

Chapter XX. Ideology and Interests in Putin's Construction of Eurasia

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On 4 October 2011, the then Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin published an article in the newspaper *Izvestiya*, entitled 'A New Integration Project for Eurasia: A future which is being born today'. He announced that the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space (CES) being created by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan would be developed into a Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would join the three original members. He added, 'We are not stopping at this point and place before ourselves the ambitious task: to go to the next, higher level of integration – a Eurasian Union.'¹

While considerable work has now been done on integration in post-Soviet space, not enough has been done to understand the domestic political and geopolitical motivations for Russia's support for it. This chapter investigates what Putin means by the 'Eurasian Union', what its aims are, the context it arose in, and how seriously he takes it, and how widely it is supported. These questions are important because they can influence all of Russian foreign policy, as the spillover from Russia's relations with Ukraine and the Crimea show, and may continue to so after Putin leaves the scene. After examining Putin's concept, the chapter briefly outlines the development of Eurasianist thought in the twentieth century and why it is relevant to post-Soviet society. Next it investigates the geopolitical and domestic ideological contexts in which Putin put forward the idea of the Eurasian Union. Existing projects for Eurasian integration are mentioned, before the domestic and international impact of his proposal to deepen and broaden some of these projects is examined. The chapter suggests that for Putin, Eurasia is both a 'discursive space' and a 'geopolitical project', but it leaves to other chapters to consider whether it is or might become a 'geo-economic reality'.

Putin's proposal for a Eurasian Union

In the original article, Putin explicitly compared the integration processes around the Customs Union with those in Western Europe. He pointed out that it took 'the Europeans' 40 years for the European Coal and Steel Community to develop into the 'full European Union' (EU), but integration in the Customs Union and CES was proceeding much more quickly because they could learn from the EU experience. Putin was clearly intending that Russia and its partners would proceed through economic integration to political integration, as the European Economic Community had become the EU.

At the same time, Putin rejected from the start the idea that he was trying to revive the Soviet Union. 'It would be naïve to try to restore or copy what already remains in the past, but close integration with new values and a new political and economic basis is a demand of the times.' He continued: 'We propose a model of a powerful supranational association [*ob"edinenie*], capable of becoming one of the poles of the contemporary world and with this to play the role of an efficient link [*svyazka*] between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific Region.' The Eurasian Union would promote economic and social cooperation of its members and of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a whole, building on the shared Soviet economic and cultural legacy.

It was a project open to other partners, and firstly to CIS members; but there was to be no pressure. 'It must be a sovereign decision of the state, predicated on its own long-term national interests.' Clearly referring to Ukraine, but possibly also to Moldova, Georgia and

Armenia, Putin admitted that some ‘neighbours explain their unwillingness to participate in the proposed integration projects in post-Soviet space because they supposedly contradict their European choice.’ But ‘the Eurasian Union will be built on universal integrationist principles as an unalienable part of Greater Europe, united by the common values of freedom, democracy and the laws of the market.’ In view of what Putin proposed would be a growing dialogue between the Eurasian Union and the EU, joining the former would assist states in the process of European integration. Acting together, the Eurasian Union and the EU could work out ways of overcoming the structural problems beneath the 2008 financial crisis, in cooperation with other regional organizations around the world, and create from the Atlantic to the Pacific a space ‘harmonic in its economic nature but polycentric from the point of view of its concrete mechanisms and managerial decisions’.²

The language of Putin’s article suggested that he no longer saw Russia as an essentially European power; Europe was different from Russia. In early 2000, before his first presidential election, he had affirmed: ‘Of course, Russia is more than a diverse country, but we are part of West European culture. And this is our great value, in fact. Wherever our people live, in the Far East or the South, we are Europeans.’³ Now Putin’s Russia was seeking to lead a group of states, which followed norms which were politically and culturally different from those of the EU, into another integration process.

In September 2013 at the Valdai meeting, where Putin meets annually with Western journalists, politicians and experts on Russia, the president emphasized that the Eurasian Union would defend the individual identity of its members. ‘The future Eurasian Economic Union, which we have announced and talked about a lot recently, is not simply a collection of mutually beneficial agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of the peoples (*identichnosti narodov*) of the historical Eurasian space in a new age and a new world.’⁴ It seems here that Putin was blurring the edges between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Eurasian Union, but in any case wanted to reassure potential members about their sovereignty.

Eurasianist thought

Putin’s use of the term ‘Eurasian’, in the context of his increasingly conservative social and political view of the world, recalls the ideas of the Russian ‘Eurasianists’ of the 1920s and 1930s. This was a movement among Russian émigrés who understood that the Russian Empire could not be recreated on its former basis. In 1921 in Sofia appeared a collection of essays entitled *Iskhod k vostoku* (The Way Out [or Exodus] to the East), by Prince N.S. Trubetskoi, P.N. Savitskii, P.P. Suvchinskii and G.V. Florovskii. The authors believed that the European and Asian peoples of the former Empire and then the USSR shared an organic unity, different culturally from European or Asian culture but heavily influenced by the geography of the steppe and the autocratic traditions of Mongol rule. While they themselves were all Russian Orthodox they saw Eurasian culture as uniting peoples who were Orthodox and Muslim by religion and of Slavonic and Turkic ethnicities and languages.⁵

In the emigration these ideas influenced the historian G.V. Vernadskii and the linguist R.O. Jakobson, but in the Soviet Union itself they found their reflection in the work of the philosopher and historian Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev (1912-1992). The son of the poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, he spent much of his life in labour camps, but published his ideas in Russian samizdat and, to the extent it was possible, in officially permitted journals and books. As well as devising his own theory of the rise and fall of nations (ethnogenesis), Gumilev proclaimed his continuity with the Eurasianists in an article entitled “‘They call me a Eurasianist...’”, published in 1991 in the journal of the RSFSR

Writers' Union, *Nash sovremennik*.⁶ This was a centre of various trends of Russian nationalism. As somebody who had corresponded with Savitskii but lived long enough to see the fall of the USSR, Gumilev provided a bridge between the original Eurasianists and those of the post-Soviet period.⁷ Today, Gumilev's views are widely supported in the former Soviet Union;⁸ there is a monument to him in the centre of Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, and President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan founded a university named after him in his new capital Astana in 1996.

An important reason for the popularity of Eurasianist ideas after the fall of the Soviet Union was the need to find a new ideology in the place of Marxism-Leninism. In the early 1990s, and again at the time of the Russian financial crisis of 1998, there were real fears that the Russian Federation might follow the USSR and collapse. This was a time when Chechnia had declared independence, followed by two devastating wars, and when the largest republic inside the federation, Tatarstan, asserted its sovereignty. Already in March 1992, when Russia was experiencing the first shocks of price liberalization and barely three months into the post-Soviet era, one of the president's most liberal advisers and deputy mayor of Moscow, Sergei Stankevich, issued a call for the adoption of Eurasianism. He argued that such a belief system could hold together, in foreign policy, the Central Asian and the Slav members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); and inside Russia itself, bring together the Russian and Muslim nationalities.⁹ The idea was not taken up officially in Russia at this stage, and Stankevich himself was later sacked following allegations of corruption. President Boris El'tsin favoured Russia's integration into Western-led structures; both global institutions like the IMF and the WTO, and those based in Europe, with membership of the Council of Europe in 1996 and a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement reached with the EU in 1994 and implemented three years later. As late as 2002 the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a book by the then deputy director of its Moscow centre, Dmitrii Trenin, entitled *The End of Eurasia*. Trenin argued for 'stress[ing] Russia's European identity ... There is no longer an option of withdrawing into "Eurasia"'.¹⁰

The Communists, on the other hand, who still proclaimed the desire to restore the USSR, were more open to Eurasianist ideas. Gennadii Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, in his autobiography of 1993 quoted approvingly from Gumilev: 'The nationalism of every separate people of Eurasia (USSR) must be combined with a common Eurasian nationalism.'¹¹ It was in Kazakhstan, however, that Eurasianist ideas were adopted officially, with Nazarbaev's call in 1994 for the establishment of a Eurasian Union. In principle, the substantial size of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan and the resultant need for Nazarbaev to appease this minority and their kin-state neighbour by promoting integration with Russia would explain the adoption of Eurasianism.¹²

In Russia, as the 2002 census (the first since 1989) demonstrated, the ethnic Russian population of Russia was in decline, while the traditionally Muslim nationalities of Russia, especially in the Northern Caucasus but also in the Middle Volga, were dynamically developing. On top of this, as Russia boomed in the 2000s, uncounted millions of migrants of Muslim culture from Central Asia and Azerbaijan moved to Russia to work, most often illegally. An ideology which based itself purely on appealing to ethnic Russians or Slavs, or to adherents to Orthodoxy, would only antagonise the Muslims of Russia, forcing them towards the ideas of Islamism infiltrating from Afghanistan and the Arab world.

The context of Putin's Eurasian turn: Russia and the West

In the first years of his presidency from 31 December 1999, Putin sought cooperation with the West and right from September 2001 supported the US-led 'war on terror'. When NATO agreed in 2002 to admit the Baltic States, he expressed no alarm, saying that NATO

was not a threat. But the coloured revolutions - the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2005 – led Putin and most of the Russian political elite to believe that the EU and the West generally were interfering in Russia’s own region of influence. Putin had hoped that the defeated candidate in Ukraine’s presidential elections, Viktor Yanukovych, would implement an agreement signed in 2003 by Ukraine’s President Leonid Kuchma to establish a common economic space between Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Instead, the victors of the revolutions, presidents Yushchenko of Ukraine and Saakashvili of Georgia made clear their desire to join NATO and the EU. Moscow’s alarm intensified when in April 2008 the Bucharest summit of NATO promised both Ukraine and Georgia alliance membership. The Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 demonstrated NATO’s unwillingness or inability to defend Georgia, and put its expansion into post-Soviet space off the agenda for a long time. Dmitrii Medvedev, Russian president from May 2008 to May 2012, openly announced that Russia would defend its position in an undefined ‘sphere of privileged interests’.¹³

With NATO enlargement stymied, the European Union began to act as the main multilateral agent of Western influence in the post-Soviet states. Brussels had already in 2003 created the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to spread its influence south across the Mediterranean and further east into Europe. Russia had reacted negatively, and excluded itself from the process, but not seen it as such a major threat as NATO enlargement.¹⁴ The countries targeted by ENP had not been offered the prospect of membership; even if they sought to adopt the rules of the *acquis communautaire*, the benefits of association were not so tangible. The post-Soviet elites, in particular, were generally unable or unwilling to deliver the economic and social reform and the level of transparency that the EU expected. Following the Georgia-Russia war, the EU, on the initiative especially of Poland and Sweden, made a special pitch to six post-Soviet states: the Eastern Partnership (EaP). In the words of the European Commission, explaining the initiative: the EaP was ‘a step change in relation to these partners... *responding to the need for a clearer signal of EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia and its broader repercussions*’.¹⁵ The ‘partners’ were Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The aim was to offer them the possibility of Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the EU. In the opinion of Putin and Medvedev, whether the EU through the EaP is acting by example or economic sticks and carrots, it is acting strategically to weaken the position of Russia in the post-Soviet area.

Ukraine is by far the largest of the EaP states, and also the most important to Russia culturally, historically, economically and politically. After the Orange Revolution, Moscow not only put economic pressure on Ukraine by shutting off the gas supplies, in 2006 and 2009, but also widened the scope of its political contacts in the country, including with Tymoshenko. The victory of Yanukovych in the presidential election in February 2010 was also a major victory for Russia, effectively wiping out the consequences of the Orange Revolution. Two months later, Yanukovych signed the Kharkiv accords, allowing Russia to extend the lease for its Black Sea Fleet to have a base in Sevastopol from 2017 to 2042, in exchange for cheaper gas, and the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, withdrew Ukraine’s application for NATO membership.¹⁶

The idea of the Eurasian Union thus arose in the geopolitical context of the enlargement of Western multilateral organizations towards the post-Soviet states. In this respect it was a defensive move, to prevent such states from falling into a Western sphere of influence. As Hannes Adomeit has argued, probably the main target for the Eurasian Union is Ukraine,¹⁷ which despite extending the lease on the Sevastopol naval base has refused to join the integration projects led by Russia so far. Aside from the geopolitical factors and the geo-economic factors linked particularly with Ukraine’s status as a major country for the transit of

Russian hydrocarbons westward, the absence of Ukraine from the Eurasian Union undermines Russian conservative ideas about the historical unity of the Eastern Slavs and their Orthodox Church.

The ideological context

It is impossible to separate Putin's idea of a Eurasian Union from the wider, conservative and backward-looking elements in Putin's ideology.¹⁸ In his Internet article published just before he became acting president, he said that he was against Russia returning to an official ideology. But he argued for a 'Russian idea' (*rossiiskaya ideya*), meaning a unifying idea or concept for the whole of Russia, not simply the ethnic Russians. This would be based on four elements: patriotism; Russia being a great power; statism, or a strong state, playing an important economic role; and social solidarity.¹⁹ Putin's former chief ideologist, Vyacheslav Surkov, developed the idea of 'sovereign democracy'. This claimed that Russia was a democracy, but democracy was impossible without sovereignty, and therefore sovereignty was a prior value. From this it followed that any foreign criticism of the quality of Russian democracy or about human rights was an inadmissible intervention.

In contrast to Yel'tsin's strident anti-Communism of the 1990s, Putin has tried to reconcile the Red and the White in Russian history. He has sought to find elements of a usable past in both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. He cites the émigré conservative thinker Ivan Il'in quite frequently. At the same time he is aware of, uses and encourages the nostalgia for the USSR that has existed in Russia since soon after its collapse. Nostalgia for the Communist era is found in all the East European countries, but in Russia it is held by a majority or at least a plurality of the population, including many born after 1991. The decision at the end of 2000 to adopt the music of the Soviet state anthem for the Russian anthem, and to commission words from Sergei Mikhalkov, who had supplied texts for the anthem to both Stalin and Brezhnev, was symbolic. Furthermore, the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany is celebrated on 9 May under Putin and Medvedev as fervently as under Brezhnev.

Putin does not, however, call for the restoration of the Soviet Union. 'He who does not regret the break-up of the Soviet Union has no heart; he who wants to revive it in its previous form has no head.'²⁰ In his address to the Federal Assembly in 2005, Putin said: '...the fall of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. For the Russian people [again, *rossiiskogo*, in the non-ethnic sense – the people of Russia as a whole] it was a real drama. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory.'²¹ It should be remembered that what is officially the largest opposition party in Russia, the Communist Party, and the fourth largest party in the State Duma, Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, both promise to recreate a union or an Empire, respectively. Both refer to bringing together the ethnic Russian people, in one state – a point which Putin does not make in relation to the Eurasian Union.

Since 2000, there have been a number of nationalist ideologists seeking Putin's ear. Most widely known as the founder of the contemporary Eurasianist movement is Aleksandr Dugin. His voluminous treatises on geopolitics are widely reprinted and studied.²² Although reported to having been influential with the Russian General Staff, and now a sociology professor at Moscow State University, it is difficult to estimate his direct influence on the regime.²³ His belief in the perennial, civilizational conflict of values and interests between the maritime powers led by the USA and UK against the powers of the Eurasian 'heartland' led by Russia has by no means become an axiom of the Kremlin. Rather, Russia has emphasized the aim, in the words of the 2013 foreign policy concept, of promoting 'a constructive dialogue and partnership between civilizations'.²⁴ It is true that a book by Igor' Kefeli of the Baltic State Technological University 'Voenmekh' in Putin's native St

Petersburg, published in 2012, emphasized the geopolitical advantages to Russia of the Eurasian Union.²⁵ Putin, however, has avoided this aspect; the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which is broader than the existing Customs Union, is seen as Russia's principal military alliance, and Putin does not draw parallels between the Eurasian Union and NATO in the way that he does with the EU.

Nevertheless, in practice, since the coloured revolutions, the Russian leadership has felt that it and the other authoritarian regimes of the post-Soviet states have been under attack from liberal and democratic ideas from the West which aim at their overthrow. The Kremlin has therefore sought to show solidarity with the dictatorships in Belarus and most of Central Asia, and the other post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, in resisting the threat of revolution.²⁶ Integration projects such as the Eurasian Union are, in the final analysis, pursued first and foremost in the interests of the states themselves and their political leaders, rather than in the interests of any other class or group within these states, although these projects undoubtedly benefit specific economic sectors.

Integration projects before the Eurasian Union

Under Yel'tsin, many agreements were signed to increase economic integration within the CIS, but they remained only on paper. Generally, Russia was unable or unwilling to pay subsidies to the other former Soviet republics to the extent that they would be prepared to give up their new-found sovereignty.²⁷ At times it seemed that the 'Community of Sovereign Republics' formed in 1996 with Lukashenka's Belarus, which in 1999 had become in words a 'Union State' or perhaps a 'Federal State' [*Soyuznoe gosudarstvo*], might develop into a real cooperation project, but it was mainly used in Russia as an electoral boost for Yel'tsin. He might claim, not very convincingly, to be 'gathering the lands' again. When Moscow feared that Lukashenka might use the Union structures to take control of Russia, agreements were unwound.²⁸

From 2000, Putin took a more business-like approach to integration, as to other aspects of foreign policy, than Yel'tsin had. He focused on creating groups of smaller numbers of CIS states which were more committed to cooperation with Russia than the others such as GUAM were. Putin clearly hoped that the success of these projects would ultimately win Ukraine back into Russia's sphere of influence. The foreign policy concepts of the Russian Federation of 2000, 2008 and 2013 all placed the countries of the CIS first in the list of areas of regional cooperation. While the 2000 concept began with the need to harmonize Russia's cooperation with CIS states to Russia's national security priorities, the later documents put more emphasis on economic cooperation.²⁹ The pressures for integration were not only ideological, but reflected real state and elite security and economic interests. The emphasis on security in 2000 reflected not only fears about NATO, whose new Strategic Concept widening the scope of its potential activity was criticised in the document, as the threat of international terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and the need to cooperate with CIS states against it. This was a time when Islamist ideas had replaced nationalism as the main ideology of the most dangerous of the Chechen rebels. In economic terms, the desire for integration came from the desire of Russian state and private business corporations to have access to the markets and raw materials of the former Soviet republics. This was particularly the case in energy, where Russia sought to hold on to its position as the main transit route for Caspian oil and gas supply to Europe, and prevent Caspian energy supplies from competing with Russian energy on foreign markets.³⁰

In October 2000, five months after Putin's inauguration as president, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) was announced. Composed of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, this seems to have been the first significant

state association in which the term Eurasian was used. (Uzbekistan joined in 2005 but suspended its membership in 2008.) EurAsEC has been the basis for the subsequent economic integration initiatives of the Putin era. The organization for defence co-operation, the CSTO was established in 2003 with the same membership as the original EurAsEC, plus Armenia; Uzbekistan joined in 2006. The CSTO did not act to prevent the ethnic violence which erupted between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, despite a call from Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva for Russian intervention. Since then Russia has sought to increase the utility of the organization.³¹

Within EurAsEC, the plans of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan to form a Customs Union in 2010 and a Common Economic Space in 2012 were officially implemented. The operational management structure is headed by a nine-member Eurasian Economic Commission comprising three members from each of the three countries. Decisions are made by consensus or by a two-thirds majority; theoretically Russia could be outvoted by the other two members, but this would undoubtedly provoke (or reflect) a crisis.³² Russia's expectation has been that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will also join the Customs Union in due course. It is indicative of Putin's own commitment to the Customs Union that while prime minister, prior to the invitation in December 2011 to Russia to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), he had publicly argued that Russia should join only together with its partners in the Customs Union. Medvedev rejected this, however,³³ and Russia joined the WTO in 2012. The dispute indicated clear differences of priority between the two, with Medvedev reflecting the interests of those sectors of the Russian economy who had more to gain from accession.

The impact of the Eurasian Union proposal

Putin's call on 4 October 2011 for a Eurasian Union came in the immediate political context of the 2011-2012 electoral cycle. Medvedev had announced on 24 September that Putin would be the United Russia candidate for the presidency in 2012, dashing any hopes that Medvedev himself would continue in the role or that there might be a public discussion about the candidate. It seemed that Putin saw the Eurasian Union as a slogan or project which might garner support for United Russia in the State Duma elections and his own presidential candidacy. On 16 November United Russia held a Round Table at the State Duma under the heading 'For the Union' in support of the idea. The Duma speaker and one of the main leaders of United Russia, Boris Gryzlov, specifically referred to the experience of coexistence of Christians and Muslims in post-Soviet space, contrasting this with problems in the EU in this area. Aleksei Pushkov, head of the 'TV Centre' channel, emphasized the geopolitical necessity of the Eurasian Union. Dmitrii Rogozin, Russia's ambassador to NATO, said that the Union should be 'about the gathering, not so much of the lands, as the peoples and citizens into a single state body'.³⁴ (It may not be coincidental that both Pushkov and Rogozin soon received promotions; Pushkov to be chair of the International Affairs Committee of the State Duma, and Rogozin to deputy prime minister, indicating their closeness to Putin.) A meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council composed of the three presidents, Lukashenka, Nazarbaev and Medvedev, on 18 November promised to 'strive to complete' the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union by 1 January 2015, but failed to mention Putin's concept of the Eurasian Union itself.³⁵

The Eurasian Union did not resonate with the Russian public as much as Putin hoped. Concerns about the millions of immigrants (known as *gastarbeitery*) working in the main Russian cities had already led to racial tension and clashes. In his pre-election article on ethnic relations in January 2012, Putin sought to assuage these concerns. He argued that the reason for immigration from the Caucasus and Central Asia into Russia was the levels of

inequality existing between the different states. He argued that the Eurasian Union would be an instrument to reduce this inequality.³⁶

After Putin's election as president in March 2012, the Eurasian Union received less attention in public discourse. While the February 2013 foreign policy concept mentioned the Eurasian Economic Union twice, in a long section on cooperation within the CIS, it did not mention the Eurasian Union as such at all. Nevertheless, Putin was committed to its creation. The EU failed to appreciate how intent Putin was in making the Eastern Partnership fail. At the beginning of 2013, the European Commission still hoped that at the Vilnius summit in November, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia would sign up to Association Agreements with the EU, and Ukraine and others would possibly initial Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements also. Negotiations with Ukraine had gone on for eight years. In August Medvedev, then prime minister, even made overtures to Georgia. He told Georgian Rustavi 2 television, "Georgia should be interested in joining the Eurasian Union, because it is a neighbour of Russia."³⁷ The previous October, Saakashvili's United National Movement had been defeated by Georgian Dream, a party created by a Georgian billionaire, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who had made his fortune in Russia and promised to improve relations with Moscow. In September 2013 Prime Minister Ivanishvili in effect responded to Medvedev's invitation by refusing to rule out Georgia joining the Eurasian Union, provided that it did not impede Georgia's course towards the EU and NATO and that it would not be dominated by Russia.³⁸

Both the EU and Russia made it clear that, for any country, signing an Association Agreement would be incompatible with membership of the Customs Union.³⁹ In September 2013, however, Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan announced that the country was seeking to join the Customs Union. This came immediately after meeting Putin in Moscow. Russia had earlier in the year sold a billion dollars' worth of arms to Azerbaijan, even though the latter had threatened the use of force against the unrecognized Armenian-backed state of Nagorny Karabakh. Russia had reportedly threatened to sell better arms to Azerbaijan if Armenia signed the agreements with the EU. Sargsyan cited Armenia's security interests and its membership of the CSTO in explaining his decision.⁴⁰ In November, just a week before the Vilnius summit, following threats from Russia to cut its trade with Ukraine and a meeting with Putin in Moscow, Yanukovich announced that Ukraine would postpone signing the agreements with the EU.⁴¹ Only Georgia and Moldova initialled Association Agreements. Brussels' strategy was 'in tatters'.⁴² Putin promised Ukraine aid of 15 billion dollars if it dropped the EU agreements.⁴³

On 24 December, a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, now comprising Lukashenka, Nazarbaev and Putin, was joined by the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, Almazbek Atambaev and Sargsyan, and the Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. A road map for Armenia's joining the Customs Union and the CES was signed, symbolizing the potential for enlargement of the Eurasian Economic Union.⁴⁴ But a revolution in Kyiv in February 2014 led to the overthrow of Yanukovich and the installing of a pro-Western regime, signalling a setback to Putin's plans for Ukraine. The revolution illustrated the top-down nature of the whole Eurasian integration project, suggesting it exists to serve the interests of political elites who lack democratic mandates rather than the populations of the member states.

Conclusion

For Putin, Eurasia is clearly both a 'discursive space' and a 'geopolitical project'. The Eurasian Union is much more than a slogan for the 2011-2 electoral cycle, although it certainly was that at the time. It has continuing relevance as a means to resist the efforts of

the EU (and indeed NATO, if that were to become a factor again) to expand further into the former Soviet Union. Equally it might defend Russian interests against encroachment from China in Central Asia. It is important ideologically, internally and externally. Internally, it appeals to Soviet nostalgia while promoting authoritarian and conservative values, in a way which is not restricted to the ethnic Russian population as traditional Russian nationalism was, but may appeal to the growing ethnic groups of traditionally Muslim culture in Russia. Externally, it offers to the regimes of other post-Soviet states an alternative to liberal democracy: state sovereignty is emphasized, internal critics can be silenced and the state plays an important role in the economy. As was seen at the Vilnius summit, while Russia is still benefiting from high energy prices, and has the resources to subsidize its neighbours and buy the loyalty of their elites, the process of Eurasian integration may develop. The revolution in Ukraine shows, however, that the stability of these elites cannot be taken for granted.

¹ V.V. Putin, 'Novyi integratsionnyi proekt dlya Evrazii: budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnya', *Izvestiya*, 4 October 2011, website of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/16622/print>, accessed 19 January 2012.

² All quotations from the above..

³ *Ot pervogo litsa. Razgovory s Vladimirom Putinyim*, Moscow: Vagrius, 2000, pp. 155-6.

⁴ 'Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba "Valdai"', 19 September 2013, President of Russia website, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/19243/print>, accessed 14 February 2014.

⁵ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, 'The Emergence of Eurasianism' *California Slavic Studies*, 4, 1967, 39-72; Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

⁶ L. Gumilev, "'Menya nazyvayut evraziitsem ...'", *Nash sovremennik*, 1991, No. 1, pp. 132-41.

⁷ Vjačeslav Ermolaev and Aleksandr Titov, 'Istoriya neskol'kikh zabluzhdenii', *Revue des Études slaves*, 76, 4, 2005, 499-510.

⁸ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 50-5.

⁹ Sergei Stankevich, 'Derzhava v poiskakh sebya', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 March 1992.

¹⁰ Dmitrii Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*, (Washington, DC and Moscow: Carnegie, 2002), pp. 311, 312.

¹¹ Gennadii Zyuganov, *Drama vlasti. Stranitsy politicheskoi avtobiografii*, (Moscow: Paleya, 1993), p. 177.

¹² Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 171-88, which argues that in reality from the late-1990s internal Kazakh Eurasianism tended to take an anti-Russian form.

¹³ 'Interv'yu Dmitriya Medvedeva telekanalam "Rossiya", Pervomu, NTV', Sochi, 31 August 2008, President of Russia website, <http://president.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2008/08/205991.shtml>, accessed 1 September 2008.

¹⁴ Hiski Haukkala, 'Russian Reactions to the European Neighbourhood Policy', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55, 5, September–October 2008, 40-8.

¹⁵ *Eastern Partnership, Communication for the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM [2008] 823/4, 3 December 2008, as cited in Derek Averre, 'Competing Rationalities: Russia, the EU and the "Shared Neighbourhood"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61, 10, December 2009, 1689-1713 (1694). Emphasis in the original document.

- ¹⁶ James Sherr, 'The Mortgaging of Ukraine's Independence', August 2010, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Briefing Paper, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/109440>, accessed 3 April 2013.
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