

**CENTRAL ASIA
IS A REGION OF
FIVE STANS**
Dispute with Kazakh Eurasianists

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A so-called Eurasian trend of foreign political thought born in Kazakhstan is gaining increasingly wider support in this country, the main argument of its proponents being “Kazakhstan borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country. Ours is a Eurasian state strongly influenced by Europe and Western values. Contrary to what certain politicians and journalists assert, we are not another *stan*. Saudi Arabia is not our historical landmark: we look to Norway, South Korea, and Singa-

pore.”¹ This is what these people think about their country’s place and role in the world after 15 years of independent development. They loathe the very name of their country, which ends in *stan*. The Eurasian trend of “anti-*stan*” rhetoric merits serious attention and profound analysis.

¹ D. Nazarbaeva, “Spetsifika i perspektivy politicheskogo razvitiya Kazakhstana,” *Biulleten No. 3, 2003*, Mezhdunarodniy institut sovremennoy politiki at the Institute’s site [http://iimp.kz/index.php?action=show&art_id=150&from=5], 17 February, 2006.

On the *Stans'* Geopolitical Insufficiency

It is tempting to ask whether the concept of a Eurasian state can be applied to Kazakhstan. This invites the question of where the borders between Kazakhstan, which is “not a Central Asian country,” and Central Asia proper lie, and another broader one about whether the Central Asian countries can cope without Kazakhstan.

The statement quoted above turned geopolitics and ideology upside down; it distorted the regularities of geopolitical transformation and the process of national self-identification. I will discuss self-identification ideology in the next section, but for now I would like to analyze the geopolitical implications of the above quotation.

Indeed, if Kazakhstan does not belong to Central Asia, where is its place? To which part of Asia does it belong? None of the sources describe it as part of say, northern Asia. Why should it move away from Central Asia? The answers to these questions might clarify the reasons why the country wants to detach itself from Central Asia, but they will hardly identify the geographical boundary between “Eurasian” Kazakhstan and Central Asia proper. In fact, Kazakhstan’s Eurasian nature is nothing but a myth or, rather, a geopolitical provocation; the same applies to the idea of Eurasianism, which spells rejection of independence and withdrawal into Eurasian nonexistence.

Eurasianism is a conception and philosophy designed to formulate the principles of Russia’s statehood; it is a philosophy of uniting lands for Russia and around it, therefore Russia alone is a Eurasian state. Neither Kazakhstan, nor any other CIS republic, belongs to this category. The Eurasian concept can be applied to the post-Soviet states only in the geographical context, it has nothing to do with the self-identification of either countries or nations.

The Soviet Union’s disintegration was a geopolitical phenomenon, the results of which, that is, new unification or moving further away from each other, can be realized only as geopolitical events. The very first words of the Agreement on Abolishing the U.S.S.R. and Establishing the CIS say: “We, the Republic of Belarus, the R.S.F.S.R. and Ukraine, as founding members of the U.S.S.R. and signatories to the 1922 Union Treaty, bear witness to the fact that the Union of S.S.R., as a subject of international law and a *geopolitical reality* (emphasis mine.—*F.T.*), ceases to exist.”² This condemned to death not only the Soviet Union, but also the Eurasian doctrine as a cornerstone of the inter-state union. It survived only as one of the possible versions of Russia’s national ideology.

On the whole, the Eurasian doctrine is not a geographical sum of two continents; it is part of this sum, or, rather, the sum of its parts, the territory on which part of Europe and part of Asia are found. The Eurasian doctrine is a form of Russia’s self-identification as a region. Russian scholar D. Zamiatin has written: “The Russian conquest of Central Asia was important not only and not so much because the metropolitan country found this territory valuable. What was important was its position in the newly emerging geopolitical expanse of Central Asia.”³ The author reminds us that General Mikhail Skobelev said that Russia conquered the Turkestan area by chance, as an operational base on its way to India.⁴

Central Asia might possibly return to Eurasia, to which it belonged as part of the Soviet Union, at some later date. But this will happen only after it restores, completes, and proves *its geopolitical self-identification*. In other words, it can only join Eurasia as a geopolitical entity of the five *stans*.

² E.G. Moiseyev, *Pravovoy status SNG*, Iurist Publishers, Moscow, 1995, p. 111.

³ D. Zamiatin, “Russkie v Tsentral’noy Azii vo vtoroy polovine XIX veka: strategiya representatsii i interpretatsii istoriko-geograficheskikh obrazov granits,” *Vostok*, No. 1, 2002, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

Not only Kazakhstani academics, but also their colleagues in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan studying post-Soviet realities and wishing to find a place for their countries in the world wrongly insist on the absolute nature of the gained sovereignty. The disintegration of the Soviet super-state and the appearance of independent states in its place bring to mind the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, when the term “sovereignty” was coined, while the newly independent states of the time laid the legal foundations of present-day international relations. Globalization, a fundamentally important factor, excludes this analogy. Among other things, globalization has weakened the principle of national sovereignty in favor of the universal legal principles of world order and regional integration models. This factor is partly ignored when it comes to discussing the status of the region as a whole and its countries. National-regional dualism is the key factor behind the self-identification of the Central Asian nations and regional geopolitics. In other words, the sovereignty of Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors should be regionally determined.

At the same time, the quest of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) members for unilateral, rather than common advantages created by the geopolitical position of the landlocked countries far removed from marine outlets is leading nowhere. None of these countries is self-sufficient geopolitically. In the past, they all were Big Game targets; today, they have become its subjects. *They may become targets once more if they fail to collectively recognize their geopolitical insufficiency and overcome it.*

Today, there is a fairly widely shared opinion that in the absence of the Center, the relations among the Central Asian countries will degenerate into conflicts; this opinion is probably suggested by the fact that despite the artificial and inevitably asymmetric administrative division of the region, it survived in Soviet times as a centripetal entity within the political formula Central Asia and Kazakhstan with de jure and de facto transparent administrative borders between the republics. Today, it exists as a relatively centrifugal entity within the CACO structure.

The border issue is the watershed between sovereignty and integration; there is another reality too: the countries are interconnected. For this reason, any discussion of the political and legal side of the border issue should take the regional context into account.

So far, scholarly studies of the development dynamics of the Central Asian geopolitical space in the context of its status in global geopolitical delimitation are still few and inadequate. Not much has been done to study how this delimitation will affect the local countries and the creation of a regional security system. Geographic knowledge and geographic data have come to the fore; it is still unclear to what extent the Central Asian geographic area, the ecumene, forms a common expanse of national self-identification and political self-determination of nations and regional states. So we cannot describe its external frontiers as their common borders. This and other issues should be studied in depth, otherwise all deliberations about identity outside the Central Asian ecumene will remain primitive and provocative speculations.

S. Kushkumbaev, a Kazakh political scientist, was quite right when he wrote that a certain amount of tension along the borders between political Central Asia and the extra-regional countries is manifested through objective trends of a narrowing of the Central Asian geopolitical complex. He concluded: “If these trends grow stronger in the future they might cause the region to disintegrate and make it even more amorphous. This variant will demand that the opposite trend take place in the local states in the form of planning integration processes.”⁵ Being aware that the total numerical strength of the Central Asian armies (including Turkmenistan) is much lower than the armies of their neighbors, the same author suggests that the local countries should increase their military cooperation and try to jointly protect their external borders.⁶

⁵ S. Kushkumbaev, *Tsentrāl'naia Azia na putiakh integratsii: geopolitika, etnichnost, bezopasnost*, Kazakhstan Publishers, Almaty, 2002, p. 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

This raises the question of whether the Central Asian countries can create an alliance of their own (from the viewpoint of the theory of alliances, blocs, and unions). In other words, can the region acquire a collective security system based on an alliance of its states? S. Kushkumbaev offers a positive answer: "Without open access to the world transportation system, the Central Asian states are, in fact, strategic partners."⁷

All deliberations about Kazakhstan not being a *stan*, but a Eurasian state, is another reflection of geopolitical de-rationalization based on Central Asia's distorted geographical image... In fact, this boils down to the choice between Kazakhstan's dependence and independence. This is not all. This is the choice between the dependence and independence of the *whole of Central Asia!*

This conception differs but little from the conception formulated by prominent Russian geopolitician Alexander Dugin, who, in his well-known book, divided Central Asia politically, geopolitically, and racially into three parts: Central Kazakhstan; the deserts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the mountains of Kyrgyzstan; and Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India. According to the author, tellurocratia, that is Russia-Eurasia, should exploit this "natural" division to win the static warfare with thalassocracy, that is, with "Atlanticism." Describing Tajikistan as the key state in the geopolitical war in Central Asia, Alexander Dugin wrote: "It possesses all the major factors of the entire Russian 'Drang nach Süden,' that is, 'drive to the South,'" and added, "the actual border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan should not be seen as a strict line. This is not a fact given by history; it is a geopolitical task, since it would have been *in the interests of the Heartland to annul all strict limitations there and move the strategic line further south. The intermediate area should be restructured on the basis of ethnocultural, tribal, and regional boundaries* (italics mine.—F.T.)."⁸

At first glance, the merging of CACO and EurAsEC announced on 6 October, 2005 put an end to the history of Central Asia's independence and seemed to abolish the region's name. In fact, this "historical event" illustrated once more the permanent geopolitical tension in the region, which has been in evidence since 1991; it demonstrated the fundamental difference between a fragmented and a united Central Asia. The efforts to detach Kazakhstan from Central Asia are part of this large geopolitical and historical issue.

The EurAsEC founding fathers have actually perpetuated geopolitical instability in the form of large and small CISs (this became even more evident after the EurAsEC merged with CACO). In the absence of a fundamental conception and a *basic post-Soviet idea*, these structures cannot be stable. They are all united by one desire—to prevent further disintegration of the former Soviet superstate, or to be more exact, to prevent further distancing of the Commonwealth countries from Russia, which is this structure's core. This desire is not the basic idea; the EurAsEC members are united neither by a common idea about threats to their security, nor by their belonging to one region, their common origin, nor by their geopolitical status. They are members of other international organizations: some of them belong to the SCO, others are tied by bilateral treaties; still others belong to the Collective Security Treaty Organization, until 6 October, 2005 some of them were CACO members, etc.

The above has convincingly demonstrated that the geopolitical transformation of the post-Soviet expanse has not yet been completed; the same applies to national and regional self-identification. Kazakhstan should be neither Norway, nor South Korea, nor Singapore. Kazakhstan should not transform itself into another country or imitate other states. None of the states that delight the Kazakh

⁷ S. Kushkumbaev, *Tsentral'naia Azia na putiakh integratsii: geopolitika, etnichnost, bezopasnost*, Kazakhstan Publishers, Almaty, 2002, p. 144.

⁸ A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*, Arktogetia-tsentr, Moscow, 1999, pp. 354-355.

Eurasianists transformed themselves or imitated others. They can be admired mainly because they not only preserved their identity in the course of the reforms during the so-called transition period, but they also managed to harmoniously synthesize the national and the borrowed.

To Be or Not to Be a *Stan*?

Another Kazakh analyst S. Akimbekov has written in the same spirit of isolationism from unwelcome and “unstable” Central Asia: “We can talk about a vast space of instability to the south of Kazakhstan’s borders. If the events in our ‘southern underbelly’ spiral out of control, Kazakhstan runs the risk of being confronted with numerous negative problems.” Talking about the threats from the south, he concludes: “It would be wise to drop the terminological discourse about ‘Central Asia’ imposed on us from outside and pick up the old and very comfortable term ‘Kazakhstan and Central Asia.’”⁹ In this way, and probably unwittingly, the author plays into the hands of those geopolitical forces which wish to preserve the region’s present, that is, fragmented status. On the other hand, the author seems to ignore that the region’s old name contains a short, yet irremovable word “AND” which reflects Central Asia’s historical unity. I do agree that a stop should be put to the terminological discourse about the term and the region’s present name ultimately registered (and protected in the name of our independence).

I should say that the *stan* issue is by far an ontological one. Names may differ; in the Central Asian context this question can be formulated as “Whether There Will Be *Stans* at All?” This is a crucial question of national self-identification, foreign policy orientation and, finally, the country’s independence, rather than of a high sounding name.

Strange as it may seem, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev invited the local countries to set up a Union of Central Asian States. While presenting an annual budget message to a joint sitting of the chambers of the Kazakhstani parliament, the President of Kazakhstan said: “A treaty on perpetual friendship between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan may serve as a firm foundation for such a union.”¹⁰

The state formation and nation-building processes in all the Central Asian countries are unfolding under the strong impact of geopolitical factors, on the one hand, and ideological construction, on the other. This is confirmed by a comparative analysis of similar processes which took place in Central Asia. Early in the 20th century, the region’s artificial division distorted and fragmented the natural historical process of national self-identification. This forced the political and cultural elites to plant in the minds of the people living within a single region new “imagined communities” (to borrow a term from Benedict Anderson) which were allegedly living in their native territories. As a result, the key idea of 1991—*political independence*—was perceived as *historical independence* of one another. This left the real historical and political *interdependence* of these countries and peoples in the shadows.

“The independence of each of the Central Asian countries will be even more precious if they develop according to the cooperative development principle; otherwise they risk losing much more and finding themselves left by the wayside.”¹¹ To achieve this we should move away from the concept

⁹ S. Akimbekov, “Tupik liberalizma. Kakuiu strategiu izbrat Kazakhstanu?” [http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1131088440_04.11.2005].

¹⁰ [<http://www.tribune-uz.info/news/>], 18 February, 2005.

¹¹ S. Kushkumbaev, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

of state- and nation-building to the concept of regional construction, whereby ensuring a political, economic, legal, organizational, and ideological backup. S. Kushkumbaev has correctly associated the success of Central Asian integration with the position of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.¹² He has also pointed out correctly that integration is limited, among other things, by the non-homogeneous nature of the region as a whole. “Optimal transparency in various spheres of political, social, economic, and cultural life of Central Asian society is impossible if the existing political systems which subvert the processes largely remain the same.”¹³ Indeed, it is for the next generation of political leaders, who will replace the present ones, to shoulder the task of full-scale integration. If this new generation keeps saying that “Kazakhstan borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country,” they will bury both Kazakhstan AND Central Asia in the EurAsEC or similar structures of sham integration.

Even if the “Kazakhstan is not a *stan*” formula is correct it is applicable solely to its northern part, while the south has been always integrated into the rest of Central Asia. At all times, Southern Kazakhstan was part of all kinds of *Central Asian* polities: the state of the Shaybanids, the state of Amir Timur, the Bukhara and Kokand khanates, the Turkestan Autonomy. The first two leaders of the latter were Kazakhs Muhammadjon Tynyshpaev and Mustafa Chokai, who thought of independence as applied to the entire Central Asian community. Textbooks on the history of Kazakhstan describe the Turkestan Republic as a regional rather than a national-territorial autonomy, because it was not clear which of the local ethnoses of this multinational structure was the vehicle of autonomy. Its population was called either the “people of Turkestan,” or “the Turkestaniens,” or “the Turkic toiling masses.”¹⁴

I would like to remind those who want to detach Kazakhstan from Central Asia of the words of prominent Kazakh historian Prof. M. Abuseitova: “At all times, Central Asia was a fairly integral and specific cultural and historical region, because of shared historical destinies, geographic conditions, and shared cultural regularities. Shared ethnic and cultural processes were not the only important factor: the absence of internal borders made regular and wide-scale contacts inside the region possible.”¹⁵ Her studies of the history of Kazakhstan and Central Asia led her to the conclusion that the region’s history should be regarded as an integral process. There are numerous historical facts that confirm this. In the 16th century, for example, the Bukhara Khanate, under Abdallah Khan II of the Shaybanid dynasty, developed close ties with the Kazakh Khanate. Today these ties could be described as a strategic partnership—in 1575, the two states entered an “oath-bound union” and promised mutual military support, friendly relations, and wide trade contacts.¹⁶

Another Kazakh historian Zh.M. Tulibaeva has written about the interlaced roots of contemporary Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Two neighboring peoples maintained close economic and cultural ties during prolonged peaceful and military contacts. The Kazakhs, who made up part of the population of the Central Asian khanates, roamed about the vast deserts and semi-deserts between the mouth of Amu Darya, the banks of the Syr Darya, and in the area of Tashkent; they tilled vast expanses in the valleys of Zaravshan, Kashka Darya, Chirchik, and Angren.¹⁷

¹² S. Kushkumbaev, op. cit., p. 138.

¹³ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁴ M.Kh. Abuseitova, Zh.B. Abylhozhin, et al., *Istoria Kazakhstana i Tsentral'noy Azii*, Dayk Press, Almaty, 2001, p. 522.

¹⁵ M. Abuseitova, “Razvitie istoricheskoy nauki i izmenenie interpretatsii istoricheskikh sobyitii v stranakh Tsentral'noy Azii posle obreteniya nezavisimosti,” *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii: “Novaia istoria Tsentral'noy Azii. Pereoisnka istorii, sovremennye problemy i podkhody,” Tashkent, 13-14 sentiabria 2004 g.*, Tashkent, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁶ See: G. Sultonova, *Sviazi Bukharskogo khanstva s Kazakhskim i Iarkendskim khanstavami vo vtoroy polovine XVI veka*, Author’s summary of a candidate thesis, Tashkent, 2005.

¹⁷ See: Zh.M. Tulibaeva, *Kazakhstan i Bukharskoe khanstvo v XVIII-pervoy polovine XIX v.*, Dayk Press, Almaty, 2001.

M. Abuseitova has correctly pointed out: "The sovereignty of the Central Asian independent states widened the breach of the single cultural and historical space; this resulted in the mystification and ethnization of the cultural-historical heritage, specific features and exclusiveness were overstressed contrary to historical facts and objective reality."¹⁸ It was mystification of the cultural-historical heritage that prompted the formula "Kazakhstan borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country." In the final analysis, this road leads to the loss of national independence.

The term "independence" here is used as the antinomy of political, economic, etc. vulnerability. The period of independence has already demonstrated that Central Asia is very sensitive to many domestic and external threats and challenges. The sensitivity threshold is determined by the modality of the new geopolitical Big Game with possible favorable or unfavorable results. As long as the region remains geopolitically vulnerable the concepts of "independence" and "national self-identification" will remain crippled and will differ little from such vague terms as the "Soviet people" or "socialism," two most frequently used political and ideological terms of our recent past. The region's damaged geopolitical integrity and conservation of the present state of affairs will become the main stumbling block on the road toward the Central Asian countries' international/geopolitical role as subjects, and will therefore inadequately limit their independence.

Our esteemed Kazakh colleagues say: Our state "is strongly influenced by Europe and Western values." This is an even bigger mistake than the talk about the Eurasian nature of Kazakhstan widely shared by Kazakhstani political scientists. For example, President Nazarbaev, who has spent over 15 years at the helm, was nominated for another term. His first term was extended for a period equal to another term; therefore while in democratic countries 15 years would be regarded as three full presidential terms, in Kazakhstan they are counted as two terms. Nursultan Nazarbaev will run for another term, which will be legitimized in full accordance with his country's laws. No matter how successful the country's leader, this should not be used as a pretext for adjusting the immutable democratic principle of changing leaders when the time comes. The situation in Kazakhstan speaks of the undemocratic nature of its political system, which is not much different from the authoritarian regimes of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and their neighbors. Kazakhstan is a classical Asian/Central Asian country with no trace of the benevolent influence of Europe and Western values.

Senior Associate of the American Foreign Policy Council E. Wayne Merry described Kazakhstan's political system in the following words: "These examples of oil-rich, but probity-poor states demonstrate that money flow can prolong a 'Big Man' in power for years, but the regime will ultimately fail due to the corrosion of social peace and the inability of the ruling clique to keep a firm grip on political realities."¹⁹

Kazakhstan's fear of a Color Revolution similar to those that have already taken place in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan does nothing to bring it closer to European democracies.

Finally, the academic community believes that because of its nomadic culture, the Kazakh people are more democratic than their neighbors, the land tillers of Uzbekistan in particular. Kazakhstan is probably more democratic than, for example, Uzbekistan, but not because its people were nomads. The Kazakhs abandoned the nomadic way of life long ago, partly because of urbanization and industrialization. In fact, division according to the archaic "nomadic-settled" principle can be used to distinguish Kazakhs from the northern, non-nomadic, but more democratic peoples (of Russia, European countries, etc.).

¹⁸ M. Abuseitova, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁹ E.W. Merry, "The Politics of Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Content," in: *In the Tracks of Tamerlane. Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century*, ed. by D. Burghart and T. Sabonis-Helf, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 2004, p. 39.

From this it follows that the influence of Europe and European values in Kazakhstan is not greater than in other Central Asian countries.

I would like to pay attention to another facet of the same problem, related to how the national self-identification process is treated. There is a fairly popular opinion in Central Asia that throughout the period of independence, two *stans*—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—have been competing for regional leadership. This is not true.²⁰ At the same time, this says that Kazakhstan is undoubtedly part of Central Asia. There was no rivalry, strictly speaking Kazakhstan could not claim leadership; only Uzbekistan could play this role because of its geopolitical, economic, social, cultural, and historical parameters. Today, when Uzbekistan has sacrificed this role and its independence by inviting Russia to join CACO in May 2004 and signing a union treaty with it in October 2005, Kazakhstan could claim the leading role. Today, Kazakhstan is gradually developing into the region's true leader; it will have to shoulder the burden of historical and strategic responsibility for it. Instead of looking for a non-existent place in the Eurasian system, it should take care of *its* Central Asia and do its best to reintegrate it.

Therefore the question "To Be or Not to Be a *Stan*?" leads to the question of "Whether There Will Be *Stans* at All?"

The Missionary Nature of the Eurasian "Trio"

The "non-*stan*," or Eurasian idea became a doctrine in November 2003 when the International Institute of Contemporary Politics (Kazakhstan) published a report entitled *Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine: liderskaia troika Evrazii*²¹ (Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine: Three Leaders of Eurasia). The paper primarily deserves the academic community's serious attention. Here I would like to refute some of its theses.

It says "stability in Eurasia and democracy across the post-Soviet expanse requires an efficient system of partnership and a *joint regional leadership of the three largest CIS democracies: Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine* (italics mine.—*F.T.*)." The "triple alliance" is justified by the fact that "in the course of 12 years, from the moment they acquired their new statehood, the three countries performed a huge amount of work and covered long and very similar roads.

- They acquired a new infrastructure of state institutions.
- They created market economy institutions.
- The number of people fully adapted to the new conditions has increased considerably and continues to grow.
- Stable political conditions indispensable for economic growth cannot be achieved outside international legitimacy, which itself depends on democratic choice. It has become clear that it was this choice that made the Eurasian Trio the leader."

All this equally applies to other CIS countries—the above is not the exclusive achievement of Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.

²⁰ For more on so-called Uzbek hegemonism, see, for example, F. Tolipov, "Certain Theoretical Aspects of Central Asian Geopolitics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (12), 2001.

²¹ It can be found at the Institute's site [http://iimp.kz/index.php?action=show&art_id=150&from=5], 17 February, 2006.

The paper says that the three countries face similar tasks, namely:

- They need an efficient state system.
- They need a system for moving money from the raw-material to the high-tech economic sectors.
- They need better conditions for personnel rotation to move the new generation of managers into the leading positions.
- Illegal migration should be stemmed—this means that Kazakhstan should fortify its southern frontiers, while Russia should do the same in the Far East.
- The three countries should be integrated into the global economy under conditions conducive to higher living standards and stronger human rights and freedoms.
- Civil society should be developed to encourage greater activity among citizens and to form state institutions of a new type.

In fact, all the other CIS countries, not only the “privileged trio,” face the same problems.

The paper says with a great deal of pomp: “The security of the post-Soviet expanse in the context of the new global challenges primarily depends on our three countries, international terrorism, drug trafficking, uncontrolled migration, and domestic political strife being the major threats. The CIS might become incorporated into the global instability zone. This is a real danger that should be averted.

“It is for our trio to shoulder the responsibility for stability and promote the values of the civilized world across the CIS. We should bring democracy and security to our closest neighbors.” (Italics mine.—F.T.)

This brings to mind the claims of the United States and the West as a whole to the role of democratic missionaries condemned and rejected by practically all the post-Soviet states. The trio’s missionary claims are no better. It would probably be more correct and much fairer if the civilized world itself undertook the task of promoting its values.

“The security of the post-Soviet expanse in the context of the new global challenges” depends on *all* the countries of this expanse rather than *primarily* on Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Do those who wrote the paper imagine that the “Trio” could ensure security in such places of the post-Soviet expanse as the Caucasus and Central Asia?

The authors go on to say: “We believe that in the current situation equal mutual exchange of accumulated experience, as well as mutual support on the key, breakthrough issues would be more adequate to the tasks of national strengthening than domination of one country. In the final analysis, there should emerge a situation in which each of the countries would be able to use its partners’ strong sides to address its own tasks.” This primitive formula has been elevated to a political innovation; meanwhile, it is applicable to all the CIS countries. Why is their mutual support impossible? This so-called doctrine was invented to conceal the CIS’ chronic disease—its impotence. This is not all. The doctrine ignores another important feature of post-Soviet realities: all attempts at “deeper integration” of some of the post-Soviet countries fail in the absence of *all* the other countries. Deeper integration of the chosen or “democratic leaders” will push the others away from the newly created “trio” and widen the geopolitical gaps in the CIS territory, which is dangerous for the trio itself. In other words, integration/reintegration across the post-Soviet territory can either be achieved with the participation of all the CIS countries, or not be achieved at all. Therefore, the joint leadership doctrine is a false doctrine.

Here is another extract from the same document: “On the whole, the system of ‘joint leadership’ of the three countries should become an ideological center and a pillar of all the other integration processes across the CIS.” The role of an ideological center and a pillar of post-Soviet integration/reintegration belongs to one state only—the Russian Federation. The former Soviet republics will close ranks around Russia, which in the past served as the core of the Soviet system and today remains the

center of the post-Soviet expanse. The outcome of the rivalry of the centripetal and centrifugal forces inside the CIS largely depends on Russia. The former may become stronger thanks to Russia's obvious democratic success; the latter, because of the Kremlin's revived imperial ambitions. It is too early to talk about democracy's obvious success in Russia. This is testified by the fact that Moscow extends its support to the Central Asian authoritarian regimes threatened by Color Revolutions and demonstrates complete indifference to the future of democracy in these countries. I have already written that it is too early to speak about Kazakhstan's democratic success.

Finally, the report contains the following "pacifying" phrase: "Interaction of the 'trio' contradicts neither the European factor, nor the acting state organizations—the CIS and EurAsEC." The "triple union" doctrine, however, contradicts the geopolitical principles governing the transformation of the post-Soviet expanse, especially the conception (or doctrine) of the Central Asian independent alliance.

The paper's authors became lost in their own assertions when they said that the partner relationships within the "Eurasian Trio" would fortify their position when talking to united Europe. It is not clear why they need a stronger position at the talks with the EU, which is not designed to conquer or subjugate them or infringe on their sovereignty. The authors are looking for something with which to replace Kazakhstan's geopolitical insolvency (in fact, this is not limited to Kazakhstan and applies to all the post-Soviet states) with an even less geopolitically insolvent Eurasian conception. The Central Asian doctrine, which the Kazakhstani Eurasians prefer to ignore, is the only solvent geopolitical doctrine for Kazakhstan.

C o n c l u s i o n

I have written above that *stan*-ism is a political rather than a philological issue. From the very first days of their independence, the local countries have been involved in a political experiment called Central Asian Cooperation/Central Asian Economic Community/ Central Asian Cooperation Organization. The integration project was put on the agenda in the most natural way and without any (external or domestic) pressure from the very beginning, back in 1991.

Politicians and analysts are erroneously convinced that the Central Asian states are different not only in the sociopolitical and economic, but also in the cultural respect, therefore strategic landmarks should be sought outside the region. We also might suggest with an ironic smile that Uzbekistan should also believe that its *stan* sounds derogative. Its leaders, at least, describe the U.S., EU, Japan, and Russia as their strategic landmarks. This is nothing but irony: when talking about faraway partners, the politicians and academics of Uzbekistan are more concerned with Central Asian communality rather than with its disunity.

It is regrettable that the Kazakh Eurasianists feel uncomfortable with the *-stan* suffix. It is even more regrettable that they look to faraway countries as their historical landmarks and tend to forget that Central Asia is their main historical landmark. This should become the meaning of what science calls the "big strategy" of any state, since Central Asia is the beginning and end of their common history. The word "Motherland" sounds the same in all local languages: Otan in Kazakh, Vatan in Uzbek, Ata-meken in Kyrgyz, and Vatan in Tajik and in Turkmen.

I would like to call on Kazakhstan and all the other regional republics which are still not former Central Asian countries to come back to Central Asia, come back to your Motherland.

Stay with us—be a *stan*.