

Key Findings and Conclusion

The key findings of this study are summarized and listed in bullet-point form below. Following this, we conclude by arguing for the pressing need of establishing ties between the segments of Central Eurasia.

Redefining Central Eurasia

- After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., not only did the historical process of state formation take place, but so did the formation of new geopolitical areas, affecting most former Soviet republics. In recent years a relatively new geopolitical term, “Central Eurasia,” has become common. The term, as a rule, is used to refer to the countries of the Central Caucasus (often referred to as South Caucasus) and Central Asia.
- Geographically, Central Eurasia actually covers the entire geographical Central Asia but excludes Central Europe. If we consider it logically, proceeding from the fact that geographic Eurasia as a continent consists of two parts of the world, that of Europe and Asia, it is only natural that geographic Central Eurasia should include both Central Europe and Central Asia as well as the Central Caucasus, which connects them.

Russia and Eurasianism

- After the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the issue of national and territorial identity has become especially pressing for Russia which for the first time in the course of two hundred years appeared in much narrowed borders which strongly stimulated its leaders to search for a new concept of its special role, at least in the post-Soviet area. The idea of so-called “Eurasianism,” which received a “second breath” in the post-Soviet period, could be successfully used as a theoretical substantiation of Russia’s imperial ambitions.

- Currently, the debate on the correct geographic definition of Eurasia and the territory which is under Russian control is ongoing, with no end in sight. Nevertheless, the Eurasianist elements of the Russian geopolitical school facilitate the justification of Russian imperial ambitions – to rule the center of the geographic continent of Eurasia.
- Although proponents of Eurasianism are not in power in Russia, modern Eurasianists have from the outset of the Putin era become more mainstream and accepted by the official establishment, unlike the case in the Yeltsin era. As a result, Eurasianism swiftly became dominant to the point where it became the prevailing ideology.
- Russia is unlikely to be able to dominate the post-Soviet area. This is not only because other “players,” who also appeared in this space, have much more economic, informational, and military resources; but primarily because the Russian elite is not interested in ensuring and strengthening the state sovereignty of the former Soviet republics. Russia’s modern policy with regards to the Central Caucasus is based not upon the understanding that it is more beneficial for Russia to deal with united, integral, and stable countries of the Central Caucasus but, in fact, coincides with the Eurasianist approach towards conflict regions and strategic partners. In Central Asia, Central Asian countries have learned over the last 20 years how to maneuver to some extent amongst various countries competing with one another for the realization of their interests.
- Since the 1990s, there has been an impression that the Cold War was over and that the new Russia was irrevocably moving towards cooperation with the civilized world, democratic reforms, and a transition to market economy. This perception began already during Gorbachev’s era and grew stronger during Yeltsin’s presidency. The Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, however, proved that the end of the Cold War is not so much a reality but wishful thinking on the part of the West. In other words, it is an illusion. This illusion held up during the era of a dying U.S.S.R. was succeeded by a period when its successor – the newly established Russia – was so weakened politically and economically that it was forced to receive economic support from

the West. But even during this time, nostalgia for the lost empire was intensifying in Russia.

- An even more sober attitude of Russia towards the Central Caucasian countries does not exclude a somewhat “soft” alternative for imposing Russian interests upon at least some countries of the region, whether or not this corresponds to the interests of those countries. If Moscow’s policies are characterized by Russia’s historical, psychological, and other links with the former Soviet republics, any theorization in the spirit of “soft” or “limited” sovereignty of those countries is principally unacceptable for the U.S. Moreover, Americans consider that Russia must be content with more flourishing neighbors and a more stable encirclement.

Evolution of the Pivot Area

- The geopolitical situation being formed at the beginning of the twenty-first century gave new impetus to the research of the regional organization of the geopolitical and geo-economic area of the whole Eurasian continent. The concepts proposed by Halford Mackinder and, afterwards, by Nicholas Spykman are again becoming topical in this regard.
- The history of the establishment and development of a Pivot Area definitely allows us to make the conclusion regarding the permanent change of its spatial-functional parameters. The Pivot Area was extending or decreasing at different times under different imperial systems and, as a rule, stable administrative-territorial units used to emerge after collapse of those empires. At different times, the Pivot expanded or contracted within the empires that for several centuries replaced each other in its expanses. As a rule, each of them left behind stable administrative-territorial units within which the historical evolution of the Pivot Area unfolded.
- In order to achieve global development of mankind by forming a Pivot Area, it is necessary to unfailingly use the principles of compatibility, complementarity, and self-organization. As the centuries’ old history of Central Eurasia shows, Eurasian empires ultimately collapsed with

the Heartland as a united or whole geopolitical area breaking up into separate segments during the periods when it was being formed predominantly by ethno-confessional or political-ideological principals and, therefore, which operated under the principal of the leading or conquering nation ruling the conquered nations. This disrupted the existing objective interrelations amongst the main regions of the Eurasian continent.

- The certain integration potential which exists under the Pivot Area is based specifically upon the commonality of the history of the Eurasian people who lived together in almost all Eurasian empires during a long period of coexistence and intermixing. Naturally, this led to a natural closeness of cultures, languages, and economic and technological relations.

Conceptualizing “Central Caucasus-Asia”

- The fact that the Central Caucasus and Central Asia can use their potential capabilities at full scale is very important: the Central Caucasus can act as a “bridge” making Central Asia, which is geopolitically closed for the West, more accessible. It would have been naive to expect the world and the regional powers to step aside and leave Central Caucasus-Asia alone. In fact, these countries must make their choice based upon the aspirations and actions of the powers and in correspondence to their national interests.
- The establishment of understanding “Central Caucasus-Asia” is not only a more precise definition for the geographic identification of the region, but is also a conceptual view of the interests for strengthening the state sovereignty of the countries of the region which, in essence, is against the approach and ideas of Eurasianism.

In conclusion, we believe that one of the key tasks the world community will have to address in the first quarter of the 21st century is that of establishing systemic ties between the segments of Central Eurasia, or to be more exact, between the countries of Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central

Asia, along the principles of socioeconomic expediency, self-organization, and self-administration.

While taking into account the objective regularities of the joint development of the Central Eurasian states in all segments, it is also highly important to identify the contradictions among the states within one segment and among the segments themselves, and then find the shortest road to settlement. In certain cases, the volume and level of cooperation among the states in different segments of Central Eurasia is higher than that among the states of one and the same segment. For instance, the level of cooperation Central Asian Kazakhstan has with Central Caucasian Azerbaijan is much higher than the level of its cooperation with Turkmenistan, its Central Asian neighbor. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is engaged in strategic partnership with Central European Ukraine while being at war with Armenia, another Central Caucasian country.

In order to realize the integration processes in Central Eurasia, it is necessary therefore to add activity to the “initiating core” in each of the segments. This means having a group of the most economically and politically developed countries serve as the cornerstone of integration within the segment with due account of the general integration trends in the Central Eurasian region. The following countries claim the role of the initiating core in Central Eurasia: Ukraine in the Central European segment, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Central Caucasian segment, and Kazakhstan in the Central Asian segment. These countries have pushed aside intra- and inter-regional contradictions to seek the most effective ways of socioeconomic cooperation in the entire Central Eurasian region. In these terms, Central Eurasia can create its own integrated and smoothly functioning economy no matter what the skeptics say. This will probably not happen in the near future, yet integration in the region and the greater role of the “initiating cores” of the three segments testify that the Heartland’s economic and political might is reviving.

Only then will this allow Central Eurasia to ensure long-term, sustainable, and effective fulfillment of its global geopolitical and geo-economic function: integrating the relatively isolated, but large, areas of the Eurasian continent - a development that the Russian Eurasianist tradition precludes.