

## CHAPTER 5

# EURASIAN PIVOT IN RUSSIAN AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: EURASIANISM AS AN IDEATIONAL PREMISE?

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### ABSTRACT

The main focus of the chapter is an examination of the issue of the Eurasian pivot in Russian and Turkish foreign policy. In doing so the chapter aims to determine the ideational and rational underpinnings of a substantial shift in foreign policy identity construction by concentrating on the question of whether Eurasianism constitutes an ideational premise of the Eurasian pivot. Another major question this chapter seeks to address is the strategic rationale behind the eastward shift. In this context, the chapter argues that the ideational foundation of the Eurasian pivot in both countries' foreign policy is a fusion of two substantial elements of Eurasianism: anti-Westernism in combination with a post-imperial great power mindset (the discourse of “velikoderjavnost” and “neo-Ottomanism”). At the same time, it is not merely an ideational construction that drives such dynamics in foreign policy identity construction; it is also a pragmatic and rational interest that demands an instrumental use of the Eurasianist idea. In other words, what drives the Eurasian pivot and mutual rapprochement in this context is the need to acquire more effective maneuvering instruments and mechanisms with the aim to strengthen the international position against the West. Thus, Eurasianism in both countries' Eurasia pivot discourse constitutes an instrumental approach.

**Keywords:** Eurasia pivot, Eurasianism, foreign policy identity, Greater Eurasia Partnership, Asia Anew Initiative

## Introduction

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the bipolar system of the Cold War era was transformed into a “unipolar moment” of the West under an American leadership (Krauthammer, 1990). However, since the end of the 2000s, this transitory of unipolar order has been replaced by a new bipolarity. This time the emerging bipolar system is multi-centered in itself; thus it has been theorized “as a multi-order world system” (Flockhart, 2016; Lisanin; 2017) or “orders within order system” (Paikin, 2019). In this multicentricity there is the West or Transatlantic pole, which is increasingly dissociating and loosening internally at the expense of a traditionally strong unity and solidarity; on the other hand, there is a nascent non-Western pole, formed by the strategic alliance between Russia and China. Though constituting a relatively secondary center in the emerging system, Moscow strives to enhance a strategic rapprochement with Beijing and acts on the basis of a similar set of values. Both powers advocate a system of international relations, which resides on the principle of multilateralism and a great power equilibrium.

The rapprochement and stable coherence between the two major Eurasian countries means the re-emergence of Eurasia as a continent with a pivotal role/function in the changing world order. In this context, it is argued that the 21st century will be neither an American nor Asian century, but rather a Eurasian century with interaction between the major powers of the supercontinent (mainly China, Russia, and the European Union) as the dominant dynamic of the international relations as a whole (Macaes, 2018). Thus, given the increasing strategic importance of Eurasian countries, it is suggested that the nascent multicenter world order will be a Eurasian order (Rolland, 2019). Major powers, such as China and Russia, are proposing initiatives to increase the geopolitical and geoeconomic value and strategic importance of the Eurasian supercontinent. The most obvious manifestation of such policies is the two powers’ aspiration to merge their regional integration and cooperation structures (the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union - EEU) and infrastructure initiatives (the China-led Belt and Road Initiative – BRI) within the framework of the “Greater Eurasia Partnership” project, as well as the EU member states’ increasing interest in enhancing the continental connectivity between Europe and Asia. Thus, the contours of Greater Eurasia are beginning to take a more precise shape (Karaganov, 2019).

In this context, the success in achieving congruence and interaction between different (regional) orders existing in the greater Eurasian continent is important for the stable structuring of the new multipolar/multicenter world order. As Kissinger points out, “a

struggle between regions could be even more debilitating than the struggle between nations has been”... thus “the contemporary quest for world order will require a coherent strategy to establish a concept of order within the various regions, and to relate these regional orders to one another.” (2014: 371).

In the gradual process of the shifting center of world power towards the Asia-Pacific region, two major countries of Eurasia – Russia as a country increasingly more confident in positioning itself as a non-Western power and taking on the role of building a non-Western order, and Turkey as an actor of a strategic importance within Trans-Atlantic alliance (mainly via NATO) – are shifting their foreign policy attention to Eurasia, revising their foreign policy doctrine and the intellectual/ideological foundations of their geopolitical identity. In addition, the strategic rapprochement between the two major Eurasian powers, Russia and Turkey, and a Eurasian reorientation in their foreign policy occur in parallel to the synchronization of their perspectives on the pressing world issues.

Retrospectively, the main reason for the two countries’ Eurasian pivot lies in the dynamics of the post-Cold War foreign policy identity construction and their relations with the West. The intention that pushed both countries to Eurasia as an alternative geopolitical concept against Europe and the West, in general, is deep dissatisfaction with the West and growing distrust in relation.

This chapter examines the issue of Eurasian pivot in Russian and Turkish foreign policy. In doing so the chapter aims to determine the ideational and rational underpinnings of such a shift in foreign policy identity construction by concentrating on the question of whether Eurasianism constitutes an ideational premise of the Eurasian pivot. Another major question this chapter seeks to address is the strategic rationale behind the Eastward shift. In this context, the chapter argues that the ideational foundation of the Eurasian shift in both countries’ foreign policy is a fusion of two substantial elements of Eurasianism: anti-Westernism in combination with a post-imperial great power mindset (the discourse of “*velikoderjavnost*” and “*neo-Ottomanism*”). At the same time, it is not merely an ideational construction that drives such dynamics in foreign policy identification; it is also a pragmatic and rational interest that demands an instrumental use of the Eurasianist idea. In other words, what drives such a Eurasian shift and mutual rapprochement in this context is the need to acquire more effective maneuvering instruments and mechanisms with the aim to strengthen their position against the West. Thus, Eurasianism in both countries’ Eurasian pivot discourse constitutes an instrumental approach.

Throughout the chapter this assumption is substantiated by a further four assertions: First, the Eurasian pivot and the concept of Eurasia/Eurasianism are understood and defined differently by Russian and Turkish advocates of the idea. Russian Eurasianism in its current manifestation serves as an ideological foundation for the efforts to legitimize Russia's influence in neighboring countries and to expand it to greater Eurasia, which is seen as a crucial prerequisite for great power status. Turkey's Eurasianism, in turn, conveys a foreign policy aspiration to create an effective balance against the West and increase its strategic presence and engagement in the greater Eurasia. Second, there are asymmetric bilateral relations, which take place in a covert competition in a number of regions (such as Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East), and areas (such as the energy field in the context of oil and gas pipeline routes). Third, the discourse of the Eurasian reorientation is paralleled with a transactional and situational character of bilateral relations with the combination of overlapping and contradicting interests. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that cooperation between Turkey and Russia will soon be translated into a full-fledged strategic alliance.

### **1. Russo-Turkish Rapprochement: A Dichotomy of Partnership and Competition**

The unique geographical position of Russia and Turkey at the center of the Eurasian continent and at the crossroads of civilizations, the imperial past and an aspiration for post-imperial self-assertion as a major power have given rise to similar views on the international system and strategic culture, which determined the dynamics of bilateral relations evolving from competition in the 1990s to an ambiguous rapprochement in the 2000s (Svarin, 2015).

Due to the historical-geographical and cultural-civilizational factors, the two major powers' interests forming the supercontinent of Eurasia had frequently clashed and converged in different periods of history. Their foreign policy behavior and identity to a large extent were shaped under the influence of imperial politico-ideological legacy. Both countries claim to have a regional superiority or privileged interests in their strategic environment and consider themselves not only politically but also morally responsible for the processes taking place in the former imperial peripheries. Even though both countries' current foreign policy strategy does not require an imperial restoration, the objective of bringing together or reuniting peripheries is an important issue in both countries' foreign policy agenda. Russia's *Ruskiy Mir* (Russian World) or an idea of the Eurasian Union and Turkey's idea of a historical Ottoman sphere of influence where modern Turkey is destined to assume the role of "regional power" also demonstrates the persistence of the imperial imagination in both countries self-perception (Torbakov, 2017). Importantly, Eurasian regions where both powers are striving

to disseminate their influence contain an element of kinship in terms of their historical and civilizational structure, thus cooperation and competition occur in an intertwined context.

The collapse of the Russian and Ottoman empires after World War I was a critical turning point in the Russo-Turkish interaction. The cooperation between the newly established Republic of Turkey and the Soviet Union as a new incarnation of Russian statehood paved the way for a more visible political and economic rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow during the 1920s and 1930s. However, with Stalin voicing doubts about the legitimacy of Turkey's territorial integrity after World War II, Ankara had to lean towards closer strategic ties with the transatlantic alliance and to join NATO in 1952. With this, the Turkish-Soviet understanding ceased to be the case (Erşen, 2017a). Nevertheless, Turkey's periodic disappointments over the Atlantic allies have led to the perception of the Soviet Union as a compensating opportunity in Turkish foreign policy.

The end of the ideological confrontation of the Cold War-era offered a breakthrough opportunity in Turkey-Russia relations. A volatile combination of cooperation and antagonism has acquired a new dimension. Bilateral relations have continued to take place within the framework of a new geopolitical rivalry in the context of power projection on the new independent Turkish states in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Erşen, 2017a). At the same time, this was a historical period when both countries were forced to reconsider their role and foreign policy identity in the wider international context. It was during this period that post-Soviet Russia faced the problem of weakening power, while Turkey ran into the risk of strategic marginalization within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic security system (Frappi, 2018).

During the 2000s Russo-Turkish relations remained under the strong influence of their bilateral relations with the United States and the EU. Although Turkey's NATO membership prevented a genuine strategic partnership with Russia, Moscow viewed this limited interaction with an important NATO member as a strategic instrument that could be used in its geopolitical rivalry with the West. Similarly, Ankara tended to use its expanding ties with Moscow to gain leverage over its transatlantic partners and act more independently in the regions of its traditional influence (Erşen, 2017a).

While having unstable and serpentine relations with their Western partners, Turkish and Russian approaches to various issues on the regional and global scale are becoming closer and more synchronized, the need for coordinated actions is increasing and much effort is being made to base bilateral relations on a strategically stable framework.

Russia perceives Turkey as not an entirely Western actor in its criticism of the dominant position of the West in world politics and therefore excludes Turkey from the new East-West confrontation rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War period. Thus, from a Russian perspective, Turkey's participation in the cooperation and partnership initiatives carried out under Moscow's leadership is possible and appropriate. From Turkey's perspective, on the other hand, the membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as the idea of Turkey being a party to the free trade agreements and cooperation mechanisms developed between the Eurasian countries are frequently emphasized on the official level.

## **2. The Essence of Eurasian Pivot in Russian and Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse**

Since the end of the Cold War, both Russia and Turkey have sporadically diversified their external relations and sought alternatives to disproportionate dependence on the West/Europe. In this context, the ideology of Eurasianism and theoretical discussions about the concept of Eurasia has become an intellectual platform advocating for the strengthening of Russian-Turkish mutual understanding and approximation in the joint efforts of building multipolarity.

### **2.1. Russia's Foreign Policy Identity Construction: From Greater Europe To Greater Eurasia**

A retrospective review of Russia's Eastward shift reveals that the fundamental dynamics of this strategic redirection can be discerned within the scope of Moscow's fluctuating understanding of "order" which gradually evolved from the idea of "Greater Europe" to "Greater Eurasia" (Karaganov, 2017). The crucial turning point in this context came with the 2014 Ukraine crisis when Russia-Europe/West relations turned into a "new Cold War" (Kohen, 2018). Effectively, this meant the impossibility of establishing an international order based on the "Greater Europe" model and Russia's forced need to turn its attention from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific with a new strategy to build the "Greater Eurasia" order (Trenin, 2013; Mankoff, 2015; Trenin, 2016; Trenin, 2017; Khlebnikov, 2018; Karaganov, 2018).

In the context of foreign policy identity construction and strategic reorientation, Russia has historically seen itself as part of Europe. In this sense, Russia's bonds with Europe were legitimized both on the basis of civilization (in the context of Christianity) and geopolitics (in the sense that it was among the major European powers such as Germany, France, and England). In the post-Cold War era, however, post-Soviet Russia ceased to be perceived as a major power; instead it was relegated to the status of the periphery of Europe or as Trenin

points out, the “East of the West” (2016). Russia’s Greater Europe proposal on the new European security architecture was rejected by the Western capitals without entailing any serious discussion. The main reason for this fact is that such an agreement would undermine the current system of a European security order, which envisages the acceptability of only one superpower on the continent which is “occupied” by the US (Miller & Lukyanov, 2018).

The basic tenet of the Greater Europe system arrangements was the idea of a rapprochement between the two sides rather than the assimilation of the East within the West. In this context, further Europeanization of Russia required some degree of “Russianization” of Europe (Kortunov, 2016). This implied a need for a mutually beneficial convergence within the framework of symmetrical and equal partnership, particularly in the areas of energy security and economic cooperation.

In contrast to the European understanding of a liberal order, Russia’s understanding of order is based on the classical realist and traditional power politics approach which presupposes the existence of a multipolar and multicenter system of relations and the internalization of the principle of “equal partnership of equals” as the main precondition of regional order and stability. In other words, Russia advocates a vision based on the principle of multilateralism with more than one political center and ideational basis, contrary to the perspective of the EU-centered security community, which is perceived as part of the unipolar order (Sakwa, 2015). The basic principle in this sense is “equal cooperation between equals”. Indeed, in the context of his criticism of the unipolar world model, Russian President Vladimir Putin during his February 2007 Munich Security Conference speech stated, “In the modern world, the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible”. In 2014, during the Valdai speech, Putin once again emphasized that unipolarity means “the dictatorship of one power over the world”.

In this context, Russia’s strategic thinking, which has been renewed with Putin’s ascendance to power, the model of multipolarity and multilateralism based on the Primakov doctrine has become an important rationale for legitimizing the sphere of influence in Russian foreign policy (Zagorski, 2008). In this multi-centered and multi-polar system of great powers, Russia positions itself as an independent center and claims to represent a geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural whole between the East and West. This structure has been institutionalized in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and has been theorized within the framework of the Eurasian identity, Orthodox Christianity and, more recently, the concept of a Russian World.

Moreover, for Russia, the great power status (*velikoderjavnost*) in the first place begins with the continuity of the status of a “regional great power”. In other words, Russia sees itself as a regional leader in the territories under Moscow’s influence since the imperial period and the Soviet Union and believes that the dominant power position in its own periphery adds significant legitimacy and weight to the status of the global power center. In this context, Russia believes that the effort to ensure the continuity of its historical influence in post-Soviet Eurasia is a legitimate necessity, similar to the role of the US in the Western world.

The Ukraine crisis of 2014 put an end to Russia’s two substantial efforts – integration with the West (based on the model of Greater Europe) and re-integration of former Soviet territories (Trenin, 20019). This process triggered Russia’s gradual transformation into a revisionist power, which rejects the universality of the Atlantic security order. The failure to create the “Greater Europe” from Lisbon to Vladivostok and the idea of an order based on Europe/West-Russian concert has led Russia to focus its political, economic and diplomatic efforts in a different direction. Thus, unable to secure a genuine partnership with the West, Russia began to seek new partners in the East and turned towards a “Greater Eurasia” strategy within the scope of the rapprochement with the emerging powers, especially China (Timofeev, 2018). Together with China and other emerging Eurasian powers, Russia has begun to create an alternative world order based on the principle of pluralism in the international system. In this sense, China with its westward pivot (BRI) has become the main focal point of Russian foreign policy. Starting from 2015, Russia, in line with the idea of “Greater Eurasia” spanning from Shanghai to St. Petersburg, aims to harmonize its own integration mechanisms (EEU) with China’s continental infrastructure projects. In this context, the nature of the Russian-Chinese rapprochement is defined primarily by the concept of *entente* and argues that it represents the formation of a “multi-order world system”. As Trenin emphasized, this cohesion is based on mutual understanding and geopolitical convergence based on overlapping worldviews rather than an alliance in the traditional sense (2016). It refers to the degree of opposition to Western hegemony and particularly US global dominance.

There is also an important issue affecting the foreign policy identity of Russia in the context of the shift from Greater Europe to Greater Eurasia. Historically, Europe was significant for Russia in three different but interrelated hypostases: “Europe as an idea, Europe as a model and Europe as a geopolitical reality that allowed Russia to become and remain a great power” (Stent, 2008). Since the 17th century, Russia sought to establish itself as a European power, despite the fact that geographically it was situated more in the Asian part of the continent than the European one. An intellectual dispute between Westerners and the Slavophiles of the

19th century was built on the very same question on the Russian quintessence. The existential question was the dilemma “is Russia a part of Europe or apart from Europe” (Stent, 2008), while for Europe itself, Russia has always remained the “other” (Bespalov, 2019). In the context of reorientation in foreign policy, for the first time in history, Russia has rejected Europe and the values represented by Europe as a means and model of modernization and abandoned the European-oriented perspective over its own future (Trenin, 2014; Kortunov, 2016). Thus, the discourse suggesting that Russia should be seen as a different Europe in terms of defining its relations with Europe became no longer valid (Romanova, 2018).

In the context of the restructuring of foreign policy identity, the intellectual tradition of Eurasianism, which sees Russia as a unique civilization encompassing the Eurasian continent, became an important source of Russia’s strategic thinking and the Eurasian pivot in foreign policy. Arising from the interconnectedness and mutual construction of geography and civilization, the problem of Russian quintessence in Eurasianism was resolved through the conceptualization of Russia as a multinational Eurasian empire, a unique civilization that combined elements of different cultures belonging neither to Europe nor Asia. This notion became ideally suitable within Russia’s yet another Eurasia pivot. This time Eurasia is defined as a unique geographical area and civilization, which by its nature constitutes an important contrast with the Atlanticist system. The fundamental idea is the necessity of making Eurasian geography a united political entity under the influence of Russia (Imanov, 2008; Bassin, 2008). The new appeal to Eurasianism is fully compatible with Gumilyov’s belief that it was Eurasianism that was the only true ideological choice for Russia: “I will tell you a secret that if Russia is going to be saved, then only as a Eurasian power and only through Eurasianism” (2008: 31).

Moreover, in the first decade of the 21st century, the traditional Russian East-West dilemma acquired a new dimension. “To become a strong and modern state, Russia needs to align its national development strategy more closely to the macro trends of global development than anytime before. The key trend of global development here is the shift, unprecedented in scale and speed, of the global economic and political center to the “new Asia.” (Valdai, 2012) The recognition of this changing role of Asia and its importance from the point of view of Russia’s development is reflected at the highest official level. An age-old question of Russian identity resolved in an imperative – “to be closer to Asia, to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (Bespalov, 2019) In this context, Russia’s main priority in regional cooperation is the integration of its own integration project (EEU) with China’s Belt and Road Initiative. In 2016, Moscow proposed an overarching continental initiative “Greater Eurasia Partnership”,

which was supported by China. In a joint statement of the two countries in 2019, it was emphasized that the Belt and Road initiative and the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership “can develop in parallel and coordinated manner, which will contribute to the development of bilateral and multilateral integration processes for the benefit of the peoples of the Eurasian continent” (Bespalov, 2019).

## **2.2. Turkey’s Foreign Policy Identity Construction: From the Periphery of The Euro-Atlantic System to A “Central Country” In Eurasia/Afro-Asia**

Since the 1990s, the concepts of Eurasia have become one of the focal points of intellectual debates in Turkey. This discourse has occupied a wide range of issues spanning from the necessity of developing a new relationship model with newly independent Central Asian and South Caucasus Turkic republic to the ongoing shift in foreign policy orientation from the West to the new geopolitical alternative of Eurasia. In other words, it is possible to observe that Eurasian orientation in Turkish foreign policy discourse developed within two waves. The first wave corresponds to the first half of the 1990s when the idea of a “Turkic world extending from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China” and attention towards the post-Soviet countries in Russia’s former southern peripheries was an important policy priority. Since the second decade of the 2000s, Turkey has expressed dissatisfaction with the EU integration process and begun to move towards the emerging Eurasian countries such as Russia and China. Thus, on the highest official level, Turkey numerously declared its interest in becoming a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) while reconsidering its European integration aspiration, which meant that Turkey was seeking new alternatives to its traditional reliance on the West.

In a broader context, the characterization of Turkey as a “Eurasian country” was a rarely used notion due to the fact that since the beginning of the Cold War, Turkey had pursued a foreign policy line based on the Western/European affiliation while rejecting the Eastern/Asian self-perception (Tellal, 2005). Turkey’s pro-Western positioning of itself within an opposite geopolitical and ideological pole against the Soviet Union meant severing all ties with the Turkic peoples in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, which had become part of the Soviet Union. Turkey’s estrangement and even alienation from the Turkic peoples of the USSR has become more evident with Ankara’s NATO membership.

The Eurasian orientation in the foreign policy of Turkey was revived as a geopolitical concept in the early 1990s due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world. In 1991, the emergence of the independent Turkic states in the post-Soviet Southern Caucasus

and Central Asia crisis in the EU-Turkey relation triggered a new reading of the concept of Eurasia in Turkey. However, in the Turkish political and strategic thinking there were multiple interpretations rather than a consensus on the Eurasian direction in foreign policy. In this context, there are some apparent differences in approaches to Eurasian orientation in Turkey's political spectrum. The ultra-left nationalists currently advocate an alliance with the Neo-Eurasianists in Russia for the sake of building an anti-Western geopolitical alliance. While the far-right nationalist movements advocate an anti-Russian and Pan-Turkic approach, which envisages the necessity for Turkey to restore historical influence in the South Caucasus and the Central Asian region.

Thus, until the mid-1990s, the Eurasian concept had been associated almost exclusively with the Turkish republic in Central Asia and the Caucasus and has been used as a tool to increase Turkey's influence in the region within the scope of the Turkic world discourse. The first half of the 1990s was the peak moment in the spreading of ideas of a Turkic world and Pan-Turkism for nationalist and ultra-nationalist parties and political organizations; at the same time this was a period of intense implementation of various policy initiatives (Valiyeva, 2018). This was an idealistic period in Turkey's Eurasia pivot. However, the priority of relations with the new Turkic republics in Eurasia based on cultural and historical affinity and ethnolinguistic kinship, which to a large extent shaped Turkey's post-Soviet geopolitical strategy towards the region, soon was replaced by a pragmatic approach dominated by economic interests. Turkey positioned itself as an applicable model for socio-economic and political development to newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This strategy was important not only in terms of developing multifaceted relations with the post-Soviet republics but also in terms of upgrading Ankara's status in the hierarchy of world powers. In other words, success in the Eurasian policy was supposed to increase the geopolitical importance of Turkey in the eyes of the West.

Thus, significant interest and attention to the Turkic world and disposal of active policy engagement in post-Soviet Central Asia and South Caucasus during the first half of the 1990s signified an existence of an independent and thoroughly developed Eurasian strategy in Turkish foreign policy. However, the dynamics of Eurasian orientation in Turkey has always been inversely proportional to the intensity and success of the EU integration negotiations and the importance of its relations with the West as a whole. In other words, Eurasia as a geopolitical project was only a viable and widely discussed option in Turkey when Ankara suffered a decline or deterioration in its relations with the West. Therefore, ideological structures are not the driving force behind the development of the Eurasian pivot in Turkey; it has rather been the pragmatic interests (Erşen, 2017).

Particularly since the late 2000s, there has been a serious revision of Turkish foreign policy at the intellectual, strategic and tactical levels affecting the Eurasian orientation. The new foreign policy doctrine of Turkey envisioned the country's transition from the periphery of the Euro-Atlantic system of the bipolar world order into a "central country" in the post-bipolar world (Frappi, 2018).

Although it is not possible to come across a clearly formulated Eurasian concept within the scope of the new foreign policy approach, former Turkish Foreign and then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's indirect Eurasian conceptualization was different from previously existing approaches. Davutoğlu conceptualized Turkey as a "Central Country" surrounded by concentric circles consisting of two regions of primary importance – the Middle East and North Africa, while the importance of Central Asia as an element of Eastern orientation was reduced. That is why, in such a reconceptualization of Turkey's Eurasia orientation, Davutoğlu refers to the region where Turkey should be defined as a "central country" as "Afro-Eurasia" rather than "Eurasia". Thus, Davutoğlu expanded the scope and the content of the traditional Eurasian orientation of the 1990s in Turkey, which had focused merely on the South Caucasus and Central Asia and blended it with the classical geopolitics of the Heartland concept. According to Davutoğlu, positioning Turkey as the regions' central country should solve the problem of upgrading the status of Turkey on a global scale. Thus, from the Turkish perspective the Eurasian orientation implies not only the necessity to formulate a coherent strategy towards the Turkic republics, but also envisages a regional order in which Turkey with its "central country" position could play a new role in the emerging marco-region of Afro-Eurasia. (Davutoğlu, 2011).

Thus, Turkish foreign policy has a multi-faceted nature, and Ankara is in search of new partners and allies, which can be discerned in Turkey's objective to establish mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with BRICS and SCO countries as an alternative economic development model. In this sense, although on the level of official discourse European integration remains among the political priorities, Turkey increasingly perceives itself outside of the "European family" (Öniş & Kutlay, 2017). Turkey's rhetoric to become one of the most important parts of the emerging Greater Eurasia replaces its European strategy.

In the context of the Eurasian pivot, the cooperation and competitive balance in the triangle of Turkey-Russia-China constitutes an important issue. The development of cooperation and integration processes in Greater Eurasia creates necessary preconditions for the formation of the Russia-China-Turkey rapprochement in which cooperation and competition are intertwined. Interest and policies of the three major Eurasian countries intersect in the region

of Central Asia, which is important for Turkey in terms of ethnic, religious and linguistic ties. This means that the pursuit and realization of national interests in an effective way necessitates Turkey's balancing between the major powers. Turkey's interest in cooperation with the SCO and even joining it as a full member and the Easter/Eurasian pivot, in general, is, in fact, a manifestation of a multi-vector foreign policy strategy rather than its aspiration to secure a viable alternative to its reliance on the West (Akıllı, 2013).

One of the significant manifestations of Turkey's Eurasia shift is the "Asia Anew" initiative launched in August 2019, which is designed to include cooperation on education, defense industry, investments, trade, technology, culture and political dialogue (Daily Sabah, 2019). According to the Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, "To be influential in the economy and diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires going hand-in-hand with Asia. Asia is becoming the economic center of the world. The international community is in a competition to gain more ground in Asia. However, our roots are deep in this most dynamic region of the world. Just like being in Europe and European, being in Asia and Asian is valuable to us. One of the qualities that make us who we are is that we stand on these two dimensions." (Yeni Şafak, 2019). Since Asia is becoming the economic center of the world, Turkey's orientation to Eurasia is a strategic imperative. In this context Turkey-Russia and Turkey-China relations have the potential to shape the basic paradigms in the continent of Eurasia. (Sputnik, 2019)

### **3. Eurasianism: An Ideational Premise of the Eurasian Pivot?**

#### **3.1. Eurasianism in Russia and Turkey: A Comparative Review of the Main Tenets**

In the 20th century, Russia twice experienced similar geopolitical collapse, namely the dissolution of two historical embodiments of the Russian state – the Russian Empire (1917) and the Soviet Union (1991). In both cases, the state structure and geopolitical unity were disintegrated leading to a deep identity crisis. In other words, the imperial collapse and post-imperial challenges constituted a political and psychological milieu for the reinterpretation of Russia's national and international identity (Bassin, Glebov, & Laruelle, 2015). Therefore, Eurasianist accounts of different historical periods reflect different political circumstances and serve to promote fundamentally different political ideologies. For this reason, it is impossible to reduce Eurasianism to any single doctrine (Bassin, 2008). It is an ambiguous system of thoughts with a changing ideational lineage. The "classical" period of the ideology corresponds to the interwar period and was a deeply heterogeneous and ideologically fragmented movement in itself.

Originating in the 1920s, the idea of classical Eurasianism with it strives to legitimize the Eurasian element of the Russian identity, proclaimed an “exodus to the East”. Rethinking Russia’s geopolitical space (as well as geopolitical identity) at the beginning of the 20th century, which endured radical changes due to the defeat in the First World War, the Russian revolution, the dissolution of the Russian Empire and the emergence of the Bolshevik regime, constituted the intellectual basis for Eurasianism (Glebov, 2015). Throughout the Soviet period, there were attempts to support Eurasianist views, which were most thoroughly developed in the works of Lev Gumilyov. Nevertheless, till the 1990s, the idea of Eurasianism occupied a marginal position in Russian public consciousness (Paderina, 2019). The growing interest in the concept of Eurasia coincided with yet another catastrophe in Russian history, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union, which triggered the resurgence of new discussions on Russia’s quintessence and place in the world. A new appeal to the idea of Eurasianism as part of the post-Soviet rethinking of Russia’s geopolitical space and identity in the early 1990s emerged within the framework of Neo-Eurasianism most thoroughly elaborated by Alexander Panarin and Alexander Dugin.

Eurasianists of the classical period put forward a new vision for post-imperial Russia. According to this vision, without being officially an empire, Russia would preserve the geographic and civilizational unity of historical Russia – “Russia-Eurasia”, which occupies a dual position between Europe and Asia. It enjoys a *sui generis* civilizational structure, which is born out the fusion of the Slavic and Turko-Muslim peoples (Laruelle, 2008). As Nikolay Berdyaev briefly points out, “The Russian people is not purely European and it is not purely Asiatic. Russia is a complete section of the world – a colossal East-West. It unites two worlds, and within the Russian soul, two principles are always engaged in strife – the Eastern and the Western” (1948: 1).

The whole discussion on Russia’s Eurasian quintessence was built around two fundamentally interconnected ideas: first, Peter Savitsky’s idea of Eurasia as a natural “development space” (*mestorazvitiye*) for many different ethnic and religious groups constituting an interrelated unique collection of identities under the overarching Eurasian affiliation; and second, Nikolai Trubetskoy’s concept of pan-Eurasian nationalism (Tolz, 2015). According to the Eurasianist idea, Russian society is indeed a Eurasian society with multiple identities: a multifaceted and extremely complex linguistic, anthropological and cultural-civilizational mixture of Russian-Slavic, Finno-Ugric, Turko-Mongolian elements (Bassin, 1991). In accordance with this idea of multiple identities, the nationalism of each people of Eurasia must be combined with pan-Eurasian nationalism. Moreover, the historical

role and significance of the Russian people, according to classical Eurasianism, gives it special status among the rest of the peoples of Eurasia (Tolz, 2015). Based on these two interconnected ideas, the main task for the Eurasianists was to maintain the integrity of the former imperial space.

In neo-Eurasianism, Russia is also defined as “Russia-Eurasia” and it is emphasized that its borders overlap with the territories of the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and is interpreted as an organic geographic, historical, cultural and anthropological whole. This organic unity is based on a solid foundation of multidimensional ties of a large number of ethnic and religious groups with a common history. In other words, Eurasian geopolitical unity and social cohesion are indestructible as it includes the co-existence of brotherly peoples (Bassin, Glebov, & Laruelle, 2015). Eurasianists of the new period also focus on how to reconstruct the unity of Russia-Eurasia. In their geopolitical imagination, the present-day Russian Federation is seen as an incomplete entity, therefore, restoration of “historical Russia” or “Russia-Eurasia” is once again conceptualized as a vital necessity for Russia. The disintegration of Russia-Eurasia is believed to be a disaster, and it is argued that this dissolved organic union should be restored in the form of the Russian-led Eurasian Union (Torbakov, 2017).

An important similarity or common ground between classical and new Eurasianism is the fact that both arose as a reaction to the political collapse of the existing state, accompanied by the territorial or geopolitical collapse of the whole. The process of territorial fragmentation of an organically unified civilizational zone was equally unacceptable for both classical and new Eurasianism. Therefore, the attempt to justify the need to restore the geopolitical and territorial cohesion of Russia-Eurasia is a common element in two versions of Eurasianism. (Bassin, 2008)

Although adherents of neo-Eurasianism claim to continue the idea of classical Eurasianism of the early 20th century, deriving its legitimacy from it (Bassin, 2015), there are significant conceptual discrepancies between the two versions of the Eurasian idea. In this context, in the classical idea of Eurasianism, the borders of Russia-Eurasia approximately corresponded to the space of Russian statehood in its structure that existed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is considered as a *sui generis* geographical region – an organically unified “geographical individual”. (Laruelle, 2015 a) Nevertheless, the new Eurasianism sees Eurasia in a more complex perspective. Internally, Eurasia is identical to the territories of the former Soviet Union, which reflects the classical understanding of the term Eurasia – the traditional space of Russian statehood. However, at the same time, the geographical scope of Eurasia is not limited to the post-Soviet space. Eurasia extends beyond even the imperial and Soviet space

in three directions: western – to Europe, southern – to Central Asia and eastern – to China and even the Pacific Ocean. As a result of such erosion of the limits of Eurasia, the meaning of civilizational borders is also eroded, and Eurasia becomes a “global project” (Bassin, 2008).

Unlike the original Eurasianist’s opposition to Europe, for neo-Eurasianists, particularly for Alexander Dugin, the concept of Eurasia is identified with the principle of political and ideological opposition to the global domination of the United States after the Cold War. The opposition to Atlanticism is absolutized and it is believed that the image of the world in the 21st century will be determined precisely by the imminent and continuous struggle of Tellurocracy and Thalassocracy (Dugin, 2000; 2015). Therefore, the function of modern Eurasianism is to constitute a theoretical/discursive dimension for the global struggle against Atlanticism.

In neo-Eurasianism, Eurasia is conceptualized within the global geopolitical milieu. On the one hand, Eurasia is a “Russia-Eurasia” of classical Eurasianism, territorially represented today by the post-Soviet space and integrated partially within the Eurasian Economic Union. However, in addition to this “smaller Eurasia”, there is a “large Eurasia”, which represents different geo-economic zones of the continent as a whole. (Bassin, 2008) Thus, neo-Eurasianism is an ideology with geopolitical and economic essence while civilizational justification (such as the deep interaction of the Slavic and some Asian peoples over the centuries) is relegated to the secondary position (Laruelle, 2015).

There is a significant body of literature on the “concept of Eurasia” and “Turkish Eurasianism” and their relationship with the idea of Russian Eurasianism in Turkish geopolitical discourse (Laruelle, 2008; Güneş, 2012; Erşen, 2011, 2017; Tüysüzolu, 2014; Shlapentokh, 2015; Imanbeyli, 2008; 2015). Turkish Eurasianism is seen as an emerging new school of thought that includes various geopolitical readings of the concept of Eurasia and ideology of Eurasianism in the Turkish context (Ismayılov, 2011: 275).

In a broader context Eurasianism in Turkey is conceptualized as one of the key intellectual movements along with Turkism, Westernism, and Islamism. Similarly, referring to Yusuf Akçura’s “Three Styles of Politics”, conceptualization for Turkish national identity, Turkish Eurasianism has been defined as the “fourth style of politics” (Aktürk, 2015). At the same time, there are accounts of Turkish Eurasianism as one of the strands of Turkey’s post-Cold War geopolitical discourse, which places conceptualization of Eurasia within the framework of various geopolitical traditions associated with three political ideologies: Turkism/nationalism, socialism/Kemalism, and conservatism/Islamism. According to this explanation, each political ideology maintains its own (unique) understanding of the concept of Eurasia (Erşen, 2017 b).

Therefore, instead of considering Turkish Eurasianism as an ideology on its own, it is actually more appropriate to talk about various “interpretations” of the concept of Eurasia, which consists of three geopolitical traditions with their understanding of the significance of Eurasia in post-Cold War Turkish identity discourse. These are: Eurasia as a manifestation of Turkey’s aspiration to unite the Turkic world under its own hegemony; Eurasia as an anti-Western geopolitical project which envisages a strategic rapprochement between Turkey and other Eurasian countries (Russia, Iran and China in particular) as a counterbalancing leverage against the Transatlantic alliance; and Eurasia as a novel definition for the former imperial peripheries of Turkey (Erşen, 2017 b). Consequently, there is no genuine Eurasianist ideology in Turkey and ideological constructions designed under the banner of Turkish Eurasianism are devoid of philosophical roots or thoroughly elaborated theorization. Self-proclaimed Eurasianists imported the idea of Eurasia into their own system of thought without fully comprehending its ideological essence. (Karasar, 2008; Imanov, 2008).

Discourse on Turkish Eurasianism emerged in the 1990s as a manifestation of Turkey’s post-Cold War identity crisis and was elaborated mostly within the left-wing ideology with its discourse of pro-Russian geopolitics (Akçalı & Perinçek, 2009). “Pro-Russian orientation abroad and socialist–nationalist government at home are the international and domestic faces of Turkish Eurasianism, which distinguish this movement from others” (Aktürk, 2015:55). References to Eurasianism as an ideological framework for Russia-Turkey rapprochement in this explanation is linked to attempts at the reinterpretation of the geopolitical identity of Turkey, which stipulates a pro-Russian orientation for Turkey as the only right way of preserving sovereignty and integrity in the face of Western hegemony. For them, Russia – a powerful northern neighbor – should be considered as the most important ally of Turkey in world affairs.

An aspiration of Turkish intellectuals to reconceptualize or reproduce the imperial past was, in essence, a reaction to the new conditions of post-Soviet existence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey began to search for a new foreign political identity, since its role as a buffer state between two antagonistic poles has ended. Moreover, “The Soviet collapse resulted not only in the diminution of Turkey’s strategic and military appeal to the West but also in the explosion of Europeans’ long suppressed, atavistic anti-Turkish prejudices. (Karpat, 2004: 510). Therefore, in (anti-Western) academic and political circles, the issue of new ways in foreign political orientation, namely the Russian alternative, has become more relevant.

This “pro-Russian” specificity in the Turkish Eurasianism constitutes the most critical and defining feature of such conceptualization, which in turn distinguishes it from pan-Turkism as a rival to Russian Eurasianism conceptualization of Eurasian geography and

civilization. Pan-Turkism, as another way of understanding Eurasianism, puts forward a deeply anti-Russian vision while for the rest of the advocates of Eurasianism in Turkey Russia is perceived as Turkey's potentially most significant ally (Aktürk, 2015). In this sense, there occurs a paradoxical contradiction between Eurasianism as a Russian ideology and its Turkish version with its special emphasis on the necessity for Turkey to expand its influence across the entire Turkic World. Thus, there is a contention that Russian Eurasianism emerged as a reaction to spreading the influence of the Pan-Turkic movement within the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries since it was perceived by the Eurasianists, who designed this ideology to protect Russia as a multinational empire, as a threat to the territorial integrity of Russia. Russian Eurasianists replaced the pan-Turkic Turanian myth with their own, emphasizing the common historical fate of the Turanian people and the Eastern Slavs (Wiederkehr, 2007). The emphasis on the unity of the Turks and Eastern Slavs, therefore, was supposed to serve as an instrument for preserving the unity of the Russian Empire.

Although the representatives of Eurasian geopolitical discourse in Turkey define themselves as "Eurasianists", both its ideological and geopolitical content do not envisage principles with a real Eurasianist quintessence. Nevertheless, there is an intellectual current in Turkish geopolitical discourse with overlapping ideas with Russian Eurasianism – Neo-Ottomanism (Tüfekçi, 2012; Tüysüzolu, 2014). This concept has similarities with the original Eurasianism in terms of containing the expansionist objectives that Russian Eurasianism strives to achieve. In other words, an aspiration to rebuild a sphere of influence on the post-imperial peripheries envisaged by the concept of neo-Ottomanism is seen as the most important element that approximates Eurasianism in Turkey to the Russian Eurasianism in its original guise (Tüfekçi, 2012; Torbakov, 2017). A post-imperialist mindset and identity form a common source of inspiration for the two interpretations of Eurasianism, which is considered as an ideology of justification or legitimation of imperial aspirations (Tanrısever, 2018). At the same time, Neo-Ottomanism diverts from Russian Eurasianism in the sense of not including Western opposition.

### **3.2. The Instrumental and Pragmatic Function of Eurasianism in Russian And Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse**

The notion of "Russia as a Eurasian power" quite frequently appears in the official rhetoric. In Vladimir Putin's words, "Russia since ancient times was formed as integrated Eurasian power and is a Eurasian civilization"; "Eurasia has vital importance for the establishment of the Russian state as a great multinational Eurasian power" (Putin, 2005; 2007). In the framework of the ongoing implementation of the Greater Eurasia partnership as the most

recent manifestation of Russia's Eurasian pivot, Putin has emphasized, that the "Greater Eurasia is not an abstract geopolitical scheme, it is a future-oriented, truly civilizational project" (Putin, 2017).

As the Valdai Discussion Club puts forward, "Russia has set itself a goal to actively participate in the construction of an objectively forming new geoeconomic, geopolitical, cultural and ideological community – a partnership of Greater Eurasia. Unlike the old Russian Eurasianism, the concept of Greater Eurasia is not targeted against Europe or the West but provides for including Europe of the European Union or most of it. And Russia will at long last find a comfortable place in history and geography as a great Eurasian power. Given the growing trend toward the regionalization of the world, Greater Eurasia will most likely be one of the leading centers." (Valdai, 2018: 17). Likewise, in the Turkish discourse of Eurasia pivot, Eurasia is seen as of vital importance in substantiating Turkey's power projection in a variety of regions and countries.

Therefore, the emphasis of the foreign policy narrative in Russia and Turkey has shifted: the two countries no longer seek integration with Europe. Moscow and Ankara see the Eurasian project as an alternative and a chance for a new multicenter order, which for Russia, in turn, means a "Eurasian" way out of the European crisis" (Karaganov, 2015).

This Eastward turn of Russia, as well as Turkey, reflects a shift in the priorities of the countries' foreign policy and the objective need for both of them to benefit from the economic recovery/rise of Asia in the global economy (Trenin 2015). As the Valdai Discussion Club report states, "In 2015, we can talk about the emergence of the "moment of Central Eurasia" – a unique combination of international political and economic circumstances that allow us to realize the potential for cooperation and joint development of the states of this region. The main driving forces for turning the Center of Eurasia into a zone of joint development will be the project of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Eurasian Economic Integration." (Valdai, 2015: 4-6). Thus, it is believed, that the wider continental space of Greater Eurasia in contrast to post-Soviet Eurasia will determine the fate of the 21st century (Trenin 2013).

From the Russian perspective, Eurasianism serves as an instrument for territorial control through economic integration and security cooperation within the scope of various Russia-led institutions and arrangements aimed at the reintegration of former Soviet countries. Thus, as Morozova asserts, "Russia's Eurasian ambitions are justified not by its historic destiny but the convergence of the economic preconditions necessary for the practical realization of the Eurasian idea, whatever its origins are. Eurasianism is proposed as the state-ideology,

capable of providing the ideational underpinnings for the current borders of Russia, on strictly pragmatic, utilitarian grounds.” (2009).

Similarly, the processes of regionalization in Greater Eurasia are largely pragmatic in their objectives. Existing and potential initiatives primarily serve the goals of economic development and political interests. Modernization of national economies, increasing global competitiveness, common markets for goods, services, capital and labor, direct investment, trade loans, infrastructure projects, and transport subsidies are the key mechanisms of Eurasian integration and cooperation in all its manifestations (EEU, BRI and the Greater Eurasia Partnership) and for all its participants. In terms of political rational participating in these integration and cooperation mechanisms and projects to a large extent serves to the expansion of the sphere of geopolitical influence on the great Eurasian continent as an effective way of becoming a major power with global aspirations. Thus, it is the pragmatic approach, within which integration is not an end in itself, but a means of modernizing economies and gaining a more favorable place in the international system (Vinokurov, 2013).

The discussion about Eurasianism inevitably rests on the debate about the role of borders in this space, which lingers unresolved. There is no clear understanding of where Eurasia begins and ends. Even neo-Eurasianism perceives Eurasia as encompassing Europe as its part (Lewis, 2018). Greater Eurasia is an attempt to go beyond the borders of the Eurasian world towards a wider continental reach. Eurasianism’s “Russia-Eurasia” was a holistic and closed continent, which was vital for the internalization of certain “ideocracy” (Laruelle, 2015 b). The discourse of Greater Eurasia, however, is aimed at opening a space in which Russia could play a significant role outside the traditional boundaries of Eurasia while creating a geopolitical image of power with a continental scale (Lewis, 2018).

From this perspective, despite an Eastward turn the western direction still remains important. The geostrategic and geoeconomic calculation is based on the fact that the economic and diplomatic achievements associated with the eastward reorientation will allow Russia to once again enter a new negotiation process with the EU as an irreplaceable partner in Greater Eurasia in the new hypostasis of the Eurasian Union (Dutkevich, 2019).

From Turkey’s perspective, Eurasianism is not a guiding ideology or a clearly articulated strategy. The concept of Eurasianism is rather regarded as an instrument of pragmatism (Erşen, 2013). Thus, on the theoretical level along with the “cultural-reductionist” discourse (which perceives a stable Eurasian identity as a precondition for regional integration) and “strategic” discourse on Eurasianism (which sees the geopolitical and strategic interests of

Eurasian actors as the main trigger for mutually beneficial Eurasian integration), there is a “pragmatic” discourse on Eurasianism, which does not require a clear commitment to fixed ideological principles and strict adherence to the adopted strategy (Tanrısever, 2018). Thus, it serves to overcome political and diplomatic challenges by using economic opportunities. At the same time, Turkey’s Eurasianism is pragmatic in the sense that it serves to promote its own vision of the former imperial periphery while continuing the traditional role of a “bridge” between Europe and Asia (Tanrısever, 2018).

## Conclusion

In the current circumstances of a changing world order, Russo-Turkish relations are deepening and their foreign policy perspectives are becoming more coordinated in spite of different interests and approaches in various issues and regions. Moreover, contradictions in bilateral relations and occasional tensions do not prevent the preservation of mutually beneficial trade and energy relations. One of the significant determinants in the changing dynamic of mutual rapprochement is both powers’ Eastward reorientation in foreign policy. Against this background, an ideology of Eurasianism has become an important focal point for political and academic discussions. This chapter has sought to determine the function of the idea of Eurasianism in both countries’ Eurasia pivot discourse and substantiate the pragmatic and instrumental nature of Russian and Turkish interpretations of Eurasianism. While classical and neo-Eurasianists are trying to justify Russia’s great power status, Turkish Eurasianism in its neo-Ottoman incarnation strives to substantiate the strategic importance of Turkey as a “central country” in the continent with *sui generis* significance in a historical and civilizational sense.

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