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The Russian Euro-Asian Movement and Its Geopolitical Consequences

Piotr Eberhardt

Abstract

This article presents the history of the Euro-Asian movement. An original ideological stream of Russian political thought, it appeared at the beginning of the 1920s. Its founders expressed the necessity of establishing a great empire encompassing the major part of the Eurasian continent. Such proposals have been brought back and re-created in contemporary Russia. The leading representative of this ideological movement is Alexander Dugin whose views are discussed. The final section of the paper is devoted to the possible geopolitical consequences of such thinking.

Keywords:

Russia, Euro-Asian movement, geopolitics

Introduction

The central part of the Eurasian continent¹ and its influence on the development of the civilizations and politics of the world have been the subject of studies by numerous geographers, ethnographers, and historians. These studies have been primarily undertaken by Russian scholars, but western scholars have also devoted attention to the particular significance of this school of thought in the history of humanity. Among them were the founders of geopolitics, a new, dynamic discipline, which took shape at the beginning of the 20th century. Its theoretical bases were laid down in the work of H. J. Mackinder on the geopolitical model of the world, the decisive role in which is played by the so-called “heartland”. According to Mackinder (1904) the country which dominates the “heartland” of the Eurasian continent also influences in a dominating manner the political fate of the world. The classical works of the leading specialists in geopolitics, such as F. Ratzel, R. Kjellén, and K. Haushofer, strongly emphasize the role of Russia as a powerful continental empire ruling over a principal part of Eurasia. The sole continental power which seized and held this strategic part of the world for a relatively long period was the Russian Empire followed by the Soviet Union.

¹ The notion of Eurasia was introduced by the Austrian geologist Edward Suess who demonstrated that there is no distinct geographical boundary between Europe and Asia. In the text, we shall evoke the notion of Eurasia for primarily geographical issues and that of Euro-Asia in reference to the ideology under consideration.

The Russian empire, which expanded in all geographical directions starting with Ivan the Terrible and continued through the rule of Joseph Stalin, offered evidence that the vision of J. H. Mackinder was becoming a political reality². It was only the unexpected events at the end of the 20th century and the disintegration of the USSR that brought a new look at this geopolitical concept. Despite the current domination by the maritime powers, with the United States in the lead, the heartland domination idea continues to have fervent supporters in the Russian Federation. Numerous reports devoted to this subject are being published. They are not simply of abstract scientific importance; they are influencing current Russian policies with respect to neighboring countries.

The desire to subordinate the essential part of the Eurasian continent to Russia and to expand towards three oceans was a constant foundation for the strategic objectives of the Russian state. It was also present in the work of Russian historians, philosophers, and geographers. An imperial perspective on the past, present, and future of Russia permanently pervades the texts of Russian thinkers. Such messianic and maximalist ideological and territorial concepts also find their reflection in Russian *belles lettres*³. These concepts were most visible in the ideas promoted by the leading Russian thinkers belonging to the Slavophile stream and their great debate with the so-called “occidentalists” (“oriented-to-the-West”). The latter, critically assessing the Russian tradition, favored the western system of values based on rationality and individualism. They were cognizant of the backwardness of civilization in their country and opposed the cultural isolation of Russia from the West.

The best known representatives of the Slavophile ideology were Ivan Kireyevski, Alexi Khomiakov, Konstanty Axakov, and Yuriy Samarin. The central issue for them was not only a negative evaluation of Western European culture but also a particular attitude towards Russian statehood. According to the Slavophiles, the historical mission of Russia consisted in the creation of a distinct spiritual civilization and the expansion of the range of influence of Russian Orthodox culture. Expansionist tendencies were even stronger in the activities of the so-called Pan-Slavists. They promoted the ideology of imperial power, voicing the need to conquer the Balkans and the Dardanelles and to organize a greater Slavic federation, subordinated to Russia. This direction of thought was particularly represented in the writings of Mikhail Katkov, Mikhail Pogodin, Konstanty Pobedonostsev, and Konstanty Leontyev. For activists representing this orientation, the supreme goal was to build a greater empire uniting all Slavs for whom Eastern Orthodox Russian culture would offer the possibility of civilizational advancement.

² This view conformed to the prophecy of Philotheus addressed to tsar Vassil III, father of Ivan the Terrible, which went as follows: “dva ubo Rima padosha a tretiy stoit’ a chetvertomu ne byti” (“two Romes [Rome and Byzance] fell, the third one [Moscow] stands, and there will be no fourth”).

³ It is worthwhile quoting a sentence from Fyodor Dostoyevski’s writings: “Our beautiful motherland is pointed at by a mysterious index finger as the country most appropriate for the realization of grand schemes” (The Possessed, Chapter VII).

The attitude of the Pan-Slavists towards Poland was inconsistent. On one hand they viewed Poland as a “traitor to [the] Slavic community,” subject to “Jesuit-and-Vatican” influences, while, on the other hand, they emphasized the Slavonic origins of the Polish people, which, in an alliance with Russia, could rid themselves of the fatal influence of Roman Catholicism. Pan-Slavic ideas were associated with the designs of a geopolitical character. The ultimate goal was to establish a greater empire stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

The theoretical foundations of the Euro-Asian ideology took shape relatively late⁴. They appeared among Russian emigrants following the October Revolution. Their founders were young refugees from Bolshevik Russia who found themselves in Sofia, Prague, Berlin, and Paris in the 1920s. They created an original school of thought which played a major role in the development of Russian geopolitical science.

The prerequisites for the emergence of the Euro-Asian movement were quite complex. They had their roots beyond doubt in the imperial past of the Russian state and in its geographical location on two continents. Russia was at the same time “Europe in Asia” and “Asia in Europe”. This conception engendered a definite psychological ambiguity for many Russians, for they were frequently viewed as “Asians” by many western Europeans, while they were perceived in Asia as one hundred percent “Europeans”. After the victory of the Bolsheviks, they saw that the empire, citizens of which they had been, and the power of which they were proud, had disintegrated. The reconstruction and re-integration of this country and the establishment of a new empire on new principles became a historical necessity for them. The new ideological-political movement was meant to serve as an alternative to the universalist appeal of communist ideology (Kara-Murza, 2002, p. 218).

The birth of the Euro-Asian movement is linked to the publication in Sofia in 1921 of the so-called *Almanac*, titled, in Russian, *Iskhod k Vostoku*, which can be freely translated as *Drive towards the East*, or, alternatively, *Issue towards the East*. This volume was composed of chapters written by four authors of whom the oldest was thirty-one years old. These young people included the linguist and ethnographer, Mikolay Trubetskoi, the geographer, Pyotr Savitskii, the philosopher, Georgiy Florovskii, and the art historian, Pyotr Suvchyn'skii. Later they were joined by the lawyer, Mikolay Alexeev, the historian, Georgiy Vernadskii, and the philosopher, Lev Karsavin.

⁴ The forerunners of the Euro-Asian concept were two Russian thinkers. The first of them was Mikolay Danilevski, who in 1870 published an ample treatise on the philosophy of history titled *Russia and Europe*. In this work he portrayed Russia as dominating Europe in a future in which Germanic-Roman Europe had gradually faded away. This idea was further developed by another visionary, Vladimir Laman'ski. His book, *Three Worlds of the Asian-European Continent* (1892), offered a concept of tripartite Euro-Asia. In this perspective, the small peninsula of Europe was to be subordinated to the Russian empire, which, in the West encompasses the major part of the Hapsburg monarchy, the Balkans with the Dardanelles, Silesia, East Prussia, and a part of Pomerania. At the same time, two-thirds of Asia would be subordinated to the influence of Eastern Orthodox Russia.

The scientific foundations for the new idea therefore had their sources in the disciplines of geography, philosophy, theology, history, and ethnography and were expected to contribute to a concrete political activity.

Characterization of the Euro-Asian movement

The above-presented introduction constitutes the starting point for an examination of Euro-Asian views, particularly those of one of the founders of the Euro-Asian movement, Pyotr Savitskii. As already mentioned, he was a geographer whose understanding of the concept of the movement stressed its territorial aspects. At the same time he was one of the most representative of the proponents of the concept.

It is possible to argue that “Euro-Asianism” was a distinct reaction to the pessimistic attitude which prevailed among white Russian émigrés after the victory of the Bolsheviks. According to the followers of the new movement, the revolution in Russia and the dethroning of the tsars was simply an episode on the way to the establishment of a greater continental empire.

The starting point for the theoretical considerations of P. Savitskii and other activists of this ideological orientation was to precisely define its three main concepts: Europe, Asia, and Euro-Asia. This key task had geographical and philosophical dimensions that determined their ideological attitude and the perceived relation to the political as well as topographic distinctions characterizing the Eurasian continent. The leading supporters of the Euro-Asian movement, including P. Savitskii, considered it nonsensical to use the term “Europe” to denote the territory stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals. In their opinion, the boundary set at the summit of the Urals had no historical, physiographic, ethnic, or political justification. Likewise, it was false to divide Russia into European and Asian sections. The basic prerequisite that Russia constitutes an indivisible whole led to serious consequences of both a geographical and a geopolitical nature. For this reason, the proponents of the Euro-Asian ideology were fervently opposed to the division of the Russian empire into national states. We can cite in this context a characteristic fragment from the work of P. Savitskii: “Russia is perceived by them [the ‘Euro-Asians’] as a unity. They will not agree to go along with those, who, for their egoistical purposes, desire to tear this unity to pieces. Moreover, they are fully convinced that such attempts must fail, and even if they succeed, it would only be for a short period and with the greatest harm to those, who might undertake them. Such attempts would be against the nature of things. The times we live in are the epoch of the establishment of giant economic organisms, ‘continent states’, encompassing vast territories and guaranteeing freedom and constancy of economic turnover. This tendency is also visible beyond the boundaries of Russia-Euro-Asia. The latter, in view of its geographic properties and its history, is a classic example of the ‘continent state.’ Geography, history, the needs of the present day – all oppose to an equal degree the fragmentation of this whole” (Savitskii, 1933, p. 109).

According to Savitskii, the great continental mass lying between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is composed of three parts: the relatively small European peninsula, then Euro-Asia (Russia), composed of three plains: the Eastern-European, the Siberian, and Turkestan, and Asia proper encompassing the southeastern part of the Asian continent where the leading role is played by China⁵. This basic geographical perspective is present in all the works published by the “Euro-Asians”. They particularly underline the separate character of Europe and Russia (Euro-Asia).

From the cognitive point of view, the sole significant task, given the above assumption, is to determine the boundary between Europe and Euro-Asia. Doing so is also important from the point of view of politics since this boundary is closely associated with the western border of Russia.

The issue is to determine which areas ought to be fully subordinated to Moscow. The Euro-Asian activists were not fully unanimous as to how this issue should be resolved. They linked it to the delimitation of the reach of influence of Russian power and culture. Writing in the 1920s, P. Savitskii, placed the eastern boundaries of Europe approximately along the boundaries of what was then Bolshevik Russia. According to this delimitation, the Scandinavian countries (including Finland), the Baltic countries, and Poland, within the boundaries set by the Treaties of Versailles and Riga, would belong to Europe, while the remaining part of the Eastern European Plain would constitute an integral part of Euro-Asia. For other adepts of Euro-Asianism, the eastern boundary of Europe was further to the West. And so, in particular, M. Trubetskoi (1925) maintained that eastern Galicia (‘Halychyna’) is a natural extension of Euro-Asia. The same author also assumed that the Eastern Orthodox Balkan countries would respond positively to Euro-Asian ideas thus offering the possibility of uniting southern Slavs with Greater Russia. Euro-Asians, therefore, were willing to include the Balkan countries in the Euro-Asian community, but they definitely viewed Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks as belonging to (Western) Europe. This distinction was based primarily upon cultural and religious factors, not linguistic kinship. The Euro-Asians understood that these nations have strong ties to the Latin cultural community.

In this case, the geographical-natural prerequisites were treated as secondary. The programming documents produced between 1926 and 1928 argued that the boundary between Europe and Euro-Asia followed the courses of the Niemen, Bug, and San Rivers and then reached the coast of the Black Sea in the vicinity of the mouth of the Danube, leaving Romania (except for Bessarabia) on the western side of this divide. Thus, one can conclude that there was no unanimous agreement in this regard. Yet, according to the founders of the Euro-Asian movement, the boundary between Europe and Euro-Asia ran, more-or-less, from the Baltic Sea to the Black or the Adriatic Seas. The political borders existing at that time were evidently not taken too seriously.

⁵ The founders of the Euro-Asian movement repeatedly indicated that the common designation, “Middle Country (Kingdom)” ought to be applied to the centrally situated Russia, and not to the peripherally located China.

The representatives of the Euro-Asian movement were proponents of extreme geographical determinism (even going beyond naturalistic factors). This perspective is particularly visible in their worldview and their adopted assumptions for spatial delimitation. The tripartite division of the Eurasian continent was justified for them by the physiographic conditions according to which the ethnographic (mainly denominational) divisions were adjusted. They constituted the objective basis for the development of political patterns. The Roman-and-Germanic countries were situated⁶ on the western side of the divide; and on the other side only Orthodox Russia should serve as the political sovereign. In the East all of Siberia including Mongolia, Manchuria, and Central Asia should also be subordinated to Russia. These presumptions justified the expansion of Russia to the West, to the South, and, above all, to the East.

These maximalist territorial postulates were motivated by the unique character of Russian culture. Special emphasis was placed on the difference between the values represented by the Russian Orthodox faith and those formed by the so-called *latinstvo* (Latinism). The western boundary of Euro-Asia would constitute a barrier to the destructive influence of western culture, especially of Roman Catholicism, on Russia. In the opinion of P. Savitskii, the divide separating Europe from Euro-Asia should even be given formal and symbolic expression. He therefore proposed moving the Greenwich “0” longitude to the East. Instead of the Greenwich Observatory, the new reference point would be the astronomical observatory in Pulkovo, near St. Petersburg. The core of Euro-Asia would thus be appropriately marked with geographical coordinates.

One can assume that such considerations that were permeated with “missionary zeal” were a pretext for the elaboration of imperial visions serving as justifications for the geopolitical programs being developed. The territorial reach of the future empire was, therefore, already distinctly determined. Realization of the goal thus outlined only required possession of appropriate political and military power.

Russians were not the only people living in the delimited geographical area of Euro-Asia. Various peoples of diverse ethnic origins inhabited this territory, not all of them associated with the Eastern Orthodox faith.

⁶ When Euro-Asians wrote about Europe, they clearly emphasized its Roman-Germanic roots. They passed over in silence the Slavonic nations (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, and Slovenians), who, for more than 1000 years, belonged to the circle of Western civilization. This reality has an ideological explanation. According to the Euro-Asians, the Slavonic peoples should belong to the Euro-Asian community, their ties to the West being a kind of historical misunderstanding, resulting from the subordination of these nations to the dominating Roman-Germanic culture.

One of the best known founders of the Euro-Asian movement, N. Trubetskoi (1925)⁷, attempted to deal with this issue. He maintained that there is just one Euro-Asian nation but that it is composed of numerous smaller ethnic nationalities.

They are connected through their geographical, historical, and economic communities. The Euro-Asian nation encompasses not only Slavs but also the Karelian, Caucasian, and Mongolian peoples. Faced with the realities of multi-ethnic diversity, the Euro-Asians adopted views that were different from those of the Slavophiles. They abandoned the idea of uniting all Slavs in favor of integrating all the nations, regardless of ethnic origin, inhabiting the vast territories of Euro-Asia. The most important place among these nations was assigned to Russia in view of its significance and the size of its population. Russia indeed was tied with unbreakable bonds to all the nations of Euro-Asia. The binding element was Russian Orthodox culture.

Euro-Asians were very much against the independence movements in Ukraine. They recognized the existence of Ukrainian culture and folklore but within strictly defined limits. Universal Russian culture was viewed as the supreme culture. Russians constituted a decisive majority among the followers of the Euro-Asian ideology, but there were, also representatives of other nations of Euro-Asia. One such representative was J. Bromberg, a well-known writer active in the Euro-Asian movement who was an émigré of Jewish extraction. He lived in New York during the inter-war period (Bromberg, 2002).

A telling feature of Euro-Asian ideas was the specific and extreme anti-western attitudes that they vectored. Western civilization was treated with apprehension, even with enmity, since it propagated values that were alien to the Russian spirit. Elimination of its influence was the necessary condition for the construction of a separate Euro-Asian civilization based on economic idealism and social solidarity and permeated with Eastern Orthodox philosophy.

The founders of the idea of Euro-Asianism who lived as émigrés were painfully aware of their separation from the motherland. They were still strongly tied to the Eastern Orthodox religion and to Russian traditions. This situation is what led to the elaboration of idealistic scenarios that were underpinned by nostalgia for the past and that identified with what had been the powerful Russian Empire. They kept a respectful distance from the streams of Russian émigrés who favored a partial return to the state as it had existed before 1914. Euro-Asianists considered such a position to be unrealistic and even harmful for the future of Russia.

The attitude of Euro-Asians towards the political entity constituted by the Soviet Union was ambiguous. Despite their intense dislike of Bolshevism, they perceived some positive traits in the evolving processes in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution.

⁷ His 1925 publication was included in the collective volume edited by A. Dugin (*Evrasiystvo...*, 2001, p. 11-15).

They distinguished the communist ideology put forward by the Bolsheviks from the revolutionary movement through which the aspirations of the masses for the establishment of a more just society were expressed. The views of the leading Russian Euro-Asianists were quite differentiated, especially as regarded an assessment of the Soviet state. They were opposed to communist principles associated with western Marxism but favored the establishment of an effective central authority in the Kremlin that opposed the centrifugal tendencies that were threatening the territorial cohesion of the country. They fully accepted the strong dictatorial power of the state which was imposing order and discipline and assessed positively the policy of isolation from the West. On the other hand, they criticized the attitude of the Soviet authorities towards the Orthodox Church and Orthodoxy in general, perceiving with apprehension that the struggle of the communist party to overcome the religious worldview and to promote communism and atheism had originated in the West. Their assessment of the economic undertakings of the Bolshevik party was more difficult. Euro-Asians were supporters of the private economy of individual producers and were thus not in favor of collectivization. In general terms, however, they supported the efforts to industrialize the Soviet Union so as to strengthen the economy and the military power of the Soviet state.

The overall attitude of the Euro-Asians towards the Soviet Union was different from that of the majority of Russian émigrés who longed for the collapse of the Bolshevik regime. Euro-Asians feared turmoil and the weakening of Soviet statehood given that it guaranteed stability on the Euro-Asian continent. The views presented were formulated in the 1920s and partly in the 1930s when there was as yet no direct threat of a European war. Their views that evolved during the later period paralleled changes in Soviet policies and then the territorial conquests of Stalin, which appeared to conform to their program. Although the Soviet state was far from their ideal, and the Marxist doctrine on which Bolshevik principles were based came from the hated West, they still believed that the rulers in the Kremlin would be forced to implement the concept of Euro-Asianism.

These assumptions proved to be correct. The Soviet empire gradually abandoned internationalism and to an increasing degree concentrated on strengthening Greater Russian power. Likewise, the rhetoric of the communist party changed and began to refer to the imperial tradition and to reflect the glory of the founders of Russian power (Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great⁸, Nakhimov, Suvorov, Kutuzov). For this reason, as time went by, the founders of the Euro-Asian movement came to view the Soviet program as a continuation of the former Russian imperial mission. Still, certain reservations remained concerning the issue of religion and the nationalization of small landed property.

⁸ The supporters of Euro-Asian ideology were quite sceptical regarding the achievements of Peter the Great. On the one hand they praised his role in the strengthening of the military power of the Russian empire, but, on the other hand, they criticized him roundly for destroying ancient Russian traditions and introducing western models.

Yet, these issues were viewed as secondary in comparison to the principal objective of developing imperial power on the Euro-Asian continent.

At the end of the 1930s the Euro-Asian movement underwent ideological disintegration. Many of its members abandoned the movement and associated themselves with right wing, frequently even fascist, political factions. Others for various reasons collaborated with the Soviet regime⁹. Agents of the NKVD, the Soviet political police, infiltrated and then destroyed the community of the Euro-Asian movement. Although the three leading activists, P. Savitskii, N. Trubetskoi, and G. Vernadskii were increasingly isolated, they remained faithful to their original views, even though their influence shrank significantly¹⁰.

The subsequent stage in the development of the Euro-Asian movement took place in different political conditions. Following the victorious war with Hitler a new global superpower emerged, the Soviet Union, an empire dominating the vast territories of Euro-Asia. From the geographical point of view the designs and the dreams of the Euro-Asians were to some extent realized. Other issues once considered important (like, for instance, the place of the Eastern Orthodox Church) became increasingly marginalized in the new situation.

The Euro-Asian Views of Lev Gumilov

A new phase in the organizational aspect and the ideological concepts of Eur-Asianism took the name, Neo-Euro-Asian Movement. It was primarily associated with the views of Lev Gumilov¹¹, a scholar with a different profile from those of the founders of the original Euro-Asian movement. The founders had been primarily interested in ideological issues and political-territorial programs, while Lev Gumilov's concerns were in geography, history, and ethnography.

When considering the scientific work and the views of Gumilov, one should take into account the conditions in which he lived and worked. He was a citizen of the USSR who worked at the Institute of Geography of Leningrad University where he contended with rigorous state- and self-imposed censorship.

⁹ The disintegration of Euro-Asianism was primarily the result of the the activity of L. Karsavin for whom the strengthening of the power of the USSR was evidence that under the rule of the communists the greater empire was being reconstructed. In the interwar period and then during World War II he resided in Lithuania. After the war he was arrested by the NKVD and sent to a gulag, where he died in 1952.

¹⁰ The authorities of the NKVD did not forget the "counterrevolutionary" activities of P. Savitskii who was living in Prague. After the Red Army marched in, he was arrested and deported to the USSR. He was held in Soviet gulags until 1953. As a Czech citizen he was allowed to return to Prague where he died in 1968.

¹¹ He was the son of Mikolay Gumilov, an outstanding poet, founder of the stream of acmenism, who was shot by the Bolsheviks. His mother was the very well-known poetess, Anna Akhmatova.

Hence, he could not openly present views or even declare himself as a clear supporter of the Euro-Asian ideology with which he identified over his entire life. He avoided political subjects and devoted his scholarly work to history and to the ethnography of the Euro-Asian continent. Lev Gumilov associated geography closely with ethnology and the philosophy of history. He was interested in entire nations – “ethnoses” – these being the outcomes of relevant geographical-and-landscape conditions.

In his numerous books Gumilov discusses the history of the mainly nomadic peoples of Central Asia (in particular: *Hunns*, 1960; *History of Ancient Turks*, 1967; *Discovery of Khazaria*, 1970). He was the founder of a new research direction that was called ethnogenesis. Gumilov attempted to demonstrate that strict interrelations exist between natural conditions and ethnic processes on the Euro-Asian continent. He studied the cultural influences of Asian nations on the formation of the Russian mentality, and the role of Russians, brought up in the Tartar-Mongol spirit, in the establishment of the greater Euro-Asian continental empire, the Russian Empire.

According to Gumilov, echoing P. Savitskii and M. Trubetskoi, Euro-Asia links three oceans: the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. This enormous territory (excluding the small European peninsula and South Asia along with the adjacent islands) has a specific landscape. In the North the landscape is constituted by forests; in the South, by the steppes. Similar geographic conditions form the separate cultural-civilizational types of peoples living in these spaces. Gumilov argues that the landscape factor was decisive for the fate of the people and the nations of Euro-Asia. Consequently, a Euro-Asian “super-ethnos” developed, subdivided into “ethnoses” (Greater Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Turkmen), and then into “sub-ethnoses” (for example, Don or Amur Cossacks). The decisive factor was constituted by the geographical environment, which influenced common history, culture and habits¹².

In his considerations regarding the theory of ethnogenesis, Gumilov pays special attention to the element of dynamics and phased development. As distinct from other Russian geographers and historians, Gumilov expresses a positive assessment of Mongol-Tartar slavery in Ruthenia. He emphasizes the civilizational achievements of the nomadic peoples and their influence in favour of the development of a centralized empire that evolved over several centuries. His fascination with the cultures of the Euro-Asian nations is closely linked to a sharp anti-western attitude. As with the followers of the Euro-Asian ideology, Gumilov is very critical of the West which he views as a destabilizing force in regard to the inhabitants of Euro-Asia. Although Gumilov always denied that he was a geographical determinist, all his books reflect the preponderant influence of geographical environments on the history and fate of particular nations and peoples.

¹² Gumilov cites the influence of Byzantine culture on the Russian soul but clearly downplays it. This position separates him from the émigré Euro-Asians, for whom the Eastern Orthodox religion was what caused the emergence of Russian culture.

Given these assumptions, one can conclude that Gumilov believed that the Russian conquest of the Euro-Asian continent conformed to the natural conditions as well as the aspirations and tendencies present in all the nations inhabiting this vast territory which cannot be classified as being situated strictly in Europe or in Asia¹³. On this territory a separate “super-ethnos” took shape, composed of a mixture of Asian and European elements. As Gumilov had already written in the 1920s, “we are neither Slavs nor Turans, we are a synthesis of the Slavic and Turan elements” (*Evrasiystvo...*, 1926, p. 357). Gumilov opposed the Euro-centrist vision of the history of Russia. He rejected the view, still alive in the Russian philosophy of history, of Tartar-Mongol slavery and of the archetypal hatred between farming and nomadic peoples. In his opinion, the superposition of the Slavonic, Turanic, and Finno-Ugric elements brought about the emergence of the greater Russian empire.

Gumilov’s hypotheses are similar to the views of F. Koneczny, who, in 1934, maintained that Russia belongs to a separate Turan civilization (Koneczny, 2002, p. 305). The historical development of Russia was conditioned by constant influences from the East (Khazars, Polovtsy, Mongols, Tartar slavery). The impact of the “Great Steppe” influenced the civilization and culture of the Russian nation.

During the decades of the post-World War II period, the Euro-Asian movement gradually faded away. The generation of inter-war supporters of the Euro-Asian movement abandoned the political stage. In the Soviet Union, the expression of views that did not conform to Marxist-Leninist ideology was forbidden¹⁴. The Soviet domination of a large part of Europe, including a part of Germany, was not in agreement with the ideological doctrine of Euro-Asianism. Yet, the ultimate goal, conquest of Euro-Asia proper, was fully realized. Attempts to justify the territorial conquests were not significant scholarly or political endeavors.

The vast geopolitical changes brought about by the downfall of communism, the disintegration of the USSR, and the independence of the federal republics, linked, at the same time, with the acquisition of freedom of speech and publication, brought about the revival of Euro-Asian ideas which gained support in numerous communities of the Russian intelligentsia. For many nationalist groups, the Euro-Asian idea became an attractive intellectual alternative following the disgrace of communist ideology. Slogans associated with the rebirth of the superpower status of Russia became popular and catchy. Such a rebirth would require, first of all, the re-subordination to Russia of the former federal republics and the re-establishment of the empire according to new ideological principles.

¹³ Lev Gumilov remained faithful to his Euro-Asian views over his entire life. The evidence is provided by the sentence ending the last interview that he gave as evoked by S. Lavrov: “I only know and I will tell you in secret that if Russia is saved, it is only as a Euro-Asian country and only owing to Euro-Asianism” (Gumilov, 1993, p. 19).

¹⁴ Gumilov was nevertheless persecuted. He spent fourteen years in a gulag and was forbidden to publish for twenty-four years. His views were sharply criticized by orthodox Marxists (Yanov, 1992, p. 105).

The territorial program of the neo-Euro-Asian movement constituted a response to reborn expansionist dreams linked to the revival of the centralized state within the boundaries of the USSR or of the former Russian Empire. New hopes stimulated a consolidation of numerous political groups around Euro-Asian ideas. Many periodicals began to appear in which Euro-Asian concepts were promoted and popularized (e.g. *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Put'*).

Alexander Dugin as a Continuer of the Euro-Asian Movement

The rebirth of the Euro-Asian movement is inseparably linked with the activity of Alexander Dugin. Relatively young (born in 1962), his domain is the geography of religion and geopolitics. He is also a historian and a philosopher – an intellectual with broad and multifaceted interests. Following the death of Julius Evola and René Guénon¹⁵, he has been viewed as the most pronounced exponent of integral traditionalism.

Alexander Dugin is the author of numerous books of which the best known are *Goals and Tasks of our Revolution* (1999), *Templars of the Proletariat* (1997), *End of the World* (1997). He is also actively publishing in scholarly journals. He has grouped around him numerous supporters for whom he is an unquestioned scientific and political mentor. He published a monumental work titled *The Foundations for Geopolitics: Geopolitical Future of Russia* in which he deploys his views on the present and future of Russia. According to him, the powerful position of the Russian state underwent catastrophic decline as a consequence of political and economic undertakings programmed and implemented by the ideological enemies of Russia. But this decline is transitory. In the near future Russia will regain its position as a world superpower¹⁶. He expresses his views very distinctly: “The new world empire ought to be Euro-Asian, multi-continental, and in a further evolution, global. The war for Russian domination of the world has not ended” (Dugin, 1999, p. 213).

Alexander Dugin is a clear supporter of the Euro-Asian idea. He makes reference to the interwar classics dealing with the concepts and the work of Lev Gumilov. He does not identify himself with all the views expressed by the Euro-Asians; however, he updates them and introduces numerous modifications in the light of which his views have gradually evolved.

¹⁵ Julius Evola – outstanding Italian philosopher, who studied the influence of spirituality and culture on the development and transformation of civilizations, the ideological patron of the so-called European radical right; René Jean Guénon – a controversial French thinker and esoteric writer who studied religious, metaphysical, and mystic traditions and their influence on the development of societies.

¹⁶ Euro-Asian concepts and Dugin himself are the objects of sharp criticism by the Russian elite. Not only the liberal and democratic parties and associations are opposed to his imperialist and nationalistic ideas, but even Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who, after all, represents rightist views and is the supporter of the joint statehood of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (1999, p. 31).

Regarding the Neo-Euro-Asian manifest, he identifies the positive aspects of Tartar slavery viewing it as having enabled the centralization of Russia and the transmission of the spirit of expansion. Nowadays, however, in the opinion of Dugin, Turan nations constitute a threat. They have the potential to break down the Euro-Asian realm into three regions: western (Russia, Europe), eastern (Siberia, the Far East) and southern (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan). Russia cannot permit that to happen. For Dugin, Pan-Turkism is as great a threat as Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism, since it places the interests of one ethnic group over the collective goals of the entire Euro-Asian community.

On the other hand, Dugin identifies completely with the negative attitudes of the founders of Euro-Asianism towards western civilization. The philosophy that the West represents is, in his opinion, murderous for Russia. It is expansive and is attempting to impose its viewpoint on the entire world. It includes globalism, Cartesian and Enlightenment philosophy, individualist lifestyles, moral depravation, orientation towards consumption, materialism, and the dominance of economic aspects in the lives of persons and societies. Euro-Asian ideas therefore represent a negation of the West. In the East the spiritual element is recognized as being superior to the material element. Tradition is more important than democracy. The interests of the group and the community should prevail over the interests of the individual. These completely different perspectives on the world are bound to lead to an ideological and political or even a military confrontation.

The internationally recognized works on political geography, especially those referring to the division of forces in the modern world, embody ideas that are very close to those expressed by Russian scholars like Dugin. The latter in particular makes deliberate reference to the concepts of H. J. Mackinder and frequently cites the notion of the “heartland” of the Euro-Asian continent. He expects that in the future there will be a collision between the “land” (that is, Euro-Asia) and the “sea” (the Atlantic world). The antagonism leading up to it will be particularly evident in the interface areas (borderlands).

For this reason, the priority task for Russia is to form a new, vast continental realm (Euro-Asia). Dugin is uncompromising in this regard. He maintains that, irrespective of the moral assessment of the Soviet system, and even if one critically assesses the not always appropriate relation of the latter with Russian principles (for example, the Eastern Orthodox religion), the USSR achieved to a large extent the program of territorial integration of Euro-Asia. The renewed subordination of the lost territories to the rule of Moscow ought therefore to be the supreme objective to be unconditionally achieved. Dugin calls this program *sobiraniye imperii* (*gathering of the empire*). The issue is not simply one of the subordination of the countries of the so-called “near abroad” (that is of the post-Soviet republics), Russia should also regain control over Central Europe. In addition it should re-establish close relations with the French-German block in order to free Western Europe from Atlantic-American tutelage.

If the process of re-establishing the “Great Territory” is not started, a general catastrophe will ensue. China will expand towards the North and West in the direction of eastern Siberia and Kazakhstan. The countries of Central Europe will start to occupy Ukraine, Belarus, and western Russia, while the Islamic block will initiate the conquest of Central Asia, the Volga region, and a part of southern Russia. Only the emergence of a new “axis of history,” encompassing the principal portion of Euro-Asia, will offer a chance for stability and peace. Such a task is beyond the capacities of France, China, or even Germany. The only country which can fulfil this task is Russia, it being the “world island” or the “heartland” of Euro-Asia.

Dugin’s reasoning is logical and unambiguous. One should understand that it has an imperial-expansionist character and is, in principle, not territorially constrained. Even an assessment of the possibility of its realization is not relevant. The probability of fulfilment of this program is very low. Russia does not have the political, economic, and military capacities needed to realize it in the near or the distant future. Yet, one should not neglect such abstract designs, for they are creating an atmosphere of hostility and distrust.

This far-reaching geopolitical program can be broken down into a number of immediate tasks. These include the establishment of a “fourth geo-economic zone” to include certain countries with which Russia has friendly relations: Serbia, Greece, Iran, India, Iraq, Syria, Libya, in addition to Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Dugin’s list excludes Ukraine. It is hard to tell whether or not this omission is deliberate. It should be clearly understood, however, that the leading Euro-Asians do not envisage the future of Russia without the inclusion of Ukraine. They are as hostile to the idea of Ukrainian separatism as are Russian nationalist activists. An ample selection of such opinions can be found in (*Ukrainskiy...*, 1998), a book published several years ago in Moscow. A similar ideological image is presented by a collective volume edited by M. I. Turyanitsa (Ukraine, 2000). It presents numerous arguments intended to prove that the Ukrainian nation does not exist and that Ukraine is simply one of the provinces of Greater Russia.

In order to portray the extent of Russian territory in Euro-Asia, Dugin has developed three categories of geopolitical areas, each one the object of a map. The first one of these (Fig. 1) delimits the mono-ethnic areas inhabited by Russians. The second map (Fig. 2) portrays the Russian Federation within its current political boundaries. The third map (Fig. 3), the most interesting one of all, portrays Russia as the Euro-Asian empire. It encompasses the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, northeastern Romania, all of the Black Sea, and three Caucasian countries. To the Northwest, Finland as well as northern Norway and Sweden are included. The Asian portion of the map includes all the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia. These are portrayed as internal subdivisions of Russia to which are added Afghanistan, Mongolia, Manchuria, and western China (Tien-Shan). Beyond the boundaries of the empire thus outlined, some countries including Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the three Baltic states, Turkey, and Iran are portrayed as independent (see Figs. 1, 2, and 3), Dugin (1999).

These maps, except for the one portrayed by Fig. 2, are a creative improvisation that should not be taken too seriously. Yet one can suppose that for Dugin as well as for numerous Russians with nationalist opinions, the boundaries of Russia as portrayed are both justified and fair¹⁷.

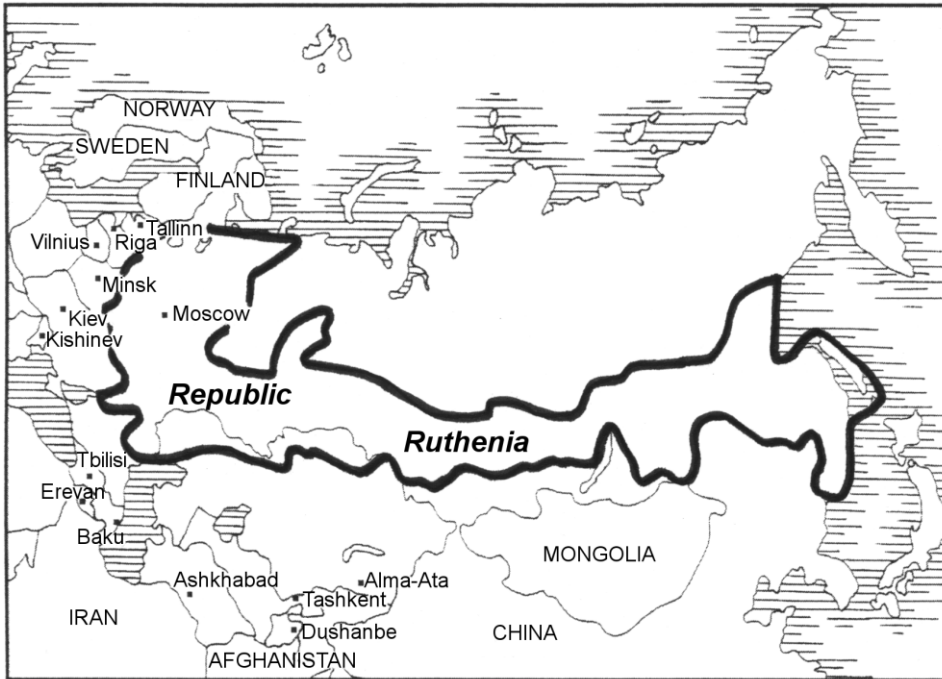


Fig. 1. Russia as a Mono-Ethnic area.

Source: A. Dugin (1999), p. 411

Dugin advances interesting considerations regarding the so-called “geopolitical axes.” He lists the following axes: Moscow-Berlin, Moscow-Tokyo, and Moscow-Beijing. In conformity with the secular tradition in Russian politics, Dugin stresses the importance of the Russian-German understanding, especially with respect to Central-Eastern Europe. His position is that the countries in this area should be dominated by Germany but that Russian interests should also be recognized.

In view of the importance of this issue, it is necessary to quote Dugin’s words:

¹⁷ Many Serbian publications portray “Greater Serbia,” just as Croatian ones portray “Greater Croatia,” and Albanian publications, “Greater Albania.” These irredentist portrayals, however, are the concerns of territorially small countries, disposing of quite limited demographic and military resources. In the case of Russia, however, we are dealing with a country having imperial traditions and the capacity to engage in serious political undertakings. Therefore this type of rhetoric coming from Russians is dangerous.

Germany today constitutes an economic giant and a political dwarf. Russia, on the contrary, is an economically handicapped country. The Moscow-Berlin axis will end the respective inabilities of the two partners and will facilitate the establishment of a powerful Greater Russia and a powerful Greater Germany. In a farther perspective this development will lead to the creation of a continuing strategic and economic elaboration of an emerging united Euro-Asian Empire – the European Empire in the West and the Russian Empire in the East of Euro-Asia.... Given this perspective, it would be wise to return the District of Kaliningrad (East Prussia) to Germany, thus giving up the last territorial symbol of the tragic fratricidal war. Then, in order that this gesture not be interpreted by Russians as a step towards geopolitical capitulation, Europe should propose to Russia other possibilities for territorial annexations or for extending its zone of influence, first of all at the expense of those countries that are stubbornly working for a ‘Black Sea-Baltic federation’ (Dugin, 1999, pp. 228-9).

Such reasoning demonstrates the lack of realism and sense of responsibility of the author. The proposed geopolitical concepts might have been appropriate during the Bismarckian era or as proposals for the Locarno or Rapallo conferences of the 1920’s. They might even have served a purpose in August 1939. Nowadays, however, such proposals are anachronous and do not constitute an adequate response to the processes unrolling in Europe. Dugin’s abstractions that ignore contemporary reality create scenarios for future events that would lead inevitably to the complete destabilization of Central-Eastern Europe.

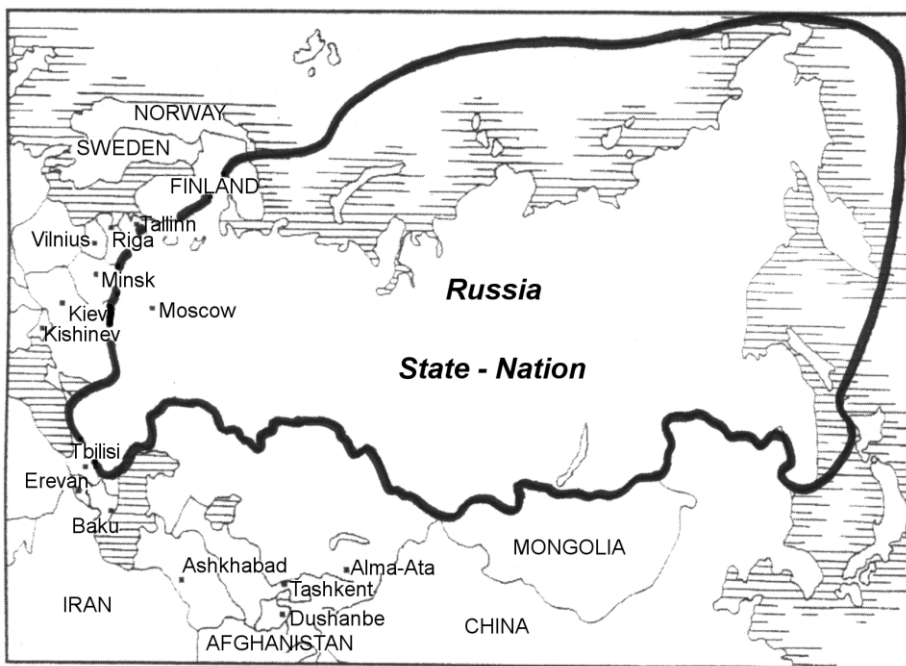


Fig. 2. Russia as a State-Nation
Source: A. Dugin (1999), p. 413

Against the background of the general geopolitical concepts that Dugin is proposing, the problem being considered here is of secondary significance. Dugin's primary objective is the formation in the future of a Greater Russian continental empire in Euro-Asia. His approach to the task, including his selection of arguments and relevant supporting evidence that are drawn from the tactics and strategy of the secular tradition of territorial expansion which is deeply rooted in the mentality of the political elite of Russia, are subordinated to the all-encompassing aim of making Russia coterminous with Euro-Asia.

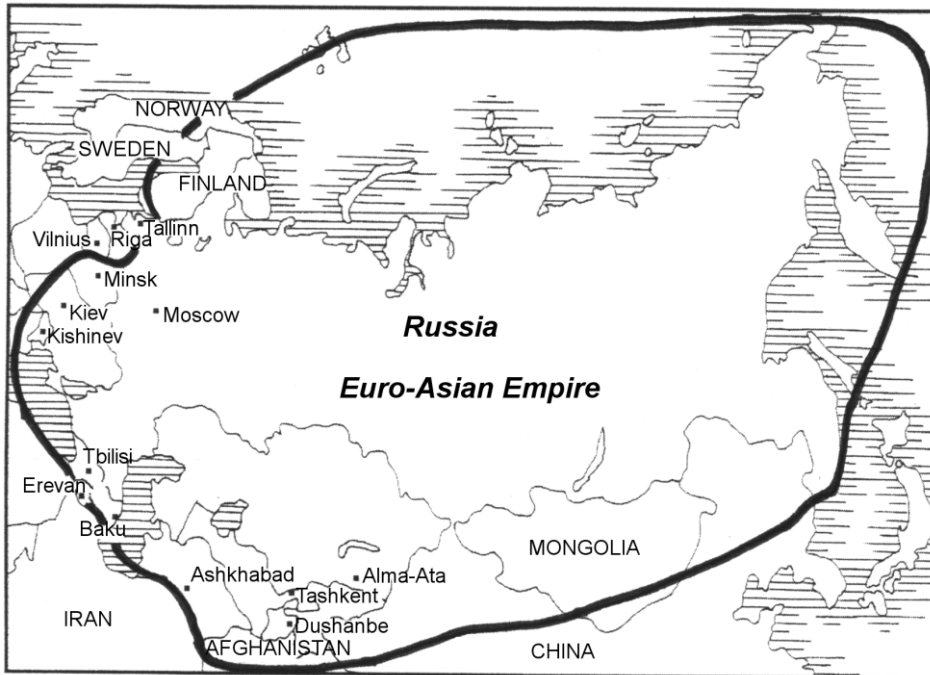


Fig. 3. Russia as the Euro-Asian Empire

Source: A. Dugin (1999), p. 415

Alexander Dugin has formulated his views regarding the contemporary world and the geopolitical role of Russia in ways that are logical and consistent. He has expressed them with simplicity, comprehensiveness, aggressiveness, and, at the same time, emotional engagement. The convention that he has adopted serves the purposes of propaganda.

When defending its national interests, Russia, according to Dugin, should stick to four main principles. First, Russia will remain responsible for the development of and control over the northeastern part of Euro-Asia (Central Asia, Siberia, Outer Mongolia) thus forming a counterweight to the increasing influence and power of China. Second, Russian politics at the global level will continue to have an anti-western character accounting for the fact that the United States will remain its main adversary.

The most probable location of conflict will be Europe. The supreme objective for Russia is to prevent the political and military unification of Europe (“Finlandization of the continent”), to force the USA to step back from this region, and to liquidate the strategic void in Europe (Belarus’, Ukraine) and in the Caucasus. Third, the efforts of Russia in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (Turkistan) should aim in the direction of reconstructing the Greater Russian empire and its buffer zone of influence. Fourth, Russia is the sole vector of the civilization of the “Great Steppe.” The latter characteristic is decisive not only for the right of Russia to determine its own fate but also to determine the fate of the world.

Poland occupies a very distinct place in Dugin’s considerations. His views are similar to those expressed by the 19th century Russian Slavophiles. In his opinion Poland, through its language, folklore, and customs belongs to the eastern world, since it has Slavonic, therefore Euro-Asian, roots. On the other hand, its adoption of Christianity in its Latin form and of the Roman-Germanic legal system brought Poland into association with the West. By this very fact, Poland has found itself on the boundary between the two civilizations, but on its western side. The partitions of Poland undertaken by Prussia, Russia, and Austria were natural and morally justified deeds, since the existence of Poland as a separate civilization and cultural entity was a distinct geopolitical dissonance. Dugin writes very clearly about this situation: “Russia, in its geopolitical and sacral-geographical development is not interested in the existence of the sovereign Polish state in any shape.... Poland must choose either a Slavonic or a Catholic identity”.

Concluding Remarks

The Euro-Asian movement, the principal representative of which is Alexander Dugin, is becoming increasingly popular in Russia. Within the communities which identify themselves with this movement, views are quite diverse. Attention should be paid to the publications and literary writings of E. Limonov, who is appealing for the reconstruction of the Russian empire within the former Soviet boundaries (according to him, the disintegration of the USSR was an unconstitutional act). In many of his publications he sketches his vision of Russia – a powerful, centralized Euro-Asian nation. Unlike many other “Euro-Asians” he downplays denominational questions. For him, the integrating element for the new empire should be the Russian language and Russian culture¹⁸.

Euro-Asian ideas have influenced the highest authorities of the Russian Federation. President Vladimir Putin does not hide his positive feelings regarding these ideas.

They have been echoed in such pronouncements as:

¹⁸ One of the leading activists of the contemporary Euro-Asian movement is Nikita Mikhalkov, the most well-known Russian movie director, son of Sergey Mikhalkov, author of the Soviet national anthem.

Russia has always defined itself as a Euro-Asian country. We never forgot that an essential part of the Russian territory is in Asia... The hopes that the Euro-Asian ideas bring are especially important nowadays, when relations based on equal rights are being developed between the countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States. In this way we must preserve the best achievements of the centuries of history of the East and West (*Evrasiystvo...*, 2001, pp. 3 and 5).

One should pay attention to the fact that the concepts of Russian Slavophilism (and then Pan-Slavism), Euro-Asianism, followed by Neo-Euro-Asianism have appeared at the turning points of Russian history (following the Crimean War, after World War I and the ensuing revolution and civil war, after World War II, and following the disintegration of the USSR). They have constituted attempts to “heal the aching Great Russian soul.” Given all the shortcomings of cures (moral and ideological ambiguity), such kinds of activity are in a sense rational – they contribute to the strengthening of responsibility for the institution of the state among citizens.

The transformations of the Euro-Asian movement have had a cyclical character. The movement appeared in a difficult period of Russian history, immediately after the downfall of the Russian Empire, but before the political and economic consolidation of the Soviet Union. After several years of lively creative and publishing activity this stream of thought disappeared for a couple of decades. After the downfall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet state, it was revived and updated in the new geopolitical conditions. The considerations presented in this article imply that the Euro-Asian movement can become an attractive idea for Russian society¹⁹.

In the unanimous opinion of many scholars interested in Russia, Euro-Asianism is among the most important achievements of Russian political thought in the 20th century. Its foundations are constituted by broad knowledge from the domains of geography, political science, philosophy, theology, history, and ethnography. At the same time, this stream of thought is provoking many questions of a moral, intellectual, and psychological nature. It calls for the verification and the re-evaluation of views about the history and achievements of Russia. This re-interpretation is also linked to a more universal approach to the question of Russian nationality. The ethnic criterion is losing significance in favor of political identification associated with a definite territory²⁰. The ideological message of this political movement is a call for the integration of ethnically different nations into an ideocratic super-civilization within a centralized neo-empire. The supporters of this kind of program often do not correctly perceive contemporary political reality.

¹⁹ In this context, an interesting paper, in terms of the notions that it reflects and its cognitive aspects, was published by V. L. Skurativskii (1998). This author assesses Euro-Asian ideas very negatively. For him, they appeared as a result of the catastrophic fall of the first (tsarist) empire and were brought back to life as a consequence of the breakdown of the second (Soviet) empire.

²⁰ A similar universalist concept was promoted by the communist leaders, who aimed at the “creation” of the Soviet citizen (sometimes called, although in a different context, *homo sovieticus*), having no ethnic roots.

Implementation of these designs, hard to realize, would require liquidation of the sovereignty of some existing countries and the establishment of entirely new political divisions. Through the resulting destabilization, a new geopolitical order will supposedly emerge. This urge to save the world and its own citizens by such means is interwoven into centuries of Russian history. The ideological principles and the external conditions may change, but the causal mechanism remains the same. The future must differ significantly from the present. The road to the desired goal requires faith, sacrifice, and determination.

The plan to re-establish the Greater Russian empire on the Eurasian continent conforms to the aspirations, dreams, and attitudes of many citizens of the Russian Federation. The defeated idea of communism is being replaced by a new, universal idea the realization of which, it is hoped, will cement the currently disintegrated post-Soviet society.

The supreme goal of the partisans of Euro-Asianism is to establish a new world power through cooperation between the Eastern Orthodox religion and Islam and the integration of the eastern Slavonic nations with the peoples of Turan, Finno-Ugric, and Mongol origins. The result of a successful course of events would be the appearance of a new superpower, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, and from the Arctic to the Himalayas.

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