin, 2002).

Thus, the Eurasian project was largely abandoned or at least lost its significance in the prevailing narratives of post-Soviet politics after the initial enthusiasm experienced in 1996-1997. An agreement establishing the Eurasian Economic Community was signed into force on October 10th, 2000 by Russian, Belarusian, Kazakh and Tajik leaders. At another summit in October 2005, it was decided that Uzbekistan would be granted membership. But few steps were taken to make the Eurasian Economic Community truly functional. After all, the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) has never been a customs union in practice, only a free trade area. No common external tariff has been put into place by the member states, with each member having a different tariff structure with regard to imports from the rest of the world (Broadman, 2005). It is therefore difficult to even call the EAEC an actual economic community.

The lack of political will among most of the member states to cede any degree of sovereignty to a supranational structure was further undermined by parallel agreements between the Russian Federation and some of its neighbours. For example, Lukashenko pressed for a closer relationship between the Russian Federation and Belarus and, as a result, a number of agreements were concluded between the two countries toward forming a 'Union of Two', though later years would see a lack of progress on this front as, according to some scholars, "Presidents Putin and Lukashenko sparred continuously over the form a union between their countries would take" (Donaldson and Noguee, 2009). By the end of the 21st century, a Customs Union of Five had also been agreed upon between the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The Eurasian Union had yet to materialize and the post-Soviet space was becoming rife with partially realized inter-state arrangements. In the midst of this crowded space, "...the Union of Two and the Customs Union of Five have established themselves as more or less self-sustainable projects, competing with other emerging subregional groupings and broader concepts such as Nazarbayev's proposal for a Eurasian union..." (Pazynak, 2000).

In many respects, this clutter of inter-governmental institutions and arrangements in the post-Soviet space has been, and continues to remain, one of the principal obstacles to the realization of a fully functioning Eurasian Union. It is certainly true that the European political space also includes a significant number of inter-governmental arrangements, including such bodies as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the

Council of Europe (CoE), and many other sub-regional organizations, like the Council of Baltic Sea States or the now defunct Western European Union. However, it could be said that these numerous bodies are to a degree complementary, serving as a semi-coherent European security toolbox (Basu *et al*, 2012). Conversely, while there is much overlap in membership, there is little in the way of complementarity between structures established in the post-Soviet space, such as the CIS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the aforementioned Union of Two and Customs Union of Five, as well as the Eurasian Union and its myriad components.

In light of this, one might have expected the project to be utterly abandoned, the decision in 2005 to admit Uzbekistan as an EAEC member being the last hurrah for the Eurasian vision. This was seemingly demonstrated in November 2008 when, after a protracted period of inactivity within the EAEC, Uzbekistan announced its withdrawal from the Community (RIA Novosti, 2008). But Putin's surprising announcement in October 2011 that he would press for the establishment of a functioning Eurasian Union brought about a sudden resurrection of the project, bringing renewed vigour to integration efforts. A month later, Dmitri Medvedev, still serving as President of the Russian Federation at the time, reached an agreement with Nazarbayev and Lukashenko at a November 2011 summit to establish a political and economic Eurasian Union by 2015 (BBC, 2011b). By the start of January 2012, the three states had launched a Eurasian Economic Space, largely similar to the pre-existing Customs Union of Five, and announced preparations to establish a Eurasian Commission, modelled on the European Commission (Interfax, 2012).

This iteration of the Eurasian Union thus far seems to have avoided a pitfall encountered by other inter-state arrangements in the post-Soviet space – namely the lack of criteria designated for associate membership. In the case of the SCO in particular, this led to a lack of coherence in the organization's membership, with Belarus' application for associate membership being rejected yet invitations were extended to Iran and Pakistan (Kembayev, 2009). The lack of interest from Russian, Belarusian, and Kazakh officials in Syria's recently expressed enthusiasm to participate in the Eurasian Union demonstrates an understanding that cultivating the development of this organization will require discretion in growing the Union's membership (Central Asia Newswire, 2012).

For Nazarbayev, the motivation to propose and advocate this Eurasian Union is apparent state interest. Balancing Russia and China against one another ensures that neither secures exclusive hegemony over Central Asia. While there are certainly strong historical ties between Russia and Kazakhstan, "it should also be noted that a strong Russian presence in the area is seen as protection against possible threats from China and Uzbekistan, as the Kazakhs are acutely conscious of the geopolitical consequences of having a large territory and a small population" (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2003). Pursuing some level of integration with Russia, while also promoting other institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, means obtaining security guarantees for Kazakhstan from both Russia and China.

But why have Putin and the Russian political elite renewed the push for a functioning Eurasian Union? There appears to be a number of erroneous ideas being put forward in

the literature as to what the principal motivation for the latest Eurasian push is. Contrary to the suppositions of some observers, the Eurasian Union is not actually intended as a means for Russia to re-establish an empire in the region. Taking over responsibility for the development of the Central Asian states would by all accounts be prohibitively expensive (Giusti and Penkova, 2010). Other authors have suggested that the Eurasian project is pursued by Russia as a means by which to block further EU enlargement into Russia's traditional sphere of influence (Bugajski, 2008). The applicability of this rationale is also dubious, given that the states involved in the Eurasian project would not be likely candidates for EU membership in any case. The accession of Kazakhstan or Tajikistan to the EU is not exactly a topic of debate in Brussels or Strasbourg. If the Eurasian Union has the potential to interfere with any remotely feasible enlargement of the EU, it is the case of Belarus or Ukraine, whose political elite is allegedly mulling the benefits of membership in the Eurasian Union.

In actuality, Putin's new push for the establishment of the Eurasian Union reflects the search by Russian political elites to find a new framework of identity for the broader Russian society. Rather than the result of a complex geopolitical arithmetic, the Eurasian Union is an effort to institutionalize an increasingly dominant political ideology in Moscow: neo-Eurasianism. Once regarded as a fringe view in post-Soviet narratives of Russian identity, neo-Eurasianism has managed to become the mainstream view, supported by many of Putin's closest advisors and even many opposition figures. In order to better understand the nature of this 'Kremlin consensus' on Russia's place in the world, we will next examine its roots in classical Eurasianism and the core concepts around which neo-Eurasianism has formed.

### **The Roots and Rise of Eurasianism**

At the end of the 19th century, concern was mounting among Russian political elites and intellectuals at the emergence of pan-Turkism (Wiederkehr, 2007). This nascent political ideology recognized the precarious position of the Ottoman Empire and sought to conceive of a new identity framework for Turkic peoples, chiefly through promoting the political and cultural unification of all Turkic peoples, whether this take place through Ottoman rule or some other association (Landau, 1995). Presented with the growing influence of this pan-Turkic idea in Russia's Central Asian territories, classical Eurasianism began to take form in response.

This form of Eurasianism enjoyed its greatest degree of development in the 20th century interwar period as Russian emigrant intellectuals in Europe strove to develop a new framework of identity that could both resist the perceived threat of pan-Turkism and embrace the drastic social change brought about by the Bolshevik Revolution (Staalesen, 2004). Regarding the Bolshevik Revolution, this development was initially seen by the Eurasianists as a consequence of Russia's Europeanization, but it was later decided by most Eurasianist thinkers that Bolshevism was a form of national communism, a breaking away from the West, and they supported it (Chaudet *et al*, 2009). Borrowing from the Heartland Theory advanced by Sir Halford Mackinder, Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi and

Nikolai Berdyaev were some of the most prominent proponents of the idea that Russia stood apart from Europe on a civilizational level and represented a distinctly Eurasian character (Jackson, 2003). In essence, classical Eurasianism portrayed Russia not as a common state but as a civilization in its own right, with Russia compared to Europe or 'Atlantic civilization' as a whole, rather than to such states as the United Kingdom, France, or Germany (Shnirelman, 2009).

But classical Eurasianism largely faded away by the 1930s, with many Eurasianists seeking to reconcile with Soviet leaders and merge their ideas with Stalinism (Grier, 2003). The literature composed by classical Eurasianists even came to be prohibited in the Soviet Union for some time. Hints of Eurasianist ideas would occasionally appear in Soviet political discourses, as in Mikhail Gorbachev's proposal for a common European home, which held that the countries of the Warsaw Pact would be allowed to determine their own future but not the republics of the Soviet Union as these constituent units were civilizationally different, even if they shared a European home (Smith, 2006). Proposals with these Eurasianist connotations, however, were few and far between during the Soviet years.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, much more explicitly Eurasianist ideas began to surface in the Russian media by 1993. The right-wing publication *Den* reprinted portions of B.Y. Vladimirtsov's 1922 essay, *The Life of Genghis Khan*. This essay stressed the importance of Genghis Khan on the development of Russian political culture, imbuing the Russian people with an appreciation for strong authority figures (Borer, 1997). Even so, intellectuals and political elites in Russia widely regarded classical Eurasianism as the purview of only the far-right political fringe (Allensworth, 2009).

The transition from classical Eurasianism to neo-Eurasianism was facilitated by the rise of one figure in particular in the Russian political arena: Alexander Dugin. While the publication of Eurasianist pieces like Vladimirtsov's essay on Genghis Khan ignited interest on the far right, Dugin took up the task of modernizing Eurasianism and defining its ideas in a context relevant to Russia in the 1990s. Despite having only a tenuous connection to classical Eurasianism at best, Dugin positioned himself as the successor to Berdyaev and the other various émigré thinkers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, providing some semblance of continuity between classical Eurasianist thought and the neo-Eurasianism Dugin would come to espouse (Bassin, 2008).

It did not take long for Dugin to obtain the patronage of Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. At its core, the Eurasianism put forward by Alexander Dugin idolizes medieval Muscovy, places considerable importance on the Orthodox faith within Russian society, emphasizes Russia's distinctly Eurasian civilizational basis and is deeply patriarchal. It rejects not only 'Western' overtures for partnership with Russia but also the notion that Western liberal values could have any place in Russian society (Clowes, 2011). Through the patronage of the Communist Party, Dugin soon garnered considerable media attention for his views.

Yet Dugin soon found that Russian society presented a hardly receptive audience for his ideas. More mainstream contributors to Russian political discourses identified a linkage between the classical Eurasianist thinkers from whom Dugin derived his inspiration and the European conservative *Weltanschauung* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that condemned the legacy



of the Enlightenment (Parland, 2005). Even today, many of those espousing Eurasianist sentiments in Russia heap scorn on Dugin for what they perceive as his borrowing of ideas from the European conservative and ultranationalist movements (Laruelle, 2006). At the same time, while Dugin was advising Zyuganov and the Communists, then President Boris Yeltsin was extolling the virtues of Atlanticism, positioning Russia as a partner to the European Union and the United States of America (Molchanov, 2002).

The deep financial crisis that struck the Russian Federation in 1998 changed this orientation, however. Atlanticists, as well as the liberal democracy and civic nationalism promoted by them, were effectively branded as responsible for the socio-economic shocks experienced in the 1990s (March, 2007). For a time shortly thereafter, the only Russian political institution perceived in the country as remaining true to Atlanticist ideals was the opposition party Yabloko, a member of the European Liberal Democrats group in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and an observer in Liberal International (Makinen, 2003). But such has been the dramatic shift in the political environment of Russia that Vladimir Lukin, one of the founders of Yabloko, argued recently that Russia is not necessarily a Western country and that there is a distinct Russian civilization, echoing some of the core beliefs of neo-Eurasianism (Mankoff, 2009). Lukin certainly has continued to press for closer relations between the Russian Federation, the EU, and the United States, but the tone is no longer Atlanticist.

Even if Dugin himself has not seen an increase in popularity, his ideas certainly have taken hold in the years following the 1998 financial crisis. This is most apparent not in the spread of neo-Eurasianist sentiment from the Communist Party on the one hand to Yabloko on the other, but in the now pre-dominantly Eurasianist slant of Putin's three terms in the Kremlin. As one of the authors points out, during Putin's first two presidential terms, the Kremlin drastically increased funding for what has been styled 'patriotic initiatives'. "Under the guise of patriotism, the Kremlin under Putin is undertaking a campaign to indoctrinate the country and in particular its youth with Neo-Eurasianist ideas and values..." (Szaszdi, 2008).

But precisely how has this neo-Eurasianism been instrumentalized through government policy, beyond that seen through the recent push for the establishment of a Eurasian Union? If Alexander Dugin remains ostracized to some degree in Russian society, what figures close to the presidency have become the heirs to Eurasianism? In order to demonstrate this neo-Eurasianism in practice, it will be necessary to next examine the policy contributions of a number of figures within the United Russia party.

### **Instruments of Eurasianism**

By February 2008, neo-Eurasianism had become so well-entrenched as the political consensus in Moscow that leaders within United Russia felt comfortable to acknowledge that some of their policy positions were inspired by the writings of Alexander Dugin. Ivan Demidov, upon being appointed the new head of the Directorate for Ideological Work of United Russia's Central Executive Committee, professed his dedication to neo-Eurasianism and his enthusiasm for Dugin's writings (Umland, 2008). Demidov is perhaps one of the

more explicit proponents of neo-Eurasianism and it should be noted that, while Demidov holds a prominent position within United Russia, he holds no formal governmental office as of this writing.

However, several key proponents of neo-Eurasianism can be identified who have not been as explicit in their support for this ideology as Demidov but hold, or have recently held, governmental office. Two specific figures will be examined here: Vladislav Surkov, to whom we can attribute the idea of 'sovereign democracy', and Sergei Karaganov, who originally engineered the so-called Compatriots Policy.

Vladislav Surkov, who served as Deputy Chief of Staff in the presidential administrations of both Putin and Medvedev from 2000 until the political fallout from the December 2011 parliamentary election, was responsible for introducing the idea of 'sovereign democracy' into Russian political discourse. This concept represents the "...conviction that Russians should define their own democracy and protect themselves from values exported from outside" (Light, 2009). Liberal democracy and Atlanticism is represented here as capitulation to external influence from the Americans and Europeans, whereas embracing a decidedly authoritarian model of society is seen as recognizing the distinctly Eurasianist character of contemporary Russia.

This idea that 'Western models' of liberal democracy are incompatible with Russian society is not purely a matter of scholarly debate in the Russian Federation. Nashi, a youth movement in Russia suspected of having informal connections with United Russia and Putin's presidential administration, has helped to promote the idea of sovereign democracy among the Russian electorate. In previous elections, Nashi activists have reportedly distributed campaign materials criticizing liberal democracy, suggesting that the 'Western model' of governance leads to caustic debate that undermines social cohesion, whereas sovereign democracy and the centralization of political authority in Russia can better facilitate orderly development (Ishkanian, 2008). In the wake of the 2012 presidential election, erroneous reports emerged in the media that Nashi was preparing to dissolve as an organization. However, Nashi not only continues to be an influential force in Russian politics but also maintains its support for the centralization of authority through Surkov's idea of sovereign democracy (ITAR-TASS, 2012).

Sovereign democracy did fall out of favour to some degree during the single term presidency of Dmitri Medvedev. Of particular note is the first speech made by Medvedev on the international stage. In January 2007, then First Deputy Prime Minister Medvedev addressed the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland. In his speech, he remarked that:

*"Russia is a country that endured the most severe trials in the twentieth century: a revolution, civil war, the world wars, economic collapse. Today we are building new institutions based on the fundamental principles of full democracy. This democracy requires no additional definition. This democracy is effective and is based on the principles of the market economy, the rule of law, and government that is accountable to the rest of society"* (Wall Street Journal, 2008).

Some observers have noted that the standpoint conveyed by Medvedev in his speech to the World Economic Forum was completely opposite to the ideas of Russian democracy



expressed by Putin over the previous years (Ambrosio, 2009). The emphasis that Medvedev gave in his remarks – namely that, ‘this democracy requires no additional definition’ – suggests a complete rejection on Medvedev’s part of the ‘sovereign’ adjective attached to Russian democracy by Putin and Surkov. But, while the United States of America may have experienced a ‘reset’ in relations with the Russian Federation in recent years, the Russian government under Medvedev continued elsewhere to pursue similar policies and foreign policy priorities to those that were characteristic of Putin’s earlier presidential terms. With the return to the presidency of Putin, it is apparent that sovereign democracy will remain a cornerstone of the neo-Eurasianist establishment in Russian political culture.

While sovereign democracy draws its inspiration from such Eurasianist works as Vladimirtsov’s writings on the cultural impact of Genghis Khan and Alexander Dugin’s protestations that Russia is civilizationally distinct from Europe, this is not the only attempt by political elites to implement neo-Eurasianism. Another important contribution is the Karaganov Doctrine, put forward by Sergei Karaganov, who is a close associate of Yevgeny Primakov and served as Presidential Advisor to both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. This Doctrine holds that the Russian Federation should position itself as the defender of ethnic Russian minority rights throughout the former Soviet republics, asserting its influence wherever ethnic Russians are subjected to perceived discrimination by the authorities of the state in question (Smith, 2002). The Karaganov Doctrine has come to be most explicitly applied through the Compatriots Policy. Compatriots are deemed as those who, while not being citizens of the Russian Federation itself, are ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers and are thus defined as part of a ‘greater’ Russian nation. “Russian Eurasianists who describe the Eurasian region as Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’ claim that no state other than Russia could assert its political dominance in Eurasia” (Tarrisever, 2004). This is in part because actors like the European Union or the People’s Republic of China represent civilizations entirely separate from the Eurasian civilization; as such, Russia is understood as the natural and rightful regional hegemon, with Chinese, European, or American influence disruptively unnatural.

Comparisons have been drawn by some between the Karaganov Doctrine and the Monroe Doctrine (Kuzio, 1995). The Monroe Doctrine, first proposed by US President James Monroe in 1823, warned that further attempt at colonization in the Americas by any of the European powers would be perceived by the United States as an act of aggression and would provoke an American military response. This Doctrine sought to enact the popular American belief of the time in Manifest Destiny, which held that the United States of America was destined by divine right to expand its rule across North and South America (McDougall, 1997). In much the same way, the Karaganov Doctrine invokes the imagery of a Russian Manifest Destiny over those territories that once fell under Tsarist rule, ranging from the Baltic States in the west to the expanse of Central Asia east of the Caspian.

It is clear that instrumentalizing the Karaganov Doctrine has been more so a matter of ideology and identity than pure Russian state interests. In 1999, this concept of foreign policy was enshrined in law, following its approval by the State Duma and the Council of the Federation. This piece of legislation, entitled ‘On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad’ “...actually constitutes quite a heavy

burden for the present Russian government, which openly recognizes that it does not know what to do with the ‘compatriots’ but is still unable to renounce this responsibility” (Morozov, 2003). This form of outreach to the ethnic Russian minorities of neighbouring states obliges the Russian Federation to take a strong stand on perceived grievances, contributing to tensions in relations with these states, yet “...this dispersed group of Russians... has not been a source of noticeable remittances or investments in Russia” (Varadarajan, 2010). Rather than empowering the Russian Federation and affording this state a strategic advantage in its relations with its neighbours, the Karaganov Doctrine and its attendant Compatriots Policy drains state resources to little benefit and irks many of Russia’s neighbours.

For domestic audiences, however, who have been inundated with programmes and rhetoric that emphasizes the Eurasianist character of the Russian Federation, the Compatriots Policy holds a certain appeal for segments of the Russian electorate. In condemning the alleged persecution of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia or advocating for the adoption of Russian as an official language in Latvia, Putin seeks to display the strong, uncompromising leadership that is held in such high regard in Eurasianist literature. “Eurasian agitation is also directed at the dominant part of the Putin constituency, which seeks an ideological rationale to support its nostalgia for a romanticized, great-power past...” (Rumer, 2002).

The Karaganov Doctrine and Surkov’s sovereign democracy certainly take inspiration from the Eurasianism of Dugin and his early 20th century forebears, but there has also been a recent move toward blurring the lines between church and state, which has been another important pillar of neo-Eurasianism. Initially, the realization of this pillar of neo-Eurasianism, which would see close ties formed between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin, was quite elusive but could be said to have at last been achieved in the midst of the 2012 presidential election. With the vote roughly a month away, Kiril I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russians, endorsed the presidential candidacy of Vladimir Putin, calling the man’s leadership a ‘miracle of God’ (Bryanski, 2012).

The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state apparatus has steadily been cemented since. In the Duma, deputies with the United Russia party have been preparing amendments to the Criminal Code that would allow for criminal charges to be brought against any individual criticizing or ‘insulting’ the Orthodox Church (Russia Today, 2012). Subsequently, considerable controversy arose in the international community when three members of the Russian punk rock band “Pussy Riot” received jail sentences for delivering an impromptu and uninvited performance in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (Kashin, 2012).

It is important to note that neo-Eurasianism does not call only for partnership between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church; this has been more so the position of members of the Slavophile movement, like Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who leads the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. Rather, neo-Eurasianism calls for an alliance of faiths between Orthodox Christianity and Islam, though with Islam as the inferior partner (Peunova, 2012). According to Dugin, Islam and Orthodox Christianity have their basis in Eurasian civilization and share certain core values, such as a respect for centralized authority and strong leadership. The secessionist conflict in Chechnya is attributed to

'assertive' Wahhabist Islam at odds with the Islam envisioned in neo-Eurasianism, which is essentially subservient to Orthodox Christianity and Russian paternalism (Hunter, 2004). Beyond the Chechen conflict, progress on the Islamic dynamic of neo-Eurasianism has been lacking, though Putin has spoken at various meetings of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) about Russia's special position as a civilizational bridge between Europe and the Muslim world (Tsygankov, 2010).

As has been demonstrated here, efforts are being made to implement the ideas set out in neo-Eurasianist thought. The rhetoric utilized by Putin on the international stage, whether that has been criticizing Estonia and Latvia in accordance with the Compatriots Policy or emphasizing the Eurasian character of the Russian Federation at OIC summits, has always insisted that Russia differs from Europe on a civilizational level. Sovereign democracy becomes less a response to pressure from Europe and the United States to adopt democratic reforms and more a reflection of this distinctly Eurasian civilization that Russia is meant to embody. The Eurasian push can therefore best be understood as entrenching the idea that Moscow must hold increasingly centralized authority over the regions, much as the President of the Russian Federation and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church must have uncontested authority over all aspects of Russian society.

We have discussed *how* neo-Eurasianism has come to dominate the Russian political discourse through projects like the Eurasian Union, sovereign democracy, the Compatriots Policy, and the partnership with the Russian Orthodox Church. Next, we will examine *why* neo-Eurasianism has found such favour with Putin and other Russian political elites.

### **The Russian Identity Crisis**

By casting himself as the Eurasianist champion of a strong and united Russia, Putin has been able to establish for himself a recognizable brand with the Russian electorate. Yet electoral strategy alone cannot be the sole motivation for pursuing such intensive efforts to institutionalize neo-Eurasianism through government policy, especially in light of the shared Eurasianist attitudes of opposition groups that range across the political spectrum from the Communists to Yabloko. The association of neo-Eurasianism with the Putin brand is an advantageous offshoot of this ideology, but it appears that the principal motivation for adopting neo-Eurasianism as a kind of ruling ideology lies in the search for a new framework of Russian identity that can hold all the country's myriad regions together.

Much has been written on the secessionist conflict in Chechnya, but the Russian Federation has been faced with increasingly severe secessionist impulses in other regions of the country. Agitation for independence in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Tuva, and Yakutia has become markedly severe in recent years, with regional leaders accusing the core (Moscow) of neglecting its impoverished periphery (the aforementioned semi-autonomous territories of Russia in Central Asia) and seeking a 'top-down' federal arrangement (Giuliano, 2011). Perhaps the most successful of these territories in claiming concessions from Moscow on political and economic autonomy has been Tatarstan. Unlike Chechen rebel leaders in the past, Tatar political elites have sought a more gradual, non-violent

process for obtaining independence (Graney, 2004). Particular importance has been placed by Tatar leaders on obtaining recognition in the international community for Tatarstan's independence, for example. This has included establishing connections with sovereigntist and separatist groups in the Canadian province of Quebec.

In part, the Russian Federation's willingness to participate in the plethora of inter-governmental arrangements established in Central Asia, including leading the process of establishing a Eurasian Union, is intended to block any efforts by Tatarstan and other such regions to obtain recognition from the Central Asian states through some integration effort that excludes Moscow. This is reflected in the pressure mounted by the Russian Federation in previous years to prevent the development of the Central Asian Union, which the Central Asian states have agreed to fold into the structures of the Eurasian Union (Melvin, 2000). However, the efforts of Moscow have not been sufficient to prevent the establishment of the Turkic Council, which not only includes the Central Asian states but also Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Tuva, and other territories.

Neo-Eurasianism attempts to answer questions as to what place these territories can have in the Russian Federation, drawing upon a mythologized past and assertions of a distinctly Russian/Eurasian civilization for inspiration. To draw upon the concept of nationalism and national identity introduced by Brubaker, Putin has sought to counter the formative nationalizing nationalism of the Tatar secessionist movement with a homeland nationalism that insists on expanding Russian influence, rather than curtailing it. To elaborate further upon the distinction between nationalizing nationalism and homeland nationalism, "...nationalizing nationalisms... are directed 'inward' by states toward their own territories and citizenries, while homeland nationalisms... are directed 'outward'..." so as to encompass members of 'their own' ethnic nationality beyond the boundaries of territory and citizenship (Brubaker, 1996).

In the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, Yeltsin had attempted to introduce a number of nationalizing projects around which a new framework of identity could form in the Russian Federation. Given the federal structure of the Russian state, proponents of these nationalizing projects referred to the nascent post-Soviet identity as civic or civil federalism (*grazhdanskii federalism*) (Waller and Malashenko, 1998). The adoption of the 1993 Constitution was an important step toward realizing the civic federalist identity envisioned for Russia. However, since then, this nationalizing nationalism common to all Russians has been eroded. The association of civic federalism with Atlanticism and, thus by extension, the deep financial crisis experienced under Yeltsin undermined public interest in this attempt to build a Russian nationalizing nationalism with a civic tone.

Civic federalism has been further undermined by what has been seen as para-constitutional behaviour by political elites. Para-constitutional behaviour entails those actions which are seen to not be in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, even if these same actions do not explicitly violate particular constitutional provisions. "...Para-constitutional behaviour gets things done, but it is ultimately counter-productive because reliance on bureaucratic managerialism undermines popular trust and promotes self-interested behaviour on the part of elites" (Sakwa, 2011). If elites are seen to be capable of circumventing the Constitution on a whim, the Constitution loses its power as a symbol of Russian identity.

In a sense, in the process of centralizing political power in Russia around himself, Putin has inadvertently contributed to the identity crisis which he now seeks to remedy through neo-Eurasianist policies and the further centralization of power. Engineering amendments to Article 81 of the Constitution in order to extend presidential terms would be one example of para-constitutional behaviour on the part of Putin. More relevant to those agitating for independence in Tatarstan and other territories on the Russian periphery, changes made by Putin to the Council of the Federation have not only been para-constitutional in nature but also cast Moscow as a highly unreliable negotiating partner. The Council of the Federation was originally intended as a representative body for the myriad regions, facilitating dialogue between the core and the periphery of the federation (Bacon, 1998). The terms of the 1993 Constitution detailed how representatives of each region on the Council would be directly elected by their constituents in regionally-mandated elections. After a series of reforms introduced by Putin and United Russia, the Constitution now assigns the presidency the power to appoint all regional representatives to the Council of the Federation, turning this 'bottom-up' federal structure into a 'top-down' managerial instrument. As such, "...the Federation Council has shown itself to be ineffective in the Russian political system. Not being directly elected, its membership has been open to manipulation in the way that it is recruited. The Council has come, in fact, to reflect the dominance of the centre over the regions" (Waller, 2005).

This tendency to seek dominion over the regions, rather than partnership with the regions, has undermined confidence in the reliability of the centre. Accordingly, as Russian nationalizing nationalism eroded, the regions sought to establish their own nationalizing nationalisms, though rooted in ethnic terms similar to those of the Soviet republics that were able to remain independent of Russia in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution. To counter this trend and attempt to bring the regions back fully under the dominion of the centre, neo-Eurasianism emphasizes that there is a common Eurasian identity beyond the civic and ethnic dimensions in which previous nationalisms have been rooted. If there is a Eurasian civilization to which Moscow and Tatarstan belong, then the sentiment is that Tatarstan's past, present, and future lies in some form of association or another with Russia.

Whether neo-Eurasianism will prove to be a successful tool for preserving the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation remains to be seen. The homeland nationalism of Slavophiles at least offers a coherent ethnic, linguistic, and religious basis for its worldview and identity framework. Neo-Eurasianism, on the other hand, suffers from numerous internal contradictions that could harm its legitimacy among the intended audiences in the outlying territories. Eurasianists claim that Islam has an important role to play in Russian society, yet insist that this role entails subservience to Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox values. The periphery is held up as integral to the core, yet the periphery is also expected to accept the dominion of the core. The Eurasian Union is presented as a partnership between states that share numerous commonalities, yet these same partners are expected to accept the leadership of Putin and Russia.

Much as confidence in the civic federalism of the 1990s came to be sorely lacking, confidence in neo-Eurasianism may be steadily lost both within Russia and abroad before the Eurasian Union can be realized in 2015. In turn, the authoritarian aspects of neo-

Eurasianism may be emphasized as Russian political elites desperately attempt to shore up the credibility of this identity framework and react to the resurgence of pan-Turkism, the very same intellectual movement that inspired classical Eurasianism a century ago.

## **Conclusion**

Taking account of numerous trends that have emerged in Russian political culture since Putin first assumed the presidency in 2000, it is clear that the Eurasian Union is not a new idea nor can the impetus for its establishment be found in great-power politics. Instead, the Eurasian Union takes its inspiration from the writings of Russian intellectuals in the early 20th century, who feared the influence of pan-Turkism in Central Asia and worried that the Bolshevik Revolution had left Russian society without an overarching sense of identity.

Much as classical Eurasianism was intended to hold Russia together, neo-Eurasianism is intended to keep the Russian Federation from fragmenting as a result of secessionist movements in Russia's Central Asian territories and a lack of public confidence in Russia's civic institutions. As has been demonstrated here, attempts to institutionalize neo-Eurasianism and reinforce the legitimacy of the Russian state have been disjointed and numerous ambiguities can be identified.

Through pressing for the establishment of a fully functioning Eurasian Union by 2015, Putin is gambling with his legacy. The Eurasian Union might well be established by the target year and neo-Eurasianist rhetoric could placate political elites in Tatarstan and elsewhere. However, it is equally possible that interest in the Eurasian project will diminish, much as it did after the enthusiasm of 1996-1997 abated, and the transition from civic-based nationalizing nationalism to civilization-based homeland nationalism will be incomplete and unsuccessful. In the latter scenario, the Russian Federation will not only have failed to preserve its territorial integrity against secessionist forces but will be left heavily isolated from the rest of the international community. In a very real sense, Russia is at a crossroads. It will be incumbent upon Russian political elites to determine whether to forge ahead on this Eurasianist route or articulate a Russian identity that can better include all those communities which now reside within the boundaries of the Russian Federation.



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