



The concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian policy and its implications

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ABSTRACT

The term Eurasia is a contentious and illusive one and there is no consensus or agreement among authors on its meanings, implications and ramifications. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan introduced and developed his own vision, policies, perceptions and values of Eurasianism which he has been propagating and practicing on a continuous and consistent basis. In fact, the concept of Eurasianism and Eurasian policies have turned into state ideologies which are reflected in domestic, regional and foreign policies as well as in the foundation of the recent regional integration process. The purpose of the article is: to study and review the genesis of the old, popular as well as contemporary schools and thoughts of Eurasianism, their underlying goals, objectives and purposes in order to locate and understand Kazakhstan's views and concepts of Eurasianism in a broad historical and comparative perspectives; to review and critically analyze how President Nazarbayev's visions and policies of Eurasianism are reflected in the country's domestic, regional and foreign policies and what are their implications.

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1. Introduction

The term 'Eurasia' is rooted in the classical theories and concepts of 'Geo-politics' particularly the concepts of 'pivot' and later 'heartland' defined and developed by British Geographer Sir Hartford Mackinder in 1904, where he identified the huge landmass of the east of Urals as the 'pivot' and claimed that whoever will control this vast

territory control global politics (Mackinder, 1904, 421–444). Eurasia is a highly debated, contested and illusive term with different meanings and perceptions in time and space. It has two apparent meanings and dimensions: geographical and politico-philosophical-ideological; where the first one deals with space and location meaning Eurasia is a place (space) which is located both in Asia and Europe; the other is more complex and complicated with multiple views and perceptions, often conflicting and contradictory, probably with one common feature that the concept of Eurasia first emerged and evolved in imperial Russia (Isaev 1991; Ivanov, Polikov, Tugashev, & Shishin, 2007; Schmidt 2005; Sengupta, 2009).

The term 'Eurasianism' is more of a politico-ideological and philosophical concept and understanding with multi-dimensional features and aspects that emerged and re-emerged in various historical stages by philosophers, historians, nationalists, communists as well as individual groups and leaders for pursuing their respective goals and

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aspirations (Brzezinski, 1998; Shrielman 2009). The Russian geopolitical concept of Eurasianism, with all its changes and modifications, is still very powerful, dominant and alive in historic-cultural, academic, as well as national political and ideological debates and discourse.¹ Turkish Eurasianism is mainly an idea and vision of creating a commonwealth of Turkic states inhabited by Turkish peoples including parts of Russia and Central Asia. Kazakhstan's vision of Eurasianism and creation of the Eurasian Union based on Eurasian solidarity is an official policy (ideology) developed, launched and being implemented by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan that fundamentally differs from those of Russian, Turkish and others forms in terms of underlying goals, objectives, methods, directions and mechanisms of implementation.

The purpose of the article is to briefly define the concepts of Eurasia and Eurasianism, its various forms, debates, interpretations and directions, overtime changes, evolutions and current policy debates and discussions. The main concentration is on Kazakhstan's vision of Eurasianism, its evolution and differentiation, nature, characteristics, implications and reflections on the country's domestic, regional and global politics in building a peaceful harmonies nation as well as balancing and maintaining a multivector foreign policy. The article raises and critically analyzes the challenges and difficulties of Kazakhstan's Eurasian policies, particularly in relations with neighboring and regional countries. The conclusion will succinctly summarize the potential benefits and advantages of President Nazarbayev's Eurasian policy.

2. Literature review

The literature in the field is huge and multidimensional and it is not easy to divide or classify them into various categories. However, for the purpose of review and analysis, the author has divided them into the following broad categories:

First, the classical and neo-classical writers of Geo-politics and the concepts of Eurasia and Eurasianism who were mainly European and Russian origins and their primary focus was on geo-political, strategic and security interests of Russia as a 'pivotal' state of Eurasia. Author like, Hartford Mackinder, Pytor Chaadev, Vasily Tatishchev, Nikolai Danilevsky, Alexander Pompiansky, Nikolai Trubetskoi, Peter Savitskiy, Nikolai Alekseev, Issaev, Longworth, Leonid Gimilev, Mark Bassin and Alexander Dugin can be classified into this category. They emphasized the importance of the Eurasian landmass as the pivotal of the world and since Russia is located in the center, it has the natural right and power to control and play dominant role in Eurasia. One of their main claims was that Russia is neither a European nor an Asian country rather a Eurasian one and it must protect, preserve and promote its identity accordingly.

Second, in this category of literature, we can include the wide varieties of authors who wrote about other types and forms of Eurasia and Eurasianism often challenging and contradicting the Russian centric views and perceptions claiming that Russia is at the center of Eurasia and that very geographical fact gives it special role and privilege to claim the leadership position but it is not the only Eurasian state. These are mainly authors from Central Asian and Caucasian origins. Authors like, Osmanov, Simavoryan, Matikeeva, Sengupta, Tolipov, Shrielman, Ivanov and others can be classified into this category who claim, at various levels, that the Center of Eurasia can be in China, greater Central Asia or in the Caucasus. They do not have any single or cohesive theory or concept of Eurasianism rather challenge the notion that Russia is the center of Eurasia and argue that the concept is disputed and divisive.

Third, in the third group of literature we can include the authors and writers of Kazakhstani Eurasianism where President Nursultan Nazarbayev seems to be the main advocate and proponent of creating a Eurasian Union based on the common economic, political and security interests of the Eurasian states. In his numerous books, monographs, articles and memoirs, he elaborated his detailed policy perceptions, arguments and roadmaps for creating and implementing the policies of Eurasianism. Other authors, mainly Kazakhstani ones, like Sultanov, Laumulun, Shakenova, Tokaev, Nyssanbaev, Tulepbergenova, Baipakova, Gulyamova, Sidorovich and Qoraboyev generally support the above view.

In the fourth group of literature we can include the recent official documents, speeches and articles published by the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus regarding the various issues and aspects of the creation of the Customs Union and its gradual progression to a Eurasian Union which are mainly considered as more of policy papers and documents rather than serious academic and research materials.

In the final group of literature, we can include the authors (mainly foreign) who criticize the concepts of Eurasia and Eurasianism from various points of views and perspectives and cast doubts and suspicions about the success of the proposed Eurasian Union. Authors like, Laruelle, Gleason, Shlapentokh, Cutler, Weitz, Bohr, Masanov, Schmidt and others can be included into this category.

3. Russian Eurasianism

The Russian concept of Eurasianism started as a philosophical and political movement at the beginning of the XX century developed by Russian intellectuals who emigrated after the Communist revolution in 1917 (Trubetskoi, Savitskiy, Alekseev & Longworth, 2005). The Russian pan-Eurasian nationalists were worried about the disintegration of the Eurasian common culture, language (Russian) and values and wanted to stop the potential threats of emerging regional identities (pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, pan-Asianism and so on) in order to keep and promote an all-Eurasian identity that could unite all peoples in Russia and its periphery in a single entity. Eurasianism was born as a reaction to the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks' coming to power. Interestingly, classical Russian Eurasianists were

¹ Among the classical Russian Eurasianists, Pytor Chaadev, Vasily Tatishchev, Nikolai Danilevsky, Alexander Pompiansky are the most important ones. For details, see Mathew Schmidt, "Is Putin Pursuing a Policy of Eurasianism?" www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3996/is_200501/ai_n13640828.

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