



## **STRATEGIC PROJECTS IN CENTRAL ASIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL RISK ANALYSIS CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract:**

The article mainly analyzes two geopolitical strategies related to the Eurasian region of Russia and China in recent years through trade and energy routes through Central Asia in order to develop economic cooperation between East and West.

**Keywords:** strategy, geopolitical strategies, geopolitical project, Eurasian Economic Union, Silk Road to Belt Road, Central Asia, integration, political forecasting.

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### **INTRODUCTION.**

In recent years, Russia and China have been pursuing two geopolitical strategies related to the Eurasian region through trade and energy routes through Central Asia in order to develop economic cooperation between East and West.

At present, the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union is one of the brightest attempts to develop cooperation in the region, while the Chinese strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt attracts huge investments in infrastructure development and national economy and attractive projects to attract all Central Asian countries to useful energy and economic sectors. is one.

Since 1991, the post-Soviet republics in Central Asia have taken different approaches to regional cooperation initiatives and projects in the economic, political and security spheres: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have always supported and participated in regional cooperation initiatives, but Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been cautious. changes in the environment have changed the position of our government).

Moreover, these two geopolitical project strategies affect the political and economic development of the Central Asian countries, as well as their foreign policy and, of course, their near-term prospects.

**So, what does Eurasia mean for Uzbekistan and the entire Central Asian region?** The Eurasian ideology and attempts to turn it into a political project were revived as soon as the former Soviet Union collapsed. In the ideology and political system of the Soviet Union, Eurasianism had lost its former importance. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the conceptual significance and relevance of the Eurasian or neo-Eurasian identity of the Central Asian

states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was on the agenda of the scientific community.

Despite the fact that the region decided to call it Central Asia from the first days of independence (1991) and was recognized by the world community as the name of a group of five republics called Central Asia at the time, the debate over naming has not stopped. Critics say the geographical center of the Asian continent is currently located outside the Central Asian region, and suggest that the region be alternatively called "Central Eurasia."

**The term "Central Eurasia" means that Central Asia has always been an integral part of Eurasia.**

**Is that really so?** In terms of geographical, that is, spatially related parameters, Eurasia also covers the Central Asian region. But based on such a view, Eurasia can be compared to China in China, Vietnam, Japan, France, Sweden, Greece, and so on in Europe. countries. In our view, this is an exaggerated approach to the name, which is nothing more than a semantic and illogical game made up of a combination of the terms 'Europe' and 'Asia'. In this approach, the unity and integrity of Eurasia, on the one hand, and the geopolitical dignity and identity of Central Asia, on the other, are eroded<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, the geographical-political connotation at the heart of calling the Central Asian region Central Asia has an additional meaning, because the region in a sense will be structurally strongly connected to the Eurasian space with all its geopolitical consequences arising from the Eurasian concept. Geopolitics really

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marc F. Blanchard. Editor. China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative and South Asia A Political Economic Analysis of its Purposes, Perils, and Promise. California, USA. PP 74-75.



does exist here. Recall Putin's view that the crisis in the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century, and his initiative to create a new integration structure called the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)<sup>2</sup>.

**Are the Central Asian and Eurasian integration models compatible?** This is a complex and fundamental issue. The same reasons and preconditions that exist as a primary substrate for the unification of the five countries on the path to Central Asian integration [1] are expressed in the Eurasian space - either not or very weakly. But this does not mean that the two models are completely incompatible. Importantly, the Central Asian model must be fully resolved before it can be considered as a model that is large and extends to the entire continent, is shrinking under the geopolitical burden, and is not yet clear. [1]

Even in the context of the mutual integration of the two integrations, it is inappropriate to call Central Asia Central Eurasia not only in the former Soviet Eurasia, but also in the world system in order to maintain its international subjectivity. However, the integration process in Central Asia has not been easy. Two of the five countries in the region - Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan - are members of the EEU. It is not yet known how this will affect the prospects for Central Asian integration within the region. Last year, on the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a new impetus was given to the work in the region, which testifies to the potential for hidden and open integration, and it is constantly creating such a unifying impetus. This hidden power in the region will always return countries to their normal state even if they deviate from the state of integration.

In the Eurasian Economic Union, it can be said that its internal nature, that is, the "Soviet syndrome" (real or deceptive) is hidden. It is no coincidence that the announcement of Uzbekistan's possible accession to the EEU has caused both sarcasm and serious hints that Russia is trying to return to the past. In general, they are understandable, because it is clear to all of us that Russia is leading in this union (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). "At a meeting of the Eurasian Economic Union, Kazakh President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev criticized the fact that the union is in the interests of only one state, that priority is in the hands of Russia, and that the new strategic

project of the union," he said. He also condemned the restrictions on trade, saying that the proposed strategy would affect Kazakhstan's sovereignty and that the participation of an ally in negotiations with other countries would be unacceptable. It is a non-member structure of Russia-led in all parameters and coordinates. At the same time, it is important to remember that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century, when the President of Russia spoke in the spirit of longing for the past.

There is a rigid and widespread perception of the Eurasian choice that the West opposes in relation to this union. Perhaps this is why the EEU needs Russia more than any other member to create a geopolitical buffer line along the entire perimeter. Even from an economic point of view, Russia accounts for more than 80 percent of the EEU's gross domestic product<sup>3</sup>.

Speaking of the brief history of the Eurasian Economic Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, which unites Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia, is a huge economic market with a population of 184 million and an area of more than 20 million square kilometers. Although the EEU in its current form was established in 2014-2015, the beginning of such integration dates back to 1994-1995. In March 1994, Kazakh President (former) Nursultan Nazarbayev first put forward the idea of creating a Eurasian Union<sup>4</sup>.

**The range of geopolitical competition and cooperation between Russia and China in Central Asia.** After the independence of the five Central Asian republics in 1991, Russia and China, one of the strongest regional geopolitical players, have established strong ties with these new states to achieve their strategic goals in a changing geopolitical regional scenario. In addition to economic, energy, and geostrategic goals, security and stability issues have been key common goals in post-Soviet Central Asia as prerequisites for the successful impact of Russia and China's strategies.

<sup>3</sup> This record received a damning assessment recently by the US Trade Representative, 2017 Report on the Implementation and Enforcement of Russia's WTO Commitments, December 2017, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/Press/Reports/Russia%202017%20WTO%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Eurasian Economic Commission, Report on the Restrictive Measures Applied to the Goods from EAEU member states in Third countries' Markets, 2015, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/trade/dotp/SiteAssets/dostup/Report%20on%20trade%20restrictive%20measures%20in%201H%202015.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, "The Eurasian Economic Union: Deals, Rules and the Exercise of Power," Chatham House Research Paper, May 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-05-02-eurasian-economic-union-dragneva-wolczuk.pdf>.



Russia's strategic goal is to bring the "near abroad" under bilateral influence under political, economic and military influence, and the Central Asian states in the economic sphere (Central Asian Cooperation Organization, CACO), in the military sphere (Collective Security Treaty Organization). was to save through involvement in organizations.

As for Russia's attempts, the Central Asian states took a different approach, closely linked to economic and political problems: on the one hand, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have always been members of inter-ethnic organizations promoted by Moscow, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been cautious.

The Eurasian Economic Union is the most important project to shape a common market of 180 million people during Vladimir Putin's third presidency, following several subsequent moves by the former Soviet Economic Integration, the most important of which was the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010. Existing disagreements between member states as a result of unilateral action and high-level trade wars since its launch in 2015 have aggravated the status of the project. As domestic policy continues with limited development and an undoubted crisis, the Eurasian Economic Union has sought to present its external agenda in a positive light. High-level political statements have consistently provided information on a list of more than 50 countries interested in establishing trade relations with the Union. The Eurasian Economic Union has signed trade agreements with Vietnam and Iran, and in May 2018 also established cooperation with China<sup>5</sup>.

These changes are a sign of success and benefit, both for ourselves and internationally. The bloc sought to disprove the accusations of neo-imperialism by proving its economic viability by adhering to the modern agenda of imperialism. As a result, many in the West began to see the Eurasian Economic Union as a viable platform for economic advancement at a time when relations with Moscow were improving.

It reveals more political motivation and power asymmetries than is reflected in the internal dynamics of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Eurasian Economic Union is at the heart of Russia's strategy to understand its global aspirations. Its foreign relations are reflected in Moscow's strategic achievements. Geopolitical considerations prevail from an economic

point of view, and both the trade commitments made affect its economic benefits.

#### Russia's geopolitical interests

Sometimes a single map can reveal the most important thing about a country. Russia's participation in the Eurasian Economic Union's foreign affairs will primarily help inspire Moscow for Eurasian integration of geopolitical importance. Given Russia's trade profile, the Eurasian Economic Union is unlikely to offer much benefit, although integration costs are not insignificant. But we think that Russia will gladly cover these costs for the accepted geopolitical benefits of the union.

Russia's interest in Eurasian integration can be understood as Russia's modern orders as some imperial heirs. Moscow believes that the post-Western world is taking shape and that globalization and regionalization of the world economy and politics will be replaced by U.S. hegemony.

Russia's strategic goal is to bring the "near abroad" under bilateral influence under political, economic and military influence, and the Central Asian states in the economic sphere (Central Asian Cooperation Organization, CACO), in the military sphere (the Collective Security Treaty Organization). was to save through involvement in organizations (CSTO and in the political sphere (Commonwealth of Independent States), CIS)<sup>6</sup>.

If Russia's foreign policy was initially aimed at strengthening relations with the West, leaving post-Soviet Central Asia as an economic and political burden to be left to its fate, then there are concerns about threats to regional security and stability (such as the 1992-1997 civil war in Tajikistan). Instability in Afghanistan is a political strategy to maintain its traditional influence on possible uprisings and the new political implementation of Central Asia.

As for Russia's efforts, the Central Asian states took a different approach, closely linked to economic and political problems: on the one hand, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have always been members of inter-ethnic organizations promoted by Moscow, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been cautious. political 2016 until the situation changes). As for Uzbekistan's integration policy, Russia has not consistently participated in Turkmenistan's neutral policy due to its desire to play the role of a regional leader.

When President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, Russia stepped up Moscow's foreign policy strategy to restore its geopolitical influence in Central Asia: in fact, in 1999 and 2000, Islamic militants claimed armed attacks on Uzbekistan and the Fergana

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Gabuev, "Post-Soviet States Jostle for Role in One Belt One Road Initiative," Carnegie Moscow Centre, 6 August 2015, <https://carnegie.ru/2015/08/06/post-soviet-states-jostle-for-role-in-one-belt-one-road-initiative--pub-60997>.

<sup>6</sup> Karaganov "From the Pivot to the East to Greater Eurasia," 2017.



Valley. Threats to regional and domestic security and stability, as well as significant benefits received by Western energy companies in the regions of Kazakhstan, have necessitated an increase in Russia's presence or influence.

Russia hoped to maintain its position in this way by establishing the Customs Union in 2010 and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. This desire was especially true for other Western initiatives, such as the Trans-Pacific Union, which sought to exclude Russia from integration. In this sense, the Eurasian Economic Union has gifted Russia of regional significance to participate in the process of global space reconstruction. Because Vladimir Putin made this clear in his October 2011 article, *Izvestia*<sup>7</sup>. The Eurasian Economic Union can be one of the pillars of the modern world and an important factor connecting Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. An important factor in Russian integration is the determination of equal partnership among integration initiators to achieve global stability.

Russia, as an alliance with the ability to engage with foreign partners, has a great influence in supporting the Eurasian Economic Union. According to *Izvestia*, Putin described the Eurasian Economic Union as the hearth of a Greater Europe. He noted that through EII and other regional structures, the principles of free trade can spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But after Russia's conquest of Crimea and its inability to gain any dominance in the West, Moscow turns its entire attention to the east. Late 2015 In 2016, political scientists developed the Greater Eurasian Cooperation Strategy in their high-level political statements. The partnership provides for cooperation between Eurasian integration groups such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, but this does not mean that the major regional powers are China, India, Pakistan and Iran.

Russia's interest in the foreign affairs of the Eurasian Economic Union has a protective dimension. Moscow's attempts in 2013 to expand the Eurasian project, which was successful for Armenia and unsuccessful for Ukraine, meant giving priority to the EII in the region. Since then, Russia has been trying to influence the attitude of members of the Eurasian Economic Union through external partners. This is especially true after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war in Eastern Europe. Kazakhstan and Belarus have officially supported Russia's actions, but

have refused to impose sanctions and trade fines on Ukraine and the West. Moscow's decision was to continue to estimate the distance. The result of this unilateral action was an effort to reduce dependence on Russia by developing bilateral relations with strategic partners such as China and the EII. As the countries develop their relations with other partners, the Eurasian Economic Union has offered Russia an important mechanism by suspending and reshaping the foreign relations of each member of the Union<sup>8</sup>.

Consider another important event. I would say that this is important for both Uzbekistan and Russia. The pandemic crisis has led to a dramatic change in the situation of migrants in Russia. It is known that Uzbekistan is the Central Asian country that sends the largest number of labor migrants to Russia. In Russia, the number of labor migrants will halve by 2020. Plus, it all came with big problems. Because the airports were full of people who couldn't leave the country. The Uzbek government has tried to help its citizens.

In general, this is a serious problem - at the heart of it is human destiny.

The analytical-prognostic direction is known to be related to the entry of the EEU, which is one of the strategic issues in the foreign policy of our country today, and geopolitical and geoeconomic projects such as Beijing's "One Place - One Way". We have tried to analyze and forecast these scenarios based on the subject of our study.

In recent years, Russia and China have been pursuing two geopolitical strategies related to the Eurasian region through trade and energy routes through Central Asia in order to develop economic cooperation between East and West.

At present, the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union is one of the brightest attempts to develop cooperation in the region, while the Chinese strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt is a huge investment in infrastructure development and national economy and an attractive project to attract all Central Asian countries to useful energy and economic sector.

Changing global and regional trends, the emergence of new risks and risks affect the growth of general uncertainty. Several scenarios have been selected to develop the geopolitical and geoeconomics situation in the region. It should be noted that both positive and negative scenarios may occur in each model.

We believe that the modern geopolitical position of Central Asia was formed under the influence of the

<sup>7</sup> For more, Jeanne L. Wilson, "The Eurasian Economic Union and China's Silk Road: implications for the Russian-Chinese relationship," *European Politics and Security*. vol. 17, pp. 113-132.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Marc F. Blanchard. Editor. *China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative and South Asia A Political Economic Analysis of its Purposes, Perils, and Promise*. California, USA. PP 112-113.



West, Russia and China, and in the future such a geopolitical structure based on these centers of power will remain relevant. The strategic concept of "Three Support Points" reflects the most optimal development model for the region, according to which a common multi-vector strategy of all Central Asian countries has been developed<sup>9</sup>.

The relatively equal geopolitical attractiveness of the West, Russia, and China as key characteristics has paved the way for a sustainable development of Central Asia in the world coordinate system. In the medium term, relying on the three geopolitical centers and the balance between them will remain relevant, as both sides are equally important for the sustainable development of Central Asian countries. The dynamics of relations with the external environment of Central Asia will undoubtedly affect regional development. The existing balance of interests of the West, Russia and China determines stable and broad opportunities for the region. In our opinion, this geopolitical structure remains unchanged. It can also remain stable or deform under the influence of destabilizing factors, disrupting the development prospects of the region.

#### **The main factors are:**

- A sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the West will lead to a geopolitical confrontation with the revitalization of Cold War elements in the medium term.
- The escalation of political tensions between China and the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region could exacerbate the security architecture situation in this part of the world. This will lead to increased competition between the West and China in Central Asia. The relationship between Russia's and China's rapprochement and distance is closely linked to their relationship with the West.
- characterized by the strengthening of the role of asymmetric measures in public policy in the context of growing geopolitical challenges.

When it comes to Russia's strategic goals and geopolitical interests, sometimes a single map can reveal the most important aspects of a country. Russia's participation in the foreign affairs of the Eurasian Economic Union is primarily of geopolitical importance. It will help inspire Moscow for Eurasian integration. Given Russia's trade profile, the Eurasian Economic Union is unlikely to offer much benefit, although integration costs are not insignificant. But we

think that Russia will gladly cover these costs for the accepted geopolitical benefits of the union.

Russia's interest in Eurasian integration can be understood as Russia's modern orders as some imperial heirs. Moscow believes that the post-Western world is taking shape and that globalization and regionalization of the world economy and politics will be replaced by U.S. hegemony.

In this regard, one of the leading political scientists of the country F. Tolipov said: However, it is not clear what is meant by this. First, the question arises: if we are going to enter an incredible market of 185 million people, the question arises as to whether the markets of 34 million people (Uzbekistan) and 70 million people (Central Asia) have been mastered. Second, this market is actually open as trade and economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia (as well as other members of the EEU) continues to expand. Third, the openness of this market has not brought significant benefits to Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Belarus - some data on the development of trade within the EEU confirm this<sup>10</sup>.

Uzbekistan's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union will be detrimental in all respects. In particular, it is not in Russia's long-term interests, and Uzbekistan's accession to the union will not only be beneficial, but also harmful, "Rabbimov said. The expert described the state of the Uzbek economy, especially the manufacturing sector, as "weak." According to Rabbimov, Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are far ahead of Uzbekistan in terms of economic development and per capita income. "If in all post-Soviet countries the period of 'shock therapy', brutal privatization and transition to market relations began in the 1990s and partly in the 2000s, we are now starting these reforms," Rabbimov said. The first president, Islam Karimov, Rabbimov said, was determined to be able to manage the whole process as a "cautious" politician. In particular, this applied to exchange rate and price policy. According to him, the purpose of the EEU is to advance Russia's interests, or more precisely, "to transfer the weight and problems of Moscow to the common shoulders of all participating countries." According to Rabbimov, Uzbekistan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union will at the same time upset the balance of foreign policy.

Fourthly, without a rigorous analysis of the market structure, without asking questions about what to sell and what to buy, then presenting its size is nothing but a distortion of the essence of the problem ..."

<sup>9</sup> Silk Road to Belt Road. Reinventing the Past and Shaping the Future. Editor Md. Nazrul Islam United International College Zhuhai, China.\_Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2019. PP 87-89.\_[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2998-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2998-2_1)

<sup>10</sup> <https://eurasia.expert/integratsiya-v-tsentralnoy-azii-vzglyad-iz-uzbekistana/>



In our opinion, the calculations of the benefits and harms of Uzbekistan's membership in the EEU should be published and discussed not only in the economic but also in the political sphere.

In our view, Russia's strategic goal is to bring the "near abroad" under the influence of political, economic, military bilateral relations and the Central Asian states in the economic sphere (Central Asian Cooperation Organization, CACO), in the military sphere (the Collective Security Treaty Organization). was to save through involvement in multilateral organizations (in the CSTO and in the political sphere (Commonwealth of Independent States), CIS).

**Characteristic aspects of EEU.** Compared to other models available in the world for integration within the EEU, the following are typical:

- very ambitious plans based on political ideas and political views of the future association;
- an overly rigid structure that can pose serious risks in the near future, even in relationships with close partners;
- The "secondary" economic goals of integration and, accordingly, the lack of a positive economic agenda and positive outcomes for economic agents.

In the context of increasing competition between China and the United States, primarily in the world order, it is expedient to re-understand the development strategy and tactics of the EEU. In addition to looking for ways to deepen and strengthen the internal integration chain in the new format, one of the priorities is to form an external chain that is gradually expanding.

According to experts, the correction of the internal contour requires a transition from de jure integration to de facto integration when institutions are organized in an accelerated mode, where important steps may include the introduction of a special regime of co-operation and export to the EEU<sup>11</sup>.

We believe that the West will take measures to strengthen the influence of Russia and China in Central Asia. For the West, Central Asia is an acceptable platform for global tasks. The loss of its position in the region threatens to narrow the geopolitical opportunities for future influence in Russia, China, South Asia and Iran. The U.S. and NATO contingents will continue to have a strong political influence in the region, despite the reduction in military action in Afghanistan.

In the medium term, Russia may have sufficient resources to withstand Western pressure and pursue active policies in the post-Soviet space, including Central Asia. One of the strategic directions of the Russian leadership will be to actively participate in the implementation of the integration project - the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and deepen its efforts to politically unite its participants. The Eurasian political vector in Russian politics is manifested as a successful foreign policy doctrine, which can be expanded through the entry of new members into the organization and the powers of national authorities with additional powers.

**China is strengthening its financial and economic position in Central Asia.** China has the financial and economic power to define the region as a zone of strategic interest. At the same time, the Chinese economy needs to expand its markets for export goods and import sources. Therefore, in the medium term, China's policy will be shifted to Central Asia, including in the Asia-Pacific region, as it seeks to provide alternative transit land routes in the face of increased competition from Japan and the United States. Named the "Great Silk Road Economic Belt," China's policy in the region is based on the principle of peaceful coexistence with other global projects such as the New Silk Road and Eurasian integration. According to Beijing, this will promote its economic interests in Central Asia effectively and without conflict.

In the future, under the growing threat of instability in Central Asian countries and under the influence of external factors, China may become more active in the political settlement of the regional situation. Despite growing economic influence, especially in the Central Asian region, a factor hindering Beijing's consolidation is its fear of dependence on China, which is very strong in society and in the elites of Central Asian countries. Their goal remains a multi-vector and maximally independent foreign policy. In this regard, competition between the United States and China is fully in the interests of Central Asian states as an additional tool of their foreign policy and foreign economic strategy. With a sensible approach to correcting and strengthening Russia's strategy in the region and beyond, these three factors can be used:

- U.S. parties, along with the current U.S. administration's "chosen approach" (budget cuts for aid programs) and the traditional fears of the Central Asian elite that they are trying to democratize their regimes;
- China's fear of domination is growing;
- Strong desire of Central Asian states to pursue an independent multi-vector foreign policy.

<sup>11</sup> B.R. Deepak. Editor China's Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road. B.R. Deepak. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi India. 2018 P 112.



However, first of all, it is necessary to optimize the activities of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)<sup>12</sup>.

Today, the course of integration processes in the EEU can be described as inertial.

Any devastation in the region is seen by the Chinese leadership as a struggle against geopolitical and geoeconomic isolation, which poses a threat to its western regions and a loss of investment in Central Asian countries.

In this situation, the Central Asian states, especially our country, will have to find more resources for political maneuver. Apparently, they are expecting several dangerous development prospects, including:

Simultaneous pressure on the region from the geopolitical environment limits the political capacity of Central Asian countries to make certain decisions. Each of the external participants is looking for specific reasons to include the region in the zone of strategic interests for them and to increase the unilateral requirements for the regional participants. This trend will increase proportionally as the confrontation between major global players intensifies. An important aspect of this geopolitical structure is transport logistics and free access to the region's commodity markets.

In the medium term, Russia's role in these areas will continue to decline due to China's revival. In turn, the West is showing a more active interest in building alternative transport and energy routes from Central Asia to the south and west. Despite the Russia-China rapprochement on a number of issues of energy partnership, the Central Asian vector could lead to conflicts for both countries due to the pricing policy for key energy sources. Russia will also have a very negative attitude towards the activation of the West's policy in the Caspian Sea. The narrowing of the field for political maneuvers of the countries of the region is caused by the growing political demands of the external environment and the fear of disturbing the geopolitical balance of each Central Asian state. Political instability Security can remain an important measure of Central Asian development. Tensions at the crossroads of interests of the West, Russia and China, as mentioned above, can become external factors of political instability in a number of countries in the region. The current internal crisis can turn socio-political events into explosive events with an increase in external negative factors, leading to acute and long-lasting internal political conflicts. The aggravation of

the situation in Central Asia may be due to the aggravation of the positions of the parties in the field of transport and energy, as well as the desire to unilaterally develop military-political cooperation.

**Growing Asymmetric Threats** In order to strengthen the status of the regional government, Russia is trying to use all its potential to attract as much of its influence as possible from the post-Soviet territory. In this context, the Russian leadership sees Central Asia as a potential object, so it seeks to compensate for the loss of its geopolitical position in other regions<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the growing economic influence in the Central Asian region, a factor holding back Beijing's position is its fear of becoming dependent on China, which is very strong in society and in the elites of Central Asian countries. Their goal remains a multi-vector and maximally independent foreign policy. In this regard, competition between the United States and China is fully in the interests of Central Asian states as an additional tool of their foreign policy and foreign economic strategy. With a sensible approach to correcting and strengthening Russia's strategy in the region and beyond, these three factors can be used:

- U.S. parties, along with the current U.S. administration's "chosen approach" (budget cuts for aid programs) and the traditional fears of the Central Asian elite that they are trying to democratize their regimes;

- China's fear of domination is growing;
- Strong desire of Central Asian states to pursue an independent multi-vector foreign policy. However, first of all, it is necessary to optimize the activities of the Eurasian Economic Union (EII)<sup>14</sup>.

Today, the course of integration processes in EII can be described as inertial.

In addition, there is some growing frustration among participating states, driven by unfounded assumptions that are expected to be quick and significantly positive. The integration results also present additional challenges due to the confrontation of sanctions between Russia and the West.

Compared to other models available in the world for integration within the EII, the following are typical:

- very ambitious plans based on political ideas and political views of the future association;

<sup>12</sup> This idea has been explained by Prof. Yiwei Wang from Renmin University of China during his key note speech at the 2nd Interdisciplinary Forum on "Belt Road Connectivity and Eurasian Integration: Meeting the Culture," held at the United International College, Zhuhai, China, from March 26–27, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> This argument has been articulated on a number of occasions by Putin's adviser, Sergei Karaganov, e.g. "From the Pivot to the East to Greater Eurasia," Opinion, 24 April 2017, <https://www.rusemb.org.uk/opinion/50>

<sup>14</sup> Cheng, Y., Song, L., & Huang, L. (Eds.). (2018). *The Belt & Road Initiative in the global arena: Chinese and European perspectives*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.



- an overly rigid structure that can pose serious risks in the near future, even in relationships with close partners;
- The "secondary" economic goals of integration and, accordingly, the lack of a positive economic agenda and positive outcomes for economic agents.

In the context of the growing global competition, primarily between China and the United States, it is desirable to re-understand the development strategy and tactics of the EII. In addition to looking for ways to deepen and strengthen the internal integration chain in the new format, one of the priorities is to form an external chain that is gradually expanding.

According to experts, internal contour correction requires a transition from de jure integration to de facto integration when institutions are organized in an accelerated mode, where important steps may include the introduction of a special regime of co-operation and export to the EII. High amount of added value obtained in EII countries, etc. In other words, integration within the EII must be clear and its benefits must be demonstrated to business and the public. In this sense, it is important to actively expand the integration into the humanitarian, educational, scientific space, sports and tourism. In creating a humanitarian project, it is possible to redistribute some of the resources of Russian development assistance programs, under the auspices of which there will be an exchange program for students, teachers and scientists<sup>15</sup>.

The interests of further development of the Eurasian integration project and modern geopolitical reality require the formation of a strong Eurasian neighborhood policy, expanding the interests and sphere of influence of the Union in neighboring countries, as well as allowing it to benefit from cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Community. At the same time, the EII as a trade and economic bloc interacts only with individual partners in the CIS countries, while in the CIS free trade zone, the EII countries are represented as independent participants.

At the same time, geo-economic competitors such as the EII and China are pursuing very active policies towards neighboring countries in entering not only neighboring countries but also the post-Soviet space.

Despite serious internal problems, the EII is consistently pursuing a European Neighborhood Policy. Including through association agreements with the Eastern Partnership countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia,

Moldova, Ukraine and two EII countries - Armenia and Belarus) and new cooperation through a comprehensive partnership. through joint projects (e.g., the Digital Community Project), financial and technical assistance in implementing reforms. A new partnership strategy for the EII is being implemented for the Central Asian countries (as evidenced by the fact that the head of our state declared 2020 ... the year of transition to the digital economy is a proof of the above idea)<sup>16</sup>.

Since 2013, China has declared its so-called neighborly diplomacy a priority over its neighbors and increased the flow of resources in their direction, including the use of the One Belt One Road initiative. Along with Central Asian countries, China is establishing preferential relations with Georgia and Moldova.

The European model of neighborhood policy, which includes an "integration core" in the form of some kind of merger with the "integration core," is not appropriate for EII because it lacks a strong and attractive center of attraction and the periphery itself is committed to a multi-vector nature. China's experience of rapprochement with neighboring countries, based on large financial and economic expansion, cannot be used, especially due to limited resources in Russia.

Therefore, the EII requires more flexible, democratic and financially burdensome interactions with neighboring countries. And here cooperation in the humanitarian sphere (science, education, medicine, etc.) is necessary.

The external location of the EII can be facilitated by the merger with the Great Silk Road Economic Belt and the formation of the Greater Eurasian Space (KEM) on the basis of a "Declaration of Intent" signed by the President of Russia and the President of China. Today, KEM is seen as an "umbrella" based on the principles of open, inclusive, "new regionalism" of international cooperation<sup>17</sup>.

The humanitarian component, including the field of higher education, the provision of high-tech medical services, etc., should also become an important factor in shaping the space. The concept of KEM also implies the active participation of civil society, business and its

<sup>16</sup> Jinping X. (2014). Xi Jinping tan zhi guo li zheng. Beijing: Wai wen chu ban she, Publisher: 外文出版社有限责任公司

<sup>17</sup> Wrobel, Ralph. China's New Energy Geopolitics: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia. ASIEN, ISSN 0721-5231, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Asienkunde e.V., Hamburg, Vol. 133, Iss. Oktober, pp. 24-51

<sup>15</sup>Xi, J. (2017). Key note speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Raod Forum for international cooperation in Beijing, May 14, 2017. Beijing: Xinhuanet.



associations, non-governmental organizations and expert centers.

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS.**

An analysis of competition development options between the U.S. and China reveals significant differences in their mutual approach. In the U.S., current and long-term divisions are clearly separated and significantly different. In fact, addressing global leadership challenges will be shifted by Washington to the regional level. China, in turn, has a linear temporal and spatially expanding approach. Traditionally, China has long been implementing the "One Place, One Way" project, which covers more and more countries and continents to strengthen its leadership from the regional to the global level. Alternatively, the dominant factors in policy formulation are inversely related. In the United States, the focus shifts from the economic component to security; In China, the military-political aspects remain an effective means of ensuring economic and trade expansion security as the basis of a long-term strategy to achieve global leadership. Accordingly, the role of these factors in world politics is changing. According to experts, to date, the depth of US-PRC financial, economic and trade ties has been a stabilizing factor. However, the situation is changing very rapidly.

In the short term - at least on the horizons of the current U.S. administration - the level, scale and nature of U.S.-PRC competition will be affected by a number of different factors and their combination, as well as growing global trends (regardless of Sino-US relations).

The first group includes domestic political factors due to the unprecedented sharp confrontation in the American regime and the sharp crisis in Chinese society. The U.S. trade confrontation with China in 2018 is largely due to the midterm elections in November and Trump's desire to strengthen its position by demonstrating the implementation of election data. 62 promises.

It should be noted that ideology plays a secondary role in the conflict at this stage - "just business".

For Russia, it is important in both foreign policy planning and practical work, and is the second group of factors that directly affect the leadership position of the United States and China. Passive or active confrontation is becoming increasingly apparent as the partners of both countries recognize their unilateral superiority in the region and the world. The United States is increasingly facing rejection of its trade and economic dictatorship, as well as by its allies in the European Union, especially in foreign policy and security in Germany. Japan's worries are growing. In terms of cooperation, India is trying to maintain a

balance to avoid unilateral dependence on the United States. In turn, China is more accurately assessing the implications of the "One Place and One Way" leadership initiative for participating and participating countries in Europe, both in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Apparently, Malaysia intends to reconsider its excessive dependence on the newly elected Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for One Place and One Road projects, as the emergence of many workers and companies in the country has negatively affected the development of local business. Fighting corruption and limiting dependence on China was one of the campaign's most important promises. At the same time, as part of its nationalist-oriented program, Mohamad is also avoiding excessive dependence on the United States and trying to find other external partners to offset the negative effects of growing U.S.-China competition.

Critical review of nationalization, sovereignty, trend associations and institutions, as well as the weakening and decline of traditional institutions of global governance, have all contributed to the realization of leadership ambitions - both China and the U.S. on the one hand, providing greater maneuverability and freedom; unformatted "relationships can lead to unexpected disparities and losses. Hence, the global aspirations of all participants 63 balance international relations as a possible guarantee of over-reliance on the policy of world grandchildren.

In fact, the search for new balances, formats of cooperation and interaction (primarily in the Asia-Pacific region), as well as mediation in finding balance in certain regions (Middle East), has been an important area of Russian foreign policy for several years.

This activity remains relevant in the context of the growing leadership struggle between Russia and especially the United States and China.

According to experts, there are three possible scenarios, each of which requires great caution and flexibility from Russia: The simplest option that China hopes for is for the U.S. to peacefully relinquish leadership and for a growing China to gradually take over. Given their location and the good relations between Russia and China, such a scenario is now welcomed by Moscow, but as China grows economically and geopolitically, new threats and challenges will arise for Russia (especially in the post-Soviet space). If the reverse scenario materializes and the U.S. launches a violent confrontation to prevent the Chinese leadership, the situation will be even more tense for Russia, as the conflict could spill over into the Pacific and spread, requiring Russia to respond quickly and make choices.

The third scenario under discussion is spheres of influence reminiscent of the old two-dimensional world



that divided the world into two camps - liberal capitalism and authoritarian capitalism. From the Western point of view, Russia was already in this last camp and was not offered an alternative. As noted in American doctrinal documents, "China and Russia are revisionist forces."

The alliance between Russia and China or the United States is not very realistic, primarily because the parties have different perceptions of this idea. Russia still considers itself a force to be reckoned with, but this level does not fit the perception of either the United States or China. In this regard, based on their position, the alliance is possible in the format of a "small partner", which is absolutely unacceptable for the Russian side.

Most Russian experts believe that Russia should remain neutral if Sino-US relations deteriorate, and almost no one expects a military-political alliance with China until 2030 in the future.

In this context, the most optimal strategy for Russia is to form a growing system of relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region and the world in general in order to find time to launch the mechanisms of economic development and growth of the country.

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