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The Eurasian union: actor in the making?

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Recent studies on regionalism tend to view regions and regional organisations as distinct actors in global affairs. This paper seeks to contribute to these discussions of regions' actorship capabilities by exploring the regionalisation process among post-Soviet states driven by the Eurasian regionalism project. The progress in regional integration among post-Soviet states, including the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia with the Eurasian Economic Commission as its supra-national body, and the developments within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, provides rich empirical data for the approaches in contemporary regionalism studies to assess whether or not we are witnessing the emergence of a region with actorship capabilities.
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Introduction

Contemporary regionalism theories have contributed significantly to the understanding of the regionalisation processes around the world. The field of regional studies is no longer Eurocentric, nor is it dominated by state-centric approaches. Recent studies on regionalism also show a tendency to view regions and regional organisations as distinct actors in global affairs. Hettne (2011) argues that the internal cohesiveness of a region shapes its ability to act *vis-à-vis* the external world. He uses Europe's case to show how the interplay between regionness, presence and actorness allows for the viewing of the European Union (EU) as a global actor. Wunderlich (2012), drawing on the contributions by Hettne (2011), Bretherton and Vogler (2006), and Doidge (2008), argues that the EU is not *sui generis*; therefore, it is possible to compare the highly institutionalised EU with other less institutionalised regional organisations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This paper seeks to contribute to these discussions of the regions' actorship capabilities by exploring regionalisation in post-Soviet geography driven by Eurasian

regionalism. The definitions of the terms *regionalism* and *regionalisation* are based on the New Regionalism Approach (NRA). *Regionalism* refers to a political commitment and body of ideas and objectives with an aim towards transforming a particular geographical area into a cohesive region (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, 2008; Hettne 2005). *Regionalisation* refers to a multidimensional process, including political, economic, security and socio-cultural dimensions, which takes place within a certain geographical space and leads to a higher convergence and cohesion of the integrating units. Regionalisation can occur spontaneously or can be driven by the regionalism project (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000; Grant and Söderbaum 2003).

The theoretical framework adopted in this study proposes that particular geography should not be considered as a 'given' region and it focuses on the process in which regions are constructed or deconstructed. However, this does not mean the rejection of boundaries and delimitations. According to the NRA, the degree of regionness or cohesion among integrating units plays an important role in defining the region in the making (Hettne 2005). This study explores the Eurasian Integration Space, a region under construction, in which the core trio consisting of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia pursue deeper regional integration, while other post-Soviet states, most notably members and observers of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), are engaged actively.[1]

In the framework of Eurasian regionalism, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have formed regional organisations, including the EurAsEC, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia Customs Union (BKR CU), and the Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia Single Economic Space (BKR SES). The heads of the states of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have recently signed the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty (EEU Treaty) agreeing to establish the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) on 1 January, 2015. The three states have also agreed on a Common External Tariff (CET) scheme and delegated competencies in foreign trade policy to the Eurasian Economic Commission (EAEC), the supranational body of the EEU. Moreover, Vladimir Putin raised both hopes and suspicions about the future of Eurasian regionalism by stating the need to establish the Eurasian Union 'on a new political and economic basis and a new system of values' (Press Service 2011). On the basis of these developments in building regional institutions among the post-Soviet states and the discourse on Eurasian regionalism, this paper explores the potentials and limits of the actorship capability of the region as represented by the BKR SES, which will be replaced by the EEU in 2015, and the CSTO.

Although it may be early at this stage to talk about the EEU as a distinct actor in international relations, recent developments in the regionalisation process suggest that internal cohesiveness, particularly among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, has increased and that the region, at least in the economic dimension, is an actor in the making. The previously mentioned progress in regional integration in post-Soviet space provides rich empirical data for contemporary regionalism approaches, particularly the NRA.

The next section of this paper presents the theoretical, conceptual framework of the study. The emergence and spread of constructivist and critical political economy approaches in the 1980s and 1990s have influenced the field of regional studies. The critical constructivist approaches in the recent debate, that is, the second-generation regionalism studies, view regions as social constructions and question the state-centrism and overemphasis on rationalism of the theories in the earlier debate, including neo-functionalism, intergovermentalism and neo-liberal institutionalism.

The section after that presents an overview of regionalisation processes among post-Soviet states since the collapse of the USSR. It is argued that regionalisation among the former Soviet states has been highly influenced by two regionalism projects: Eurasian regionalism and West-oriented regionalism.

The last two sections of this paper present an assessment of whether or not the Eurasian regionalism project can lead to the emergence of a region with actorship capability. The assessment covers economic and security dimensions of Eurasian regionalism.

Conceptualising actorship

One of the important developments in the field of regional studies since the 1990s is the assessment of regions, represented by regional organisations, as possible actors in international relations. The process of regionalisation, as in the case of the regionalisation driven by Eurasian regionalism, leads to increased regionness, which 'implies that a geographical area is transformed from a passive object (an arena) to an active subject (an actor) that is increasingly capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region' (Hettne 2005: 555). Langenhove (2011: 69) notes that 'regions are not states, but they can act "as if" they were a state'.

In this paper, the actorship capability of the emerging Eurasian Integration Space is assessed by drawing upon the NRA. Hettne *et al.* (2008) identify three components that constitute the regional actorship or the capability of a region to behave as an actor in international relations: first, regionness, which refers to the level of internal cohesiveness in terms of institutionalisation (regional institutions) and identity ('we' feelings); second, presence, which includes a region's weight in terms of demography, economics, military power and ideology; and third, actorness, which is defined as 'the capacity to act purposively to shape outcomes in the external world'.

Regionness

In assessing the regionness or internal cohesiveness of a region, Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) propose classification into five levels or stages of regionness, from regional social space — that is, the lowest level in which a region is populated by non-related groups — to a regional institutionalised polity such as the EU.[2] Their classification of

regions is based on the levels of social interaction, institutionalisation, and the existence of collective identities (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000). This study assesses the level of regionness based on its two components, which are the level of institutionalisation and regional identity.

First, the level of institutionalisation is one of the key factors that influence regionness and the actorship capability of a region. A region needs to possess some form of institutionalisation, formal and/or informal, in order to emerge as an international actor (Wunderlich 2012). A region with a fixed and permanent decision-making structure, the so-called institutionalised polity, has stronger actorship capability (Hettne *et al.* 2008).

Second, the construction of a strong regional identity or, in other words, the emergence of 'we' feelings among people in a region, will lead to external actorship (Hettne 2011). Regional identity can be understood as 'the meaning that people attribute to (geographic) spaces (e.g., states, micro-regions, macro-regions), to persons seen as representing those spaces (including their duties and rights), as well as to the interactions between them' (Slocum and Langenhove 2003: 3). The meanings that people attribute to spaces or regional identity can be explored through the concept of *representations* that refers to how particular space is represented in a discourse (Dunn 2004; Neumann 2004). Identities and representations are interrelated: 'identities refer to shared representations of a collective self as reflected in public debate, political symbols, collective memories, and elite competition for power' (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009: 4).

Presence

Hettne *et al.* (2008) argue that the very existence of the EU gives it influence as an external actor because of its demographic, economic, military and ideological weight. 'Presence does not denote purposive external action, rather it is a consequence of being' and reflects the external audiences' understanding of a region's identity and internal priorities and policies (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 26). Size matters; for example, the region that has strong economic weight will have a stronger influence not only in economics but also in other aspects of international relations. Presence also includes the scope of external activities of a region, such as providing economic aid to other parts of the world or dependence of the external parties on a regional market. The region's or regional organisation's capacity to act depends on its presence. However, the presence itself does not lead to actorship capability, as in the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has a strong economic presence but lacks strong internal cohesiveness and actorness (Hettne *et al.* 2008).

Actorness

Hettne (2005) defines *actorness* as the capability of a region, in some cases having legal personality, to influence external environments. The region may have different

degrees of actorness in different fields (e.g., trade, security and development) of its external relations. In assessing the actorness, the NRA builds on four basic requirements for actorness identified by Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 28), which are, first, a shared commitment to a set of overarching values and principles; second, domestic legitimation of decision processes and priorities relating to external policy; third, the ability to identify priorities and formulate consistent (refers to the degree of congruence between external policies of the member states) and coherent (refers to the level of coordination of regional policies) policies; and finally, the availability of, and capacity to utilise, policy instruments such as diplomacy, economic tools and military means.

The three components previously discussed — regionness, presence and actorness — are interrelated and their interplay defines a region's actorship capability. This analytical framework is used to explore whether or not the increased levels of cohesiveness among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, particularly the establishment of the EEU, the reforms of the CSTO and the intensification of *integration-speak*, may result in the emergence of a region as a distinct actor in international relations. Before exploring the actorship capability of a region in the making, the so-called Eurasian Integration Space, the next section provides an overview of regionalisation processes among post-Soviet states since the beginning of the 1990s.

Regionalisation processes among post-Soviet states

A voluntary nature and consensus building rather than coercion are important characteristics in constructing regional actorship (Hettne *et al.* 2008). In the past, the societies living in post-Soviet geography were unified mainly on the basis of coercion by Tsarist Russia and its successor, the communist regime. This historical background has a double-edged effect on the regionalisation processes among the post-Soviet regionalism. The coercive regionalism of the past — that is, under Tsarist Russia and later under the communist regime — has resulted in the creation of a common language space (the Russian language still maintains a dominant position in many of the post-Soviet states), increased economic and infrastructural interdependencies, and some common perceptions and identities that tend to support regionalism. On the other hand, the construction of the Russian and, later on, the Soviet Empire had destructive effects on local cultures, languages and identities. These destructive effects are often invoked in discourse to limit the processes of regional integration, particularly of Russia-centred integration.

The regional integration among the post-Soviet states since the collapse of the USSR has been influenced by this historical baggage, which contains both potentials and obstacles for regionalism. The establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991 by 12 former Soviet states was more an effort to manage a 'divorce' than an attempt to reintegrate. Despite the fact that many studies view it as a

failure, the CIS has served its role as a dialogue platform. Moreover, the CIS framework provided ground for the establishment of the inter-parliamentary assembly, for maintaining the visa-free regime within the region, for running the MIR TV channel broadcast in the CIS member states, and for other important regional arrangements. However, the broad membership and the divergence of interests within the CIS limited the commitments made by the states in furthering regional integration. For example, the free trade agreement signed by the CIS member states in 1994 was ratified by only a few parliaments in the region.

In the security dimension, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) was signed in 1992 by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia joined in 1993, and the treaty went into effect in 1994. However, the CST was signed for a 5-year period only, and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan ended their membership in 1999.

The failures to deepen the regional integration within the CIS and the CST in the early 1990s and the changes at global and regional levels in the late 1990s and the early 2000s (i.e., the global war on terrorism, the failures of market reforms in many post-Soviet countries, the eastward expansion of NATO) have significantly influenced the approaches to regionalism among post-Soviet countries. Instead of the wide membership and limited commitment approach of post-Soviet regionalism projects like the CIS and the CST, two major regionalism projects emerged in the second half of the 1990s: Eurasian regionalism and West-oriented regionalism.

West-oriented regionalism was an attempt by some post-Soviet countries to integrate into the West. The EU and the United States were the main supporters of this regionalism project. Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine established GUAM in 1997.[3] To reflect its political and economic aspects, the organisation was officially renamed the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development — GUAM (ODED-GUAM) in 2006. ODED-GUAM promotes a deepening of integration with the EU, and its members also actively participate in the European Eastern Partnership Programme.

Each state in this bloc has its own reasons for joining ODED-GUAM, which is pro-Western and it is the only regional organisation established by post-Soviet states with no Russian participation. Although the adoption of Western standards of democracy and good governance are stated among the main reasons for the establishment of ODED-GUAM, it is often argued that the organisation is an exclusive arrangement to limit Russia's influence in the region (Sakwa and Webber 1999; Tsygankov 2006; Libman 2007). Russia's position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its involvement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia made it an uneasy partner for Azerbaijan and Georgia. As for Ukraine and Moldova, the exclusive nature of ODED-GUAM can be explained by the existence of strong anti-imperialist sentiments in Ukraine and Moldova's worries about Russia's involvement in Transnistria.

GUAM experienced some periods of activism in the middle of the 2000s but, in general, the organisation had limited impact in addressing the economic and security

issues in the region (Malek 2013; Dinesen and Wivel 2014). Gower (2014) argues that, despite its limited success, GUAM reflected an ideological shift that served as a stepping stone for the European Eastern Partnership Programme.

Eurasian regionalism was first proposed by the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in 1994 as an initiative to create a workable regional organisation to facilitate economic relations between the former Soviet states, and to establish stability in the region. Nazarbayev identified four basic principles for Eurasian integration: economic pragmatism; voluntarily nature; common efforts to maintain stability in the region; and multi-speed integration (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda 2004). The first step towards such regional arrangements was made in 1995 by the signing of the Customs Union agreement among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia (these countries were later joined by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). However, the states that signed the agreement failed to eliminate non-tariff barriers or find a compromise on common external tariff levels.

Although the Customs Union agreement of 1995 was not fully implemented, it became a stepping stone for the establishment of EurAsEC by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in 2000. Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine received observer status in this organisation. As a further step in regional integration, the concept of the Single Economic Space (SES Concept) was agreed upon by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine in 2003 within the framework of EurAsEC.[4] The SES Concept was based on the multi-speed integration idea, which implied that the previously mentioned four countries would advance with deeper forms of integration, and it was hoped that other CIS countries would join the core four in the future. During the Yalta Summit in May 2004, Nazarbayev proposed a direct move to the customs union, but Ukraine's leadership insisted on the free-trade zone as the initial stage to implement the SES Concept (Vinokurov 2007). In the same year, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine brought to power the pro-Europeans, Viktor Yushchenko as president and Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister, and the SES Concept negotiations with Ukraine as a member were frozen.

The SES Concept was revived in 2009, but only among three core countries. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia agreed to establish the BKR CU in 2010 and the BKR SES in 2012.[5] This time, the three countries were able to agree on a CET scheme, which has been in effect since 1 January, 2010. Customs control between these three countries was abolished by July 2011. The BKR SES among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia was established on 1 January, 2012. The EAEC, a supranational body of the BKR SES and the BKR CU, started to function in the same year. The core three have also signed the EEU Treaty that will lead to the establishment of the EEU in 2015.

Despite Ukraine's reluctance to continue with the implementation of the SES Concept of 2003, attempts to involve Ukraine in Eurasian regionalism projects continued. Ukraine's choice to tilt towards the EU in the mid-2000s was considered a geopolitical threat by the Russian leadership. The victory of pro-Russian Viktor

Yanukovich in the presidential election of 2010 provided a vital opportunity for Russia to reverse Ukraine's move towards Europe. A series of events that included promises of cheap gas deals and long-term loans by Russia culminated in the Vilnius Summit on 29 November, 2013, when Ukraine refused to sign the planned Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. Michael Emerson identifies three main reasons for the failure of the AA: the EU's insistence on the AA with inadequate balance between incentives and obligations for Ukraine; Putin's determination to torpedo the AA; and Yanukovich's attempts to play geopolitical games that made him and Ukraine Putin's hostages (Emerson 2014a). The failure to achieve the AA between Ukraine and the EU and the events that followed, such as Crimea's 'choice' to join Russia, have left little chance for Russia to have Ukraine as a full member for the planned Eurasian Economic Union.

The relations between Ukraine and Russia will be shaped by the outcome of the ongoing political crisis in Ukraine. In the case of more predictable partners, that is, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Russia is pushing forward the issue of political integration through the establishment of an Eurasian parliament with direct elections (Naryshkin Calls for Establishment of Eurasian Parliament 2012). However, Belarus and Kazakhstan have shown lack of support and have even opposed the idea of political integration at this stage or in the near future (Akhmatova 2012; No need to hurry 2012).

Figure 1 provides information on the membership of post-Soviet states in regional organisations. The figure indicates the existence of two regionalism projects in post-Soviet geography and the multi-speed integration formula of Eurasian regionalism. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia form the core trio, or the first tier, of the most

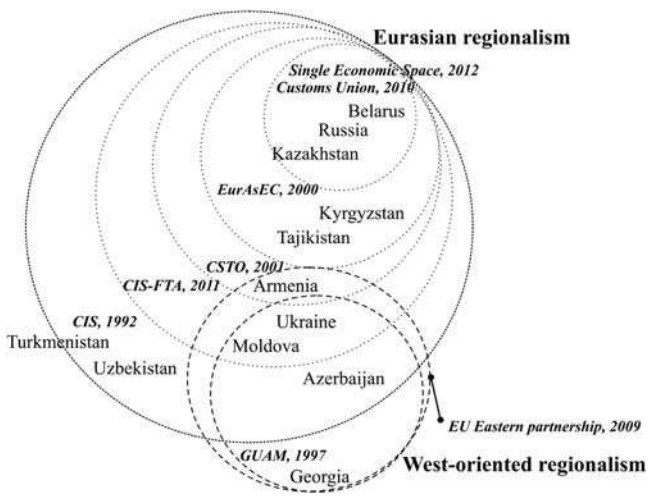

Figure 1 Membership of post-Soviet countries in regional organisations.

integrated countries within the framework of Eurasian regionalism. The next tier is the Eurasian Five, that is, the core trio plus Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These five countries are members of EurAsEC in the economic dimension and of the CSTO in the security dimension. Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine also participate in Eurasian regionalism alongside the Eurasian Five, but their participation is limited to observer status in EurAsEC and by membership in the CIS Free Trade Agreement (CIS FTA) signed in 2011. Armenia, which is also a member of the CSTO, is more inclined towards Eurasian regionalism, while Moldova and Ukraine, alongside Eurasian regionalism, actively participate in West-oriented regionalism projects and are members of GUAM and the European Eastern Partnership Programme. Following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine over the status of Crimea, Ukraine's foreign ministry indicated its dissatisfaction with the CIS, but the country has not ended its membership in CIS FTA (Ukraine Interfax, 2014).

This paper focuses on the regionalisation processes among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, which are the core trio of states pursuing Eurasian regionalism. The actorship capability of the region in the making, the Eurasian Integration Space, which is being constructed by the actors in these core trio states, is assessed by exploring economic and security dimensions of Eurasian regionalism. In each of these two dimensions, the issues of the region's presence, regionness and actorness are discussed.

Economics of Eurasian regionalism

The establishment of the BKR CU in 2010 and the BKR SES in 2012, the adoption of the CET scheme, and the removal of the customs borders between the members of the BKR CU were among the notable developments in regionalisation among post-Soviet states in recent years. Although economic cooperation in the form of the Free Trade Areas (FTAs) is widespread, only a few regional arrangements such as the EU, Mercosur, and recently the BKR CU were able to adopt the CET schemes. The next step is the establishment of the EEU between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia in 2015. The was signed on 19 May, 2014, and the previous agreements on the BKR CU and the BKR SES are incorporated in this treaty.[6] The aim of this section is to assess whether or not the EEU may emerge as a distinct actor in international trade and economics. In discussing the components of actorship (regionness, presence and actorness), the study often refers to comparisons with the EU and the ASEAN.

Regionness

The regionness component of the EEU is explored in relation to two interrelated aspects: institutionalisation and regional identity. These two aspect are interrelated as the institutional framework, formal or informal, leads to higher cohesiveness in a

region through facilitation of social communication and common values and norms (Hettne *et al.* 2008).

First, in its institutional aspect, the structure of the EEU is more similar to the EU institutional design. The major differences are the degree of supranationalism, the range of competencies delegated to the regional level, and the tools available for regional organisation to realise these competencies.

The highest decision-making body of the BKR SES is the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC), which provides strategic direction for the integration as in the case of the European Council.[7] Both the European Council and the SEEC can be described as supreme political authorities. However, based on the treaties signed and ratified by member states, the SEEC partly performs the legislative function by approving the decisions and legislative proposals of the EAEC. The legislation that delegates new competencies from national to regional level is subject to ratification by national parliaments after the approval of the SEEC. The legislative function in the EU is performed by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (the EU Council). The EU Council consists of national ministers of member states and acts in a fashion similar to the upper house of a national parliament. In the BKR SES, there is no parliament, but the Council of the EAEC, which consists of deputy prime ministers of the member states, performs a function of reviewing legislative proposals and decisions made by the Board of the EAEC, and makes recommendations for the SEEC. The Board of the EAEC, an executive body of the EEU, performs similar functions as the European Commission in relation to its exclusive competencies such as the international trade and competition issues. The list of exclusive competencies of the EAEC is much shorter than that of the European Commission. While the work of the European Commission is organised by Directorates-General headed by Commissioners the EaEC has the Departments that report to the members of the Board.

Second, alongside the progress in institutionalisation, the higher levels of regionness require the development of regional identity. The absence of shared values and norms at the regional level will hinder the actorship capability even of a highly institutionalised region. In explaining the levels of regionness, Hettne *et al.* (2008) link the emergence of a region as a community to the capacity of a regional organisational framework to facilitate the formation of common identity and social trust at the regional level.

For example, the EU is often identified as a model and exporter of values such as democratic political culture and the respect for the rule of law and universal human rights that are included in the *acquis communautaire* (Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Wunderlich 2012). The distinct feature of the EU is also the idea of the 'pooling of sovereignty' and 'the willingness to impinge on state sovereignty' in cases of human rights violations (Manners 2002: 252). The EU can also be distinguished by its supranationalism in building regional institutions and its emphasis on formal rules and a legal framework. In relation to trade, immigration and border controls, the EU

is identified as a 'fortress' that protects member states from 'unfair trading practices of others and illegal cross-border activities' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 58).

In contrast to the EU approach of the pooling of sovereignty, relying on supranational institutions, and emphasising formal rules, the ASEAN is identified as a sovereignty enhancing intergovernmental organisation that relies on informal and consensus-based decision-making mechanisms. In more than 40 years of its existence, the ASEAN developed particular regional norms, the so-called 'ASEAN Way', such as non-interference in the internal affairs of its members, respect for sovereignty, restraint from using force, wide consultations, and consensus building (Stubbs 2008; Acharya 2009).

Post-Soviet regionalism has a very short history of 20 years and it is often identified as 'ink on paper', 'virtual', and 'failed' regionalism (Allison 2008: 185; Kubicek 2009: 237; Libman and Vinokurov 2012: 66). One of the reasons for the lack of regional identity is the absence of a proper name to describe the post-Soviet space (Libman and Vinokurov 2012). Regional identity is unlikely to be formed under the CIS brand, while the term 'Eurasian' has better chances as it is promoted by major centres of integration in the region — Russia and Kazakhstan. However, the meaning of 'Eurasian' is highly contested within and outside the region.

To date, several proposals have been formulated for what 'Eurasian' is or what it should be. In this contest of ideas over the content of Eurasian regionalism, the most influential proposal came from Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan, who identified Eurasian integration as a voluntarily project among interested states based on economic pragmatism and the equality of sovereign partners with the goal of promoting stability and development in the region (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda 2004).

To some extent, the actual progress in regional integration, such as the establishment of the BKR CU and the EEU, among the core trio of Eurasian regionalism, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, follows Nazarbayev's proposal. The EEU Treaty emphasises the equality of partners and the economic nature of integration. The EEU membership criteria, which can be used to assess identity formation, contain a very general requirement for candidates to 'share the EEU goals and norms' (EEU Treaty 2014: Article 108).

Although the norms indicated in the EEU Treaty and proposed by Nazarbayev remind one of the ASEAN Way, there are differences in perceptions of sovereignty that allow creation of supranational institutions such as the EAEC and the EEU Court. The intensity and level of debates over the treaties that govern regional integration also show the tendency towards formal arrangements. These norms of sovereignty, economic pragmatism, voluntary integration and equality of partners imply that members of the EEU delegate some competencies only in trade and macroeconomic policymaking to the regional level in order to strengthen their sovereignty in the face of challenges posed by growing global economic instabilities; but states retain competencies in matters of security and politics at the national level. These norms can be grouped under the concept of 'pragmatic Eurasianism' that

acknowledges the need for Western-style economic modernisation but pays limited attention to ideology and politics (Vinokurov and Libman 2012). Pragmatic Eurasianism is not Russia-centred or limited to the post-Soviet region; it is open to Europe and Asia and, in this respect, it is compatible with the idea of 'Greater Eurasia', that is, the promotion of a continent-wide cooperation (Emerson 2014b).

However, these norms enshrined in pragmatic Eurasianism are not shared by all major actors in the region thus undermining their acceptance as the cornerstones of regional identity under formation. For example, Russian negotiators constantly tried to include security (i.e., articles on border protection) and political (i.e., articles on future regional parliament) issues in the EEU treaty. These attempts by Russian officials and statements of some high-level members of the Russian government and parliament led to another identification of Eurasian regionalism by national patriots in the near abroad and by some western policymakers as a project for a re-Sovietisation of the region or the restoring of the Russian Empire.[8] The meaning of 'Eurasian' is also contested by the so-called Eurasianists in Russia, such as Alexandr Dugin, who praise Eurasian regionalism, however, contrary to the 'pragmatic Eurasianism', they envisage an emergence of an anti-Western bloc centred on Russian civilisation.

Presence

One of the most significant sources of the EU's external influence is its presence as the Single Market in which the European Commission acts as gatekeeper (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). The establishment of the BKR CU in 2010 also resulted in the creation of a single customs territory and access to the markets of three member states, which in total have a population of 170 million people. It is mostly controlled at the regional level through the competencies delegated to the EAEC. The exclusive competencies of the EAEC include competition and trade policies that enable it to retain control over trade in goods between the EEU members and third countries.

The negotiations for enlargement of the EEU are ongoing. Kyrgyzstan and Armenia have already applied for membership and negotiated the roadmaps. The presence of the region will increase slightly as a result of the enlargement, but it may lead to decreased actorness of the EEU because of the consensus-based decision making in the SEEC, the highest decision-making body of the EEU.

Actorness

Actorness requires 'the ability to formulate and implement external policy' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 211). In the case of the EU, the actorness concept can be explored on the basis of delimitation between national and regional competencies (Hettne *et al.* 2008). Competencies delegated from national to regional level can serve as the indicators of the scope of a regional organisation's policies that are

considered legitimate by member states. The establishment of the BKR CU in 2010 and the delegation of authority in tariff policy to the Customs Union Commission, predecessor of the EAEC, was the first step in building the organisation's actorness. The EEU approach to regional integration resembles, to some extent, the EU model of distinguishing between three levels of competencies: first, the EEU competencies; second, the coordination of policies within the framework of the EEU; and third, seeking coordination of policies according to the main goals and norms of the EEU (EEU Treaty 2014: Article 5).

The first level, the EEU competencies that include tariff policy and technical and customs regulations, are areas of external economic relations in which Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have agreed to pursue consistent policies. Consistency refers to the compatibility of member states' bilateral external polices with the policies of the regional organisation, which is one of the requirements of actorness alongside the availability of policy instruments to realise those policies (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). In the abovementioned three areas, the EAEC has policy instruments such as setting CET levels, implementing anti-dumping and countervailing measures, and developing regional technical standards in order to maintain consistent policies in trade in goods.

At other levels where member states have agreed to coordinate and follow the EEU goals and norms, consistency is problematic. The trade in services and foreign investment issues are coordinated, but they remain an exclusive national competency of member states (EEU Treaty 2014: Appendix 16, Article 48). The limitations of the EAEC competencies can be explained by difficulties in ensuring consistency among states with different economic systems. Belarus still preserves some elements of a command economy (i.e., price controls, employment requirements, and state control over private enterprises), while Kazakhstan pursues pro-market policies.[9] These differences lead to lack of coherence in identification and prioritisation of external policies. The EEU Treaty (2014) tries to address this situation by stipulating macroeconomic requirements and setting three main indicators: first, budget deficits should be less than 3 per cent of GDP; second, public debt should be less than 50 per cent of GDP; third, the difference in inflation rates among member states should be less than 5 per cent (Article 63). These requirements can be a challenge for Belarus, while Kazakhstan and Russia do not face any difficulty in conforming to them. As regards policy instruments of the EEU designed to ensure the coordination of macroeconomic policies among member states they are limited to monitoring and providing recommendations only.

To summarise the discussion on actorship capability in the trade dimension: the competencies of the EAEC, the decision-making structure within the EEU, and the discourse on Eurasian regionalism suggest that, in trade policy, the region has been developing its actor capability. In their assessment of the EU actorness, Bretherton and Vogler (2006) also note that the trade dimension was the oldest and most effective indicator of the EU as an actor.

Security dimension of Eurasian regionalism

The link between regionalism and security can be established by identifying security problems and analysing regional responses to them (Stadtmúller 2005). The evolution of security arrangements in post-Soviet geography is related to the issues that were viewed as security problems by the state and non-state actors in the region.

In the 1990s, the security arrangements established in post-Soviet geography addressed primarily traditional security issues, such as avoiding inter-state conflicts, deterring outside military intervention, and solving border disputes. The CST, which came into effect in 1994, addressed the threat of inter-state conflicts in the region and possible military intervention from outside the region. In later years, some countries preferred to address these security issues not through Russia-centred security arrangements but through NATO, which was actively moving eastward. The Shanghai Five mechanism, which included four post-Soviet countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) and China, was established in 1996. The border demarcation between China and the Central Asian states was ongoing at that time, and so the Shanghai Five mechanism treaties included the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions and the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions, both of which were designed to address this issue effectively and to build mutual trust among member states.

However, the evolution of these security arrangements in the 2000s, such as the transformation of the CST into the CSTO and of the Shanghai Five mechanism into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with a wider spectrum of security issues needing to be addressed, shows that member states changed their perceptions of threats. As noted in Buzan and Wæver (2003: 409), Russian securitisation under Putin placed emphasis on terrorism, which allowed Russia to widen the security agenda covered by the framework of the CSTO.

After the events of 9/11, which triggered the global war on terrorism, the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking were considered existential and requiring regional responses. The CSTO, established in 2002, widened its spectrum of security issues to include fighting international terrorism and extremism, illegal drug and arms trafficking, organised transnational crime, and illegal migration, which indicates changes in threat perceptions.

The perception of terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational crime as threats has caused state and non-state actors in the region to converge. However, the degree of regional response and the strength of regional security organisations such as the CSTO and the SCO depends on the importance of the Eurasian vector for regional actors in addressing these threats.

This study focuses on the CSTO actorship capability insofar as this organisation can be considered part of the Eurasian regionalism promoted by the post-Soviet states, particularly Russia and Kazakhstan. Although the CSTO and the SCO address

similar security problems, the SCO is primarily a China-led organisation that fosters security cooperation among its members (Lo 2009).

Regionness

The common characteristic of regional security institutions around the world, including those in Europe, Southeast Asia and Central Eurasia, is their intergovernmental nature. While European states and, to some extent, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have delegated some partial authority to the regional level in the economic dimension through the establishment of supranational institutions, the authority in security issues remains mostly at a national level.

In Southeast Asia, the security issues are addressed in a more informal way through wide consultations within the framework of the ASEAN. The adoption of the ASEAN Charter in 2007 led to the establishment of a pillar system based on three communities, including the ASEAN Political-Security Community. The ASEAN Political-Security Council, an intergovernmental body that comprises foreign ministers of the ASEAN member states, coordinates regional initiatives under the Political-Security Community and is supported by related departments in the ASEAN Secretariat and National Secretariats.

European institutions in the security dimension were revised several times since the introduction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1993. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in 2009, strengthened the regional component in addressing security issues. The High Representative, who is appointed by the European Council and approved by the European Parliament, chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and serves as Vice President of the European Commission. Consolidation of these functions in addition to support by the European External Action Service allows the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP) to coordinate the EU security policies better (Treaty of Lisbon 2007).

In Central Eurasia, the main institutional changes happened at the beginning of the 2000s when the CST, a mutual defence organisation, was transformed into the CSTO, a multifunctional security organisation with two permanent bodies — the CSTO Secretariat and the Joint Staff. The highest decision-making body of the CSTO is the Council that comprises heads of the state of member states with one vote per member and consensus-based decision making. The CSTO has its own military forces — a Collective Rapid Reaction Force of about 20,000 troops, and a Collective Peacekeeping Force comprising 3,600 troops.[10]

In the security dimension, the EU, the ASEAN and the CSTO have similarities regarding decision-making structures that are intergovernmental in nature. However, these organisations are different with respect to shared norms and identities.

The EU is often identified as a ‘security community, where war is no longer an option for resolving conflicts’ (Hettne *et al.* 2008: 38). Unlike NATO, the EU

approach to security de-emphasises the role of military action and stresses the civilian or 'soft power' approach in addressing threats (Bretherton and Vogler 2006).

The ASEAN can be a candidate for a security community with its norms of non-interference, consensus-based decision making and wide consultations. The ASEAN can be viewed as a 'nascent' security community with a more than three decades-long history of settling disputes without the use of force (Acharya 2009: 208). However, 'security in the region seems more evident than community' (Emmerson 2005: 181).

Unlike the situation in the EU or the ASEAN, the security cooperation among post-Soviet states, including the cooperation among the CSTO members, has not resulted in shared norms and some form of collective identity. Russia is the main initiator and catalyst of security arrangements in post-Soviet geography. Its size, military might, ambitions for great power status, and the overall dominant position in the region play a dual role. Russia can be viewed by neighbours as a security provider and a threat at the same time. Therefore, the security dimension of Eurasian regionalism is characterised by the emphasis on sovereignty and pluralism by the states participating in Russia-centred security organisations. Although some post-Soviet states cooperate actively with Russia in Eurasian security organisations, they often show lack of support for the Russian foreign policy agenda, as was the case in Russia's failure to convince the other CSTO members to recognise sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, and the status change of Crimea in 2014.[11]

Russia's role as a great power or pole in a multipolar world, as viewed by Putin, depends largely on its influence in the Russian 'near abroad'.[12] The CSTO is often viewed as a tool with which Russia provides an alternative to NATO's security provision mechanism. The long-term military presence of NATO in Central Asia and NATO's activism in the post-Soviet area in general are defined as security problems in Russia (Vasilyevna 2007). However, the Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which host Russian and the US military bases at the same time do not view the presence of NATO or the United States as a security problem.

Seen from the perspective of the Central Asian countries, the multi-vectorial approach to security, as opposed to sticking to Russia, is viewed as a more viable alternative. The survey among experts in Kazakhstan lists the CSTO, the SCO and NATO as the most important organisations for Kazakhstan's security (Reiting Research Center 2012). Although Kazakhstan can be considered a main strategically of Russia alongside Belarus, the country manages to hold both the CSTO and NATO military exercises on its territory.

It is also difficult to describe the region represented by the CSTO as an emerging security community because of lack of trust among its component societies. Although the CSTO Charter stresses respect for sovereignty as a primary principle, and the intervention in any member state's internal affairs as possible only upon the request of that state, these norms are challenged by the growing 'great power'

nationalism in Russia. The efforts of Russia to protect its Russian compatriots abroad, which are articulated in Russia's foreign policy documents and the country's activism in Crimea and East Ukraine, influence the representations of Russia in its near abroad. Pictures of the Russian bear having Ukraine as a meal and eyeing other post-Soviet states are not uncommon in the local press and social networks in post-Soviet states.

Presence

In considering the presence component of regional actorship, the most important factor is the status assigned by external parties to the regional organisation, influenced by the meanings about what a regional organisation 'is and what it does' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 26). In the security dimension, post-Soviet states have not created a region represented by a regional organisation that is widely accepted by external parties. Russia's military might and active foreign policy provoke reactions and create expectations from other actors in international relations that are conditions for strong presence (Hettne 2011). However, other members of the CSTO are often reluctant to accept Russia's position and develop a common response as a region, thus limiting or even preventing the emergence of the region as an actor in the security dimension.

Actorness

There were some attempts, mainly initiated by Russia, to increase the cohesiveness within the CSTO and develop a common foreign policy. Discussions on a common foreign policy started in 2011 when there was an attempt to define the list of foreign policy issues in which the views of the CSTO members converged (Kucera 2011). During a meeting in Bishkek on 27 May, 2013, the CSTO member states' ministers of foreign affairs issued a joint statement on foreign policy issues, including the Syrian conflict and the NATO antimissile system in Europe.[13] Another important document that contributes significantly to the actorness of the CSTO is the Protocol on the Location of Military Installations in CSTO Member States, which requires any CSTO member to obtain the consent of all other CSTO members before placing military bases and other military infrastructure of non-members (i.e., NATO and the US bases) on its territory.

Alongside the ability to formulate external policies, actorness requires the existence of instruments to implement these policies (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). The coordination of the foreign policies that have intensified since 2011 resulted in several joint statements by the foreign ministers of the CSTO member states on issues related to the conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan.[14] These joint statements are major diplomatic instruments at a regional level to show the common position of the CSTO members on particular foreign policy issues. The CSTO also has the potential to use its joint military forces within and outside

the region if approved by all members. There have been no military operations carried out by the CSTO members that would allow some conclusions to be drawn about their military effectiveness. However, the CSTO deploys its collective military forces actively in annual exercises and operations to limit drug trafficking and illegal migration. For example, the anti-drug operation 'Kanal' (Channel in Russian) is carried out on an annual basis to stop drug trafficking and it attracts observers from a number of countries, including China, Pakistan, the United States and Iran, as well as international organisations such as Interpol (Nikitina 2012).

Despite attempts by Russia to improve cohesiveness within the CSTO framework, the external actorness of the organisation remains weak. Russia's great power status, or its aspiration for this status, necessitates an active foreign policy, including the adoption of positions that do not always serve the interests of the other CSTO members. It is possible to adopt common positions on those issues where interests converge, but it is too early to expect the adoption of a common foreign policy, or to talk about regional actorship in the security dimension.

Conclusion

This article explores the recent developments in regionalisation among Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, including the establishment of the BKR CU, BKR SES, and the measures adopted to increase the effectiveness of the CSTO, and it assesses whether or not the region (represented by these organisations) can be considered an actor in international systems, or at least as an actor in the making. The region's actorship capability in economic and security dimensions is assessed on the basis of contemporary regionalism theories.

In the economic dimension, the discourse on regional integration indicates a consensus among the political elites to strengthen the regional economic institutions with some elements of supranationalism. The active stance of political leadership in the three states has led to the institutionalisation of economic relations through the establishment of the BKR CU, the BKR SES, and the EEU. The formation of the common customs territory and the establishment of the EAEC, the supranational body of the EEU, with competencies to negotiate CET levels and to implement countervailing and antidumping measures, have contributed significantly to the region's actorness. These developments suggest that the region can be considered an emerging trade and economic actor. However, the progress of integration may slow down when partners have to implement the most sensitive issues, such as the harmonisation of transportation tariffs, the removal of export tariffs on mineral resources, and the reduction of non-tariff barriers in practice. These sensitive issues were about to delay the signing of the EEU treaty on 29 May, 2014, but the heads of state of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia were able to compromise and agree to certain transition periods for establishing common energy and transportation markets.

In the security dimension, Russia plays a dominant role and pushes forward deeper forms of integration within the framework of the CSTO. There have been a few developments in recent years that have improved the actorness of the organisation — such as the establishment of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force, the formulation of joint statements on foreign policy issues, and the agreement on obtaining partners' consent to permit the establishment of military bases by non-members (i.e., NATO and the US). However, the general formulations in joint foreign policy statements and the possibility of establishing foreign military bases under different names, such as the US Transit Centre in Kyrgyzstan, limit the effectiveness of these documents. Moreover, the multi-vectorial foreign policy approaches adopted by Russia's counterparts in the CSTO make the Eurasian/Russian vector only one of the alternatives in addressing security problems, thus limiting the development of the region as a security actor and even posing questions as to whether or not this is desirable.

Alongside economic and security dimensions, the region's internal cohesiveness and external actorness depend on political structures and identity issues. Both the politics and identity of Eurasian regionalism are highly contested issues among actors (e.g., political elites, nationalist forces) in the region. It can be concluded that the future of Eurasian regionalism depends on the result of the contest over its content and on the answers to the following questions: How will regionalism and nationalism be reconciled? Will Russia accept and sustain the position of being one among equal partners? What common values will be adopted by regional actors? Finally, will integration in the economic dimension, which has advanced ahead of other dimensions, bring benefits to the societies in partner economies?

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Notes

1 The term Eurasian Integration Space can be found in Qoraboyev (2010) and its Russian equivalent is often used in IR literature in Russia to denote the Russia-centered regional integration processes.

2 Hettne (2005) acknowledges that the evolution of regionalism might not follow this five-stage model and that the model serves mainly a heuristic purpose.
3 The word GUAM is made up of the first letters of the member states Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova.
4 The English version of the SES Concept is available at http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en/publish/printable_article?art_id=2831293.
5 Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an Agreement on the Establishment of the Common Customs Territory and the Customs Union in 2007; however, this agreement did not have specific dates. The dates of the establishment of the BKR CU were clear only in 2009.
6 The text of the EEU treaty in Russian is available on the official website of the EAEC at http://eurasiancommission.org.
7 The SEEC meets at the level of heads of state of the BKR member states once a year and at the level of prime ministers twice a year.
8 Putin proposed the Eurasian Union with political and value dimensions in his 2011 article on Eurasian integration (Press Service 2011). Other Russian officials have also showed their disappointment that integration happens only in the economic dimension and proposed coverage of other dimensions, including the establishment of Eurasian parliament (Naryshkin Calls for Establishment of Eurasian Parliament 2012; Shuvalov 2012). After Izvestia published Putin's article on Eurasian integration, Hillary Clinton identified the project as a re-Sovietisation of the region (Gearan 2013).
9 The classification of economic systems of post-Soviet states is available in Charman (2007) and Korosteleva (2007).
10 The CSTO structure is available at http://odkb-csto.org (last accessed on 28 May, 2014).
11 None of the post-Soviet countries, including Belarus and Kazakhstan, have supported Russia in recognising the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have also shown lack of support for the change in the status of Crimea by abstaining in the vote on the UN Resolution calling upon states not to recognise the changes in the status of the Crimea Region.
12 In Russia, the term 'near abroad' refers to post-Soviet countries.
13 Available in Russian at http://odkb-csto.org (last accessed on 28 May, 2014).
14 The Joint Statements of the CSTO are available in Russian at http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/.

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