

# Eurasia and Central Eurasia: Initial Analytical Assumptions

## The Geographic and Geopolitical Contours of Eurasia and Central Eurasia

The Eurasian continent consists of two parts of the world – Europe and Asia; for obvious reasons its geographic dimension can be used (and is used) in geopolitical contexts as well. The books by prominent American political scholar Zbigniew Brzezinski best demonstrate this.<sup>1</sup>

There is another, not less popular, geopolitical idea about Eurasia that has been created in the context of Russia's quest, in the post-Soviet period, for national and territorial identity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for the first time in the last 200 years, Russia finds itself on a much smaller territory. This prompted the search for a conception that would justify its special role at least across the post-Soviet expanse.<sup>3</sup> Russia has lost an empire and not yet found a role.<sup>4</sup> No wonder the questions "What is Russia?" and "Where is Russia?" remain topical.<sup>5</sup> It should be said that the so-called myths<sup>6</sup> and narratives<sup>7</sup> about the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). The following work (Johannes F. Linn and David Tiomkin, *Economic Integration of Eurasia: Opportunities and Challenges of Global Significance*, CASE Studies & Analyses No. 298, April (Warsaw: CASE, 2005), <[http://www.case.com.pl/upload/publikacja\\_plik/4974349\\_sa298%20ook.pdf](http://www.case.com.pl/upload/publikacja_plik/4974349_sa298%20ook.pdf)>) can be given as an example of a geo-economic study of the geographic continent of Eurasia.

<sup>2</sup> Gail W. Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2007, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2007), pp. 138-155.

<sup>3</sup> John O'Loughlin and Paul F. Talbot, "Where in the World is Russia: Geopolitical Perceptions and Preferences of Ordinary Russians," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2005, pp. 23-50, <<http://www.colorado.edu/IBS/PEC/johno/pub/Wheres-Russia.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, "Europe Needs to Forge a Strategy to Cope with a Shaken, Evolving Russia," *Guardian*, February 5, 2009, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/isfree/2009/feb/05/russia-european-union>>.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Geostategic Triad: Living with China, Europe, and Russia* (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2007), pp. 56, 64; Robert Service, *Russia: Experiment with a People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 13-44.

<sup>6</sup> Vera Tolz, "Conflicting "Homeland Myths" and Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (1998), pp. 267-294.

homeland were largely encouraged by the talks about revising the Russian Federation state borders, which are much more popular in the intellectual and political communities of Russia and among the Russian public than is believed in Western academic writings.<sup>8</sup> The Russian elite and, to a certain extent, society as a whole, are concerned about Russia's current borders, since some territories where Russian-speaking people live, fell under the jurisdiction of other states after the collapse of the U.S.S.R.<sup>9</sup> To one extent or another, this might prompt Russia to carry out an aggressive policy with respect to these states.<sup>10</sup> According to the latest public opinion polls, an ever growing number of people in the Russian Federation favor the idea of a restored Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> This is perfectly natural if we keep in mind the post-imperial nostalgia popular in Russian society.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008<sup>13</sup> gives reason to believe that Russia's national identity and the independence of the countries bordering it are two mutually exclusive concepts.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, this war made it obvious to the whole world

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<sup>7</sup> Şener Aktürk, "Reflections on Central Eurasian Model: A Foundation Reply to Barfield on the Historiography of Ethno-Nationalisms," *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2006), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Tolz, "Conflicting," p. 294.

<sup>9</sup> Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 271.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Roy Allison, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to 'Coerce Georgia to Peace'," *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 6 (2008), p. 1167.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Petukhov, "Vneshnepoliticheskie prioritety rossian: 'novy izoliatsionizm' ili pragmatizatsia soznania" [Foreign Political Priorities of the Russians: 'New Isolationism' or Pragmatic Thinking], in Igor Zadorin, ed., *Integratsia v Evrazii. Narod i elity stran EEP* [Integration in Eurasia. The People and Elites of the Countries of the Single Economic Expanse] (Moscow: "Evropa" Publishers, 2006), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire. Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), pp. ix-xiv.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009); Charles King, "The Five-Day War. Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2008, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20081001faessay87601/charles-king/the-five-day-war.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "They Can Only Go So Far," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2008, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/22/AR2008082202395.html>>. If a particular country is in Russia's zone of interests, it is willing at all costs to stop this country from withdrawing from its sphere of influence, regardless of the interests and orientation of this country itself – pro-Russian or pro-Western (Alexandros Petersen, "Russia Invaded Georgia to Teach the West a Lesson," *EU Observer*, August 18, 2008, <<http://euobserver.com/13/26611>>). So it comes as no surprise that Russia prefers to have weak and vulnerable states on its borders that easily fall

that Russia will never reconcile itself to the thought that the Soviet Empire has been lost.<sup>15</sup> This explains Russia's adherence to a policy of force<sup>16</sup> in order to restore hegemony over its neighbors;<sup>17</sup> in other words, Russia has demonstrated its willingness to protect its interests in post-Soviet Eurasia by means of force.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, such behavior entirely correlates with the generally known schemes of empire formation.<sup>19</sup> Even experts quite loyal to the Kremlin do not exclude the possibility of Russia restoring the empire, not in the classical way though, by means of seizing territory, but by using some so-called 'neo-imperialistic' mechanisms based primarily on energy policy.<sup>20</sup>

In so doing, the historical lesson should also be kept in mind: the czarist elite regarded the conquest of the Caucasus, the Khazar steppes, and Central Asia not only in terms of the glorification of the empire, but also as a contribution to Russia's European identity.<sup>21</sup>

Imperial order, the imperial body, and the imperial mind are the three components of Russia's imperial syndrome structure.<sup>22</sup> Of these components,

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under Russian influence. See, for example, Svante E. Cornell et al., *Regional Security in the Caucasus: The Role of NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Denis MacShane, "Georgia: We must Unite to Resist Russian Aggression," *Telegraph.co.uk*, August 11, 2008, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2008/08/11/do1104.xml>>.

<sup>16</sup> Jörg Himmelreich, "Moscow's Power Politics," *Spiegel Online International*, August, 11, 2008, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/o,1518,571229,00.html#>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald D. Asmus and Richard Holbrooke, "Black Sea Watershed," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2008, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/10/AR2008081001870.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> Oksana Antonenko, "A War with No Winners," *Survival*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2008), p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Baer, "The Russian Empire Strikes Back," *Time*, August 12, 2008, <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1831857,00.html>>; Monica Duffy Toft, "Russia's Recipe for Empire," *Foreign Policy*, September, 2008, <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4462](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4462)>.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Künzl, "The Caucasus Needs a Rest After the War, Interview with Alexander Rahr," *Caucasian Review on International Affairs*, vol. 2 (4) (2008), p. 79, <<http://cria-online.org/Journal/5/THE%20CAUCASUS%20NEEDS%20A%20REST%20AFTER%20THE%20WAR.pdf>>.

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Emil Pain, "Liberalny sdaiutsia bez boia. Intelligentsiia usvoila i priniala ideiu o predopredelennosti "osobogo puti" Rossii" [The Liberals Surrender Without a Fight. The Intelligentsia Has Understood and Accepted the Idea of Russia's Predetermined

the imperial body, that is, the country's territory, is the most inert. At the same time, in fact, its territory, as the receptacle of natural, labor, financial, and other resources, acts as the main resource, the expansion or at least containment of which is the main task of the imperial state.<sup>23</sup>

Russia can successfully use the ideas of so-called "Eurasianism," which found their second wind in the post-Soviet period, as a theoretical basis for its imperial ambitions.<sup>24</sup> Based mainly on geography,<sup>25</sup> Eurasianists<sup>26</sup> still presuppose a geopolitical revision of the Eurasian continent as a geographical unit.<sup>27</sup> Late in the 19th century Russian Professor V. Pomanskiy suggested that there were three, rather than two, continents within the Old World.<sup>28</sup> Later, prominent Russian geopolitician Petr Savitskiy called the third continent "Eurasia" (the limits of which essentially coincided with Russia or, rather, the Russian Empire).<sup>29</sup> He argued that this Eurasia was different from the geographic description of Eurasia offered by Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>30</sup> This gave rise to *Eurasianism*, one of the strongest trends of the Russian

"Special Way"], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 1, 2008, <[http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2008-02-01/11\\_theway.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2008-02-01/11_theway.html)>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Lasha Tchantouridze, "After Marxism-Leninism: Eurasianism and Geopolitics in Russia," in Lasha Tchantouridze, ed., *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns* (Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 2004), pp. 167-190.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geopolitical Space," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1991), p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> It should be said that the proponents of Eurasianism call themselves Eurasians, which is not totally correct: Eurasians are people living in Eurasia, while those who preach Eurasianism should be called Eurasianists. This term is used here precisely in this context.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> For example, N.A. Nartov and V.N. Nartov, *Geopolitika* [Geopolitics] (Moscow: UNITI-DANA, 2007), p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> P.N. Savitskiy, *Kontinent Evrazia* [The Eurasian Continent] (Moscow: Agraf Publishers, 1997). As Savitskiy put it, "Russia-Eurasia is the center of the Old World." (P.N. Savitskiy, "Geograficheskie i geopoliticheskie osnovy Evraziystva" [The Fundamental Geographic and Geopolitical Principles of Eurasianism], *Informatsionno-analiticheskiy portal "EVRAZIA.org"* [Information Analysis Portal "EURASIA.org"], 1933, <<http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=800>>.)

<sup>30</sup> Savitskiy, "Geograficheskie geopoliticheskie osnovy Evraziystva." According to other authors, it was the Viennese geologist Eduard Suess who coined the term Eurasia in the late 20th century to apply it to Europe and Asia (see, Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia," p. 10).

geopolitical school which asserted Russia's special historical and cultural role in geographic Eurasia.<sup>31</sup>

Lev Gumilev, a prominent Russian historian, ethnographer, and geographer, who studied the geographic limits of the geopolitical continent of Eurasia,<sup>32</sup> concluded that it consisted of three regions: High Asia (Mongolia, Djungaria, Tuva, and the trans-Baikal area), the Southern region (Central Asia), and the Western region (Eastern Europe).<sup>33</sup>

We all know that geographically the Old World consists of several parts of the world – Europe, Asia (the so-called Eurasian continent) and Africa – while the term “Eurasia” as applied by the Russian geopolitical school narrows down the territorial limits of Eurasia to those of a geographical continent.

The academics who embraced the entire geographical continent in their geopolitical studies fell, mostly inadvertently, into the “trap” of the Russian geopolitical school. In *The Grand Chessboard*, because of its conflict-prone nature, Zbigniew Brzezinski calls the region made up of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the adjacent areas: “the Eurasian Balkans.”<sup>34</sup> There is an obvious contradiction: if “Eurasian” is applied to the geographical Eurasian continent (as suggested by the book's content), then the author has wrongly placed the Balkans outside this continent. The “Eurasian Balkans” is nothing

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<sup>31</sup> Russia's claims on the Eurasian continent are so strong (for example, Janatkhan Eyvazov, “Russia in Central Eurasia: Security Interests and Geopolitical Activity,” *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 (2009), pp. 11-22) that even where there is no need to mention Eurasia, authors of certain fundamental publications prove unable to leave the cliché alone. For example, when discussing economic reforms within the CIS and addressing the Eurasian problems neither in a geographic nor in a geopolitical context, the book by Egor Stroev, Leonid Bliakhman, and Mikhail Krotov used the term indiscriminately (Egor. S. Stroev, Leonid S. Bliakhman, Mikhail I. Krotov, *Russia and Eurasia at the Crossroads. Experience and Problems of Economic Reforms in the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer, 1999). The same can be said about some non-Russian academics from the Former Soviet Union countries (for example, Irakly Areshidze, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2007)).

<sup>32</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), pp. 50-82.

<sup>33</sup> Lev Gumilev, *Ritmy Evrazii: Epokhi tsivilizatsii* [The Rhythms of Eurasia: Eras of Civilization] (Moscow: AST, 2007), p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, p. 123.

else but the Balkans. This contradiction can be removed if we specify that the term “Eurasian” in this context is related to Eurasia as seen by the corresponding Russian geopolitical school. In other words, Brzezinski was “taken captive” by this school unawares.

For simplicity’s sake, the borders of Eurasia are sometimes deliberately narrowed down to the framework of the territory of the former U.S.S.R.<sup>35</sup> According to the Eurasianists, Russia is a special continent.<sup>36</sup> To resolve the terminological conflict between the geographic and geopolitical interpretations of Eurasia, the geopolitical context uses the terms “Eurasia-Russia,”<sup>37</sup> “Russia-Eurasia,”<sup>38</sup> or “Eurasian Rus.”<sup>39</sup> The problem became topical again in the post-Soviet period, as before that geographers used the term “Eurasia” in its geographical meaning.<sup>40</sup> The discussion over a possible compromise between the correct geographical term for Eurasia and the territory of Russia’s domination is still going on.<sup>41</sup>

Since the Russian geopolitical school relies on its own interpretation of Eurasia to justify Russia’s imperial ambitions, the term “Central Eurasia” needs specification: to what extent do its geographic and geopolitical interpretations coincide and what problems do they entail?

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Thomas W. Simons Jr., *Eurasia’s New Frontiers: Young States, Old Societies, Open Futures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> For example, A.G. Dugin, *Evraziiskiy triumf* [The Eurasian Victory], in A. Dugin, ed., *Osnovy Evraziystva* [The Fundamental Principles of Eurasianism] (Moscow: “Arktogeia-Tsentr,” 2002, pp. 485-502). See also <<http://www.evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=102>>.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Nartov and Nartov, *Geopolitika*, pp. 133-135, 137.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii* [The Fundamental Principles of Geopolitics. Russia’s Geopolitical Future] (Moscow: “Arktogeia-Tsentr,” 1997), pp. 83-84.

<sup>39</sup> Igor’ Panarin, *Informatsionnaia voyna i geopolitika* [The Information War and Geopolitics] (Moscow: Pokolenie Publishers, 2006), pp. 312-364, 539-543. Instead of the artificial terms “Eurasia-Russia,” “Russia-Eurasia,” or “Eurasian Rus,” the term “Post-Soviet Eurasia” is much better suited (Igor Torbakov, “Post-Soviet Eurasia Enters a New Era,” *Eurasia Insight. Eurasianet*, September 17 (2008), <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091708.shtml>>), which correctly reflects reality from the geographic and geopolitical viewpoint.

<sup>40</sup> Milan L. Hauner, “The Disintegration of the Soviet Eurasian Empire: An Ongoing Debate,” in Mohiaddin Mesbahi, ed., *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 222.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Traditionally, Central Eurasia as a geographic concept is related to the territory between the Bosphorus in the west and the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region in the east and from the Kazakh steppes in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south.<sup>42</sup> This means that geographic Central Eurasia almost completely covers geographic Central Asia, but not Central Europe. For this reason Central Europe is left outside Central Eurasia, the conventional center of the single continent called Eurasia. If, however, the physical dimensions of the continent's parts are put aside, logic suggests that geographic Eurasia as a continent consists of two parts of the world: Europe and Asia. This means that geographically Central Eurasia should consist of both Central Europe and Central Asia and the Central Caucasus as the link that connects them.<sup>43</sup> It seems that the geographic interpretation of the Central Eurasian concept is still dominated by its geopolitical interpretation, which equates Russia and Eurasia even in the post-Soviet era.<sup>44</sup>

Those who limit Central Eurasia to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are still under the spell of Soviet approaches.<sup>45</sup> They leave vast territories beyond the

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Kenneth Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia: Prize or Quicksand? Contenting Views of Instability in Karabakh, Ferghana and Afghanistan*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 338 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Eldar Ismailov, "O kategorii Tsentral'naia Evrazia" [On the Category "Central Eurasia"], *Doklady Natsional'noy akademii nauk Azerbaidzhana* [Papers of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan], Vol. LXIII, No.1 (2007); Eldar Ismailov, "Central Eurasia: Its Geopolitical Function in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (50), 2008, pp. 25-26; Vladimer Papava, "Tsentral'naia Kavkazia: osnovy geopoliticheskoy ekonomii" [Central Caucaso-Asia: The Foundations of Geopolitical Economics], *Analiticheskie zapiski Gruzinskogo fonda strategicheskikh i mezhdunarodnykh issledovaniy* [Analytical Notes of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies], No. 1 (2007), p. 8, <[http://www.gfsis.net/publications/VPapava\\_Ru\\_1.pdf](http://www.gfsis.net/publications/VPapava_Ru_1.pdf)>; Vladimer Papava, "'Central Caucasia' Instead of 'Central Eurasia,'" *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (50) (2008), p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Hauner, "The Disintegration," p. 217. Authors who favor clearer definitions describe Russia as the northern part of Eurasia (for example, N.N. Moiseev, "Geopoliticheskoe polozhenie Rossii: perspektivy razvitiia" [Russia's Geopolitical Position: Development Prospects], *Evolutsia Evrazyskoy teorii i factor ATP. Diskussionny Klub. Krugly stol* [Evolution of the Eurasist Theory and the APR Factor. Discussion Club. Round Table], No. 3, 2000, <<http://nnmoiseev.ru/geopolit.htm>>).

<sup>45</sup> Today this idea of Central Eurasia has gained wide currency (see, for example, Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling, "Introduction: The Crisis in IR-Theory: Towards a Critical Geopolitics Approach," in Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk

region, in particular those of Afghanistan, Northern Iran, the Northern Caucasus, Northwestern China, Kashmir, and the Tibetan Plateau, which share historical, ethnic, and cultural roots with the above-mentioned countries.<sup>46</sup> However, some scientific publications on Central Eurasia apply the concept of this region only to Central Asia.<sup>47</sup>

While the Russian Eurasian school narrows down the scale of Eurasia as a geographic continent, the differences are less important in the case of Central Eurasia since the Russian geopolitical school is in control of geography: look at the way the contemporary Russian geographers describe Northern and Central Eurasia as the territory that covers the former Soviet Union, western part of the European Arctic region, and some regions of Central Asia.<sup>48</sup>

Why has the Russian geopolitical school had a cautious, to put it mildly, approach to the Eurasianist trend?

### **Transformation of the Geopolitical Space of Eurasia**

Today, while concentrating on the problems of regional studies and regional cooperation, it has become especially important to look at the processes going on within what was once a single military-political and socioeconomic space (the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (COMECON) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO)) formed by the Soviet Union. It fell apart late in the 20th century into:

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Houweling, eds., *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. pp. 2-3; Charles Fairbanks et al., *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council of The United States, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 2001), p. vii; Karl Meyer, *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Supremacy in the Asian Heartland* (London: Abacus, 2004), p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Laura Adams, "Can We Apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?" *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2008), pp. 2-7, <[http://www.cesr-cess.org/pdf/CESR\\_07\\_1.pdf](http://www.cesr-cess.org/pdf/CESR_07_1.pdf)>.

<sup>48</sup> V.M. Kotliakov, ed., *Oledenenie Severnoy i Tsentral'noy Evrazii v sovremennuiu epokhu* [The Freezing of Northern and Central Eurasia in the Contemporary Era] (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 2006), p. 13.



### 1. *Central (Eastern) Europe:*

- *post-COMECON countries:* Poland, Czechoslovakia,<sup>49</sup> Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, the German Democratic Republic (GDR),<sup>50</sup> and the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY);<sup>51</sup>
- *post-Soviet countries:* Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia;

### 2. *Central Caucasus:*<sup>52</sup>

- *post-Soviet countries:* Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia;

### 3. *Central Asian Region:*

- *post-COMECON countries:* Afghanistan, Mongolia;
- *post-Soviet countries:* Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

Post-Soviet Russia was the “initiating core” of both the U.S.S.R. and COMECON.<sup>53</sup> Evidently, the interest in the three post-COMECON regions that detached themselves from the initiating core (Russia) can be explained by the special place they retained in the world political arena. This becomes especially obvious when viewed as a single, independent, and isolated geopolitical object of the globalizing world.

The geopolitical conceptual apparatus typical of the bipolar world lost its relevance after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The world was no longer divided into socialist and capitalist camps, therefore these conceptions and related terms, such as “the non-

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<sup>49</sup> In 1993, the country divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

<sup>50</sup> In 1990, the GDR became part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

<sup>51</sup> Early in the 1990s, the SFRY fell apart into Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro.

<sup>52</sup> See below for more details on the Central Caucasus.

<sup>53</sup> Cuba and Vietnam were two other COMECON members; Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen were observers.

capitalist way of development,” “the non-alignment movement”, etc., were gradually replaced with more adequate categories. Despite the changes that have taken place in the last few decades, discrepancies persist in academic publications as well as educational and reference literature, when it comes to relating the post-COMECON countries to various regions of the *Eurasian continent* and their names.

Nowadays, the academic and political communities are using old (czarist or Soviet, European and Asian) definitions along with new, not fully accepted ones. The post-Soviet republics on the *Baltic coast* (the Russian term is “Pribaltiiskie”) are called the Baltic states; the republics that were called “Sredneaziatskie” in Soviet times are now known as the Central Asian (“Tsentral’noaziatskie”) republics;<sup>54</sup> the *Trans-Caucasian* republics are now known as the South Caucasian or Central Caucasian republics<sup>55</sup> and are seen as part of Eastern or Southeastern Europe, Central or Northwestern Asia.<sup>56</sup>

States were related to regions depending on geopolitical contexts. The shift of countries from one sphere of influence to another resulted from the

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<sup>54</sup> N.N. Alekseeva and I.S. Ivanova, “Sredniaia ili Tsentral’naia Azia?” [Middle or Central Asia?], *Geographia* [Geography], No. 30 (2003), pp. 13-17, <<http://geo.1september.ru/articlef.php?ID=200302804>>.

<sup>55</sup> Eldar Ismailov, “O geopoliticheskikh predposylkakh ekonomicheskoi integratsii Tsentral’nogo Kavkaza” [On the Geopolitical Aspects of Economic Integration of Central Caucasus], *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences—Economic Series*, Vol. 10, No. 3-4 (2002), pp. 123-148; Eldar Ismailov and Zia Kengerli, “Integratsia Kavkaza i sovremennye geoeconomicheskie protsessy” [Integration of the Caucasus and Present-Day Geo-economic Processes], *Izvestia Natsional’noi akademii nauk Azerbaidzhana. Seria gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk (ekonomika)* [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. Humanitarian and Social Sciences (Economics) Series], No. 1 (2002), pp. 24-48; Eldar Ismailov and Zia Kengerli, “O kategorii Kavkaz” [On the Category “The Caucasus”], *Doklady Natsional’noy akademii nauk Azerbaidzhana* [Papers of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan], Vol. LVIII, No. 5-6 (2002), pp. 290-294; Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, *The Central Caucasus: Essays on Geopolitical Economy* (Stockholm: CA&CC Press, 2006); Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, “A New Concept for the Caucasus,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2008), pp. 283-298; Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, *The Central Caucasus: Problems of Geopolitical Economy* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> For more detail about the Northwestern Asia conception, see Abdollah Ramezanzadeh, “Iran’s Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis,” in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), <<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/cho701.htm>>.

changed balance among the main geopolitical actors in Eurasia. This, in turn, drew new dividing lines between the regions. These changes took place in the European and Asian parts of Eurasia. The conventional nature of the regions' new spatial descriptions, assumed to correspond to the geopolitical situation, allows us to identify new trends of development in intra- and extra-regional contacts and relations on the Eurasian continent.

The geopolitical transformations of the 1990s have called for fresh approaches to the regional division of the political expanse of Europe and Asia. They aim to reflect as fully as possible the continent's internal political, socioeconomic, and cultural relations while keeping up with the current geopolitical situation.

Today, Europe's political expanse should be regarded as the sum total of its main regions:

- Western Europe – EU and NATO members (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, France, U.K., Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Rumania) and candidate countries (Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and still neutral Switzerland).
- Central Europe –Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.
- Eastern Europe – the European parts of Turkey and the Russian Federation.

In view of the greater socioeconomic compatibility of the “new EU members” with, say, Ukraine rather than France or the Netherlands, they could all be included in *Greater Central Europe* (Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova).

It is much more complicated to restructure the political expanse of Eurasia's other part – Asia. Its vast spatial-political scale and the current political and economic relations among the states with very different axiological systems, political regimes, geopolitical orientations, and development levels, do not

permit the countries to be grouped into strictly delineated regional segments. Distinct from Europe, the region's political borders in Asia are much more conventional. The current geopolitical situation suggests five regional parts:

- Western Asia – Asian part of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other states of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Iran;
- Eastern Asia – China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and the states of Indochina and the Malay Archipelago;
- Northern Asia – the Asian part of the Russian Federation;
- Southern Asia – India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives;
- Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Just as in Europe, the central part of Asia can also be described as Greater Central Asia,<sup>57</sup> which would include Mongolia of Eastern Asia and Afghanistan of Southern Asia. The Central Caucasian countries can be included both in the Asian (for geographical reasons) and in the European continent (because of their political and institutional involvement in European affairs). This region is a geopolitical “special zone” of Eurasia, an area where the continents meet.

The conception of the post-COMECON expanse has become completely outdated; its key segments – the European, Caucasian, and Asian – are now described as “central,” which means that any discussion of them as a totality should be based on Central Eurasia as an integral conception. In any case, it is impossible to revive the Russian (either czarist or Soviet), European, or Asian (of the 20th century Cold War period) terms. The world has changed

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<sup>57</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *A ‘Greater Central Asia Partnership’ for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors*, Silk Road Paper, March (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 2005), <<http://www.stimson.org/new-century/pdf/Strategy.pdf>>; S. Frederick Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (2005), pp. 164-178. Some authors also count Mongolia as part of the Greater Central Asia.

and the conceptual approaches and the categorial-conceptual apparatus have changed accordingly.

It is necessary, therefore, to clarify the definitions relating to this region. A profound understanding of the objective development regularities of the Eurasian continent and its effective integration call primarily for clearly systematized geopolitical conceptions.