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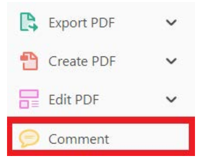

1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.

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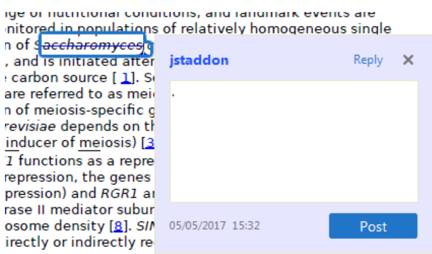

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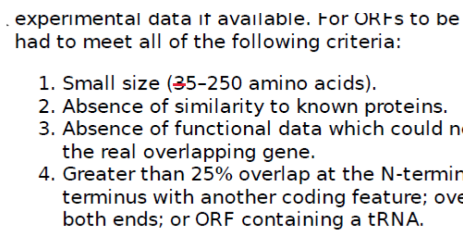

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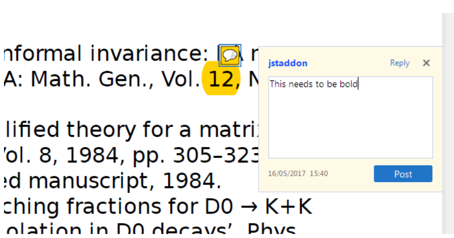

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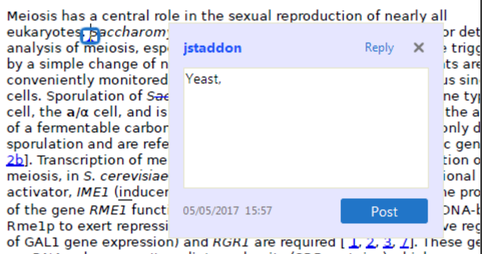

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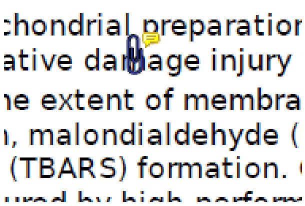

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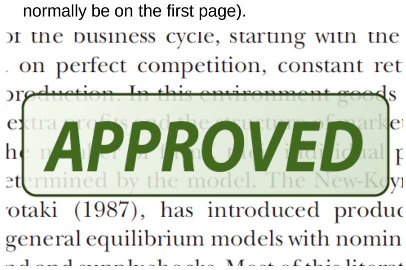

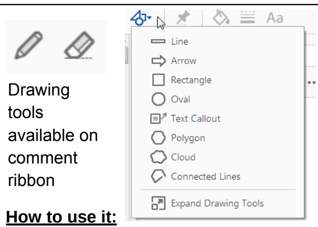

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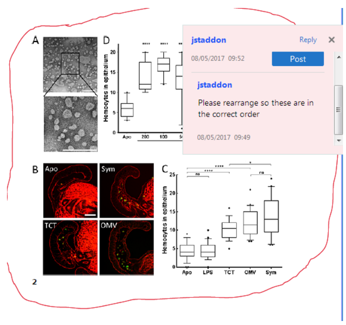

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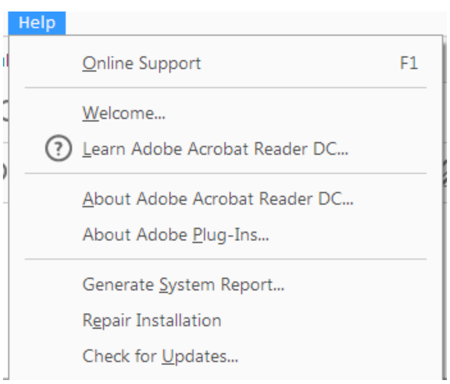

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The Eurasian Economic Union and the Integration Process in the Asia Pacific

Anastasia Likhacheva*

Since 2015, the Eurasian Economic Commission has become a key agent of Russian external trade policy and the policy of connecting with China's Silk Road Economic Belt initiative. It has been responsible for all of Russia's current free trade negotiations, and in the future may encompass wider frames of international economic cooperation. However, because of its short track record, the Eurasian Economic Commission is not very well studied in Russia or abroad. This article analyzes the current international exchanges between the Commission and Asian countries, and attempts to study other formats of cooperation with Asian actors where the Commission can be involved in the future according to its mandate. Our study reveals that bilateral exchanges remain dominant between the EAEU and Asian partners, and a switch to multilateral tracks like EAEU-ASEAN or EAEU-RCEP can occur only in the medium-term future. Both the analysis of open negotiations and of the Commission's organizational resources prove this hypothesis.

Key words: Asian integration, EAEU, EEC, Greater Eurasia, Pivot to Asia

An Environment for an EAEU Cooperative Agenda in Asia

Since the global financial crisis of 2007–2009, all the Asian powers, both rising and already well established, have initiated or supported some large-scale infrastructure projects in the region and have launched or joined various regional integration formats. ASEAN has significantly advanced integration, connectivity, and infrastructure development through the Connectivity Blueprint and the ASEAN Economic Community. The diversity of integrative agenda-setting in Eurasia has drastically expanded since 2013. First, an American-led was launched

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(in 2017, the United States quit the Trans Pacific Partnership [TPP], but other participants demonstrate a desire to continue with this framework); ASEAN and its ASEAN+ partners initiated the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade negotiations. RCEP, what is more, has the capacity to become one of the largest trading blocs in the world (Kimura et al., 2010; Lewis, 2013) and at the same time is most attractive as an EAEU multilateral partner (Knobel & Sedalishchev, 2017; Lissovolik, 2017).

Experts widely agree that ASEAN's regional integration projects and China's One Belt, One Road (now called the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]) initiative are complementary and have tremendous potential (Fukunaga & Ikumo, 2013; Pitlo, 2015). Since 2015, China has placed its BRI project in the center of its foreign economic policy and made it part of its cultural diplomacy, economic and energy security policies, and internal strategic development. Korea's President Pak officially launched a Eurasia Initiative in 2013. India started to position itself as a Eurasian power (a step beyond the traditional scope limited by Southern Asia) and proposed an idea of a new North-South corridor—a cross-Eurasian trade route.

The Eurasian Economic Union since 2015 has become an essential supranational framework for Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Kirgizstan. Subsequently, Russia made the Greater Eurasian framework a cornerstone of its regional foreign policy as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has recently confirmed at the Russia-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Singapore on August 2, 2018 (MID RF, 2018).

These Asian-led projects stand to benefit ASEAN and East Asia significantly, while their impact on and connection to the Russian Pivot to Asia Policy, the Greater Eurasia policy, and the relations of the EAEU with Asian countries and blocks varies from moderate to almost minimal. To boost ties and connectivity, all actors will be required to move beyond the previous agenda and structure of political and economic relations and look toward the future possibilities and opportunities that may arise from Russia-EAEU-Asian cooperation.

This article argues that, currently, the bilateral track remains dominant between EAEU and Asian partners and a switch to multilateral tracks like EAEU-ASEAN or EAEU-RCEP can occur only in the mid-term future. One of the main aims of the article is to present one of the first attempts of a comprehensive list of opportunities and projects that have already existed or can be established within these tracks.

In the following sections, we briefly present the current environment for cooperation in Asia; i.e., the external conditions for integration policies between EAEU and external partners; we then analyze the existing achievements on EAEU-Asia track (mostly FTZ with Vietnam) and open negotiation tracks with four Asian powers (China, India, Singapore, South Korea). Then, we steer the discussion toward the possible areas of cooperation—mostly in infrastructure and finance, concerning new possible competences of the Commission. The final section focuses on medium and long-term prospects for the multilateral dialogues between the Commission and ASEAN and RCEP.

While most of the projects and negotiation activities are rather new, we provide brief descriptions based on open sources, as well as regular communication with members of the Commission within research projects conducted by the National

Research University–Higher School of Economics (HSE; in 2017, these included: a series of executive seminars with Commission ministers and heads of departments, participation of HSE experts in the Research Council of the Commission, joint sessions at the April Conference of HSE, Eastern Economic Forum, etc.). The data used in the analysis comprise official documents, strategy plans, official statements of the policymakers, and business news sources.

The purpose of this article is not to give a definitive diagnosis on the degree of cooperation between EAEU and Asian countries, but to present a visionary approach to how to develop different formats of this cooperation and to which extent this cooperation could contribute to Pivot to Asia policy of the Russian Federation. In doing so, the conclusion proposes several approaches toward building new ties between EAEU and Asian countries and defines some time horizons for more sophisticated forms of cooperation—among EAEU, ASEAN, or RCEP.

An analysis of vital socioeconomic indicators confirms that the integration processes in Asia are objective phenomena, often overcoming even profound political differences between the countries of the region. As part of this broader regional trend, Asia is shifting from the “Asia for the world” and “Factory Asia” models (Baldwin, 2013) and transitioning to an “Asia for Asia” model (Bordachev, Likhacheva, & Xin, 2014). As a result, the balances of the intraregional trade and traditional North-South trade patterns have sharply shifted (Ando, 2006).

Leading Asian economies are trying to compensate for the slowdown in growth rates due to trade liberalization measures, which only spurs regionalization. Such acceleration and consolidation of integration processes in the countries of Asia have direct consequences for their partners (Kanaev & Korolev, 2016). A consistent policy with regard to these integration processes is virtually the only alternative for countries wishing to enter the markets of the region and attract investments from Asia.

For Russia, as the leader and founder of its integration project, the EAEU, the principal agent for such a policy is the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), which is responsible for the common trade policy of the Union. In the future, based on the functionalist logic of the integration process, we can expect a rising number of spillovers and gradual expansion of its powers to other areas of integration cooperation—regulation, investment, transport, and infrastructure, and in the long-term period, energy. Some of these areas have already been included in official agendas and even road maps of the EEC, but remain far from being brought into life.

The EEC as an Agent of the Russian Economic Integration Agenda in Asia

This article unifies two close but not integral elements of Russian foreign policy in Asia: first, the “Turn, or Pivot to the East” policy and, second, the Eurasian integration project. Experts differ on pinpointing the start of the Pivot: either it started in 2012 with the establishment of the Ministry for Development of the Russian Siberia and Far East (subsequently Siberia was excluded from the Ministry’s competencies) and preparations for the APEC summit in Vladivostok (Karaganov, 2017)—or once the anti-Russian western sanctions had been imposed (Filippov, 2016). However, the real agenda of the Pivot remains the key issue (for a comprehensive analysis of the Pivot policy see research conducted by Alexander Lukin (2016a, 2016b).

For now, the political results of the Pivot policy remain much more persuasive than the economic dimension of the Asian policy of the Russian Federation. However, an export-oriented framework is a cornerstone of Russian trade policy in Asia. In the "Foreign Economic Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020," the promotion of exports and the achievement of global competitiveness have been clearly prioritized (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation [MED RF], 2008).

On the economic track, i.e., trade liberalization, FTZ agreements, trade, and customs regulation, the principal agent of Russian activity in Asia was appointed in 2014—and it is the EEC—one of two key executive institutions of the Eurasian Economic Union (the second one is the Eurasian Court). As a member of EAEU, Russia cannot conduct its trade negotiations with other countries. This mandate lies with the supranational body—the EEC, according to the Treaty on the EAEU (Eurasiancomission.org, 2014).

The EEC is the chief negotiator with Asian countries in the framework of trade liberalization. As Veronika Nikishina, EEC's Minister of Trade, exhorts,

> do not mix national and supranational competencies. For example, we are talking about a free trade agreement, the result of which is the reduction of duties, and hence—simplified access to the markets of our partners. Because these are supranational competencies, no country can conduct such negotiations individually. We have a single tariff on the external contour, so we can only conduct agreements that relate to the liberalization of duties. … Other aspects of cooperation cannot be ignored, for example, tourism. Negotiations in these areas should not stop or be contrasted with the supranational level. (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017a).

Nowadays, in line with its mandate and the established practice of intergovernmental cooperation in the EAEU, the EEC can promote Russian interests within the logic of the Pivot to Asia in many areas:

1. Negotiations on free trade zones with an emphasis on trade, but not mixed-type negotiations.

2. Reduction of non-tariff barriers, especially for agricultural products and food products, increasing information transparency in trade relations between countries.

3. Promotion of Russian investment projects during negotiations with international partners of the EEC and reduction of trade barriers in exchange for investments, i.e., removal of certain tariff or non-tariff barriers in exchange for investment in specific projects (for a detailed review of open negotiation tracks see below).

4. Consolidation of the special economic status of the border areas. The EEC can facilitate the conclusion of preferential and nonpreferential trade and economic agreements, which detail the mechanisms for cooperation with the border areas (through sections on cross-border trade, on priority cooperation in the region, on specific sectoral cooperation).

5 Protection of the domestic market. In many Russian industries, concerns about the influx of cheaply imported analogs remain very strong. That is why the rapid liberalization of trade with Asian countries along the Chinese-led mode, i.e., when the partner country of the free trade agreement (FTA) removes tariff protection for a larger number of product lines than China, is met with a lot of negative anticipations in Russia despite clear advantages of similar free trade zones (FTZs) for exporters to China and opportunity to apply "sensitive categories" for decades.

6 Promotion of business-to-business contacts due to negotiations. The EEC can support trade dialogues by business weeks and forums and cooperate with export agencies of member states.

7 Promotion of transport, tourism, and other services, as the EEC has the authority to conduct negotiations not only in the framework of trade cooperation, but also in the area of international regulation of services.

8 Promotion of a playground for negotiation on visa regulation and residence regime for foreign workers, etc.

These options represent the current capacity of the EEC within its existing powers. Thus, the principal issues of Russia's interaction with Asian-like trade liberalization and, in the long term, participation in mega-regional trade agreements directly depend on the effectiveness of interaction among Russia, the EEC, and the countries of Asia within this negotiating triangle and not in two isolated negotiation "rooms."

Key Tracks of Cooperation with Asian Countries and Blocks

EAEU Track Record as of 2018

Until 2014, the main partners of the EvrAsEC (a customs predecessor of the EAEU) for trade consultations were EFTA and New Zealand (Izotov, 2013; Vinokourov, 2014; Vinokourov et al., 2016), with no Asian country as a partner in mind. However, since an acute crisis in relations between Russia and the West began, followed by series of mutual sanctions, the focus of the Commission has shifted to Asia, and the EEC has intensified its external activities (Yastreb, 2016). The first achievement in that direction was the agreement on the FTA with Vietnam, signed on May 29, 2015.

Today, Vietnam is Russia's key trade partner in ASEAN and the country whose exports to Russia are the most diversified. The FTA between the EAEU and Vietnam is currently the primary channel for trade and investment integration in ASEAN for Russia and the EAEU; the degree of its success to a large extent will define future negotiations with other countries of the Association. Given that Russia's accession to any TTP reincarnation or alternative U.S.-centric mega-regional trade agreement is hardly possible and expedient, and the role of ASEAN in RCEP is hard to overestimate, creation of an FTA with ASEAN at first glance appears to be the logical next step for Russia's integration into trade and economic cooperation in Asia.

The essence of the EAEU-Vietnam FTA agreement is to consolidate the mutual obligations of its participants to simplify the access to their commodities markets (Eurasiancommission.org, 2015). The agreement intends to reduce customs duties for the commodity items included in the turnover structure by 88%, 59% of which will be reduced immediately, and another 29% in 5–10 years. By 2025, the average level of Vietnamese imports duties for goods from the EAEU countries will decrease from 10 to 1%, and in the EAEU, it will reach 2% for Vietnamese goods. In practice, this means that initially, the terms of the Treaty will not have an immediate effect on the economies of the countries involved: real results will only be visible after a few years (Eurasiancommission.org, 2016a).

Besides trade, the agreement covers, or at least mentions, such areas of cooperation as services, mutual investment, movement of labor, and the exchange of technology, but only for Russia and Vietnam. Other countries of the EAEU, if they express willingness to join, will be able to do so in the future, while an agreement with Vietnam for the trade in goods will be mandatory for all members of the EAEU.

To date, the primary export items from Russia to Vietnam are weapons, engineering products, mineral fuel, fertilizers, and chemicals. Vietnam's export to Russia is dominated by electronics, apparel and footwear, and food. The structure of trade with Vietnam more or less coincides with Russian trade with most partners in Asia: most of Russia's exports to Vietnam, namely, all products of the military-industrial complex and a significant part of the mineral fuels, are supplied under state contracts and in no way depend on the FTA. That fact contributed heavily to a relatively cooperative approach of the Russian side during EAEU negotiations.

Many other types of goods, prevailing in the trade turnover of the two countries, were listed as "sensitive." On the Vietnamese side, these are the products of the textile and food industry, mainly coffee, tea, sugar, some types of canned vegetables, starch, and instant drinks. From the Russian side, these include steel rolling and machine sets. The current duty on the latter exceeds 70%. Also, the duty will be preserved for some types of Russian meat products and confectionery products.

Some traded goods will be subject to quotas following the agreement. In particular, it is stipulated that only 10,000 tons of Vietnamese long-grain rice per year will not be levied. The usual duty will be applied to the rice imported in excess of this volume.

According to the EAEU (Eurasiancommission.org, 2015), the abolition of customs duties could lead to an increase in the export of agricultural products from EAEU to Vietnam: meat (poultry, sausages), dairy products (cheese, butter), wheat, flour, and cereal seeds. In the industrial sector, producers of precious stones, tires, asbestos, pipes, rolled metal, ships, mechanical and electronic equipment, parts for automobiles, steel products, agricultural machinery, buses, cars, trucks, and oil products will benefit. Savings on duties for exporters of the EAEU may amount to about $40 million in the first year of the agreement's operation and $55–60 million annually after all transitional periods. However, it is too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness. Trade and economic cooperation with Vietnam will take several years to begin.

The agreement does not solve the issue of admission of the Vietnamese labor force to the Russian market, but at least confirms Russia's interest in an active dialogue on this topic. The very solution of the migration issue is associated with a change in the fundamental principles of Russia's immigration policy. The issue of public procurement is far from finalized. The parties plan to mitigate the risks through a consultation mechanism, but it makes any estimation of its future effectiveness quite vague.

For Vietnam, the agreement with the EAEU is only one in a series of many others. Vietnam is a participant in more than 15 multilateral and bilateral FTAs, some of which are already in place, and others are at the negotiation stage. In May 2015, Vietnam signed an FTA with the Republic of Korea; in December 2015, Hanoi concluded FTA negotiations with the EU, and the text was finalized at a bilateral meeting in Brussels on July 25, 2018, and is expected to enter into force in 2018. Thus, the agreement with the EAEU is not something exclusive for Vietnam; it is needed to support the producers of specific industries, and also as an additional step for the transformation of Vietnam into the most open economy of Southeast Asia (after Singapore).

For Russia, the FTA with Vietnam is a window into ASEAN and it has also been promoted as a counter-Western measure attaining diversification of trade partners. Russia is gradually discovering this market: according to Rosstat, in 2014, there was a sharp jump in exports to the countries of the Association to $10 billion, primarily because of a steep increase in the supply of mineral fuel to Singapore (3.2 times), Thailand (2.3 times), and Indonesia (almost 5 times). In 2015, against the backdrop of the fall in oil prices, Russia's export to ASEAN fell to just above 2008 levels of $5.3 billion, but it coincided with some strengthening of nonprimary sectors (ships, land vehicles [except for railroad cars and trams], defense products, tobacco, some types of equipment, aluminum, fertilizers, copper, rubber, and ores). As a result, growth was already visible in 2016—the exports amounted to $5.5 billion. The structure of exports did not evolve significantly. However, in the field of cooperation between public authorities, some progress has already been achieved (Fedorov, 2018).

Open Bilateral Tracks

At the beginning of 2018, the EAEU had the following open country tracks:

- Negotiations with China on an agreement on trade and economic cooperation (nonpreferential trade and economic agreement, which do not lead to the establishment of an FTA);
- Negotiations on the FTA with India;
- Negotiations on the FTA with Singapore;
- Working consultations with the Republic of Korea on the FTA;
- Negotiations with Iran on a transformation of an interim agreement to a permanent FTA;
- Negotiations with Israel and the FTA on the unification of the trade regime and the FTA with Serbia.

The formats of these negotiations differ, but all of them to some extent cover the economic dimension of the Russian policy of the Pivot to Asia. Progress on these agreements also varies considerably. Negotiations with Iran are in the final phase, and it is expected that in 2018–2019 a permanent FTA agreement will be signed. The main text of the future agreement with China is elaborated and the agreement is expected to be signed quite soon (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017b). Another working group on the FTA with Singapore was opened and since the end of 2017, negotiations have been announced on the FTA with India.

The process of decision making as to the start of trade negotiations at the Commission level has already been operationalized. As the EAEU Trade Minister Veronica Nikishina points out:

> It is important to understand: before asking our presidents to give a mandate for negotiations with a country, a joint research group necessarily studies the benefits and risks for the Union and each of the member-states. Only if the working group confirms that the benefits are greater than the risks do we go with a request for negotiations. All seven tracks are open after thorough research, which showed that all the countries of the Union would benefit from these negotiations. (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017a)

China

China is both a key trade and investment partner for the EAEU countries and Russia's strategic partner, who shares common views on a wide range of international political issues. At the moment, the conceptual framework for economic cooperation between the Union and China is a joint statement on the conjunction of the development of the EAEU and BRI, put forward by the leaders of Russia and China on May 8, 2015 (Kremlin.ru, 2015).

EEC was nominated as the chief operator from the EAEU side, and, in coordination with national agencies, it has had to fulfill the conjunction framework with real projects and initiatives. One such step should be an agreement on trade and economic cooperation.

The EAEU and China agreed on the preparation of a comprehensive trade and economic agreement as early as May 2016, and in June 2016 the Minister of Trade of the EEC Veronika Nikishina and the Minister of Commerce of China Gao Hucheng signed a joint statement on the transition to negotiations; the first round was held in mid-October 2016 (Eurasiancomission.org, 2016b). The central issue on the agenda was the discussion of the establishment of a Greater Eurasian Economic Partnership with the participation of the EAEU countries, India, China, and Pakistan, with the possibility of involvement of other countries. It is assumed that the first step of establishing this space could be an agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the EAEU and China, which was planned to be prepared within two years and in October 2017, both sides declared conclusion of negotiations on the text of an agreement. For a more detailed analysis of EAEU and China cooperation, see Lukin (2018a, 2018b) and Svetlicinii (2018). The parties have presented a common understanding of the type of this agreement and the range of key topics that it will cover—China's agreement with the EAEU will be a nonpreferential trade agreement (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017b). Establishing a FTZ with China is currently not planned, although in the medium term this issue may have to be reconsidered, especially given China's persistent interest in the creation of a FTZ. The necessity to address the issue of a FTZ will also arise in the transition to the negotiations on the RCEP, where most of the participating countries are tied with a network of FTA agreements, allowing them to include more complex integration and regulatory items in the negotiation agenda on RCEP.

However, due to the lack of interest from Russia and other EAEU member states in FTA with the PRC in the short term, the regulation of tariff barriers in either this agreement or in other negotiating initiatives with China is not worthwhile. Moreover, the conducted analysis (Izotov, 2015; Likhacheva & Kalachihin, in press) proved those tariff barriers exert an extremely limited influence on Russian exports to the PRC due to a specific export structure with a high share of raw materials and hydrocarbons. Therefore, the main directions for extended dialogue on trade between the EEC and China could be confined to nontariff barriers. The main areas that heavily depend on China's nontariff rules include agriculture, food industry, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and mechanical goods.

Therefore, we can expect that the main "added value" of the agreement for the EAEU countries could be China's readiness to disclose some information on the regulation of the domestic market, while for Russia a number of aspects may be of particular interest. It is also highly likely that this agreement will be only the first step in conjunction with the EAEU and BRI, so a list of specific subjects can already be drafted now:

- First, a section with prospective investment projects can be useful in this or any future agreements;
- Second, it may be appropriate to include a section on cross-border economic cooperation. This is important as an opportunity to promote a "special solution" for trade regulation in the export-oriented Far Eastern region of Russia, which is less concerned with protecting the domestic market than other players in the EAEU;
- Undoubtedly, the clarification of the information that the EAEU ask China for regulating the domestic market is also of interest. The latter will increase the awareness of the Russian exporters on the terms of access to the Chinese market.
- An important long-term priority is the inclusion of transport and logistics projects in the wider context of EAEU and BRI cooperation, and not simply listing such projects as opportunities for cooperation.

As for such an important format of cooperation as the Russian-Chinese transport corridors, these will still develop through national dialogues. The issue of transferring the power to formulate the transport agenda to the EEC in relation to foreign partners, primarily China, remains open (the infrastructural dimension of the cooperation will be discussed later in this article).

India

Officially, the start of negotiations on the FTA with India was announced on June 3, 2017, under the auspices of the Petersburg Economic Forum. However, due to the fact that India is to some extent a difficult negotiating partner and traditionally demonstrates a certain degree of slowness (Israel and India have closed negotiations after an extended study of the feasibility of the FTA; the agreement on the FTA with Australia was also slipping as of December 2017), a vibrant dynamic of the negotiation process on this track is not expected in the near future.

The primary interest for India and the common project with the countries of the EAEU is the North-South International Transport Corridor, but the issue of embedding this item in trade negotiations is still open (more detailed description of this project is provided later in this article). Said embedding is extremely important, as the regulation of access of promising goods is directly related to the effective implementation of the corridor project, filling it with not only transit, but also regional cargo from the corridor countries.

However, regardless of the dynamics of the negotiations on the FTA, today we can list a number of priorities in the negotiations with India based on the preliminary feasibility studies and analyses of existing barriers in trade with India for Russian goods and services:

- Promotion of exports of cereal products is of particular interest in this regard because, currently, Russia does very little trade with India, which levies a high duty onto cereals.
- Removal of tariffs on fish and fish products (which are now one of the largest in Asia—about 30%).
- Removal of tariffs on forest products (tariffs on the entire timber group), abolition of anti-dumping measures for a wide range of chemical products.
- Implementation of the diamond exchange project in the Far East, for which there is no need to seek tariff reduction (they are currently zero), but it is essential to obtain state guarantees for the participation of India in the diamond exchange project in the Far East.
- Speeding up the process of getting clarifications for certification, which currently takes a very long time, which in general does not contradict WTO rules and meets the interests of local producers. The key sectors that are subject to nontariff restrictions are the food industry, agriculture, the chemical industry, and related industries.
- Simplification of the procedures for determining the customs value, as well as the bureaucratic component of customs clearance.

Republic of Korea

The status of negotiations with South Korea is the least ambitious; the EEC and Seoul just conducted a feasibility study on the evaluation of possible FTZ effects. The study was launched after South Korea applied for accession to the Commission in 2017.

As for tariff barriers, in general, Korea has a particularly high level of tariff protection of agricultural products—about 50% of the import duty. These restrictions apply to all countries, and not only to Russia, due to the sensitive status of this sector of the Korean economy; thus, the EEC negotiators' potential bet on the facilitation and removal of tariff restrictions is inexpedient and, in the long term, rather unlikely. However, even at the consultation level, it is possible to raise several issues to boost cooperation between the EAEU and the Republic (through the facilitation of nontariff barriers):

- Dissemination of information on customs clearance, certification, and admission of agricultural products to the Korean market;
- Promotion of investment projects under the EEC umbrella that could be potentially attractive for Korean investors with regard to further export to Korea and elsewhere;
- Development, in the long term, of export guarantees for products from the grain terminal in the port of Zarubino (the construction is planned for 2018–2020).

Singapore

The negotiations process on the establishment of a FTZ with Singapore is now fairly active. The next meeting of the joint working group should be held in the first half of 2018. However, it is important to take into account the fact that Singapore has zero tariffs for most of the trade items, and therefore the key importance for Russia in the negotiations is not the removal of tariff restrictions, but the profound regulation of services, which is expected to be elaborated in a future document. Therefore, these negotiations can contribute to the implementation of such Russian priorities as promoting Russian projects and companies in the Singapore business community (in April 2018, a business forum organized by the EEC in cooperation with the Russian-Singapore Business Council took place, and two business missions are planned till the end of 2018) and establishing adequate standards for regulating the service sector in international agreements of the EAEU. Thus, the Singapore negotiations represent the first testing ground for the expansion of the plots for cooperation with the Asian partners for the EAEU.

New Opportunities for a Cooperative EAEU Agenda in Asia: Infrastructure Dialogues

The analysis of the previous section proves that the EAEU external agenda has been limited mostly to trade issues. Infrastructure dialogues—particularly, such Russian projects as modernization and the promotion of the Northern Sea route, renovation of the Trans-Siberian route and transport corridors in the Far East—remain on national tracks. However, the Commission sets rather ambitious long-term goals: "It is necessary to form a 'seamless corridor' between Europe and Asia, the North and the South and in practice to implement the 'single window' principle, discussing with trade partners the harmonization of standards and requirements in the transport sector," Tigran Sargsyan, the head of the EEC declared on December 2017, at his talk in the Federation Council of Russian Federation (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017a).

In general, the external factors that will have a considerable influence on the quality of the infrastructure dialogue between the EEC and the Asian countries are the pace of China's economic growth; the allocation of the main center of economic activity in China itself; the prospects for China's trade and economic cooperation with the countries of Asia, EAEU, and the United States (Mayer, 2018; Zhang, Li, & Gabuev, 2016); and, finally, the degree of trade liberalization within Asia and with other countries, including Russia (Karaganov et al., 2005). The key internal factor is the level of the EAEC's authority to develop a common transport agenda.

Thence, the key operational obstacle to the development of such a dialogue is the lack of the necessary level of authority for the EEC to form an all-Union transport agenda with third countries. Moreover, the implementation of elements of the general transport policy within the Union is sometimes obstructed with severe disagreements between its members, primarily Russia and Kazakhstan. In the medium term, the EEC is likely to seek to build up its authority and maximize the transfer of the transport agenda to the level of supranational regulation: only these measures will allow maximizing both the transit and export potential of the member states of the Union. However, this process can take 3–5 years or even more.

In fact, the transport agenda of the EAEU has not been linked to trade and investment; these areas have not been considered comprehensively yet. The question of how the liberalization of trade regimes can help ensure the profitability of infrastructure projects has not yet been raised, although it has a direct impact on ensuring sustainable regional integration.

The EEC has not participated in raising funds for infrastructure projects from international development institutions, including the Asian Bank for Infrastructure Investments, the New Development Bank of BRICS, and the Silk Road Fund. The EEC has no representatives in these institutions; meanwhile, the implementation of some infrastructure projects in the region will *a priori* require supranational regulation and, possibly, management.

Development of Transport Agendas for the Russia-EEC-Asia Dialogues

Today, the transport agenda between the EAEU and the Asian countries is limited only to the Chinese track and is mostly of descriptive character, rather than of a problem- or project-oriented one (Likhacheva, 2017). However, regarding the recent boost of infrastructure connectivity and regional integration in Asia, we can expect incorporation of the infrastructure agenda into the EEC external activities.

There is also a solid basis for infrastructure dialogue between the Commission and other countries, namely, Korea, India, and Singapore. For negotiations with India and Korea, this is a prerequisite for the comprehensive internationalization of Russian and, in particular, the Far Eastern infrastructure. Otherwise, realization of transport projects would likely lack the assessment of direct trade effects associated with their implementation. A brief scope of these projects is presented below.

South Korea has been one of the countries keenest on joining the OBOR and Silk Road projects and has launched its own Eurasian Initiative. Inaugurated on October 18, 2013, by South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, South Korea's Eurasian Initiative seeks to bolster not only South Korea's connectivity with Russia but also the opportunity to enhance South Korea's trade and economic development (Lukyanov, 2013; MOFAORK, 2013). Currently, there are a variety of cross-border logistic projects underway that have strengthened South Korea-Russia ties. In September 2013, Russia and North Korea opened the railway that connects Hassan and Rajin (Expert Online, 2013).

While the Hassan-Rajin railway is part of the larger Trans-Korean Railway, political tensions between Seoul and Pyongyang have caused the project to be placed on hold indefinitely as South Korea declared it was dropping out of the project in March 2016. While unclear in the short term, it would be in the interest of South Korea for it to pursue the Trans-Korean Railway venture, as it could emerge as an important corridor connecting the country to Europe. The project is in Russia's interests as well as it offers the opportunity to further expand and modernize the Trans-Siberian Railway by linking it with the Trans-Korean Railway. In this light, Russia has a chance to act as a mediator between North and South Korea, whereby a normalization of the political situation on the Korean peninsula represents a significant opportunity for Russia (Lee, 2017).

Finally, in the long run, the implementation of the Korean plan, implying intense involvement of the Trans-Siberian Railway could naturally bring bonus transit to the Russian side, while at the same time creating risks for the Russian export, alternative channels for which in most parts of Siberia and the Far East are nonexistent.

Another key component driving connectivity and infrastructure linkages is the Trans-Eurasian project, North-South International Transport Corridor, which seeks to develop a cargo and passenger transportation route from St. Petersburg to the Bandar Abbas Port in Iran, and, potentially, Mumbai, India. The route, with a total length between 4,500 and 7,200 km, will facilitate the movement of goods and people from India, the Middle East, and Persian Gulf states to Russia and Western Europe. The route itself has been in existence since the 1990s, as it was utilized by the Soviet Union to ship goods to Central Asia and Iran (Khusainov, 2010). EEC's existing negotiation experience with Iran (related to a temporary agreement on a FTZ) and an open track with India on a FTZ can make the EEC a valid ground for a realization of this project.

Perspectives of and Key Constraints for the Asian Agenda of the EAEU

Analyzing the current negotiation activity of the EEC with its Asian partners, we can conclude that the EEC at its external integration initiatives still follows the "catching up" mode of cooperation, limiting its activity either to primarily political documents (like with China) or to those focusing on bilateral FTAs ("EAEU + partner country"), limited by the trade agenda. However, several studies of FTZs in East Asia argue that since 1990, the range of aspects addressed by the FTAs have expanded considerably to include, for example, the problems of regulation of electronic commerce, intellectual property, labor, etc. (Dent, 2005; Yastreb, 2016).

Moreover, we can state that the external request for integration with the EAEU significantly exceeds the Union's capabilities: today more than 40 applications to establish an FTA with the EAEU have been submitted, but the current seven negotiations, at this stage, are the organizational ceiling of the Commission (RIA, 2015). On the one hand, this can be explained by the systemic challenges that the Commission faces in intergovernmental interactions within the Union, while on the other hand, it also relates to operational obstacles within the EEC itself.

The first reason is the ultra-conservative trade policy of the EAEU member states. For many years, the mere idea of an FTA in any member state would immediately start a flood of accusations of the undermining domestic market (see Tarr, 2014).

Second, until the 2010s, the member states of the EAEU experienced low political and economic interest in Asian countries in comparison with the European direction: thus, practically until the introduction of anti-Russian sanctions, the consultations on the FTAs were conducted only with the EFTA and New Zealand.

Third, this ceiling can be explained by the very young age of the EAEU itself, which so far is more focused on internal integration.

Fourth, there is an objective disagreement between the member states of the EAEU, and the resulting difficulties in the formulation of a consolidated position for negotiations (it is usually quite linear: "open your markets and do not demand to open ours"). According to Article 12 of the EAEU Treaty, all decisions of the Commission are taken by consensus, which undoubtedly hinders the negotiation process (Eurasiancommission.org, 2014).

Finally, there are purely organizational reasons. Today, seven bilateral FTZs are under development, and there are simply no more human resources for the Commission to open new similar negotiations, let alone negotiate a more complex level (for instance, negotiations with RCEP, where FTA agreements already link most of the negotiating countries, and the negotiations around the RCEP involve deeper layers of regional cooperation). Thus, for example, only two EEC employees deal with all the negotiations on the FTA from Belarus at the operational level, yet the principle of consensus requires their approval for all critical issues.

The issue of building up expertise on the agenda of the Commission's development is worthwhile, but its solution requires at least several years. The EEC Minister of Trade V. Nikishina supports this idea speaking about trade negotiations with external partners, particularly, China: "We probably have a problem associated with the slowness of identifying specific interests for which these projects should be developed, an objective human factor" (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017c).

A separate issue is the lack of authority of the Commission both in the sectoral (e.g., infrastructure or energy) and in the functional contexts, especially the lack of adequate control mechanisms.

First, when the Union was established, the spheres of customs and technical regulation were transferred to the supranational level, while investments and infrastructure remained at the national one. The fact that the investment agenda remains only at the member states level does not allow the implementation of the idea of mixed-type agreements efficiently, thus restricting formats of negotiated FTAs and negotiation assets of the EEC.

Second, there is a question of not only regulatory, but also supervisory competency that the Commission does not have. Thus, control functions remain at the national level, which limits the possibilities for creating a single legal field for entrepreneurs of all the countries of the EAEU. Joint competence of the states and the Union in the control field seems the more natural way. In addition, the EEC insists on the right to apply to the Court of the EAEU in the case when the countries of the Union violate the decisions or provisions of the Treaty of the Union. For the time being, the Commission has only the right to notify the government of a country of the need for their implementation, and its functions are limited to monitoring the common market. The expansion of the powers of the EEC will allow "firstly, to have a proper reaction mechanism in case of violation of the rules of the common market, and secondly, to take responsibility and, if necessary, to act as a 'bad cop,' thus freeing member-states of the Union from this role," Tigran Sargsyan recently declared (Eurasiancommission.org, 2017a).

In the medium term, given the increase in exports to Asia from the EAEU countries, primarily, from Russia as the most significant economy of the Union, the FTA with ASEAN cannot be avoided. Although this goal has already been set (the former Minister of Economic Development, A. V. Ulyukaev, in 2015 stated that the creation of the ASEAN and EAEU FTZ is within a perspective of 2 or 3 years), in the short term the transition to this format seems impossible.[1] The reasons lie with the complexity of consensus-building within multilateral integration associations and with the severe disparity in the negotiating resources of the two associations.

ASEAN is an exceptionally complex partner, with conflicting interests within the Association and fundamentally different markets, both for importers and exporters. Moreover, over the decades of integration in Asia, the bureaucracy responsible for ASEAN trade negotiations has developed strong competencies, having concluded agreements with such partners as China, Korea, and Japan. The EEC does not have such skills yet, and their acquisition requires not only academic training of specialists but also building relevant experience within the framework of bilateral negotiations.

Both the expert community and the staff of the Commission agree that in the perspective of 3–5 years the bilateral track will remain the main one. After the ratification of agreements on the FTZs with Singapore and, possibly, other Southeast Asian countries takes place in the future 5–7 years, it is possible to start active negotiations on the FTA between the EAEU-ASEAN. The full participation of the EAEU in mega-regional trade agreements and integration projects will take at least 7–10 years to materialize. Then the EAEU can become a full-fledged participant in the RCEP and the Great Eurasian Partnership.

If, in spite of economic and institutional considerations, a political decision is made dictating a forced accession to these initiatives, we can expect that such participation will be mostly formal. It will have a rather symbolic political significance, with emasculated content on key positions of trade liberalization, not to mention the regulation of investments, infrastructure, and services.

In a decade, however, with an increase in powers based on multiple spillovers, the Commission can become the central agent of the economic dimension of the Russian policy of the Pivot to Asia covering not only trade and custom issues, but also services, joint financial institutions, a digital agenda, logistics and infrastructure, and other promising areas for regional cooperation. This work will definitely demand many efforts from both member states, their national bureaucracies, and the EEC bureaucracy as well. In the coming years, we will probably see new institutional formats within the EEC created to promote intergovernmental dialogue, begin international negotiations, and build an environment for a more open dialogue between numerous stakeholders of the Eurasian integration states, business, and the EEC.

Without those kinds of steps, the Russian policy of the Pivot to the East will be based on political and security dialogues with unilateral efforts to boost the non-energy export by means of bilateral negotiations on discriminative nontariff barriers. Of course, some of these steps are very useful and will bring significant local positive effects. Still, Russian exporters in this case will compete with ASEAN, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea, who all have FTZs with China and thus have a greater competitive advantage.

Therefore, if we expect that the imperative of diversification of the external economic operations declared by President Putin in May 2018, and later supported by Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov and other high-ranking officials, will be put into life in a long-term prospective, it will inevitably lead to a rising role of the EEC in a regional integration process in Asia.

Note

[1]As the first step of the EAEU and ASEAN cooperation, they agreed in August 2016 to form a research group to study the prospects of a FTZ. However, the group has not yet been established, and the Commission itself is not ready to launch it in the coming years.

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