

# PROSPECTS OF THE EURASIAN UNION

## A VIEW FROM CHINA

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### Abstract

In the first half of the second decade of the XXI century, international relations have been characterized by an increased regional association both in the peripheral regions of Eurasia (Trans-Pacific Partnership, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and in Central Eurasia (Eurasian integration of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan). China is a sea-continental country, which has always paid close attention to the eastern (sea or Asian-Pacific) direction, and the western (continental or Eurasian) direction in its foreign policy. The purpose of this article is to identify the new challenges and characteristics of Chinese foreign policy in the western, continental, Eurasian direction and compare it with the Eurasian integration of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

After the return of Vladimir Putin to the post of President of the Russian Federation, the promotion of the Eurasian integration and the creation of the Eurasian Union are regarded as one of the main strategic directions of the foreign policy agenda, and the foundation for fulfilling the "Eurasian Superpower Dream" of Russia. Russia, resting upon the Eurasian Union, aims at strengthening its position in Central Eurasia. According to the plan, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEC) was set up in 2015. Located to the eastern boundary of the Central Eurasia, China has always maintained close political, economic and cultural ties with Central Asia and acted as the "Asian-European" power.

In the view of Chinese researchers, current Eurasian integration processes are extremely significant for the Western region of China. Therefore, the success in managing China's relations with the new actors such as the EEC in Central Eurasia will certainly be bounded and interlinked with the external environment in order to deepen reforms and openness of China in the forthcoming years. In this context such questions as 'how does the Chinese scientific society perceive the phenomenon of the Eurasian Union?', 'how do the Eurasian Union and the Eurasian integration affect the Sino-Russian relations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?', 'how will China refer to the Eurasian Union?' are undoubtedly relevant for the Chinese scientific community.

So the authors believe that, if China wants to develop fructiferous relationships with the EEC, it should insist on the following fundamental principles of its foreign policy: 1) 'China is the country close to Central Asia' (Jing Zhong Ya Guo Jia) as a new identity of the state's foreign policy at the west direction; 2) Sino-Russian relations are fundamental for the development of China's relations with the Eurasian Union; 3) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Union serve as two pillars maintaining the development and security of China in the region, which is close to China's western part.

### Keywords:

Russia; Eurasian Union; Eurasian integration; Post-Soviet states; foreign policy of China; the country close to Central Asia; Russian-Chinese (Sino-Russian) relationships.

In recent years, the Eurasian integration and the project of the creation of a Eurasian Union, which was suggested by V.V. Putin back in 2011,

have been among the most discussed topics in the political sphere as well as by the academic community. Supporters of a Eurasian integration

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are the presidents of Kazakhstan and Belarus. Subsequently, the leaders of the three countries officially published a joint „Declaration of Eurasian Economic Integration“ and declared the beginning of a new phase in Eurasian integration in connection with the creation of a Single Economic Space (SES). After V.V. Putin returned to the office of President of the Russian Federation the promotion of Eurasian integration and the creation of a Eurasian Union have been considered one of the main strategic areas on the agenda of foreign politics [Feng Shao Lei 2011] as well as the foundation for the realization of the Russian Federation’s „old dream“ of the status of a “Eurasian superpower” [Li Xing 2012]. There is a good reason to believe that the implementation and intensification of Eurasian integration have been priority areas in the foreign politics of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. In 2013, the presidents of these three countries met regularly at summit talks in Astana, Minsk and Moscow within the framework of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. It is fair to say that the summit talks and the current issues that were discussed by the leaders of the three countries turned out to be incentives for the development of Eurasian integration and created a common ground for the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015.

China and the former Soviet Union are neighbors. The post-Soviet region located west of China is exceptionally important for Chinese foreign policy strategy. It is worth noting that the successful regulation of relations between China and new „powers“/actors like the EEU in the former Soviet Union will certainly depend directly on and at the same time influence foreign politics, promoting the intensification of reforms and the opening of China within the next few years. In this context, questions like “How will the Chinese academic community perceive the phenomenon of a Eurasian union?”, “How will the Eurasian Union and Eurasian integration influence Sino-Russian relations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?”, and “How will China relate to the Eurasian Union?” will become highly significant for this Asian state.

Studying V.V. Putin’s project for the creation of a Eurasian Union as well as current

Eurasian integration processes, the authors cannot ignore contemporary processes in world politics. Firstly, the consequences of the global financial crisis have an indeterminate influence on the situation in European and world economics. The current state of affairs stimulates the acceleration of integrational processes between Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, i.e. countries aiming to achieve stability for their national economies, to protect themselves from global challenges and to find new driving forces for an all-round and inclusive modernization.

Secondly, Western Eurasia (the European Union) has already achieved a high level of development, whereas Eastern Eurasia (e.g. China) is only continuing to develop at a fast pace, increasing the potential of hard and soft power. At the same time, Central Eurasia (Russia, Central Asia, the Trans-Caucasian Region, Eastern Europe etc.) [Li Xing 2013] because of its regional instability and socio-economic problems is somewhat of a weak link in comparison with Western and Eastern Eurasia. Russia is situated in Central Eurasia geographically, between well-developed Western Eurasia and dynamic Eastern Eurasia and it finds itself under direct or indirect pressure from countries in the southern part of the continent. Under these conditions Russia must take on the responsibility for the unification of Central Eurasia in order to “build a strong bridge” connecting Europe and Asia.

Thirdly, Russia today commands rare strategic resources for development. Analyzing the situation of foreign politics in the immediate vicinity of the Russian Federation, it can be said that the “five-day war” with Georgia in 2008 and the proposed project of “Chemical weapons in exchange for peace” for the solution of the Syrian crisis in 2013 were turning points for the consolidation of Russia’s position throughout the post-Soviet space and Eurasia. From an economic point of view, Russia has all the characteristics of one of the new growing economies in the world which has ramped up its diplomatic activities in the sphere of foreign trade. Furthermore, current Eurasian integration under the auspices of Russia has proven highly significant, since it

corresponds with the strategic direction of development for Kazakhstan as well as Belarus.

American scholar Alan Burke believes that „without expedience any strategy cannot be considered adequate but is no more than tactical behavior“ [David M. Abshire, Richard V. Allen 1963]. Furthermore, the strategy of any country must also have a universal and complex meaning. According to Chinese scholar Zhou Pi Qi “if we analyze problems in the sphere of strategy individually instead of comprehensively, all we get is a tactical idea instead of a strategic one“ [Zhou Pi Qi 2009: 19]. In the words of Mao Ze Dong, „acquiring knowledge of universal significance allows us to use resources of particular significance more rationally, since events of particular significance are always subject to things having universal and comprehensive significance“ [Mao Ze Dong 1991: 175]. In this context, according to the point of view of Chinese experts, V.V. Putin’s project concerning the creation of a Eurasian union and the acceleration of Eurasian integration can be attributable to Russia’s comprehensive national strategy for the foreseeable future.

In the opinion of Wang Li Jiu, leading scholar at the Chinese academy of contemporary international relations, the Russian strategy concerning a Eurasian union is marked by the following characteristics:

- the Eurasian union is a humanitarian union focusing on the reconstruction of historic socio-cultural relations between Russia and the former Soviet republics;

- the Eurasian union is a union designed to enable traditional as well as non-traditional types of security in the Eurasian region;

- the Eurasian union is an important tool in Russian foreign policy that will enable Russia in the future to enhance its status in the international arena and defend itself against the challenges of other superpowers and alliances of countries [Wang Li Jiu 2012].

According to Lu Bai Chun, researcher at the Research Center for Development under the State Council of PRC, Russia’s strategic interests within the framework of a future Eurasian union include the following:

- „re-integration“ within CIS and widening of its traditional sphere of influence;

- support by the Eurasian union, strengthening of Russia’s strategic role in the Asian-Pacific Region;

- restoration of superpower status and aspiration to be one of the power centers in a multipolar world [Lu Bai Chun, Song Yu Liang 2013: 62-64].

Feng Shao Lei, Director of the Center for Russian Studies under the Eastern-Chinese Normal University, points out that at present V.V. Putin’s project of a Eurasian union is confined to the sphere of economic cooperation based on the principles of a market economy and democratic values. With a great degree of certainty, it can be said that in the long run the relations between the Eurasian union and the European Union and North-American region will combine elements of cooperation as well as competition [Feng Shao Lei 2011].

Based on the opinions of Chinese experts presented above, the authors come to the conclusion that the Eurasian union is set to become a universal transnational union encompassing key spheres of interactions like politics, security, economy and culture.

In the Chinese academic community, there is a prevailing opinion that the Eurasian union and Eurasian integration must be viewed in the context of Russia’s universal national strategy. In our opinion, both Russia and the USA started the execution of their respective strategic projects on the Eurasian continent in the second decade of the 21st century. Russia, leaning on the Eurasian union, attempts to strengthen its position in Central Eurasia. The USA concentrate on peripheral regions of the Eurasian continent by implementing their economic project of a “Trans-Pacific Partnership” (TPP) and a military-political program to “return to Asia” in order to change the balance of power in the Asian-Pacific Region. In contrast to the Eurasian strategy of the USA, the project of a „Eurasian union” does not include any „aggressive“ component.

## 2

From a geopolitical and geo-economical point of view, contemporary conditions in Central Eurasia are such that there is a process of „re-integration“ of regional powers going on

which will have great influence on other neighboring regions and countries. In the opinion of the majority of Chinese experts, the creation of a Eurasian union under the auspices of Russia will have both a positive and a negative side for China and the SCO.

The positive side includes the following:

(1) The creation of a Eurasian union will accelerate the emergence of a multipolar world, which China is also striving for. Furthermore, a Eurasian union will be capable of balancing the relations between Russia and the USA and at the same time of neutralizing part of the influence, which US policies may have on China when the USA return to Asia [Lu Bai Chun, Song Yu Liang 2013: 62-64; Ou Yang Xiang Ying 2012].

(2) Bilateral relations between Russia and China are characterized by strategic interaction and partnership, which has certainly created the institutional basis for the cooperation between China and the Eurasian union. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that neither country is interested in creating tensions in Central Eurasia. Should disputes or problems appear between the two countries, Russia and China can discuss them openly and find the best solution within the framework of their bilateral relations. However, according to Wang Li Jiu, the future Eurasian union will not have any negative impact on Sino-Russian relations [Wang Li Jiu 2012].

(3) The objective of the Eurasian Economic Union is similar to the course of economic integration of SCO, i.e. a transition from the simplification of procedures in trade and attracting investments to economic integration on a higher level [Fu Quan Zhang 2013: 165-175]. However, the EEU will certainly be able to establish complementary relations with the SCO.

Among the negative aspects the following can be pointed out:

(1) the establishment of a CU will negatively influence the trade relations between China and the member states of the union/agreement [Lu Bai Chun, Song Yu Liang 2013: 62-64; Wang Zhi Yuan 2013: 148-158]. This will manifest in the following ways:

– The single market within the CU will simplify the cooperation between the member

states in the sphere of mutual investments. At the same time, it also complicates Chinese investment activities in the region.

– According to the “Customs code” of the CU that was established based on the Russian „Customs code“, which is in effect at the present, the import duty on 92% of goods is determined in compliance with Russian standards. As a result, Kazakhstan has raised the import duty on Chinese goods in compliance with the code of the CU. Consequently, Chinese goods gradually lose their price advantage and become less attractive for purchase on the Kazakhstani market.

– Within the CU there are still several barriers of regional protectionism in existence, which prevent a quick strengthening of raised capital (investments) [Xu Yun Xia, Li Qin 2013]. As A.A. Slepnev, member of the Trade College of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), declared, „the EEC intends to introduce new tariff quotas in 2015, within the framework of which the EEC will expand the list of goods...” .

(2) The Eurasian union and SCO both encompass huge geographical space – the territory of the member countries of two international organizations/alliances. Russia and Kazakhstan are the “founding” countries of both the Eurasian union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In time, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan may also join the CU and participate in the Eurasian integration. It seems obvious that all these factors will weaken the economic component of the SCO [Lu Bai Chun, Song Yu Liang 2013: 62-64; Wang Zhi Yuan 2013: 148-158]. Apparently, it can be said that while Russia originally was not in the position of a “leader” in the Eurasian economic configuration, nowadays it does not intend to further economic integration with China within the framework of SCO. Quite on the contrary it now prefers a Eurasian integration under its own leadership within the framework of a different format [Li Xing 2012]. Compared to China, and apart from the economic component, Russia today possesses the potential of domestic policy, culture, history, and, finally, foreign policy in Central Asia. Because of that, a Eurasian

union will to a certain degree reduce the economic effectivity of China in the region concerned.

### 3

Starting with its territorial expansion on the Eurasian continent in imperial times, gradually going through the period of the formation of absolute supremacy of the Soviet Union over Central Eurasia, and ending with today's Russian Federation, promoting the project of Eurasian integration, one can say with conviction that the Russian Federation, which describes itself as a Eurasian power (Ou Ya Guo Jia), has long been the determining force in the historic development of Central Eurasia. With the exception of the Tan Dynasty (in the 7th-10th century) and the state of Western Liao (in the 12th century), which created a real administrative system and established vassal relationships with neighboring countries in Central Asia [Wang Zhi Lai 2010: 60-79], China, which is situated east of Central Eurasia, has been maintaining close political, economic and cultural relations with Central Asia, just like Russia, and played the role of an „Asian-European“ superpower (Ya Ou Guo Jia).

It should be mentioned that the Eurasian union which Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are striving for today in the framework of Eurasian integration, represents a growing new power center in Central Eurasia and will certainly have a significant impact on the geopolitical and geo-economical situation in the Western direction of China's foreign policy. As a matter of fact, China may become an „associate“ of Eurasian integration, based on the following principles:

Formation of a regional foreign policy identity of the country in the Western direction according to the principle „China is a country close to Central Asia (Jin Zhong Ya Guo Jia)“.

In geostrategic terms China belongs to the sea or maritime powers as well as to the continental powers, i.e. it belongs to a „mixed“ type of states, a group of countries which have borders on land as well as on sea [Shao Yong Ling, Shi Yin Hong 2000]. In this way, this type of state with its unique „maritime“ and continental geopolitical characteristics always experi-

ences to a certain degree threats and challenges to its national security from land as well as from the sea [Shao Yong Ling, Shi Yin Hong 2000]. It is obvious that China is a representative of this type of countries. From the point of view of the structure of world politics and the world economy, China's role is a relatively complex and multifaceted one, sometimes even a contradictory one. „China has reached the „first world“, being situated in the „third world“, however, it is still situated in between them, in the „second world“. China is rather similar to a „third world in the first world“ as well as a „first world in the third world“ [Li Xing 2009].

It can be assumed that thanks to its policy of reform and openness in 30 or more years' time China's connection with the international community will be much closer. Especially to such neighboring regions as the Pacific Rim, Central Asia and others. China is already highly interdependent with them. In this context, it is only natural that the fifth-generation leadership of China, elected at the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, takes the diplomatic relations with neighboring regions and countries seriously. At a Conference on diplomacy in the regions neighboring China (October 25, 2013) General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that „from the geographical point of view as well as the point of view of mutual relations, the relationship with neighboring regions is of the utmost importance to China. Thinking about the problems in neighboring regions and performing diplomatic activities, which are directed at neighboring regions, we must insist on the principles of universality and diversification. In order to achieve the goal „Two centenaries“ (to build a society with a high average level of prosperity for the centenary of the CPC, to turn the People's Republic of China into a rich, powerful, democratic, civilized and harmonic modernized socialist state for the centenary of the PRC) and the great revival of the Chinese nation, China's diplomacy towards the neighboring regions must be aimed at a deepening of comprehensive, mutually beneficial and goodneighborly relations, a rational use of a strategic period of opportunities for the

development and full realization of national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests. In a word, China's relationship with the neighboring regions must be stronger and closer in the sphere of politics, economy, security, and humanitarian relations“ .

A consequence of this situation is the idea that based on the global macro-political identity, which is the basic ideology in the design of a national strategy of development, China is also in need of a more distinct regional micro-political identity, which would coordinate the diplomatic activities of the country in relation to the concrete neighboring regions. In other words, the goal of the formation and realization of a regional foreign policy strategy with due regard to the specifics of the concrete region is that China's diplomatic activity match to a higher degree the historic past, today's situation and the tendencies of the future development of any given region. In this way, in the given region, we can describe China as a “country close to Central Asia”.

Under a „country close to Central Asia“ is to be understood any country which is not a country of the given region, but at the same time is not an external player, situated beyond the borders of Central Asia. A “country close to Central Asia” refers to a country which has close historical, cultural, political, and economic ties with Central Asia, which together with the countries of the region is also part of a common association for the development and realization of cardinal interests. The perception of China as a “country close to Central Asia” is basically founded on the following postulates:

(1) Close geographical proximity. The Western part of China juts out far into Central Asia and borders on Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Also, the geographical center of the Asian continent is located at Xinjiang in China.

(2) Close historical and cultural ties. At the end of the official visits of Zhang Qian, a diplomat of Ancient China, to the West in the 2nd century BC, China established permanent, multifaceted relations with Central Asia, which certainly were an integral part of the transnational relationships in Eurasia. By way of ex-

ample we can name the trilateral relations between the Tan Dynasty, the Tibetan Kingdom, and the Arabian Empire in the 7th and 8th century [Wang Xiao Fu 1992], the relations between Western Liao and the realm of the Khwarazmian dynasty in the 12th century, and the relations between the Qin Dynasty and the Russian Empire around Xinjiang at the end of the 19th century. Apart from that, Islamic culture has played and is still playing a connecting role in the intercivilizational communication between China and the countries of Central Asia. According to a new statistic, the total number of the Muslim population of China amounts to over 20 million . The majority of them live in the Western part of the country, e.g. in the Xinjiang-Uyghur and Ningxia-Hui Autonomous Regions, as well as in the provinces of Gansu and Qinghai.

(3) The Western direction is one of China's geopolitical priorities in the foreseeable future. In 2010, Lieutenant-General Liu Ya Zhou, commissioner of the Defense University of China's People's Liberation Army, for the first time put forward the idea of the realization of a strategy in the western direction. In his opinion, “the western part of China is a grand space. The West is not only our strategic orientation, our hope, but also the destiny of our generation. Its advantageous location (nearer to the center of Eurasia) gives us a very strong driving force for development. We need to recognize the West as a direction for development, not a border region...” [Liu Ya Zhou 2010]. The new geopolitical and geo-economic conditions are based on the new idea of an „Advance on the West“, put forward by Wang Ji Si, dean of the Institute of International Relations of the University of Beijing, in 2012. He says that in a situation where one of the key points of US foreign policy is the “Advancement to the East“, and where the EU, India, and Russia start paying close attention to the eastern direction, too, China, which occupies a central position in the Asian-Pacific Region, should not limit its interests to its maritime borders, traditional rivals and partners, but should take the initiative and develop a plan for an “Advance on the West”, in order to rebalance the strategic relations with a number of

great powers [Wang Ji Si 2012]. The motivation for the development of a foreign policy strategy aimed expressly at the West, expressed by two contemporary Chinese strategists, consists in the fact that Central Asia, first and foremost thanks to its rich gas and oil resources, will become one of China's closest source of energy resources. Particularly, oil and gas resources from Central Asia can get to the Chinese market directly and without any middleman. Furthermore, the war on the "three evils" (terrorism, separatism, and extremism) remains a sensitive issue in Central Asia. It exerts a great influence on national security efforts in China. It is crucial to uncover one more factor: as a new arena in the fight for influence between the superpowers, to China Central Asia is also a new arena of regional administration and regulation of relations with large and small countries.

(4) The Western region is an important region for the implementation of „China's policy of openness“ in this new historic phase. For the new generation of Chinese leadership, the continuation of the policy of openness is one of the most important tasks. So, while spreading openness in the coastal regions (e.g. creating Free Trade Zones in Shanghai), raising the level of openness to the border regions and the west is part of the architecture of priority areas in the work of the government. As Prime Minister Li Keqiang pointed out, „the development and opening of the western part of the country creates big maneuvering opportunities for China. While insisting on the intensification of reform and openness in the coastal regions, China must also emphasize the development of the western part of the country, support openness in the border regions and in the west in general...“ . In this context, China focuses on the intensification of beneficial cooperation in order to accelerate the process of creating Free Trade Zones with neighboring countries and regions as well as on the increase of trade volumes and investments in order to build a new structure for regional economic integration .

(5) Integration processes west of China have a favorable influence on the formation of the country's new regional foreign policy identity

called "country close to Central Asia". It is obvious that the Eurasian integration processes at present are happening with the help of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Based on the CU and EEP, EEU will be created in 2015. Apart from that, the CU will have to undergo expansion – the first of its kind and the first in the history of the CU's existence. The list of candidates for accession includes Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

It can be said with absolute certainty that in today's Eurasian integration Russia is the connecting link in all areas of focus. It is necessary to state the fact that contemporary Eurasian integration can be divided into three subregional integration processes, i.e. a sort of "subregional integration" in the framework of Russia and Eastern Europe (Belarus), Russia and Transcaucasia (Armenia), and Russia and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan). Based on the above-mentioned, the idea can be put forward that Russian-Central Asian subregional integration is rather important for the western region of the PRC. This situation is of great current interest now that it is essentially influencing China in two ways. Here we would first like to point out the positive effects from the CU and EEP.

It is important to point out that the CU and EEP create a large integrated market for the development of the western region of China. Under these conditions, Chinese goods and capital can reach the Eurasian market directly via overland routes. New statistic data indicate that since the formation of the CU the trade volume between China and the member countries of the CU has been growing steadily. In 2012, gross trade volume between the two parties amounted to 114.6 billion US dollars while China became the biggest trading partner of the CU .

In Eastern Asia, China and ASEAN were able to dramatically develop economic relations within the framework of a strategic partnership over the past ten years, which are called the "Golden decade". China expects to intensify its foreign policy activities in Central Asia and the bilateral relations with the CU in order to create a belt of prosperity, stability, and harmony in Central Asia. As to the nega-

tive side, it concerns mainly trade barriers which are created by any kind of regional integration in relation to external players. For example, in 2012 the EEC decided to introduce an anti-dumping duty on rolled metal products from China. It is clear that as Eurasian integration develops, a completely new, growing and relatively closed economy will appear west of China.

The situation being what it is, China will have to revise its foreign policy in the west as soon as possible and establish a regular dialogue with the member states of the CU in order to build a platform for future cooperation with the EEU while at the same time insisting on its regional foreign policy identity referred to as “a country close to Central Asia”.

In summary, it must be pointed out that China’s proposed regional foreign policy identity as a „country close to Central Asia“ boils down to a concrete micro-foreign policy identity on a regional level and is the result of complex considerations of such factors as the geographical location, historical and cultural ties, macro-foreign policy strategy on a global level, areas of focus for the development within the country and current problems in Central Asia. Consequently, China as a “country close to Central Asia” has to adhere to the following three principles in relation to the countries of Central Asia.

– Principle 1: based on the principles of good-neighborly relations and mutual benefit, China has to play a more constructive part in the regional administration and boldly take on the corresponding responsibility for key problems concerning the regional economic development. On the one hand, using its own economic advantage, China needs to continue moving in the direction of realizing the project of creating an economic belt along the Great Silk Road in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of the countries in the region. On the other hand, adopting the experience of the development of relations with ASEAN in the format “10+1”, China can certainly establish a cooperation with the CU in the format „3+1“ in order to support a regular dialogue between the two economies and at the same time stimulate economic integration

within the framework of SCO for the sake of the creation of Free Trade Zones.

– Principle 2: while the level of interdependence between China and the countries of Central Asia in the economic sphere is rising, Central Asia still faces the threat of the “three evils” (terrorism, separatism, and extremism), the destabilization in Afghanistan etc. In this context, China considers the implementation when necessary of a rather flexible approach to the solution of regional problems appropriate, that is, if the solution of any given problem requires a bilateral approach, China can solve it within the framework of bilateral relations, if it requires a multilateral approach, the problem is resolved within the framework of a multilateral platform.

– Principle 3: in addition to advancing the development of SCO and creating a platform for dialogue with the future EEU, China also needs to intensify its strategic partnership with Kazakhstan and to effectively realize a strategic partnership with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In short, the creation of a highly stable, multi-level, network-based diplomatic structure according to the model of „bilateral relations within multilateral ones and multilateral relations based on bilateral ones“ involves the formation of a Chinese foreign policy strategy in relation to its western neighboring countries.

Sino-Russian relations are the foundation for the development of relations between China and the Eurasian union.

The reasons for the realization of this principle in the conception of foreign policy are the following: Firstly, it is the essence of strategic cooperation and partnership between Russia and China. It has become obvious that in 2013 alone the leaders of the two countries met five times within the official format of various events on the highest level. In February 2014 PRC Chairman Xi Jinping visited the Winter Olympic Games at Sochi by invitation of the Russian president V.V. Putin. This high level of intensity of meetings and talks on the highest level, something that is rare in the relations between superpowers in contemporary international politics, proves the closeness, importance and priority of the bilateral rela-

tions for Russia as well as China. The “Joint declaration of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the mutually beneficial cooperation and intensification of relations of universal partnership and strategic cooperation“ and the „Action plan for the realization of the implementation of the Treaty on good-neighborly relations, friendship and cooperation between the RF and PRC (2013-2016), signed by the two heads of state in Moscow in March 2013, turned a new page in the history of the development of the bilateral relations. Supporting a special way of development both countries will cooperate strategically on a global and regional level, intensifying the regional and trans-border cooperation within the framework of the projects „Northeast China – Russia’s Far East“ and „Yangtze – Volga“, diversifying bilateral trade and facilitating the promotion and development of humanitarian and socio-cultural ties. However, Sino-Russian relations today have moved to a new stage of development in all areas and on all levels. Contemporary Sino-Russian relations are characterized by “quasi-allied relations“, within which all problems, and even challenges, can be openly discussed and are resolved in a rational and mutually beneficial way.

Secondly, it is the essence of today’s Eurasian integration processes. As was pointed out above, Eurasian integration is founded on three subregional integration processes: Russian-Eastern European integration (Russia – Belarus), Russian – Transcaucasian integration (Russia – Armenia), and Russian – Central Asian integration (Russia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan). Consequently, the cooperation within the framework of Eurasian integration in such areas as trade, transport, labor migration, mutual investments and others is carried out either with Russia or via Russia. In this way, the essence of Eurasian integration consists in future integration associations of Kazakhstan and Belarus, and even Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, with Russia. According to this logic, it can be considered that the development of relations with Russia is undoubtedly the key pillar in the relations of China and the Eurasian integration groups as well as the future Eurasian union.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian union are two pillars supporting the security and economic development of China in the neighboring Central Asian region.

SCO was founded in 2001. Over thirteen years SCO achieved considerable success in the maintenance of security and socio-economic development in the region. However, it must be acknowledged that SCO cannot be the only mechanism enabling China to adequately support its strategy of security and economic development in the region [Li Xing, Niu Yi Chen 2013]. There are several explanations for this:

(1) SCO is a new regional intergovernmental organization. The construction of its institutions is still far from being completed.

(2) The existence of different approaches of the member countries of SCO. China as a country close to Central Asia and a new growing “power” in the region belongs to the countries of Central Asia on the principle of equal rights and mutual benefits. Russia is the former “historic mother country“ in relation to the countries of Central Asia and perceives this region as a zone of special interests. Situated between Russia and China, the countries of Central Asia strive for the maximal realization of their own interests.

(3) The degree of dependence on SCO takes various forms. It should be pointed out that the degree of China’s dependence on SCO has doubtlessly turned out to be higher than that of Russia or Central Asia [Li Xing, Niu Yi Chen 2013]. To China, SCO is the only multilateral platform for the conduction of a dialogue with the countries of Central Asia. Apart from SCO, Russia and the countries of Central Asia have the CU, the EEP and the Free Trade Zone of CIS economically, as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) concerning regional security. Consequently, within the architecture of Russia’s and Central Asia’s foreign policy SCO functions as a multilateral platform for the development of their relations with China and is one of the objects of diversification their foreign policy interests. In this context SCO prefers to establish close business relations with the Eurasian union to fill in their deficits and to optimize their part in the regional solutions in Central Asia.

From the authors' point of view, "mutual complementarity" is the main driving force in the development and intensification of the relations between SCO and the Eurasian union. Economically, double membership in SCO together with China, the second largest economy in the world, as well as in CU, EEP and the future Eurasian union give Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the status of an important link between two integration processes. Via the institutional mechanism of CU and EEP multilateral economic cooperation with China within the framework of SCO may exert a constructive influence on the Eurasian market. Furthermore, this approach corresponds with the cardinal interests of the member countries of Eurasian integration and with the key content of China's policy of raising the level of openness in the west and in the border regions.

But what about the problem of regional security? Reportedly, there are two mechanisms working simultaneously to maintain regional security in Central Asia: SCO and CSTO. These two mechanisms have their pluses and minuses. Thanks to the higher efficiency of its management system, troops mobility, and other advantages, CSTO can react rather efficiently in emergency situations. The priority in SCO's work is strategic communications and coordination of bilateral and multilateral military interactions to strengthen the deterrent in the war on terrorism [Wang Li Jiu 2012]. The authors are convinced that the military cooperation together with the economic partnership will also be included in the list of priority areas of focus in the cooperation between SCO and CSTO and even with the future Eurasian union.

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An important event is always connected with big opportunities as well as big challenges. Eurasian integration and the creation of a Eurasian union are important events in the region neighboring the western regions of China. In order to optimize the risks and develop relations with the new regional powers and to continually strengthen regional security in Central Asia, China must clearly formulate its new regional foreign policy identity in the west and

continue to intensify its relations with Russia as well as activate cooperation within the framework of multilateral structures and organizations.

From the point of view of political science, ruling is the sum of all actions and processes promoting the interests of subjects by sacrificing the interests of objects. Governing is the sum of actions and processes simultaneously promoting the interests of subjects as well objects due to the limitations of the expedience of their interests [Shi Xue Hua 2012]. In this context, the countries of Central Asia must be acknowledged as subjects of the regional collective government and not as objects in the fight for the sphere of influence between superpowers. Essentially, Eurasian integration (CU – EEP – EEU) may dovetail perfectly with the Chinese Eurasian integration project of creating an economic belt along the Great Silk Road aimed at increasing the opportunities for development of the Central Asian countries and at maintaining stability in the region south of Russia and west of China.

The creation of an economic belt along the Great Silk Road does not contradict the CU and EEP of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. The idea of such an economic belt is a mutually beneficial platform for China's cooperation with Russia and the countries of Central Asia. The majority of the member states of Eurasian integration are also member states of the SCO and countries which are situated in this economic belt. It may also be pointed out that an economic belt along the Great Silk Road will serve as yet another project for Eurasian integration processes alongside with CU, EEP and the future EEU.

In comparison with the spill-over effect of the European integration, Eurasian integration boils down to a network model in combination with cross-regional, intercivilizational and trans-border characteristics. In this context, China and Russia should avoid stereotypes like "Russian CIS", "Russian Eurasian Union", "Chinese SCO", and "Chinese economic belt along the Great Silk Road" in Central Eurasia and establish flexible network relationships as well as include Eurasian integration in strategic bilateral cooperation.

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