

THE EURASIAN UNION CONCEPT: POLITICAL OR CIVILIZATIONAL?

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ABSTRACT

The author probes deep into the concept of Eurasianism, the subject of heated discussions interpreted as an integration attempt in the post-Soviet expanse. He looks at the idea of Eurasianism as a civilizational project designed to unify all entities of the geostrategic expanse into a single whole. This multilayered problem cannot be

exhaustively analyzed in one or even several dozen articles. Nevertheless, the subject deserves clarification as a target of analysis.

The political and economic vs. civilizational discourse looks very much like the chicken or the egg dilemma. The author prefers a civilizational discourse, although many will probably disagree with him.

KEYWORDS: *Eurasia, the Eurasian project, liberal empire, multiculturalism, migration flows, autochthonous population, ideocracy, colonial or liberal democratic order, the legal field, integration, assimilation, autonomism, civilizational project, civilizational egregore.*

Introduction

Any discussion should begin with a clear definition of imperative concepts and terms, as well as ways to categorize the process and target of study. This means that Eurasianism as a concept should be discussed in the context of the processes unfolding all over the world, primarily taking into account the European countries have expanded beyond their historical and ethnic boundaries thanks to their military-technological and economic breakthroughs.

On the other hand, we need to go back to the original state of the discussed subject with the help of its immanent properties and realistic features. At the same time, we should not be misled by the numerous prejudices and outdated ideological clichés that have accumulated throughout modern and recent history.

Analogies cannot be used to explain the exclusive features and characteristics of any country, although most of them can be easily categorized.

Columbus, who landed in America in 1492, opened the Age of Discovery; it continued while Spain and Portugal moved deeper and deeper into Central and South America in the mid-16th century and ended when France and Britain entrenched themselves in North America in the early 17th century.

In 1580, Ataman of the Russian Cossacks Yermak conquered the Siberian Khanate of Khan Kuchum; thirty years later, the Russians reached the Yenisey, and one hundred years later, Kamchatka and the Bering Strait. Many of the Siberian cities (Tobolsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk among others) are older than the American megalopolises. Russians moved to Siberia in great numbers. By the early 19th century, people from the Russian metropolis constituted the absolute majority in Siberia: over 70% of the population had their roots in European Russia; the same picture also applied to North America.¹

Yu. Krizhanich, V. Kliuchevskiy, G. Potanin, N. Yadrintsev, and G. Fedotov, to name a few Russian historians and thinkers, agreed that Siberia was a colony.

Later, the North American European colonies declared their independence: between 1776 and the mid-1820s, that is, within a fairly short period of time, the British, Spaniards, and Portuguese lost their overseas dominions. Siberia remained part of Russia and a source of minerals, noble metals, furs, etc.

In the 18th century, the Europeans conquered India, China, Southeast Asia, and also Australia and South Africa. The second stage of colonial expansion saw no mass migration to the newly acquired lands; Europe relied on military force and vassal relations to maintain law and order in their new dominions, while the Europeans accounted for a meager 1.5% to 2% of the total population. (Australia and South Africa were colonized by American patterns; these were practically the last territories with more or less friendly nature and climate, relatively sparsely populated by peoples with no consistent statehoods.)

Throughout the 19th century, the leading powers finally divided the world into zones of their strategic interests. The Berlin Treaty of 1885 completed the division of Africa. Russia, which operated within its zone, joined Georgia in 1800, Azerbaijan and several of the north and northeastern parts of Armenia in 1801, Ingushetia and Abkhazia in 1810, Daghestan in 1813, the larger part of contemporary Kazakhstan in 1822, Chechnia in 1859, Kyrgyzstan in 1862, and Adigey in 1864 (as a result of the Caucasian War of 1763-1864 most of the Adighe were driven into the Ottoman Empire; those who stayed behind moved to the left bank of the Kuban River). In 1868, Russia moved into

¹ [<http://calvaryguard.com/ru/kanz/hist/genoz/>]; [<http://ycnokoutellb.livejournal.com/9160.html>].

Central Asia; in 1885 it came dangerously close to the borders of the British dominions in this part of the world.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the European colonies became independent; Russia was the last to withdraw from its colonies: the colonial regime of the Union republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia was soft, while the share of Russian-speaking population was high. According to the 1989 figures, the autochthonous population in Kazakhstan amounted to 44.4%, in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to 24.8%, and in the Kirghiz S.S.R. to 24.3%.

The exodus of Russian speakers from the former Soviet republics was the largest re-immigration wave: 4.5 million left the Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics. Today, the largest share of ethnic Russians in the post-Soviet expanse (up to 30%) lives in Latvia.²

This means that Russia can be regarded as a “problem zone” and an area of transition from one taxonomic level to another. In other words, we can observe a transition from the Soviet ideological discourse complete with its ideological and cultural features and clichés toward a new civilizational identity composed of eclectic cultural blocks which have little in common both with the real state of these cultures and the rapidly changing globalizing space of a new world. These processes are not controlled either at the local or the federal level.

Today, Eurasianism (the foundation of which was laid early in the 20th century by Russian émigrés) has come to the fore as one of the models for a new arrangement of Russia, in which Siberia serves as a system-forming and economically attractive segment of the Eurasian geopolitical project.

During the last Soviet years, Siberia accounted for 13% of the country’s economic potential and less than 10% of its population living in 57.1% of the country’s total territory. Today, the Russian lands to the east of the Urals comprise 74.8% of the total territory of Russia with just 20.3% of its population.

In 2012, the resources produced or pretreated in Siberia constituted from 68% to 75% of Russia’s exports. A great share of the federal budget (50.7%) consists of taxes on mineral extraction and oil and gas (primarily Siberian) export taxes. This puts Russia in 9th place among the biggest global exporters.³

Even a superficial analysis of Siberia’s role in Russia’s aggregate economy vs. its real political and economic status easily reveals contradictions causing a lot of displeasure with federal policies seen as discriminatory by many of those who live in Siberia. It seems that the political and administrative institutions of the Russian Federation should have tried to balance out their regional strategies. We should never forget that Russia’s political and economic stabilization concerns not only its leaders and population: a destabilized Russia may cause a lot of problems for many other countries, its neighbors in particular.

Siberia should be modernized and become more independent economically; this means that the mounting systemic degradation of the eastern regions should be stemmed through political, administrative, and economic reforms.

Today, the lion’s share of Russia’s export income is earned in Siberia and redistributed from Moscow. The local financial experts are convinced that redistributed investments do not compensate for the retracted money and that redistribution should become fairer.

The region, with its considerable economic and intellectual potential, stands a good chance of becoming a new development hub rather than a raw-material appendage and a consumer market for

² See: *Distribution of the Population in the Republic of Latvia by National Composition and State Affiliation as of 01.01.2013*, available at [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Население_Латвии] (in Lettish).

³ See: [http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/doc_2013/rus13.pdf].

cheap “made in China” products. The region should be steered toward producing high-tech products with high value added to be sold in the Pacific and Atlantic markets.

Siberia: A Geopolitical Trophy or Part of Russia?

The concept of Eurasianism reconstructed at a new development stage of the super-region is directly related to the problem of rational governance in the ethnic margins. This became obvious when the Russian Empire was spreading far and wide. At one time, prominent Russian historian Vasily Kliuchevskiy described the steadily spreading borders as a “curse of the territory” and noted “as the state swelled, the people shrank.”⁴

This puts the problem of integration of the conquered variegated population in a nutshell and speaks volumes about the multitude of other obvious and latent stumble blocks created by the need to incorporate individual ethnicities into a unified political nation seeking the best algorithm of its historical and cultural development.

To adequately understand the problem of Eurasianism, we must remove the large number of stereotypes that distort the true picture.

There is a fairly widespread conviction that the Russian Empire subjugated those living in the ethnic margins; political scientists and other experts disagree on the origins of this stereotype: some believe that it was generated by the imperial policies of Russification of the local population; others blame the low professional level, incompetence, and irresponsibility typical of the controlling structures of the Russian Empire, which ignored the specific cultural needs of the titular peoples of the newly acquired territories.

There is a different opinion: the empire introduced technological novelties into the area’s primitive production and economic system and educated the autochthonous population. Those who think so are also convinced that the imperial authorities preserved the national and cultural identity of the local populations and treated them with a lot of compassion.

The truth is somewhere between the two opposites; to reach it we need to answer the following questions:

- What were the specific (progressing and turbulent) administrative problems the Russian Empire had to cope with in the ethnic margins?
- What possibilities could be used to “enforce loyalty?”
- What development prospects did come to the fore in these regions?

The way this problem, “pivotal” for the Russian academic community, geopoliticians, and population of the colonized territories, was resolved was of special but not absorbing importance. The degree to which the empire realized its resource and constructive potential very much needed for the future of the conquered peoples was much more important.

The extent to which the relations between the Great Russians as the empire’s titular nation and the ethnic minorities extended beyond the interests of Russia proper and fitted the emerging

⁴ V. Kliuchevskiy, “Kurs russkoi istorii. Lektsia XLI,” in: V. Kliuchevskiy, *Sobranie sochinennii v 9-ti tomakh*. Tom III. Mysl Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 12.

geopolitical space of civilizational discourse and globalized international politics is no less important.

Eurasianism as the Liberal Empire's Geopolitical Concept

Eurasianism as a geopolitical theory was created by the Russian émigré intelligentsia of the 1920s as a response to the events of 1917.

They did not justify the Bolsheviks and their authoritarian power, but approved of their methods for preserving the territorial integrity of the Russian Empire, which was gradually acquiring a new image.

The authors of this theory, severely criticized by prominent scholars and public figures (N. Berdyaev, I. Ilyin, and G. Fedotov) for their alleged sympathies for the Bolsheviks, did a lot to help the peoples of Russia identify themselves as component parts of a geopolitical entity.

A wide discourse of the geostrategic idea of Eurasianism (which went back to certain ideas of Dostoyevsky and the Slavophiles) attracted prominent Russian figures: philologist and culturologist Prince N. Trubetskoy, historian G. Vernadskiy, geographer P. Savitskiy, art critic P. Suvchinskiy, religious philosopher G. Florovskiy, philosopher of history and geographer L. Gumilev, who spoke of himself as “the last Eurasianist,” and many others.

On the whole, their ideas can be summed up as: Russia is not Europe and not Asia; it is a very specific continent-country they called Eurasia dominated by the Asian (Turan) elements much more congenial to it. On the other hand, the ideologists of Eurasianism never looked at Europe (including the Western Slavs) as an example to be emulated, but as a threat to the very exclusive culture of all Russians. They were convinced that the artificial transfer of West European ideas of representative democracy, socialism, and liberalism to Russia would do more harm than good.

The Eurasianists regarded Russian society as a “symphonic entity” in which Orthodoxy as a system-forming element never clashed with other, non-Christian religions and cultures; it was living side by side or even integrated with them, this symbiosis bearing rich fruit. In this context, Christian Orthodoxy stopped being the element of a certain culture and became an active element of “fermentation” in diverse religious-cultural and social strata (N. Trubetskoy).

The Eurasianists criticized Europe (as much as the Slavophiles did) and objected to Eurocentrism, but they never idealized the social context of the Great Russians and admitted that, although outstripping the Russians in experimental sciences, the Europeans were trailing behind the Russians in terms of ideology and morality.

Being deeply rooted in everyday life, the Eurasian doctrine shaped the ideas of its followers about the state and its role: an institution of mobilization and coercion absolutely indispensable in Eurasia where liberalism and weak power were rejected by a greater part of population.

After reinterpreting the Slavophilic idea of *sobornost* as “symphonic unity of collective individuals,” the Eurasianists concluded that Russia needed ideocracy and statism, that is, the organizational principle in which “the ruling stratum” elected by popular vote closed ranks under the banner of a certain idea (doctrine) realized by a strictly authoritarian power and that this power should be represented not by the Bolshevik version of Marxism, but by traditional Orthodoxy. Prince Trubetskoy had the following to say about this: “The type of selection which, according to Eurasianism, should establish itself in the world and in Russia-Eurasia in particular is called *ideocratic*; the members of the ruling layer are selected and brought together by their common ideas of the world.”⁵

⁵ N.S. Trubetskoy, “Ideokratiia i armii,” in: *Evrasiiskaia khronika*, Issue 10, Paris, 1928, p. 3.

According to the Eurasianists, the Bolsheviks realized this principle by cynically replacing Orthodoxy with their quasi-Marxist ideology.

The Eurasianists, as apologists of the Russian ideocratic idea, stir up a lot of interest mainly because they place the Eurasian multinational community higher no matter what its political (including national and confessional) specifics. In his address to the citizens of future Russia, Petr Suvchinskiy wrote: "We should cherish the Motherland above all else happening in society; we should not lose this attitude lest we lose our patriotic pride together with it and fall victim to helpless individual pride, which makes service impossible. Meanwhile, to serve means to understand the destinies of the Motherland and, having grasped it, shape it by one's own will... We should stir up the depths of Russia's historical memory ... which in the last few centuries has become too shallow and lost the ability to synthesize the past of its faith, culture, and statehood and no longer recreates the past in the present."⁶

When analyzed, everything said about the concept of Eurasianism suggests that its architects (members of the socio-philosophical and culturological school of Russian scholars of the humanities in emigration) tried to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian Empire.

The philosophical ideas of the Eurasianists (highly respected by the scholarly community) may stir up all sorts of feelings, but the high intellectual level is keeping them alive to serve as the starting point for academics and politicians alike striving to resolve the problems of Russia's civilizational identity as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural entity.

Certain political forces have borrowed concepts and terms from the Eurasianists to use them as the cornerstone of the national idea of Russia striving for geostrategic domination. I will not comment on what Russian politicians say about Eurasianism: they have come close to the ideas of geopolitical revenge and reincarnation of the empire and are obviously unconcerned about the future of this geopolitical space.

The format described by the Eurasianists and supported today by their followers requires cruel authoritarianism that does not shun repressive and mobilization methods of governance. This is confirmed by imperial and Soviet practices and is fraught with total corruption and a new GULAG archipelago. Today, we can see a wave of conflicts (very similar to that which arose on the eve of World War I) rising in the Russian Federation. The people in power responded with quasi-patriotic rhetoric; they are trying to defuse the tension by talking about Orthodox values, "rising from the knees," re-unification of the lost Russian lands, and talks about conspiring Jews and Free Masons.

I have posed myself the very limited task of discussing the Eurasian theory in the light of the civilizational problems that are rapidly coming to the fore amid the mounting globalization in all spheres of human life and the urgent need to seek and find a cultural-historical identity as the starting point of strategic development of any entity. It should be said that the Eurasian civilization in the territory of the disintegrating Russian Empire was interpreted by the founders of Eurasianism as the sum-total of peoples living together in Eurasia and bound together by a common history and cultural traditions. Different ethnic origins, languages, religions, and traditions apart, these peoples share a common typology.

Eurasia as a Civilizational Egregore

The Eurasianists call the territory that coincides with the territories of Russian Empire and the Soviet Union which replaced it Eurasia (Russia-Eurasia).

⁶ P. Suvchinskiy, "K preodoleniiu revolyutsii," *Nash Sovremennik*, No. 2, 1992, pp. 157, 158.

They insisted that the commonly accepted division into European and Asian parts along the Urals was unjustified and that it was a single ecosystem and, naturally enough, geostrategic space. They pointed out that the empire's European part (up to the geographical border with Asia) and the territories in the eastern and southern sectors (situated in Asia) had very similar landscapes, climates, flora, and fauna.

At the same time, they pointed to obvious differences between the geography and climates of the former Russian Empire and Eastern and Western Europe: the territories stretching up to the borders of the Russian Empire were a patchwork landscape with mild winters and moderate summers. Beyond the imperial borders, there were plains with a continental climate, which meant cold winters and scorching summers.

The closely interconnected ecosystems and ethnogenesis (Lev Gumilev looked into all the details of the process in his *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1990) and the macro- and micro-climatic conditions determine the living conditions and the way of life in all the territories; they shape civilizations and the “symphonic” individual of the civilizations and are responsible for the basic systemic features of the people living in the Eurasian expanse.

The peoples of the forests and steppe, mainly Slavs (Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians), Turks, Finno-Ugrians, and Mongols (Turans), outnumber those living in the sparsely populated tundra and deserts. The fact that they inhabited the same geopolitical and geostrategic area presupposes close economic, social, and political ties and led to the emergence of a single system of coordinates, a civilizational “matrix” of sorts.

The Eurasianists could discern a lot of similarities in the Eurasian peoples, even though they followed different religions and traditions, belonged to different anthropological types, and had different ethnic roots. (It should be said that anthropologists detected long ago that any, even very different “smaller races” are connected by chains of “transition” each of which taken separately is practically unnoticeable and can be regarded as a variation of the same genotype.)

There are many phonological similarities in the languages of ethnicities and sub-ethnicities of Eurasia (which belong to different linguistic groups). Nikolai Trubetsky and Roman Jakobson underpinned this approach with the concept of a “linguistic union” that united languages by geographical location rather than linguistic closeness, a typical feature of a language family (Jakobson also spoke about a “Eurasian linguistic union”).⁷

The confessional specifics of the Eurasian peoples do not disunite, but rather keep them fairly close together: Orthodox Slavs, Turkic Muslims, and Lamaists (Buryats, Tuvinians, Kalmyks, and Mongols) alike keep religion and everyday life very close together and prefer to build the state and its policies on the principles of ideocracy rather than pragmatism.

Having elaborated the “Eurasian system of coordinates” based on their observation and conclusions, the Eurasianists arrived at the following:

- (1) From the geostrategic point of view, Russia-Eurasia was neither Europe nor Asia, nor their blend, but a special territory called Eurasia.
- (2) The peoples of Eurasia cannot be divided into Slavs (Europeans) and Turanians (Asians)—they are all Eurasians.

The official Russian/Soviet historiosophy, which acquired its final shape under the Romanovs, follows the Westerners to regard the Great Russians as Eastern Slavs and to exclude their Asian

⁷ See: [<http://russkayagazeta.com/rg/gazeta/fullstory/live-trub>] (see also: R. Jakobson, “K kharakteristike evraziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza,” in: R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings. I. Phonological Studies*, s-Gravenhague, 1962; cf.: R. Jakobson, *Über die phonologische Sprachbünde*, TCLP, 4, 1931; idem, *Sur la théorie des affinités phonologiques entre les langues*, «Actes du IV Congrès international des linguistes», Copenhagen, 1938).

identity. The founding fathers of Eurasianism, in turn, did a lot to prove the Eurasian nature of the Great Russian ethnicity. They also pointed to the Turanian, eastern roots of the Great Russians, the system-forming super-ethnicity of Eurasia, a product of mixed ethnic elements of Turks, Finno-Ugrians, and even Mongols. This fully applies to their language, which brims with direct and indirect Tatar borrowings.⁸

The Eurasianists considered the Russian political tradition to be eastern or Asian rather than European. Eastern Christianity as the religion of the Great Russians was more mystical and irrational than Western Christianity and, in this respect, was close to the Oriental faiths. The Eurasianists were convinced that the Great Russians should shake off Western illusions and admit that they were not Europeans (in fact, Europe never accepted them as such) and reconcile themselves to their closeness to the Eastern peoples as an objective reality and formulate their geostrategic tasks accordingly.

The geographic, climatic, sociocultural, religious, and linguistic factors responsible for the homogenous nature of the Eurasian civilizational egregore were responsible for its very exclusive historical, political, economic, and cultural landscape. The Eurasianists went even further: they insisted on a gradual shift (though unconfirmed by historical facts) toward political integration. History is not a chain of wars, but a space of trade, economic, ethnic, cultural and other contacts that led to cultural and ethnic admixtures, the role of which should be taken into account.⁹

The Eurasianists pointed to one more ethnocultural and geopolitical specific feature of Eurasia, namely, at all times it was the home of strong authoritarian states. They were convinced that any attempt to set up a liberal democracy of the Western type in Eurasia (as a sociopolitical and economic space) would bring total degradation and social collapse.

They paid particular attention to the Golden Horde, the state of the Turkic-Mongol tribes, and pointed to the geopolitical and institutional continuity between the Golden Horde and the Muscovite State and the obvious closeness of their political traditions (ideocracy and authoritarianism) and anti-Western foreign policies. The Eurasianists never denied that the Turkic-Mongol invasion destroyed Rus and pointed out that its vassal dependence on the Golden Horde incorporation into the Golden Horde played a positive role. It should be said that the rulers of the Golden Horde demonstrated a lot of religious tolerance, while Western knights tried to impose Catholicism on the Russians.

Prince Alexander Nevsky, who considered the Golden Horde an acceptable ideologue, saved Russian Orthodoxy and Russia. The Eurasianists believe that the Golden Horde protected Russia against the hostile West and created a zone in which the future Russian state could develop in safety.

The Eurasianists divided the history of Russia into several periods.

- The first period from the 1st millennium B.C. to the 14th century was a time of the nomadic empires of Scythians, Sarmates, Huns, Bulgars, Khazars, and Tatar-Mongols, which came one after the other; the leading layer was nomadic, the dominant ideology (as the Eurasianists understood it) was paganism, which they confused with Tengriism.
- The second period from the 14th century to 1917 was an epoch of Great Russian domination in Eurasia represented by the Muscovite State and the Romanovs, the former being the highest point of Russian history (the Eurasianists agreed with the Slavophiles on this).

⁸ Later this was convincingly confirmed by Kazakh poet and student of protolanguages Oljas Suleymenov in his books *Az i Ya, Yazyk pisma* and *Tyurki v doistorii*.

⁹ In the mid-1990s, I offered a specific discussion of this subject in: "Turkestan-Turan—illuzia realnosti ili realnost illuziy," *Tiurkskiy mir*, No. 2, 1999, available at [http://www.analytics-iss.ru/articles/library/libr_rus_18_8_00gp.htm] and "Gimn Evraziystvu kak epitafia Rossiyskoy imperii," available at [http://gazeta.zn.ua/CULTURE/gimn_evraziystvu_kak_epitafiya_rossiyskoy_imperii.html].

On the other hand, while the Slavophiles pointed to the Orthodox nature of the Muscovite State, the Eurasianists considered it a geopolitical descendant of the Golden Horde from which Muscovy inherited its statehood and lands. Both were states of “those who served,” in which all and everyone, either peasant or aristocrat, served the czar (khan), while the ruling class was replenished with those loyal to the state-forming idea. This differed from the West where relations between the patrons and patronized (between the feudal lords and the kings or between feudal lords and vassals) were negotiated, while the social status depended on ancestry.

The Europeans argued that the social status/ancestry introduced in Russia divided its society into the nobility, which thought of themselves as Europeans, and the ordinary people, who learned to regard the aristocrats as an alien element. This led to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 interpreted by the Eurasianists as the response of the Russians and other Eurasian peoples to forced Europeanization.

A New Phase of the Eurasian Concept

The October revolution of 1917 (which the Eurasianists interpreted as a national-liberation revolution) ushered in the third, Soviet, period in Eurasian history: the Bolsheviks liberated the country from the bonds of foreign capital that had turned it into the semblance of a Western colony. At this point they fell into the trap of contradictions.

As adepts of the radical Western idea, the Communist-Bolsheviks who headed the October coup knew next to nothing about Russia’s specifics and misinterpreted its geostrategic status. They restored its territory, set up a strong authoritarian ideocratic state, which contradicted their ideas of internationalism and their conviction that the state should wither away and the former colonies should become independent.

The Eurasianists regarded declarative federalism, a one-party system, the Komsomol, the Soviets, etc. as very useful novelties; they accepted as positive the new practice of drawing representatives of all nations and social groups into the ruling structures. At the same time, they rejected the ideas of Communist-Bolsheviks as absolutely false, unacceptable in Eurasia, and unsuitable for its cultural specifics. They went as far as predicting that sooner or later the gap between the Western ideas and the Eurasian spirit would destroy the Soviet Union. They even naively believed that the West would use the disintegration of Eurasian space as a chance to destroy the Soviet Union to give a new lease of life to Eurasia armed with a new ideology and capitalizing on the best results of the Soviet institutional reforms.

Siberian Eurasianism Seen from the Inside, or the Siberian Egregore

When trying to reconstruct the political identity of Eurasia as a historical, social, and cultural space, the classical Eurasianists, who had no direct knowledge of the subject, were confronted with criticism. I want to introduce here Grigory Potanin (1835-1920), a prominent student of Siberia and Central Asia, a “patriot of Siberia,” and an Eurasianist to a much greater extent than the “classical” Eurasianists.

There are even more illustrious names associated with Eurasia and Eurasianism: P. Semenov-Tianshanskiy (1823-1914), N. Przhevalskiy (1839-1888), V. Grum-Grzhimaylo (1861-1921), N. Yadrin-tsev (1842-1894), V. Radlov (1837-1918), N. Konrad (1891-1970), Kazakh Ch. Valikhanov (1836-

1865), Buryats D. Banzanov (1822-1855) and G. Tsibikov (1873-1930), Yakut G. Ksenofontov (1888-1938), and others. All of them can be called trailblazers.

Even the briefest analysis of the works of these real founders of the theory of Eurasianism goes far beyond the limits of this article, yet I deem it necessary to say here that they regarded Eurasia as a historical and cultural entity rather than a “liberal empire” (Anatoli Chubais).

The present generation of Eurasianists (they have assumed this title without sufficient grounds) either knows next to nothing about the scholarly heritage of their predecessors or deliberately ignores it for ideological reasons. A comprehensive study and revival of the ideas found in the works of the above-mentioned giants of Eurasianism (which can be described as an academic treasure) could have been used to harmonize ethnic, social, and cultural relations within the geopolitical space of Eurasia. If continued and further developed, their ideas could have revived Eurasia as an equal entity of world civilization; so far, however, nothing has been done in this respect.

I would like to dwell here on certain theses formulated by Grigory Potanin, which official Russian and Soviet science preferred to pass over in silence. They are related to the administrative status of the Siberian Territory; in fact, his academic legacy was suppressed because he was an ardent supporter of what he called “autonomism” or “Siberian patriotism,” which speaks more of his civil and philosophic position.

He was convinced that the Eurasian space needed a horizontal system of self-governance as the best model of social, political, and administrative arrangement and that values created by the local traditions and sociocultural realities should be accepted as the political, economic, historical, and cultural priorities rather than as imposed abstract values that had nothing in common with the local economic system, cultural traditions, and mentality.

In a letter to his colleague Nikolai Yadrintsev, he discussed the possibility of patterning the Siberian administration on the Swiss Confederation: “I want to demonstrate that everything is so good in small states where all public figures know each other, where people are very close to the everyday life of their leaders, where a public figure acts not as a theoretician far removed from life, but is involved in local developments, and where there is close control over all and everyone involved in public life.”¹⁰

While in exile in 1868-1871, Potanin became absolutely firm in his conviction that the bureaucratic mindset destroyed local specifics and unified interests. It was then that he started writing a textbook on what he called “science about motherland” based on his belief that the child should be taught to think that his native town or village represented the whole world; his worldview should be later expanded to the region and, still later, to the country, and quite logically concluded that each region should have its own textbook.¹¹ A concise description of czarist administrative and social policy in Siberia will clarify the point.¹²

After ascending to power, the Bolsheviks made no attempt to cardinaly revise the imperial laws relating to ethnic relations and the political, legal, social, and economic status of the autochthonous peoples or readjust the region’s administrative-territorial division. The command form of administration that the Soviet Union inherited from the Russian Empire and the state, which was present in all spheres of social life, reduced the autochthonous peoples of Siberia to a target of exploitation.

The state regarded them primarily as taxpayers, while deliberately disregarding their ethnic origins and ethno-psychological specifics; this deprived the Siberian peoples of homogenous existential self-perception and ideas about the world. Until the early 20th century, there was no clearly for-

¹⁰ Quoted from: I. Podshivalov, “Patriotizm svobodnoy Sibiri,” available at [<http://www.syndikalist.narod.ru>].

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² See: “Aborigennaia (inorodcheskaia) politika,” available at [<http://bsk.nios.ru/enciklodediya/aborigennaya-inorodcheskaya-politika>].

ulated nationalities policy; on the other hand, this attitude toward the local peoples speeded up their assimilation.

While spreading far and wide in Siberia, the czarist authorities had a no more or less clear ideology; what was done was done for the sake of acquiring new lands and making their population subjects of the Russian Empire. This brings to mind the rulers of the Muscovite State who “gathered” lands and interacted with the non-Russian peoples of the Urals and the Volga Area, all of them not Orthodox Christians.

Certain elements of the Golden Horde policies were applied to the subjugated peoples of Siberia.

The methods used to unify individual territories and peoples with Russia did nothing to change the administrative principles used in Siberia for a long time. Here I have in mind, first and foremost, cooperation with the non-Russian clan and tribal elites and the administrative measures and repressions used to pacify the masses.

The local Siberian administrations used more violence to adjust the unified methods recommended from above to the real Siberian context.

- First, not all Siberian peoples meekly accepted Russians and their power; many of them used arms to resist the colonialists.
- Second, the czarist administration, which had promised to protect the local peoples from the arbitrary rule of local administrators, failed to keep its promises at all times and in all cases. The local administrations used violence, extortion, plundering, and lies when gathering taxes from the aborigines. The situation was further aggravated by frequent intrusions of private entrepreneurs into the hunting reserves of the locals; not infrequently, their lands were occupied by migrants from Russia, while merchants increased their income by lending money on interest.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the number of Slavs in Siberia increased many times over. The declining fur (sable) trade and the government’s decision to develop agriculture, mining, and trade as the main sources of budget revenues transformed the local people into land-tillers and industrial workers.

The Europeanization, modernization, and bureaucratization of Russia and paternalism as an instrument of the Siberian administrators created the false impression of the Siberian peoples as “primitive” to be enlightened, civilized, and assimilated. In the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, this meant Russification; nothing was done to preserve ethnic specifics: the state was determined to radically change the lifestyle of the autochthonous population through administrative control and regimentation of all spheres of social life.

The czarist colonial regime relied on the local clan and tribal elite and increased its administrative powers specified by S. Vladislavich-Raguzinskiy in 1728¹³; his instructions written for the Trans-Baikal Territory were applied across Siberia. The Senate further specified them in its decrees of the 1703s-1750s and the instructions given by the czar to Second-Major A. Shcherbachev of the Life Guards of the Semenov Regiment in 1763 when he was appointed head of the First Yasak (Tax-Gathering) Commission.¹⁴

In the early 18th century, it was decided to turn the autochthonous Siberian peoples into “true subjects of the Russian Empire” through mass and at times enforced Christianization. By the end of the same century, all more or less large Siberian peoples had been baptized, with the exception of those who embraced Buddhism and Islam. In an effort to avoid religious clashes and remain in con-

¹³ [<http://interpretive.ru/dictionary/438/word/vladislavich-raguzinskii-sava-luki>]; [<http://ez.chita.ru/encycl/person/?id=353>].

¹⁴ See: “Aborigennaia (inorodcheskaia) politika.”

trol, the czarist administrators revised their previously negative attitude toward both faiths, which were legalized.

After a while, the Russian state readjusted its attitude toward the autochthonous population of Siberia, but the resultant administrative reforms did nothing much to soften the negative repercussions of the originally cruel colonization to any considerable degree. At that time, capturing the lands of the locals by peasants who had moved from European Russia was being carried out on a wide scale, which made reconciliation between the locals and the migrants impossible. The local people were turned into serfs to be bought and sold, while the authorities preferred to ignore what was going on.¹⁵

The Charter on Ruling the Aliens was one of the basic documents by which those who administered Siberia were guided; it can be described as an attempt to reconcile the conservative course of Russian autocracy applied to the Siberian autochthonous peoples and overdue reforms. It was issued because by that time it had become clear that the local people should be incorporated into the system of Russian legal, social, and economic relations.

Under this document, the local peoples acquired the right to their land; it also specified the size of taxes, regulated the rules of trade with Russian merchants, and extended Russian criminal laws to the autochthonous population of Siberia.

This act was relatively tolerant toward different religions even though the clergy of the aliens were controlled by the police.

On the whole, the Charter preserved the traditional economic, social, and cultural context, but pushed the local people toward gradual and complete assimilation.

The document remained valid until 1917; it downplayed, to a certain extent, the regional specifics, even if did not destroy them altogether.

In the latter half of the 19th century, czarism readjusted its administrative policy to the newly acquired Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, the Amur and Maritime areas. Russia strengthened its position in Mountain Altai and energetically moved into Tuva and Mongolia.

Territorial expansion stabilized the situation along Russia's southern borders; the empire became less concerned about the foreign influence in Southern Siberia and Central Asia, which strove to liberate themselves from the Russian Empire. Russia, on the other hand, acquired more opportunities to assimilate the aliens and move into their territories in the form of mass migration of Russian peasants to Siberia.

It should be said that from the very beginning, peasant migration was seen as the key factor of Russification of the newly acquired lands. In the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, it became the main geopolitical tool used to complete annexation of Russia's Asian territories.

On the whole, between the end of the 16th and the early 20th centuries, the administrative system of Siberia developed from military-colonial to administrative-territorial, which changed the social and legal status of the autochthonous population and contributed to the emergence of new economic and cultural types. The local people mastered new types of economic activities; later, when this area became part of the empire's legal space, the "social status of aliens" was abolished; and the local people became assimilated, while Siberia became a single ethnic and cultural space.

¹⁵ See: M.M. Fedorov, *The Legal Status of the Peoples of Eastern Siberia (17th-early 19th centuries)*, Yakutsk, 1978; L.M. Dameshek, *Internal Policy of Czarism and the Peoples of Siberia (19th-Early 20th Centuries)*, Irkutsk, 1986; A.Yu. Konev, *Autochthonous Peoples of Northwestern Siberia in the Administrative System of the Russian Empire (18th-Early 20th Centuries)*, Moscow, 1995; *Peoples of Siberia as Part of the State of Russia*, St. Petersburg, 1999; *Russia's Multinational Civilization: Unity and Contradictions*, Moscow, 2003; *Asian Russia in Geopolitical and Civilizational Dynamics. The 16th-20th Centuries*, Moscow, 2004; E.P. Kovalyashkina, "The Aliens" Question in Siberia: Concepts of State Policies and Regional Ideas, Tomsk, 2005 (all in Russian); Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich, 2008, 416 pp.; English translation: Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, Longman, London, 2001, xxiii, 455 pp.

The centralized administrative system, which encouraged the fairly passive bureaucrats, created a completely corrupt and arbitrary system. There were even more problems, which were either swept under the carpet or resolved in favor of bureaucrats, while the efforts of the local population to stand opposed to the unbridled tyranny were cruelly suppressed.

By Way of a Conclusion

No matter what, the Eurasian project is moving to the fore in Moscow since, to quote Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin, leader of the Russian proletariat, “the lower classes do not want the old way and the upper classes cannot carry on in the old way.” Implementation of this geostrategic project (in which Siberia with its highly qualified scientific and technical potential and progressively minded intelligentsia will play the central role) completely depends on whether the people in power can master new ideas and acquire political will.

Siberia’s future as part of the geopolitical and civilizational space, which also includes the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, depends on whether it will become an inalienable part of the Russian Federation. It is highly important that these newly independent states become civilized and economically and technologically developed entities of the Eurasian community without losing their state sovereignty, but rather strengthening it by means of equal and mutually advantageous relations.