CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REVIEW

Volume 8, 2014

EURASIANISM AND THE FAR RIGHT IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH EAST EUROPE

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Abstract

This article focuses on Eurasianism as an ideological trend with a political appeal beyond the post-Soviet space. It demonstrates that the roles envisioned for the 'Trojan horses' of Eurasianism among the far right in Central/Southeast Europe and for Eurasianism's sympathizers in Western Europe bear a qualitative difference. In the former case, the emphasis is on systemic transformation whereas, in the latter case, on a gradualist strategy.

ISSN 1752-7503

First publication

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The latest developments in Ukraine are indicative of Russia's motive to solidify its status within the Eurasian space. In Russian geopolitical discourse, Eurasia roughly coincides with the post-Soviet territories to the east of the Baltic Republics that stretch all the way to the Caucasus and Central Asia. As early as the 1990s, experts in Geopolitics, such as Sergey Karaganov, had been advocating that Russian minorities should be utilized as instruments of Russian foreign policy in the 'near abroad' (e.g. the 'Karaganov doctrine' in 1992). However, Boris Yeltsin's foreign policy of appeasement towards the West softened the impact of these approaches.

During Vladimir Putin's tenure in office, Moscow has demonstrated a more powerful resolution to safeguard its interests within a region that it regards as a 'traditional' sphere of geopolitical influence. My aim in this article is to focus on Eurasianism not so much as a new agenda in Russian foreign policy but, mainly, as an ideological trend with a political appeal beyond the post-Soviet space. Eurasianism's newly-acquired 'fellow-travellers' comprise a number of far right parties in the 'old' (e.g. Golden Dawn in Greece) as well as the 'new' (e.g. Jobbik in Hungary, Ataka in Bulgaria) EU member-states in Central and Southeast Europe. This research acquires greater importance if one considers the successful performance of populist and far right parties in the May 2014 elections for the European parliament.

For the purposes of this article, I concentrate on the most prominent representative of Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin. A Professor of Sociology at Moscow State University, Dugin commenced his literary and political engagement as a dissident journalist in 1988. Instead of a classical theorist in International Relations, Alexander Dugin has been an avant-garde figure involved in a series of literary and political initiatives. Throughout the 1990s, he took active part in quite a few controversial circles in the midst of the ideological vacuum that accompanied the fall of the Soviet Union (e.g. the nationalist grouping Pamyat and Edvard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party). Alexander Dugin launched the Eurasian Movement in 2001. Despite his flamboyant writing and controversial statements, the author is one of the State Duma's advisers in foreign affairs. The main questions here are:

1) What are the ideological foundations and evolution of Eurasianism?

2) How is it possible to interpret the appeal of Eurasianism among political actors from the far right in Central and Southeast Europe?

Eurasianism: early beginnings

Alexander Dugin introduced the foundations of Eurasianism in the Principles of Geopolitics (1997). In this book, the author advocates a foreign policy doctrine shaped by cultural essentialism and historical revisionism. Dugin's essentialism consists of dividing the world into geopolitical spheres of influence in accordance with 'established' historical and cultural attributes. Within this global context, the primary goal of Russian foreign policy must be to maximize its national interest within the Eurasian space.

In accordance with the 'Karaganov doctrine', Dugin also contends that Russia must intervene to endorse the collective rights of ethnic Russians living in the 'near abroad'. Nevertheless, there exists a basic difference between the 'Karaganov doctrine' and the concept of Eurasianism at its early stages. In the former case, Sergey Karaganov positions his thought within the context of Classical Realism and advocates ways for Russia to maximize its national interest inside the post-Soviet geopolitical environment (e.g. involving the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia). On the other hand, although he assigns Russia a role of pivotal importance within the Eurasian project, Dugin does not endorse a strictly statist approach. By contrast, the thinker aspires to embed Eurasianism within a political infrastructure that goes beyond the role of states as the main actors in international politics (Shekhovtsov, 2008, p.496).

A dichotomy of fundamental importance is the one which consists of the Continental (mainly Russia) versus the Atlantic powers (i.e. the US and NATO). Russia's main global competitor is 'Atlanticism, the NATO/US imperium, and the liberal, as well as expansionist, principles that underpin US foreign policy' (Dugin, 1997 p.p. 255, 259; Ingram, 2001). Russia's main objective must be to utilize its resources in order to sustain a balance of power vis-à-vis its global rival and harness 'Atlanticism's incursions to the Eurasian heartland' (Ibid). An early sign of Dugin's differentiation from the 'Karaganov doctrine' is his occasional choice of appeasement for tactical purposes. In this light, the author judges that the Baltic Republics, together with Central and Eastern Europe, may be 'conceded' to the Atlantic sphere of influence

Dugin's outlook on global politics as a puzzle that consists of 'Russian/Eurasian', 'Atlantic/Western' and/or 'Arab/Islamic' spheres of influence, reads like a rehearsal of the pattern introduced in Samuel Huntingdon's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). It also reads like a 'reversal' of the pattern introduced by Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard* (1998). In an opposite outlook to Dugin's, Brzezinski views Russia as the main competitor to the US and recommends ways to counter Russian influence in international politics.

Concretizing Eurasianism: Towards a 'Fourth Political Theory'

Dugin's most recent work, *The Fourth Political Theory* (2012), standardizes and enhances the political infrastructure within which the Eurasian project is embedded. In this work, Dugin desires to set up the foundations upon which a fourth ideology will emerge after Communism, Fascism, and Liberalism. The author subscribes to a vague notion of neotraditionalism and deplores the way that liberalism and postmodernity aspire to achieve universal homogeneity and lead towards an 'end of history'.

In *The Fourth Political Theory* and in quite a few of his recent statements, Dugin has concretized Eurasianism as a cultural sphere which, in his own words, is as distinct as the Islamic or the Buddhist world. According to the author, this has been the outcome of a historical process that has consisted in intercultural contacts and bonds of mutual reliance within a common geographic space. As a matter of fact, Dugin has been particularly cautious in order not to conflate Eurasian identity with a 'Greater Russian' identity of any sort. By contrast, the author has opted to portray Eurasianism as a transnational and inclusionary mosaic within which smaller national identities can coexist with the Russian one in harmony. For Dugin, it is the cultural diversity, as well as idiosyncrasy, of Eurasia that renders its strict categorization into either the European or the Asian cultural zones highly problematic.

For instance, Alexander Dugin has lately been quite active in his endeavour to convince Lithuanian nationalists that the Russian and the Lithuanian national identities can coexist on the basis of equality within the fringes of the Eurasian world. The feeble reactions over Crimea's annexation by Russia on the part of the Lithuanian populist parties (e.g. Order and Justice) serves as, if only, an early hint at Eurasianism's success in softening the 'traditional' Russoscepticism among Lithuanian nationalists.

Another important aspect in *The Fourth Political Theory* is the inversion of leftist principles and their fusion with neotraditionalism and cultural essentialism within the context of a new geopolitical strategy for Russia (Shekhovtsov, 2009). During the recent developments in Ukraine, Alexander Dugin has been calling, via his personal blog, for a continuous anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist revolution from Vladivostok to Lisbon. These calls often combine in the author's speech with other calls for the necessity of cementing Slavic unity as a bulwark against 'Western-sponsored' acculturation.

At a first glance, this corresponds to a change of course in comparison to the situational choice of appeasement which Dugin advocates in *The Principle of Geopolitics*. To the eyes of a Constructivist, this is indicative of Eurasianism's malleability and high subjectivity regarding geopolitical developments. Nevertheless, how can Alexander Dugin and his fellow-Eurasianists use the term 'anti-fascist' when they maintain relations with political parties accused of being either quasi-fascist or overtly fascist (e.g. Golden Dawn)? This topic requires some further elaboration.

The Great Patriotic War against Fascism and its symbolism form a major component of nationalist imagery in contemporary Russia. The portrayal of the Great Patriotic War retains much of its Soviet-era paraphernalia. Nevertheless, instead of being national in shape and Socialist in content, the image of the Great Patriotic War has been given a distinctly national (Russian) content. In his recent statements, Dugin adds 'Fascism' to the content that this notion has acquired in Russian political and popular discourse nowadays.

In this light, Russia is being portrayed as an anti-fascist force not on ideological but, mainly, on national grounds. Along these lines, Russia's rivals in foreign affairs can be viewed as potentially Fascist. Indeed, this emphasis on anti-fascism in Dugin's most recent writings has reaped some benefits for Russian foreign policy. Although this article concentrates on the links between Eurasianism and the far right in Central and Southeast Europe, a number of leftist parties in Western Europe (e.g. Germany's *Die Linke*) often tend to interpret the developments in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as a justified response to the 'EU-sponsored, Fascist government in Kyiv'.

According to Dugin, Russia's more active engagement within the Eurasian space provides an early vehicle for the materialization of the 'continuous anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist revolution from Vladivostok to Lisbon'. Although the final chapter in the Fourth

Political Theory is entitled 'Against the Postmodern World', its author's rhetoric is ironically and clearly set within a postmodernist matrix.

At this point, a crucial detail should be set in context. As result of Dugin's idiosyncratic and obscure writing, it might be an exaggeration to contend that his Eurasianism shapes Russia's foreign policy in the same way that, say, Machiavelli's thought inspired domestic as well as foreign policies in Mussolini's Italy. However, it remains equally valid that Dugin's unilateral networking with various representatives from the European far right and, to a lesser extent, the far left has expanded the pool of supporters for Russian foreign policy beyond the geographic boundaries of Eurasia .

Why the appeal to the far right in Central and Southeast Europe? The cases of Jobbik (Hungary), Golden Dawn (Greece), and Ataka (Bulgaria)

As Alexander Dugin has often acknowledged, he maintains close connections with the leaders of Jobbik (Gábor Vona), Ataka (Volen Siderov), and Golden Dawn (Nikolaos Michaloliakos). The Russian thinker has held a series of cordial meetings with the Jobbik-leader. He has also, allegedly, addressed a letter of support to the, currently imprisoned, leader of Golden Dawn. Alexander Dugin has openly admitted that he regards such parties as a potential vanguard or as 'fellow-travellers' in the European revolution against Atlantic imperium. However, why the appeal of Eurasianism, in particular, to these parties? One might isolate the following factors in regards with these parties' appreciation for the Eurasian project.

The first factor is the interaction between identity-politics and foreign policy. All three parties have been very sceptical of the ways that globalization may allegedly result in 'worldwide acculturation'. Along these lines, Dugin's neotraditionalism has struck a chord with them. Eurasianism's agenda clearly coincides with Jobbik's calls to reconnect Hungary with the Asian part of its cultural ancestry. Although it subscribes to Hungary's 'historical' image as a hegemonic power inside the Carpathian Basin, the Jobbik leadership equally acknowledges the Eurasian origins of the Hungarian ethno-genesis (i.e. the references to the Ancient Magyars and Huns).

Gábor Vona and other high-ranking members of Jobbik have been quick on their feet to dispel any Eurocentric or Orientalist outlooks and emphasize Hungary's role as a bridge between East and West. This aspect of Jobbik's foreign policy doctrine has come to legitimize Vona's

campaign among emerging regional powers such as Turkey, Kazakhstan or, in this case, Russia. In particular, it is a shared belief in cultural exceptionalism and the conviction that neither Russian nor Hungarian culture can be confined within the narrow limits of 'Europe' or 'Asia' that provides common ground between Dugin's and Vona's understandings of Eurasian identity.

The same thing can be said over the employment of the Slavophil and Christian Orthodox imageries vis-à-vis Bulgaria's and Greece's position inside the Eurasian project. With specific regard to Greece, Dugin has also stated that if Greece and Cyprus were subsumed within the Kremlin's sphere of influence, this would upgrade the maritime status of Russia, as a Continental power, vis-à-vis the Atlantic competitors.

The second factor is hard Euroscepticism. All three parties reject the EU as a bureaucratic construct that simply promotes the interests of the powerful states to the detriment of the peripheral ones. Alexander Dugin has also regarded the EU as a feeble entity within which the Franco-German axis and the post-industrial states of Northwestern Europe maximize their national interests over the EU's peripheries. Most importantly, the Russian thinker views the EU as a mere instrument through which Atlanticism promotes its geopolitical interests within the European space.

The third factor is anti-capitalism. All three parties sense discomfort with neoliberal capitalism and the way that transnational capital scours the globe with few constraints in its flow. In their political platforms, these parties often blend elements from the traditional political culture of nationalism in their countries with an artificial 'anti-capitalism'. Dugin's denunciation of global capitalism and its greed complements the discomfort of these and other far right parties with the 'Eurocrats', Atlanticism, and the alleged loss of cultural identity and national values during a global era.

Last but not least, anti-liberalism, in the political and cultural sense, provides an essential bridge between Eurasianism and its fellow-travellers from the far right in Central and Southeast Europe. Dugin has been denouncing Liberalism as an ideology that may ultimately turn human societies into herd-like aggregates of individuals without any awareness of collective belonging. Indeed, the prospective erosion of the collective bonds which, allegedly, constitute human societies (e.g. family, religion and cultural traditions) features as one of the greatest fears among the European far right. Meanwhile, the same political actors tend to regard Putin's Russia as a 'healthier' political model in comparison to the mainstream patterns of politics in the West (i.e.

involving a leader-centred and strong government, the promotion of national values, and the safeguarding of the 'naturally ascribed' gender-roles, etc.).

Implications for the future

By contrast to the bipolarity of the '80s and the unipolarity of the '90s, we are currently witnessing the emergence of a multipolar international system. The European financial crisis revealed not only the feeble foundations of monetary unification but also the conflict among various models of governance and financial management inside the EU.

It is particularly interesting how the latter conflict has often acquired cultural underpinnings in political and popular discourse (e.g. 'Germany versus Southern Europe'). It is equally intriguing how such cultural reductions have enacted themselves within an EU which is (informally) structured according to a 'three-gear' balance of power. This consists of the 'Franco-German axis' and the post-industrial states of Northwestern Europe, Southern Europe, and the new member-states from Central and Southeast Europe.

Recently, Russia has reasserted its ambition to evolve into a potent global actor. Despite his obscure and controversial outlook, Alexander Dugin maintains access to the halls of power in Moscow. The three parties that have been nominated in this article operate on the peripheries of an EU marred by economic stagnation and, occasionally, political instability. Meanwhile, Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria are three societies where Eurasianism's employment of cultural identity politics is likely to gain higher popular appeal compared to the Western 'core'.

Depending on the evolution of the balance of power between Russia and the EU, one should not exclude the possibility of such political actors functioning as 'Trojan horses'on behalf of Russian foreign policy. The prospects for Eurasianism to expand this strategy to political actors within the EU core, remains to be seen in the near future. In all of this, it should be borne in mind that the role envisioned for the pro-Eurasian 'Trojan horses' from Central and Southeast Europe within the EU bears a qualitative difference from the role reserved for the sympathetic parties from the 'core' of Western Europe.

In the former case, Eurasianism seems to be pondering on systemic transformation, or a radical shift in the foreign policy agenda, that would bring the states in question within Russia's sphere of influence. In the case of Greece, the drastic realignment of the party-system and the state of turbulence between 2010 and 2011 revealed the fragile foundations of political

institutions. In the case of Hungary, the state of friction between Budapest and Brussels over the management of the economic crisis has been a driving force behind the readjustment of this state's foreign policy towards Moscow. By contrast, the polities of Western Europe are characterized by greater stability and their democratic institutions have been established as a result of a long historical process.

Therefore, the prospects for systemic transformations with groundbreaking repercussions are rather weak. Within the West European context, then, Eurasianism has opted for a more gradualist strategy. This consists in an attempt to employ sympathetic parties from Western Europe as a bulwark with the aim of countering the impact of Atlanticism upon the foreign policy agenda(s) in these states. So far, a variety of political parties, as diverse as the National Front in France and the UKIP in the United Kingdom, seem to endorse Russian foreign policy inside the Eurasian/post-Soviet space. The growing popularity of these parties signals the shape of things to come.

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