

Post-Soviet Space: Prospects for Transformation and Impact on International Security System

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Received: June 12, 2015

Accepted: July 03, 2015

Published: July 06, 2015

Citation: Guseletov B. 2015. Post-Soviet Space: Prospects for Transformation and Impact on International Security System. *NanoWorld J* 1(2): 62-70.

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Published by United Scientific Group

Abstract

The paper describes the main factors affecting the prospects for transformation of the post-Soviet space, including the historical aspect, the current state of security in this area and the impact of the major external actors on it (US, EU, China, Iran, etc.), including such organizations as the CSTO, SCO and NATO. The article emphasises the importance of the political dialogue between major political actors in terms of strengthening security in the region and the world on the whole. Possible scenarios for the development of the situation in the former Soviet Union countries are considered.

Keywords

Post-Soviet space, Security, Political dialogue, Russia, USA, China, CSTO, SCO, NATO

A Brief Historical Overview

24 years ago the Soviet Union disintegrated and Commonwealth of Independent States was formed (CIS). In the light of the recent events it is more and more difficult to present the post-Soviet space as a single international political region: the self-identification of the individual Member States takes place not on a regional level, but a subregional one. The individual CIS countries often consider themselves to belong to more than one subregion. Such an attitude makes it possible to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy and balance between the interests of various regional powers. Thus, a number of CIS countries joined several similar in composition and functions regional organizations. For example, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are members of both Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which have largely overlapping objectives basically aimed at the struggle against new challenges and threats.

The opening of the post-Soviet space to the impact of global and regional organizations and political actors has played an important role in its further transformation. These processes have led not only to the formation of new cross-border relations between the states belonging to this space, and the countries of the "far abroad", but also to the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union space and its peculiar "internationalization". These processes were also affected by the internationalization of the security challenges, including the strengthening of local conflicts, the formation of international criminal and terrorist organizations (religious and nationalistic extremists, smugglers, etc.), who started more and more actively exploiting the Eurasian space.

As a result, despite several common problems the situation in various regions of post-Soviet space began acquiring a clear regional connotation. It is possible to name at least four major sub-regions, each of which has its own political and geographic characteristics: the Baltic States, Eastern Slavic sub-region (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine), the Caucasus and Central Asian states.

For each of these sub-regions security issues have special characteristics: the issue of territorial demarcation (Transcaucasia), ethnic conflicts and cross border crimes (the Caucasus, Central Asia (CA)), difficulties in cross-border communications related to the toughening of the border regime (the Baltic States, part of the East-Slavic sub-region, the Caucasus, Middle Asia), etc. The same applies to the prospects for development of cross-border cooperation in the west, where the special emphasis was given to the integration and expansion of economic cooperation with the countries of the European Union (EU). While the most important issues in the East were developing regulations for production seeking ways for transportation of natural resources.

To resolve all these issues it could be possible to use experience of some of the foreign countries, especially those, which have managed to create an effective system of cross-border security, while achieving obvious success in the development of cross-border cooperation. However, insufficient financial capabilities of Russia and other post-Soviet states, poor infrastructure links, difficult social and political situation and significant time limits in the formation of the structure of their cross-border relations in comparison with EU countries and North America has not allowed them to copy the experience of these countries.

Security assurance in the region under consideration is essential for the member states, for the following reasons: firstly, due to the historic and geographic reasons security issues for many years have been more important in this region rather than in other ones. Secondly, the living conditions of the millions of their citizens or representatives of their nationalities are not just an issue for their own governments. Thirdly, security guarantees National interests of Post-Soviet countries in the region, which are:

- 1) Maintaining friendly relations with their neighbors, regardless of who is in power in these countries;
- 2) Prevention of "transit" security threats arising outside the region;
- 3) Ensuring internal stability and the absence of conflicts between them.

The Role and Importance of Russia in Ensuring Security in the Post-Soviet Space

Strategically, Russia, which is due to a number of historical, political and economic circumstances plays a role of the leading power in the former Soviet Union space, should seek to achieve socially balanced, effectively developing democracies forming a belt of good-neighborhood relations and security there.

The main policy of the Russian Federation to ensure security in the former Soviet Union space is to strengthen its economic and military power. Historically, the weak state has always sought help and protection from the stronger ones. If Russia continues to deteriorate in the economic and military ways, it will be difficult to talk about its successful policy of ensuring security in the post-Soviet space.

Russia's relations with the CIS countries should be organically integrated into the policy of creating a common economic space with the EU and the formation of a partnership with NATO in the area of security. Such a policy may be an additional resource for the Russian foreign policy in relations with the countries of the CIS and the West, a factor, which will strengthen its international status.

Currently Russia is still one of the most influential Eurasian geo-economic countries, since it owns the most scarce resources of the continent - oil and gas. However, Russia does not fully use economic and political leverage in its geopolitical strategy. To enhance the integration processes in the post-Soviet space it is important to use modern geo-economic techniques more effectively in addition to expanding and strengthening of the political dialogue: transition to a strictly regulated system of distribution of scarce energy resources and introduction of the principle of economic preferences - the system of internal prices for energy and other scarce resources. This will help create additional incentives for economic and political unification and strengthen integration processes in the post-Soviet space. Thus, the new geo-economic model of the post-Soviet space integration could become a real alternative to the process of de-industrialization, which we have seen recently.

In general, it is possible to state that the priority of foreign policy of Russia should not be the protection of partially lost and unnecessary or costly under the new conditions positions, but focus on occupying the worthy place in the world community. In the foreseeable future, it obviously cannot be a superpower, but can really become a powerful, competitive trans-regional power of Eurasia, which could affect the situation on the global level.

It is in the interests of the country to give up autocracy and imperial ambitions and get rid of the syndrome of "besieged fortress", which generates xenophobia. A weighed and balanced course is needed, which will take into account the dynamic and contradictory realities of contemporary world, allowing for entering the process of globalization at the lowest cost.

Russia's strategy of gaining new global role of an independent center of power can be effective only in the case of the creation of an innovative economy and continuous strengthening of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Currently, it is unclear how far the process of disintegration of the post-Soviet space went, and whether Russia pursuing the constructive and targeted policy, can unite at least the key CIS states to jointly reach a qualitatively new level of economic development and confront common threats.

With the anticipated gradual reduction of the role of the post-Soviet space as an object of Russia's policy in this area it will inevitably become fragmented and will focus

on specific groups of countries or single states. It will have to protect its investments in neighboring countries, to take measures to minimize transit dependence while transporting energy resources through the construction of detour pipelines and plants for liquefied natural gas (LNG), and to limit the negative effects of possible local conflicts in the border areas.

In general, the further policy of Russia in the post-Soviet space stands in front of dilemma: the country is not strong enough politically to completely protect the space from external forces, and too poor to develop a wealth of Eurasia on its own. The claims of other political actors in the region appear to be more significant.

Influence of the World's Major Political Actors on the Situation in the Post-Soviet Space

Russia's desire to maintain its influence in the former Soviet Union space encounters interests of the major world powers: the EU and the United States (U.S.) - in the West, Turkey, Iran, China and Japan - to the east (India and Pakistan are indirectly involved in this rivalry). This is due to the fact that important transport routes go through the post-Soviet space, which allow for the shortest ways to connect the industrialized west to the remotest areas of Eurasia in the east, rich in mineral resources, and such important geopolitical players as China and Japan. Big reserves of gas and oil deposits are concentrated in the post-Soviet space, which exceed Kuwait, the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea deposits, as well as gold, nickel and other non-ferrous metals.

Well-known American expert on post-Soviet space Brzezinski believes that the U.S. interest is to create a condition under which no country would control this geopolitical space and the leading world powers had direct access to the financial and economic resources. The U.S. are very interested in exploiting the wealth of Eurasia, installing new oil pipelines and transport routes, which will connect regions of Eurasia with major centers of the world economy through the Mediterranean and the Arabian Seas, as well as on land. Brzezinski pointed out a number of geopolitical centers in the CIS, which, in his opinion, deserve serious geopolitical support from America: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Kiev, in his opinion, plays a key role, but Kazakhstan (taking into account its size, economic potential and geographic location) also deserves American support and long-term economic assistance. Brzezinski believes that the economic growth in Kazakhstan will eventually let it play an increasingly important role in the region.

Nowadays, the U.S. has developed a number of strategies to implement their plans in the post-Soviet space. First, Washington prevents the development of integration processes within the CIS, supporting separatist and nationalist aspirations of new independent countries. Secondly, they widely use economic leverage to ensure favorable conditions for the penetration of American capital into the CIS countries. Thirdly, they encourage integration of post-Soviet states into international political and financial organizations and their

participation in the dialogue on security and co-operation aiming that they will actively oppose the implementation of Russian geopolitical interests in this space. In the long term it relates, for example, to the creation of a single transmission line and gas pipeline system in the Transcaucasian republics, Caspian countries of Middle Asia, Iran and Turkey, and formation of a transport corridor from Caspian countries of Middle Asia to Europe.

With regard to the post-Soviet space the U.S. share common interests with Turkey. Nowadays, Turkey declares itself as a potential leader of a community of Turkish-speaking countries, using its economic and political capital to ensure geopolitical domination in the region. One of the ways of achieving this goal is the construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.

Iran opposes Turkish ambitions in the Caspian countries of Middle Asia and the Caucasus, offering its conception of the Islamic society. Currently, Iran's geopolitical aspirations are mainly directed towards Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, although the idea of a Muslim empire lives in the minds of the religious leaders. Iran actively uses economic levers to spread its influence in the region. Taking advantage of its geographical position, it seeks to expand the network of transport corridors through its territory and participates in the construction of oil and gas pipelines to the Persian Gulf ports. Significant volumes of Kazakh and Azerbaijani oil have been already pumped through the pipeline system in northern Iran. The U.S. intends to confront the ambitions of Iran in the Caspian region, trying to isolate it from the international community and using as a pretext its nuclear program. It makes Tehran look for political support from Russia. Interests of Iran and Russia partly coincide in relation to another important geopolitical issue - limiting the influence of pan-Turkism in the region.

China is becoming more and more powerful actor in the post-Soviet space. New states of the Caucasus and Caspian region serve as a buffer between the Russian and Chinese interests. Energy resources of the post-Soviet space are very attractive to Beijing, and direct access to them is perspective geopolitical purpose of China. Nowadays, China has become a serious competitor to the United States and Russia in the struggle for Kazakh oil. Chinese diplomacy has achieved significant success in this issue recently: agreements on cooperation in oil and gas extraction and two pipelines installments were signed. Beijing plans to invest heavily in the development of oil resources of Kazakhstan and Caspian region. Turkmenistan is ready to sell China additional 20 billion cubic meters of gas annually. Turkmenistan has 160 discovered deposits, 50 of which have been already developed, occupying the 6th place in the world gas reserves. China has also begun receiving oil from Kazakhstan. In 2009, it gave Astana 10 billion US dollars in exchange for the access to the assets in the energy sector of the country, having agreed to increase the volume to 20 million tons per year. In April 2006, an agreement was reached on the construction of the gas pipeline Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China. In 2009 gas was transported through it, and in 2013 it reached its designed capacity of 40 billion cubic meters per year. Currently, China is negotiating the increase of up to 60 billion. As a result, Russia may lose lucrative market for oil and gas.

China carries out an active policy towards the Republic of Belarus (RB). In 2008 an agreement on cooperation in the field of nuclear energy was signed. In 2009, in the backdrop of the scandal between Moscow and Minsk because of Russia's refusal to allocate 100 million Rubles as an aid for the transfer of bilateral trade to the Russian rubles, Beijing signed a three-year agreement with the National Bank of Belarus for 2.9 bln. US dollars and 8 trillion Belarusian rubles. In the case of continuation of the Russian-Belarusian conflicts and the inability to normalize relations with the European Union, the Belarusian leadership could radically change its policy. The purpose of this policy is economic, and in the future, political domination in the country. China has developed and implemented in different countries during many years the scheme of cooperation based on the interests of the partners.

Results of vigorous activity of new political actors in the post-Soviet space are very obvious. Baku – Supsa oil pipeline launched in 1999 decreased the dependence of Azerbaijan from Russia in transporting oil to the Western markets; construction of the new Tejen – Serakha- Meshkhed railway gave Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan new opportunities in developing economic ties with Iran; opening of Karakum highway has become an important transport bridge between China, Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan. China plans to build railway through Iran towards the Persian Gulf.

The Role and Importance of the CSTO and the SCO in Ensuring Security in the Post-Soviet Space

CSTO is an important organization for security. Its main value is that currently it is the only organisation aimed at security with the military component. Moreover, the CSTO has the necessary institutional, regulatory and political tools to combat existing threats and challenges, and at the same time “is not burdened with extra dimensions (economic, cultural, etc.)”. It is very attractive to its members in this particular form.

An important element of improving Russian policy for ensuring security on the post-Soviet space is to improve the functioning of the SCO and removal of contradictions, both military and economic between members of the organization. For example, China, considering the SCO countries as a prospective market for its products, believes SCO should have equal priorities of anti-terrorism and economic activities, and in the long run economic strategy must take the first place in the activity of the organization. Russia, on the contrary, insists on traditional activity of the SCO against “three evils”: terrorism, extremism and separatism, and is afraid of China's economic hegemony in the post-Soviet space.

The Russian Federation is developing a number of measures in the military area in the framework of the SCO, which will contribute to the strengthening of relations with China. First of all it is joint military exercises called “Peace Mission”, held in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2010 with the participation of other partners of SCO. Second, joint initiatives on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well

as banning the placement and use of weapons in space (2008), which were opposed by the U.S. Third, support of cross-border regional stability. Fourth, military-technical cooperation. The growth of high-tech production in the defense industry of China shall be 15% by 2015, which is impossible without cooperation with other countries. China hopes to modernize its defense industry with the assistance of Russia. Fifth, joint actions in the international arena, contributing to the consolidation of peace. For example, the joint turning down of the UN resolution on Iran by China and Russia in 2012.

Another important step aimed at improvement of Russian policy for ensuring security in post-Soviet space is tackling the problem of expansion of the SCO. Postponing expansion for an indefinite period, the SCO members fear, on the one hand, that it will become amorphous and as a result, will reduce its impact on world politics. On the other hand, if India and Pakistan become full members of SCO, the effectiveness of this organization might decrease, because the foreign policy interests of these countries are quite different.

India and Pakistan are interested in becoming full member of SCO having currently the observer status. These countries are important components of international and regional anti-terrorist structure. Terrorist organizations are located in the territory of both states. They are closely connected, sometimes integrated. Therefore, India and Pakistan may rely on the SCO as an ally in their fight against terrorism. India and Pakistan have access to the ocean, which contributes to the development of their economic cooperation with China, Russia and the countries of the post-Soviet space and Middle Asia. In addition, India and Pakistan have considerable weight in the world arena, thus their possible joining the SCO will expand the activities of the organization in the fields of politics, economics, security, cross-border cooperation, demography, culture and other areas.

However, if India and Pakistan join the SCO it can cause some problems. If India alone joins the SCO, it will adversely affect of the stability in South Asia. If Pakistan alone joins the SCO, it will complicate the internal relations between SCO member-countries. If both of these countries join the SCO at the same time, the SCO could become a victim of India-Pakistan conflicts and mutual attacks if they don't reconcile their bilateral relations.

In any case, it is difficult to argue now about the effects of these two big regional competitors joining SCO together. To make constructive decisions inside organisation, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between China and Russia. Another important factor is that these two countries have nuclear weapons, and their accession to the SCO could complicate the process of nuclear non-proliferation within this organization. Russia traditionally does not recognise Pakistan as reliable partner, because Islamabad has always supported the Mujahideens, and sees Islamabad as China's ally.

Cooperation in the energy field is one of the reasons for Iran's trying to join the SCO. Membership in SCO will give Iran an opportunity to get out of the international isolation, imposed on it by the United States. Despite the fact that the SCO is interested in Iran as one of the world's largest energy

producers, its joining the SCO will escalate the situation around the Iranian nuclear programme and can be regarded as the creation of a block and cause weakening of relations between SCO, the EU and the United States. However, India and China are interested in the cooperation with Iran.

Strengthening cooperation between SCO and CSTO is another important direction of Russian policy aimed at ensuring security in the post-Soviet space. Areas of responsibility of SCO and CSTO overlap considerably both functionally and geographically. Five of the seven member-countries of CSTO are in SCO, and five of the six member-countries of SCO are members of CSTO. These two organisations are more and more competing with each other and this competition is not to the benefit of CSTO.

It is clear that SCO is more effective in solving security issues and preventing new emerging threats. It is important for CSTO to continue being involved in control of the system of air defense, in training of military personnel and in supplying Russian weapons to member countries. For several years, there is a certain tension between the secretariats of these organizations. In 2007 an attempt was made to settle differences in opinions. At SCO summit in Bishkek a decision was made to coordinate the work of SCO and CSTO. As a result, the General Secretaries of these organisations Nikolai Bordyuzha (CSTO) and Bolat Nurgaliev (SCO) signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariats of CSTO and SCO in October 2007 in Dushanbe. This Memorandum suggested that these organizations should hold consultations, exchange information and coordinate their activities in all fields, but we can only speculate how this cooperation will be realized in practice.

Several countries, which are members of both organizations are interested in some kind of competition between them. Some of them want to balance Russian influence in the CSTO by their participation in the SCO and others want to neutralize China's influence in the SCO through their participation in the CSTO. Despite this, the two structures obviously don't want to have an open rivalry. However, it is possible to avoid this competition only at the expense of the interests of one of these organisations. In the nearest future the CSTO will gradually give way to the SCO. Each of the SCO member-states, especially such big players as Russia and China have different opinions about the future of this organisation.

Becoming of the SCO an influential regional organization led to its confrontation with NATO countries, in particular with the U.S. This is partly due to the fact that the U.S. recently pays more and more attention to the situation in the Middle Asia, which has traditionally been a zone of Russian interests. Under the pretext of combating terrorism the U.S. tries to gain a foothold in the post-Soviet states of Middle Asia. NATO military bases already exist in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Chinese analyst Zhao Huasheng thinks that the SCO has no anti-American orientation. However, he gives evidence that the SCO was established in the period of the biggest tensions between the U.S., China and Russia. After Uzbekistan stated that Americans should leave the Karshi-Khanabad base placed in its territory, the high-ranking

officials from both sides (SCO and U.S.) made a number of reciprocal statements, which has become a starting point in the official relations between the SCO and the U.S. The U.S. Minister of Defense harshly criticized Russia's foreign-policy doctrine, noting that Russia, China and North Korea may prevent security cooperation between the countries of the South East Asia. All meetings of the SCO leaders evoked disapproval of Washington, which considered that SCO has become anti-American. However, the Russian side assured the "American partners" that the SCO no plans to expand in the nearest future.

In October 2005, the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Kyrgyzstan and agreed to transfer the American contingent from Uzbekistan to the Ganci air base in Kyrgyzstan. In February 2009 the Kyrgyz side announced it's intend to close the Manas air base, referring to the U.S. refusal to discuss the issue of increasing the rent. In March 2009 a ban for use of other air bases applied to other eleven ally-states. However, the U.S. strategy for the deployment of military bases in this region won. Currently, there are twenty-eight U.S. and NATO bases in Afghanistan, which allows them for controlling such countries as Russia, China, Iran, India and protect oil reserves in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian region. The U.S. plans to receive up to 60% of imported oil from these regions by 2025. Thus, the U.S. has already penetrated into the region, which worries Russian leadership very much.

It seems that contradictions between Russia, China and the U.S. have not yet fully matured, and the basis for cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, and opposition to Washington is not strong enough. Both Russia and especially China value their relationships with the U.S. too much, to sacrifice them for the military-political alliance to counterbalance NATO.

The relationship between EU and SCO are defined by energy component and the problem of transport corridors. In April 2007 representative international conference entitled "SCO: opportunities for partnership with the EU" was held in Berlin. Secretary General of SCO Bolat Nurgaliev, EU special representative for Middle Asia Pierre Morel, experts from the SCO member states, representatives of German political circles, as well as the embassies accredited in the German capital attended it. After the conference, a discussion on the topic "SCO - possible partnership with the EU" was held. EU member states have expressed interest in exploring the Middle Asia markets, not only as markets for products sale, but also as a large energy extraction region. To the question why EU chose SCO instead of EurAsEC for regional cooperation in the Middle Asia, Europeans answered that in addition to important economic issues the political dimension in the Middle Asia is even more important, especially in view of the struggle for influence of China, Russia, U.S. and recently Japan. However, the EU has not yet developed a clear line aimed at the partnership with the SCO and the countries of the Middle Asia in the post-Soviet space.

Another major partner of the SCO is Japan. Activity of Japan in the post-Soviet space has increased dramatically since the late 1990s. Japan's main interest lies in the economic sphere: being 100% dependent on imports of energy resources, it seeks

to gain access to Central Asian hydrocarbons, especially in the context of growing instability in the Middle East. Japan is the only country providing free assistance to the post-Soviet Asian countries, the volume of which amounts to billions of dollars. In 2003, Japan offered all Central Asian countries cooperation format named "Central Asia plus Japan". According to political analysts, the dialogue in this format was an open challenge to SCO. Some time ago, the Japanese assured the Foreign Ministry of RF that they will not transform the dialogue into the organization, competing with the SCO but would like to use this structure just to assist Caspian countries. However, it is possible that the US will try to use Japan in the dialogue to strengthen their influence in the former Soviet Union space. Tokyo's desire to integrate into the region clearly manifested on December 5, 2006 during a round table meeting held by the Kazakh Institute for System Studies of the Government of Kazakhstan in cooperation with the Japan Foundation Sasakava on "Kazakh-Japanese cooperation". According to the Japanese scientist A. Ivasita from Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University, the SCO initially was different from blocks dated back to "cold war", but "the organization must get rid of the the negative attitude towards oneself, which is amplified in the West." According to Ivasita, it is possible by inviting new members to the SCO from developed countries. To meet the target he suggested the use of the status of "dialogue partner" (this status was granted in 2009 Belarus and Sri Lanka).

Currently, Japan's influence in the former Soviet Union countries in Middle Asia is not enough to make it possible to create a new international organization in the region, especially after the earthquake in Japan experienced not before. Create alliance with Japan would require the leaders of post-Soviet space and policy decisions contrary to their political commitments within existing organizations such as EurAsEC and SCO. But apparently, Japan will continue establishing relations in the framework of trilateral cooperation format.

It should be noted that in the recent years the activity of the CSTO considerably intensified, although experts note with concern that the Russian military gradually leave one country for another. Despite the large number of bilateral agreements cooperation in the post-military-economic and military-technical spheres are not established, in the production and supply of arms and military equipment, even within the Collective Security Treaty. If the latter happens, the country in search of other CIS peacekeepers will increasingly appeal to the West, the UN, and the OSCE, which is already partly happening today. West actively supports these aspirations to make the post-Soviet geopolitical space an object of bargaining with Russia.

The Role and Influence of Ukrainian Crisis to Post-Soviet Space Transformation and Relations between Russia and Key World Political Actors

The Ukraine crisis that began in 2014 has shifted the geopolitical axis of Eurasia. Russia, which during the previous 25 years had tried to integrate into the West and become a

part of Europe, has moved back to its traditional position as a Eurasian power sitting between the East and the West. Now Russia faced with economic and political pressure from the U.S. and its allies, has moved toward China and Asia. This does not presage a new Sino-Russian block against the West, but it carries implications for the countries of both Europe and Asia, as well as for the U.S.

Western sanctions that are sharply reducing Russian companies' access to credit, investment, and technology; and the plunge in the price of oil, which sent the ruble into free fall.

What is the significance of the fundamental change in Russia's foreign relations for ties with Beijing? Russia's confrontation with the U.S. and the rupture with Europe have given Sino-Russian relations a wholly different strategic context. In the coming years, those relations are likely to get appreciably closer, tending toward a quasi alliance and integration, with Beijing as the more powerful member of the relationship. For China, peacefully gaining superiority in Eurasia will bring it closer to assuming its rightful place in the world. The U.S., which even 15-20 years ago could claim to be the Eurasian hegemon, watching now from the sidelines.

Russia's turn to Asia predates the crisis over Ukraine. It's not good to ignore the fact that the part of Asia that Russia today cares about the most lies within its own borders. The approach is essentially Russian President V. Putin's policy born out of the need to develop the Russian Far East and Siberia and to use the dynamism of Asia-Pacific region (APR) to accelerate its development. But for geopolitical reasons, Moscow could not be to remain passive when it came to the East. The Far East and Siberia are rich of resources but economically depressed and sparsely populated territories, and they are a neighbours of the most dynamic region in the APR is on China's territory.

Russia's foreign policy has traditionally try to have a balance in Moscow's relations with all key players around the world, including the U.S., China, and EU. Its outreach to the APR was initially meant to add to, not subtract from, the Euro-Atlantic dimension of Russia's foreign policy. Even within the region, Moscow was looking for a balance in relations with the key asian powers such as China, India, and Japan. In 2014 the balance was lost, at least for the time being.

In reacting to the pro-Western regime change in Ukraine in February 2014 by reincorporating Crimea into Russia, and later by supporting an anti-Kiev revolt in the eastern Donbas region, Russia broke free from the U.S. domination in post-Cold War system and openly challenged Washington. EU's reaction to the Ukraine crisis was crucial and most consequential. In 2013, the EU accounted for about 50% of Russia's foreign trade-some \$417 bln. Europe was also dependent on Russia for about 30% of its energy supplies. Germany, the EU's powerhouse and emerging sole leader, was particularly close to Russia. But Europe has joined the U.S. in sanctioning Russia.

Russian natural resources would have been linked to European industries and technologies, with Russia providing the EU a geopolitical and strategic channel to APR. The Nord Stream and the South Stream pipelines controlled by

Gazprom were to have become the pillars of the new construct. Moscow had intended to allow the Europeans access to its natural resource base in exchange for access to the European retail gas market.

But EU followed of the U.S. campaign to put pressure on Moscow and turned into a strong critic of Russia. The change in the German position may be explained by Merkel's disappointment that Put in returned to the power rather than allowing former president D. Medvedev to run again.

B. Obama's administration really hoped that China would condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea and its interference in Eastern Ukraine. Washington counted on Beijing's strong support for the principles of the territorial integrity of states and non-interference in their domestic affairs. This, however, turned out to be a miscalculation. China refused to publicly condemn Russia. At the General Assembly of United Nations (UN) vote in March 2014, it chose to abstain, along with some 57 other UN member states.

On the face of it, Russia's actions violated the principles of Beijing's foreign policy. However, the Chinese leaders could not ignore the events in Kiev. To them, a Western-supported color revolution, like Euromaidan protests in Kiev, was a bigger threat to stability. Most importantly, confrontation between Russia and the U.S. relieved China of the potential concern that Putin's pragmatism might lead Moscow to seek an understanding with Washington. It also narrowed Russia's international options, making the country more compliant to partnering with China on conditions that favored Beijing.

China did not want to back Russia outright because it would damage Beijing's relationship with Washington. It has highly valued its relationship with the U.S., which it has worked to transform into "a new type of great-power relationship," as Chinese President Xi Jinping terms it. Beijing has envisioned bringing about a long period of close cooperation and peaceful competition with the U.S., hoping to eventually achieve equality with it. At the same time, a Russia that had to rely more on China would strengthen Beijing in its complex interactions with the U.S.

All things considered, China turned out to be the main beneficiary of Russia's conflict with the West. In this new environment, Beijing came to be seen by Moscow as a source of money, investment, and even some technology. China was left as the largest economy outside the anti-Russian coalition. In addition, since 2009, China has been Russia's trading partner No 1, with common trade reaching \$95 bln in 2014. In December 2014, when the ruble fell, China promised to stand by Russia, if need be.

In May 2014 Gazprom signed an agreement estimated at \$400 bln to supply natural gas to China over a next 30 year. Even though many details of this agreement are undisclosed and doubts about its implementation are not uncommon, it is clearly a historic turning point in Russia's energy geopolitics.

China benefited from the fallout of the Ukraine crisis in other ways, too. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Beijing in November 2014, Xi put himself in a central position, between Obama and Putin. China's foreign policy becoming more active during last few years. Under

President Xi, China has reached a platform from which it can be more assertive in promoting and defending its interests.

China's relations with the U.S. are becoming increasingly competitive. The expansion of China's power in the East, toward the Pacific, weakening the U.S. led system of alliances and promises to enhance Beijing's access to resources and markets and also to boost its influence in continental Asia. Closer ties with Russia fully fit into this strategy.

Japan, which had been working toward some kind of strategic accommodation with Russia until Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had no option, but to show solidarity with the U.S., on the issue of sanctioning Russia.

Russia's relations with South Korea have sustained less damage as a result of the Ukraine crisis than those with Japan. Moscow has become to increase its relations with Seoul, which it needs as a source of technology and investment. But there are limits to what this relationship can contribute to Russia's development of its eastern territories and to what Washington would permit Seoul to do with Moscow.

Russia has to put its traditionally friendly relationships on a qualitatively new level. This refers above all to the two other strategic partnerships Russia keeps in Asia: India and Vietnam.

Moscow has yet to respond to Indian Prime Minister N. Modi's interest in speed up India's economic development. The model of Russo-Indian relations has really changed since the Cold War. In addition, Russia's greater reliance on China in the face of confrontation with the U.S. may take a toll on these ties.

Vietnam is very important to Russia, but it is a middle power. Vietnam is Russia's gateway to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which Moscow has been seeking to engage. Russia's means for building a strong relationship with Southeast Asia are still fairly limited because of Russia's economic and financial weakness. Moscow also needs to step more carefully in its dealings with Vietnam to avoid upsetting its relations with China.

Since the late 1990s China and Russia have subscribed to the notion of multipolarity as the optimal structure for the global order. Right up to 2014, however, Russia was simultaneously seeking to carve out a place for itself in the Western system through membership in such institutions as the G8, an informal grouping of the world's leading industrialized nations, and strategic partnerships with the U.S., the EU, and the NATO. Moscow wanted to be with the West and the East, and hoped to benefit from this unique position.

The Chinese and Russian assessments of Washington's global policy have strikingly converged. Beijing and Moscow both agree, that the U.S. policies breed chaos, citing the Middle East as evidence. In Asia, according to that view, the U.S. seeks to destabilize China's periphery (in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang), to isolate China by consolidating the U.S. led alliances, and to undermine Beijing's own outreach to its neighbors. In Eurasia, the U.S. seeks to move the NATO alliance closer to Russia and to foil Moscow's own Eurasian integration plans, such as those in Ukraine.

China does not approve of annexations, or foreign military interventions unless, Beijing feels the need to intervene itself. China has no geopolitical, economic, or security interest in seeing Moscow's will broken by Washington, or Russia itself broken and falling apart. A pro-Western or, more likely, chaotic Russia would be a major security hazard to China. Beijing also interprets Washington's pressure on Moscow as not just an attempt to break Russia's will and make it obey U.S. rules, but also as a warning to other non-Western competitors, above all China. Exemplary punishment of Russia, in that view, is to serve as a means to deter China. The Chinese do not expect Russia to be defeated by the United States, and they wish it to stay united internally, which fully conforms to their national interest.

In the field of energy, cooperation is potentially being upgraded to an alliance. China has become not only a buyer of Russian natural gas for the first time (until 2014 it had been virtually all exported to Europe) but also a consumer of more Russian oil. Beijing's companies are gaining access to Russian hydrocarbon resources—something they have long been barred from by Putin's own policies and Russian regulations. In February 2015, Russian Deputy Prime Minister A. Dvorkovich said Chinese companies could now acquire majority stakes in Russia's strategic oil and gas fields, except those on the continental shelf. The partnership between Rosneft and BP collapsed, as did its partnership with U.S.-based ExxonMobil, as a result of the sanctions, likely opening the way for the Chinese to take some of the business formerly reserved for the Europeans and Americans. At a time when Europe is reducing its dependence on Russian energy imports, going east appears to be a rational strategy for both Gazprom and Rosneft.

China is also moving ahead with infrastructure development in Russia. This includes high-speed rail way that will eventually connect Moscow to China via Kazakhstan; modern seaports on Russia's Pacific coast; and development of the Northern Sea Route shipping lane from Asia to Europe across the Arctic. These projects will not only bring Russia much closer to China but also make Eurasia much better connected including Mongolia and Central Asian countries.

In the field of finance, China is unlikely to replace the West when it comes to Russia, but connections are deepening. Raising money in China has already proven challenging for Russian companies. Yet, China has expressed its willingness to extend loans to Russia. For Russia, this would mean recognizing China's financial leadership.

Under current circumstances, China's planned Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), a regional trade and transportation project, and the 2015 inauguration of Putin's EEU are more likely to lead to a sort of symbiosis between the Chinese and Russian integrationist projects than to a rivalry between Beijing and Moscow. Again, Moscow will have to compromise, allowing Central Asian states to participate both in the EEU and the SREB.

China will insist on advanced military technology transfers from Russia, in such areas as air and missile defense, as well as air and naval power. In the current situation, when Moscow has to rely on Beijing's support more than ever before, Russia

might have to lower the bar for defense technology exports to China.

In the Middle East going forward, Russia and China are likely to cooperate more in responding to conflicts and dealing with issues such as the Iranian nuclear program. At the UN Security Council and elsewhere, the two countries have already reached the point where they are able to reliably harmonize their positions on most matters. In the future, they can come up with joint initiatives and strategies on issues such as Syria and Iran. Russia is sympathetic to Xi's ideas about a regional security arrangement in Asia, which, according to Xi, should be put together by Asians themselves, implicitly without the U.S.

In the field of global governance, China and Russia will work together to further empower non-Western international institutions, such as the SCO, a Eurasian economic, political, and security union, and the BRICS group of developing economies (made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In 2015, the SCO will add India and Pakistan as new members, and it will thus include most of Asia's great powers. The BRICS group, now with a development bank of its own, will attempt to provide a partial alternative to the International Monetary Fund.

China and Russia are now entering into a relationship that will fall short of a formal alliance but will be closer than the strategic partnership the two countries have had since the 1990s. It could be described as a harmonious association of two major powers based on the commonality of some key interests; mutual resentment of the global hegemon, that is, the U.S.; a measure of foreign and security policy coordination; and a degree of empathy between their leaders.

Within this tighter relationship, Moscow will insist on its coequal status, and Beijing would probably be wise to accept this. China and Russia will not form a block to oppose the West militarily. They will not come up with an ideology to supplant Western liberal democracy. Rather, they will join forces to withstand Western pressure (Russia's main interest today and potentially China's tomorrow) and to gain resources to better compete against the West (China's main interest). The Sino-Russian entente will be about coordination without a central command. Russia's essentially European identity will not be affected, even though its relationship with the European Union will remain broken for a long time.

On the Importance of Political Dialogue for Strengthening Security in the Post-Soviet Space

It is clear that improving security in the post-Soviet space largely depends on the effectiveness of the integration of the states which belong to this space. One of the most important factors of integration is the existence of a common philosophy of integration, which directly defines the degree of political compatibility of the states. This very sensitive sphere is connected with the common values and willingness of the elites to integrate. The first common thing to note is identical state systems, which present presidential models

with authoritarian tradition of administration. At present, there is some transformation of authoritarian models in post-Soviet space. It does not become stronger, but transforms into something else, because every member-state of the EurAsEC try to carry out political reforms.

Russia cannot be the only driver for the unification process. Other member-states, especially Kazakhstan, should put more efforts into the development of this process. Currently, integration is understood not only as coordination, but also the exchange of interests (e.g., in the form of exchange of assets and areas of responsibility), which should be mutually beneficial. Such integration, in contrast to the European model, does not imply a significant reduction in the sovereignty of States. However, the national elites are not willing to give even part of their functions to some supranational bodies. It is necessary to take into account other realities: the ruling bureaucracy of the CIS countries have only recently gained a reliable source of income in the form of "state property and budget" and diligently protects it via the corruption mechanism. This fact does not contribute to the integration, since the national bureaucracy intends to keep in their hands these resources for a long time under the guise of "sovereignty."

In these circumstances, one can imagine several interrelated scenarios of post-Soviet space development.

The actual process of integration can take place if economic strength and political will are united. Russia must grow stronger economically and politically to such an extent, that it becomes attractive to other post-Soviet states. Then integration will be irreversible.

The alternative option is economic and political weakening of the Russian Federation and strengthening of the position of Kazakhstan. In this case, the integration process will be much affected by external centers of power.

Summing up the results of the 20 years development of the post-Soviet space, we can make the following conclusions:

First, the world's leading powers demonstrate the growing interest to the states belonging to this space in the recent years, giving them a prominent place in their politics and therefore develop a strategy of penetration and strengthening of their influence on these countries. Thus, the Central Asian countries are undoubtedly important, first of all, because of their special geopolitical position, enormous energy and other natural resources. For example, the politics and economics of Kyrgyzstan were significantly affected, especially until 2005, by such organizations as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and others. The U.S., for example, made significant efforts for accession of Kyrgyzstan to the WTO.

Second, the Russia and other countries of the post-Soviet space, engaged in multifaceted foreign policy based on balance between global centers of power are still in the initial stage of seeking place and role in the changing world, which entered the period of deep economic crisis. In these difficult external conditions the post-Soviet countries continue to ignore the fact that their successful co-existence and secure development is possible only within a single economic and defense space. Hence, the main directions for improving security policy in the post-Soviet space should be restoration of the common geopolitical space, but on the new economic (social oriented market economy) and political (protecting interests of the majority) foundations.

Third, in spite of all differences in opinions concerning integration, and in particular, in the sphere of security in the post-Soviet space, Russia and the countries of the Space still have possibilities for cooperation within the framework of the newly formed structures: CSTO and SCO, provided their further development and improvement.

In general, ways for improvement security policy in the post-Soviet space look like this:

- Creation of a common economic space;
- Organization of control over the energy resources production and transit to the world markets;
- Sustaining and optimizing Russian military presence in this space;
- Supporting the country leaders in this space in their endeavours for modernization of the political and economic systems;
- Searching for consensus on the issue of the growing influence of the U.S. and China in the post-Soviet space.

We need to recognize that many conflicts in the post-Soviet space can not be resolved by force of arms: they require a flexible combination of political, diplomatic and economic means. They may include creation of free economic zones in the conflict border areas, introduction of the institute of dual citizenship, which would significantly soften the acuteness of the humanitarian problem associated with the regime of crossing the state borders by residents of border areas