



Editorial

Eurasia – From confrontation to partnership



The idea of Eurasia per se is not nearly as old as that of its constituent parts – Europe and Asia. The latter two date back to ancient Greece, whereas, according to some accounts, not until the 1880s did the Austrian geologist Eduard Suess first coin the term “Eurasia.” His idea was to fashion a union of the two divided parts of a single continent as a demonstration of their inherent unity – initially in the geologic and geographic sense, and later, in the social and political sense.

The idea, however, that Europe and Asia are fundamentally different – rooted in European thinking since the time of Ancient Greece and later carried from there to Asia itself – is still widespread. Ever since the Enlightenment and the colonial period, Europe and the “Western civilization” founded on it have most often been viewed as “advanced,” while Asia has been seen as a “backward” continent in need of being “pulled up” to the level of Europe.

The concept of “Greater Eurasia” or “Greater Eurasian Partnership” differs significantly from the 19th-century geographic interpretation of Eurasia, the romantic ideas that Russian Eurasianists held in the 1920s, and the abstract constructions of classical geopolitics. It is, in fact, a very concrete and modern concept. When the collapse of the Soviet Union destroyed hopes of building a united Europe stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, and when the West’s relations with Russia and China began deteriorating early in this century, Russian political scientists proposed the idea of “Greater Eurasia” and Russian leaders soon adopted it as official policy. The idea was that “Greater Eurasia” – based on cooperation between Russia, China, India, Central Asia, and other countries of the continent – would become one of the economic and political centers of the emerging multipolar world, or even a conglomeration of several non-Western centers that had no proper place in the sweeping global system imposed by the West. China gave its official sanction to the concept and began concrete work with Russia towards its implementation.

This Special Issue of Journal of Eurasian Studies is the first collection of articles by contributors from Russia, China, USA, and Central Asia devoted to the concept of a Greater Eurasia. Writing from a variety of viewpoints, they examine the processes currently unfolding in the region. Many of

these authors helped develop the concept of Greater Eurasia, while others discuss the approaches of major actors interested in joining or understanding the integrative processes on the continent. Despite some differences in their approaches, all look favorably on the Eurasian integration process.

The authors of the articles in this special issue examine the history of the development of this concept in detail and assess the prospects for the implementation of the “Greater Eurasia” project. It begins with an article by Sergey Karaganov, a well-known Russian international relations expert and one of the originators of the “Greater Eurasia” concept. He places the process of a Eurasia gaining strength in a global context and ties it to the West’s declining influence in the modern world. Myself and former president of Russian Railways professor Vladimir Yakunin draw a link between the promotion of the “Greater Eurasia” concept and political and economic processes within Russia, showing how the need to achieve the strategic objective of the country’s development is best achieved by developing the economy and infrastructure of its Asiatic regions. These authors also consider in detail the possibility of implementing various infrastructure projects in Siberia and the Russian Far East, particularly within the framework of the Trans-Eurasian Belt Development project.

A China’s leading authority on Russia and Central Asia, Chairman of the Chinese Association for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies Li Yongquan continues this theme, assessing the possibilities of linking the Greater Eurasian Partnership project, put forward by Russia, and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Tajikistan scholar and diplomat who is currently serving as Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Rashid Alimov explains what role the SCO would play in the emerging Greater Eurasia. Senior Fellow at the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies of Georgetown University Andrew Kuchins assesses American approaches to the new integration initiatives in Eurasia. And Russian experts on Japan Oleg Paramonov and Olga Puzanova analyse Japanese policy in Central Asia and its relevance to the “Greater Eurasia” project.

This Special Issue will hold great interest for both experts and general readers interested in current and future trends

in international relations and economic processes in Eurasia and the world in general.

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