

## EURASIAN INTEGRATION: VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Murat LAUMULIN

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Chief Research Fellow,  
Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under  
the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

### ABSTRACT

**E**urasian integration and the Eurasian Economic Union have attracted numerous views and opinions and ignited heated discussions: a larger part of the political and business community of the CIS countries is aware of the advantages a common economic space that has their best interests at heart will have to offer. On the other hand, the possible loss of national sovereignties and independence has stirred up apprehension that keeps politicians in two minds and slows down economic cooperation.

**KEYWORDS:** *the Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, common economic space, integration in the post-Soviet space.*

### *Introduction*

The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union signed in Astana on 29 May, 2014 made it a reality even though the vacillations on whether Eurasian integration (post-Soviet reintegration) was possible and/or necessary are rooted in the more distant past.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the pre-history of the subject, see: E.S. Syzdykova, "Evraziyskaia integratsia v otsenkakh nauchno-issledovatel'skogo i ekspertno-analiticheskogo soobshchestva stran TS-EOP," *Kazakhstan-Spektr* (KISI), No. 3, 2013, pp. 5-29.

The story goes back to the early 1990s and the attempt to arrive at a new Union Treaty (the so-called Novo-Ogaryovo process); in April 1994, Nursultan Nazarbaev delivered his famous speech at Moscow State University, in which he invited the post-Soviet republics to reunite into a Eurasian Union. The 1990s were dotted by attempts to create regional integration structures—the Central Asian Cooperation (CAC), the EurAsEC, the Customs Union-1, the Common Economic Space (CES of 2004), etc. The new version of the CU, which appeared in 2010, developed into the CES with the prospect of becoming the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015. The idea of Eurasian integration acquired clear international-legal and political-economic outlines.

Seventeen agreements commissioned on 1 January, 2012 form the contractual and legal framework of the Common Economic Space and serve as the foundation of its member countries' relations related to a vast range of problems—from macroeconomic policies and financial markets to technical regulations and protection of intellectual property. The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), a supranational structure, was set up to administer the integration processes of three members so far (Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). In October and December 2013, they arrived at a decision to sign an agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union on 1 January, 2015.

It should be said that there are enough supporters and opponents of integration outside the three countries involved, as well as inside each of them. The sides involved can be divided, with a great degree of approximation, into four groups:

- (1) supporters and opponents inside the countries belonging to the Customs Union, Common Economic Space, and Eurasian Economic Union;
- (2) supporters and opponents in the candidate states (Armenia), potential candidates (Kyrgyzstan) and candidates with reservations (Tajikistan);
- (3) observers—the other CIS countries affected by the integration process;
- (4) foreign observers (mainly in the West, as well as in other countries).

## Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is actively involved in the integration processes and promotes Eurasian integration within the EEU and the CES.

There is no agreement, however, on the subject in the republic, where discussions have been going on and on for many years. It can be said that the questions related to Eurasian integration have been carefully elaborated at the fundamental academic and analytical level by the republic's best think tanks: the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies (KISI), the Institute of World Economy and Politics at the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan (IMEP), the Institute of Political Decisions (IPR), the Agency for Studying Profitability of Investments (AIRI), the Institute of Economics at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MON RK), and several others.

In the last few years, KISI has carried out several fundamental studies of various forms of Eurasian integration,<sup>2</sup> while its experts have expressed their own opinions about integration and its

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<sup>2</sup> See: *Tamozhenny soiuz Belarusi, Kazakhstana i Rossii: sostoianie, problemy, perspektivy*, KISI, Almaty, 2009, 368 pp.; *Tamozhenny soiz Belarusi, Kazakhstana i Rossii: realii i perspektivy, Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii, 25 November, 2009*, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI, Almaty, 2010, 128 pp.; D.Sh. Mukhamedzhanova, *Kazakhstan i mezhdunarodnye integratsionnye protsessy*, KISI, Almaty, 2011, 200 pp.; *Tamozhenny soiuz i Edinoe ekonomicheskoe prostranstvo: problemy ekonomicheskoy integratsii*, KISI, Almaty, 2013, 176 pp.; *Formirovanie EEP: sostoianie, problemy, perspektivy*, KISI, Almaty,

course.<sup>3</sup> They agree with the official position and are convinced that Eurasian integration should proceed slowly but surely from EurAsEC to the Customs Union, then to the Common Economic Space and, finally, to the Eurasian Economic Union. It is extremely important to convince the public that Eurasian integration is an important factor of regional stability and higher competitiveness of the CU countries.<sup>4</sup>

KISI experts summarized the preliminary results of Kazakhstan's membership in the CU and CES and found them positive. Since 2011, the CU's first year, Kazakhstan has been demonstrating quantitative and qualitative progress in the main macroeconomic indices, including GDP, investment cooperation with the CU countries, inflow of investments into advanced economic branches, smaller deficit in trade with Russia, slower inflation, and greater inflow of taxes.

According to the KISI experts, asynchronous development within the EurAsEC creates two integration spaces: the space formed by the Union State of Russia and Belarus and the space formed by the states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) or, in other words, the "European" and "Asian" parts of the common EurAsEC space. On the other hand, there is a threat of disintegration of the EurAsEC economic space (withdrawal of its Asian part, in particular) which can be described as a threat to "Eurasianism."

This means that the political elite of Kazakhstan largely supports integration in the economy, but not in other spheres, and regards President Nazarbaev as one of the leaders and authors of the Eurasian Union idea. Kazakhstan's analysts point out that the integration process has already produced its first fruits. The idea is supported at the grass-roots level; Senator Anatoly Bashmakov is one of the most active supporters of Eurasian integration.<sup>5</sup>

Positive assessments of integration do not exclude doubts expressed by different political, economic, and public groups. Those who criticize the CU-CES point to the absence of a clear concept of integration and a national idea shared by Kazakhstan and Russia. Some of the experts believe that the idea of bringing together the potential of both countries in order to use their natural resources to organize their territories and upgrade the standard of living may become a consolidating factor.

There are fears in the expert community that supra-national institutions might deprive Kazakhstan of its sovereignty; there is no agreement either in the expert community or public at large about the usefulness of a Eurasian parliament, which is seen as an instrument of Moscow's control over

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2012, 200 pp.; A.A. Bashmakov, *Ot prigranichnogo sotrudnichestva k evraziyskoy ekonomicheskoy integratsii: sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, KISI, Almaty, 2013, 216 pp.; K.B. Berentaev, *Ekonomika Kazakhstana i vyzovy XXI veka. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. by B.K. Sultanov, KISI, Almaty, 2013, 244 pp.; *Integratsionnye protsessy v evraziyskom prostranstve i sovremennyy mir*, KISI, Almaty, 2013, 234 pp.

<sup>3</sup> See: L. Muzaparova, "Tamozhenny soyuz i Edinoe ekonomicheskoe prostranstvo: perspektivy razvitiya i vozmozhnosti dlia stran-uchastnits," *Analytic* (KISI), No. 4, 2011; idem, "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskii soyuz: novaia realnost v globalnoy ekonomike," *Analytic*, No. 12, 2012; idem, "Tamozhenny soyuz i Edinoe ekonomicheskoe prostranstvo: vozmozhnosti i perspektivy," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii* (IMEMO), No. III, 2011, pp. 1-7; D.Sh. Mukhamedzhanova, "Novye aspekty ekonomicheskoy politiki v usloviakh Edinogo ekonomicheskogo prostranstva," *Analytic*, No. 6, 2009, pp. 76-89; idem, "Problemy postsovetetskogo regionalizma," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 2, 2011, pp. 63-67; idem, "Stanovlenie edinogo ekonomicheskogo prostranstva: vzgliad iz Almaty," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. I, 2013, pp. 14-23; idem, "Natsionalnaia ekonomicheskaia strategiiia v usloviakh EEP," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2011, pp. 44-56; S. Nugerbekov, "Analiz torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnosheniy i sostoiانيا ekonomik RK, RF i RB v usloviakh predstoiashchego vkhozhdeniia v Tamozhenny soyuz," *Analytic*, No. 3, 2009, pp. 48-57; G. Rakhmatulina, "Tamozhenny soyuz v ramkakh EvrAzES: perspektivy dlia Kazakhstana," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia* (IMEMO), No. 11, 2010, pp. 75-81; idem, "Neftegazovy sektor Kazakhstana v usloviakh EEP," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. I, 2012, pp. 18-31.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Tamozhenny soyuz i Edinoe ekonomicheskoe prostranstvo: problemy ekonomicheskoy integratsii*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> See: A.A. Bashmakov, "Kazakhstan i Rossia—passionarnoe iadro evraziyskoy integratsii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2013, pp. 18-23.

Astana. It seems that this opinion, incessantly broadcast by the media, forced President Nazarbaev to make several outstanding statements. In January 2013, he pointed out: "The country's political sovereignty is not discussed. Any attempt to put pressure on Kazakhstan to threaten our independence will be seen as a reason to leave the union," and he also said that Kazakhstan needs economic integration.

The critics are concerned about the continued raw-material nature of the country's economy. The arguments are simple: the leaders' hasty decision to join the alliances allegedly meets the interests of the raw-material companies, which will move to the duty-free markets. The future of small and medium businesses unable to compete with more or less competitive Russian business is vague. The rising level of bureaucratization inside the integration alliance and the absence of a common system of technical regulation are seen as weak points.

Russia's excessively protectionist policy at the regional level raises even more objections. Its federative structure allows the local parliaments to issue their own regulations, which erect obstacles to goods from Kazakhstan. The critics point to the fact that Kazakhstan's involvement in the CU-CES inevitably limits its trade with China.<sup>6</sup>

There are attempts to assess Eurasian integration at the theoretical level. Director of the Institute of World Economy and Politics Sultan Akimbekov believes that ideological issues were pushed aside by the fierce political and economic discussions and, therefore, out of the political space. Today, ideology is closely connected with the following questions: Is Russia determined to restore its old empire? And what do the other former Soviet states and nations think about this? This has inevitably pushed the issue into the sphere of politics.<sup>7</sup>

## Russia

In Russia, the most active driving force behind integration in various forms, the problem is attracting even more attention. There are many supporters as well as opponents in the academic community and political establishment.

At the intellectual level, it is discussed at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO RAS), the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISI), the Foreign Ministry Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) (MGIMO-U), the Institute of Economics RAS, and many others. The *International Affairs* journal, which translates the opinions of the Foreign Ministry of Russia, has been paying a lot of attention to the issue.<sup>8</sup> Academician Genadi Chufrin of the IMEMO RAS, the most enthusiastic supporter of Eurasian integration and the author of numerous works on the subject,<sup>9</sup> is convinced that Russia should add vigor to its informa-

<sup>6</sup> On detailed criticism, see: N. Kassenova, *Kazakhstan and Eurasian Economic Integration: Quick Start, Mixed Results and Uncertain Future*, IFRI, Paris, 2012, 29 pp.; F. Vielmini, "The Challenges of Eurasian Integration for Kazakhstan," *ISPI — Analysis (Rome)*, No. 151, 2013, 7 pp.; Zh. Ibrashiev, S. Abdugazieva, "Politicheskiy aspekt evraziyskoy integratsii," *Analytic*, No. 4, 2012, pp. 198-110.

<sup>7</sup> See: S. Akimbekov, "Evraziiskaia teoria dlia integratsii i Kazakhstana," *Kazakhstan v globalnykh protsessakh* (IMEP), No. 1, 2013, pp. 6-17.

<sup>8</sup> See: "The Architecture of Integration Processes in the Post-Soviet Area: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus," *International Affairs* (MID RF), No. 1, 2012; "Yalta-2012. The Eurasian Development Vector: Problems and Prospects," *International Affairs*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 112-175.

<sup>9</sup> See: G. Chufrin, *Ocherki evraziyskoy integratsii*, Ves mir Publishers, Moscow, 2013, 128 pp.; idem, "Evraziiskaia integratsia: pervye itogi i novye vyzovy," in: *Dvustoronnie politicheskie i ekonomicheskie otnosheniia Kazakhstana i Rossii*, KISI, Almaty, 2013, pp. 20-131; idem, "Tamozhennyi soiuz Rossii, Belorussii i Kazakhstana," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. II, 2010, pp. 5-14; idem, "Posle SSSR: ot SNG k Evraziyskomu soiuzu," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 3, 2011, pp. 35-42; idem, "20 let bez SSSR: ot SNG k Evraziyskomu soiuzu," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2011, pp. 5-13.

tional and propaganda efforts to demonstrate that economic cooperation within the Customs Union, the Common Economic Space (since 2012), and the future Eurasian Economic Union is the main cooperation trend and will remain so in the foreseeable future. He has pointed out that Russia and its partners are not only determined to move consistently toward mutually advantageous positions in the integration process, but also seek the best possible solutions to make this rapprochement irreversible.

Academician Chufirin is also convinced that the Eurasian Economic Union might develop in the distant future into a confederation (if and when the necessary preconditions have been created), not only consolidated by economic, domestic and foreign policy, and security interests, but also by shared interests in the humanitarian and cultural spheres.<sup>10</sup> He has written elsewhere that structural changes and gradually moving away from the present raw-material development model (responsible for their dependent status in global economy) are impossible without breakthroughs in the above-mentioned directions.<sup>11</sup>

There is no agreement in the Russian academic and expert community on the efficiency of the planned association. Some people believe that the project is doomed, while others see it as an already accomplished reality and are living in the pleasant anticipation of huge advantages. There are those who, while accepting the project as well-timed and useful, warn about the strenuous efforts in store for its builders. They mean that these efforts should be harmonized and that the Union's supranational character should be accepted and its members act accordingly. There is another, no less challenging task: the members should modernize their economic and, hence, political systems within a very short period of time.<sup>12</sup>

Vladislav Inozemtsev, a well known political scientist, says in so many words that the claims of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to the role of one of the world's geo-economic centers are unfounded. Prof. Alexey Portanskiy of the Higher School of Economics is, likewise, very skeptical about the prospects of the new integration structure. He believes that the leaders of Russia are driven by foreign policy considerations—they want a strong economic and territorial structure to be taken into account to a much greater extent; there is another (and rarely proclaimed) aim to keep the post-Soviet states in Russia's sphere of influence.

S. Chernyshev, Director of the Department of Economic Cooperation with CIS Countries, Ministry of Economic Development, on the other hand, does not question the efficiency of the CU and the CES of the three countries.

Alexander Bykov, Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Economics, RAS, has offered a much more balanced opinion: despite the weak starting positions, "good results are possible if work is organized correctly, if the goals selected are optimal and realistic, and if an efficient mechanism is built." The text, however, betrays that success is not guaranteed.

Russian experts pay a lot of attention to what their colleagues from other countries, Kazakhstan in particular, have to say.<sup>13</sup> Nikolay Rabotyazhev of IMEMO has pointed out that closer integration among the post-Soviet states meet the national interests of Russia and its CIS partners and that, not infrequently, the foreign policy of the newly independent states does not correspond to their national

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Chufirin, "O zadachakh evraziyskoy integratsii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. I, 2013, pp. 5-13.

<sup>11</sup> See: G. Chufirin, "Dostizhenia i problemy evraziyskoy integratsii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2013, pp. 8-17.

<sup>12</sup> N. Fedulova, "Perspektivy Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuz," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. III, 2012, pp. 5-20.

<sup>13</sup> See: E. Ionova, "Kazakhstan i razvitie ekonomicheskoy integratsii na postsovetском prostranstve," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. III, 2012, pp. 81-86.

interests, which slows down integration. At the same time, writes the author, integration in the post-Soviet space should not be limited to Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.<sup>14</sup>

Russian experts write a lot about integration at the global level.<sup>15</sup> E. Vinokurov and A. Libman from St. Petersburg have summarized their conceptual approach to the issue in their fundamental work *Evraziyskaia kontinentalnaia integratsiia* (Eurasian Continental Integration), in which they developed their idea of a new configuration of integration processes on the Eurasian continent. They believe that the integration going on in different parts of the continent is being increasingly complemented by continental integration. It should develop in the form of extensive cooperation among the existing integration associations, forums, and all sorts of other structures based on the shared interests of the states involved. They expect that the present disunited associations will be replaced with the incorporation of all the integration entities into several integration structures.<sup>16</sup>

The authors agree that Eurasian integration is potentially important for all the countries on the Eurasian continent and is very important for Russia and Central Asia, which gain a lot from the combination of two Eurasian integrations—the Eurasian post-Soviet and Eurasian continental.<sup>17</sup>

Russian academics have been showing immense interest in the civilian dimension of integration.<sup>18</sup> A. Portanskiy has pointed out that the obviously unequal distribution of responsibility for the Eurasian integration project between the sides involved should be regarded as its weakness. The state of their economies suggests that each of the sides needs stronger partners with high-tech bases found only outside the borders of the future Eurasian integrated union.<sup>19</sup>

Prof. Xenia Borishpolets doubts Russia's position as the integration leader. It is the leading economic entity of integration, the raw-material, population, and industrial potential of which is greater than the aggregate potential of the two other countries, however the movement along the Eurasian trajectory has not made Russia, by default, an absolute leader.<sup>20</sup>

Andrey Suzdaltsev (Higher School of Economics) asks whether the Eurasian Economic Union will replace the Union State of Belarus and Russia? By way of answering his own question, he points to the unique place of the Union State among the other post-Soviet integration projects as the only attempt to bring about political integration of the CIS members. In 2010, Belarus joined the Customs Union, which deprived the Russian-Belorussian political integration project, the Union State, of its economic dimension. This means that it will remain a very specific social and

<sup>14</sup> See: N. Rabotyazhev, "Integratsiia na postsovetском prostranstve: novy start," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2011, pp. 28-43.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Budushchee Evrazii: BRIKS ili Evraziyskiy soiuz? Voprosy ustoychivosti soiuzov*, TsSOP, Moscow, 2012, 28 pp.

<sup>16</sup> See: E. Vinokurov, A. Libman, *Evraziyskaia kontinentalnaia integratsiia*, Center of Integration Studies, St. Petersburg, 2012, 224 pp.

<sup>17</sup> See also: E. Vinokurov, "Pragmatic Eurasianism," *Russia in Global Affairs* (Moscow), No. 2, 2013; E. Vinokurov, A. Libman, "Trendy regionalnoy integratsii na postsovetском prostranstve: rezultaty kolichestvennogo analiza," *Voprosy ekonomiki* (IE RAS), No. 7, 2010, pp. 94-107; idem, "Post-Soviet Integration Breakthrough. Why the Customs Union has More Chances than Its Predecessors," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2, 2012; A. Libman, "Postsovet'skaia integratsiia i politicheskie sistemy postsovet'skikh gosudarstv," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2012, pp. 5-20; idem, "Optimalnoe prostranstvo evraziyskoy integratsii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. IV, 2010, pp. 5-17; E. Vinokurov, A. Libman, "Dve evraziyskie integratsii," *Voprosy ekonomiki*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 47-72.

<sup>18</sup> See: T. Guzenkova, "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: grazhdanskoe izmerenie," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii* (RISI), No. 6, 2012, pp. 75-89.

<sup>19</sup> See: A. Portanskiy, "Poblemy i dilemmy evraziyskogo vybora Rossii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 24-31.

<sup>20</sup> See: K. Borishpolets, "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: integratsionny proekt v deystvii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. II, 2012, pp. 5-15; K. Borishpolets, S. Chernyavsky, "The Common Economic Space of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan: Present and Future," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, 2012, pp. 120-129.

political bridge between Russia and Belarus, which will preserve the friendly feelings between the two neighbors.<sup>21</sup>

Stanislav Borisov (IMEMO RAS) has analyzed a novel phenomenon of the post-Soviet period, namely, efforts to promote monetary and financial integration within the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space.<sup>22</sup> The author has pointed out that since Eurasian integration has not moved very far yet, it is too early to offer substantiated and objective conclusions about its efficiency, advantages, and shortcomings. He writes that Russia profited from the agreement: it keeps the income produced by the export of crude oil in its budget. It should readjust the payment for energy resources it sells to Belarus: obligatory payments in convertible currencies should be replaced with the possibility to pay in Russian rubles (this has been done in trade in other goods).

Kazakhstan should follow Belarus and issue a law that will make the Russian ruble a convertible and reserve currency in its territory. The author concludes that a single currency in the integrated states will probably appear in the distant future; today this is a subject of theoretical supposition and academic discussion.

## Belarus

The Belarusian leadership talks of itself as the flagman of Eurasian integration and claims a special role for its country. It proceeds from its active involvement in all the integration projects up to and including the Union State of Russia and Belarus. In many respects, the republic is a privileged member of the integration alliances, President Lukashenko being the main (or even the only) supporter of integration with Russia in the republic's political elite.<sup>23</sup>

Integration with Russia causes apprehension in the political and expert community of Belarus. First, that part of the republic's expert community that supports the government is convinced that the unique Belorussian model of a socially oriented state is incompatible with the Russian political and economic development pattern and that Belarusian sovereignty will be threatened.

Those who oppose integration into a future alliance proceed from the familiar arguments related to the choice "between the East and the West." These people look at integration as gradual acceptance of Russia's conditions and describe it in terms of subordination and absorption rather than integration. Those who regard Eurasian integration as an imposed process also doubt its future.

Some experts interpret integration in the post-Soviet space as a key to the "doors to China" and its rapidly growing economy. Experts of the Center for European Integration Problems at the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus believe that China as a source of high technologies and investments is an alternative to Europe, while Eurasian integration will give the country the opportunity to become one of the main transit corridors for Chinese goods and will add to Belarus' geopolitical weight.

On the other hand, the country is actively invited to join the Mezhdumorie, a Polish integration project expected to join Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in an integrated region. With a population of about 100 million, this association, supported by its allied relations with Washington,

<sup>21</sup> See: A. Suzdaltsev, "Smenit li Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz Soiuznoe gosudarstvo Belorussii i Rossii?" *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 8, 2013, pp. 71-75 (see also: A. Suzdaltsev, "Politics ahead of the Economy. Risks and Prospects of the EurAsEC Customs Union," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 89-90; idem, "Formirovanie rossiiskoy politiki v otnoshenii Belorussii (2005-2008)," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 3, 2009, pp. 64-74).

<sup>22</sup> S. Borisov, *Valiutno-finansovye problemy evraziyskoy integratsii*, IMEMO RAS, Moscow, 2014, 92 pp.

<sup>23</sup> See: "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: otnoshenie k proektu v stranakh SNG," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 9-14.

will be able to control the larger part of Russia's western contacts, be involved in trans-Eurasian trade routes, and be strong enough to defend its interests in Brussels. The Poles proceed from the (false) supposition that the Belarusian regime is fragile; this explains why their plans are not supported either by the country's political and expert community, or the ordinary people.

## The Candidate Countries

The expert community of Kyrgyzstan and its parliament were far from united in their response to the statement made by President Almazbek Atambaev in 2013 that Kyrgyzstan should join the Customs Union and that an interdepartmental commission had been set up to start negotiations on the country's CU membership. The prospects and possible repercussions were discussed at a series of public meetings; much has been written in specialized publications and much has been said in the media.

In Kyrgyzstan, the nationalist or pro-Western politicians and public figures are forced to support in public (even though with much reservation) the ideas of Eurasian integration in general and the Eurasian Economic Union in particular. Kyrgyz labor migrants and their far from enviable situation is one of the most painful issues. The business community is very positive about Eurasian integration; the country's orientation toward re-export is seen as the main problem, while the opening of internal markets and the probability of new jobs breed hopes. It should be said that despite the gradually shrinking of Russia's cultural position in the region, the ordinary people are still positively disposed toward Russia and Eurasian integration.

Kyrgyz experts point out that the structure of the republic's trade with the members of the Customs Union shows that the changed trade conditions might have a strong impact on practically all of the economic sectors, the budget, and employment and that a considerable part of the country's foreign trade relies on re-export.<sup>24</sup>

A group of independent experts studied the possible economic effects of the country's CU membership; the project was funded by USAID. They concluded that its membership would inevitably cut down the volumes of import and re-export together with budget revenues. On the other hand, the WTO rules, which allow its members to join free trade areas and customs unions under certain conditions, make it fairly hard for Kyrgyzstan, which is a WTO member, to join the new Customs Union.

Kyrgyz society is especially worried about Russia's absolute economic and political domination in the Customs Union; the country's economy is small and weak to the extent that it can function only as a part of a large economic association. This means that its CU membership will resolve many problems related to the labor migration of Kyrgyz citizens to the CU member states.

The public and expert communities are involved in uncompromising discussions of whether the country should join the Customs Union stirred up by slack or even absent integration within the CIS, contradictions between integration and the desire to preserve national independence, and fragmentation of the integration process. Time has shown, however, that the leaders of Kyrgyzstan are becoming more inclined to join the new integration structure, particularly after President Putin's visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2013 and the signing of large-scale investment agreements with Russia in the energy sphere.

If it joins the CU, the discrepancies between the conditions for CU and WTO membership must be addressed and resolved. Kyrgyzstan will have to double its customs tariffs; Russia's WTO mem-

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<sup>24</sup> See: T. Dyykanbaeva, "Tamozhenny soiuz i Kyrgyzstan," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. III, 2011, pp. 1-7



bership and the intention of Kazakhstan and Belarus to join might cause readjustments of the Unified Customs Tariff of the Customs Union.

The public debates on whether or not the country should join the Customs Union are accompanied by alarmist statements that re-export will die and jobs will disappear. The distribution of income revenues might cause even more complications. Kyrgyz experts insist on the following preferences: the national and the CU regimes should coexist for three to five years; the CU countries should extend Kyrgyzstan technical support to modernize production and improve the quality of locally produced goods; support of and assistance to the business community of Kyrgyzstan should be rendered to enable it to adjust to the international security and quality standards.<sup>25</sup>

On 19 September, 2013, the Ministry of Economics of Kyrgyzstan and the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) approved the final version of the corresponding roadmap. Some of the Kyrgyz experts offered a very unusual opinion: they see the Customs Union, the Common Economic Space, and the Eurasian Economic Union as practical implementation of the liberal theory of a market economy in which goods, capital, services, and labor circulate with minimum state limitations and add that Russia risks more than the other members.<sup>26</sup>

Armenia is already involved in all the integration formats (the CIS and CSTO) and has an observer status in the EurAsEC. At the official level, much is being said about the need to strengthen economic ties in the Eurasian space. In October 2011, Prime Minister T. Sarkisian approved the newly established format of self-organization of states and promised that Armenia would be actively involved in the process. In August 2012, after a meeting of the presidents of Russia and Armenia, the two countries set up a commission to study the opportunities for Erevan's integration efforts within the framework of the CU and the EEC.

It should be said that the main Armenian information resources and progovernment media are very negative about the EEU and Armenia's involvement in it. For a long time, the official circles insisted that the issue could be discussed only when a document outlining the format, instruments, and mechanisms available to the future members of the Eurasian Economic Union had been signed. A country with no common borders with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus cannot be fully involved in the CU and CES formats for obvious geopolitical reasons.

Early in September 2013, Armenia announced that it wanted CU membership and, later, involvement in building the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia and Kazakhstan agreed immediately, while Minsk remained in two minds: the local leaders viewed Armenia within the CU as a rival of Belarus with respect to Russian subsidies.

Seen from Russia, it looked as if Armenia was ready to perform a geopolitical U-turn away from Moscow; in fact, Armenia was acting under the pressure of a blockade that weighed heavily on its economy and was extremely disappointed in the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation. Most of the industrial enterprises that Russia acquired as payment of Armenia's debt remain idling, while the repeated requests for a \$2 billion loan needed to stabilize Armenia's economy were ignored. It remains to be seen whether Russia will issue a grant to minimize the losses caused by the higher gas prices. There is an even weightier argument: Russia sells weapons to Azerbaijan.

It should be said in all justice, that President S. Sargsian planned to initial the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit of the Eastern Partnership Countries in November 2013. The Armenian elite see the country's alliance with Moscow as a temporary measure prompted by the unfavorable geopolitical environment, i.e. Turkey as the closest neighbor and the state of war with Azerbaijan. They, the younger generation in particular, associate the country's future with the EU and

<sup>25</sup> See: *Ibidem*, No. IV, 2013, pp. 24-32.

<sup>26</sup> See: A.L. Saliev, "Kyrgyzstan i integratsionnye protsessy v Tsentralnoy Azii," in: *Integratsionnye protsessy v evraziyskom prostranstve i sovremenny mir*, pp. 160-169.

NATO, rather than with Russia and the CIS integration structures. Armenia should remain Russia's friend, but not an ally. Russia, in turn, "should not block the road to Europe." When Armenia reached the final stretch of the road to the Association Agreement with the EU, Vladimir Putin made it abundantly clear that economic dividends were no substitute for the national security ensured by Russia.

Some Armenian experts are fairly outspoken about the prospects of Eurasian integration. Alexander Iskandarian, Director of the Caucasus Institute in Erevan, for example, is convinced that the former relations between the former Union republics cannot be restored because cooperation among the post-Soviet states stands on a basis very different from their coexistence within the same country. "In ten to fifteen years from now, the generation of the elites that grew up in the Soviet Union and that shares the same culture codes and the ability to communicate with each other like people of one country, and not like foreigners, will begin to leave the stage."<sup>27</sup>

Since 2005, a wide range of problems caused by Tajikistan's possible CU membership has come to the fore and remains on the republic's sociopolitical agenda. Very much in line with the globalization trends, Tajikistan looks at deeper integration as one of its foreign policy priorities; the public shares this conviction with the country's leaders.

In October 2011, in the wake of Vladimir Putin's program article written as part of his election campaign, all the political parties of Tajikistan approved the idea of integration and the prospect of CU membership for the republic. Later, public discussions of the future of the Eurasian Economic Union were pushed aside by the more urgent prospect of CU membership. On the whole, the idea has been accepted in Tajikistan even though there are fears that at the first stage there might be economic losses. Koqidavlat Koimdodov, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Belarus, shares this apprehension. Until the borders of the Customs Union approached Tajikistan, i.e. Kyrgyzstan joined it, Dushanbe preferred bilateral agreements. According to public opinion polls, most of the political forces and ordinary people support the ideas of Eurasian integration.<sup>28</sup>

## Other CIS Countries

The bloodshed in Maidan in February 2014 predated by Viktor Yanukovich's foreign policy somersaults we observed in 2013 and in Vilnius made it next to impossible to assess Ukraine's position on this or any other foreign policy issue. We can talk about trends related to the problem discussed that were more or less obvious in the country's political and expert communities before 2014.

Russian experts have agreed that Ukraine was the weakest European link in the chain of Eurasian integration.<sup>29</sup> Ukraine remained outside the integration field and stubbornly refused to join integration projects because there is no more or less influential right-wing political force or public group willing to join Russia's integration projects and ready to defend its position in public.

The financial and political elites are showing no interest in integration, individual politicians and marginal movements being the only exception. According to the public opinion polls conducted in 2009-2012, about 54% of the country's population supports integration within the CIS; isolationist feelings were even less popular than in Russia: 23% and 36%, respectively.

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<sup>27</sup> A. Iskandarian, "Why are We Drifting Apart? The Dialectics of Integration and Disintegration," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> See: R. Zairov, "Problemy vstuplenia Respubliki Tajikistan v Tamozhenny Soyuz," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 187-198; M. Olimov, "Konkurentsia globalnykh proektov v prostranstve Evrazii i pozitsia Tajikistana v Azii," in: *Integratsionnye protsessy v evraziyskom prostranstve i sovremenny mir*, pp. 170-175.

<sup>29</sup> See: "Evrosiyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: otnoshenie k proektu v stranakh SNG," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 37-38.

On the whole, before 2014, the nation and the elite could not agree on many points—a situation typical of today's Ukraine. The closely intertwined economic and political elites have their own ideological and business reasons to oppose reunification. Indeed, everything Ukrainian is consistently opposed to everything Russian; there is a lot of talk about the civilizational abyss between the two peoples, which dominates public life and the local media. The integration idea has little chance in a country where pro-Russian views and opinions are banned and where sympathy for Russia is incompatible with Ukrainian patriotism. The structure of business interests of the Ukrainian financial and industrial elite is very important; in fact, the Ukrainian business community is afraid of the Russian "oligarchs" and defense and security structures.

Since 2012, the opinion that Russia's integration proposals are compulsory in nature has been spreading far and wide across the country. The Western lobby in Ukraine stands opposed to the projects of the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union. Petr Simonenko, First Secretary of the C.C., Communist Party of Ukraine, is the only open supporter of the former. Today, integration of Ukraine and other parts of the post-Soviet space looks improbable in view of the stormy events of 2014, which led to Ukraine losing Crimea and its waging a de facto war in its eastern regions, etc.

Writing in 2013, that is a year before the Euro-Maidan in the center of the Ukrainian capital, Yuri Andreev, an expert from Russia, predicted that the West, the United States in particular, would try to keep Ukraine away from the Eurasian Union in order to deprive the integration structure of the lion's share of its potential consequences and international weight.<sup>30</sup> The stormy events of late 2013 and, especially, of 2014, which removed Yanukovich, himself not an enthusiastic supporter of integration, confirmed what Andreev wrote early in 2013 and buried the weakest of hopes that Kiev would agree to be involved, at least marginally, in Eurasian integration. Prompting from the outside is obvious.

Moldova and Transnistria disagree over the nature and aims of Russia's integration initiatives. The ruling and humanitarian elites of the former, which are looking at Europe and Rumania, describe Russia's initiatives as another bout of its "imperial" policies and suspect Moscow of a desire to "detach Moldova from the Rumanian cultural community and European civilization." In Transnistria, where people regard their republic as part of historical Russia, the motives and aims of Eurasian integration under the aegis of Russia are seen as absolutely justified.

Sociological polls register, very much as in Ukraine in 2009-2012, consistent growth of Euro-skepticism among the popular masses attracted by Russia and its integration initiatives. Politicians and experts of the opposite camp are alarmed by the figures and their impact on Moldova's European integration. Their explanation of the evolution of opinions and preferences are highly one-sided. The local opposition, on the other hand, is exploiting the subject in its own interests. The left-wing parties heavily rely on Eurasian rhetoric in an effort to present themselves to the public as consistent supporters of drawing closer to Russia through integration projects.

The South Caucasian countries, each in its own way, are important elements of Eurasian integration, especially in the mid-term and longer perspective. The way Armenia, Azerbaijan, and partly Georgia will relate to the Eurasian subject range will determine the currently developing trends. Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two newly independent states in the region, can be described as an integration factor that cannot and will not be ignored in the future.

Baku is in two minds about the Eurasian Economic Union, which is easily explained by its relations with Russia; relations with Belarus and Kazakhstan (the latter being a member of the Turkic Council, another integration project together with Azerbaijan) are not that important. In Azerbaijan, the ordinary people are, on the whole, inclined to approve integration with Russia for sev-

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<sup>30</sup> See: Yu.V. Andreev, "Kievskoe uravnenie v evraziyskom proekte," *Puti k miru i bezopasnosti* (IMEMO), No. 1, 2013, pp. 120-122.

eral reasons, including the large (or the largest among the post-Soviet) Azeri diaspora in Russia. On the other hand, there are ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan that pin their hope on Russia as a possible guarantor of their rights.

The country's political elite sides with the country's top leaders: they are seeking a balance between the Western, Russian, and Turkish (pan-Turkic) vectors. Officials have already made it known that their country is not interested in CU membership, territorial integrity being the highest stumbling block. Practically everything that has already been said on the matter is vaguely formulated and can be interpreted as a warning that Azerbaijan's territorial integrity should be respected.<sup>31</sup>

The business community of Azerbaijan is divided into those related to the oil and gas sector, its economic cornerstone, and others. The former is a natural rival of the oil and gas sector of Russia, which contradicts the idea of integration. A large part of other businesses (trade, agriculture, and industry) is closely associated with Russia and the CIS countries; it is aware of the integration advantages and, therefore, sides with the idea.

The specifics of the relations between Russia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia and their unwillingness to create problems for Russia on the international scene prompt both republics (which have not yet gained international recognition and cannot, for formal reasons, join the EEU) not to claim EEU membership.

Compared with most of the Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan), Uzbekistan is marginally involved in the already functioning post-Soviet integration structures. In 2008, Tashkent suspended its membership in the EurAsEC; four years later it left, for the second time, the CSTO. In June 2012, the same people decided to join the CIS Free Trade Area.

In December 2011, in Moscow, President Karimov described the functioning and planned forms of economic integration in the post-Soviet space as logical results of CIS and world development. Tashkent is convinced that disintegration across the post-Soviet space is spreading far and wide; this does not mean that no joint projects can be implemented, especially if they leave the members' sovereignty and independence intact. Today, Tashkent, obviously unwilling to draw closer to Russia, intends to keep away from the developed forms of Eurasian integration (the Customs Union, Common Economic Space, and the Eurasian Economic Union).

Turkmenistan, sticking to its policy of neutrality (an official term for international isolationism), gives no reason to count it among the potential members of the Eurasian Union (at least in the short-term perspective). On the other hand, one should not ignore any interest of Ashgabad in economic cooperation with Russia and its Central Asian and Caspian neighbors. At the official level, however, the country's leaders decline all invitations to engage in closer integration.

## External Assessments

I have already written that everything related to Eurasian integration is scrutinized from different points of view, up to and including foreign experience. Anna Lavut from the Institute of Latin America, RAS has concluded that the Latin American alliances, set up at different periods, invariably accumulated disagreements after the first five to seven years of mutual trade, which caused conflicts or even provoked political clashes and, not infrequently, slowed down integration.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See: "Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: otnoshenie k proektu v stranakh CNG," pp. 14-20.

<sup>32</sup> See: A. Lavut, "Tamozhennyi soiuz Rossii, Belorussii i Kazakhstana v svete latinoamerikanskogo opyta regionalnoy integratsii," *Latinskaia Amerika* (ILA RAS), No. 8, 2013, pp. 97-103.

Renato Marques, Brazilian Ambassador to Belarus, a diplomat and outstanding scholar with vast experience of working in MERCOSUR and the EU, agrees with the above. He has drawn parallels between the pairs of members involved in two integration processes, Russia and Kazakhstan vs. Brazil and Paraguay, to say that the bigger economies (Russian and Brazilian) will inevitably suck the weaker economic entities into their orbits.

George Washington University in the United States instituted a research program to study Eurasian integration.<sup>33</sup> Foreign experts have agreed that the project of Eurasian integration in the post-Soviet space rests on Moscow's desire to become one of the power centers that opposes the United States. Moscow's intention to keep the CIS republics within its orbit and prevent their drifting away from Russia toward other countries is described as "reunification of the post-Soviet states." From this it follows that political and strategic goals are seen as more important than economic development proper.<sup>34</sup>

The Center for Integration Studies at the Eurasian Development Bank is an unquestionable leader in Eurasian research. In 2013, it implemented over ten projects related to Eurasian integration. The Western think tanks concentrated on the geopolitical aspects of the Eurasian integration processes.<sup>35</sup>

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative American fund, likewise, has concentrated on the geopolitical dimension of the Eurasian project. The Foreign Policy Center (U.K.) describes the Eurasian Union as an instrument of Russia's neo-imperialist domination in the near abroad realized through structural economic dependence.

In its analytical report, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) (U.K.) concluded that until recently regional integration in the post-Soviet space had been mainly declarative, while the Eurasian Union, which offered more promising and much more advanced forms of economic integration, would strongly affect the relations between the EU and Russia as a whole and the EU strategy in the post-Soviet space in particular. This turned Ukraine into a field of normative battles with Russia. This problem forces the EU to revise its approaches to "external management" of its Eastern neighbors from the point of view of short- and long-term potentials and problems.

The Round Table *Eurasian Economic Integration: Rhetoric and Reality* organized by the same institute has pointed out among other things that "the Customs Union faces serious challenges, both transitional and structural in nature. It retains grey areas on complicated legal issues. In addition, each member state has different motives and priorities for economic integration." It also has pointed out that Russia's role in economic integration creates certain problems. Public opinion polls and a wave of anti-migrant protests in Moscow have revealed a gap between Russia's foreign policy geared at the Eurasian Union and the public opinion in Russia, which prefers to keep the former imperial territories outside the country's borders and outside its sphere of influence.

The Peterson Institute for International Economics (the U.S.) published an analytical paper called "Ukraine's Choice: European Association Agreement or Eurasian Union?", which said that Ukraine would profit from the Association Agreement, while "conversely, the Customs Union market is smaller, technologically backward, less competitive, and does not offer Ukraine significant institutional benefits." The authors wrote that Russia should finally admit that in view of its national interests it should not force other countries join the Customs Union, and further: "The United States and the European Union should defend Ukraine against Russian economic aggression in the WTO and through vocal and economic support."

<sup>33</sup> See: A. Libman, D. Ushkalova, "Foreign Trade Effects of the Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia," *Central Asia Economic Paper*, No. 8, May 2013, The George Washington University, 6 pp.

<sup>34</sup> See: J. Mankoff, "Eurasian Integration: The Next Stage," *Central Asia Policy Brief*, No. 13, December 2013, The George Washington University, 8 pp.

<sup>35</sup> See: A. Sivitskiy, *Evraziyskaia integratsia v issledovaniakh inostrannykh "fabrik mysl'" za 2013 god*, Minsk, TsSVI, 2014, 10 pp.

The Carnegie Endowment has made its own contribution to the discussion. Its experts have pointed out that it is Russia's first post-Soviet geopolitical alternative to other projects. There are clear economic, strategic, and humanitarian interests that call for serious integration efforts from Russia's post-Soviet neighbors. This is a real and useful project even if of very modest dimensions so far.

To become a power center it should accumulate a critical mass, yet its possible extension into Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia will not make it a strong power center in Eurasia. To become this, it needs Ukraine with its 46-million strong population and Uzbekistan with its 30 million citizens. Today, Ukraine is obviously more important: its economic, demographic, and cultural potential could have added weight to the Eurasian Union.

The Brookings Institute (the U.S.) held a Round Table called *The Future Course of the U.S.-Russia Relationship*, which concentrated on the Eurasian Union, a Russian initiative. The participants concluded that the project stemmed from the idea of establishing a vast market, similar to the Soviet one. So far, the market is too small, while the project itself is senseless without Ukraine.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London looks at a different (security) aspect of the same project. Russia is actively working toward disrupting the EU policy and squashing the European dreams of the region's population. What is said about Moscow's intention to draw its neighbors into its sphere of influence and restore its Soviet-type domination is wrong. In fact, Russia is defending itself and merely responding to the moves of others; this means that a mutually acceptable compromise between Moscow and Brussels is impossible.

China is also interested in Eurasian integration. Recently, the RISI published a research paper by Wang Shuchun, Director of the Law School, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (written in co-authorship with Wang Qingsong) about possible repercussions for the People's Republic of China. The authors asked several questions: Why did Putin offer the project of European Integration? What are his real aims? What are the project's prospects? How should China respond to Putin's initiative? How will integration efforts in the post-Soviet space coordinate with China's policies, its economic dimension in particular? What are its advantages and disadvantages as seen from China? The Chinese experts showed no enthusiasm; however they admitted that the EEU will force China to take the new geo-economic and geopolitical reality in Eurasia into account.<sup>36</sup>

It should be said that according to the experts from Kazakhstan, China received, through the CSO, a legitimate opportunity, approved by Russia and the Central Asian states, to operate in the post-Soviet space according to the rules not officially registered but accepted in the CIS. In other words, it can play on the contradictions among the Eurasian countries and influence the integration process.<sup>37</sup>

The Valdai International Discussion Club, along with the Center for Russian Studies at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, analyzed four dimensions of Eurasian integration—economic, political, social, and security—from the viewpoints of Russia, Central Asia, China, and the EU/U.S. There is an opinion that Eurasian integration is the first step toward a polycentric world order. Eurasia, which remained on the margins of international relations after the latter half of the 20th century, is moving to the fore. The process of Eurasian integration created two big problems for Russia:

- first, it must learn how to deal with economically and politically smaller and weaker countries as equals;
- second, by drawing China and South Korea into integration, Russia might lose its leader status.

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<sup>36</sup> See: Wang Shuchun, Wan Qingsong, "Perspektivy evraziyskogo integratsionnogo proekta i ego posledstvia dlia Kitaia," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 3, 2013, pp. 84-101.

<sup>37</sup> See: K. Syroezhkin, "Evraziyskoe prostranstvo i kitaysky faktor," in: *Integratsionnye protsessy v evraziyskom prostranstve i sovremenny mir*, pp. 156-165.

The Eurasian countries, potentially involved in integration, have their own fears: they are afraid of losing their sovereignty. China is treading cautiously in Central Asia lest it tramples on Russia's interests there.

Some of the Turkish think tanks are also interested in the Eurasian integration processes; the Turkish Academy of International Politics (Uluslararası Politika Akademisi) points out in an article called "The Eurasian Union: Russian Hegemony Built Up in the Shadow Economic Integration" that Russia insists on a multipolar world and, together with China, is the main supporter of this idea, which will cast doubt on Euro-Atlantic hegemony. Each of the potential members of the Eurasian Union knows that it is joining an umbrella organization headed by Russia; this speaks volumes about its regional hegemony. The Eurasian Union is best described as an attempt to set up regional hegemony in the post-Soviet space in line with Russia's global interests.

Turkish nationalists from the National Security Council of Turkey (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu) plan a Eurasian Union as an alliance with Russia and Iran. The Union's future is doubtful; it is regarded as an attempt at integration that contradicts the global and regional interests of the EU and the United States in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea basin, as well as of China in Central Asia. Certain groups would like to see Turkey a member of the Eurasian Union, which is hardly feasible: it will cost Turkey its EU membership prospects, as well as its involvement in the common EU market and in NATO. Its foreign policy trends will be changed, while the country will find itself in the Russian hegemony zone.

### *Conclusion*

In the post-Soviet space, Eurasian integration is opposed by several very different groups: political groups in power demonstrating their loyalty to the so-called European values; new social groups, the product of the market economy; certain groups in the ruling elite, the product of their countries' newly acquired independence; and Russia's geopolitical rivals led by the United States (the latest events in Ukraine graphically show this).

So far, there is no critical mass of supporters of the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet states. Our colleagues from the RISI have justly pointed out that, strange as it may seem, the ruling bodies of the new integration structure are partly responsible: the EEC is not transparent enough, while its decisions taken without adequate public discussion remain unexplained and unknown to the public, which makes them hardly legitimate in the eyes of the ordinary people.

The Customs Union, which is already functioning, and the Eurasian Economic Union, which is taking shape, can be described as a new type of regional integration that presupposes much stricter financial and executive discipline, transfer of part of economic sovereignty to supranational managing structures, and adherence to common standards and regulations.

This means that several of the CIS countries confronted with the need to make a very important choice are gripped by doubts and the need to weigh all the "pros" and "cons." It should be said that not all the post-Soviet political elites have adequate ideas about the future—not a group or corporate future—but very specific prospects for their countries and nations. Indeed, the ruling circles of certain CIS countries drawn into the rivalry between the European and Eurasian integration projects are behaving like objects of global policy rather than independent actors.