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Construction and Deconstruction of the Borders of (Re)Integration Projects in Eurasia: The Western and Eastern "Edges" of Russia

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1. Introduction

Along with its political and economic recovery (after almost two decades of depression, resulting from the disintegration of the Soviet Union), the Russian Federation has conceptualized and implemented several initiatives aiming at (re)establishing its active, even dominant, position on the Eurasian continent.[1] However, the ongoing changes in the structure of the global order have resulted in those attempts taking place in a new international environment. The Cold War-era territorial, political, and military domination of Russia over the Eurasian space was replaced by a polycentric system. On the one hand, it was marked by the expansion of the EUropean project in the west, attracting and absorbing numerous states (including those located in the direct neighborhood of Russia). On the other hand, China became first a regional and then a global power, thereby gaining the ability to influence the eastern and even central parts of Eurasia. As Bobo Lo claimed, in a changing international environment, the victims are those states who "are either unwilling or unable to adapt" to the new circumstances.[2]

Consequently, Russian (re)integration projects were confronted with at least two competitors, one in the west and one in the east.[3] Comparing these competitors in terms of potential, aims, and activities would be analytically fruitful. Simultaneously, even more can be mapped when changing the perspective: to understand the internal dynamism of any political-territorial structure, one can explore the way its limits are organized, (de)constructed, and justified. Consequently, the territorial edges of investigated actors define them as well as their policies and politics in the Eurasian order. The author decided to examine the ways of structuring of the borders and borderlands on the western and eastern edges of Russia, as carried out by this state and its neighbors.

The aim of this work is to propose a new approach to investigating the formation of the current political order in Eurasia by concentrating on the bor-

1 Mikhail Alexseev, "Blocs, States, and Borderlands: Explaining Russia's Selective Territorial Revisionism," *Eurasia Border Review* 6:1 (2015), pp. 1–23.

2 Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), p. 242.

3 Anton Kireev, "Typological Features of the European and Asian Parts of the Russian Border: The Example of the Northwestern and Far Eastern Borders," *Eurasia Border Review* 4:2 (2013), pp. 21–35.

ders of Russia with the European Union (EU) in the west, and on Chinese-led initiatives in the east of the continent. It attempts to explain border dynamism by employing both classical and recent approaches to studying borders. A premise of the investigation is that the changing political and geopolitical circumstances in Eurasia have undermined the formerly dominant paradigms, and are consequently forcing scholars to look for new interpretative instruments. The analytical concepts of boundary, empire, expansion, and so on, applied to the EU, Russia, and China, can be useful in understanding the current situation, but only if combined with the constructive nature of border structuring today.

The main hypothesis of this investigation states that, unlike in the Cold War times, and in the period between the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the beginning of Putin's regime in Russia (where Eurasia was subsequently characterized by the domination of the Soviet Union, and then by Russia's decomposition, resulting in a sort of a vacuum in the region), three main actors now determine the shape of the space, forming three integration structures (albeit of different character, nature, aims, and instruments). The relations between them are visible not only in the traditional international sense but also in the way they construct and deconstruct borders and border interactions in spaces where they neighbor each other directly.[4] Theoretically, this analysis is based on testing the empirical developments with two approaches: neorealist and constructivist, using geopolitical models and geostrategies proposed by William Walters[5] and Christopher Browning with Pertti Joenniemi.[6]

In successive parts, the present text first deals with the conceptual terms, especially those related to borders and bordering, geopolitical models, and so on. Second, the concept of Eurasia is presented. Third, the study examines the western and eastern borders of Russia. The final part presents the interpretation of the collected observations and mapping the new political order in Eurasia.

2. Border, Geopolitical Models, and Border Geostrategies

One of the key concepts in this analysis is that of the border. Classical approaches, dominating especially in the first half of the 20th century, focused on state borders based on national, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity, which developed into several further models, including spaces of biological struggle,

4 Ivan Dumka, "Europeanization in EU External Relations after the Eastward Enlargement: Complications and Bypasses to Greater Engagement with the Eastern ENP Countries," *Review of European and Russian Affairs* 1 (2013), pp. 1–25.

5 William Walters, "The Frontiers of the European Union: A Geostrategic Perspective," *Geopolitics* 9:3 (2004), pp. 674–698.

6 Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Geostrategies of the European Neighbourhood Policy," *European Journal of International Relations* 14:3 (2008), pp. 519–551.

natural borders, and contact of territorial power structures.[7] The end of the century resulted in a conceptual turn in border studies, with a visible (or even dominating) constructivist approach, in which borders are perceived as processes, as well as characterized as having a changing and socially constructed nature.[8] Bordering was proposed as a perspective of understanding borders, seen as being constructed in everyday practice by discourses, ideas, attitudes, and practices.[9] Meanwhile, some scholars have remarked on the dissonance between the debordering perspective (dominant especially among Western scholars) and empirical realities, where economic globalization has been confronted with the (re)construction of social and political boundaries in other spheres[10] and the reappearance of more classical border-related issues, including territorial conflicts and (re)establishment of imperial aspirations. Consequently, the merging of classical and new approaches can be useful for understanding these processes.

Within this context, the concept of the geopolitical models of territorial-political structures was developed by Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi[11] in their attempt to define the character of a state "interior" and its relations to the external environment. They described three geopolitical models, proposed in three forms: Westphalian, imperial, and neomedieval.

The Westphalian model considers political-territorial actors as spaces characterized by a precisely defined territory. These actors are trapped within clearly defined boundaries. Political power is located in the center and expressed equally across the entire territory, where borders mark the limits of sovereignty. The imperial model reflects the concentric power-territorial circles. Power is again concentrated in the center, but as the distance from the center increases, its strength decreases. Consequently, depending on the physical and political remoteness from the center, peripheries are progressively less strongly controlled. In the neomedieval model, the structure is of a polycentric character. Numerous centers comprise a structure with overlapping powers and often different interests and visions of policies.[12] The concepts the above presented models employ, despite their explanatory value, have been critically approached in academic discourse: the imperial and neomedieval for underestimating the role of nation states, and the Westphalian, among others, for

7 Stephen B. Jones, "Boundary Concepts in the Setting of Place and Time," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49:3 (1959), pp. 247–248, 251.

8 Victor Konrad, "Toward a Theory of Borders in Motion," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 30:1 (2015), pp. 1–17.

9 James Wesley Scott, "Bordering and Ordering the European Neighbourhood: A Critical Perspective on EU Territoriality and Geopolitics," *TRAMES* 13:3 (2009), p. 235.

10 David Newman and Anssi Paasi, "Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 22:2 (1998), pp. 186–207.

11 Browning and Joenniemi, "Geostrategies of the European Neighbourhood Policy," pp. 519–551.

12 Ibid., pp. 522–524.

its understanding of sovereignty. John Agnew, for example, claimed that the latter ignores complex connections to globalization,[13] the hierarchy of states, and non-state sources of authority, as well as overstresses its territorial expression.[14] Nonetheless, the present study aspired to use these models, but critically, including the abovementioned aspects.

Intensive interactions are observable in the spaces where the actors meet. Actors have to structure their borders employing specific strategies. William Walters defined four of them: networked (non)border, march, colonial frontier, and limes.[15] A networked (non)border is understood as an emanation of the idea of a "borderless world" and describes the situation where a permeable borderline is subject to governance by numerous actors forming a dense network across it. A march is a buffer zone, separating neighboring structures. A colonial frontier is a line of relative separation. Usually, there are two asymmetric structures with one-dimensional flows of norms, values, and solutions; a stronger neighbor tends to influence the weaker one. This scenario leads to the absorption of the influenced territories. Limes is a final line of separation with a relatively low level of openness.

The key question is how the above-presented geopolitical models and border strategies are reflected in the structural and discursive practices of the three actors (the EU, Russia, and China) when structuring their edges, and, consequently, how they create the international order in Eurasia in organizing border relations.

3. THE CONCEPT OF EURASIA

The next step of the analysis involves the understanding of Eurasia as both a geographical and discursive space. Being aware of the extensive literature devoted to this topic, the author decided, owing to the limitations of the length of this work, to indicate only the key elements. Consequently, the notion of Eurasia is outlined, followed by the idea of Eurasianism, by presenting example forms of its manifestations from the Russian perspective.

The impressive academic studies on Eurasia, both historic and recent, have revealed various approaches to this concept. Recently, however, researchers have tended to suggest that "far from being a significant ideational, geographic, economic and strategic space, Eurasia it turns out, is an incoherent mess of spaces," and, at the same time, various concepts of Eurasia "reveal a widening chasm between Eurasian rhetoric and everyday reality."[16] Especially,

13 John Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), p. 216.

14 John Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95:2 (2005), pp. 437–461.

15 William Walters, "The Frontiers of the European Union," pp. 674–698.

16 Jeremy Smith and Paul Richardson, "The Myth of Eurasia—a Mess of Regions," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32:1 (2017), pp. 4–5.

owing to its deconstruction following the Georgian and Ukrainian wars, and instability in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and even Afghanistan,[17] Eurasia is consequently seen as a construct[18] that can hardly be classified according to structural criteria and as being in the process of creation by various actors in different ways. Therefore, this study employs a dual approach. On the one hand, the space is viewed in geographical terms, as consisting of Europe and Asia (or its northern part), with respect to the political developments in the area. On the other hand, the discursive nature of the concept is recognized, and only those manifestations that concentrate on Russia and its two neighbors, namely, the EU in the west and China in the east, are investigated. In both cases, the identity of Eurasia is marked primarily by the construction of a civilizational zone in Russia with the key question being "how to maintain a cohesive civilization zone on such a divided territory"[19] and the consideration of Russia as a "border civilization" characterized by "in-betweenness" and its creation of "its own world" long-term policy.[20]

In this context, a brief look at Eurasianism is warranted. First, Eurasianism is a concept rooted in Russian political thought. Classical Eurasianism, a concept dating back to the interwar period (1918–1939) marked especially by the name of Lev Gumilëv,[21] currently circulates as a political concept in its "neo" form. It is fueling a debate on the territorial shape of the Russian Federation's integration project, as well as its role in shaping the political, social, and economic order in this part of the world.[22]

Second, various ideas of Eurasianism have manifested themselves in numerous political projects in recent years, starting from the ideas of the Eurasian Union idea, proposed in 1994 by Kazakhstan's then-president Nursultan Nazarbaev,[23] through the Eurasian Customs Union initiative in 1999, Eurasian Economic Community, Eurasian Economic Space, and ending with the Eur-

17 Andrei P. Tsygankov, "The Heartland No More: Russia's Weakness and Eurasia's Meltdown," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 3:1 (2012), pp.1–9.

18 Chris Hann, "A Concept of Eurasia," *Current Anthropology* 57:1 (2016), p. 1.

19 Toni Mileski, "Identifying the New Eurasian Orientation in Modern Russian Geopolitical Thought," *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 6:2 (2015), pp. 177–187.

20 Caroline Humphrey, "Concepts of 'Russia' and Their Relation to the Border with China," in Franck Billé, Grégory Delaplace, Caroline Humphrey, eds., *Frontier Encounters. Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), pp. 54–70.

21 Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

22 Mark Bassin, "Eurasianism 'Classical' and 'Neo': The Lines of Continuity," in T. Mochizuki, ed., *Beyond the Empire: Images of Russia in the Eurasian Cultural Context* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2008), pp. 287–288; Viktor Shnirelman, "To Make a Bridge: Eurasian Discourse in the Post-Soviet World," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27:2 (2009); Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Dugin, Eurasianism, and Central Asia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40:2 (2007), pp. 143–156.

23 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 171–190.

asian Economic Union (EEU) in 2014. All of them attracted mostly post-Soviet republics. Most of them originated from Russia, and despite "not account[ing] directly for Russian foreign policy or the new patriotism, [they were] not a marginal phenomenon in any sense."[24] Vladimir Putin's Eurasianism, from the very beginning, has especially employed the ideas of Dugin,[25] with a stress on Russia perceiving itself as a Eurasian state and aiming at multipolarity. This later translated into the concepts of the abovementioned unions[26] as well as (re) expansion shall be written together toward the Caucasus, Ukraine, and Central Asia.[27] Consequently, the mainstream of Russian politics appears to be in line with the key ideas of Dugin.[28]

Third, to understand the current Russian self-positioning in the context of Eurasian identity, it seems necessary to follow the logic of path dependency and explore historical modes constituting the culture of Russian foreign policy. Yang Cheng identified three main relevant diplomatic aspirations.[29] The "power of space" refers to the role of vast territories in Russian political culture, and the tendency to expand borders to gain security, which has always resulted in an illusory security (or even in so-called *imperial overstretch*, as was experienced at end of the 1980s by the Soviet state).[30] The power of the state was consequently expressed by the "power of space" and *vice versa*; space illustrated imperial power, territorial expansion meant state development, and shrinking space equated to times of trouble and insecurity. The "power of time" reflects the never-ending modernization following Western patterns, and never-ending delay in this process, thereby exchanging space for time and temporary territorial losses in order to win time for modernization and consolidation, with the objective of regaining the space later. This strategy seemed to work in the case of Napoleon's and Hitler's invasions, and can serve as an interpretative framework for the current expansion of Western structures at the expense of the former Soviet Empire. Third, "the power of empire," is illustrated by the

24 Ibid., p. 9.

25 Often referred to as one of the most influential individuals in Russia and "Putin's brain." See: John Rice-Cameron, "Eurasianism is the New Fascism: Understanding and Confronting Russia," *Stanford Politics* (February 2, 2017).

26 Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

27 Marian K. Leighton, "The Basis of Putin's Eurasianism," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 30:4 (2017), pp. 810–817.

28 This is despite the fact that some of his ideas seem to belong to political fiction, including an axis with Berlin, Tokyo, and Tehran. Moreover, this neo-Eurasianism (when compared with Eurasianism), in Putin's version, is becoming institutionalized and used to reinforce Russian states' legitimacy. See: Paul Pryce, "Putin's Third Term: The Triumph of Eurasianism," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 13:1 (2013), pp. 25–43.

29 Yang Cheng, "The Power of Diplomatic Traditions: Understanding the Logic of Russia's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era," *Eurasian Review* 4 (2011), pp. 25–40.

30 Włodzimierz Malendowski, "Doktryna wojenna Federacji Rosyjskiej w XX i XI wieku. Cele – zadania – kierunki działania," *Przegląd Strategiczny* 10 (2017), p. 56.

following: Russia has been conducting an imperial policy and has considered itself an empire. To preserve its status, Russia has prevented other empires or state alliances from developing in its neighborhood, and has created alliances in all possible directions to maintain the balance of power.[31] The EU can be considered one of these "other empires."

Having debated the concept of Eurasia, with the Russian perspective being its pivotal element, the following two sections analyze Russia's relations with two neighboring political entities: the EU in the west, and China in the east. Both will be treated as "integration projects," assuming that they have gone through a long-lasting process of both political consolidation and economic development. Both interact with Russia, challenging its position in Eurasia and thereby redefining the international order there. As indicated in the conceptual section above, border relations will serve as the perspective of investigation. In both cases, a context of mutual relations will be presented, followed by the discussion of conflict and cooperation spaces and, finally, Russian vs. its neighbor's perspectives on the shape of the Eurasian order.

4. Russian–EUropean Border

4.1 Global and Regional Context

Together with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western structures expanded territorially and organizationally. The enlargements of NATO and the EU to the east occurred at the territorial expense of the former Russian/Soviet empire and were considered a direct threat not only to the Russian imperial position in the future but even to the existence of this state. Consequently, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has presented several versions of its military doctrines, pointing at NATO and its expansion toward Russian borders as the main danger.[32] Meanwhile, the EU's growth (political and territorial) has been more challenging. On the one hand, it was, until the Vilnius Summit in 2013, considered as a counterbalance to the United States in Western policies, being more open and compromise-oriented, and thus ideal for those looking to establish their own (America-alternative) regional (or even) global order. Russia aimed to become a strategic partner of the EU. On the other hand, Russia's policy toward the EU is considered reactive, oriented toward a "friendly" France and Germany, while disregarding the Union as a whole and being afraid of pressure (political and territorial) that goes with the growth and strengthening of the integration project, especially on the western outskirts of the former Soviet Union. [33] The West is rhetorically considered (again) a threat as a whole.[34]

31 Yang, "The Power of Diplomatic Traditions," pp. 25–40.

32 Malendowski, "Doktryna wojenna Federacji Rosyjskiej w XX i XI wieku," p. 93.

33 Marcin Kaczmarski, "The Policy of Russia towards the European Union, Center for International Relations," *Reports and Analyses* 13:05 (2013), pp. 1–30.

34 Victor Mizin, "EU-Russia Relations from a Russian Point of View," *Heirich Boell Stiftung* (July 26, 2017).

The above described approach has emerged also from the fact that the EU, especially after the Maastricht Treaty and Lisbon Treaty, gained a new status in international relations, having the ambitions and capabilities to become a global player. The ongoing coordination of member states' foreign policies has produced a synergy effect and created a potential for a new *European empire*,[35] visible at least in the concept of *normative power* and *external Europeization*.[36] Following Jan Zielonka's claims of interpreting the enlarged Union via the neomedieval paradigm (with diversity being an asset and Eastern enlargement an issue of externalization of security policy), the EU consolidated its international agency. Developments in recent years have undermined this perception, including Brexit and its consequences, as well as the growing Euro-skeptic tendencies within the EU. Moreover, there are loud voices calling for a European empire, as in the case of the French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire calling on Germany to transform the EU into a "form of empire, like China and the US," especially with regard to the use of military power.[37] Following the logic of the "power of empire," Russia has sought to prevent the EU's consolidation and growth, preferring bilateral relations with single member states, especially from Old Europe, while being afraid of supranational EU bodies (with the visible influence of Eastern members).[38]

The Russian–EUropean neighborhood has been marked by significant asymmetries in recent decades. Russian economic backwardness (reflected in its natural resources-based economy) contrasts with the booming economy of the common market, visible especially in former Soviet bloc states that are new EU members. The economic improvements after 1999 were hindered by the economic crisis of 2008, and then by the Western sanctions in 2014. Today, Russia's nominal GDP is at USD 1.3 trillion and is 13 times lower than that of the EU, similar to that of Spain. About 45% of Russian exports go to the EU (mainly energy resources) whereas 38% of imports come from there. From the EUrope's perspective, the figures are 4% and 5%, respectively.

The context of border structuring is also framed by the demographic situation. The Russian diaspora is visible on the EU's side of the border, especially in the Baltic states, concentrated in the eastern provinces and capital areas of

35 Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

36 Hatmut Behr and Yannis A. Stivachtis, "European Union: An Empire in New Clothes?" in Hatmut Behr and Yannis A. Stivachtis, eds., *Revisiting the European Union as Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1–16.

37 Stephen Flurry, "France: We Want a European Empire," *The Trumpet (*19 November, 2018).

38 The EU itself is also diverse, and, in trying to reconcile frequently opposing interests, is often inefficient in its policy, especially toward Russia, as illustrated by the post Crimea sanctions policy. The role of the US has to be mentioned, especially with regard to its interest in Eastern Europe (including Georgia and Ukraine) and pro-American policy of many of the 2004 enlargement members. See: Kaczmarski, "The Policy of Russia towards the European Union," pp. 1–30.

Tallinn and Riga. Deprived of many civil rights after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian diaspora has become one of the most problematic issues in relations with Russia both at the national and EU levels. Additionally, the Russian language dominates in Belarus, southern and eastern Ukraine, and in the Transnistrian region that split off from Moldova.

The post-Cold War developments in the mutual relations between the EU and Russia have been characterized by numerous attempts to create a cooperative environment; however, it has been contaminated from the very beginning by Western superiority and the territorial expansion of the EU.

The former could especially be detected when analyzing, on the one hand, the EU's policy toward Russia, and on the other hand, Russian perceptions. An awareness of its own advancement has resulted in the EU's attempts to democratize and modernize Russia at several levels, starting from the penetration of non-governmental organizations, and ending up with inviting Russia to European Neighborhood Policy and creating the Partnership for Modernization. However, Russia did not want to be treated as a "junior partner."[39] As Andrey Kortunov pointed out, "Russia had to modify its standards, procedures and rules to get closer to Europe, but Moscow expected the same approach from the European side."[40] The annexation of Crimea is sometimes perceived in Russia as "some kind of *revenge for the alleged humiliation and inattention* it suffered from the Western side in the 1990s."[41] As claimed, "Russia still feels less than equal and humiliated," arising from its operating within a "symbolism of respect" as a key value.[42] Meanwhile, as Bobo Lo described, Russia fails to recognize the consequences of this policy to its strategic interests.[43] Iver Neumann claimed in his research that the Russian attitude toward the West has a cyclical pattern, and has been characterized by Westernization followed by nationalization, with both aiming at recognition of its power by the West. He noted, however, that an alternative source of recognition appeared recently: China.[44] Reconstructing Eurasia used to be a way to win Western recognition of Russian power.[45] Possibly, then, the "power of time" does not have to be exchanged now for the "power of space", as with the West.

The latter was manifested in the never-ending territorial expansion of the EU to the east, with which Russia was unhappy but was unable to prevent until the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in 2013, when the association

39 Kaczmarski, "The Policy of Russia towards the European Union," pp. 1–30.

40 Andrey Kortunov, "How Not to Talk with Russia," *European Council on Foreign Relations London* (1 April, 2016).

41 Mizin, "EU-Russia Relations."

42 Kadri Liik, *How to Talk with Russia* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), p. 2.

43 Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, p. 242.

44 Iver B. Neumann, "Russia's Europe, 1991–2016: Inferiority to Superiority," *International Affairs* 92:6 (2016), pp. 1381–1399.

45 Tsygankov, "The Heartland No More," pp. 1–9.

agreement with Ukraine was to be signed. This was the next step in the colonial frontier strategy of the EU, which this time crossed the "red line" of the Russian "power of space" (too far to the east) and the "power of empire" (Russia cannot be an empire without Ukraine) in the context of the "power of time" (Russia managed to recover partly under Putin's rule and is now able to reverse negative developments). Eventually, the negotiations with Ukraine led to the Euromaidan (later with anti-Russian nationalistic elements) and then to separatist tendencies in the eastern provinces of Ukraine. This was followed by the militarization of the conflict and Russian support, first for the Donetsk and Lugansk Republics, and then for the idea of separating the Russian-speaking eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, called Novorossiya, and reuniting it with the Russian Federation.[46] This would not only allow the national reunification of "Russian lands" and Russian speakers to take place but also connect Russia proper with Transnistria and Crimea, which were already controlled by Russia (embodying the Westphalian geopolitical model with the Russian nation's territories reunited within the precisely demarcated state borders of a single and homogeneous political-territorial structure). Western powers, including the EU, responded with economic and political sanctions, which spoiled mutual relations and forced Russia to look for alternative partners.

4.2 Border Structuring

When trying to understand the way Russia is structuring its western border in the context of the developments presented above, several elements related to both conceptual-discursive tendencies and policies have to be mentioned.

Eurasia, as a concept, has always been defined in opposition to the West, and in both the classical and modern forms of Eurasianism, it is believed that "the West (...) has always sought to undermine the national welfare and geopolitical unity of Russia-Eurasia."[47] However, the meaning of the concept of the West has changed, originally being associated with the great Western European powers, and in the post-Soviet period, mainly with the USA and its allies, labeled the Atlantic world.[48] Europe was consequently one of the potential allies of the Eurasian project, which eventually changed with the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. Therefore, as Alena Vieira claimed, the "Eurasian project's role as a counterweight to the EU has emerged as the central theme. Once again, this clearly diverged from the approach based on efficiency and economic pragmatism." Additionally, together with the Ukrainian crisis, "the project [is] seen predominantly as establishing Russia's hegemonic position in relation to the countries of its *Near Abroad*."[49] This made the partners less enthusiastic about many of

46 Andrii Gladii, "Konflikt zbrojny w Donbasie w latach 2014/2015 – rozłam wewnętrzny czy ukraińsko-rosyjska wojna? Scenariusze dalszego rozwoju konfliktu," *Przegląd Strategiczny* 10 (2017), pp. 117–118.

47 Mark Bassin, "Eurasianism 'Classical' and 'Neo'," p. 284.

48 Ibid., pp. 289–290.

49 Alena Vieira, "A Tale of Two Unions: Russia–Belarus Integration Experience and Its Lessons for the Eurasian Economic Union," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32:1 (2017), p. 48.

the project's aspects and negotiations more difficult. It also needs to be remembered that the very origins of the Eurasian Economic Union were not directly related to creating a counterweight to Western structures but included an element of both the EEU and the EU to cooperate and integrate, which changed, especially after the Ukrainian crisis.

At the policy level, the Russian–Belarusian cooperation can serve as an example of border structuring. It has been strongly rooted in Soviet nostalgia, and used by the elites of both states in political discourses over the last 20 years. The cooperation materialized in numerous political initiatives, among others in the Customs Union in 1995, Treaty on the Union of Russia and Belarus from 1997, and Union State Treaty in 1999 aiming at the political and economic union with its own institutions and citizenship.[50] The conflict of interests, "pragmatization" of Russian foreign policy in the new millennium, and high economic costs of subsidizing Belarusian economy modified the Russian vision of integration toward the "German model," in which instead of being an equal partner, Belarus was to be reunited with Russia.[51] As Alena Vieira stated, both the Russian–Belarusian Union State and Eurasian integration have originally been presented by policy makers as projects where all the parties involved were supposed to gain, making a direct, albeit silent reference to the western European model of integration. Stepwise, however, instead of accelerating, the projects slowed down, which could be associated with the sovereignty- and security-related fears of the partners toward Russia. This culminated in the time of the Ukrainian crisis and during the intensive meetings of both presidents in late 2018. Consequently, the political dimension has not been developed, and a common position on the economic response to Ukraine, Moldova, and the EU has not appeared. Thus, a marked asymmetry was revealed between the partners and their interests.[52]

The same approach, but on a wider scale, has been visible in the attempts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space with several "unions" addressed at all the states of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of the three Baltic states, following the imperial model. The aggressive reaction to the expansion of EUrope toward the east can also be considered an attempt to create a state in the Westphalian logic (bringing Russians and Russian provinces together in Russia) with the borders strategy of limes, finally separating it from the West. The (re)integration projects, however, illustrate the imperial model and colonial frontier that is to contain diversified border provinces in a multinational and multicultural empire.

Since 1989, the EU has been fueled by one of the most pressing challenges since the end of World War II, namely, structuring relations with a large group of newly independent states located in the eastern part of the continent that, se-

50 Ibid., p. 43.

51 Ibid., p. 46.

52 Ibid., p. 50.

duced by Western ideas of freedom and democracy (fascinating some Russian democrats as well[53]), as well as economic prosperity, decided to Westernize and modernize in an attempt to join the EU. These attempts quickly translated into several waves of enlargements, all of them pushing the EU's borders to the east: in 1990 (Eastern Germany), 1995 (Austria, Sweden, and Finland), 2004 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, and Cyprus), 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria), and 2013 (Croatia). This not only created a new, strong, anti-Russian flank in the Union but also revealed pressures for further involvement in the post-Soviet space. This resulted in the Eastern Partnership initiative addressed at Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with no formal membership prospects, but visible hopes in many member and some partner states. The partners were at times seen in EUrope as a new manifestation of the march border strategy.

This process of constantly pushing forward the EU's border was a typical example of the colonial frontier strategy, based on two concepts: external Europeanization and normative power. The former assumes the superiority of the European political and economic model that is to be exported broadly. The gradual transformation of the surrounding environment ought to lead to neighboring states being Europe-like and their joining the Union, pushing the border further away from the center. The normative power, meanwhile, is associated with the growing position of the EU as a global actor, and replacing the American–Russian dominance in the global order. Yet being incapable of acting as a typical empire, and contesting the neo-realistic approach to international relations manifested in American foreign policy, the EU has been seeking to use its norms and values as the main tools of its foreign policy, promoting democracy and the free market, attracting new members in this way, and influencing their domestic systems. This policy has been related to the agency of the new member states (especially Poland and Lithuania), representing an interest in weakening Russia and winning security in this way, which has resulted in numerous initiatives (starting from the Eastern Partnership, through the active support for both Maidans, and ending with the 2012 UEFA European Championships Poland–Ukraine) addressed to the new eastern neighbors of the EU.[54] Both approaches were successful as long as the EU acted in a sort of vacuum, with no real competitors around. However, given the Russian reaction to the territorial expansion (following the "power of time" logic), the EU has been confronted with this hard power-based actor, as manifested in the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts and Russian military involvement.

53 Alexander Lukin, *The Political Culture of the Russian 'Democrats'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

54 This policy was successfully embedded in the Brussels agenda (corresponding with the idea of stabilizing the EU's surroundings by making them Europe-like, and expanding the zone of peace and stability), to the indifference of the western and southern members, and generally positive approach of Germany (following the imperial model).

5. The Russia–China Border

5.1 Global and Regional Context

The global context of the Russian–Chinese neighborhood is determined by the end of the bipolar system, collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia's attempt to reconstruct its imperial position with regard to regaining its "power of empire" and "power of space." Since the 1990s, the global order has been marked by American domination, as well as the growing position of China trying to undermine it by gaining an increasingly greater economic, demographic, and political advantage. Russia perceives the strategic environment in terms of "the emergence of a multipolar world in tandem with a decline in unilateralism by the United States, along with a growth in the influence of rising powers such as the BRICs."[55] The Chinese concept of multipolarity has been considered adventurous by Moscow, seeing it as a chance to (re)construct its own zone of influence and, more generally, the imperial geopolitical model.[56] At the same time, however, the Chinese military potential has constantly been growing, inspiring distrust on the Russian side.[57] Despite Russian–Chinese relations on the political and security levels being evaluated as excellent, the northern side of the border is heavily securitized, but border guards there cooperate, including joint training.[58] Despite the official policy of good neighborhood, mutual relations are claimed to be marked with deep distrust, having historical and, currently, pragmatic components, visible in both individual and institutional behaviors, especially on the Russian side of the border.[59] However, many analysts consider such diagnosis as exaggerated. Mutual relations are framed not only globally but also locally. They are related to economic and demographic asymmetries.

With regard to economic asymmetry, Russia has been attempting to develop its eastern provinces for decades, but the original plans and strategies tend to be poorly implemented. Cooperation with China seems to be one of the possibilities (but not the only one, as numerous authors point at Japan's[60] and other states' potential role) for mitigating the economic and demographic downturn

55 Shinji Hyodo, "Russia's Security Policy Towards East Asia," in Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, eds., *Russia and East Asia. Informal and Gradual Integration* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 45–46.

56 Vitaly Kozyrev, "Russia's New Global Vision and Security Policy in East Asia," in Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, eds., *Russia and East Asia. Informal and Gradual Integration* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 52.

57 Hyodo, "Russia's Security Policy Towards East Asia," pp. 44–54.

58 Humphrey, "Concepts of 'Russia'," pp. 54–70.

59 Sayana Namsaraeva, "Déjà vu of Distrust in the Sino-Russian Borderlands," in Caroline Humphrey, ed., *Trust and Mistrust in the Economies of the China-Russia Borderlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 37–64.

60 Dmitri Trenin and Yuval Weber, *Russia's Pacific Future. Solving the South Kuril Islands Dispute* (Moscow: The Carnegie Papers, 2012), pp. 1–2.

in the region. This brings another argument, namely, that the Russian turn to the East does not mean turning (only) to China but more the Asia-Pacific region;[61] however, at the end of the day, China seems to be of key importance. This has been visible in hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in 2012 in Vladivostok and organizing, since 2015, the annual Eastern Economic Forums there (with not only significant presence of numerous states' representations, but also focus on the region and "new territories": the Arctic and outer space).

The Russian Far East exports mainly natural resources (about 85% of trade value) and imports mainly industrial and agricultural products.[62] It has also been stressed over the last few decades that reversing the population decline in the Far East is one of the most important tasks for Russia; to do so, social and economic foundations have to be created.[63]

With regard to demographic asymmetry, border relations are shaped by the arguments on the demographic threat and "silent invasion" of the Chinese. The Russian Far East is inhabited by only about 6 million people. The region is also depopulating. The other side of the border is inhabited by a population of about 35 to 40 million people. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberalization of the border has enabled intensive human flows. After initial enthusiasm in Russia, this created anti-Chinese fears in the middle of the 1990s, visible in the visa regime being introduced.[64] Consequently, the attempts to create a permanent infrastructure (ice passages have been used in the winter time) over the border of the Amur River, despite formal supportive declarations, were hampered[65] by the Russian side[66] for many years, although many links are completed already[67] and more are under construction.[68] Meanwhile, several studies have demonstrated that bigger groups of

61 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016).

62 Anna Madej, "Chińska obecność na rosyjskim Dalekim Wschodzie: uwarunkowania i stereotypy," *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe* 4 (2015), pp. 81–101.

63 Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, "Russia in Regional Integration Processes," in Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, eds., *Russia and East Asia. Informal and Gradual Integration* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 281.

64 Madej, "Chińska obecność na rosyjskim Dalekim Wschodzie," pp. 81–101.

65 This could be compared with the policy of the Russian Empire in protecting its western border in the nineteenth century, where construction of bridges over the Vistula River was strongly restricted.

66 Ekaterina Mikhailova and Wu Chung-Tong, "Ersatz Twin City Formation? The Case of Blagoveshchensk and Heihe," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 32:4 (2017), pp. 513–533.

67 There are bridges linking Heixiazi Island/Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii Island (divided by a land border) at both ends with, respectively, China (Fuyuan City, built in 2012) and Russia (the suburb of Khabarovsk, completed in 2013). See: Ekaterina Vasyukova, "Two Countries, One Island," *Meduza (*2 November, 2018).

68 The Tongjiang-Nizhneleninskoe railway bridge, originally proposed in 2007 by the local authorities, was agreed at the state level in 2014, during Putin's visit to China. It was due to be completed in 2018. The Heihe–Blagoveshchensk road bridge was also confirmed, and

Chinese settlers have not emerged in Russia, and a coordinated policy has not been implemented by the Chinese government to encourage Chinese citizens to move to the Russian Far East. The number of Chinese in Russia is estimated at 200,000 to 400,000, with less than half being concentrated in the Asian part of the Russian Federation. In 2015, they accounted for 2% of foreigners living in Russia, or the tenth national group on a list dominated by Slavic, Central Asian, and Caucasus nations. In recent decades (for example, when negotiating Russia's entry to the World Trade Organization), Chinese authorities have repeatedly stressed the postulates of opening the Russian labor market to the Chinese, but no migration or colonization policy has been implemented.[69] With the border disputes solved on the one hand, and visible border asymmetries on the other, Russian–Chinese interstate relations have responded to the new international context. Under the circumstances of the emerging multipolarity in the global order, they were expected to create an alternative to the Western global domination in the political, economic, and military realms formed after the end of the Cold War. It was hoped to be based on the military capacities of Russia and the dynamic economic growth of China.[70] As early as April 1996, Russia and China announced their "strategic partnership," which was aimed at creating an alternative to American domination in the world order.[71] Regionally, Russia tends to cooperate with China using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. However, in the Asia-Pacific context, the pattern is more complex, as the US seems to be the main actor, and Russia's role is of a side character.[72] At the beginning of the 1990s, the bilateral relations between Russia and China seemed to dominate the multilateral ones in East Asia. This has recently started to change. The policy of Russia resulted in joining most of the existing initiatives or even stimulating the development of new ones.[73] In the early 2010s, Russian–Chinese relations started to be characterized by even more visible asymmetries. On the one hand, Russia's legacy of its imperial past and dominant position in Eurasia is contrasted with its economic and political stag-

was supposed to open in 2019 (being considered in China as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative). Both bridges are seen as flagship manifestations of Xi Jinping's and Vladimir Putin's mutual foreign policy. See: Ankur Shah, "China, Russia, and the Case of the Missing Bridge," *The Diplomat* (20 November, 2018).

69 Madej, "Chińska obecność na rosyjskim Dalekim Wschodzie," pp. 81–101.

70 Alexei D. Voskressenski, "The Three Structural Stages of Russo-Chinese Cooperation after the Collapse of the USSR and Prospects for the Emergence of a Fourth Stage," *Eurasian Review* 5 (2012), pp. 1–14.

71 This partnership, from today's perspective, is evaluated as having limited effect on US policy in eastern parts of Europe and surrounding territories and waters. See: China. Feng Yujun and Shang Yue (CICIR), http://www.ciis.org.cn/gyzz/2018-07/25/content_40434373.htm (accessed on March 20, 2020).

72 Natasha Kuhrt, "Russia and China: Strategic Partnership or Asymmetrical Dependence?" in T. Akaha and A. Vassilieva, eds., *Russia and East Asia. Informal and gradual integration* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 272.

73 Akaha and Vassilieva, "Russia in Regional Integration Processes," p. 272.

nation. On the other hand, the booming economy of China not only improved its position in global politics but also supported its claims to take the more politically suitable role of an emerging global empire. Despite cultural and political differences, shared interests (especially geopolitical and economic) have brought Russia and China together.[74] Russia and China have not managed to create a new normative order, but they base cooperation mainly on practical matters.[75] No formal alliance has been established, however, which can be explained by the "divergent concepts of harmony and honor [that] make China and Russia act differently when interacting with a third party in the international community."[76] These circumstances have resulted in cooperation initiatives (assuming the commonality of interests and complementary characters of Russia and China in global, regional, and local politics) and also in conflict situations (usually owing to colliding interests or priorities).

Cooperation initiatives in the post-Cold War period were possible owing to the success of the border setting, revealing a limes strategy on the Russian side. It was rooted in the situation of Russia and China: both were looking for the stabilization necessary to develop political and economic projects, and both concentrated resources on other problematic issues and borders. It also led to the creation of many cross-border cooperation projects alongside the newly stable borders, as well as similarly successful attempts to solve the border disputes with other successors of the Soviet Union.[77] The process of improving Sino-Russian relations can be dated back to the time of Mikhail Gorbachev and his speech in Vladivostok in 1986. Later, it continued in the post-Cold War environment.[78] Alexei D. Voskressenski distinguished the three structural stages of Russian–Chinese cooperation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first one culminated in 1996, which, together with the idea of strategic partnership between both states,[79] aimed at creating a new global pole alternative to the Atlantic space.[80] In economic terms, the cities and provinces located alongside the border, in particular, experienced dynamic contacts and cooperation.[81] The second phase was marked by intensive cooperation, initially pragmatic- and later ideologically based, with visible authoritarian tendencies and an anti-Western profile. The third phase was marked by the economic crisis that affected

74 Alexander Lukin, *China and Russia: The New Rapprochement* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

75 Bobo Lo, *A Wary Embrace. What the China-Russia Relationship Means for the World* (Sidney: Penguin and Lowy Institute, 2017).

76 Ying Liu, "Strategic Partnership or Alliance? Sino-Russian Relations from a Constructivist Perspective," *Asian Perspective* 42:3 (2018), pp. 333–354.

77 Akihiro Iwashita, "Border Dynamics in Eurasia: Sino–Soviet Border Disputes and the Aftermath," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 23:3 (2008), pp. 69–81.

78 Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999), p. 5.

79 Alexei D. Voskressenski, "The Three Structural Stages," pp. 1–14.

80 Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24:4 (1999), pp. 481–494.

81 Mikhailova and Wu, "Ersatz Twin City Formation?" pp. 513–533.

both states but resulted in different global strategies. It updated and increased Chinese claims to be a global actor and preyed on Russian fears of being marginalized. Russian reactions encompassed, among others, Putin's ideas of Eurasianism, resulting in the threat of falling into Chinese domination.[82] A fourth phase could be added: the political and economic turn of Russia toward China after the Ukrainian crisis and Crimea annexations[83] and the worsening of relations with the West.

Apart from cooperation initiatives, tensions could also be detected in the region. David Wolff stressed a "comparative cooperation" paradox in Sino-Russian relations, with both elements being present in mutual relations. On the one hand, Russia was the most influential partner of China in its 20th century development. Russia's role of a civilizational leader in continental East Asia came to an end, however, in the 1990s, amid Chinese economic and military growth. It seems that it was recognized, and, later, to some extent, accepted by Russia both centrally and locally. On the other hand, owing to the growing (reversed) asymmetries, Russia has feared China in two fields. One is related to the already described economic and demographic dominance of China. This distrust of Russia was expressed, for example, in hesitance toward the creation of cross-border transportation infrastructure to protect its own territory.[84] The potential for conflicts has been more visible in the context of China's growing position in the global order and aspirations for regional or even global leadership. Central Asia, traditionally understood as a part of Russian Eurasia, is the potential conflict zone. Contrary to Russia, the Central Asian Republics have never been considered by China as a conventional threat. The ethnic and cultural proximity of their inhabitants with the Uighur Autonomous Region created fears of penetration by independentist and Islamic ideas and assistance toward China. However, the secular regimes in the states of the region have become natural allies of Beijing. For a long time, China's position there could be characterized as "we won't interfere in [Russia's] sphere of interests in Central Asia but we don't want you to be active in the Asia-Pacific [zone]."[85] Nonetheless, this argumentation should not be understood as the exchange of China's non-interference in Central Asia in return for Russian passiveness in Asia-Pacific. Chinese foreign policy is based on non-interference, and supports Russia's activity in the region (including ASEM[86] and Korean conflict resolu-

82 Voskressenski, "The Three Structural Stages," pp. 1–14.

83 John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55:3 (2014), p. 247.

84 David Wolff, "Russia and China Relations Just Offshore," presentation during the Summer International Symposium Northeast Asia's Faultline: One Hundred Years of Sino/Russian/Soviet Competitive Cooperation, (Sapporo, Japan, July 13–14, 2017).

85 Bakhtior Marufovich Khakimov, "Diplomatiia v ATR i uchastie Rossii v deiatel'nosti regional'nykh integratsionnykh struktur," in A. Lukin, ed., *Rossiia i mnogostronnye struktury ATR* (Moscow: MGIMO, 2009), p. 21, and Kuhrt, "Russia and China," p. 102.

86 *Asia–Europe Meeting.*

tion), which can also be interpreted as an anti-American and pro-multipolar strategy. Meanwhile, China is tightening economic connections to the states of the region, especially in energy imports and infrastructure investments.

5.2 Border Structuring

The last two elements of the analysis refer to how Russia and China construct their mutual border and neighborhood with respect to ideas and policies. Russia seems to do this in three ways: by orienting itself to the Pacific region, establishing close collaboration with China, and using the "power of empire" and "power of space" in other parts of Asia.

The growing emphasis of Russia on the Asia-Pacific region has been visible since the second term of Vladimir Putin. This emphasis was associated with two factors. First, the strategy of Russia was to enter Asian energy markets[87] with its own resources, especially in the context of the growing energy demand in the booming Chinese economy, as well as in Japan and South Korea. Second, it was caused by the Russian Far East Development plans.[88] However, critical analyses have indicated lower economic benefits from energy policies than Russia expected, especially with regard to the development of the Eastern provinces;[89] at the same time, energy markets are marked by growing Sino-Russian interdependence (both in the oil and gas sectors), which influences stability in the region.[90] After Dmitry Medvedev assumed the office of Russian Federation president in 2008, the newly adopted "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" assigned a high priority to the Asia-Pacific region.[91] "The turn to the Pacific" initiated by Vladimir Putin resulted in several projects, including 16 special economic zones, special solutions for Vladivostok, visa liberalization, and tax privileges. China has the potential to become the biggest investor in the Russian Far East (including Now Primorie-1 and -2). This approach seems to have dominated, as reflected in the 2016 "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," where the role of the Asia-Pacific region is strongly emphasized.[92]

87 Masumi Motomura, "The Russian Energy Outlook and Its Influence on East Asia," *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 25(2008), pp. 67–87.

88 Kuhrt, "Russia and China," p. 92.

89 Bo Xu and William M. Reisinger, "Russia's Energy Diplomacy with China: Personalism and Institutionalism in Its Policy-Making Process," *The Pacific Review*, online first (2018).

90 Shoichi Itoh, "Sino-Russian Energy Relations in Northeast Asia and Beyond: Oil, Natural Gas, and Nuclear Power," in Shoichi Itoh, Ken Jimbo, Michito Tsuruoka, and Michael Yahuda, eds., *Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente. The Future of Major-Power Relations in North-East Asia* (Seattle: NBR, 2017), pp. 29–41.

91 Evgeny Kanaev, "Southeast Asia in Russia's Foreign Policy under D. Medvedev: An Interim Assessment," *Eurasian Review* 3 (2010), pp. 107–116.

92 It is described as a destination of global power and development potential's shift. Russia aims at "using the possibilities it offers to implement socioeconomic development programmes in Russia's Siberia and Far East." See: *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016).

Meanwhile, Chinese investments on the Russian side of the border need to be briefly elaborated, as again revealing elements of the limes strategy in its economic-security dimension. As Igor Makarov and Alexandra Morozkina claimed in 2015, "Many businesspeople confirm that there have been informal limitations to Chinese participation in strategic projects in Russia. The Russian government has always viewed Chinese economic expansion in Russia as a threat, and feared that it would be followed by demographic expansion."[93] In 2012, Chinese direct investments in Russia showed a growing trend, similar to Japan, with the later removal of formal limitations in 2013.[94] Current foreign investments tend to be concentrated in Sakhalin, and in the field of hydrocarbons. In 2017, China was the main investor in over half of 43 "investment harbor" projects, with the input almost three times higher than the next on the list, Japan.[95] Chinese farming companies were attracted and responded to an invitation to farm soya beans on the Russian side of the border in 2017.[96] At the same time, reading official statistics requires caution,[97] as they present various information[98] with different levels of reliability.[99]

Without doubt, China is a key actor in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the Asia-Pacific region. By resolving territorial disputes with China, Russia was not only safeguarding its border but also "pushing" Chinese interests in another direction. From the Russian perspective, a China involved in maritime disputes and conflicts in the south is less eager and able to penetrate the north. Russia, similar to the interwar period and its policy toward

93 Igor Makarov and Alexandra Morozkina, "Regional Dimension of Foreign Direct Investment in Russia," *Paper 3*, p. 62.

94 Ibid.

95 Pavel A. Minakir and Denis V. Suslov, "Foreign Direct Investment in the Economy of the Russian Far East," *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast Volume* 11:3 (2018), pp. 41–56.

96 Zheng, Sarah, "A Deal with Moscow Could Help China Feed Its Voracious Appetite for Soybeans, but Analysts are Sceptical About the Quality of the Plots on Offer," *South China Morning Post* (12 December, 2018).

97 Official governmental data show that since 2014, the Far East Federal District has attracted about one fourth of all the foreign investments to Russia (it was only 2% in 2011). Meanwhile, not all of the regions present data, so the actual level of Chinese involvement is difficult to estimate reliably and "one gets the impression that China Far East as an object of direct investment is not very interesting yet." See: "Residents Are Cautious. How to Read Reports on Foreign Investments in the Far East," *East Russia (*6 March, 2018).

98 For example, the share of foreign investments in Khabarovsk was estimated at 45% in 2016. See: "Extent of Chinese Influence in Russian Far East Shown by Investment in Khabarovsk," *The Siberian Times* (3 January, 2016).

99 For example, half of the foreign applications to invest in special economic zones came from Chinese companies. See: Jiyoung Min and Boogyun Kang, "Promoting New Growth: 'Advanced Special Economic Zones'" in Helge Blakkisrud and Elana Wilson Rowe, eds., *Russia's Turn to the East: Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 51–74.

Japan, prefers China to direct its political impetus to the south.[100]

As Natasha Kuhrt emphasized, "(...) while concern is routinely expressed regarding China's policy intentions toward the Russian Far East, at the broader level Russia has often appeared to be remarkably sanguine about China's rise, by comparison with the United States for instance. Over the past decade, not only policymakers, but also military figures, have appeared to downplay and idea of a threat from China."[101] Through such an approach to security, Russia can reconstruct its position as an empire using the "power of space" toward other actors in the region. The final border settlement with China, creating limes, was followed by a hardening of the territorial disputes with Japan, which peaked with the first Russian leader ever, President Dmitry Medvedev, visiting the Kuril Islands in 2010. This symbolic demonstration of territorial power resulted in a diplomatic crisis in mutual relations.[102] Vladimir Putin expressed more pragmatism with regard to the issue, especially in 2012. In 2016, in an attempt to solve the territorial dispute, he declared that "we don't trade in territories"[103] in the context of the issue. In December 2018, after the failure of negotiations with Japan, Russia declared the construction of new barracks on the archipelago.[104]

Similar tendencies can be detected in China. Mark Burles defined four elements behind China's policy toward Russia in the first decade of the post-Cold War period: first, the concentration on stability in its border provinces and on borders themselves; second, economic development of the provinces located inland of the state; third, demand for energy resources; and fourth, concentration on China's own relative position in the new strategic environment.[105] This is a part of more general developments in China. "With the disappearance of an immediate threat of invasion and the emergence of dynamic economic centers along its eastern coast, China's security policy in the 1980s shifted from simply ensuring survival in a hostile world to preventing international insta-

100 Wolff, "Russia and China Relations Just Offshore."

101 Kuhrt, "Russia and China," p. 92.

102 Yukiko Kuroiwa, "Northern Challenges: The Japan–Russian Border Dispute and Local Voices," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26:3 (2011), p. 283.

103 John Micklethwait, "Vladimir Putin Just Wants to Be Friends," *Bloomberg Businessweek* (8 September, 2016).

104 A question can be posed of why Russia was able to resolve the territorial dispute with China but not with Japan (the suggestion to follow the Russian–Chinese pattern is presented in the literature). The answer seems to lie in what "stabilizing the East" means for Russia: it neither necessarily refers to the entire Asia-Pacific region nor all the actors. China is considered a key actor and the only real power (additionally, continuously strengthening its potential and aspirations) able to use traditional foreign policy tools. Japan is not, and the Kuril dispute worsening can be interpreted as a situation where, owing to internal consolidation, space (promises) does not have to be exchanged for time by Russia anymore. Moreover, the Islands' return would undermine the "power of empire," thereby strengthening similar claims, e.g., from Ukraine. See: Trenin and Weber, *Russia's Pacific Future*, p. 7.

105 Burles, *Chinese Policy towards Russia*, p. 5.

bilities from undermining its prospects for continued economic development. In this context, minimizing the potential for conflict or instability along its border [was] a central goal of China's policies toward the Soviet Union's successor states."[106]

The Chinese response to the Western, state-centric Westphalian model is manifested in various ways, one of them being the "Tianxia system." In this system, improving China's international position ought to be exercised in the spirit of responsibility for the world, based on inclusion, contrary to the West. As such, Tianxia "is part of China's assertion of normative soft power, but in a way that complements China's hard power of economic and military strength. In other words, Tianxia is not a post-hegemonic ideal, so much as a proposal for a new hegemony."[107] This translates into the idea of multipolarity, being "an important trend in international affairs as early as the mid-1980s. This trend was the product of the declining relative power and influence of the two superpowers and the emergence of economic power centers in Europe and Asia. It was expected to produce a world where many large powers, or *poles*, exist and no single power is able to impose its will on others."[108]

Critical remarks should be made, however, when investigating another Russian–Chinese neighborhood, namely, Central Asia, where the two powers' interrelations have significant consequences.[109] Central Asia has been believed, following Dugin's ideas, to be a pivotal Eurasian component of the rebirth of the Russian empire, which has been undermined, however, by Russian nationalism and the "color revolutions" that have paved the way for US and Chinese interest and influence over the region.[110] Central Asia is a space where attempts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space have materialized, resulting in the Eurasian Customs Union being created by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 2010; in the Eurasian Economic Space, in 2012; and in the Eurasian Economic Union, including also Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, in 2015. The Eurasian Economic Union is considered not only as an answer to the EU but also to the Belt and Road Initiative,[111] being a tool for Chinese penetration of the Central Asian republics. If this is so, Central Asia seems to be the main space of both states' conflicting influences.[112] One of the Chinese responses to the new strategic situation af-

106 Ibid., p. 8.

107 William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review* 10 (2008), pp. 749–761.

108 Burles, *Chinese Policy towards Russia*, p. 29.

109 Brian Franchell, Angela Stent, Yu Bin, Alexander Lukin, Tomohiko Uyama, Hiroshi Yamazoe, and Robert Sutter, "The Strategic Implications of Russia-China Relations: Regional Perspectives," *Asia Policy* 13:1 (2018), pp. 1-45.

110 Shlapentokh, "Dugin, Eurasianism, and Central Asia," pp. 143–156.

111 Enrico Fels, "The Geopolitical Significance of Sino-Russian Cooperation in Central Asia for the Belt and Road Initiative," in Maximilian Mayer, ed., *Rethinking the Silk Road* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 247–267.

112 Kaneshko Sangar, "Russia and China as the Yin-and-Yang of 21st Century Eurasia?" in David Lane, Guichang Zhu, eds., *Changing Regional Alliances for China and the West* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), pp. 199–223.

ter the collapse of the Soviet Union and American global domination was the "good neighbor" policy. Ideological foundations were replaced with a more pragmatic approach, addressed especially at the surrounding states, under the assumption that territorial disputes will be silenced or even resolved, and contacts with more remote regions intensified. The aim was to create (at least partly) alternative offsets to those coming from the US in terms of technology, resources, markets, and security.[113] The silencing of the territorial dispute and the "good neighbor" policy was mainly employed with reference to Russia. What dominated the Chinese media was the narrative of the "best ever" relations with Russia. China's northern neighbor had been positively pictured over the last 15 years, although only 10% of press articles had been dedicated to Russia (compared with 30% concentrating on the US) of all texts related to the region.[114] The border was structured as limes, but with some perspectives for a networked (non)border. Nevertheless, the southern neighborhood, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu,[115] Spratly, and Paracel Islands, had been marked by numerous territorial tensions, and Central Asia is practically a form of march with Russia, which considers it its own colonial frontier.

6. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARD THE NEW POLITICAL ORDER IN EURASIA

The new geopolitical order in Eurasia can be described from the point of view of the border relations in the region. The way the edges of political-territorial units are (de)constructed reveals the nature of the units themselves as well as the relations among them. In Eurasia, it is first and foremost the game of Russia with the EU in the west and China in the east, a game characterized by the reversal of the structural position of the analyzed actors in global politics over the last three decades and the discursive (re)construction of their self-positioning in those developments. After the eastern enlargement in 2004, the EU obtained a new eastern flank, pushing its borders to the East following the strategy of a colonial frontier. Meanwhile, by virtue of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, the EU established and institutionalized its capacities in the field of external relations, making it, together with the European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, an entity fitting the imperial geopolitical model. Consequently, the EU became a global player, expanding its territory and influence, partly at the expense of Russia, using its "normative power." China, in experiencing enormous economic growth and having more

113 Burles, *Chinese policy towards Russia*, pp. 33–34

114 Chisako T. Masuo, "Russia's Weight for China in the Global Context: Is the China-Russia Partnership Long-lasting?" presentation during the Summer International Symposium *Northeast Asia's Faultline: One Hundred Years of Sino/Russian/Soviet Competitive Cooperation* (Sapporo, Japan, July 13–14, 2017).

115 Koji Furukawa, "Bordering Japan: Towards a Comprehensive Perspective," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26:3 (2011), p. 304; Yoshihiko Yamada, "Japan's New National Border Strategy and Maritime Security," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26:3 (2011), p. 361.

visible global (co)leadership ambitions, was already becoming the main point of reference in Asia, and also expanding its influence and looking for stabilization, which resulted in its limes border strategy in the north and, potentially, a colonial frontier strategy in Central Asia. This growing position of Russia's key neighbors occurred alongside Russia's weakening both in terms of economic development and political position in international relations. When comparing the European and Chinese integration projects, a significant difference is easily identifiable. The former is an official bloc, especially with regard to market issues. The latter is based on networking and informality, allowing more space for individual political and economic solutions.[116]

The abovementioned developments have been assisted by a conceptual turn in border theory and practice. At the same time, as Natasha Kuhrt stated, "the way in which globalization de-emphasizes territory is (...) uncomfortable for these states which continue to emphasize a Westphalian order based on the sacrosanct nature of state sovereignty."[117] Russia represents the case here. The findings of this analysis demonstrate that Russia has often suffered from the security paradox, especially when expanding territorially.[118] Space in its case is a source of both power and potential, but also weakness.[119] Its borders have always been marked by ethnic, cultural, and political diversity. To secure them, Russia has been attempting to push them further away, but this has only created more diversity and more instability. Meanwhile, the West and the East, located on Russia's borders, have always played a role in defining Russian ambitions, with the former being the main reference point (in pro or anti form) and the latter representing an argument with debates on distinctiveness from Europe.[120] As Yang Cheng claimed, "one major feature of Russian civilization is that the periphery is more important than the center (...) thus, Russia can only define its identity and interests in the process of confirming its relations with the other."[121] Together with Russia's political and economic depression in the post-Cold War period, and expansion of the neighboring structures, Russian borders have been under stress. This resulted in the realistic attempts at finally setting the eastern one (with China), subsequently achieving limes, and using the "power of time" to reverse the trend in the West by retaking the initiative when it was finally able to do so, in 2014. The result has been its own colonial frontier. The "power of empire" suggests downplaying the EU but engaging in realistic cooperation with China.

116 Sangar, "Russia and China as the Yin-and-Yang," pp. 199–223.

117 Kuhrt, "Russia and China," pp. 100–101.

118 Yang, "The Power of Diplomatic Traditions," pp. 25–40.

119 Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, p. 242.

120 Alexander Bukh, "Russian Perceptions of Japan and China in the Aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution: A Comparative Case Study of Boris Pil'niak's Travelogue," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26:3 (2011), pp. 345–355.

121 Yang, "The Power of Diplomatic Traditions," pp. 25–40.

This move corresponded with more general tendencies. In East Asia, the land borders are becoming increasingly peaceful, whereas the maritime borders have become more problematic. As Akihiro Iwashita noted, the "sea zones around the Eurasian continent have become a flashpoint for border issues. Tensions between China and Southeast Asia on the South China Sea are growing."[122] Although there are no border disputes between Russia and China, some elements of distrust are noticeable between the partners. Both China and Russia can afford more radical border policies toward third parties, as their common border, and consequently, their inland territories are secured. After the expansion of the European project, EUrope is in a conceptual and political crisis, additionally challenged by the Russian empire being reconstructed in the post-Soviet space.

122 Akihiro Iwashita, "An invitation to Japan's borderlands: at the geopolitical edge of the Eurasian continent," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26:3 (2011), pp. 279–282.