

**Geopolitical Games in Eurasian Regionalism:
Ideational Interactions and Regional International Organizations**

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the ideational interaction underlying attempts at regional integration and cooperation in Eurasia. While the ideas and values of the European Union was relatively well-studied within the theory of Europeanisation, the key concepts, ideas, values, and principles driving Eurasian regionalism remained out of the main focus of Western scholarship. This paper aims to shed more light on this *ideational* basis of Eurasian regionalism through unveiling the discourse developed in Russian scholarship and available only in Russian. Understanding interaction between institutions will always remain partial as long as the ideational interaction is not addressed. Such concept as “integrative mentality”, as a segment of the wider category “foreign policy mentality”, and theory of neo-Eurasianism were incorporated into Russian political discourse and therefore affect public opinion through specific interpretation of economic, political and cultural processes in the EU’s Near Neighborhood and the EU as an actor. The analysis presented in this paper, indicates the development of new *ideational* competition, in addition to well-documented geopolitical one. The paper also aspires to contribute to emerging research on public support to governmental strategic choices and self-legitimation of international organizations in Eurasia.

Keywords: International Organizations, Eurasian regionalism, the EU Near Neighborhood, Regional Integration, Legitimation, Public Opinion, neo-Eurasianism.

Introduction

The integrative processes evolving in the global political and economic space have long-time implications for the international relations and global political dynamics.¹ While the interaction of international organizations have been well documented, their conceptual-ideational interaction remained out of the main focus so far. However, the key concepts, as ideational components, may account for success or failure of regional integration projects, as well as become crucial in public support and in legitimacy of the governmental choices in launching or joining regional international organizations (RIO).

In modern RIOs, the interaction processes are not limited only to trade, interconnections and differentiation of labor between national economies (the classical characteristics of the international economic integration), security, and politics. In addition to this well-studied issues, there are also *interactions of a different values, principles, and ideas – what we define here as ideational or axiological dimension of international interaction of RIOs*. An ideational basis, along with the economic and political components, is the necessary foundation for RIOs' stability, success, and legitimacy. The Western academic scholarship still lacks deep knowledge of such concepts as “integrative mentality” developed well in Russian academic scholarship (despite that, this concept has been widely used in Russian political discourse and in mass media).² ‘Integrative mentality’ implies a set of ideas and values developed, supported, and shared by scholars, and used by political elites and by mass media, encouraging mainly positive vision of the regional integration processes across post-Soviet space. The development of this positive approach to regional integration is arguably meant to augment public support to this governmental strategy and legitimacy of respective

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² A very quick search in Google indicates approximately 609.000 links to “Europeanisation”. There was no result at all on “integrative mentality” that would be related to political science (most of links associate it with psychology or with math-related studies on integrative models). In contrast, the search for Russian translation “Интеграционная ментальность” also in google, produced over 268.000 findings – almost a half of the above - with first and most “relevant” references (yet not all of them) relating to regional integration.

RIO. Yet, integrative mentality became a key and pivotal concept in development of new ideational foundation behind the attempts of regional integration but also behind other multiple attempts at regional integration launched by Russia. Understanding the regional integration across post-Soviet space will always be partial without understanding its' ideational foundation – just like our understanding of the EU would be downgraded should one omit the concept of Europeanisation. Moreover, apart from actual interactions between the RIOs, there is also less perceived, yet increasingly important, ideational dueling between them. This paper looks at this ideational interaction through focusing on overlap and competition of two leading concepts – Europeanisation versus “integrative mentality” (and related to it, neo-Eurasianism), with the main focus on the later as the least studied in Western academic scholarship, yet increasingly important for social perceptions in post-Soviet space.

Social perception of the integrative processes are highly important as they account for political stability, spurred vivid academic debates (Acharya and Johnston 2007; Ademmer and Lissovolik 2019; Afontsev and Lebedeva 2014; Axline 1994; Gruber 2010; Kelstrup 1998; Kostin and Izotov 2015; Laursen 2003; Obydenkova and Libman 2019; Obydenkova and Schmitter 2020; Perskaja and Eksindarov 2016; Strezhneva 2012). As these studies demonstrated, public opinion and support are highly important for an image, future, and success of development of international organizations with or without a regional dimension. Common beliefs of participants in the integrative processes can act as ‘focal points’, around which the behavior of some actors’ is constructed (Garret and Weingast 1993). Russian scholarship echoed this idea pointing out that actors of any integration must at least have a common idea about the present and future shared cross-border identity (Butorina 2005).

Regional integration influence citizens’ sociocultural and foreign policy-related attitudes as well as public support increasingly matters for legitimacy of attempts at regional integration as well as their success or failure. In conditions of the unprecedented aggravation of international relations, which is turning into ‘Cold War 2.0’, the understanding of ideation foundation of the (attempts at) regional

integration is more important than ever. The paper aims to shed more light at the key concepts underlying the projects of post-Soviet regional integration – its ideational foundation.

Ideational Dimension and Regional Integration

Since the 1990s the key role of ideas in regional integration has been in the main focus of researchers' attention. Predominantly, these issues have been studied on a wider scale of interaction of ideas, interests and power (Garret 1992; Krasner 1991; Soroos 1986). Many studies focused on integrative processes as containing both rational (material) and ideational components. Current integrative strategies are not only driven by political and economic motivations, but also promoted through a set of ideas, standards, values, beliefs or perceptions, which is not surprising given the importance of legitimacy of international organizations in general that is often challenged even for democracies. Besides, as earlier stated by some scholars, any integration, regardless of its scale and success, implies ideational elements to secure public support for the foreign policy choices (Izotov 2016). Shared beliefs of the participants of the integrative processes can act as 'focal points', around which actors' behavior is arranged, especially in the case of creating an 'integration institutional design' that protects and promotes democratic values (Börzel and Van Hüllen 2015; Garret and Weingast 1993; Closa 2013; Genna and Hiroi 2014). In contrast, autocracies and "their" regional IOs are more desperate to augment their status and legitimacy at national and international levels.

However, in the aftermath of the Great Recession 2008, growing nationalistic and populist challenges undermined the legitimacy of the EU as well as other international organizations (e.g., the UN, the ASEAN).³ 'The end of ideology' declared in the 1960-1970s, turned out to be a viable illusion, which found support right up to the beginning of our century (Bell 2000). With this in mind, let us lay emphasis on such trend as interpretation of modern integration and its convergence to theories of constructivism in international relations. In this regard, it is considered promising to analyze deeper

³ See for example, Arpino and Obydenkova (2020); Jensen (2009); Sutherland (2005).

the concept of ‘integrative mentality’ and its potential influence on the integrative processes both regionally and globally. Understanding of dynamics of modern RIOs links to theoretical and analytical formalization of related concepts. Let us assume it would be fair to view *the integrative mentality* as an aspect of a broader concept of the foreign policy mentality. Initially, Nikolay Kossolapov and Sergey Chugrov, among others, developed this category in modern Russian political science (Chugrov 1993, 2007; Kossolapov 2002; Polivaeva 2008). Historical examples of ideational framing of supranational political and economic space can be found in classical geopolitical theories. Russian political discourse and political science was built significantly on German philosophy (that is not surprising, given it is a historical legacy in high education within Marxism-Leninism stream). For example, one of the most influential German scholars was Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) who developed the theory of the world geopolitical structure based on the interaction of ‘large spaces’ (pan-regions). Haushofer defined regions as global blocks united by socio-political pan-ideas (*Pan-Ideen* in German). In his study, the world model includes several pan-regions having a central-peripheral structure (Haushofer 1931). Large supranational spaces can be either friendly or hostile. We can reduce the statement of another German political theorist and philosopher Carl Schmitt to the geopolitics of large spaces. He reflected upon the specific political distinction to which political actions and motivations can be reduced to only two categories – either a friend or an enemy (Schmitt, 1995). This point of view was widely accepted in post-Soviet scholarship and laid down a few important issues in modern development of the idea Eurasian regionalism.

Competitive RIOs must not only be successful economically and politically, but also be carriers of ‘sense bearing’ (ideational) characteristics rendering influence on their foreign policy and, in particular, their population’s integrative mentality. The image of the attractive future being common for every member-state of a RIO is impossible without an ideational component. Only in cases where shared beliefs, norms and ideas are present, the effect of spill-over in regional integration emerges: integration project acquires systemic qualities and, expands from economics in politics, science, and education, culture, etc. (Haas 1968; Schmitter 1970; 1971; 2004). In the light of previous research, it

is important to note that construction of shared identity can be implemented through ‘soft’ and ‘smart’ power as ideational foundation of state’s foreign policy (Nye 2008; Nossel 2004, 131-142; Wilson 2008, 111-113). Given the EU is geopolitically most important neighbor of former Soviet states and also an example of the most advanced integration in the world, it is worthy to look into “Europeanisation” as its ideational foundation.

Europeanisation and the European Union

The European model is considered the golden standard of regional integration world-wide. Especially in the 1990s and the early 2000s many saw the EU as a blueprint for Russia’s development. Within Russian academic scholarship, it received highest acknowledgment: ‘Influence of regionalism on multi-polar structuration comes primarily from the European integration. It is much more tangible than all other integrative formations; it leaves its traces on a structural shaping of the new world order’ (Bykov 2003, 391). Indeed, the impact of the EU has reached beyond its member- and candidate-states, as it also produced profound effects on the federal system and development of Russian provinces throughout the 1990s (see Lankina et. al. 2016a; Obydenkova 2008; 2012; Obydenkova and Swenden 2013). The key concept of the underlying ideational foundations of the EU is the concept of ‘Europeanisation’, understood as the process of emergence, spread and institutionalization of both formal and informal rules, procedures, political paradigms and styles, shared beliefs and standards, which are consolidated on the level of the EU political process and then incorporated into the policy on the supranational level (Olsen 2002; Featherstone and Radaelli eds. 2003; Cini 2007; Moumoutzis 2011). The studies further developed Europeanisation as a top-down process (initiated by the EU) but also as bottom-up trends – public support and opinion emanating from national and subnational entities within the EU. The scholars have also demonstrated the power of ideas in the West European context, as a variable that is causally significant for the choice of supranational institutions of the EU (Parsons 2003). Some scholars coincide in the opinion that a sense of belonging to common community or sharing “European” identity is an important element for the EU legitimacy

and associated with the commitment to a public sphere in a region beyond the nation-state (Jensen 2009; De Beus 2001; Sifft et al. 2007).

Geoffrey Garrett and Barry Weingast (1993) consider the role and power of ideas in players' cooperation within 'decision making' in the European Community. In addition, they show that decision making is a function of three interrelated phenomena: (1) the gains to be expected from cooperation among a relevant set of players; (2) an idea that expresses these gains from cooperation; and (3) a mechanism devised for translating the idea into a shared beliefs system so as to affect players' expectations, and their behavior (Garret and Weingast 1993, 203). In general, multiple studies considered ideas as an effective trigger of the economic integration (Haas 1968, Schmitter 1970; 1971; Bellamy and Castiglione 2003; Dinan 2004; Gofas and Hay 2010; Bickerton 2012). The studies demonstrated how the supranational use of the ideational elements made the integrative processes more effective on the inner market construction in the second half of the twentieth century. The integrational processes covered predominantly the socio-economic sphere and were associated with the welfare state theories supporting ideational image of 'prosperous Europe'. To a certain extent, this was also promoted by the liberalization of the labor market in the European Economic Community (EEC), which commenced in the late 1950s. In particular, the 'residency principle' was introduced upon labor force migration. The Union's political architects understood quite well that the integration could be successful only if the feeling of shared regional identity was naturally delegated from the political elite to citizens (Borko 2003; Brugmans 1970; Marjolin 1989; Monnet 1978; Rougemont & Guterman 1966)

The channels of such communication passed through the social strata of the middle class, the driver of the European economics in the second half of the twentieth century. The positive role of the liberal philosophy as ideas and values-relied foundation of the European integration, as well as the tight connection between the democracy and the economic interdependence, have been studied in detail since then (Bliss and Russett 1998, 1126-1147; Genna and Hiroi 2014; Polachek 1997, 295-309).

As a result, the European identity was built on shared democratic principles and human rights among multiple other values fixed in founding agreements of, initially, the EEC, then the EU, primarily in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and European Convention on Human Rights. The founding documents placed special emphasis on values of democracy, the rule of law, transparency, market economy, human rights, liberties and civil society. These values have led to the creation and consolidation of the image of the EU as a transparent and democratic actor that enjoyed legitimacy and popular support. Despite the consequences of recent financial crisis, the EU still exhibits high level of popular support as compared to regional organizations world-wide. Despite the somewhat destructive impact of the great recession 2008 and discussion of democratic legitimacy, the EU has retained its image as highly legitimate actor (e.g., Arpino and Obydenkova 2020; Jensen 2009). Studies note that the EU expressing the 'Europe-wide values' can be considered as an 'abstract' of a kind and also as a sense-bearing integrative basis of the European states (Klimenko and Barabanov 2010).

In recent years, despite the crisis 2008, the EU has continued to maintain legitimacy and public support by consistently conducting active communicative social policy (Habermas 2012; Hale and Koenig-Archibugi 2016; Kalypso 2013; Kaveshnikov 2017; Obydenkova and Arpino 2018). In 2013, Brussels renewed the supranational system of informing the population on the issues of human rights by way of opening 500 information centers 'Europe Direct'. The project is based on networking information structure which enhances citizens' possibilities in obtaining practical information concerning human rights realization and protection in the EU. It is of crucial importance that apart from their informational functions, the centers promote socio-political debates at the local level.⁴ Today, Europeans are engaged directly or indirectly in the work of various institutions within the EU. As of January 2019, in the European Commission, 32546 persons are hired (55% women and 45% men) as full-time personnel members (Ibid). According to different estimates, not less than 50

⁴ Making citizens' rights a tangible reality: 500 Information centres inform citizens across Europe'. <europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-234_en.htm.>, accessed 9 June 2019

thousand people are involved in projects on a part-time basis. The size of the European bureaucracy does not serve of course as evidence of democratic legitimacy of the EU, yet it demonstrates engagement with people and can be described as “public-centered”. In late 2017, shortly before the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adoption, publically, the EU ex-High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini made widely known the following theses. ‘From the very beginning’, she stated, ‘as for the human rights protection, the EU made them not only the basis of its domestic *and foreign* policy but also *the basis of the Union itself*. The human rights are universal, indivisible and interrelated and there are no differences between civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights’ (cursive is ours).⁵

In the area of the foreign policy, the development of the concept of Europeanisation, that encompasses these values of human rights and democracy, has been of main importance. After World War II, Western European states started a collective review of their place and role in the world politics based on this strong shared ideational ground. European states inclined to elevate themselves in the collective format up to the level of key subjects of the international policy (Baykov 2012, 68), as it was explained and perceived from outside of the EU. To sum up, when it comes to Europeanisation as ideational ground of regional integration within the EU, the world-wide acceptance of democratic values and principles (also widely shared in Europe) provided an excellent source of legitimacy, public acceptance, and international status. The question is how and whether autocracy-led regional IO⁶ may ever achieve such wide public support, legitimacy, and improve in any way its international image. What ideational ground does RIO use to claim its legitimacy? The next section will look into this issue within the context of Eurasian regionalism.

Integrative mentality and Eurasian Regionalism

⁵ Declaration by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on Human Rights Day’ 10 December 2017 <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/08/declaration-by-the-high-representative-federica-mogherini-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-human-rights-day-10-december-2017>>, accessed 7 June 2019

⁶ “Autocracy-led regional international organization” is used interchangeably here with “non-democratic regional organization” (NDRO).

The perception of integration in the post-Soviet space is critically different from the European experience. After the collapse of the Communism and disintegration of the USSR, any attempt at regional (re-)integration led by Russia has lost its *ideological* foundation, such as Marxism-Leninism.⁷ The disappearance of the ideology of the USSR posed a challenge of finding some substitution of new set of ideas and values that would replace vanished ideas of Communism. The first attempts at regional integration in Eurasia were developing, thus, in the context of ideological vacuum and ideational chaos. The first RIOs, such the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Customs Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the EurAsEC and the Eurasian Union were mainly linked to exclusively economic agenda with main focus on economic gains and profits for potential member-states in the absence of more substantial ideational justification of their existence. Yet, this economic agenda *by no means* should be interpreted as a single dimension or the only goal of Eurasian regional projects led by Russia. Any project – be that regional cooperation or integration – needs some legitimacy and some ideational support at the very least. Moreover, it may incorporate very different goals simultaneously, both declared and unofficial ones.⁸ Therefore, it is highly important to split the *officially* declared goals (e.g., economic benefits as tools of legitimacy provision) and *actual* strategic goals that were never written (e.g., security concerns and maintaining influence over the “near abroad”).

The disintegration of the USSR was a unique point of departure for numerous attempts at regional integration in Eurasia. The scholars faced a relatively new phenomenon in the studies of the regional integration – the emergence of so-called non-democratic regional international organizations (NDROs) or authoritarian regionalism (Cooley 2015; Libman and Obydenkova 2013; 2018a; 2018b).

⁷ We distinguish between ideological and ideational foundations – both are about set of values and beliefs. Yet, we refer to *ideology* (e.g., Marxism-Leninism) as highly consolidated and *dominant* theory that is well elaborated and developed and, above all, accepted as *the only* ideational foundation of a state. In contrast, *ideational* refers to fluid or flexible set of values and beliefs that can well co-exist with another, even contradictory, set of values. Ideational framework does not claim to be the only correct interpretation of the world or the only acceptable paradigm for development of a specific state.

⁸ The classic example of this would be establishment of regional development banks in the midst of the Cold War in the 1960s – the US initiative with officially stated goal to sustain development in targeted loan-recipient states when *the actual goal* behind those banks was intention to prevent developing states to slide into Communist camp (Ben-Artzi 2016; Obydenkova and Vieira 2020).

Yet, within this rapidly growing literature on NDROs, their origins and their impacts, little has been done to target the *ideational* component that is meant to provide public support and legitimacy of these regional organizations. Yet, these pressing issues of public opinion and legitimacy of the attempts of regional integration have always been in the center of attention: a number of organizations led and sponsored by Russia were monitoring public opinion on that matter, singling out the periods of crises of legitimacy of the RIOs in post-Soviet states and searching for the ways to address it.

Back to the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, political axiology was always crucial in public support of the Soviet republics⁹ before the collapse of the USSR in 1991. In the draft of the Constitution for the renewed Union, a Nobel laureate and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov proposed renaming the USSR into the ‘Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia’, a voluntary federation of sovereign republics of Europe and Asia (Sakharov 1991, 266-267). After the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union, the search for a term describing the post-Soviet intra-state cooperation culminated with a consensus regarding to the geographical toponymal “Eurasia”. Already back then, the first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, put forward the initiative of the Eurasian Union (Nazarbayev’s speech at the Lomonosov Moscow State University held in March 1994). In June 1994, the detailed worked-out integration project was published in mass media and outlined officially new integration initiative - ‘The Eurasian Union’. In 2001, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) was established. In 2015 it was institutionally and functionally incorporated in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Evolutionary stages of the Eurasian integration are quite distinct. During thirteen years of its existence (2001-2014), the EurAsEC developed legal and institutional framework for the establishment of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Area. In its turn, the EAEU was established on this pre-existing trend.

Apart from institutional evolution, the ideational development also witnessed some changes as discussed mainly in Russian scholarship and mass media. According to some post-Soviet scholars, Eurasian integration was initially based on the liberal economic ideas. Indeed, the text of Putin’s

⁹ Whenever we refer to former Soviet republics, we exclude Baltic States from this group in this paper.

seminal newspaper article on Eurasian integration might persuade a reader that it was written by “a paragon of liberalism” (Troitskiy 2020). Citizens were promised “a free choice where to live, study or work”. Businesses could count on “all the advantages of a domestic producer” in the union’s countries. Member states were promised a partnership with the EU and eventual integration into a ‘Greater Europe’ united by shared values of freedom, democracy, and market laws (Putin, 2011).¹⁰ Traditionally, potential and real economic gains served as “carrots” of economic integration in the post-Soviet space and have been an important reference in the presidential campaigns and political discourses not only in Russia but also in a number of other post-Soviet states (especially in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and later in Armenia and Central Asia). Since 1996, every Russian presidential election campaign has contained some references to the economic advantages of post-Soviet regional integration (Busygina 2019; Halbach 2012; Sakwa 2016, 4-22).

Specifically, monitors of public opinion demonstrated support for the Eurasian integration among member states as initially high that declined after the annexation of Crimean and followed up Ukrainian crisis. According to the studies of the Eurasian Development Bank, the year 2017 witnessed some decline of public support for the most recent and arguably most successful NDRO – the EAEU. In Russia, the decline in public support was visible for the period of 2015–2017 (it fell down from 78% in 2015 to 68% in 2017 of the total population) and in Armenia (from 56% to 46% in 2015–2016).¹¹ In the other EAEU member states, public support for Eurasian integration also decreased: from 80% to 76% in Kazakhstan, and from 60% to 56% in Belarus. In economically weaker Kyrgyzstan, the population displayed a more positive attitude towards EAEU membership since 2015, with support having changed insignificantly - from 86% in 2016 to 83% in 2017. Another trend of public indifference to the EAEU and lack of knowledge was registered by the public polls in 2017 (Eurasian Development Bank 2017, 7).¹² Overall, the public poll by the Eurasian Development

¹⁰ The vision echoes the idea of “liberal empire” introduced by Anatoliy Chubais in 2003. Liberal empire was widely discussed in Russian mass media and internet (see, for example, Igor Shatrov, ИА 'Росбалт' 23/12/2004: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/2004/12/23/190431.html> accessed on 15 May 2020).

¹¹ Armenia then witnessed some increase in public support for the EAEU: with an upward public approval of it is 50% in 2017

¹² EDB Integration Barometer. Saint Petersburg: EDB Centre for Integration. 2017

Bank demonstrated decrease in public support for the EAEU. This attracted attention of leading state of the EAEU, that is Russia but also of political elite in two other key-members: Kazakhstan and Belarus. While public opinion, economic agenda and its potential success became subject of debates. In fact, experts expressed reasonable doubts about the prospects of economic development within the EAEU, arguing that the unification of countries does not lead to economic synergy (Hartwell 2013, Inosemtsev 2014, Molchanov 2015, Popescu 2015). Furthermore, the Ukrainian crisis damaged the reputation of the EAEU from its' incept. As tensions with the United States and the EU escalated, Russia moved to 'securitize' the EAEU, increasingly seeing it as primarily a zone of political influence (Snyder 2018, Troitskiy 2020). Thus, such factors as regional and global tensions, decline in public support, and economic challenges made *ideation* foundation and legitimacy of Russia-led regional integration projects more pressing issues than ever before. But what ideational tools (values and ideas) were actually available to non-democracies?

The post-Soviet elites and, first of all, the countries comprising the main 'integrative core' (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan) have *attempted* to develop axiological concept of 'Eurasianism' of similar importance to the concept of 'Europeanisation' used in the EU.¹³ Russian and Kazakhstan political scientists conceptualized the term 'neo-Eurasianism'. Note that Kazakhstan's neo-Eurasianism has its own ideational specificity. According to many Turkic scholars, Kazakhstan should be the center of Eurasian region consolidation, since it historically and geopolitically occupies the 'middle' (the central) position in Eurasia as surrounded by Russia, Central Asia and China (Golam 2013; Laruelle 2015; Nikulina and Toropygin 2017). The relative economic success of the Eurasian integrative project hinges upon common cultural and historical space in shared Russian-speaking neighborhood, and by the peaceful nature of the dialogue between ethnic communities and confessions. In the 'Declaration on Eurasian economic integration' it was noted as follows: 'The further development of

¹³ Among scholars, however, there are debates on whether Eurasianism is really the foundation of the regional integration projects across former Soviet republics (e.g., Laurelle 2015). The concept of Eurasianism was not promoted by political elite but by a few thinkers or intellectuals. Therefore, we argue that Eurasianism is one of the segments *highly related* to the discussion of ideational foundation of the Eurasian regionalism, yet, it is not the only one.

the integration based on the deep historical and spiritual ties between the nations of Belarus Republic, Kazakhstan Republic and Russian Federation meets national interests of these states, promotes settlement of encountered by them common challenges on welfare and life quality improvement of their citizens, stable social and economic development, overall modernization and strengthening of their national competitiveness in the frame of the global economics' (Declaration of Eurasian economic integration 2011). The Declaration served as culmination of the development of some ideational foundation for regional integration with special emphasis on economic gains for citizens, but also touching upon a resurrection of some global mission. However, it is important to highlight here that political elites were not the main carriers and distributors of neo-Eurasianism as a concept. The concept was brewed and developed by the groups of conservative intellectuals, whose influence degree differed during the post-Soviet period. Then this pseudo-ideology moved into the sphere of meta-politics, popular culture and state-produced narratives, and attracted some academic attention, mainly in Russian scholarship (Laruelle 2015; Sergi 2018; Torbakov 2019; Tsygankov 1998). In what follows, we will look closer into the concept of Eurasianism as one of the potential future triggers of attempts at regional integration and projects of regional cooperation.

A blast from the past: Neo-Eurasianism and Regional Integration

The unique feature of post-Soviet attempts at regional integration lies in enormous impact that historical legacies connecting the former Soviet republics through infrastructure, developed trade links, diasporas and ethnic minorities, high levels of migration, but also memories and nostalgia for the Soviet past.¹⁴ With the disappearance of Marxism-Leninism providing some sense of unity and legitimacy to highly heterogeneous republics of the Soviet Union, the attempts at reintegration of the post-Soviet space have been accompanied by the search for alternative ideational legitimacy. In

¹⁴ On historical legacies and their effects, see Lankina et. al. 2016b; Libman and Obydenkova 2014; 2019a; Nazarov and Obydenkova 2020; Obydenkova and Libman 2012; 2015. Some of these studies analyzed the role of historical legacies and their implications for social-political development and for such issues as, for example, corruption, democracy, and firm innovation.

ideological vacuum at the dawn of the 20th century, the scholars and political experts had to travel all the way back into the 1920s and to resurrect the concept of Eurasianism. The search for new approaches to the “integrative identity” has put into the spotlight a set of different theories of “Eurasianism” that emerged in the 1920s among Russian political migrants (e.g., Karsavin 1926, Trubetskoy 1925). Despite theoretical inconsistency, the Eurasianism became prominent in modern political discourse reflecting on post-Soviet integrative projects (Glebov 201; Laruelle 2008; Von Hagen 2004). Remarkably, the neo-Eurasianism insured the post-Soviet integrative projects against nationalism by sustaining the idea of peaceful and mutually beneficial co-existence of various nations (first of all, Slavic and Turkic), cultures and diverse religions. Moreover, this neo-approach learned from past and prevented Russia from repeating the mistakes of its imperial Soviet predecessor with its focus on cultural unification and elimination of religions. The collective manifest of Eurasianists states: ‘Now Eurasia is viewed by us as headed by Russia special socio-cultural world distinguished by a strong internal monolithic character in the endless diversity of its manifestations’ (Karsavin 1926, 35). Echoing the manifest, another founder of Eurasianism, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, stated: “The Eurasian world represents a close and completed geographical, economic, and ethnical integrity being different from both Europe and Asia” (Trubetskoy 1925, 44-45). These visions and perceptions travelled from the 1920s to 2020s and served as inspiration for modern ideologists of the Eurasian integration.

In the 1920s, the vivid explosion of theories of classical Eurasianism was short-lived. Already in 1925, Nikolai Trubetskoy stated that “Eurasianism no longer exists” and by the 1930s the intellectual movement practically disappeared. The theoretical anthology ‘The Eurasian Chronicle’ continued to be published, but in the conditions of the Interbellum period in Europe, the interest in Eurasianism waned away shortly after the 1920s. Nevertheless, this movement was able to form a worldview doctrine, incorporating the issues of religion, history, geography and geopolitics, and the view of Russian traditions of political power as something sacred. These constructs were not always distinguished by the strict logic of scientific research and theoretical depth. Yet, they influenced the

consciousness of society in the 1920s and shaped the modern discourse. This was precisely the main force of Eurasianism and the basis for the blast from the past that took place almost a century later in post-Soviet Russia.

Some Russian political thinkers have taken on board the “Eurasianism” as an ideational foundation for regional integration and even argued that, Eurasian integration is able to promote a political consolidation of the post-Soviet space through settling the problem of the unrecognized and partially recognized states through their entrance into regional organizations as independent units equal to states in their status (Koktysh 2013, Evolyzia 2017). This disputable vision is based on the assumption that economic interaction can lead to conflict-resolution of unrecognized states (Kharitonova 2017, 131-136).

According to sociological data of Russian Public Opinion Research Center, neo-Eurasian ideas convinced and impacted the public opinion in Russia. The opinion poll held by VCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) in 2001, 71% respondents stated that they consider Russia to be the only of its kind Eurasian and Orthodox civilization, along the main argument of neo-Eurasianism. Only 13% stated that Russia belongs to the Western civilization, demonstrating convergence with so-called Euro-centrist approach (VCIOM 2001).

The modern evolution of the integrative mentality connects directly to a neo-Eurasian trend in Russian socio-political thinking that emerged and consolidated at the onset of the 21st century. The neo-Eurasianism is represented by Alexander Panarin, Vadim Tsymburskii, right-wing extremist Alexander Dugin, Natalya Narochnitskaya, Vitaly Pashchenko and others (e.g., Torbakov 2019; Peunova 2008; Morozova 2009).¹⁵ Aleksandr Panarin, for example, was one of the most fierce promoter of neo-Eurasianism, and a representative of the European New Right in Russia. He was

¹⁵ Here, we use “thinkers” interchangeably with “scholars” as they all have a doctoral degrees in History or in Philosophy, except for Tsymbursky, who holds a PhD in Philology, and was a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Science. All of these scholars held professorships at some of the best universities in Russia and, some of them were even professors of the authors of this paper at Moscow Lomonosov State University – the first and arguably the best university in Russia at least in humanities, philosophy, and social sciences. Moreover, as further discussion demonstrates, some of them (e.g., Alexander Dugin) certainly left a trace in the Russia's foreign policy development and “mentality” in the early 2010s.

described as a scholar of “the transnational nature of the extreme right and *the Europeanization of Russian ultra-nationalism*” (Peunova 2008, cursive is ours). Already in the early 1990s, Alexander Panarin considered in his works the ‘civilizational’ and ‘geopolitical’ type of consciousness (1995). The geopolitical consciousness is powered by the perceived confrontation and is associated with a sense of the war of all against all, where nobody is guaranteed a ‘living space’ (Panarin, 1995). Building on this and other studies, neo-Eurasianism attempted to answer a question on the role and mission of Russia in the 21st century, focusing mainly in sustaining the territorial integrity of Russia. Some studies argued that “Eurasianism is reduced to geopolitics, i.e. the politics of spheres of influence and hegemonic spatial control” (Morozova 2008) and in general is inconsistent with actual foreign policy strategy. The post-Soviet projects of integration were focal point for the neo-Eurasianists. Being bound for the direction taken by their predecessors in the 1920-1930s, *they protested against universality of Europeanisation* and, most importantly, against such key values of Europeanisation as democracy, liberties, and human rights. They protested against Europeanisation as Europe-centrist concepts, arguing for civilizational uniqueness of Eurasia as opposed to Europe. The neo-Eurasianists, and especially Alexander Dugin, were able to affect the Russia's foreign policy development in the early 2010s. They hold that the post-Soviet integration projects should go beyond the economic agenda and extend to the political and military-strategic spheres as well. In the neo-Eurasianists’ papers can be identified multiple calls for the next stage of geopolitical expansion, after the consolidation of the EAEU, on Eastern Orthodox Europe (Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro).¹⁶ According to their vision, this strategy must be ensured by newly emerged ‘Fourth political theory’, which is an intricate mix of neo-conservatism, anti-liberalism, anti-Westernism existentialism and proposes quite ambiguous solutions such as ‘going beyond political modernity’ and other similar abstruse issues (Dugin, 2009; Dobrenkov and Dugin, 2010). Simply stated, the ‘Fourth political theory’ is viewed by Dugin and his followers with regard to modern Russia, as the sum of neo-conservatism and neo-Eurasianism (Ibid).

¹⁶ See, for example, Dugin (2009) and Dobrenkov and Dugin (2010).

In a bizarre way, in the post-Soviet era, neo-Eurasian ideas encompassed some of the issues developed in Western political philosophy (e.g., by Carl Schmitt, Oswald Spengler, Werner Sombart, Ernst Jünger, Ernst Niekisch), European traditionalism (Rene Guenon, Julius Evola), the ‘new left’ criticism of Western capitalism (Jean-Paul Sartre, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze) and especially European geopolitics and the modern ‘new right’ (Karl Haushofer, Halford Mackinder, Alain de Benoist, Robert Steuckers, Jean Thiriart). The neo-Eurasianists found inspiration also in Western historians such as Arnold Joseph Toynbee and Oswald Spengler.¹⁷ Such a synthesis eroded the main idea of Eurasianism about limiting Western influence, and all works of European scholars were evaluated according to the criteria of criticism of the neoliberal West. In the field of foreign policy consciousness and ideas, neo-Eurasians tried to invent their own approach based on the rule of elite who share the Eurasian ideas. In many works, neo-Eurasians tried to link these ideas to Russia’s foreign policy in the area of its historical “sphere of influence”, that is, in the post-Soviet space (Abdurasakov 1998; Begovatov & Kozyreva 1995; Dugin 1994; Isaev 1989; Laruelle 2000; Myalo & Narochnikaya 1994; Panarin 1993, 1994, 1995; Razuvaev 1993; Senderov 2007; Sergunin 2004; Tsymburskii 1995, 2007).

While analyzing the *European integration genesis*, the neo-Eurasianists underlined that its experience should not be considered as an obligatory political and economic matrix for the entire world. Neo-Eurasianism coincides with the classical Eurasianism of the 1920s in the geopolitical and spatial analysis of culture (Osipov 2006, Zamyatin 2012). During 1990 – 2000s, actively using the geopolitical terminology, the neo-Eurasianists considered the initiated by Russia strategies of uniting the post-Soviet space as historical mission of establishing “Great Eurasia”. The neo-Eurasianists’ vision of foreign policy and the post-Soviet space integration continues its evolution causing interest among not only Russian but also Western researchers (Ersen 2004; Bassin 2016; Beisswenger 2015;

¹⁷ In fact, these were few of Western philosophers, upholding a civilizational approach, allowed as part of syllabus in Moscow Lomonosov State University during the late stages USSR and post-Soviet period of the 1990s, in parallel with multiple readings of Panarin, Dugin, Tsymburskii and other neo-Eurasianists: where Western philosophers were interpreted in line with neo-Eurasianists ideas. This combination was highly influential in formation the vision and perception of many young generations of students since early 1990s till now.

Ostbo 2018; Smith 1999, Tsygankov 1998; Umland 2017). Recent studies increasingly build on classical Eurasianism to analyze and to craft the ideational foundation and legitimacy of Russian foreign policy and its attempts at regional integration, trying ‘to decrypt’ the texts of the most sophisticated Russian intellectuals such as Vadim Tsymburskii and others (e.g., Torbakov 2019).

However, a blast from the past of classical Eurasianism and its modern interpretations attracted little attention of the *targeted* audience – population and middle class, that is, the actual driving force and source of legitimacy of regional integration. Neo-Eurasianism became an attraction point for mainly intellectual, political and academic circles in the former USSR. In contrast, the post-Soviet population witnessed a stable deficit of information on the new ideas and values of foreign policy strategy and choices as well as their implications and prospects for citizens’ life.¹⁸ Ivanchenko (2019) suggests that common citizens lack the knowledge of “ideological foundation” of foreign policy choices in general and attempts at regional integration and the EAEU in particular (Ivanchenko 2019).¹⁹ The idea of establishment of more digestible and attractive ideational vision of the EAEU as informational space was recognized as an important step in building legitimacy and public support within information-oriented society (Dayneko 2016).

The regional integration, socio-cultural and political attitudes are interconnected and influence each other. If we look at the most advanced and arguable most successful project, the EAEU as an example, one can argue that this interconnection may result in either weakening the EAEU in the context of ideational vacuum or, in contrary, in supporting the EAEU through developing its legitimacy and ideational foundation. To advance the legitimacy of the EAEU and to secure public support for it, a number of governmental agencies established by the executive branch have worked specifically on the ideational component of the Eurasian project in a goal-orientated manner. Such organizations as

¹⁸ This explains why the policy-makers involved in the EAEU make emphasis mainly on economic and pragmatic benefits associated with regional integration – the pragmatic benefits are easily digestible in contrast to overwhelmingly sophisticated theories of Eurasianism.

¹⁹ It is remarkable that modern Russian academic discourse keeps on using “ideology” and/or “ideological foundation” while discussing politics and policy choices instead of “ideational” foundation/dimension.

the ‘Russian World’ Foundation,²⁰ and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation,²¹ both conduct their activities through public diplomacy channels.²² Yet, despite these efforts, as of now, in the EAEU or other regional organizations emerged in post-Soviet space, there have been no supranational informational projects similar to “Europe Direct” that would be able to impact public opinion and to secure much needed legitimacy and ideational foundation for construction regional organizations “from below” as it happens in Europe.

The Declaration on further development of the integrative processes in the framework of the EAEU adopted in December 2018 emphasized the necessity of expanding integrative processes into the areas of education and science (Declaration 2019). At the first glance, this quite natural decision can have implications in the area of further strengthening the integrative mentality of younger generations. This aspect is also relevant for some other post-Soviet states that have adjusted their strategies in terms of education. For example, even in one of the best allies of Russia, in Kazakhstan, the history of Kazakh people is artificially elongated in time, with Russia described as a colonizer and oppressor. The Republic of Belarus, another fellow-autocracy and ally of Russia, re-writing history has been travelling in different directions: from pro-Russian and contra-Russian discussion, as the best-partner-country to image of Russia as an imperial metropolis (Bulhakau 2007, Kruglyi stol 2018).

Education and academic circles became both the tool and the target in spreading a set of values where states’ leaders are often pictured as prominent scientists-experts in social studies, creators of new theories and as intellectuals thinking in global categories. One of the most prominent examples is Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was a president of Kazakhstan during long thirty years (1990-2019). Following the steps of many Soviet leaders Nursultan Nazarbayev wrote a book where he presented

²⁰ Russkiy Mir Foundation was created by Vladimir Putin in 2007 (imitating Instituto Cervantes of Spanish culture and language world-wide or British Council).

²¹ Somewhat similar to Russkiy Mir, the Agency (known in Russian as “Rossotrudnichestvo”) focuses on cultural exchanges and foreign aid at global scale but especially former Soviet states and Eastern Europe, in addition to Latin America and Africa.

²² It is important to clarify here that all these are Russian initiatives.

his own vision on regional integration as main axiological justification of his rule and his political regime, called “Nazarbayev’s Eurasian doctrine”. This Eurasian doctrine contains ideas of the cultural-civilized development of Eurasian nations and states and even outlines patterns of transformations of the global order. The Kazakhstani president “not only developed theoretically conceptual basics of the Eurasian doctrine of a new type in his books but also – in the most decisive manner – promoted the formation of the real and effectively acting structure of the Eurasian Union on its every level and parameter, whether economic, financial, political, or cultural” (Nysanbayev and Dunayev 2010, 4-5).

Post-Soviet Eurasian attempts in education and other above-described initiation could probably have been inspired, at least partially, by the EU approach. Even Russian studies point to the importance of mutual ideation convergence and public support as well as effective humanitarian cooperation programs as crucial elements for success of any project of regional integration (Smirnov 2018). The development of these ideational elements take place in the context of competition with the EU ‘Eastern partnership’ (EaP) initiative. *The bilateral agreements with the EU signed by the EAEU members* (by Kazakhstan in 2014 and Armenia in 2017) *outlined such issues as culture and convergence of educational standards as well strengthening of civil society, among other targets of cooperation*. Echoing the EU’s standards and successful strategy targeting middle class and population (through education, for example), Russian experts point out that without the formation of the common humanitarian space, any projects of regional integration (even the EAEU) will be vulnerable to economic problems and informational tricking (Smirnov 2018, 59). Thus, *adjusting* public opinion to the specific “foreign policy mentality” chosen by the government became a task to complete through changes in teaching history, for example, and at all levels – starting from school and higher education (when all population can be subjected to specific vision of their world and their nation-state’s role in it). Additionally, the Eurasian integration has been also reflected in official documents and state rhetoric. For example, in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian

Federation highlights the significance of the organizations and structures promoting the idea of integrative processes in Eurasia (The Foreign Policy Concept 2016).

Yet, the new approach contrasts the previous concept of “new political thinking” that was the basis of foreign policy in the late years of the USSR (end of the 1980s) and the first few years of independent Russia with its focus on democratic values and human rights. This concept, in fact, became a negative reference point in modern discourse and was criticized due to its’ *claimed* vague interpretation of universality of human values by scholars discussed above.

Political discourse developed in line with this approach and was articulated in speeches of Vladimir Putin and Nursultan Nazarbayev. Presidential speeches tend to highlight the economic advantages of allies of Russia or Kazakhstan received in exchange of their participation in regional integration projects and the augmented status of member-states in their interactions with international partners. In addition, it was also promised that participation in such regional organizations as the EAEU might help member-states to break into new markets, to modernize and build up their soft power through economic development (Nurgaliyeva 2016, 92-105).

Along these lines, in addition to promising economic benefits, religion has become one of the focal points in integrational rhetoric in general and the quintessential discourse surrounding the EAEU in particular. In September 2018 in the Belgorod State National Researching University, a ‘round table’ on ‘Religious factor in Eurasian integration’ took place (see Religion 2019). Among the participants, there were representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) as well as non-governmental organizations supported by governmental structures. The participants underlined that the Church’s leading role must be accentuated as part of the concepts of “Russian civilization”, “Eastern-Slavic civilization”, and “Russian world” (Religion 2019). In addition to religious and economic development ties shared by

post-Soviet states, Russian researchers point to the importance of the formation of the Eurasian shared *humanitarian* sphere.²³

The question remains is whether all these efforts at development of ideational foundation of the regional integration resulted in improvement of public opinion. Indeed, according to the most recent sociological data collected in 2019, 76% respondents among Russians view the establishment of the EAEU in a favorable light. Even more so, about 28% of participants of questionnaire want to see the Union as the “restored USSR” (along the lines of restoration of the Russia’s leading mission in the world – one of the ideas of neo-Eurasianism); 39% prefer the EAEU as “a new association, which will have its own form and principles of work”; while 9% see it as a Eurasian analogue of the European Union. Only 6% believe that Russia has no need in the EAEU.²⁴ Public polls demonstrate that the idea of ‘Eurasianism’ stands also for social partnership, co-existence of different religions, and multiculturalism. The fact that EAEU will result in increased of migrants from Central Asia and Transcaucasia,²⁵ somehow was left out as an individual question from this public poll that pointed out towards advantages of EAEU. To sum up, following the successful strategy of the EU in terms of targeting and engaging the middle class through various projects and education, the actors of post-Soviet projects of regional integration considered and tried to implement a similar approach through education, adjusting political discourse, and other initiatives described above. The search for ideational foundation have found some inspiration in the philosophical debates of the 1920s and neo-Eurasianism but also imitated strategies implemented within the EU and the Eastern Partnership. So far, it is safe to state that neo-Eurasianism became dominant part of higher education curriculum, thus, targeting public opinion at this early stage of life of middle-class through education. While other strategies targeting opinion of more adult population, were less successful while compared to the EU’s initiatives. So far, it is highly important to include the studies of this ideational and strategic

²³ Based on the integration of labor and healthcare markets, the Eurasian Economic Commission at the end of 2019 also announced its intention to create a common social space within the EAEU (EEC 2019).

²⁴ The full results of the survey was accessed in June 2019 at <<https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9525>> , accessed 8 June 2019

²⁵ On the (negative) attitude of Russians towards migrants from former Soviet republics, see Libman and Obydenkova 2019b.

interactions, competition, and imitation into further analysis of regional integration across Eurasia, the EU and the EU Near Neighborhood.

Conclusion

The European and Eurasian regionalism had been analyzed from many perspectives and remain in the center of scholarly debate. While most of these studies focused on different aspects in analysis of international organizations (e.g., the EU and the CIS; the EU and the EAEU), few of them, if any, looked at ideational battle between the concepts of Europeanisation and neo-Eurasianism as a part of integrative mentality approach. This paper aimed to fulfill this gap focusing on rich and fast growing scholarship available *only* in Russian language. The importance of this scholarship should not be under-estimated as it became an integral part of higher education in humanities, social and political science as well as of political discourse of elite in post-Soviet Eurasia. Moreover, it is likely to influence the formation of public opinion of the middle class targeting younger generations of students in higher education. This is potentially huge ideational leverage that will become available in near future to political elites.²⁶ The public opinion poll hold in 2015-2016 already indicated that young generation of people of 18-34 years old would be in favor of the most extreme case of regional integration – the unity of the countries within one single state (Ibid: see footnote 23). This paper helps at least partially to shed light at this puzzling recent turn in public opinion through analysis of the efforts to develop new integrative mentality as a concept equally strong and influential as Europeanisation.

The next puzzle that could be addressed, albeit in a different project, is the conceptual inter-connection in terms of clashes and/or compatibility of political discourse and other tools of self-legitimation of RIOs led by Russia versus those regional initiatives of cooperation and integration led by China in shared and overlapping geopolitical space. While this paper analyzed the “Western”

²⁶ Significant amount of people of 18 - 34 years old (*born after 1991*), reported the “nostalgia” about the USSR and claim that disintegration of the USSR is a “bad” thing (see Pew Research Center 2016 “Views on role of Russia in the region, and the Soviet Union”. Accessed on 16 May 2020, available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/views-on-role-of-russia-in-the-region-and-the-soviet-union/>

vector of conceptual interaction, it would be equally important to consider “Eastern” vector as well, looking into, for example, the discourse of the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Somewhat related question as to how the ideational approach develops with regard to potential free-trade zones between Vietnam, Serbia, Iran and the EAEU as an actor,²⁷ as well as with India, South Korea, Cambodia, and other states beyond the post-Soviet space (Outcome 2018). How this new geopolitical turn will be accounted by integrative mentality? How this global cooperation strategy can be interpreted successfully to gain public support? Russian scholars and experts promoting Kremlin foreign policy already start paying attention to the development of the *theoretical* contrapositions of Western and Eastern strategies (Karaganov 2015). Additionally, the BRI is aimed at connecting Chinese and European markets via the EAEU serving as a transcontinental bridge of trade and communication. Therefore, a number of Asian partners are not interested in joining anti-Western confrontational regional cooperation initiatives and prefer diversification in foreign economic links. Successful cooperation of Vietnam with the EU, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (in addition to the EAEU) is an example of such diversification of foreign policy that already attracted attention of thinkers, intellectuals, and experts (Mazyrin 2016; Sozdanie zony svobodnoy trgovli 2019). That will be become next theoretical and discursive challenge to address to make this geographically extended cooperation attractive for public. Already at this stage, a number of Russian scholars argue that the RIOs led by Russia in Eurasia can claim a special civilizational status, connecting Europe and Asia. According to these new studies, this geopolitical position of, for example, the EAEU should attract European countries to non-Western historical and cultural roots, offering an alternative to the EU in order to support development, independence, and political autonomy at a more global scale (Sergy 2018, 52-60; Troitskiy E. 2020, Umland 2017). To sum up, the in-depth study of the *conceptual* foundation of the European and the Eurasian projects of integration is timely and crucial. Ideational framework

²⁷ Putin ratifies interim agreement on EAEU-Iran free trade zone - <<http://tass.com/economy/1033258>> , accessed 2 June 2019

potentially contributes to public support and impacts public opinion providing for legitimacy of RIOs.

The ideological vacuum emerged after the fall of Communism in the 1980s, became an important issue for economically strong actors emerged in post-Soviet states (e.g., Russia and Kazakhstan) searching their place in the world politics and global economy. While public support to regional integration processes is highly crucial for democracies, modern hybrid and non-democratic regimes also realized the importance of public opinion for the success of regional integration projects. The importance of ideas and values are all the tools of inspiration, public support and legitimation of RIOs. They became pivotal component regional integration in post-Soviet space and beyond. While new wave scholarship on regional integration flooded Russian political discourse, academic market and mass media, it was left out of the main focus of Western studies whose focus was primarily on political decision-making and governmental choices (leaving ideational components aside). This paper demonstrated that analysis of the interaction between the NDROs and other regional and global actors (such as the EU or WTO) will benefit significantly from better understanding of their respective ideational frameworks. In line with the main goals and focus of this special issue, the analysis of the ideational foundations helps understanding how the Eurasian organizations fit into the global ecology of international organizations. This ecology is united not only by the actual practices of interaction, but also by their ideas, principles, and values. The analysis of newly emerged ideational components will eventually contribute to the studies of citizens' political participation, public support and public opinion within non-democratic context. All these factors open extensive prospects for future research on interaction and their theoretical frameworks.

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