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International Conflicts Influence on Eurasian Integration Processes

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ABSTRACT

Eurasian integration is a complex and contradictory process. Its efficiency depends on a number of internal and external factors. The existing international conflicts between potential members of the integration organization in this region due to situational factors may either weaken or strengthen their incentive for cooperation.

KEY WORDS

post-soviet world, Eurasian integration, international conflict, situational factors

The disintegration of the Soviet Union called a geopolitical accident by Russian President V. Putin, generated a number of international conflicts which influence integration processes in the former Soviet Union even today more than 20 years later.

Before estimating the extent of their influence, let us try to classify the character and potential of their conflictogenity in a certain way. It should immediately be noted that these conflicts are at various stages of their development: a part of them has an open form as, for example, in the case with so-called “unrecognized” states, others are in a latent state yet, however in case of adverse development of events they can aggravate and lead to violence escalation. Therewith a combination of certain factors, one of which, is, however, dominating, lies at the heart of absolute majority of conflicts in the former Soviet Union.

Precisely according to this principle we can conditionally divide those conflicts, which exist now in the former Soviet Union, into a number of groups.

First of all, let us dwell on the international conflicts generated by ethnopolitical contradictions, which escalated in the period of existence of the USSR or in the course of its disintegration. It is necessary

to emphasize that, on the whole, the third wave of democratization turned out to be connected with a large number of the most glaring ethnopolitical contradictions which to some extent affected the majority of the countries of the postcommunist world. In some of them open armed clashes on the ethnic grounds began, in others the problem of ethnic minority became aggravated. In the former USSR disintegration and separatist processes captured “bottom layers” of statehood, generated territorial claims, flows of refugees and immigrants. It is no coincidence that ethnopolitical conflicts in the territory of the USSR (Nagorno-Karabakh, Alma-Ata) acted as some kind of catalysts of crash of the Soviet post-totalitarianism and country disintegration.

However, the collapse of the USSR not only failed to resolve international contradictions, but also generated a number of new ethnopolitical conflicts. It was also facilitated by such situational factors as:

- the economic crisis generating the state of frustration among general population and leading to a desire to find a guilty person (“a whipping boy”) in the created crisis situation;
- the sharp weakening of the political power, the loss of control over the country;

- complex historical heritage of international relations in many regions of the former Soviet Union;
- low level of culture of interethnic relations, absence of culture of tolerance and compromise;
- the struggle for leadership within the political elites, leading to the use of the ethnic factor to ensure their dominant position.

The formation of new independent states in the post-Soviet territory led to the development of a number of ethno-political conflicts into territorial ones.

First of all, these are conflicts based on claims of one state on the territory of the neighboring state. Thus, Estonia and Latvia sought to annex a number of regions of the Pskov region which were part of these two states at the proclamation of their independence but, in the 1940th, were passed to RSFSR.

Secondly, we are talking about the conflicts, the sources of which were the consequences of arbitrary territorial changes carried out in the Soviet period. The most vivid example of it is the problem of the Crimea, which first becomes aggravated and then fades out, providing an undeniable influence on the Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations. The transfer of the Russian Crimea to the Ukraine, undertaken in 1954 in honor of 300-year anniversary of the voluntary accession of the Ukraine to Russia, still raises doubts in the legal validity of this decision. The situation is compounded by concerns of Russia about the fate of the Black Sea Navy base in Sevastopol. Despite the 2010 Kharkiv agreement on the extension of the term of the lease of the Russian Black Sea Navy location points in the Crimea for 25 years (after 2017) with a possibility of extension for another 5 years until 2042-2047¹, no one can guarantee that the revision of this

¹ Medvedev I Yanukovich podpisali soglasheniye o prodlenii bazirovaniya Chernomorskogo flota (Medvedev and Yanukovich Signed the Agreement on the Continued Basing of Russia's Black Sea Fleet) [el.res.] // URL: <http://vz.ru/news/2010/4/21/395245.html> (reference date: 20.05.2013).

agreement will not happen much earlier deadline, because on this issue, as, however, in general concerning the attitude of the Ukrainian political elite to Russia no consensus has ever been.

Many territorial ambiguities are found in the region of Central Asia. Today the question of the Northern regions of Kazakhstan populated by ethnic Russians is practically not raised. However, in case of violation of political stability, the departure of the current President, Nursultan Nazarbayev from the political scene, it is highly probable that there will be a desire of the population of these territories to reunite with Russia, which is bound to trigger a corresponding international conflict.

Uzbekistan also has a number of territorial claims to its neighbours. So, for Kazakhstan it is primarily about the lands inhabited by ethnic Uzbeks (e.g. the district of Turkestan). In addition, there remain questions on the Aral Sea and its coast. One should not forget the fact that Uzbekistan has the highest population density in this region (62.12 people per sq. km), and Kazakhstan — a lot of vacant land (5.96 people per sq.km)².

A more critical situation is developing between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as in the late 1920s the border between the two Soviet republics was drawn in such a way, that a part of ethnic Tajiks was on the territory of Uzbekistan, whereas a part of ethnic Uzbeks found themselves in Tajikistan. Whithin the confines of the USSR, the existence of the problem was poorly realised; however, after the formation of the independent states it was almost brought to the closure of borders between them. Since Uzbekistan is an far more powerful state both economically and militarily, the government can afford to ignore any claims of Tajikistan to Samarkand and Bukhara. However, the change of the domestic political situation in Uzbekistan may lead to the development

² Geograficheskiy spravochnik o stranah. Plotnost' naseleniya stran mira (A Geographical Reference Book About Countries. Population Density of the Countries of the World). [el.res.]// URL: http://ostranah.ru/_lists/population_density.php (reference date: 12.06.2013).

of the latent conflict into the open one, as well as to an escalation of violence in this far-from-the-stability region.

The border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, changed in the Soviet period, remains a source of the whole set of the international conflicts in this region. Their concentration is the Fergana Valley populated largely by ethnic Uzbeks, which is divided into parts among Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the national policy pursued in the 1930s, the formerly unified area was divided in such a way that today Uzbekistan occupies the valley lowland, Tajikistan — the narrow mouth of the valley, and Kyrgyzstan — the mountain heights. Respectively, Fergana Valley includes the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken provinces of Kyrgyzstan, Andijan, Namangan and the Fergana regions belong to Uzbekistan, and the Sogdian region — to Tajikistan¹.

On the one hand, the Valley is an important center of cotton and silk production, and the hills are covered with walnut forests. Here too there is oil and gas. However, the population lives in poverty that is one of the reasons of rather wide circulation of radical Islam in the face of a number of militarized groups.

Turkmenistan did not avoid territorial disputes with its neighbors, however, these conflicts are rather economical than ethnopolitical. In particular, it is about the dispute with Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea due to oil and gas bedded under it.

Territorial conflicts, which are associated with the reunification of scattered ethnic groups and have the nature of a collision between the government and the national liberation movement or a separatist group, which enjoys the military-political support of the neighbouring state, are even more typical of the Transcaucasia.

¹ For details see: D. Katler: *Kyrgyzstan i osobennosti nespokojnoj ferganskodoliny*. (D. Katler: *Kyrgyzstan and Specialties of Disturbing Fergana Valley*) [el. res.] // URL: ilitary-kz.ucoz.org/news/d_katler_kyrgyzstan_i_osobennosti_nespokojnoj_ferganskoi_doliny/2011-11-03-919 (reference date: 15.06.2013).

Here are both the already mentioned problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to a full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and South Ossetia, striving for reunification with North Ossetia within the Russian Federation, but remaining in the rank of an “unrecognized” state.

Ethnopolitical conflicts, which were caused by the desire of ethnic minorities to exercise their right of self-determination in the form of creation of an independent state formation in the post-Soviet territory, remain in a kind of “frozen state”. That is about Abkhazia and Transnistria, which are still considered an integral part of Georgia and Moldova respectively by most world countries. However, the more time they continue functioning as “independent”, the less, in our opinion, are their chances to return to the former republics of the Soviet Union membership.

In our opinion, it is especially necessary to pay attention to the intercommunal conflicts where deep disagreements are concealed behind linguistic disputes on the official language between various national communities (the Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia). At the same time, in spite of the fact that formally they are internal political ones, their international character is obvious (as the fight for the rights of the Russian-speaking population is conducted with the approval and support of Russia); and that, in its turn, makes the interstate relations of the Russian Federation with the respective states more complicated.

At the same time, it is typical of the former Soviet Republics to have a number of conflicts of the economic nature. The most striking example is the problem of water resources in Central Asia, about the use of which there is quite a high level of tension between the states located in this region.

From our point of view, a great number of experts fairly note that the water problem of a region often is the main obstacle in the way to closer integration and formation of coordination decisions on these or those important questions.

The problem is that the water-energy resources in Central Asia are distributed

unequally. As regards this, E. Rakhmatulayev writes, “Uneven availability of water sources both in the entire region, and in each of the CA (author’s note — Central Asia) countries, limited reserves of water sources (whereas the economies of these states are of the agrarian character) bring water issues to the fore” [1, p. 219]. Due to geographical and historical and political circumstances in the Central Asian region there was a situation when more than 90% of these resources were concentrated in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the largest consumers of water (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan) located downstream extremely need the water resources for irrigation and industrial development. But at the same time these countries have significant oil and gas reserves, which are highly influential for the economy of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The divergence of interests on the issue of joint usage of water-energy resources of the region is primarily due to the fact that for the downstream countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan), the availability of water is a necessary condition for the development of agriculture, and for the countries of headstream (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) it is absource for hydropower development.

On the whole, finding common grounds in the conflict of “irrigation” and “power engineering” belonging to different states is a really demanding problem.

It should especially be emphasized that the country’s involvement with international conflicts, even if they are transparent, tends to have a serious impact on the transformation of political regimes in the context of a transitional period. In our opinion, this is one of the main reasons of deformation of democratic transit.

The severity of the deformation undoubtedly depends on the nature of the conflict, on the severity of the parties’ confrontation, on the level of violence, on the impact of external factors, etc. However, in the most general terms, the following trends can be highlighted.

First, reinforcement of authoritarian tendencies in social life takes place. This is

especially evident in cases when a conflict becomes violent, turns into serious armed clashes or direct military confrontation (regional wars), and that almost inevitably leads to:

- the concentration of power in the hands of one person or a small group of people;
- enforcement of the executive branch, which starts dominating the legislature;
- the increasing influence of the security services in various spheres of life of society;
- the centralization of the state administration to the detriment of a local government;
- imposing of certain restrictions on the activities of mass media.
- Second, in a varying degree, the violation of the rights and freedoms of citizens (often mass) take place. The question of the ratio of interests of a person and those of a nation, of the “right to national identity”, of the rights of ethnic minorities becomes more acute.

Third, the process of radicalization of political forces of the country takes place. Political struggle begins to be in the nature of irreconcilable confrontation, of rigid division into “ours” and “theirs”. Moderate, centrist forces find themselves pushed to the margins of political life. Nationalism increasingly serves as certain bait with the help of which the lower social strata are involved in the orbit of influence of political parties solving the problems of political mobilization of the population.

Fourth, the process of forming a democratic political culture is sharply slowed (and in some cases is simply stopped). Aggressive nationalism becomes a means for overcoming of the inferiority complex. Intolerance, xenophobia, striving for the violent resolution of conflict situations begin to dominate in the public conscience.

These tendencies can be seen, even in the cases of nonviolent conflicts of, for example, an institutional character and not accompanied by intergroup conflicts. They are even more visible in so called “mass action” conflicts, when a significant number of people involved in demonstrations, ral-

lies, hunger strikes, actions of “civil disobedience” serve as their subjects.

In any case, the enforcing of authoritarian tendencies is a response to psychological stress, frustration, caused by the involvement in a conflict situation.

Evaluating the impact of the international conflicts in the Eurasian integration processes, it is necessary, in our opinion, to take into account its divergence and inconsistency.

On the one hand, the existence of a conflict between the post-Soviet states may lead to a disruption of persisting relations, to the aspiration to distance itself from the enemy to the maximum. Georgia, which finally emerged from all structures of the CIS after the war with Russia in South Ossetia, can serve a vivid example. Similarly, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh (a potential readiness of Azerbaijan to solve the problem by military means, which is prevented by Russia and its allies) in 1999 led to the refusal of the leaders of Azerbaijan to extend the agreement on participation of this country in CSTO. One of the factors (although certainly not the only one), which, in due course, had prevented participation of Moldova in the process of Eurasian integration, is the unresolved situation with the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, enjoying, in the opinion of the leadership of Moldova, the illegal support from Russia.

At the same time, through the integration, the states can try and solve a whole set of problems concerning relations between them.

First of all, it is about *the security of a state*, which is more important than mere material reasons, usually determining an economic policy. As a matter of fact, this is the reason that is in the basis of a commitment of Armenia and Tajikistan to Eurasian integration in the military and political sphere. These countries are trying, through participation in the CSTO, protect themselves from attacks from Azerbaijan and the Afghan Taliban, respectively.

The desire *to facilitate the solution of a number of socio-political problems* existing in the sphere of interstate relations

can also contribute to the extension of commitment to the integration process. For the post-Soviet Eurasian territory it is, above all, the desire to control migration flows, to distribute manpower resources rationally, to harmonise relations between native citizens and labour migrants. On the one hand, Russia is in need of the labour force; on the other hand, there are a number of countries of the former Soviet Union, first of all, a number of Central Asian states, which are interested in the receipt of financial assets from their citizens working in Russia. And, at least theoretically the maintenance of balance of interests in this sphere can be achieved only through greater integration. As an example let us consider Uzbekistan. In spite of the made in 2012 decision to withdraw from the CSTO, the Uzbek leadership, however, strives to preserve ties with Russia in trade and economic sphere. The point is not only that Russia remains the largest trading partner of Uzbekistan. Russian fuel and energy companies work in this Central Asian Republic. Today Moscow buys a large amount of energy from Tashkent. In addition, Russian companies operating in various spheres, make enormous investments into the economy of Uzbekistan. However, the main and most difficult issue in relations between the countries is labour migrants from Uzbekistan. According to various data, there are more than 2 million immigrants from this country in Russia. Thus, Uzbekistan takes the leading position among all post-Soviet countries in the number of immigrants who wish to move to and to become residents of Russia¹. This extremely powerful leverage of influence is still extremely poorly used by the Russian authorities, however, it makes the Uzbek

¹ Yedinaya migratsionnaya sluzhba. Uzbekistan lideruet po kolichestvu grazhdan stremyashchih-sya poluchit' grazhdanstvo Rossii. (Unitary Migratory Service. Uzbekistan Is in the Leading Position in the Number of Its Citizens Seeking to Obtain Russian Citizenship) [el. res.] // URL: <http://www.grrf.ru/novosti/uzbekistan-lidiruet-po-kolichestvu-grazhdan-stremyashchih-sya-poluchit-grazhdanstvo-rossii.html> (reference date: 18.06.2013).

side behave quite carefully, not refusing (at least they say so) from participation in Eurasian integration structures.

Finally, an aspiration to *strengthen the national state* can be an incentive for the Euroasian integration. At first glance, it looks like a paradox, because the integration by perforce requires a partial transfer of control functions in the sphere of decision-making and, consequently, a certain loss of political autonomy. At the same time, regional integration should not necessarily lead to the suppression of the nation as an organizational integrity, or to the loss of effective sovereignty. On the contrary, combining sovereignties, members of the integration union can expand and thereby strengthen the concept of national identity and integrity. Nation-states can strengthen their position through the creation of a United Union to confront external forces or through the combined efforts in the negotiation process on the international scene.

Regional cooperation can promote strengthening of positions of minor states (such as, for example, the Republic of Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan) separately suffering from low level of competitiveness on the world scene. Bilateral and multilateral negotiations often demand considerable financial resources, time and expertise the existence of which is limited in these countries. As the world becomes more and more integrated and the number of issues discussed at the world arena increases, the incentive for small states to cooperate with neighbors increases, too. Thus, they manage to significantly reduce their expenses within the framework of a negotiation process, to increase their market and negotiation capacities, by pooling their resources together and articulating their common interests.

On the whole, the presence of international conflicts in the post-Soviet territory seems to make the process of Eurasian integration quite contradictory and yet unpredictable in terms of behaviour of individual participants. It is primarily connected with the transitional nature of most political regimes in the territory of the for-

mer USSR. As *G.O'Donnell and P.Schmitter* noted at the beginning of their book *Transition from Authoritarian Rule. Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, in such cases, "the transition from certain authoritarian regimes to undefined 'something different' takes place. This 'something' may be related to the establishment of political democracy, as well as to the restoration of a new, and possibly crueller, form of authoritarian administration..." [2, p. 3].

Secondly, the activity of other international actors in the post-Soviet area should be taken into consideration. Their influence on the political elites of the former republics of the USSR first increases, then decreases, and that largely depends on the degree of their influence on the international conflicts mentioned above. So, the situation in Transdnistria is under the scrutiny of the European Union; Turkey actively supports Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; the United States provide assistance, including military one, to Georgia, emphasising their commitment to the territorial integrity of this country and not recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. China and Iran are trying to actively interfere with the water-energy and territorial disputes in Central Asia.

Finally, as Russia is the natural leader of the integration in the post-Soviet territory, it is the position of this country that, to a great extent, the success of Eurasian projects will depend on. It should be emphasised, however, that, having used the word "position", we do not mean declarations but real actions, including the effective solution of domestic problems, which could offer other countries an attractive model for organization of life of their peoples.

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