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Problems, Driving Forces and Prospects of the Eurasian Integration

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ABSTRACT

In modern conditions, including the influence of world financial and economic crisis, integration processes on the Former Soviet Union area became more active. Thus specified processes are connected with numerous problems in social and economic, political, legal and other areas, remain unresolved and many theoretical problems of integration. In the article these problems are analyzed, key motives of integration come to light and prospects of integration processes on the Eurasian space are estimated.

KEY WORDS

Sovereignty, Eurasian integration, Former Soviet Union, Commonwealth of Independent States, European Union, globalization

In modern post-crisis conditions the issues of international integration and regionalization have become really burning. This can be explained by the fact that overcoming the economic crisis and choosing the right way for further development requires coordination of efforts not only on the part of corporations, but also governments, countries and international organizations. Nowadays the lack of connections between countries of the Eurasian space is in my opinion temporary. The collapse of the USSR is not the end of Eurasian history which dates back to the ancient times and is famous for the glorious past of consolidation of people in their struggle with various foreign invasions, in creative darings, in fighting for national traditions and values. Integration trends are real features of the post-Soviet states due to a set of social, economic, geopolitical historical and cultural as well as other factors. Speaking about integration in the Eurasian space it is necessary to analyze the experience of our European neighbours. In the late 20th century at the vast territory from Lisbon to Vladivostok we could observe geopolitical processes that were remarkably contrasting each other. While at the

West the integration movement was growing, the countries started to get drawn to each other; in the East a great country was falling apart. It was the Soviet Union destined once to be the heir of the power that for many centuries had been created at the Eurasian territory by sweat, blood and labour of our ancestors.

If we consider the history of European countries, the way to their consolidation would seem to be forever blocked by the bloodshed battles of the earlier ages. There are hardly any peoples that had not been at war with others at this or that point of history. Intergovernmental disputes and conflicts in Europe were almost permanent, making the relations between peoples unpleasant and hostile. It would be enough to remember that the two World Wars of the XX century started in Europe.

The cult of force, militarism and a stake on "sword and fire", typical for the European countries in the past, manifested themselves in their politics of colonization of territories in Africa, Asia and America. Later this European politics was adopted by the USA. The world was divided by force into the zones of power and influence. After suffering hard ordeals and overcoming the

totalitarian heritage of the past, Europe radically changed in the late XX—beginning of XXI century. Now it is considered a region of peace and wealth. The events in Europe that lead to the establishment of the European Union we can see deep regularities inherent in various communities everywhere in the world. Here lies the way of analyzing the modern stage of Eurasian history.

The collapse of the Soviet Union is commonly considered a global geopolitical disaster. The attempts to explain this catastrophe by internal disadvantages of the soviet society fall short of depth. External factors, corroding the socialist system for many decades, are slurred over. The West from the very beginning considered the Soviet power hostile. There was a direct threat of war hanging over the young soviet state both from the West and the East. Diplomatic recognition on the part of Washington came as late as 1932, fifteen years after the October revolution. If it had not been for destructive external influence on the USSR in the difficult period of 80-90 of the past century, that great power would have survived, I am sure.

What this external interference is like, I myself felt in 2005, during my presidency, when “tulip revolution” happened. The republic is still in chaos and instability. This instability was in many ways provoked by external forces, though we should not underestimate internal destructive processes.

My thorough readings in the Eurasian history convinced me in the fact that Russian statehood was built on a healthy natural basis, in many ways on the

Attraction of neighbouring nations to the powerful Russian state able to give a hand in hard times. This is true for the Armenians, the Kirgiz, the Ukrainians, and for many other nations. If Eurasia had not had such a powerful restraining factor as Russia in the previous centuries, many of the modern post-Soviet states would have never got their sovereignty. When analyzing history, it is not a good idea to idealise it. Russian tsars were not much of humanists and did use force to solve territorial disputes (as it was also the case in Europe

at that period). A lot of land was included into the Russian territories after military campaigns by Ivan-the-Terrible; at a certain period of time Russia tried to conquer the Black Sea straights which claimed many thousands of lives of her soldiers.

And yet in most cases joining of other peoples to Russia was based on seeking for help and protection from foreign invaders rather than on using force. Peaceful principles are to be applied to exploring and development of the territory behind the Urals. The main role was played by selfless devotion of the Russian “pioneers”: industrial entrepreneurs, merchants and “men of service”(civil servants and military people), striving to explore and develop the lands of Siberia and the Far East, to involve the population of the peoples of those lands into the flow of civilization.

In the soviet times up to the 80-ies, the USSR was a sustainable state, which in spite of the extremes of the Stalin times left positive heritage. At a crucial turning point of history fluctuations appeared in this huge and complicated system. In a system that is functioning normally such fluctuations are quickly located due to endogenic stabilizing factors. Unfortunately the Soviet system was soon involved into perestroika hazard and came close to chaos.

The process of separation of various nations and states developed. The peoples believed in it, hoping for democratic development, quick progress in social and economic sphere. Post-Soviet 20 years fell short of expectations. Social injustice has increased instead of being softened. Social stratification is increasing. These cause instability and dissatisfaction with the results of the period of independent national government development. Of course, there were attempts of integration or rather reintegration in the post-Soviet space which can be illustrated by the formation of the commonwealth of Independent States simultaneously with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The CIS problems having arisen at the initial stage of its work and caused by the national separatism of newly formed national elites gave birth to the ideology of multi-rate and multi-

rate and split-level integration that was implemented in the formation of EurAsEC, Customs Union, Union State of Russia and Belarus, and in the politico-military field — the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Herewith, it is important to note that the main actor of the integration process became Russia and it was due to her that the post-Soviet space did not disintegrate irreversibly.

What hinders the natural integration evolution? The author thinks there are no really insurmountable barriers. Subjective factors, related to the highly nationalistic motives for the actions of some post-Soviet leaders come to the foreground. Their hopes for accession to the European economic structures, to the NATO as equals proved to be a mirage. Even before the beginning of the current world economic crisis it was clear that it was next to impossible for them to get into the European Union. There is one more factor worth mentioning: if the EU membership is, in theory, possible for some post-Soviet republics, then for multiple reasons it is absolutely out of the question for the republics of Central Asia.

Thus, the post-Soviet states have no alternative but to join their efforts and settle in the geopolitical space that for centuries has been formed in Eurasia. Only such unity opens the way to their dynamic development. It is only too logical that the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus signed the constituent documents of the Eurasian Economic Union whose activity is based upon the Common Economic Space.

The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union can be compared with the process of crystallization. The first nucleus of crystallization united Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Its emergence and the consequent activities will, to our mind, powerfully attract the other parts of the Eurasian regional system. The positive effect of the new integration union will be appreciated not only in the post-Soviet space but in the adjoining parts of the world too. Accepting new members and broadening the sphere of its activities, the Eurasian Economic Union will acquire new capacity and in the future will

be able to equal the European Union in politics and economy as well as in terms of its scale and international influence.

It is only natural that there started a heated discussion about the Eurasian Union idea supported by Kazakhstan and Belarus. However, we think it is not always constructive. It would be better if the critics suggested alternatives; introduced new ideas that would allow improve or correct the initial idea of integration (or to give arguments to prove its inadequacy). Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

From my personal experience of the presidency and the study of the centuries long Eurasian history, I think the Eurasian unity ideas mature and feasible. My stand on this is expressed in the article "Eurasian unity is an answer to the people's aspirations"¹. The implementation of this idea could become a global historic event, though, of course, there will be not only pluses in the path to integration but many troubles caused by it. There are simply no absolutely accurate, ideal solutions; they are all always associated with compromises.

On the other hand, at the critical moments of states' and peoples' evolution, an approach of addition/subtraction sub cases should give way to the further mathematics where integral equations prevail, i.e., in the course of international integration, a merger of complex socio-economic systems would yield a synergetic effect. It is obvious that the Eurasian states united through integration would become much stronger in political, economic and other spheres than they are now.

Fragmentation of the Eurasian (post-Soviet) space stands in contrast to the background of the ongoing unification processes in other parts of the world. Virtually, new integration groupings are being formed at every continent. They also are becoming transcontinental. For example, there emerged BRICS — an international association of highly ambitious and fastest growing economies.

¹ A. Akayev. Eurasian unity: an answer to the people's aspirations, *Izvestia*, 10 October 2011.

We should also pay attention to the security side of the integration processes. The West and the East are in the position of inequality in this regard. In the West, the system and structure of security formed in the course of the Cold War was not only preserved but considerably expanded its potential. The NATO boundaries have been moved far to the East and are now in the immediate vicinity of Russia. The calls for the war on terror that justified the formation of the Anti-terror Coalition with the active involvement of the North Atlantic Alliance in September 2001 are actually used to justify its expansion.

At the same time, in the “post-Soviet” part of the continent there is neither consolidated military and political security structure nor effective regional system of economic and military integration able as the EU and the NATO to collectively protect its members’ interests. It is true that some attempts in the sphere of security are being made, but CSTO does not fully meet the needs of the region either in terms of its military and political potential, or in its membership. The process of Shanghai Cooperation Organization formation is far from the completion. The author thinks that the post-Soviet Eurasian space really needs its own regional instruments for the provision of the political and military security as well comprehensive cooperation system meeting its current needs. This is yet another more significant motive for integration.

Experience shows that in the modern globalising world the maximum success is achieved by large socio-economic systems sweeping beyond national boundaries, acquiring transnational nature. In addition, from the Systems Theory it is known that most stability and immunity are inherent in the systems comprised of diverse components. The movement to the Eurasian Union is a way to the integration of diverse national natural, economic, intellectual, etc. resources of our countries into a uniform system. It is neither a mechanical joining nor surrender of the weak to the strong, but a harmonization of national processes and resources in an integration unity. There

is no other way towards progress in the modern world.

One of the most topical issues to do with the Eurasian integration is maintaining sovereignty of the uniting nations.

New states, that emerged after the Soviet Union collapsed, quite naturally consider their sovereignty a supreme value, the basis of the consolidation of their statehood and equitable joining the world community. In primitive and narrow perception of sovereignty, joining the integration process by the states can be erroneously interpreted as a path to the weakening of their sovereign rights. However, it would be a mistake to consider the states’ participation in the integration processes and their membership in the international organizations as a threat to their sovereign rights or even as a complete or partial loss of their sovereignty.

On the contrary, the membership in political and economic unions would allow the member states considerably increase the portion of their sovereignty, which they delegate to the corresponding intergovernmental unity. The real increase is proportionate to the power of these unities. Economic interests protection in the boundaries of the European Union, and their security and territorial integrity in the NATO are provided by the aggregate power of these organizations and the collective actions of their members. This actually means massive enhancement of the national opportunities of the member states, i. e. the integration does not weak sovereignty, but on the contrary multiplies it.

It was not incidental that the idea of the possible national sovereignty loss by the new independent states was born after the USSR dissolution having been used by the West as a preventive measure to stop CIS strengthening and the development of the integration processes on the basis of CIS in Eurasia. Criticism of the ideas of the Eurasian integration, that allegedly inhibits the realization of the sovereign rights of the peoples, does not stop the governments of the post-Soviet states’ “knocking persistently on the doors” of other integration unions. For example, Ukraine on the

one hand strives to enter the European Union with its pronounced supra-nationality, and on the other hand avoids participation in the post-Soviet integration projects.

Thus, the first thing needed to overcome difficulties and pave the way to the Eurasian Union, is a political will that could transform the legislation of the states involved and give them freedom in the search of integration. Sovereignty is an instrument for the securing national interests that in the modern circumstances are inseparable from the integration-based unity.

The author thinks the combination of our unique geographic position with rare natural, intellectual, scientific and technological, industrial and spiritual riches can lead, in the boundaries of the Eurasian Union, to the formation of a high potential comparable to that of the European Union, with the excellent prospects for prosperity. That will enable the Eurasian states to cooperate with Europe on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and as early as possible. We should not leave the work we can do today to the future generations. They will have other matters to attend to.