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The Eurasian Union Project:  
An Analysis of the Political and Economic Integration of Post-Soviet Space  
(Working Title)

**Research Question and Overview**

Since his return to fulfill his third term as president of Russia, Vladimir Putin has asserted that his primary foreign policy objective is the integration of post-Soviet space into a common economic sphere by 2015.<sup>1</sup> The formation of a Eurasian Union would mark one of the biggest geopolitical shifts in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This thesis will examine existing regional arrangements (the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, the Eurasian Economic Community, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Commonwealth of Independent States) to assess the proposed Eurasian Union's prospects for success.

Russia is not alone in vying for influence over post-Soviet space. Especially in Central Asia, she faces stiff competition from China, the United States, Turkey, and European states. With Russian geopolitical power declining, are the economic benefits of cooperation enough of an incentive for former Soviet republics to relinquish some of their political sovereignty to a Kremlin-led intergovernmental organization? Is Putin's proposed Eurasian Union a genuine attempt to achieve regional co-prosperity or a veiled scheme to reassert Russian hegemony? These are some of the key questions this thesis hopes to answer. Furthermore, the phenomenon of regional integration in post-Soviet space provides an excellent opportunity to test general

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<sup>1</sup> "Putin Praises Post-Soviet Integration." RIA Novosti. 03 Sept. 2012.

theories of international relations that explain why and when international actors will choose to cooperate.

### **Brief Review of Literature**

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has asserted that the development of relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the “chief priority of Russian foreign policy”.<sup>2</sup> Attempts at regional integration in post-Soviet space began shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and have had mixed results. Alexander Libman has written extensively on the development of regional institutions in the former Soviet Union, particularly the CIS. Libman describes the inefficiency and of previous Russian-led attempts at “formal” top-down regionalism.<sup>3</sup> However, in collaboration with Evgeny Vinokurov, Libman presents compelling evidence for “bottom-up” regionalization occurring in post-Soviet space as a result of investments by Russian corporations and the expansion of labor migration<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, while attempts at political integration have been largely unsuccessful, there is evidence for informal economic integration.

In order to understand the Russian Federation’s current foreign policy objectives, it is necessary to briefly review its history. Christian Thorun describes four distinct periods of Russian foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia closely aligned itself from the West. From 1993 to 2000, Russian foreign policy became cautious and ambiguous as the Russian state reestablished itself in the global arena. From 2000 to 2004 it was

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<sup>2</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Survey of Russian Federation Foreign Policy, (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Libman, Alexander. "Regionalisation and Regionalism in the Post-Soviet Space: Current Status and Implications for Institutional Development." Europe-Asia Studies 59.3 (2007): 401.

<sup>4</sup> Libman, Alexander, and Evgeny Vinokurov. "Regional Integration and Economic Convergence in the Post-Soviet Space: Experience of the Decade of Growth." JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies (2011): 112-28.

<sup>5</sup> Thorun, Christian. Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (2009): 1.

more cooperative with the West in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. Finally, from 2004 forward, Russia has become more assertive and independent in its foreign policy considerations.

Two primary theories exist in explaining Russian foreign policy and international relations in general in post-Soviet space: liberalism and realism. Liberalism holds that states are interested in promoting mutually beneficial economic and political relations with surrounding neighbors. It focuses on the construction of institutions to aid and promote open cooperation between states. Under this model, Russia would place itself on equal footing with other post-Soviet states to strive towards co-prosperity with its neighbors. Building upon existing regional institutions, a Eurasian Union would provide a means of deepening economic ties and increasing political integration to create a more stable, peaceful region.

The second theory is the realism. Realism holds that states are unitary actors who act primarily in their own self-interest to increase power and security in an international order characterized by anarchy. International organizations are not regarded as particularly important, but rather as tools that can be used to pursue the power-driven interests of the state. Placing this theory in context, organizations such as the CIS and the proposed Eurasian Union are a means to an end for Russia to consolidate its power in the region.

An important aspect of this topic that will be explored is the Russian concept of Eurasianism and “Neo-Eurasianism”. Marlene Laruelle’s book *Russian Eurasianism: Ideology of Empire* explores this concept from a historical and contemporary viewpoint. She frames Eurasianism as a type of patriotic ideology that rejects the Western identity assigned to Russia and asserts the predominance the specific history, linguistics, geography, economics and

ethnology that are unique to Russia and her neighbors.<sup>6</sup> This concept is important to understanding the forces behind regional integration in the region.

Political scientist William Zimmerman offers an analysis of the formulation of Russian foreign policy as defined by mass-elite interactions in the period following the Soviet collapse.<sup>7</sup>

### **Methodology, Data and Organization**

A survey of Russian and English-language literature is currently being conducted and a full literature review will be completed by October. The thesis will consist of four chapters, two of which I plan to complete before the end of the fall semester. The remaining two chapters will be completed before February. Additional sources will be consulted throughout the entire thesis-writing process and appropriate revisions will be made in February and March.

The first chapter will be a general review of progress made towards regional integration since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Using qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, this section will describe the various institutions that have been established in post-Soviet space in the past twenty years and the political and economic impetuses behind their formations. The next chapter will be a quantitative analysis of the institutions described in the first chapter. Research for this chapter will rely on “The System of Indicators of Eurasian Integration”, a dataset published by Evgeny Vinokurov of the Eurasian Development Bank. I plan on consulting additional datasets and performing my own statistical analysis using SPSS. The third section will focus specifically on the purpose, structure, and organization of the proposed Eurasian Union. For this section I will rely on the testimony of public officials throughout the Eurasian region as well as those of foreign government agencies to construct a

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<sup>6</sup> Laruelle, Marlene. Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire. (2008) pp. 202

<sup>7</sup>

picture of what a Eurasian Union would look like. This includes speeches, interviews, reports, and published newspaper articles of politicians and government officials. The fourth section will be an overall conclusion of the research conducted and a forecast of future regional integration in post-Soviet space. The exact theoretical framework to be used to frame my argument will be determined after more background research is conducted.

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