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## RUSSIAN POLICY OF TURNING TO EAST: PROBLEMS AND RISKS

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**Abstract.** The article addresses the political and economic risks and prospects for the Russian policy of turning to the East, in the context of the new geopolitical situation that has taken shape by the autumn of 2022. The object of the study is the region of East Asia, where Russia possesses significant interests in the spheres of economy, politics and security. Among the risks for the Russian policy of turning to the East the authors mention the lack of experience of Russia's involvement in the regionalization processes of East Asia, as well as the cautious attitude of certain Asian countries towards Russia as an external player in the region, associated with Russia's image as a non-Asian country and the West-centric thinking of the Russian political elite. Another risk is an increasingly noticeable tilt in Russia's Asian policy towards China, both in the economic and political-diplomatic spheres, which is most evident in the increasing dependence of Russian energy export on the Chinese gas markets. Such tilt endangers Russia's status of a neutral power enjoying a special authority in the region as a country with considerable mediation potential not involved in any of the regional conflicts. Among the recommendations for Russia, the authors mention the necessity for the projects of "coupling" the Greater Eurasia with the infrastructure development in the Asia-Pacific countries, which should be devoid of an ideological commitment and should be based solely on pragmatic considerations. Besides, Russia needs to step up its diplomacy in the multilateral economic and political organizations of the region – the SCO, BRICS, RCEP, the East Asian Summit, as well as think over long-term plans for the development of relations with major Asian partners on bilateral tracks. Finally, it would be desirable to develop the "second track" dialogue with partner countries, both in bilateral and multilateral formats, which would provide a platform for a frank exchange of views against the background of insufficient level of the political contacts. In any case, it is necessary to pursue a meaningful and well-coordinated strategy in the East, based on an accurate understanding of national interests and the effective use of available resources.

**Keywords:** Russia, turn to East, East Asia, Western sanctions, Ukraine, special military operation, energy sector, tilt towards China, Greater Eurasia, regional integration, bilateral tracks.

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## РОССИЙСКАЯ ПОЛИТИКА ПОВОРОТА НА ВОСТОК: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И РИСКИ

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**Аннотация.** Проанализированы политические и экономические риски для российской политики поворота на Восток с учетом геополитической ситуации 2022 г. В их числе авторы выделяют недостаток опыта участия РФ в процессах регионализации в Восточной Азии, настороженное отношение к ней

со стороны многих стран региона, во многом связанное с их восприятием России как неазиатской страны, все еще западоцентристское мышление российской политической элиты, крен в политике РФ в сторону Китая как в экономической, так и политико-дипломатической сферах.

**Ключевые слова:** поворот на Восток, Восточная Азия, западные санкции, Специальная военная операция, энергетический сектор, Большая Евразия, региональная интеграция, двусторонние треки.

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## INTRODUCTION

Both Europe and Asia represent the most important areas of Russian foreign policy. The Russian Federation has always approached any of these areas based on the need for multi-vector diplomacy and diversified economic cooperation with its external partners. The pivot to the East has become a natural continuation and practical embodiment of Russia's adopted philosophy of foreign-policy multipolarity in which it sees itself as one of the global poles of power. The priority given to the Eastern direction is not accidental, given the undoubted economic and spiritual rise of Asia in the last two decades. The Russian foreign policy concept (as amended in 2016) notes the diminishing capacity of the historical West to dominate the world stage, as well as the shift of the global development potential towards the Asia-Pacific Region [source 1].

The Russian pivot to the East meets the expectations of the Afro-Asian countries that are dissatisfied with the "rules and norms" imposed by the collective West being prescribed in the course of international relations and world politics. They view the Russian Federation as a counterweight to Western domination and regard partnership with it as an instrument for the realisation of their vital interests. Anti-Americanism prevalent in many Asian and African countries, both within political elites and at the grassroots level, is also important.

In virtue of the complex geopolitical situation in the world that took shape in 2022, it is extremely important to analyse the political and economic risks of Russia's policy of turning to the East. The authors chose the East Asian sub-region as the main object of the research, considering that the Russian Federation has significant economic, political, and security-related interests in it.

## BACKGROUND AND CURRENT SITUATION

With regard to East Asia, the policy of turning to the East includes three main components:

socio-economic development of the Russian Far East, integration of the Russian economy into the Asia-Pacific Region, and strengthening of bilateral and multilateral interaction with the countries of the region [1, p. 77]. Russia is investing increasingly more resources in Siberia and the Far East, inviting East Asian countries to participate in their development on mutually beneficial terms [2, p. 262]. At the same time, Russia is consolidating with the countries of the region in multilateral political institutions at global and regional levels. Stated differently, the intensification of Russia's relations with East Asia pursues a dualistic goal: in the field of the economy – to get integrated into regional markets, in the field of politics – to secure the country's own role as one of the leading actors in this sub-region.

The Russian Federation's pivot to the East became relevant after the Asian financial crisis of 2007–2008 [3, p. 69]. The focus in the energy sector began to shift towards East Asian markets with their growing demand for hydrocarbons. In 2009, the first stage of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline was launched. Power engineering cooperation with China, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and a number of other ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) countries expanded. The Russian Federation joined many key-note Asian multilateral institutions of economic and political integration, primarily SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In 2012, the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) forum was held in Vladivostok where Russia was able for the first time to fully position itself as an Asia-Pacific power.

As the confrontation with the West intensified after the 2014 coup d'état in Ukraine, the pivot to the East became particularly important as a strategic tool in hedging external risks. Cooperation with China became a priority. Comprehensive economic ties were established at the bilateral level in the sphere of energy, finance, infrastructure,

and trade; mutual understanding was strengthened on such pressing issues of foreign policy and security as the Ukrainian crisis, the conflict in Syria, the problems of the South China Sea, the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, and the US missile programme in Eastern Europe and North-East Asia [2, p. 262]. Great success was achieved in the field of military/technical cooperation, including, for instance, such sensitive areas as early warning on missile launches.

In the mid-2010s, a number of agreements were signed on major investments by Chinese state corporations in the Russian infrastructure and the energy sector. China was granted an opportunity to buy stakes in gas and oil deposits – which Russia had previously refrained from, preferring to keep foreign investors out of strategic industries.

The cooperation with Beijing on multilateral platforms developed successfully. Among the most successful collaborative institutions are the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund, the BRICS Development Bank, and the SCO Development Bank. The institutional framework of the new governance system began to take shape in this way, not only at the regional, but also at the global level.

The ties with Tokyo and Seoul strengthened actively, especially in the energy sector. In 2019, an agreement was signed on the participation of Japanese firms in the “Arctic LNG 2 project”. According to the contract, their investments in it were to amount to almost USD3 billion. Several major agreements were concluded with South Korea in the sphere of the construction of vessels for the transportation of liquefied natural gas and the development of major transport hubs servicing power engineering projects in the Russian Arctic.

However, until 2022, the partnership with the East Asian countries was a viable alternative for Russia’s relations with Europe, primarily in the sphere of power engineering [4, p. 3]. The launch of the Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine in February 2022 changed the situation dramatically. First, the pivot to the East became a choice without alternatives because of the rupture, almost complete, of not only political, but also economic relations with the collective West. Whereas, at the beginning of 2022, Russian gas accounted for 41% of European imports, it fell to 7.5% by October [source 2]. Second, Asia on the whole adopted a

neutral stance towards the SMO. The West failed to engage the countries of the “non-West” on the anti-Russian front [5]. The SMO became a major milestone in Russia’s policy of turning to the East.

### PROBLEMS OF CULTURAL AND CIVILISATIONAL IDENTITY

The pivot to the East has never meant Russia’s complete withdrawal from Europe and joining Asia. Traditionally, Russian political discourse was dominated by a viewpoint that did not envisage Russia’s assimilation with any of these macro-regions. It was always emphasised that Russia, by virtue of its historical path and geographical location, had a unique – neither European nor Asian – socio-political culture [6, p. 9]. Therefore, the turn to the East was considered mainly through the political, diplomatic and economic, but not civilisational, dimensions.

The problem involves not only Russia’s self-identification as a predominantly European country, albeit facing Asia, but also the perception of it by many Asian countries as an external actor. East Asia is characterised by the phenomenon of Asian nationalism based on the achieved economic success.

One of its manifestations is the attempts to shape regionalisation processes on the basis of ethno-civilisational identity. In the early 1990s, the idea of creating a purely Asian (excluding “Caucasian” countries) economic integration structure was discussed in a number of states of the sub-region. For instance, the Malaysian East Asia Economic Caucus project envisaged the creation of an integration group without the participation of “white” states [7, p. 66].

This idea was nullified by the Asian financial and economic crisis of 1997–1998 which evidenced the inadequacy of the civilisation-identity approach to integration. However, it was not completely dismissed. In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his speech at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, put forward the slogan “Asia for Asians”, that is, a pattern of regional security where the main actors were exclusively represented by regional countries: “it is the peoples of Asia that shall manage Asian affairs, solve Asian problems and maintain Asian security” [source 3].

As a result, the development of economic integration in East Asia is marked by a struggle between two approaches: “open regionalism” (establishment of open institutional structures admitting any participant subject to qualification requirements regarding the internal norms of member states) and “closed regionalism” with the main criterion being geographical affiliation to the region. The former was actively promoted by Japan, Australia, and the USA, and the latter – by China and some ASEAN countries.

The rhetoric of supporters of “closed regionalism” actively used the notion of “Asian values” as opposed to Western liberal values. This position was most characteristic of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore. Their leaders always believed that the economic modernisation and socio-political development of Eastern societies should not necessarily follow the Western path [8, p. 92]. In fact, it was a rejection of liberal ideas and “rule-based order” imposed by the West and a proclamation of sovereignty and national and cultural identity as the top priority.

In these terms, Russia was often perceived in the region as a state with its main interests focused on the West rather than the East, i.e. not representing a fully Asian power. The states of the region “often do not consider the Russian Federation as an Asia-Pacific country because its demography, economy and politics largely follow the European model” [source 4]. Therefore, “from the historical and cultural perspective, it will always be difficult for Russia to build interaction in Asia that would be close in scale and spirit to the one existing in the South and the West” [9].

Russia established political relations with China earlier than Western countries, by concluding the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689; however, it did not gain the status of a full-fledged partner in the opinion of the Chinese. It is not incidentally that Russian goods were referred to as tribute in Chinese documents, and payment for them – as gifts for the recognition of the cultural superiority of the Qing Empire [source 5].

East Asia retains its historical grudges dating back to the epoch when Russia was moving eastwards. Prior to the 1917 revolution, Tsarist Russia was not differentiated from the West. Along with Great Britain, France, and the United States, the Chinese regarded it as one of the agents of the pol-

icy that had led to the “century of humiliation”. Today’s ideological paradigm towards the country’s upsurge is based on overcoming its legacy. Korea and Japan as well perceived themselves as former objects of Russian colonial policy at different stages of their historical development.

As to the post-war Soviet and post-Soviet history, the national political elite consistently demonstrated a Western-centric foreign policy mindset. Moreover, a somewhat “disdainful attitude to Asia as a secondary-importance region of the world took shape” [source 4]. This was partly a consequence of the fact that the main adversary of the USSR in the bipolar world was the USA, and after the collapse of the former, the landscape of the global governance architecture was shaped by the American global hegemony.

In some countries of the sub-region, the image of Russia as a country responsible for their current problems persists in the public consciousness. For instance, in South Korea, some forces blame Russia, as the USSR’s successor, for the tragedy of the Korean War and the country’s split; in North Korea, Russia is blamed for its refusal to provide unconditional support in the confrontation with the South. From the historical and civilisational points of view, Russia remains a “distant neighbour” for the countries of the region, i.e. the country with a Western mentality and Western national traditions.

Another problem is Russia’s lack of experience and no significant achievements in Asian economic integration structures, as well as the lack of a solid niche in Asian markets. On the one hand, the development of the Far East is inconceivable without strengthening trade and investment ties with the neighbouring countries [10, p. 44]. On the other hand, given the current level of development of Russia’s eastern regions, they are perceived as a periphery of East Asia, and Russia itself – as a marginal regional player. For this reason, in fact, Russia is mainly assigned the role of observer, and its Pacific part – of a transit territory and a source of raw materials [11, p. 73].

The Eurasian Economic Union, with the Russian Federation as its core, has not so far joined any of the multilateral free trade zones established in the Asia-Pacific Region, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Only



a single agreement has been signed – between the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This format of cooperation with the PRC is not yet included in the agenda. The cooperation within SCO and BRICS is developing mainly in the political sphere; the economic projects in this domain have been developed more on the initiative of China with its financial support. On the whole, the Russian Federation, within the three decades since the collapse of the USSR, has failed to prove itself as a major economic actor in East Asia.

### A TILT TOWARDS CHINA

Russia's policy-specific risk of pivoting to the East creates an obvious bias towards China in both economic and diplomatic spheres. It is particularly noticeable in the energy sector. In 2021, China imported almost USD3 billion worth of natural gas from the Russian Federation (a 16-fold increase since 2017) [source 6]. Since the start of the SMO, China has become a major alternative to European export markets for Russia. At the same time, Russia is not a monopoly supplier of energy to China. Russia's share in Chinese natural gas imports in 2021 was just over 6% [source 6] – less than the supplies from “unfriendly” Japan. This gives rise to a risk of the “buyer's dictate” on the part of Beijing, which objectively weakens the negotiating position of Russian suppliers.

One can note the remaining deficiency of logistic opportunities for the rapid reorientation of energy supplies to Asia. The existing pipelines from Eastern Siberia to the Asia-Pacific region are already operating at full capacity. The “Power of Siberia 2” gas pipeline via Mongolia to China is still under construction and will be completed only by 2029. The supplies to the markets of South and South-East Asia, which are important in terms of export diversification, can only be delivered by sea. The room for manoeuvre is limited here by Western sanctions in the financial sphere, primarily those affecting marine insurance. It is because of the increased freight costs that India announced its intention in September 2022 to abandon the purchase of Russian oil and switch to imports from Africa and the Middle East [source 7].

As for China, one should take into account its reduced demand for gas – caused by the well-man-

aged policy of power optimisation and diversification of supplies, as well as the production of its own shale gas. Chinese power engineering companies have demonstrated the ability to bring energy resources to China from a growing number of countries at or below world prices. Pipeline gas is already available from Myanmar, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan; there is an experience of LNG purchase on the spot market, including from the USA. Although Russian gas has a number of significant competitive advantages (geographical proximity, availability of existing pipelines, guaranteed supply under long-term contracts at a substantial discount), it would be reckless to completely ignore the risks connected with a possible “buyer dictate” situation.

Some problems exist in other areas as well. While bilateral trade is on the rise, things are not going so well in the investment sphere. Whereas direct foreign investments from China continue to grow steadily in the foreign investment structure of most world countries, their share in Russia has not been on the rise since 2014 [12, p. 1080]. The objectives of the Cooperation Programme between North-Eastern China and Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia (2009–2018) were not achieved, which prompted the elaboration of a new programme for the years 2018–2024 [13].

The gap between expectations and the actual reality is particularly noticeable in the sphere of services and high technologies [14, p. 31]. With the exception of the energy sector, the Chinese government does not seek to manage the international activities of private companies that take investment decisions on the basis of the same considerations as those adhered to by multinational corporations in other countries. Russia is so far a peripheral market for them. The situation has not changed even after the launch of the SMO in February 2022. One has to admit that the ties with China have not yet compensated Russia for its loss of access to Western technologies and capital markets.

One has to admit as well that currently Russia does not have in fact any other tangible niche in the Chinese market than hydrocarbon exports; moreover, Chinese investors have a very limited presence in the Russian Federation. Actually, Moscow needs oil and gas exports to China more than Beijing does. The situation in power engineer-

ing highlights the overall asymmetry of bilateral economic relations. The supply of hydrocarbons alone is insufficient to create a solid foundation for cooperation, which would resolve all the problems of the RF/PRC economic relations in the future [15, p. 12].

Russia, by attaching key importance to China in its foreign policy priorities, gains less room for manoeuvre in its relations with other Asian partners. The possible risk assumes the loss of its status as a neutral power not involved in any of the conflicts taking place in the region. Stated differently, whereas previously the Russian Federation could theoretically be perceived as an “honest broker” capable of efficient engagement in resolving the intraregional contradictions, now this is not in fact obvious.

This trend became clearly evident after 2014, when, finding itself in a difficult geopolitical situation, Russia was forced to significantly reduce its activity in the Asian region. In reality, the multivectoral course was much curtailed, and the foreign-policy strategy is now built in the context of relations with China as the main strategic ally in Asia and the world globally. This is fully manifested in the relations with Asian partners that have traditionally been a subject of Russia’s well-reasoned and sensible policy: Japan, the Republic of Korea, and ASEAN states.

Japan is strongly concerned about the accelerated development of Sino-Russian military and technical ties, primarily as concerns the development of new types of weapons, joint patrolling of marine areas around Japan by the Russian and Chinese navy, and integrated military exercises in the East China Sea in the immediate vicinity of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Tokyo’s greatest concern is the prospect of a Russian-Chinese military alliance, formal or otherwise, directed against the USA and its allies in East Asia – Japan and South Korea [16, p. 261]. Japan’s interest in “pulling” Russia away from China, on the one hand, motivates it to preserve contacts with Moscow, and, on the other hand, serves as a stimulus for the development of a politico-military alliance with America. Military buildup within the framework of such an alliance will inevitably require Russia’s additional costs to ensure its security in the Pacific.

Russia’s position as a participant in international efforts towards the regulation of the situation on the Korean peninsula has weakened considerably. Moscow’s considerable mediation potential, based on smooth relations with both sides in the conflict, remains unused. The limitation of Russia’s potential is objectively tied to the absence of serious economic levers of influence on Pyongyang. However, it can be remembered that in the mid-2000s, when the situation was not better in this respect, Russia was one of the initiators and most active participants in the six-party negotiations. At that time, not a single issue related to the Korean peninsula was resolved without Moscow’s agreement.

Russia’s policy towards Southeast Asian countries, which used to be traditionally neutral and balanced, has fared little better. Although Russia’s dialogue with ASEAN has developed quite successfully in recent years<sup>1</sup>, many members of the association, to the extent Russia’s alliance with China is strengthening, regard Moscow not as an independent political actor in the region, but primarily as Beijing’s ally.

This perception was reinforced by Moscow’s de facto support of China’s position at the highest level, voiced in 2016, which declared its refusal to recognise the ruling of the Hague International Court of Justice renouncing China’s claims to the exclusive economic zone in the area of Spratly Archipelago. This perception was also confirmed by the participation of the Russian navy in joint naval exercises held with China in the South China Sea the same year. These events served as a backdrop for Vietnam’s accelerated military/strategic rapprochement with the United States, with Hanoi presenting the latter as its sole security guarantor.

As noted by a Russian researcher Mosyakov, the establishment of close relations with China meant “de facto linking the Russian policy in the East to China’s interests” [17, p. 29]. Most likely, this opinion should be considered an obvious exaggeration. However, the substance of the outlined problem is correct: Russia should contemplate coming out of China’s shadow and becoming an active participant in economic and political pro-

<sup>1</sup> For instance, following the 4th Russia – ASEAN Summit of 28 October 2021, the parties published a Comprehensive Action Plan for implementation of a strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2021–2025).

cesses in the region, which is extremely important for its interests.

It should also be taken into account that Russia has traditionally, since the Cold War period, been perceived by many countries in Southeast Asia as a natural counterweight to China. Presently, from the point of view of Asian elites, it is necessary to contain China's assertive policies in the region. This, among other things, is the motivation for such countries as Vietnam or Myanmar to actively develop relations with Russia, especially in the military/technical sphere. The excessive "Chinese bias" in Russian foreign policy obviously constricts the space for Moscow's political manoeuvring in relations with them.

### WHAT COMES NEXT?

China remains Russia's natural partner and ally on the world stage. The development of relations with it in all domains – from trade to national strategy – will remain its main Eastern policy direction in the long run. Both PRC and RF share a common legacy of the communist era. Although Russia has abandoned its communist past – while China has remained faithful to it – both countries share a similar all-round resentment against the collective West: China – for "the hundred years of humiliation" and continuing domination of the West in global governance institutions, Russia – for the latter's refusal to consider its interests after the collapse of the USSR, along with the consistent expansion of NATO to the East.

Beijing and Moscow proceed from the fact that the international order is undergoing a fundamental shift from West-centrism to a multipolar system built on a balance of interests between different centres of power. The West resists this transformation desperately. During the meeting with Xi Jinping at the opening of the Beijing Olympics in February 2022, Russian President Vladimir V. Putin noted that "...the attempts to create a unipolar world have recently taken an extremely ugly shape and are absolutely unacceptable for the overwhelming number of states on the planet" [source 8]. For his part, Xi Jinping, speaking at the SCO summit in Samarkand in September 2022, said that China "in the face of tremendous changes unprecedented in history" was ready to set an example of a responsible world power together with Russia

and "bring the world community on the path of sustainable and positive development" [source 9].

The practice shows that the ability of the two countries to influence the global agenda increases significantly when they closely interact, relying on purely pragmatic considerations [18, p. 141]. For instance, the partnership between the Russian Federation and the PRC in Central Asia manifests itself precisely in this way. The two countries, in the process of development of Eurasian integration, have formulated common goals and demonstrate complementarity in the choice of ways and methods of their achievement.

Russia and China have in fact become "trend-setters" in their joint actions within the UN, cooperating in information policy regulation, monetary/financial and other strategic areas. In particular, they have developed and outlined the general principles of using force in international conflicts, in information sovereignty, and in searching for alternatives to the dollar's dominance in the global economy. As noted by Vishnick, the Sino-Russian partnership "increasingly influences not only the two countries' bilateral interaction but also the global governance in general" [19, p. 127].

However, it is natural for both Russia and China to take their own line in the areas where the parties' interests do not coincide. China, for instance, considers the United States and the countries of the collective West to be its main adversaries representing an existential threat, and at the same time – its most important partners, crucially vital for its economic development. Beijing recognises the post-Soviet space as an area of vital interest for Russia, but proceeds first and foremost from its own global interests.

The exacerbation of the situation in Ukraine in 2022 has not significantly changed China's strategic considerations. Beijing expressed an understanding of Russia's position, although it has reiterated its commitment to neutrality and non-interference. The absence of signals towards Moscow's unconditional support on the Ukrainian issue is apparently caused by Beijing's unwillingness to jeopardise its relations with other key global partners, primarily the USA and EU countries.

China apprehends that the exacerbation of the rift between Russia and the West could signifi-



cantly damage its own economy. Major Chinese companies, worried about losing access to Western markets, refrain from explicitly circumventing the Western sanctions with respect to deals with Russian partners that involve “sensitive” Western technologies and components. Many Chinese banks that are integrated into the global financial settlements system also try to avoid suspicion from the West. This, in particular, explains their refusal to clear Russian banks’ payments via the Chinese UnionPay payment system.

China also refrains from openly supporting Russia’s position connected with the referendums held in October 2022 in the Kherson region, Zaporizhzhia region, Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics. Obviously, Beijing’s foreign policy remains guided by the principles of protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. Solidarity with Russia would mean a violation of this principle. Officially, China advocates maintaining Ukraine’s territorial integrity and does not even recognise Crimea’s accession to the Russian Federation. According to its logic, supporting Russia would compromise China’s position on the Taiwan issue: if changing the borders in Europe is possible, then why can’t Asia follow it and why can’t Taiwan secede from China?

Overall, it is obvious that China has its own vision of the world, different from that of Russia. Therefore, it would be incorrect to state unequivocally that Russia-Chinese relations have taken an astringent form of manifested anti-Western alliance [20, p. 54]. The strategic partnership that has taken shape between the two countries is not at all a military alliance with rigidly stipulated obligations, similar to NATO, but rather is an “elastic alliance” based on the understanding of common fundamental interests and pragmatic benefits yielded from interaction in a variety of spheres. As noted by American researchers Charap, Drennan, and Noël, the leaders of both countries are “un-sentimental pragmatics, and if their strategic interests diverge there are certain limits to how far they will proceed in terms of sacrificing for the sake of the other” [14, p. 26].

### “GREATER EURASIA” PROSPECTS

In order to balance the relations with China in a proper way, Russia needs a proactive well-

thought-out strategy in the region, aiming towards strengthening the country’s position while adhering to its own interests in the first place. First, Moscow could propose an idea of coupling the Greater Eurasia concept with different infrastructure development projects in the Asia-Pacific region. This concept should be devoid of any ideological component and be based solely on pragmatic considerations of economic expediency.

The plan for the construction of a broad Eurasian partnership involving the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as China, Pakistan, Iran and India, put forward by Russian President Vladimir V. Putin at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2016, is the largest project within the framework of the policy of turning to the East. Russia assumes that the major provision of the Eurasian economic integration is the historically formed geopolitical, civilisational, and cultural community of EAEU countries. One of the obvious aims of the Greater Eurasia concept is the involvement of East Asian developed economies in the economic development of Siberia and the Far East.

The May 2015 Russia-China summit resulted in the signing of a joint statement on coupling the Chinese “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) initiative with the EAEU. In the summit statement, the Russian side expressed its full support for the OBOR, while China did the same for the EAEU. Russia considers the OBOR not only as an economic development tool but also, from the geopolitical perspective, – as an instrument to counter Western hegemony. First and foremost, this is about the de-dollarisation of the global financial system, liberation from the dictate of Western financial centres, and all-round strengthening of economic security [2, p. 269].

In addition to coupling the EAEU with the OBOR, the Greater Eurasia concept may become an ideological and political foundation for economic integration in the post-Soviet space. It finds a positive response in Asian countries as a project supposing the interconnection of economies and the development of integration outside the post-Soviet space. In addition to China, India and other countries – SCO, BRICS, and ASEAN members – have shown interest in it. As noted by Russian President Vladimir V. Putin at the Eurasian Economic Forum on May 26, 2022, Greater Eurasia is a comprehensive civilisational project



with the main idea to create a common space of equitable cooperation [source 8].

There is a widespread stereotyped view in the West that Greater Eurasia is primarily a geopolitical project engendered by the problems in Russia's relations with the West (see, for instance, [21]). This view can obviously result in constriction of the potential circle of its participants to "anti-Western" countries only. As far as the Russian president set the task of developing a comprehensive strategy for greater Eurasian space, which is intended to reflect the major international challenges and identify prospective goals, it would be feasible to contemplate the inclusion of states that would prefer not to face a tough choice between the West and the non-West.

It should also be taken into account that most of the EAEU countries pursue a multi-vector foreign policy, preferring to leave the problem of civilisational, geopolitical and ideological choice unresolved [22, p. 20]. Therefore, it would be advisable to refrain from excessive politicisation and ideologisation of the Greater Eurasia project goals. It is important to position it as an open-to-all instrument of economic integration in the Eurasian space.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to work out a mutually beneficial and reciprocally acceptable formula for EAEU's proactive engagement in large-scale integration projects in the Asia-Pacific region, including TPP and RCEP, it would be worth considering special state regulation measures involving preferential administration and taxation regime for foreign investors, creation of special economic conditions for them, including visa-free travel, customs preferences, well-thought-out schemes of public-private partnership, etc.

In fact, this was the approach used to create priority development areas in Siberia and the Far East after 2015. They proved their efficiency in attracting foreign investment, accelerating economic development, and improving people's life. Speaking at the plenary session of the Eurasian Economic Forum on 26 May 2022, President Putin put forward the task of creating a Eurasian Expert Centre and merchant ventures, accelerating the work over the institution of a Eurasian Reinsurance Compa-

ny, studying the development of special economic cross-border zones, possibly with supranational powers [source 9]. It is also necessary to work out a mutually beneficial and reciprocally acceptable formula for proactive interaction of the EAEU with the RCEP, the latter already including India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.

It is necessary to elaborate long-term plans for the development of relations with the main Asian partners on a bilateral level. Russia needs strong ties with India, DPRK, and Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and others). A fitting strategy should be carefully developed in relation to them, based on the understanding of the importance of each of these states for Russian national interests.

It would also be worth considering due steps to restore relations with Japan, which are now at their lowest point within the entire post-war period. Since Russia obviously cannot avoid a long-term freeze in the political sphere, it should focus on preserving old and establishing new ways of interaction in trade and economy, science and education, culture and humanities. The same applies to Russia's relations with the Republic of Korea, which participates in the sanctions policy against Russia with far less enthusiasm than the Euro-Atlantic states.

It is important to vitalise diplomacy in multilateral economic and political organisations in the region – SCO, BRICS, RCEP, and East Asia Summit. Russia should carefully preserve and enhance all of the positive aspects that have been formed in its relations with the ASEAN countries. This includes the ASEAN+RF dialogue format, various economic platforms, and expert dialogue on the most pressing issues.

In the current circumstances, the development of ties along the "second track" seems promising since it provides a platform for dialogue and frank exchange of opinions between politicians and experts on the conditions of the abridgement or even the almost complete absence of official contacts. At the same time, Russia should be proactive in initiating new multilateral international formats through which Russia's political opportunities may prove to be substantially greater than at the bilateral level.

This, for instance, could be represented by the Moscow-Beijing-Seoul trilateral format or Moscow-Beijing-Seoul-Pyongyang quadrilateral format in the sphere of security and confidence-building measures in Northeast Asia; Tokyo-Moscow-Seoul triangle on the same issue or in the sphere of economic cooperation. In view of the factual historical experience, Moscow-Hanoi-Beijing and Moscow-Hanoi-Delhi expert formats would also have great prospects. Within their framework, it would be possible not only to work out recommendations for confidence-building measures in the South China Sea area but also to offer a broader outlook on the principles of in-

ternational security in the region. Russia's policy towards such formats should be free of any politico-ideological constraints.

In any case, the state should pursue a well-considered and well-coordinated strategy in the Eastern direction, based on the efficient use of available resources. So far, irrespective of the huge experience gained in the course of work at regional organisations, and despite all the positive results of cooperation with key East Asian partners, Russia does not have a full-fledged organisational, managerial, ideological, and political framework for its realisation.

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