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THE POST-SOVIET SPACE: PREVIOUS DEVELOPMENT AND A NEW CONFIGURATION

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ABSTRACT

In December 1991, the political map of the world acquired newly independent states. The former Soviet republics became free to follow foreign policies based on their interests and conditioned, to a great extent, by their geographic location and integration in the production and economic context of the previous, Soviet period. The fact that the Soviet Union was replaced by newly independent states did not remove the cooperation issue from their common agenda. Indeed, the post-Soviet states could not cope, on their own, with social and economic problems piling up during the first years of their independence. Cooperation was an ob-

vious must, yet the post-Soviet republics remained undecided. The new elites that nurtured political ambitions of their own were not ready to abandon them and had no experience of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to rely on. The fast transit from socialist ideology to market economy, the changed status of the republics—from parts of a single state to independent countries—made it harder, if at all possible, to correctly assess the situation unfolding across the post-Soviet space. Certain political factors or, rather, the power struggle inside each of the post-Soviet states and their ardent desire to get rid of the Soviet heritage strongly

affected the discussion and realization of integration initiatives. This explains why integration projects seemed like a heavy burden rather than an instrument very much needed to cope with fundamental problems and why post-Soviet states failed to establish efficient multilateral cooperation.

The external factor, likewise, interfered to a great extent with post-Soviet integration: as independent states, the former Soviet republics became a zone of geopolitical and economic interests of the world's leading states that spared no effort to get access to their resources and to shape their domestic and foreign policies. The West wanted a greater role in the political sphere and stronger contacts with the new political elites. Economic interaction was widening; the post-Soviet states opened their markets to big Western businesses which did nothing good to national economy. The former Soviet republics were thus adjusted to the economic system of the West, which needed new markets and more resources; their elites had no choice but take commands from the new masters, which made integration a haphazard process in many respects.

The post-Soviet period is dotted with random and mainly failed attempts to realize

some of the integration projects, yet foreign policy aspirations and ambitions of the ruling elites widened the gap between the former Soviet republics.

On the whole, the newly independent states were fairly ambiguous in their policies and aspirations: on the one hand, in expectation of a wider cooperation with the West, the dominant foreign policy trend, the majority looked at Russia as one of the partners. On the other, integration projects remained on the agenda because of economic problems, because the former Soviet republics needed more time to finally define their national identities and because Moscow was needed as a counterbalance to the West.

Today, post-Soviet countries are united by nothing more than the geographical boundaries of the defunct state, while the political and economic processes unfolding in certain post-Soviet states do not allow us to look at the sub-regions of Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, etc. as geopolitical units. The balance of power that has been taking shape in the last few years is strongly affected by the changed relationship between Russia and Ukraine and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) project that triggered a reformatting of the post-Soviet space.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, the Black Sea region, the Caspian region, post-Soviet space, CIS, Eastern Partnership, Black Sea Synergy, EAEU, Eurasian integration.*

Introduction

As the Soviet Union was moving towards its end, the national elites of the Union republics spared no effort to weaken their dependence on the Center (Moscow), to tighten their grip on power and get access to industrial assets and money flows, the dreams realized by the Soviet Union's disintegration that began and ended in the historically short period of time. Its fast and unexpected withdrawal from the stage forced the newly independent states to confront many problems. The power struggle inside each of them, the fairly complicated or even conflicting relationships between former Soviet republics made the post-Soviet space a territory of contradictions and squabbles. The same political elites that had demonstrated a lot of vehemence and determination in the late 1980s when

fighting for power turned out to be unprepared to deal with political and economic transformations and address, let alone solve, the burning cultural and historical problems: they lacked experience which was very much needed in the new conditions created by the new states' economic weakness.

The post-Soviet states expected, without any reason, to build partner relations with the West which, in its turn, encouraged these unfounded expectations to impose its own agenda on them. This made it much harder to continue with integration initiatives between the former Soviet republics.

The New States: A Hard Beginning

The newly independent countries of the post-Soviet space preserved their economic and cultural ties with Russia and between themselves. There was a single ruble space and close ties between relatives; the Soviet cultural and historical heritage and the Russian language strongly affected the relationships between post-Soviet states, yet proved too weak to re-channel the political trends of the new political elites. Unlike the common people, whose living standards dropped dramatically, the elites did not need integration within the post-Soviet space that could have deprived them of their power and influence.¹

There was a wide gap between their ambitions and the potentials of national economies. It was in the first post-Soviet year that the economic insolvency of the newly independent states became abundantly clear. The national economic complex inherited from the Soviet Union made it hard, if at all possible, to promptly restructure post-Soviet economics and re-orientate foreign economic ties. Power struggle and political upheavals, decline of national economies, accompanied by the degradation of the social sphere, armed conflicts and unregulated border issues, made at least relative stability absolutely indispensable. This explains an outburst of interest in integration projects of the early 1990s. Their discussion and realization, however, revealed that the national elites were on guard, to say the least, and that there was no consensus between them. They suspected Russia of intending to restore the "Soviet empire" even if political interaction never surfaced on the agenda. Driven by two conflicting factors—economic problems to be addressed and the desire to remain in power—the elites never risked to fully realize the integration initiatives. This means that involvement in these projects was not voluntary; it was needed to maintain political and economic stability.

From the very beginning, the newly independent states demonstrated two foreign policy trends. Some of them—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova—did not support the idea of integration alliances; in their eagerness to consolidate their foreign economic ties with the European countries, the U.S. and China, they tried to weaken their economic relationships with Russia, a result of stronger pro-Western positions of the new political elites.

Another group of states—Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia, as well as certain Central Asian states—did not reject the idea of economic integration based on new principles; they wanted to preserve their industrial capacity to address their social and economic problems.

The fact that the Commonwealth of Independent States was set up meant that the republican elites were prepared to legalize their power and to shake off control of the Union center. They no longer needed a common space, which inevitably ended in the disintegration of the post-Soviet space into sub-regions of Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, the Black Sea and Caspian regions along their geographic boundaries, in line with similar economies and the nature of cooperation within the

¹ See: Zh. Toshchenko, *Postsovetskoe prostranstvo: suverenizatsia i integratsia*, Nauka, Moscow, 1997, p. 65.

Soviet Union. As could be expected, with no experience of solving inter-state disagreements and no new mechanisms of dealing with the regional problems, the relationships inside these sub-regions were far from simple. In Central Asia, water and energy conflicts fly high; the Southern Caucasus, likewise, has its share of conflict potential; it was difficult to arrive at an agreement on the new international legal status of the Caspian.

The Role of Western States

Extra-regional countries strongly affected the post-Soviet integration initiatives. Late in the 1980s, rivalry between the U.S.S.R. and the West (the U.S. and the EU) became even more vehement. While the Soviet Union was still alive, Washington demonstrated a serious interest in the Soviet republics; it established contacts with informal movements and opposition politicians, whom it encouraged through financial, technical and political assistance.

Having supported internal changes in the Soviet Union, the George Bush administration (1989-1993) achieved its main aim of removing its geopolitical rival from the scene. The Soviet Union fell apart into independent states burdened with mutual claims and political ambitions of their elites, which gave the West a chance to promote its interests in the former Soviet territory.

The West pursued a selective foreign policy in the post-Soviet space and addressed the clearly outlined tasks rooted in its assessment of the historical place of each of the former Soviet republics. It was a highly justified approach, since the republics could not compete with the developed countries: they lacked political weight, economic potential and the experience in independent policies inside and outside their borders.

The West made the first step: it recognized the newly independent states and established diplomatic relations with them, as well as raised the level of political and economic cooperation as the foundation of new trade and economic relations. The West relied on international financial structures that somewhat revived the economies of post-Soviet states by recompensing the losses caused by the ruptured economic relations with Russia. The West also relied on all sorts of political instruments. In December 1991, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) was set up followed by the Partnership for Peace program launched in 1994.

At first, the West, being convinced, and with good reason, that the post-Soviet states were acting under Russia's influence, closely followed the processes unfolding in the former Soviet territory. Several years later, when the West discovered that Russia remained fairly passive for subjective and objective reasons, while the post-Soviet states were seeking contacts with extra-regional states, it became more active when identifying and pursuing its long-term aims. The United States and the European Union wanted, in particular, to keep the post-Soviet states disunited to prevent the re-integration of the former republics, which meant that Russia should be treated as one of them – no more, no less. This was all the more important because some of the post-Soviet states wanted to preserve cultural ties inherited from the past, contacts between relatives and establish partner relationships with Moscow. Others, in an effort to consolidate their statehoods and acquire a national identity, lowered the level of their cooperation with Russia in all spheres.

The American policy and the situation in the post-Soviet space changed when Bill Clinton was elected President in 1993. The West became much more aware of the importance of the post-Soviet states for the consolidation of the U.S. geopolitical positions and dealing with its economic problems. This explains America's and the EU's increased attention to their political and economic relations with the newly independent states and their deliberate moving away from their unquestioned support of Russia. The Russian political elite, in its turn, developed a more critical attitude to the situation in

which Russia found itself after the Soviet Union's disintegration. Stronger negative assessments of the geopolitical changes and the repercussions of disintegration were accompanied by a growing desire to restore economic and political relations with the former republics. This was reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept of the RF adopted in 1993, which described the post-Soviet space as one of the foreign policy priorities. The Russian leaders, who had recognized the independence of the former national outskirts and paid a lot of attention to economic issues, tried to exclude the influence of third powers on the CIS.²

The West did not miss the U-turn in Russia's foreign policy priorities. The United States, and later the EU, changed their assessments of Russia's foreign policy. Criticism of Russia was growing more and more vehement: it was accused of formulating its foreign policy priorities in the post-Soviet space and of pursuing an active policy in the former Soviet republics. In fact, the West was concerned with Russia's intention to consolidate the post-Soviet space, widen the sphere of integration and cooperation in line with the Eurasian ideas. The West, which was determined to oppose reintegration of the post-Soviet states and Russia's key role in the process, proceeded from the need to ensure its own security.³

Russia, determined to restore at least part of its lost positions in the post-Soviet space, was driven by economic considerations. The West, unable to accept this, poured more efforts into promoting its interests in the same territory. The United States and the European Union did not limit themselves to the political support of the leaders of newly independent states and their efforts to reorientate the foreign policy of their countries; they increased their economic assistance on a bilateral basis and through international financial institutions. Anti-Russian rhetoric changed accordingly: Russia was accused of "imperialist" intentions; some of the post-Soviet leaders, determined to remain in power at all costs, used these arguments in their bilateral relations with Moscow to justify their pro-Western course and social and economic failures.

Russia-the U.S.: Struggle in the Post-Soviet Space

By the mid-1990s, the post-Soviet states had already passed the first stage of their independent development. The results of the Soviet Union's disintegration were confirmed, to a great extent, by foreign policies of its former republics: their elites proved to be inconsistent in their policies abroad and unable to cope with social and economic problems at home. The West managed to impose its anti-Russian foreign policies on them mainly because their ideas of the world were pretty vague. Post-Soviet leaders perceived Western involvement in the region as a chance to oppose Russia's influence and consolidate their positions.

The developments in the post-Soviet space and the future of integration projects were strongly affected by the political changes unfolding in most of the newly independent states. The parliamentary and presidential elections of 1992-1994 brought pro-Western elites to power; some of them, however, were ready to accept close trade and economic relations with Russia and to preserve political contacts to a certain extent. Other elite groups preferred to weaken Russia's influence in their countries. On the whole, in the majority of the post-Soviet states those political forces that insisted on reintegration or restoration of the ruptured economic ties were defeated. The United States and its

² See: D.V. Trenin, "Rossia i strany SNG: 'vzroslenie' otnosheniy," in: *Vneshniaia politika Rossii: 2000-2020*, Russian Council for International Affairs, Vol. 1, ed. by I.S. Ivanov, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2012, p. 210.

³ See: O.V. Prikhodko, "Amerikanskaia politika v otnoshenii Ukrainy," *Obozrevatel*, No. 10, 2016, pp. 43-61.

Western allies abandoned their course at closer relations with Russia in favor of stronger political and economic support of former Soviet republics.⁴

The complex relations between Russia and Ukraine were one of the key factors of post-Soviet policies: the division of the Black Sea fleet, Kiev's mounting gas debts, different or even opposite positions on a wide range of problems within the CIS and stronger positions of Ukrainian nationalists did nothing good to the relationships between former Soviet republics.

The U.S. and the EU used this chance to specify their aims and priorities in the post-Soviet space and their approaches to each of the republics. In the spring of 1995, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher defined one of his country's foreign policy priorities to be the support of independence of Russia's neighbors. America was determined to concentrate on Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, two countries rich in hydrocarbons. World powers spared no effort to engage in exploration, extraction and export of oil and gas from the Central Asian and Caspian regions.⁵ Caspian hydrocarbons were attractive and still "novel dishes."⁶

This should not be taken to mean that the West ignored the other newly independent states. The United States, the European Union and China were gradually consolidating their positions in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, as well as the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries. Unlike Beijing that concentrated on trade and economic cooperation, the West was apparently interested in the political processes; it encouraged the local elites to sever their relations with Russia up to complete fragmentation of the post-Soviet space and planted unrealistic expectations in post-Soviet leaders of a rightful place in world politics for their countries and partner relationships with the world's leaders.

Cautious policy in the post-Soviet space became a thing of the past. The West established closer contacts with post-Soviet political elites eager to move closer to the West and farther away from Russia. On the whole, the West needed the disintegrated post-Soviet space, which was no longer kept together by economic ties, as markets for Western goods and alternative sources of power.⁷

The West capitalized on Russia's inability to realize its integration projects across the post-Soviet space. Despite the signed agreements and summits, post-Soviet states never moved far enough in their efforts to tune up new political and economic relations: the new leaders refused to take the interests of their neighbors into account and looked at the West as a desirable and promising partner. In the latter half of the 1990s, this and specified long-term interests shifted the accents in Western foreign policy. Economic problems, however, did not allow the post-Soviet states to cut off all contacts with the neighbors: they had to look for and find new variants of cooperation. The expected Western aid, on which post-Soviet states had pinned their hopes, turned out to be too small to address anything but the most urgent economic problems. On the whole, the economic situation in all countries remained fairly complicated, while Russia, which proceeded from its geopolitical considerations and economic requirements, insisted that trade and economic relations between post-Soviet states should be preserved and even widened. It partly succeeded: in 1995, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan set up a Customs Union, which Kyrgyzstan joined in 1996 and Tajikistan—in 1999. Its members removed all tariffs and quota restrictions among themselves, agreed on customs tariffs on imported goods and signed an agreement on a Common Economic Space.⁸ This created potentials for much

⁴ See: V. Shorokhov, *Neft i politika Azerbaidzhana. Issledovanie TsMI-MGIMO*, Moscow, 1997, p. 31.

⁵ See: Yo. Tianle, "Rol Tsentralnoy Azii v energeticheskoy strategii Kitaia," in: *Tsentralnaia Azia: problemy i perspektivy (vzgliad iz Rossii i Kitaia)*, Collection of articles, ed. by K.A. Kokorev, D.A. Alexandrov, I.Iu. Frolova, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies; Chinese Academy of Contemporary International Relations, RISI, Moscow, 2013, p. 145.

⁶ I. S. Zonn, *Kaspiy: illiuzii i realnost*, Edel-M, Moscow, 1999, 467 pp.

⁷ See: *Evrazia v poiskakh identichnosti*, ed. by S.P. Glinkin, L.Z. Zevin, Nestor-Istoria, Moscow, St. Petersburg, 2011, pp. 67-93.

⁸ See: G. Melikian, *Armenia i Evraziyskiy soiuz: ot sotrudnichestva do integratsii*, Erevan, 2015, p. 4.

wider cooperation that, on the whole, remained untapped because of continued regionalization of the post-Soviet space, due to the efforts of the U.S. and the EU to tighten their grip on the post-Soviet space through, in particular, greater independence of the Central Asian countries.⁹ The same can be said about the Southern Caucasus, where Washington intended to carry out its own policy.¹⁰ In the latter half of the 1990s, America revised its Caspian policies.¹¹ The United States became much more interested in the post-Soviet states; it relied on all sorts of instruments to consolidate its political and economic influence, disrupt integration projects and interfere in regional problems.

Reformatting the Post-Soviet Space

Everything changed when Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. From that time on, Russia became much more determined to promote its integration projects that, if realized, could have consolidated its positions and restore its influence on part of the former Soviet territory. There was no other alternative: Moscow felt constrained by economic, political and cultural rivalry of other countries and power centers, the U.S. being one of them.¹²

Moscow turned its attention to Belarus and Kazakhstan as the most industrially developed post-Soviet countries and tried hard and failed to preserve trade and economic relations with Ukraine that was gradually drifting towards the West.

This was to be expected: in the 2000s, the West initiated several long-term projects, including Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea Synergy and Greater Central Asia. The European Union created an associated partnership format designed to change the balance of power in the post-Soviet regions.

On the whole, in the early 2010s the relationship between Russia and the West were going from bad to worse because of their fundamentally different interests in the post-Soviet space: the U.S. and the EU were crowding Russia out of the post-Soviet countries.¹³ Russia, in turn, tried hard to consolidate its influence in the post-Soviet space to resolve its economic problems, while the West needed weak and manageable states as a “sanitary cordon” around Russia.

In the last five years, the post-Soviet space has been living amid fundamental changes that coincided with the ongoing transformation of the world order. On the one hand, some of the post-Soviet states support integration projects to widen cooperation within the post-Soviet space; others stake on long-term relationships with the West and reject wider cooperation with former Soviet republics as an obstacle that interferes with their foreign policy strategies.

So far, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia remains the most successful integration project. An agreement that had been signed in 2014 and its realization in 2015 became possible because several post-Soviet countries wanted to deepen their multilateral cooperation. The difficult situation in industrial production, few chances to establish and develop equal trade and economic relationships with the West forced these post-Soviet states to es-

⁹ See: A.A. Kazantsev, “Politika SShA v postsovetsoy Tsentralnoy Azii: kharakter i perpektivy,” *Vestnik MGIMO Universiteta*, No. 4, 2012, pp. 155-164.

¹⁰ See: S.A. Mikhaylov, “Otnoshenia Gruzii i SShA,” in: *Gruzia: problemy i perspektivy razvitiya*, in 2 vols., Vol. 1, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow, 2001, p. 202.

¹¹ See: K.S. Gadzhiev, *Bolshaia igra na Kavkaze. Vchera. Segodnia, Zavtra*, Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, Moscow, 2012, p. 169.

¹² See: V.D. Trenin, op. cit., p. 216.

¹³ See: M.T. Laumulin, “Perspektivy amerikanskogo prisutstviya v Tsenralnoy Azii,” *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 3, 2012, pp.16-32.

establish closer cooperation with their neighbors. The same fully applied to foreign policy factors created by extra-regional states in the first place.

Kazakhstan and Belarus joined the Eurasian integration project in search of an optimal combination of their potentials and assessments of economic problems. As EAEU members, they have already acquired access to the Russian market and additional financial resources; both countries are very much concerned with the problems of trade and economic cooperation. Indeed, Belarus has no choice but to integrate with the post-Soviet countries because its economy strongly depends on the economy of its eastern neighbor.¹⁴ Over half of its foreign trade turnover is ensured by Russia, while a quarter of banking assets is controlled by Russian financial groups.¹⁵ The same fully applies to Kazakhstan. Astana needs access to the Russian market of capital and goods to lower its dependence on the outstripping development of the oil and gas sector and on raw material exports; it needs sustainable relations with its Eurasian partners in order to find new markets for its goods.¹⁶ Belarus, likewise, expects to bring its products to the Russian market and to acquire important resources at Russian prices.

Bishkek and Erevan have revised their approaches to integration. In the early 2000s, they had been widening their cooperation with the U.S. and the EU through political contacts and programs offered by their Western partners. In 2006, Armenia and the EU had confirmed a five-year Plan of Cooperation; later Armenia became involved in the Eastern Partnership program started by the May 2009 EU summit. Involved in association talks, Armenia retreated when it became clear that wider cooperation with European countries would interfere with its close relationship with Russia. In September 2013, Erevan announced that it was ready to join the Customs Union: it depended, to a great extent, on Russia's investments and needed the Russian market for its goods. Security was no less important: Armenia uses Russian military equipment and relies on its political support in the context of the still unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In December 2013, Erevan had adopted a general roadmap of joining the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan; in January 2014, the Government of Armenia approved a detailed plan; in October of the same year, the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Armenia to the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union of 29 May 2014 was signed.

For a long time, the Kyrgyzstan elites could not arrive at a final conclusion on the country's accession to the Treaty. On the one hand, the labor migration of local population to Russia was huge: the money earned there helped fill the budget and maintain social and economic stability; Russia's economic assistance was also taken into account. On the other, the relationship with China that realized infrastructural projects within the republic was deepening. On 23 December, 2014, Kyrgyzstan had decided to join the EAEU; on 12 August, 2015, the accession treaty was ratified. This means that both republics looked at Eurasian integration through the prism of their economic problems and their geopolitical interests.¹⁷

On the whole, EAEU membership, which means unified legislation, macroeconomic policies, technical regulation, monopoly tariffs, etc. will provide more opportunities to the member countries. It is expected that Eurasian integration will develop through unified cooperation chains between enterprises of the member countries and that trade will no longer be dominated by raw materials.¹⁸ Un-

¹⁴ See: A.V. Shurubovich, "Evraziyskaia integratsia v vospriiatii belorussov," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 1, 2014, pp. 9-25.

¹⁵ See: E.M. Kuzmina, "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: ispytanie krizisom," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 1, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁶ See: A.A. Bashmakov, *Ot prigranichnogo sotrudnichestva k evraziyskoy ekonomicheskoy integratsii*, Collection of scholarly works, KISI under the President of the RK, Almaty, 2013, pp. 182-189.

¹⁷ See: M.A. Neymark, "Russkiy mir i geopolitika," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2 (4), 2015, pp. 78-100.

¹⁸ See: I. Lis, "Maksimalnyy effekt ot integratsii," *Delovoy Kazakhstan*, 27 March, 2015, p. 1.

able to cope with economic and social problems on their own, the member countries have no choice but to look for new forms of cooperation in large infrastructural projects, which require more money than any country can provide on its own; their economic problems are caused, in particular, by the fact that their industries still rely on obsolete Soviet equipment.¹⁹ These countries need more markets for their products and a wider trade and economic cooperation.

The West was very much concerned by Russia's determination to realize its integration projects and to set up an efficient EAEU: it may reintegrate at least part of the Soviet territory and expand its sphere of influence.²⁰

China is also worried. Back in 2014, experts from Kazakhstan pointed out that the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space and the future Eurasian Economic Union will limit China's ambitious plans in the post-Soviet space as a whole, and in Central Asia in particular.²¹ The Customs Union may change the economic conditions on which China now operates in Central Asia: its members will acquire privileges, which will confront Chinese enterprises with much harsher conditions for regional investments.²²

Conclusion

In the last few decades, regionalization of the post-Soviet space has become even more obvious. Today, a group of states that treats wider cooperation with the West as a priority has emerged. In fact, the gap between former Soviet republics is widening under pressure of new economic contacts, stronger influence of extra-regional states and the less than favorable circumstances under which integration projects are realized. At the same time, trade, economic and political relations with Russia are treated as an important, but not the key, development factor.

Relationships between individual states with the main external economic and foreign policy partners will depend on the future of the post-Soviet space; likewise, much will depend on the integration within the EAEU and the dynamics of "European integration" based on association agreements with some of the post-Soviet countries.²³

The United States and the European Union will strongly affect the processes unfolding in the post-Soviet space; they will use some of the post-Soviet states (that will disentangle themselves from Russia's sphere of influence) as a sanitary cordon. Washington and Brussels are consolidating their positions in the post-Soviet space, which they have defined as a strategically important region indispensable for the successful solution of their political, economic and energy problems. No wonder that the West is negatively disposed to the setting up, let alone, the implementation of the EAEU.²⁴ Back in December 2012, when Russia was discussing its first specific steps towards Eurasian integration, Hillary Clinton, the then Secretary of State announced in Dublin: "We know what the goal is and we

¹⁹ See: A.V. Shurubovich, "Innovatsionnoe sotrudnichestvo kak faktor modernizatsii natsionalnykh ekonomik stran Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuz," *Problemy postsovetetskogo prostranstva*, No. 1, 2015, pp. 17-35.

²⁰ See: Li Xing, Wang Chenxing, "Kitayskaia politologia o smysle i perspektivakh evraziyskogo soiuz," *Mezhdunarodnye protsessy*, No. 38, 2014, p. 72.

²¹ See: K.L. Syroezhkin, "Uglublenie vsestoronnego strategicheskogo sotrudnichestva Respubliki Kazakhstan s Kitayskoy narodnoy respublikoy," in: *Kontseptsia vneshney politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2014-220 gody i zadachi po ee realizatsii: materialy kruglogo stola*, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2014, pp. 54-60.

²² See: Wang Shuchun, Wen Qingsung, "Perspektivy evraziyskogo integratsionnogo proekta i ego posledstviia dlia Kitaiia," *Obozrevatel*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 41-56.

²³ See: N.A. Mendkovich, *Na puti k evraziyskomu ekonomicheskomu chudu. Rossia i integratsia na postsovetском prostranstve*, Algoritm, Moscow, 2015, p. 207.

²⁴ See: Wang Shuchun, Wen Qingsung, op. cit., p. 48.

are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it.”²⁵ Beijing is of a more or less similar opinion: this integration project is seen as a challenge comparable to the Soviet Union’s challenge.²⁶

The West tries to prevent deeper integration represented by the Eurasian Economic Union and to set up an alternative power center in the post-Soviet space, in which Ukraine will play the leading role. This supplied the context in which the West assesses the events in Ukraine and its worsening relations with Russia. In fact, this is one of the instruments the U.S. is using to breach the process and lower the level of cooperation between Russia and post-Soviet states.

Generally, the West has armed itself with a set of varied political instruments. The fact that there are countries with pro-Western political regimes (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine) makes it much easier to oppose integration projects. It pours money in to help the elites in power preserve relative social and economic stability in these countries and camouflage their inadequacy.

The West has managed to reformat the post-Soviet space: some of the newly independent states have re-orientated their foreign policy to maximally distance themselves from Russia. In the future, the United States will work even harder; it will rely on regime change in the countries that want to side with Russia or on their destabilization and disintegration.²⁷ The instruments at its disposal are varied: funding of opposition by international organizations, putting pressure on national elites, active opposition to new export routes for Russian gas and a greatly increased interest in establishing alternative regional organizations. In 2017, GUAM was revived; there are plans to set up a Baltic-Black Sea Organization. NATO has not abandoned its efforts to draw post-Soviet states into the sphere of its interests. American presence in Central Asia and the facilities ran by NATO members scattered across the region have allowed the West to cover it with a net of military infrastructure.²⁸

The policy of anti-Russian sanctions is a long-term one. The sanctions introduced by the United States against Russia in March 2014 can be described as a logical outcome of contradictions between the two countries: Washington was obviously concerned about Russia’s efforts to implement the EAEU which, in the future, may have consolidated Russia’s positions in the post-Soviet space; it was deeply involved in the struggle for the European gas market where the post-Soviet states are also involved. “On 26 March, 2014, at the U.S.-EU Summit in Brussels, Barack Obama assured EU leaders that Europe would get as much American gas as it needed.”²⁹ Later Sergey Naryshkin, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, pointed out that the United States intended to widen the anti-Russian sanctions and was determined to wage economic warfare against it. There are attempts to cut short the supplies of Russian hydrocarbons to Europe.³⁰

The future of the post-Soviet space is connected with the EAEU, which will allow its members to stabilize the economic situation and, later, modernize and re-industrialize their economies. Much will depend on Russia and its policy. Today its cooperation with post-Soviet states is seen as a critical condition of its own development, of defusing, to an extent, the construction of a sanitary cordon along its borders, which may limit its potential influence in the post-Soviet space. The West needs

²⁵ “Clinton Calls Eurasian Integration an Effort To ‘Re-Sovietize,’” available at [<https://www.rferl.org/a/clinton-calls-eurasian-integration-effort-to-resovietize/24791921.html>], 29 July, 2016.

²⁶ See: K.L. Syroezhkin, “Evraziyskoe prostranstvo i kitayskiy factor,” in: *Integratsionnye protsessy v evraziyskom prostranstve i sovremenny mir: Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (Almaty, 14 noiabria, 2012 g.)*, KISI under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2013, p. 156.

²⁷ See: G.G. Tishchenko, V.E. Novikov, S.M. Ermakov, I.A. Nikolaychuk, V.V. Koriakin, Iu.A. Kriachkina, Ia.V. Selianin, “Voennaia politika SShA i ugrozy Rossii,” *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 6, 2014, p. 18.

²⁸ See: D.S. Popov, *Tsentrlnaia Azia vo vnesheny politike SShA 1991-2016*, RISI, Moscow, 2016, p. 57.

²⁹ D. Grushevenko, S. Melnikova, “Political Geology Hastens to Redraw the Global Energy Map in Favor of the U.S.,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2014.

³⁰ See: O. Nikiiforov, “Sostoitsia li proekt ‘Severnogo potoka-2,’” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 June, 2017.

new mechanisms to pull the post-Soviet states out of the sphere of Russia's geopolitical and economic influence and limit its capabilities of implementing integration projects.³¹

³¹ See: T.S. Guzenkova, O.V. Petrovskaya, V.B. Kashirina, O.B. Nemensky, V.A. Ivanova, K.I. Tasits, D.A. Alexandrov, I.A. Ippolitov, S.Iu. Kukola, R.V. Darvay, S.V. Tikhonova, "Politika Evrosiuza v otnoshenii stran postsovetского prostranstva v kontekste evrasiyskoy integratsii," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 9-51.