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RUSSIAN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA IN 1991 - 2010:
A DISAPPEARING POWER?

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ISSN 1028-3625

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Printed in Italy, July 2010
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/
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Abstract

Russian policy in Central Asia is usually analyzed within the context of the “New Great Game” theory. It usually assumes that Russia acts strategically and maximizes regional power. Analysis of real Russian foreign policy in Central Asia shows that this assumption is far from reality. Russian regional policy is chaotic, understanding of the interests is very vague and often contain mutually contradictory elements. The root of this situation can be discovered already in the crisis of Soviet modernization of Central Asia that caused a near-consensus desire of Russian political forces to completely withdraw from the region in 1991. The attempts to re-establish Moscow’s power in the region after that have usually represented non-systemic reactions to specific challenges or opportunities and all attempts to develop coherent understanding of Russian interests and aims in the region have failed. This was one of the important reasons of quick decline of Russian power and influence in the region that can be projected to the future, especially, within the context of recently lost Russian strategic control over energy transportation after realization of Chinese pipeline projects.

Keywords

Central Asia, Russian foreign policy, the “New Great Game”, pipelines, terrorism

Introduction

Russia till 1991 played the main role in Central Asia¹. Now it is still one of the key international players in this region, which represents a big interest for the international community as a source of huge oil and gas reserves and, at the same time, as the place from which many non-traditional security threats may arise (such as state failure, religious extremism and international terrorism). The importance of the analysis Russian policy in Central Asia is emphasized by various concepts of the “New Great Game”² within the limits of which this state is considered as one of the key participants of strategic international competition over the power and influence in this region.

The role of Russia in Central Asia is still a matter of extensive discussions from the point of view of both security studies and international political economy. Unstable coalitions and constantly changing balances of power make it hard for the scholars, who belong to a realist school of thought (they represent the majority of the “New Great Game” theorists) to stably assess Russian power in the region. The majority of experts thought that it was rising just before 9/11, then it diminished as a result of growing American involvement in the region, then grew once again as a result of consolidation of local elites around Russia after the colored revolutions, etc. Contemporary regional security studies also widely use the concepts of securitization and regional security complex, which are close to constructivist paradigm³. However, in this literature there are lots of disagreements on the character of regional security complex in Central Asia. For example, there is still a big discussion of whether Central Asia is an independent regional security complex⁴, or a part (sub-complex) of the regional security complex centered on Russia⁵. From the point of view of international political economy contemporary Central Asia represents a system of chaotically mixed and contradicting to each other economic obligations within different international organizations and institutions, which has been compared to a “spaghetti bowl”⁶ by the report of the Asian Banc of Development. All these organizations represent different “poles” of multi-polar Central Asian politics. Different organizations supported and financed by Russia, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the

¹ This international region includes 5 New Independent States: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

² See about the “New Great Game” in: Ahrari, M.E. *The New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia*. Washington: Inst. for Nat. Strategic Studies: Nat. Defense Univ., 1996; Jaffe, Amy Myers and Manning, Robert A., ‘The Myth of the Caspian “Great Game”: the Real Geopolitics of Energy’, *Survival*, 40:4 (Winter 1998–99), pp. 112–31; and Stephen Blank, ‘The United States and Central Asia’, in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds), *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*. Washington, DC and London: Brookings Institution and RIIA, 2001, pp. 127–51.

³ Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Could War Era*, 2nd ed. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; Buzan Barry, Wæver Ole, and de Wilde Jaap, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998; Buzan Barry and Wæver Ole, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁴ Coppieters Bruno, “The Partnership for Peace with Central Asia,” in *Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Eurasia*, vol. 3: *International Experience of Resolving Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. Bruno Coppieters, Eric Remacle, and Aleksei Zverev. Moscow, Ves’ mir, 1997; Peimani Hooman, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Jonson Lena and Allison Roy, “Central Asian Security: Internal and External Dynamics,” in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, ed. Lena Jonson and Roy Allison. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press/ London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001; and Burnashev, Rustam “Regional Security in Central Asia: Military Aspects,” in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

⁵ Roeder Philip G., “From Hierarchy to Hegemony: The Post-Soviet Security Complex,” in *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, ed. David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997; Buzan Barry and Wæver Ole, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁶ Asian Development Bank. Increasing gains from trade through regional cooperation in trade policy, transport, and customs transit. Asian Development Bank, 2006.

Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzEC) and the Customs Union of the members of the EvrAzEC, the Shanghai cooperation organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are prominent among regional international organizations, to which Central Asian states belong. There are huge disagreements between international experts on actual role and influence of these international organizations supported by Russia.

The literature on the “New Great Game” sees Russia within the conceptual context of strategic interaction of global powers and, therefore, presumes, by definition, that it really acts strategically. So, according to the tradition of strategic studies, *it views Russian policy as directed at maximization of power* (or, what is the same, analyzes it, *as if* it acts strategically, thus omitting lots of important details). In this paper I will basically challenge this assumption by focusing on correlations between strategic and non-strategic elements of Russian regional policy, which is usually omitted by too generalizing discourse of the “New Great Game”. From the point of view of such detailed analysis I would argue that Russian policy in the region (not only in the 1990-s, but also in the later periods) is, in reality, very chaotic and lacking any clear vision of Russian interests in Central Asia. However, this *non-strategic character of Russian regional policy can have a clear international consequence within the context of the “New Great Game”*. Therefore, I would also show that this internally contradictory character of Russian policy was one of the important reasons of quick decline of Russian power and influence in the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This absence of strategy gives the possibility to predict continuation of the steady decline of Russian power in the region in the future. Probably, it will even lead to the loss of the position of one of the independent “poles” of multi-polar Central Asian politics since Chinese influence is very quickly replacing Russian one, especially, after realization of Chinese pipeline projects.

Another objective of this paper is to make available for international specialists in IR and foreign policy the literature in Russian published in Russia and Central Asia analyzing Russian policy in the New Independent States of Central Asia in 1991-20107. Therefore, in my depictions of Russian policy in specific periods of time I will depend on the synthesis of this literature. Although this literature is often based on the same assumptions about strategic character of Russian policy, it is much more localized and familiar with the details, on which I will concentrate below. It very closely follows all actual twists and turns of actual Kremlin’s policy and closely monitors different, often contradictory, internal mechanisms of making foreign policy decisions. I will also use some original documents and

⁷ The following publications should be mentioned among others: Lusianin S.G. Eastern policy of Vladimir Putin: return of Russia to “the Great East” (2004-2008). Moscow: Asian-Pacific Region: the East-West, 2007; Lunev S.I. Independent republics of Central Asia and Russia: textbook. Moscow: Institute of oriental studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2001; Kazantsev A.A. “The great game” with unknown rules: world politics and Central Asia. Moscow: MGIMO, the Eurasian Heritage Foundation, 2008; Lunev S.I. Challenges of security to the southern borders of Russia. Moscow: Moscow Social Scientific Fund; 1999; Zvjagelskaja I.D., Naumkin V.V. Threats, challenges and risks of “nonconventional” nature (Central Asia). Moscow: Russian center of strategic and international researches, 1999; Chernyavsky S.I. Policy of Russia in Central Asia and Transcaucasia in 1992-2002, in Southern flank of CIS. Central Asia - Caspian sea - Caucasus: opportunities and challenges for Russia: collected works. Edited by M.M.Narinsky, A.V.Malgin. Moscow, 2003. pp. 35-54; Central Asian dimension of foreign policy of the Russian Federation, in Southern flank of CIS. Central Asia - Caspian sea - Caucasus: Energy and policy. Edited by M.M.Narinsky’s, A.V.Malgin’s. Moscow, 2005. Edition 2; Drug business: new threat to Russia from the East. Edited by G.I.Chufrin. Moscow: Institute of oriental studies of the Russian Academy of Science, 1996.; Arunova M. Russia and the states of Central Asia: cooperation in the sphere of security, Central Asia and Caucasus. 2001. # 2. p. 46-54; Malashenko A.V. Post-Soviet states of the South and the interests of Moscow, Pro et Contra, 2000, Volume 5 (3), p. 34-47; Malgin A.V. Basic characteristics of policy of Russia towards the Caspian energy resources, International and local aspects of regulation of political and social conflicts in the Russian Federation: collected scientific works of grantees of Moscow Social Scientific Fund/ Moscow public scientific fund; Edited by A.D.Bogaturov. Moscow, 1999. p. 51-68; Nikonov V. Policy of Russia in Central Asia, Central Asia and Caucasus, 1997. # 8; Fomenko O. Russia in the Caspian region: oil and policy, Obozrevatel -Observer. 2001. # 7-8. p. 38-42; Chernjavsky S.I. “the Great silk road” and interests of Russia, World economy and international relations, 1999, # 6, p. 95-98; Elianov A.J., Ushakov H.A. Russia - Central Asia: problems and tendencies of economic interaction, the East = Oriens: Afro-Asian societies: the history and the present, 1997. # 4. p. 83-111. (all in Russian)

my personal experience of working as a foreign policy expert with different Russian governmental bodies, such as State Duma and foreign ministry (since 1999), as well as expert assessments that I have received as a result of intensive contacts with other Russian, Central Asian and international experts. I believe that this type of analysis focused on the specific details and critical introduction of this type of literature to the discussions on the “New Great Game” can throw new light on some of the previously mentioned discussions on actual Russian role in Central Asia.

The text below contains analysis of Russian policy in this new international region in 1991 – 2010, i.e. *from dissolution of the Soviet Union to the loss of strategic control over energy transportation routes due to realization of Chinese pipeline projects*. First, I will focus on the crisis caused by the contradictions of Soviet modernization that predetermined quick decline of Russian power and influence in Central Asia later. Then I will analyze Russian foreign policy in 1991-2010 paying much attention to its coherency and internal logic from the point of view of maximization of power, or absence of both. Bilateral relations with Central Asian states, the work of pro-Russian regional international organizations and interaction with the great world powers in the region will be included in this analysis.

It is also very important to mention that Central Asian countries have very different pathways of development (ranging from extremely strong state control over economy and society in Turkmenistan to quite comparatively liberal Kazakh model) and very different styles of foreign policies (from isolationist and oriented towards bilateral relations Turkmenistan, and, to some extent, Uzbekistan, to multilateralist and integration-oriented Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). This specificity of each Central Asian state has strongly influenced Russian foreign policy in the region and the influence of these specific pathways would continue to grow. However, it would be hard to deal with this specificity within one working paper, so some of the specific issues associated with each country would be mentioned only occasionally, within the context of Russian foreign policy.

The crisis of Soviet modernization project in Central Asia, or why Russia wanted to withdraw from the region in 1991?

Russian empire before 1917 and, especially, the USSR have realized in Central Asia⁸ a specific variant of modernization, which was in many respects derivative of the model which was typical for Russia itself. I cannot within the limits of the present work consider the discussion about this specific way of development⁹. Here I will refer to its characteristic provided in the monograph of A.G.Vishnevsky “The sickle and the ruble”¹⁰. According to it, the basic contradiction of Soviet modernization can be

⁸ In the period before 1917 revolution Central Asia was equalized with “Turkestan” (it did not include present-day Kazakhstan (separated into different regions) and Turkmenistan – “Transcaspian region”). During the Soviet period four Central Asian (Sredneaziatskie) republics and Kazakhstan constituted different geographic areas, while after 1991 Kazakhstan is considered as the fifth Central Asian state. English name of the region does not reflect the change of Russian (and different local Turkic) names of the region both in Central Asia itself and in Russia after 1991: from “Srednyaya Aziya” to “Zentralnaya Aziya” (both are usually translated as the same into English). Also, the names of the Soviet republics and the New Independent States as well as the names of the cities, etc have been changed, so, these changes are also reflected in different parts of this paper.

⁹ See some discussions on this matter only within Russian political science: Pivovarov Y.S. Russian policy in its historical and cultural relations. Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2006.; Birukov N.I., Sergeev V.M. Formation of institutes of representative authority in the present-day Russia. Moscow: Letny Sad, 2004; Akhieser A.S. Russia: critical analysis of historical experience: (social and cultural dynamics of Russia): in 2 volumes, ed. 2, revised and modified. Novosibirsk: Siberian chronograph, 1997-1998. 2 volumes; Etkind A.M. Khlyst: sects, literature and revolution. Moscow: New literary review, 1998; Uvarov M.S. Binary archetype: evolution of the idea of antinomism in the history of European philosophy and culture. St. Petersburg: the Baltic Technical University, Faculty of philosophy, 1996. (all in Russian)

¹⁰ Vishnevsky A.G. The sickle and the ruble: conservative modernization in the USSR. Moscow: the Unified Humanitarian Publishing House, 1998 (in Russian).

explained on the basis of ideology of “conservative revolution”: creation of highly modernized and industrialized centers (for example, in the spheres of military or space hi-tech) based on traditional, even violently revived archaic institutions in other, more basic spheres (for example, revival of the institute of traditional forms of integration in the form of collective farms in the villages).

This, in my opinion, was also the basic contradiction of the Soviet modernization of Central Asia and, what is most important, this region turned out to be the place where the contradictions of the Soviet modernization became especially apparent. The reason was a very low degree of integration of Russian and indigenous population in comparison with other parts of the Russian empire and the USSR. Later, this contradiction was also visible in huge gaps between cities and villages, industry and agriculture, official and “shadow” sectors of economy¹¹.

The historiographic tradition existing in Russia and the USSR was for a long period of time exaggerating the merits of the Soviet and Russian modernization for the Central Asian people¹². Now rather serious discussions about Russian and Soviet heritage are taking place in the Central Asian historiographies¹³.

Balanced analysis of the results of this modernization will give rather mixed picture (*although, in my analysis below I would mostly concentrate on the negative sides and problems associated with Soviet modernization as an explanation, why Russian policymakers in 1991 wanted to withdraw from the region*). On the one hand, within the borders of the Russian Empire (between the conquest of the region and the beginning of the revolutionary events), and then the USSR (between the cessation of Basmachi rebellion and collapse of the union state) a high degree of political stability was assured, which promoted accelerated development. Within historically short period of time the modern city life, the industry, the infrastructure of transport and communication were established in the region. Nomadic people were transferred to the settled way of life. As a result of the national-state delimitation of 1920-1930-s the modern nations with their literary languages and cultures were created. But here there were “buts” as well as in all other achievements. In particular, the national attribution of different groups of people based on combination of political and anthropological considerations turned out to be very contradictory, and it provided the ground for many future conflicts.

Education and public health systems established in Central Asia during the Soviet time were characterized by low quality, but their mass and omnitude character served as a benchmark for many developing countries. Tashkent within a long period of time was positioned as the center of international education and the Soviet model of modernization for the countries of “the third world”, especially, for the Muslim countries. Until the recent time with respect to the educational level the

¹¹ Social shape of the East. Edited by R.G.Landa [et al]. Moscow: Publishing company “East literature”, 1999 (in Russian).

¹² See, for example: Radjabov Z.Sh. On historical roots of friendship of people of Central Asia with the great Russian people. Stalinabad: Tadjikoisdat, 1954. p.115; Rashidov S. Forever together with Russian people (About progressive value of unification of Central Asia with Russia), the Communist. 1959. # 10. p. 39-52; Piaskovsky A.V. Joining of Central Asian people to revolutionary struggle of the Russian people is the major progressive consequence of Central Asia’s unification with Russia, Materials of the Common scientific session, devoted to progressive value of accession of Central Asia to Russia. Tashkent, 1959. p. 56-131; History of Uzbek SSR: in 4 volumes/Academy of science of Uzbek SSR, Institute of History and Archeology; the Editor-in-chief: R.H.Ahminova [et al]. Tashkent: 1967–1968; vol. 2. 1968. p. 662; Babakhanov M. The precondition of formation of the revolutionary union of workers of Turkestan with the Russian proletariat. Dushanbe: Irfon, 1975. p.312; Momunbaev I. The Great October Socialist Revolution and creation of the basis of Kyrgyz Soviet statehood. Frunze: Kirgizgosizdat, 1962. p.79; Malabaev D.M. Formation of the USSR and development of the national statehood of Kyrgyz people. Frunze: Ylym, 1972. p.45. vol. 2. 1968. p. 662 (all in Russian).

¹³ See especially: Saparmyrat, Turkmenbashi. Rukhnama: in 2 volumes. Ashgabat: Turkmen state publishing service, 2002-2004. vol. 1. 2002 (in Russian); Saparmyrat, Türkmenbaşy. Ruhnama (Ikinji kitap). Tuerkmenin ruhy beyikligi. Ashgabat: Tuerkmen doewlet neshiryat gullugy, 2004 (in Turkmen); Ahmedov B. History. The textbook for the 5 class of high school. Tashkent, 1999; Rakhimov Z. History of Uzbekistan for the 9 class of high school. - Tashkent, 2001 (in Uzbek).

post-Soviet Central Asia was very favorably standing out against the background of the adjacent areas (Iran, Afghanistan, Chinese Xingjian). Through Russian language and Russian culture the Central Asian people have joined the achievements of Western civilization and global culture. It was noticed by such outstanding intellectuals of the region as, for example, Chingiz Aitmatov, who himself was writing in Russian¹⁴.

However, indigenous Central Asian people have paid too high price for the Russian and Soviet modernization. During different periods there were certain elements of policy of violent Russification. Indigenous people of the region (especially during the Russian Empire, the first revolutionary years, the period of struggle with Basmachi) were completely deprived of the right to dispose of their destiny. Then the policy of “korenizatsiia” (indigenization) of the state machine (reservation of important state positions for the representatives of local ethnos) gradually eased this tendency. As well as in the other regions of the former USSR, the population of the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan has paid a high price for industrialization, violent collectivization, the victory in the Second World War. At last, the Soviet modernization of the region was remarkable for economic, ecological, social and cultural disproportions significantly surpassing those for many other regions of the former USSR.

It is also important that there always was the mentioned above combination of elements of high modernity and grass-root archaic element typical according to A.G.Vishnevsky for the Soviet modernization, in general.

For example, mass introduction of cotton-growing in collective farms and state farms became the basis for development of agriculture of four Central Asian republics (Uzbek, Turkmen, Kyrgyz and Tajik SSR). It led to very serious complex archaization of rural areas of the Soviet Central Asia. They started to remind more and more traditional agrarian societies of the Ancient East with their prevalence of mass involuntary manual labor¹⁵ and huge irrigational constructions¹⁶. The share of manual labor in agriculture of the Central Asian republics according even to the Soviet statistics varied from 85 up to 93 %, i.e. the region was still in pre-industrial epoch. Moreover, this labor was usually not free since force was intensively used to make people to work on the fields. It was a serious structural step back, for example, even in comparison with the period of late Russian Empire when the elements of market structure were actively interfering with social and economic life of the region¹⁷.

Complex consequences of archaization of the agriculture became the causes of the obvious crisis of the model of Soviet modernization observed in the 1970-1980-s. Combination of archaic social structures, that caused high birth rates¹⁸, with the Soviet mass system of public health led to the demographic explosion. The last is usually defined in the demography as an increase in population of more than 2 % per year¹⁹.

According to the census of the year 1989 the annual increase of population in the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan made 2,6 % in the 1980-s. However, it essentially varied among different ethnic and territorial groups. In Kazakhstan with its high share of European population the increase of

¹⁴ Aitmatov Ch. My largest wealth is the Russian language, broadcast of Russian State TV and radio company “Voice of Russia”. Available http://www.vor.ru/culture/cultarch225_rus.html (Accessed on 21 February 2009) (in Russian).

¹⁵ See: Labor in the USSR: collected works: 1988. Published by the State Committee of the USSR on statistics, Informational and publishing center. Moscow: Finance and statistics, 1989. p. 235 (in Russian).

¹⁶ Wittfogel K.A. Oriental despotism; a comparative study of total power. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957.

¹⁷ Poliakov S.P. Present-day Central Asian village: traditional forms of ownership in quasi-industrial system, in Peasantry and industrial civilization: collected works. Published by the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of oriental studies. Editors-in-chief: Y.G.Alexandrov, S.A.Panarin. 1993. pp. 177-192 (in Russian).

¹⁸ For pre-modern societies the so-called “first model” of reproduction of the population is typical and it is characterized by a combination of high birth rate and low life time.

¹⁹ Khrustalyov M.A. Central Asia in foreign policy of Russia. Moscow: MGIMO, 1994. p.38 (in Russian).

population was below the level of the demographic explosion (1,5 %), whereas in Tajikistan it was much higher (3,2 %) ²⁰. Huge difference between the levels of birth rate was also observed between cities and rural areas ²¹.

In order to avoid falling life standards under the conditions of “demographic explosion”, the economic growth in percentage terms should surpass the rate of population increase in approximately 2 times. Accordingly, the late-Soviet Central Asia needed 6-7 % GDP growth or 5-6 % national income increase per year ²². At the same time, the rates of the national income increase in Central Asia were about 3 % at the beginning of 1980, and then they gradually decreased ²³. In 1990 the growth of manufacturing sector of economy finally stopped.

Because of large quantity of children and low productivity of manual labor the mass *poverty* became a very serious problem of the Central Asian republics of the period of “highly-developed socialism”. The Soviet statistics extremely seriously distorted the situation, but it was also giving a depressing picture. Here are, for example, the data of State Statistical Committee (Goskomstat) of the USSR for the year 1990 regarding the level of incomes for different groups of population ²⁴. But, of course, here I use the definition of poverty, which was not recognized by official Soviet statistics.

Republic of the USSR/incomes of the population	Percent of the population with the income less than 100 rbl. per capita (the poorest), in %	Percent of the population with the income from 100 up to 150 rbl. per capita (poor) in %	The total percent of the population with the income less than 150 rbl. per capita (poor and the poorest), in %
Tajikistan	67,8	21,6	89,4
Uzbekistan	57,1	26,8	83,9
Turkmenistan	49,2	29,6	78,8
Kyrgyzstan	46,6	30,8	77,4
Kazakhstan	24,4	31,1	55,5

Poverty caused the problem of *malnutrition*. Owing to the low price for bread the percent of people suffering from the shortage of it (according to rather high Soviet norms of bread consumption) was low (from 0,8 % in Uzbekistan up to 5,3 % in Tajikistan). However lack of meat in the food ration became a permanent phenomenon: from 76 % of the population in Turkmenistan up to 92 % of the population in Tajikistan did not get enough of it ²⁵. Even consumption of vegetables and fruit for the majority of the population living in the region characterized by favorable climate for their cultivation was below the norm, since the land was occupied with cotton. In general, it is a well-known fact for

²⁰ Demographic year-book of the USSR/ State Committee of the USSR on statistics, Informational and publishing center. Moscow: Finance and statistics, 1990. p. 639 (in Russian).

²¹ Social life of the East. Edited by R.G.Landa [et al]. Moscow: Publishing company “Eastern Literature”, 1999. p.405 (in Russian).

²² Khrustalyov M.A. Central Asia in foreign policy of Russia. Moscow: MGIMO, 1994. p. 38 (in Russian).

²³ National economy of the USSR in 1990: statistical year-book / State Committee of the USSR on statistics, Informational and publishing center-Moscow: Finance and statistics, 199. p.750 (in Russian).

²⁴ The national economy of the USSR in 1990: statistical year-book / State Committee of the USSR on statistics, Informational and publishing center. Moscow: Finance and statistics, 1991. p.750; Khrustalyov M.A. Central Asia in foreign policy of Russia. Moscow: MGIMO, 1994. p. 37 (all in Russian).

²⁵ Ibid.

everyone who lived in the region at that time, that the agricultural population which had to work manually a lot, usually consumed bread with tea, and they saw meat only during big celebrations.

Since women and children were working in constantly defoliated cotton fields, it very seriously affected the state of health of indigenous population of the region. For gathering the cotton it is required to spray from planes a plenty of poisonous substances causing falling off of leaves. Negative consequences for health of such reagents are well-known since the times of the Vietnam war, when the jungles were defoliated with their help. The other problem was application of huge quantity of chemical fertilizers, and in Turkmenistan and a number of the other republics there was a problem of salinization of soils and washing them with acids.

Besides, the fact of very low standards of education was well-known, since schoolchildren and students were gathering cotton instead of studying. Then these "experts" were getting "phony" diplomas and, as a result, educational, public health and culture institutions were overfull of really semiliterate people.

The other characteristic feature of "highly-developed socialism" in the Soviet Central Asia (but not in Kazakhstan) was *disurbanization*, i.e. decrease in share of urban population because of high birth rates in the countryside. So, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the share of urban population began to decrease already in the 1970-s, and in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan - in the 1980-s. The existing huge agrarian overpopulation was accompanied by the mass latent unemployment (from 40 up to 65 % of the population)²⁶.

Cities, industry and transport infrastructure existed according to the logic of the Soviet modernization separately from this rural world. It was apparent, first of all, in the national structure and culture of their population. Russian-speakers from non-Asian republics or "Russified" representatives of indigenous people prevailed there. The standards of living and the level of development of culture were essentially higher there.

The paradox was that in overpopulated and labor-redundant Central Asia the industry, transport and, in general, the city life during the Soviet period were established and maintained mainly due to migration of highly skilled Russian-speaking specialists to the region. Russia and a number of other republics, thus, were originally acting as sources of migration. However practically in all republics of Central Asia and in Kazakhstan the outflow of the Russian-speaking population began already in the 1970-s.

There were many reasons of this. Russia and other more western union republics were developing more quickly, and living standards were higher there. The Soviet policy of "corenization" of the state machine and the clan structure of the Central Asian ethnoses led to the situation, when the representatives of Russian-speaking population had no ability to receive most prestigious jobs. Russian-speaking intelligentsia (alongside with intellectuals from other "nontitular" nationalities) also turned out to be under the pressure of the representatives of the "main" ethnos, who had received higher education. So, the Russians, especially, highly qualified specialists, who lived in the Central Asian republics, were quite unhappy.

On the other hand, the situation with development of national cultures was not as idyllic as the Soviet propaganda described and this was the cause of unhappiness of local intelligentsia. In the cities local languages were replaced by Russian. Entire generations of local intelligentsia did not speak their mother tongue at all. Moreover, racist conceptions, that the cultures of indigenous people of Central Asia are "worse" and "more retrograde" than the Russian culture were incorporated into the dominating culture. As a result, education, culture and propaganda systems were introducing the inferiority complex in the minds of the region's indigenous population.

²⁶ Khrustal'ov M.A. Central Asia in foreign policy of Russia. Moscow: MGIMO, 1994. p.12 (in Russian).

The process of desurbanization in Central Asia did not mean that the cities stopped growing at all. Their population continued to grow, but less quickly than population of rural areas, moreover there was also a specificity of urban growth. The migratory pressure of rural population affected the cities of Central Asia more and more. Young people leaving the country did not find work in the official sector of the economy in the cities; they also could not get housing officially. As a result entire quarters of informal construction (“*nakhalstroï*”)²⁷ appeared, the residents of which were often working in the shadow sector of economy. This sector was characterized by semicriminal nature and by much higher incomes in comparison with the official employment opportunities²⁸. Russian-speaking population, as a rule, was completely ejected from this sector of economy, and it was monopolized by local ethnic groups and clans.

Obvious crisis of the Soviet model of development and weakening of Soviet control led to religious renaissance. In Uzbekistan and, especially, in Tajikistan the processes of Islamic revival started. In the 1970-80-s underground religious groups began their activity in both republics. They distributed religious literature, studied and popularized Islam. The most famous in Tajikistan was the underground Youth organization (created in 1978), the chairman of which was Said Abdullo Nuri²⁹, the future leader of United Tajik Opposition. A great role in these processes was played by the representatives of local intelligentsia, who worked as an interpreters for the Soviet army in Afghanistan and thus received access to Farsi-language religious literature, mostly, of fundamentalist character.

The war in Afghanistan also resulted in growth of illegal import of heroin into the USSR. As a result of this the ties of criminal groups of drug-producing (and traditional drug-consuming) regions of Central Asia (for example, Chui valley or Kopet-Daga area) with Central Russia strengthened.

Behind the bureaucratic façade of state and party institutions clientelist structures developed that were characterized by widespread corruption. Due to the “cotton cases” (investigation of widespread fraud in cotton production, especially, in Uzbekistan) during Andropov and early Gorbachev period Central Asia was strongly associated with corruption in Soviet mass consciousness. Although, one should take into account that modern Uzbek historiographers tend to consider the “cotton cases” as an anti-Uzbek campaign initiated from Moscow (which is partially true, because only in this republic anti-corruption campaign was so strong, so one can talk of “selective justice”). Clientelist structures and different power networks that developed during the Soviet period became the basis of local political systems after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Gradually weakening control of the Soviet authorities over the population led to increased conflicts. In 1986 in Alma-Ata and in a number of other cities of Kazakhstan the actions under national and democratic slogans (“*Zheltoxan*”) took place. They were caused by Gorbachev’s attempt to appoint non-Kazakh person to the post of republic’s Communist party leader.

In 1989 a real genocide organized by Uzbek groups against the Turks–Meskhetians living in the Uzbek part of Ferghana valley happened. The conflicts between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people in the Osh area of Kyrgyzstan in 1990 also caused lots of victims. In Turkmenistan in late Soviet period the group fights of students of different tribes (for example, Teke and Iomuds) became a frequent picture. The civil war in Tajikistan caused by regional and subethnic contradictions, which began in 1992 was the logic continuation of these processes. The process of Islamization was also getting out of control of early intelligentsia groups and was spreading towards semi-illiterate and marginalized, but highly aggressive groups of society.

²⁷ In the capitals of union republics the number of lumpenized population, including the population of “*nakhalstroï*” made up hundred thousands of people.

²⁸ Poliakov S.P. Traditionalism in the present-day Central Asian society. Moscow, 1989. p.112 (in Russian).

²⁹ Olimov M., Olimova S. Political Islam in the present-day Tajikistan, in *The Islam in the post-Soviet space: the opinion from inside*. Ed. by A.Malashenko, M.B.Olkott. Moscow, Moscow Carnegie's center, 2001. p. 85-204 (in Russian).

The Soviet model of modernization of Central Asia due to its inherent imbalances was causing serious problems to the republics of Central Asia. However, it did not give much also to Russia. Security considerations and the logic of “the Great Game” with the Great Britain were the key reasons of conquest of Central Asia during the period of Russian empire before 1917. Significant part of Russian bureaucracy opposed territorial expansion in this direction as senseless and costly enterprise³⁰. The region never brought any profits to Russia before 1917. The imperial government had to make huge investments in order to develop railroad transport and to help Russian migrants. Within the first 12 years after the conquest of Turkestan the expenses of the government 3 times exceeded the incomes. Even the most profitable branch of economy, i.e. the cotton growing during the period from 1895 till 1914 required up to 35 million golden rubles in governmental capital investments³¹.

Until the 1970-s Russia was a source of migration of qualified labor force to the region (and many people went there not voluntarily). It is very difficult to estimate the size of Russian economic subsidies to the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan during the Soviet period due to specificity of the Soviet statistics and system of pricing. According to official data in 1989 the size of economic subsidies of Russia to all other republics made about 53,5 billion dollars, and 48 % of these subsidies were provided to the Central Asian republics³². Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan paid nothing into the union budget, the contributions of Kyrgyzstan were insignificant. Only Kazakhstan was seriously financing the union government³³. According to the assessment of the experts of the “Economist” the size of subsidies of the union government in 1991 made 44 % of the budget of Tajikistan, 42 % of Uzbekistan, 36 % of Kyrgyzstan, 23 % of Kazakhstan, and 21 % of Turkmenistan³⁴. However, Turkmenistan received almost nothing from its oil and gas wealth due to the Soviet system of pricing, which was artificially subsidizing the end-product due to reduction of the prices for raw materials. Nearly the same things, although not in such huge scale as in unique Turkmen case, were taking place in the cases of all other Central Asian republics. So, both Russia and Central Asian union republics had the opportunity to complaint about this situation. But, in general, even in view of price disproportions, the republics of Central Asia (except for Turkmenistan) and even Kazakhstan were getting from Russia more, than they were giving to it. *Thus, both Russia and Central Asian republics had, for the different economic considerations, the reasons to be dissatisfied with the results of the Soviet modernization of the region. Exactly this became one of the reasons of the follow-up conscious minimization of the Russian presence in the region.*

If one refers to the political situation in Russia in 1991, he’ll find out, that practically all key political forces supported the idea to leave Central Asia. The then Russian “left” (i.e. the latest “liberals” and “democrats”) believed that the Russian Federation should make pro-European and pro-Western choice. They thought that Central Asia pulled Russia back, being both a source of social and economic backwardness of the union and “the bastion” of the Communist nomenclature. In their turn, “the right” of that time (for example, Polozkov’s group in the Communist Party of Russia or other predecessors of the latest “national-patriotic” or “red-brown” forces) were moving away from internationalism and tended to different versions of Russian nationalism. Accordingly, they also did not have serious interest in preserving Russia in the union with Muslim, non-Slavic, and subsidized republics. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, being the representative of more moderate form of conservatism,

³⁰ For details see: Khalphin N.A. Policy of Russia in Central Asia (1857–1868). Moscow: Publishing house of Eastern literature, 1960. p.272 (in Russian).

³¹ Republics of Central Asia during the developed socialism / K.E.Zhitkov [et al]; editorial board: A.N.Mihailov (responsible editor) [et al]. Moscow: “Mysl”, 1980. p. 153 (in Russian).

³² The national economy of the USSR in 1990: statistical year-book / State Committee of the USSR on statistics, Informational and publishing center. Moscow: Finance and statistics, 1991. p. 643 (in Russian).

³³ Khrustalyov M.A. Central Asia in foreign policy of Russia. Moscow: MGIMO, 1994. p.6 (in Russian).

³⁴ The Economist. 1993. V. 325. # 7791. p. 81 (in Russian).

also supported voluntary “divorce” of Russia and Central Asia³⁵. His opinion has played especially important role in formation of public spirit in the Russian Federation in favor of disintegration with Central Asia.

On the basis of the mentioned above considerations, the “democrats” who finally came to power in Russia after the collapse of the USSR have formulated (though in rather latent and implicit form) the first Central Asian strategy of the Russian Federation. The main idea was to withdraw from the region and to stop subsidizing it as quickly as it is only possible. They also hoped that transition to a market economy will produce an “economic miracle” and Central Asia will still continue to trade with Russia as with a center of economic growth. However, this trade would go on new terms, more favorable for Russia. Certain guarantee of preservation of key position of Russia in the economy of Central Asia, even in case of its voluntary withdrawal, was control over the transport infrastructure, especially over the infrastructure of energy transportation that later became a “holy grail” of Russian regional policy.

So the decision to dissolve the union and to get rid of the Central Asians was not only a result of a plot against Gorbachev, it was also a result of common vision of Russia’s better future without these republics, which was characteristic both of pro-Western liberals and conservative nationalists. *This historical background is very important in order to understand contradictions of Russian regional policy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union because the situation in Central Asia since 1991 has become much worse, so all factors that influenced the decision to dissolve the union in 1991 are still in action.*

I will give two examples proving this point of view. Even now those anti-liberal and anti-western political forces that mostly support reintegration of former Soviet republics are, simultaneously, mostly defend the “purity” of Russian nation as orthodox Christian and Slavic. These policies can not be combined, in principle, since closer integration with Central Asia will change national balance within Russia due to specific demographic circumstances. Economic integration with Central Asian countries is something like mantra for many politicians in Moscow. However, there is also common opinion that Russia should stop any economic assistance to other former Soviet republics. These two points of view can hardly be reconciled because much higher living standards in Russia may be diminished by integration with very poor and underdeveloped Central Asian states (the only exclusion seems to be Kazakhstan). Both contradictions, as I will show below, would define Russian policy since the disintegration of the Soviet union.

The failure of Russia’s attempts to withdraw from Central Asia, 1991–1994

The post-Soviet period began with unexpected for the population and the elites of the Central Asian countries dissolution of the USSR. The destiny of Central Asia was decided by three presidents of Slavic republics (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), without any consultation with their Turkic colleagues. So, the idea to dissolve the union and to get rid of the Central Asians, which was more or less openly supported by very important political groups inside Russia, was realized. At the beginning of the 1990-s the leaders of Central Asian New Independent States, who were very nervous about such unexpected crash of the Soviet Union, were the initiators of creation of the CIS and other integration processes in the post-Soviet area (for example, the Tashkent agreement, that later became the basis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization).

As a whole, the plans of Russian political elite described in the previous section proved to be total miscalculations. In the process of Russian withdrawal from the region a terrible chaos appeared there, which in the first half of the 1990-s could not be compensated by other out-of-region forces (the USA, Western European states, Turkey, China, Iran, etc.). This chaos started to threaten Russia itself more

³⁵ Solzhenitsyn A.I. How can we develop Russia: feasible deliberations. St. Petersburg, the Soviet writer, 1990. p.64 (in Russian).

and more, and so Russia had to be involved into regional matters even against the desire of its own leadership.

Even simple reduction of the economic assistance was a problem. In 1992 according to the statement of A. Shokhin, the Vice-Premier of the Russian government, the assistance to former union republics was reduced down to 17 billion dollars (10 % of the GDP), and more than a half of this aid was given to Central Asia³⁶. However, some alternative estimations show Russian assistance up to 20 % of Russian GDP in 1992³⁷ and up to 12 % of its GDP in 1993³⁸. In 1993 according to the statement of a well-known economist A. Illarionov the share of the Russian subsidies made nearly 70 % of GDP of Uzbekistan (that is obviously very seriously overestimated) and Tajikistan (that is more realistic, although, also seems an overestimation)³⁹. Only after 1993, due to “rejection” of Central Asia from the ruble zone, the Russian subsidies dramatically dropped.

At the same time, Russia, controlling Soviet gas and oil transportation systems, struck a terrible blow to the economy of Turkmenistan and, to a lesser degree, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, by blocking the entry of their oil and gas to the European market. Oil and gas from these countries were directed to the markets of the CIS countries (especially, Ukraine), which did not want or had no opportunity to pay according to the world prices. Thus, Russian gas and oil that would otherwise go to these former Soviet republics became available for export to Europe.

Gradual termination of the Russian economic assistance increased economic recession in Central Asia, that was also caused by the crisis of Socialist economic model, breakup of economic links with other republics, growth of political instability, unsuccessful and badly planned reforms. By 1993 the economic decline in all Central Asian countries varied from 20 - 25 % in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which had not accepted the ideology of radical market transition, up to 35 - 45 % in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan introducing “the shock therapy” model of transition and, finally, up to 50 % in war-struck Tajikistan⁴⁰.

Reduction of the Russian presence in the military sphere and in the sphere of security posed even more problems than economic withdrawal. Sometimes, it was simply impossible, since there was a threat of general destabilization of the situation in the region threatening the interests of the Russia itself. To react to this situation Russia, according to the expression of V. Naumkin, had to use military and political “triad”: peacemaking, joint protection of CIS borders and military presence³⁸.

How Russia was still militarily involved into Central Asian issues can be seen from the example of the Civil war in Tajikistan. In August of 1992 Mr. Nabiev, the President of Tajikistan, was overthrown as a result of mass actions of coalition of Islamic and democratic forces. He ran to the location of the 201-st division of former Soviet army (which at that moment, in many respects, nominally, was subordinate to the government of Russia). Dushanbe, the capital of the country was under the control of loose “Islamic-democratic coalition”. “The reds”, i.e. the opponents of “Islamic-democratic coalition”, with some Uzbek assistance created the People’s front. Coming from the south from Kurgan-Tyube and from the north from Leninabad with support of Uzbekistan, on December 4th, 1992 the army of the People’s front captured Dushanbe.

After that the 201-st division under the arrangement with both parties of the conflict with the purpose to prevent penetration into Dushanbe of different small gangs plundering the townspeople, occupied the key points of the capital. One should note that during the fighting both parties involved

³⁶ Polis, 1993, # 3; *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*. 1993. # 6. p. 77 (all in Russian).

³⁷ *Izvestiya*, 1993, November, 11 (in Russian).

³⁸ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1994, March, 6 (in Russian).

³⁹ *Izvestiya*, 1993, November, 11 (in Russian).

⁴⁰ The policy of Russia in Central Asia. Broadcast of Radio Svoboda. URL: <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/SP/1999/SP-62.asp> (Accessed on 21 February 2009) (in Russian).

into the civil war committed terrible atrocities against the civilian population that belonged to the other clans or regional groups. So, the involvement of the 201-st division in the conflict was, in many respects, inevitable. It is essential, that the territory controlled by the 201-st division during the war was playing the role of “refugee camps”, where people were hiding from different militias and gangs.

However, the 201-st division played a contradictory role in the conflict. Politically, the commanders of the division didn't want to obey to Moscow's democratic government. Besides, corruption was widespread. Even prior to the beginning of the civil war in 1992, the 201-st division, which was at the time disorganized and not properly controlled by Moscow, was the source of arms for both conflicting parties. One of the representatives of the Russian authorities noted, that “everything (in terms of arms and ammunition) was plundered” in it because of high corruption⁴¹. One should also understand that the parts of the 201-st division located in various parts of the republic turned out to be in a very difficult situation. Parts of the Russian division actually appeared to be in encirclement by various militias and had to organize the all-round defense within the borders of its military camps. In autumn of 1992 well trained and disciplined units from Russia reinforced the 201-st division. After that it restored its fighting efficiency, and the discipline essentially improved.

After the capture of Dushanbe the democratic government of Russia publicly supported the new Tajik government, having turned the blind eye to its Communist slogans and ethnic cleansing directed against rival regional groups. Boris Yeltsin, the President, Pavel Grachev, the Minister of Defense, and Andrey Kozyrev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, agreed that Tajikistan is “the zone of special interests of the Russian Federation”. Since Russia had no opportunity to defend it's own huge southern border, destabilization of Tajikistan opened the Russian Federation for the traffic of weapons and drugs from Afghanistan. Therefore, Russia has rendered to new Tajik government the significant economic and security assistance. According to the Agreement “On the cooperation in military sphere”, Russian military intervention also became more active. Even some cases were registered, when Russian military units accompanied the units of Tajik army, which were confiscating weapons in the villages and, sometimes, committed different atrocities⁴². Operations of this type, called “clear up” (“zachistka”) later became well-known to the international press due to Chechen conflict.

At this time in Afghanistan, where the remains of groups of Islamic opposition had ran to, preparation of new military operations in Tajikistan was going on. According to the request of the government of Tajikistan Russia transferred to Tajik-Afghan border the airborne troops first, and then the frontier guard units. At night on July 13th, 1993 one of Russian outposts was totally exterminated by one the of Tajik militia group, which had come from Afghanistan. This caused in Russia a wide public opposition against military involvement into Tajik issues, and in response the government of the Russian Federation offered the idea to create a coalition of forces of the CIS countries to guarantee stability in the region.

The government of Uzbekistan which also was under the pressure from its own Islamic extremist groups (especially, in Ferghana valley) was seriously concerned by the situation in the neighboring country. Besides, some representatives of Tajik Islamic-democratic coalition had territorial claims to Uzbekistan. The active position of Uzbekistan became one of the important stimuli for intensification of the military-political integration in the post-Soviet space. On May 15th, 1992 in Tashkent the heads of six CIS states - Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (4 of them are from Central Asia) signed the Agreement about collective security of the CIS. It became a legal ground for official intervention of Russia and neighboring Central Asian countries into the inter-Tajik conflict.

⁴¹ Human rights in Tajikistan: after events of the Civil war in 1992. Moscow: "Memorial" Human rights' Center, 1994. – p.95; Shaposhnikov E. On the security concept of Russia // *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn*. 1993. # 9. p. 5–15 (in Russian).

⁴² Human rights in Tajikistan: after events of the Civil war in 1992. Moscow: "Memorial" Human rights' Center, 1994. p.95 (in Russian).

In November 1993 during the joint session of the heads of the CIS states the collective peace-making forces (CPMF) for Tajikistan were created. It was planned, that they would include the contingents of the Russian army that had been stationed in Tajikistan before, Uzbek units participating in the war on the side the People's front, military units from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (1 battalion for each). However, in reality, the Uzbek forces were acting absolutely independently, and participation of the Kyrgyz battalion in CPMF was postponed several times. Only Kazakhstan completely carried out its obligations, though efficiency of actions of its battalion in Mountain Badakhshan was rather low.

At the beginning of the 1990-s Russia was also playing the key role in guaranteeing security of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. According to the Agreement of 1992 Kyrgyzstan delegated the issues of protection of the border with China to the border troops of Russia. Under the Agreement of 1994 the border troops at the local level were completed with the recruits from Kyrgyzstan. Russia paid 80 % of costs for these troops.

Turkmenistan did not sign the Tashkent agreement on collective security, but at the beginning of the 1990-s it was cooperating with Russia in military and border-protection spheres on a bilateral basis. An operative group of the Russian frontier guards was located on Turkmen borders. Thus, for example, in 1995 fifty armed conflicts took place on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Many Russian military men served in the army of Turkmenistan as senior officers, and the Council of Defense and National Security of Turkmenistan included the head of the operative group of the Ministry of Defense of Russia at the Ministry of Defense of Turkmenistan and the Commander of Russian border troops. At the beginning of the 1990s the army of Turkmenistan often was called "joint" Russian-Turkmen army⁴³.

The USA and the EU countries paid big attention to return of the nuclear weapon to Russia from Kazakhstan. In return on December 5th, 1994 in Budapest during the summit of the OSCE Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, Bill Clinton, the President of the USA, and John Major, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, signed the Memorandum on the guarantees of security to Kazakhstan. In 1995 the Chinese government also made the announcement granting to Kazakhstan security guarantees. Thus, the key world players have for the first time showed the opportunity of positive mutually advantageous cooperation in Central Asia.

At the same time, Uzbekistan have proclaimed a policy of taking full responsibility for its own security and refused from Russian assistance in this sphere. Tashkent aspired to position itself as a large regional power, a focus of internal Central Asian integration. Moreover, the Uzbek armed forces and special services were actively interfering with the conflicts in the neighboring territories of Tajikistan (on the side of the "reds") and in Afghanistan (on the side of the ethnic Uzbeks of the General Dustum).

More active Russian policy in Central Asian and increasing competition over regional influence, 1995–1998

By 1995 the policy of Russia in Central Asia started to change. This had a number of reasons caused by different foreign and domestic policy considerations. Due to obvious failure of the liberal reforms in Russia the dissolution of the USSR was now perceived by an essential part of voters as a catastrophe. As a result, president Yeltsin, in order to be re-elected in 1996, had to portray himself as the supporter of reintegration of former union republics. It also became obvious, that it was simply impossible for Russia to completely withdraw Central Asia because different security problems from this region could easily spread to the territory of the Russian Federation. The international competition

⁴³ For details see: Kazantsev A.A. Turkmenistan: the general review, Monitoring of the Institute of Humanitarian and Political research. 1999. # 1 (84) (in Russian).

for influence in Central Asia (especially, caused by the interest to energy deposits) also increased and it raised the value of the region in the eyes of the Russian political elite that was afraid of losing strategic control over the routes of energy transportation.

However, already at this period there appeared the main contradiction of Russian regional policy. *Russian political elite wanted to restore some elements of destroyed Soviet empire, however, it did not have the recipe to deal with the regional problems that had made Russia to withdraw from Central Asia earlier. For example, everyone seems to have forgotten (and the competition for Caspian sea energy was one of the reasons of this) that Russia had always spent in Central Asia much more than it had received from this region. So, if the Kremlin wanted to restore, at least, some elements of former control in the region, it had to be ready to systematically spend enough resources for this. However, Russian political elite was not ready to do this constantly, all expenditures were made (and are made even in 2010) on ad hoc basis. This type of policy is not strategic by definition.*

Essential circumstance was the fact, that both in Russia and in Central Asia the most acute period of the social and economic crisis was over by the middle of the 1990-s. As a result of this Russia in 1995-1996 had some resources, which could be used in foreign policy. However, in 1998 both Russia and the countries of Central Asia suffered very seriously from the global crisis of developing markets (the Russian default of 1998 was also a part of this crisis).

During this period a new, although still very vague understanding of Russian interests in Central Asia started to develop. *One should notice that the process of formulation of Russian strategic interests in the region is not completed even now, in 2010.* There are two groups of specific Russian interests: positive and negative ones, or the things that Russia would prefer to have in the region and the things that it would like not to have there. "To "positive" interests we attribute those interests, which promote strengthening of geopolitical positions of Russia, and can bring certain economic benefits. To "negative" interests we attribute threats and challenges, which Russia faces and which make it to spend some resources in the region"⁴⁴. The first group includes: opportunity to use military bases on the territory of the region, control over raw materials; development of common market and joint communication projects; import of cheap labor force; expansion of Russian influence on the southern flanks of former Soviet Union; supporting the status of the great world power due to regional influence. The second group of factors includes: struggle against illegal drugs' trade; controlling the growth of religious and political extremism; prevention of establishment of regional domination of international forces hostile to Russia⁴⁵. The problem is that these "interests" have been until now formulated as desires, not as mutually correlated strategic objectives. And there has been no allocation of specific resources in order to achieve these desires. So, these interests represented not real strategic interests, but wishful thinking.

On September 14th, 1995 the Decree of the President B. Yeltsin was issued according to which the reintegration of the New Independent States around Russia officially was considered as the major foreign policy priority⁴⁶. However, no clear strategy of achieving this objective was formulated.

The aspiration of the government of Russia to strengthen the integration processes was expressed in signing the agreement on the Customs Union between Russia and Belarus on January 5th, 1995. On January 20th, 1995 Kazakhstan joined the document. Three states signed another agreement stipulating the principles, mechanism and stages of creation of the Customs Union. On March 29th, 1996 Kyrgyzstan joined it. The same day this "group of four" signed the Agreement about extension

⁴⁴ Zviagelskaya I. Why Russia needs Central Asia, Continent (Kazakhstan). 2004. 4-17 February. P. 20 (in Russian).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ On approval of the strategic course of the Russian Federation with the states - participants of the Commonwealth of Independent States: the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, September 14th, 1995, #940: in edition of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 8/31/2005 // Consultant Plus: Version Prof. Technology 3000 [electronic resource] / " YurSpectr " Limited Company. Moscow, 2009 (in Russian).

of integration in the economic and humanitarian spheres involving formation of a unified economic space.

After activation of Russian foreign policy in Central Asia the problem of interaction with other major world powers in the region became important. This caused some tensions in relations between Russia and the USA. The government of the United States right at the beginning of the 1990-s was pursuing the policy of preferential cooperation with Russia. It also originally had no specific interest to Central Asia, except for transfer of the nuclear weapon from Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation. However since the middle of the 1990-s the administration of Clinton turned to more active policy in the New Independent States. In particular, in Central Asia Uzbek aspiration to turn into the center of regional integration was encouraged. A significant role in strengthening of the interest to Central Asia was also played by the American oil lobby due to growing international interests to oil and gas deposits of Caspian sea region. Practically synchronous increase of Russian and American involvement into Central Asian affairs caused a conflict of interests.

The issue of interaction with China was also important for Russia. On April 26th, 1996 in Shanghai the presidents of China and four Post-Soviet countries bordering it (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) signed the agreement on strengthening the trust in military sphere in border area. It stipulated for withdrawal of forces and arms, except for frontier troops, out of 100-kilometer frontier zone, refusal to carry out military maneuvers against the other party, restriction of the scope of maneuvers and number of forces participating in them, provision of mutual information about them, establishment of friendship between the army units of the parties located in the area of the border, mutual invitation of observers to military maneuvers.

As a whole, the paradox of the examined period consists in the fact that, despite of growth of interest of the government of Russia to Central Asia (which not always had a declarative pre-election nature), its positions in the region continued to weaken. There was a number of very serious reasons for this, which I will list below.

A. The USA, Western European states, Turkey, Pakistan and other participants of the “New Great Game” started to conduct more active policy in the region. These actors in many respects competed with Russia. In particular, western oil companies in Caspian sea region became very active after signing of “the Agreement of the century” with Azerbaijan. New transportation projects (TRACECA – “the Great silk road”) and pipeline routes (Transcaspian, Transafghan) were proposed. Cooperation of Central Asian countries with NATO was developing within the framework of Council of Euro-Atlantic partnership, and, later, “Partnership for peace” programs.

B. The USA were actively supporting the integration inside Central Asia without participation of Russia, in particular, the project of the Central Asian union having both economic, and military-political dimension (“Centrazbat”). On October 10th, 1997 in Strasbourg the constituent forum of GUAM took place. In April, 1999 Uzbekistan joined the organization. In 1999 Uzbekistan refused to prolong the Agreement about collective security of the CIS, which it had earlier initiated.

C. At the middle of the 1990-s Russian-Uzbek relations quickly deteriorated. The main reason of this was structural. Uzbekistan by virtue of a number of reasons of geographical, historical, demographic, military, etc. nature perceives itself as a natural focus of the Central Asian integration⁴⁷. In this connection it aspired to play a role of the main regional power alternative to all external forces. Thus, in the middle of the 1990-s Tashkent started to view Moscow as the main competitor. Situation in Tajikistan became one of the major specific reasons for deterioration of the relations. After capture of Dushanbe by the armies of the People’s front, low-intensity military operations were taking place in the areas along the Tajik-Afghan border, accompanied by negotiations at different levels (started in

⁴⁷ Tolipov F.F. The grand strategy of Uzbekistan in the context of geopolitical and ideological transformation of Central Asia. Tashkent: Fan, 2005 (in Russian).

1994). Russia and Iran played especially important role in pushing forward these talks. On June 27th, 1997 the agreement on division of power was signed between the rival forces. Under it Emomali Rakhmonov, the representative of the "reds", remained the leader of Tajikistan, and all positions in the state hierarchy were divided according to the principle 2/3 to the "reds", 1/3 - to the former "Islamic-democrats" (this loose coalition was transformed into United Tajik Opposition, UTO).

However as a result of inter-Tajik agreements all "red" positions were usurped by Kulyabians, the representatives of the clan of the President Rakhmonov. The other constituent force of the People's front, i.e. Leninabad (Hudjand) clan, was not included into the scheme of division of power. This regional clan was historically connected with Uzbekistan and it actively used Uzbek support during the civil war. At the same time, Rakhmonov actively relied on the military assistance of Russia.

Uzbekistan being dissatisfied with the situation in the neighboring country, was behind the attempt of military coup - invasion of the army of the Colonel Mahmud Hudoiberdyev from the Uzbek territory into Sogdiana district of Tajikistan in November 1998. The failure of this adventure led to sharp deterioration of Uzbek -Tajik and Uzbek-Russian relations. In particular, in Tajikistan the discussions that traditional Tajik territories (first of all, Bukhara and Samarkand) are controlled by Uzbekistan became widespread, and now there was official support to these kinds of arguments. For Uzbek leadership such discussions were especially painful because Uzbek leader Islam Karimov himself belongs to mostly Tajik-speaking Samarkand clan. So, this discussion also undermined his personal authority in Uzbekistan.

D. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan at the middle of the 1990-s continued to develop their multi-polar foreign policies. The degree of their dependence on Russia and orientation on it was constantly decreasing. In its turn, Turkmenistan moved to isolationism. Its government was dissatisfied with the fact, that Russia did not let Turkmen gas go to the European market. Thus, in particular, the cooperation in the military sphere was gradually decreasing. At the same time anti-Russian slogans were supported by official propaganda (for example, annual commemoration days of the capture of Geok-Tepe by the army of the general Skobelev during the Russian conquest of Central Asia were taking place).

Only Tajikistan, the government of which in opposition to Afghan and "Uzbek" threat in many respects depended on Russian direct military support continued to develop cooperation with the Russian Federation. However in the process of consolidation of the political regime in this country it also gradually started to move to the multi-vector policy (but, it would happen later, at the beginning of the 2000-s).

Increasing strategic instability and the growth of Russian influence in Central Asia, 1999 – 2001

In 1999 – 2001 security problems in Central Asia became very acute. The balance of power abruptly changed. The radical Islamic movement Taliban first appeared in Pakistan among Afghan refugees in 1994. It was widely believed in Central Asia that the Taliban was originally linked to the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, which had close ties with the American CIA, at least from the period of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The argument about 'US support of Taliban' was widely used to reinforce cooperation between anti-Taliban forces and Russia⁴⁸. It was reminiscent of the historic case of the period in the nineteenth century of the Great Game, when Pushtu tribes headed by the Afghan emir and supported by the British empire, the leading western country of the period, conquered Uzbek and Tajik principalities of the left bank of the Amu-Darya river. These principalities

⁴⁸ Lomagin M. The New Independent States as a sphere of interests of Russia and the USA, *Pro et Contra*, 5: 2, Spring, 2000.

were in coalition with the Bukhara emirate, situated on the territory of modern Uzbekistan, and Russia⁴⁹.

The Taliban had a clearly defined Pushtu character. This provoked the opposition of ethnic minorities predominant in the North of the country that formed the 'Northern Alliance'. Of especial importance for Russia and the Central Asian countries were the Uzbek forces of general Rashid Dustum (supported by Uzbekistan, Russia and Turkey) and Tajik forces of interim president Burhanuddin Rabbani and the famous warlord Ahmad Shah Masud (they were linked to Tajikistan and Russia). The growth of the Taliban's influence was perceived as a direct threat for all neighboring countries. Afghanistan quickly turned into the focus of attraction for all extremist Islamic groups of the world, including the Central Asian countries, the Russian North Caucasus, and Chinese Xinjiang. In 1996 the Taliban captured the Afghan capital Kabul, and by 1998 it controlled 90% of Afghan territory. The only exclusion was Tajik territory controlled by warlord Masud, who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda terrorists just before 9/11. After the Taliban had captured almost all of Afghan territory, the Central Asian countries became frontline states. Only Turkmenistan established friendly relations with the Taliban. Besides, there was a dangerous combination of Islamic extremism and crime in Afghanistan. This country in the 1990s turned into a major producer of opium poppies. One of the important routes of Afghan heroin trade was organized through Central Asia and Russia to Western Europe.

After the blowing up of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the US position towards the Taliban became very negative. But the Central Asian political elites thought that the American emphasis on democracy and human rights did not allow them the possibility of suppressing Islamic opposition within the region, which was allied to the Taliban. At the same time, Russia itself had threats similar to those in Central Asia. The de facto independent Chechen republic in the North Caucasus harbored terrorists and religious extremists from all over Russia. Besides, the Chechen Republic and Taliban's Afghanistan officially recognized each other and became allies. This is why Russia was seen in Central Asia as a major potential stabilizer.

Support by the Taliban and financial assistance from Al-Qaeda made Islamic extremists in Central Asia more active. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), headed by Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani, became the main extremist force in the region. Its aim was to establish an Islamic emirate including all the Central Asian states. In the autumns of 1999 and 2000 IMU forces invaded Kyrgyzstan from Tajik territory. For Central Asian countries, and even some Russian Islamic regions with their weak statehood and strong alienation between the governments and populations, it entailed the possibility of a snowballing Islamic revolution. On both occasions the forces and resources of not only Kyrgyzstan, but also of other Central Asian countries and Russia were used to repel the aggression. This cooperation, as well as common opposition to the Taliban, became the starting point for the formation of a new Russian-centered security system for the region based on the Collective Security Treaty.

In September 1999 the war in the Northern Caucasus started once again after the invasion of Islamic militants from Chechnya to Dagestan, an Islamic region loyal to Russian government. Decisiveness and sometimes even brutality of the new Russian government headed by Vladimir Putin indicated to Central Asian political elites that Russia could actively use force also in Central Asia in case of a new crisis. On 16 February 1999 a series of terrorist acts occurred in the Uzbek capital Tashkent. Russia in the same period also experienced brutal terrorist attacks on Moscow. Common threats (terrorist attacks and invasions of Islamic militants) increased mutual understanding between political elites of Russia and Central Asian New Independent States.

⁴⁹ Halfin N. Russian policy in Central Asia (1857-1868). Moscow, Izdatelstvo vostochnoy literatury, 1960 (in Russian).

Conceptual uncertainty of Russian foreign policy in Central Asia

The growth of Russian influence in Central Asia to the beginning of Putin era has made the problem of conceptual uncertainty of Russian foreign policy in this region very acute. One of the main problems of Post-Soviet Russian policy in Central Asia has always been the absence of clear long-term vision of what it wants to do in this region. There are, at least, 3 competing ideas based on different broad historical conceptions, and all of them are very vague and do not contain any image of the desirable future.

A. *“Postimperial ideology”*. It emphasizes the role, which Russia and the USSR, Russian culture and Russian language played in modernization of the region. Sometimes, this idea appears in more liberal form. In this case it is underlined that Russia in the XVIII – XX centuries served as the historical intermediary, although a very specific one, in adoption of the western culture and technologies by Central Asia. There is also more conservative and much more widespread variant of such ideological orientation, which is in a greater degree associated with the Communist heritage. It emphasizes that within the limits of the USSR there was a highly integrated economic system, which residually remains even now, for example, in the form of an infrastructure of pipelines, power grids, highways and railways. Russia is still an important economic partner of Central Asia since the degree of economic interdependence created during the Soviet period has sharply decreased, but has not disappeared completely. A very serious synthesis of cultures of indigenous and nonindigenous people of the region took place in the social and cultural sphere. Interpersonal and migratory contacts are also very important since Russian is the most widespread foreign language in the region. In security sphere Russia is still acting as the successor of the Russian empire and the USSR interested in protection of Central Asia as a “buffer zone”.

"Residual" nature of this idea is its main disadvantage. This “postimperial” idea contradicts the logic of development of national identities of the New Independent States. Russia until the second term of Putin didn't even try to capitalize on the elements of common culture and language by using them as elements of a “soft power”⁵⁰, and even since that all such attempts have been mostly badly organized and unsuccessful.

Anti-Westernism. In this case Russia portrays itself (in alliance with China) as a guarantor against the pressure of the West upon local elites directed at democratization and liberalization. This type of integration is occasionally used by modern Central Asian elites (for example, by I.Karimov, the President of Uzbekistan) in a short-term political games. But this idea of anti-westernism is very vague and unstable.

Eurasianism. Now the ideology of Eurasianism is widespread in Russia. It is also officially supported in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. So, this ideology also pretends to intellectually define Russian foreign policy in Central Asia. This ideology is even integrated into the official name of the EurAzEC.

Eurasianist ideology in Russia exists in very different forms. On the one hand, there is a mystic and esoteric Eurasian fundamentalism (A.Dugin) propagandizing the ideas of the never-ending war of the “elements” of the land (Eurasia) and the sea (the West). On the other hand, there are more moderate and "pseudoscientific" variants of Eurasianism related to the historical science (L.Gumilev) or political science (A.Panarin). These approaches emphasize commonality of interests and culture that have historically developed in Russia and Central Asia. Finally, the liberal form of Eurasianism also existed

⁵⁰ The role of Russian “soft power” in the post-Soviet space has been considered in the following works: Kazantsev A.A., Merkushev V.N. Russia and the post-Soviet area: prospects of use of the “soft force”, Polis, 2008, # 2; Bespalov S.V., Vlasov A.V., Golubtsov P.V., Kazantsev A.A., Karavaev A.V., Merkushev V.N. The mechanism of formation of positive image of Russia in the countries of the post-Soviet area. Moscow: Eurasian network of political studies, Informational and analytical center of the Moscow State University on studying the political processes in the post-Soviet area, 2007(in Russian).

in Russia, which was represented by famous liberal dissident A.Sakharov. He propagandized the idea of replacing the USSR with Euro-Asian union that would promote more successful modernization of the region.

Different variants of this ideology assume different foreign policy priorities. Less liberal variants of Russian Eurasianism propagandize the ideas of the union with China and the Islamic world against the West. On the contrary, the liberal versions of Eurasianism are much less hostile to the West.

Central Asia is influenced by both Russian and Turkish variants of Eurasianism. In the last case this is a variant of Panturkist ideology that can be even strongly anti-Russian. In general, this variant of Eurasianism is less anti-western than dominant Russian variants. The variants of Eurasianism dominating in Central Asia mostly belong to more moderate and liberal interpretations of this ideology synthesizing Russian and Turkish versions. Usually, Central Asian Eurasianism does not oppose itself to the Western world. Kazakh and Kyrgyz Eurasianists often see Central Asia as the “bridge” between the West and the East. So, for example, president of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev, who sees himself as a Eurasianist⁵¹, has equally supported the versions of this ideology proposed by A.Saharov and A.Dugin⁵². A.Akaev, the former President of Kyrgyzstan, also interprets Eurasianism as “a contact of European and Asian civilizations, mutual enrichment and mutual penetration of cultures and religious and philosophical principles”⁵³.

In the absence of conceptual certainty it was impossible to develop coherent Russian strategy.

New doctrinal documents and new organizations, but still the old problems under Putin

Putin’s coming to power brought a new style to Russian foreign policy. Irrespective of conceptual uncertainty that has been already discussed, already during Putin’s first year heroic attempts to bring conceptual and organizational order into all spheres of Russian foreign policy were made. Below, I will analyze the success of these attempts.

In the first months after Putin’s election three key doctrinal documents defining future Russian foreign and security policy were adopted: the National Security Concept (10 January 2000), the Military Doctrine (21 April 2000), and the Foreign Policy Concept (28 June 2000). In the last document Russian relations with post-Soviet countries were once again described as the main priority. It is very important that this was put in the context of guaranteeing national security, especially in the field of fighting international terrorism and extremism.⁵⁴ Economic cooperation with the New Independent States was also proclaimed a priority, thus the Concept discussed the problem of the sectoral division of the Caspian Sea.

The very attempt to bring some order into Russian foreign policy was quite positive. However, the principles formulated in the documents adopted in 2000 were too general. They had to be concretely defined in some kind of a regional strategy, with a certain set of priorities and material means allocated for their realization. This task was not carried out even by 2010. As a result of this Russia in Putin’s period still had very vague understanding of what it wants and what it does not want in the region. This understanding simply reflected conceptual developments that had been achieved already in the mid 1990-s. Such understanding can not lead to any coherent practical policy if one can not

⁵¹ Nazarbaev N.A. Eurasian union: ideas, practice, prospects, 1994-1997. Moscow: Fund of assistance to development of sociology and political science, 1997; Nazarbaev N.A. The strategy of transformation of the society and revival of the Eurasian civilization: selected works. Moscow: Economy, 2002 (all in Russian).

⁵² Dugin A.G. Eurasian mission: program and materials. Moscow: Internaional “Eurasian Movement», 2004 (in Russian).

⁵³ Akaev A. New understanding of Eurasianism: (conversation with Y.I.Surovtsev, the Associate Editor of “Sovremennaya Evropa” magazine). *Sovremennaya Evropa*, 2001, # 1, p. 7–13 (in Russian).

⁵⁴ Foreign Policy Concept of Russian Federation, 28 June 2000.

define which amount of resources should be spent in order to achieve specific aims. Without this the policy may turn into wishful thinking. *The paradox is that even during the period of high oil and gas prices that gave to Russia the resources for more active foreign policy, the Kremlin actively used a neo-imperial rhetoric portraying the New Independent States as “its privileged sphere of interests”, but, at the same time, it tried to minimize the costs of its policy in this region. So, there was a huge divergence between the aims and the allocated resources.*

The same problems of uncertain and mutually contradictory policy can be seen in the case of pro-Russian regional international organizations, also irrespective of the attempts to create a “second generation” of them during the Putin period.

The work of the CIS throughout the 1990s was absolutely ineffective. Decisions made within the context of this organization were not obligatory and they mostly were not fulfilled. It was an organization for the ‘civilized divorce’ of former Soviet republics, and not for real cooperation. As a result, at the beginning of Putin’s presidency a ‘new generation’ of pro-Russian integration structures was created. Decisions made within this new generation of post-Soviet structures were presumed to be much more obligatory for all participants, although, in reality, too often these new organizations would resemble the CIS.

At the end of Yeltsin’s presidency, on 26 February 1999, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed a treaty on forming a Customs Union and Common Economic Space. It foresaw the formation of a unified customs zone as well as conducting associated customs, monetary, currency and trade policies with the purpose of the free movement of ‘goods, services, capital and workforce’.⁵⁵ On this basis, on 10 October 2000 the same participants together with Tajikistan signed a Treaty on Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community’. This idea was originally proposed by Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is a proponent of Eurasianist ideology⁵⁶. The same tasks of forming a unified customs and economic union were proclaimed by this treaty.⁵⁷ Thus, a new bureaucratic mechanism outside of the CIS was created for deepening economic integration. The Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzEC) had a predominant Central Asian character since four of its six members were situated in this region.

The formation of the customs union turned out to be too hard to realize. In August 2006 it was decided to create a customs union with only three participants (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) that were ‘economically ready’ for this. However, in the period 2000-2010 the customs union and single economic space has not started functioning even in this ‘minimal version’. The members of the EvrAzEC has been unable to unify their legal acts in the economic sphere. As the research of the ‘Eurasian Heritage’ foundation has indicated, most experts on the post-Soviet space evaluate economic integration, even within the new generation of organizations, as ineffective.⁵⁸ However, trade between the former Soviet republics (and not only between members of the EvrAzEC) during the Putin’s presidency was growing due to the economic boom caused by high oil and gas prices.

In addition to the new economic cooperation organization, there also emerged also a new collective security organization. It was formed on the basis of the old CIS Collective Security Treaty. This Treaty was originally signed by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Tashkent on 15 May 1992. Later, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus joined it. On 2 April 1999 Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan prolonged the treaty. However, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan refused to do this.

⁵⁵ A Treaty on Customs Union and Single Economic Space, 26 February 1999.

⁵⁶ Nazarbayev N. Eurasian union: ideas, practice, perspectives, 1994-1997. Moscow, URSS.Ru, 1997 (in Russian).

⁵⁷ A Treaty on the Establishment of Eurasian Economic Community, 10 October 2000.

⁵⁸ Eurasian Heritage Foundation, Perception of Integration Projects on the Post-Soviet Space, Report, 2005 (in Russian).

On 7 October 2002 in Chisinau (Moldova) Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and an agreement on the Legal Status of the CSTO. According to the Charter the members of the CSTO 'set themselves the objective of maintaining and nurturing a close and comprehensive alliance in the foreign policy, military and military technology fields and in the sphere of countering transnational challenges and threats to the security of States and peoples'.⁵⁹ Article 8 foresees coordination in 'combating international terrorism and extremism, the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and arms, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other threats to the security of the member States'.⁶⁰ The CSTO Charter also provides for cooperation in case of external military threat. These agreements came into force on 18 September 2003. Within the framework of the CSTO Russia has proposed to its partners the purchase of arms at subsidized prices and receiving military education in Russia at low prices.

The CSTO as well as the EvrAzEC has a specific Central Asian character. Four out of its seven members are situated in this region. The CSTO has 3 'regions of collective security': Central Asia, Europe and the South Caucasus. However, the European and South Caucasian CSTO security regions exist only nominally; each of them is represented by bilateral agreements of Russia with its allies (Belarus and Armenia) outside of the CSTO framework. At the same time, in Central Asia a specific mechanism of Collective Rapid Response Forces was created. These forces were 1,500- strong in 2003 and by 2008 they had about 4000 members. The plans to develop these forces have been discussed during the beginning of Medvedev's presidential term. They regularly conduct military exercises. These forces can also in case of crisis be supported by Russia's 201st infantry division stationed in Tajikistan and by warplanes and military helicopters situated in the Russian aviation base in Kant (Kyrgyzstan). Mechanism of peace-keeping and unified air defense systems are being created within the CSTO framework.

The CSTO was originally not repeating the scandalous situations as occurred within the CIS in the 1990s, when two members of the block de facto were in a state of war (Armenia and Azerbaijan), or two states accused each other of supporting separatist, extremist and subversive movements (Russia and Georgia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). The situation has worsened after Uzbekistan's accession to this organization since this country has serious border problems with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the same time, integration within the CSTO has also some problems. Decisions of CSTO's bodies have been usually not realized in due time, especially in the sphere of financing different programs. Besides, Russia (the main proponent of the CSTO and chief financier of its work) conducted within it a contradictory policy. For example, by the end of Putin's second presidential term out of 10 agreements signed within the CSTO only 8 had come into force. And out of these 8 agreements that had come into force, 4 were not ratified by Russia!

Uzbekistan, after joining the CSTO continued its isolationist policy within the organization. The degree of Uzbek cooperation within the organization was very weak. There were also some problems of cooperation of the CSTO with other international security organizations. For example, *modus vivendi* between the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO, see below) is not clearly defined, although both organizations represent Russian interests and sometimes even cooperate (for example, in conducting military exercises). The same problems of parallelism and contradictions exist between all contemporary pro-Russian post-Soviet integration structures (CIS, CSTO, EvrAzEC and SCO). Paradoxically, each organization represents almost the same states and is Russian-centered, yet at the same time realizes its own integration project. Contradictions between these organizations can be explained by the fact that they represent different groups of Russian interests that are not correlated within a unified regional strategy.

⁵⁹ Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, 7 October 2002.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The problem of coordinating pro-Russian integration projects with other vectors of international cooperation of Central Asian states is even more acute. For example, the issue of cooperation between the CSTO and NATO has always been a problem. On 18 June 2004 the Collective Security Council, the CSTO's supreme body, proposed the establishment of official relations with NATO for the purpose of solving Central Asian security problems. This proposal was repeated in the letter of CSTO's Secretary General, Nikolai Bordyuzha, to NATO's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. However, NATO replied that bilateral cooperation with separate members of the CSTO is a priority for the Alliance. Relations between the CSTO and European organizations such as EU and OSCE are, in general, much better than relations with NATO.

Irrespective of Russian attempts to reintegrate post-Soviet space around a new generation of international organizations, new groups of states appeared within this space and new division lines have emerged⁶¹. Azerbaijan, which also is situated in the Caspian Sea region, is still a member of GUAM, an integration structure alternative to pro-Russian ones. This organization was established by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova in 1997. Uzbekistan joined GUAM in 1999, after that the name of the organization changed to GUUAM. Then Uzbekistan left GUUAM and joined the EvrAzEC and the CSTO, and, finally, it left EvrAzEC (see below). However, it still has very specific position inside both organizations. Turkmenistan is not a member of any second generation pro-Russian organization. It continues to pursue an isolationist policy. Former Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) even within the CIS, which is an absolutely non-binding organization, proclaimed 'associational status' and withdrew from full membership.

The situation is even more complicated by the fact that many Central Asian countries participate in different integration projects. For example, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are simultaneously members of the CSTO and participants of programs of cooperation with NATO ('Partnership for Peace', individual programs of cooperation). But, as we have already mentioned, the CSTO and NATO even do not officially recognize each other.

The reasons, why even heroic attempts of Putin have not brought much order into Russian foreign policy in the region can be partially explained by specificity of regional "multivector" policy. In Central Asia the Kremlin deals with political elites that it really does not consider to be sincerely pro-Russian and does not really trust⁶². Since it does not have enough economic and military (the case of "Taliban" has clearly shown this) resources, it also does not have serious instruments to influence the behavior of local elites. All of them are realizing "multi-vector" foreign policy balancing Russian influence and interests against the interests and influence of China, the USA and EU. Actual aim of this type of international strategy is maximization of power of local elites⁶³.

This can be proved by the presence of different foreign military bases as well as by the membership in different international organizations (both in 2010). From the point of view of military presence, there are still some Russian bases and objects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, there are also the bases of NATO member-states in Kyrgyzstan (USA), Tajikistan (France) and Uzbekistan (Germany). Chinese military involvement through the mechanisms of the SCO is also growing.

The membership of Central Asian states in different international organizations is represented in the following table. This table shows that, in fact, there are institutionalized forms of cooperation and

⁶¹ Nikitin A. *The End of the 'Post-Soviet Space: The Changing Geopolitical Orientations of the Newly Independent States*. London, Chatham House, 2007.

⁶² Speech of M.A. Kolerov, a Head of Department of Presidential Administration on Interregional and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries in Bilingua Club, Moscow, 29 June 2006.

⁶³ See substantiation of this viewpoint in more details in: Kazantsev A. *Western Policies in Central Asia: Projects, Dilemmas, Contradictions*, Moscow, MGIMO Publishing House, 2009 (in Russian).

even integration in many different directions and Russian vector is now only one of the options among others.

Geographical region/ sphere of cooperation (including all aspects of security)	Political sphere	Economic sphere	Military sphere
Russia	Commonwealth of Independent States ⁶⁴	Eurasian Economic Community ⁶⁵ (EvrAzEC) and the Customs Union ⁶⁶ of members of <i>EvrAzEC</i> , Shanghai cooperation organization ⁶⁷ (SCO)	Collective security treaty organization ⁶⁸ , SCO
Europe/Euro-Atlantic region	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Euro-Atlantic Partnership	European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, different institutional arrangements with the EU. Energy and transportation institutions initiated by EU: INOGATE, TRACECA, Baku Initiative, Energy Charter Conference	Council of Euro-Atlantic Partnership, Partnership for peace program, individual programs of partnership with NATO.
China and Asia-Pacific countries	SCO	SCO, Asian bank of development, partially, Silk road projects.	SCO
Islamic world	Organization of Islamic conference	Economic cooperation organization, Islamic bank of development	No

However, even in the context of specific “multivector” Central Asian policy Russia, if it behaved strategically, could better coordinate the policies of different regional international organizations that

⁶⁴ Turkmenistan is not a member, but observer.

⁶⁵ Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not members.

⁶⁶ It includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus.

⁶⁷ Turkmenistan is not a member

⁶⁸ Turkmenistan is not a member

it has created and financed. Lack of cooperation between different integration organizations headed by Russia reinforces the disintegration of the “post-Soviet space” based on disappearing Russian power.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and contradictions of Russian-Chinese cooperation

One of the most important strategic contradictions within Russian Central Asian policy that by 2010 has caused a loss of strategic control over energy transportation from the region has always been in the sphere of relations with China. Russia has never been able to define, if it competes with China for regional power, or simply fully surrenders its regional interests for the sake of strategic global cooperation with China.

The step by step development of a ‘border dialogue’ between Russia, China and the Central Asian countries in the 1990s led to the creation of the ‘Shanghai Five’ group and, finally, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). A declaration on its creation was signed on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai simultaneously with the Shanghai Convention on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO proclaimed ‘strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good-neighborly relations among the member countries; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, ecology and other fields; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region, to establish a new, democratic, just and rational political and economic international order’⁶⁹ as its goals. At present, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the SCO. Four out of six SCO members are situated in Central Asia, and thus the Organization’s interests are concentrated mainly in this region. However, from geopolitical point of view the SCO is essentially different from the EvrAzEC and the CSTO. It is not an organization designed to reintegrate post-Soviet Central Asia around Russia. The SCO has two main sponsors that finance the lion’s share of the Organization’s activities: Russia and China. The Secretariat of the SCO is situated in Beijing, and its Regional Antiterrorist Center in Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

Cooperation in security sphere includes fighting international terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. However, economic and trade cooperation also became one of the foci of organization’s activities⁷⁰. On 14 September 2001 in Almaty (Kazakhstan) the heads of governments of SCO member states signed a memorandum on the Main Objectives and Directions of Regional Economic Cooperation. On 23 September 2003 in Beijing the heads of governments of SCO member states approved the 20-year ‘Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation among SCO Member States’. In 2004 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) a plan of concrete measures to implement the Program was adopted. It included more than 100 common projects and directions of cooperation in the spheres of transport, energy, telecommunications, agriculture, tourism, water supply and ecology. At present, energy became one of the main directions of economic cooperation due to creation of an ‘Energy club’ within the SCO with the purpose to develop a unified energy policy.

There are some disagreements between Russia and China within the SCO. Beijing is interested in the formation of a single economic space inside the SCO within a short-term perspective. But Moscow is afraid of Chinese economic hegemony inside the Organization. Cheap Chinese goods are already flooding not only Central Asian but also domestic Russian markets, and all SCO members are turning simply into raw-material suppliers dependent on China. Already to the end of Putin’s second presidential term raw-materials constituted up to 90% of Russian export to China. Russian arms,

⁶⁹ Declaration on the Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 1, 15 June 2001; Declaration on the Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 2, 15 June 2001.

⁷⁰ Lukin A. Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, *Analiticheskie zapiski NKSMI MGIMO*, 6(26), July, 2007; Lukin A., Mochulsky A. Shanghai Cooperation Organization: structural forms and perspectives of development, *Analiticheskie zapiski NKSMI MGIMO*, 2(4), February, 2005 (all in Russian).

chemical products and chemical fertilizers were the only substantial manufactured items in Russian-Chinese trade. But Chinese exports to Russia were almost fully composed of manufactured goods. Russia is also afraid of political repercussions of Chinese migration to the depopulated Russian Far Eastern regions. Besides, construction of Chinese pipelines has by 2010 destroyed Russian control over transportation of Central Asian resources.

Russia, in turn, believes that economic integration within the SCO zone is a long-term priority. At present, only post-Soviet countries having structurally comparable economies can integrate. Russia will inevitably be a leader of this process. In the short term, inside the SCO Russia is interested in political and security cooperation. It mostly includes fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism. There are also some strategic considerations. Russia is interested in showing to the West that its diminishing power is supported by the alliance with China.

The SCO, as an organization representing two great international powers, also has great potential in world affairs. But Russia is interested in this instrument of potential pressure upon the USA and the EU much more than China. For China economic cooperation with the USA is considerably more important than political and military cooperation with Russia. In Central Asian affairs the large political role of the SCO became apparent in 2005. On 5 July 2005, during the SCO summit in Astana (Kazakhstan), a declaration calling on the USA to clearly define the terms of withdrawal of American bases from the region, where they supported antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, was adopted. 'Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consider it necessary, that respective members of the Antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states'.⁷¹ In response, the House of Representatives of the US Congress adopted a resolution expressing concern with the attempts of Russia and China to force the USA out of the region. However, later the US military had to leave the military base of Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan (see below).

In general, from the Russian point of view, the role of the SCO in Central Asia is twofold. On the one hand, through the SCO mechanism Russia is trying to find an acceptable mode of regional coexistence with China, which becomes stronger each year. On the other hand, Russia has created a legitimate channel of Chinese regional influence that helps to overcome traditional fears and alienation between the Central Asian peoples and the Chinese. This fear was well expressed by Buhar-Jirau, an advisor to Abulai-Khan, the famous Kazakh eighteenth century political leader, who expressed the historically formed perception of the difference between China and Russia using the traditional nomadic metaphor of a rider and a horse. Kazakhs have a choice between two potential yokes: Russian and Chinese. The Russian yoke is made of leather. It can gradually be worn out. But the Chinese yoke is made of iron. One can never free oneself from it⁷².

Taking into account that by 2010 even Russian control over the routes of energy transportation from Central Asia is being replaced by Chinese control, this saying of Kazakh wise man can become a good depiction of the future that expects Central Asia. Influential Russian foreign policy expert A. Bogaturov has already predicted some years ago that due to growing Chinese influence a new geopolitical configuration was developing. In this configuration Central Asia will become a part of a new region "Central-Eastern Asia"⁷³. This may mean final disintegration of residual "Post-Soviet

⁷¹ Declaration of the Heads of States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 1, 5 July 2005.

⁷² Iskaliev N.I. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on their way to integration. Alma-Ata, Moscow, 1995. p. 66 (in Russian).

⁷³ Bogaturov A. International relations in Central-Eastern Asia: geopolitical challenges and prospects for political cooperation. Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies Working Paper. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2004; Bogaturov A. Central-Eastern Asia in contemporary world politics, Vostok, 2005, № 1, P. 102-118.

space”⁷⁴ and total collapse of Russian power in what the Kremlin still perceives as a “near abroad”, or a sphere of privileged Russian interests.

The war on terror and reduction of Russian regional influence in Central Asia, 2001 – 2003

During Putin’s presidency Russia periodically showed its readiness to cooperate with the USA in Central Asia. It was best manifested in the period of the war on terror in the region. 9/11 abruptly changed the strategic balance in Central Asia. On 7 October 2001 US operation against the Taliban started. It consisted of a mass bombardment accompanied by special operations and the support of Northern Alliance forces. Russian assistance was of great importance in establishing American contacts with Tajik and Uzbek forces. In fact, Russia shared its Afghan allies with the USA. The Russian motive was very simple: it had a unique opportunity to destroy its worst enemies with American hands.

However, the USA lacked an adequate military presence in Central Asia for effectively conducting operation in Afghanistan. Otherwise, US forces would have attacked Taliban only from the south, from Pakistani bases. But the positions of Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the south of Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistani provinces were very strong. This American interest directly collided with Russian interests in Central Asia. From the standpoint of a substantial part of the Russian political class, the insertion of American forces in the region could lead to the final loss of Russian influence. Moreover, Uzbekistan (since it was not a member of the CST treaty at the time) had permitted use of its territory for an American military base even before Russian agreement to this. Other states, irrespective of formally existing documents could follow the lead. So, Russia could not prevent the US military presence in Central Asia. Resistance by the Russian leadership would only have caused a break in relations with Russia’s regional allies. In this situation, president Putin grudgingly supported the temporary stationing of forces of the anti-terrorist coalition in Central Asia. Besides, Russia itself allowed its territory to be used for the delivery of American military cargoes.

The antiterrorist coalition received permission to use bases on the territories of four Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan). In Kyrgyzstan, the American military airbase Ganci was established in Bishkek’s international airport Manas. In Uzbekistan an American airbase Karshi-Khanabad was created in Kashkadarya region in the south of the country, and later a German base was also established in this country. There were talks with Tajikistan on placing a US base in the Kulyab region near the Afghan border on the territory of former Soviet military unit. However, this Soviet base was plundered during the Tajik civil war and it could not be used. Originally, only some Antiterrorist coalitions’ auxiliary services were situated in Tajikistan. Later, on Tajik territory in Dushanbe a French military base was created to support NATO operations in Afghanistan. The issue of using Kazakh territory was discussed during the first stage of the war in Afghanistan. In particular, airfields in Shymkent and Lugovoe were planned to be used by American military aviation, and one motorized infantry brigade could be quartered near Karaganda. However, it turned out later that there was no necessity for this since the Taliban was destroyed very quickly. Only Turkmenistan, which had good relations with the Taliban and enjoyed a UN-sanctioned official neutral status, stayed apart. Later NATO forces started to use Mary military airport for some shipments.

On the whole, the Russian political elite negatively appreciated the American military presence in Central Asia. It was afraid that America was trying to encircle Russia with its military bases and to create a *cordon sanitaire* around Russian territory. Besides, the majority of experts believed that the Americans would stay even after the operation. Opposition to this expectation was a point of

⁷⁴ Nikitin A. The End of the ‘Post-Soviet Space: The Changing Geopolitical Orientations of the Newly Independent States. London, Chatham House, 2007.

consolidation for the Russian political class. For example, Konstantin Totskii, the director of the Federal Border Guard Service, said: 'We cannot agree with the permanent presence of the USA and other countries here [in Central Asia]'. Gennady Seleznev, speaker of the State Duma, declared: 'Russia will not welcome the creation of permanent American military bases in Central Asia'⁷⁵.

After a month of bombardment, the combat ability of Taliban forces substantially decreased. On 9 November 2001 the Northern Alliance captured Mazar-i-Sharif, the biggest city in Northern Afghanistan. After that many warlords, who supported Taliban, deserted to Northern Alliance. On 13 November Taliban forces left Kabul. Active fighting continued until 17 December when American forces captured the Tora Bora caves, where Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters were hidden. For Russia and Central Asian countries the most positive aspect of American operation was the destruction of the Taliban's Al-Qaeda allies. Among them there were lots of fighters from the Russian North Caucasus and from Central Asian countries. After the end of the active phase of the antiterrorist operation the UN sanctioned a NATO military mission in Afghanistan, named the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). As the USA was drawn into a new war in Iraq, the forces of EU member-states started to play a significant role inside the ISAF.

The worst fears of Moscow were soon justified. Russian political influence in the region quickly evaporated. Uzbekistan tried to play the role of an alternative to Russia regional leadership, and it pushed through a decision to reform the Central Asian Economic Community. This organization was created as the Central Asian Union in 1994. In 1998 it was renamed the Central Asian Economic Community. Previous renaming meant a change of position towards Russia. The Central Asian integration structure was originally designed as a form of integration alternative to pro-Russian ones. After the reorganization of 1998 Russia was invited as an observer. The new reorganization of 2001-2002 was designed to underline the strengthening of military and political cooperation within Central Asia. This was perceived as an alternative to the Russian role in the region. Thus, responsibility for guaranteeing security in the region could have been transferred to such military structures as the joint Central Asian battalion, which was created in 1996 with US support (but later, since American assistance stopped, it disappeared). The agreement to transform the Central Asian Economic Community was worked out during the summit of heads of states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in December 2001 in Tashkent. The treaty establishing a new international body, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, was signed on 28 February 2002 in Almaty.

A very alarming situation developed in Turkmenistan. After unsuccessful attempts to assassinate the Turkmen life-long president Saparmurat Turkmenbashi on 25 November 2002, a new wave of mass repressions started in Turkmenistan. The Turkmen authorities wanted to close for their own population all possibilities to communicate with the outer world. The agreement with Russia on double citizenship came in the way of this, and in the beginning of 2003 Turkmenbashi decided unilaterally to repeal this agreement. All Turkmen citizens had quickly to decide which citizenship they would want, Russian or Turkmen. The Russian-speaking population of Turkmenistan perceived double citizenship as the only guarantee from the arbitrariness of the Turkmen authorities. As a result, this decision of Turkmenbashi was equal to the proscription of virtually all Russian-speakers from the country. Falling property prices and different bureaucratic barriers for selling property meant also the confiscation of their property. The Russian government did not seriously try to put pressure upon Turkmenbashi and did not even try to help the refugees to start a new life in Russia. Public opinion in Russia suggested that this was because of the agreement to purchase Turkmen gas by Gazprom, which had been successfully signed before.

At the April 2003 talks on the withdrawal of Russian border guards from the Tajik-Afghan border started. In 2005 this withdrawal was completed. Only some advisors remained. Earlier, Russian

⁷⁵ Torbakov I. Putin's policy in Central Asia is criticized in Russia, 13 November 2002, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed 5 December 2007 (in Russian).

border-guards had left all other Central Asian states. The absence of Russian border guards resulted in a rapid increase of drug trafficking along the route Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Russia-Western Europe. Already in 2003-2004 the Taliban regrouped its forces and started a partisan war in the south of Afghanistan and in the northwest of Pakistan. North Afghanistan was controlled by warlords actively involved in the drugs trade. Neither Western forces nor the Khamid Karzai government in Kabul could control drug trafficking. Hopes of Central Asian countries to get substantial Western assistance did not materialize since the West was preoccupied with Iraq. The USA through different foundations actively supported opposition forces in the region. Besides, they continued their criticism of Central Asian regimes' policy on human rights issues. This once again shifted the sympathies of Central Asian political elites towards Russia.

‘Color’ revolutions, growth of anti-Westernism and consolidation of Central Asian elites around Russia and China, 2003 – 2005

In 2003 – 2005 the post-Soviet space experienced a series of ‘color revolutions’. This new pattern of political development was provoked by the ‘Rose revolution’ in Georgia (November 2003) and the ‘Orange revolution’ in Ukraine (November-December 2004). Both revolutions were actively supported by the US government and by some European countries. Activities of some Western non-governmental foundations played a role in organizing the revolutions. Besides, political forces that came to power in Georgia and Ukraine were characterized by anti-Russian rhetoric. Thus, ‘color revolutions’ were perceived by a large part of the Russian political elite as a kind of ‘Western assault’ on Russian interests. Since Russian political elite was afraid of repetition of the same events in Russia, the policy of Moscow towards the West, especially, in the New Independent States, became much more hostile. Besides, all post-Soviet political elites, including the Central Asian ones, were afraid of losing power as a result of possible ‘color revolution’ in their respective countries. In this situation good relations with Russia became for Central Asian leaders a guarantee of preventing ‘color revolutions’.

A wave of ‘color revolutions’ quickly reached the Central Asia and Caspian Sea region. But the outcome was quite different from that in other regions of the former Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan in 2003 opposition unsuccessfully tried to prevent the transfer of power from Geidar Aliev to his son Ilham. In March 2005 Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev, who had earned the reputation of being the most pro-Western and most liberal in the region, was ousted during ‘Tulip revolution’. The government that replaced Akaev turned out to be less liberal and more pro-Russian than the previous one. In May 2005 there was a mass rebellion in the Uzbek city of Andijan (Ferghana valley). Its suppression by government forces turned into a major bloodshed. Uzbek authorities accused the US non-government foundations and, indirectly, the US government in organizing the rebellion. The West applied sanctions against the Karimov’s regime. Cooperation with the USA was stopped and US forces left their base Karshi-Khanabad on Uzbek soil. At the same time, Putin supported Uzbek president Islam Karimov’s tough course. Specific Central Asian reaction to color revolutions was consolidation around Russia and China as well as around integration organizations supported by them, which was called “virtual” and “protective integration” by Roy Allison⁷⁶. Uzbekistan had been dissatisfied with the work of GUUAM even before “color” revolutions. It proclaimed its desire to leave the organization already in 2002. After that it simply ignored GUUAM meetings. However, Uzbekistan officially left GUUAM in May 2005.

The shifting regional balance of power also affected the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, which, as we have already mentioned, was created in order to serve as an alternative to pro-Russian integration structures. On 18 October 2004 during the Dushanbe (Tajikistan) summit Russia joined the

⁷⁶ Allison R. Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia, *Central Asian Survey*, 2008, 27:2, pp. 185 — 202.

Central Asian Cooperation Organization. Thus, the key Russian role in guaranteeing regional stability was underlined. On 7 October 2005, during the Saint-Petersburg summit of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, it was decided to merge this organization with the EvrAzEC. After that the Central Asian integration structure disappeared. On 25 January 2006 Uzbekistan joined the EvrAzEC. Finally, on 16 August 2006 Uzbekistan also became a member of the CSTO.

One can say that formally Russia to the middle of 2006 achieved its aim to include Central Asian countries into pro-Russian integration structures and to push all alternative organizations out of the region. The only exclusion was isolationist Turkmenistan. But at the end of 2006 Saparmurat Turkmenbashi died. His successor Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov is less isolationist. So, there is a potential for the evolution of Turkmen foreign policy according to the Uzbek model. But, as we have already discussed above, Russian organizational success in Central Asia was very limited due to the mutually contradictory nature of pro-Russian organizations.

From “energy super-state” to global economic crisis: the end of Russian strategic control over energy transportation, 2006 - 2010

In 2005-2006 oil and gas boom gave to Moscow resources for more aggressive foreign policy combining the ideas of geopolitical control with energy geopolitics. Putin’s speech at the meeting of the Russian Security Council at the end of 2005 gave rise to discussion of a new foreign policy idea – Russia as an ‘energy super-state’⁷⁷. This conception was supported by the Russian political elite⁷⁸. Within the context of it, Russian foreign policy in Central Asia continued to concentrate on controlling the routes of oil and gas transportation. Russian domination in the sphere of energy was associated with preventing the building of trans-Caspian pipelines (an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan) as well as with opposition to Nabucco project. This purpose was achieved. To the end of Putin’s second presidential term northern (Russian) routes of oil and gas transportation from the region were still the main ones, and construction of Trans-Caspian pipelines and Nabucco was still far from being started. However, as I will show below, to the end of Putin’s presidency, China appeared as a new major player on regional oil and gas market, and this has finally doomed Russian strategic control over Central Asian energy in two years after Putin has left the Kremlin and moved to the “White House” (a residence of Russian government).

Kazakh oil was transported mainly through Russian territory via old Soviet pipelines (Atyrau-Samara, Kenkiyak-Orsk, Mahachkala-Novorossiisk) as well as via the new Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) system (Tengiz-Novorossiisk). First agreements on the creation of CPC were signed in 1992, its construction started in May 1999, and first oil was exported in October 2001. The CPC includes major transnational oil companies. Since CPC goes through Russian territory it corresponds to the goal of keeping strategic control over the routes of energy transportation. However, quick expansion of the project was blocked by Russia because of disagreements over oil pumping tariffs and profits of the shareholders. The Russian position started to change because of the project of construction of a new pipeline, Burgas-Alexandropoulos, in the Balkans. It is planned to pump Kazakh oil through this new pipeline.

Russia up to now has managed to block the construction of a Trans-Caspian oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan. However, Kazakh exports through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan is expanding. For this purpose, a fleet of large capacity tankers has been built. Besides, regardless of American opposition many international companies working on the Caspian shore make swapping

⁷⁷ Putin V. ‘Opening Address to the Meeting of Security Counsel of Russia on the Role of Russia in Guaranteeing International Energy Security’, 22 December 2005 available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru>, accessed 15 December 2007 (in Russian).

⁷⁸ Simonov K. *An energy super-state*. Moscow, Eksmo-Press, 2006; Kokoshin A. *International energy security*. Moscow, Evropa, 2006 (all in Russian).

operations with Iran. In this way Iran supplies the energy deficit in the north of the country, providing the same amount of oil at the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, a new major participant appeared in this strategic game and quickly won it. At the 15 December 2005 ceremony of opening of the first stage (Atasu-Alashankou) of a large-scale pipeline project Kazakhstan-China (Atyrau-Alashankou) was held. Originally, mostly Russian oil was exported to China through this pipeline. But this situation has changed after the second stage of the project has been finalized in 2009.

Turkmen gas along the Northern route was transported mostly through old Soviet pipeline system Central Asia-Center. Russia has for a long period blocked independent appearance of Turkmen gas on the European markets. Russian companies (Gazprom, Itera) either purchased Turkmen gas themselves or served as intermediaries in its supply to other post-Soviet countries (especially, Ukraine). As a result, Turkmenistan earned much less than current European prices permitted. This was the greatest stimulus to search for new transportation routes.

Russian preoccupation not to permit construction of Trans-Caspian gas pipeline has led to a decision to expand the existing infrastructure of the northern route. In May 2007 the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan reached an agreement on constructing the Caspian pipeline as an alternative to the Trans-Caspian one. A formal treaty was signed on 20 December 2007. Observers noticed that this agreement strengthened Russian positions in energy discussions with the EU.⁷⁹ In May 2007 there was also an agreement of 4 countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) on expanding the gas pipeline system, Central Asia-Centre. At the same time, a small capacity gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran (Korpeje – Kurt-Kui) was constructed in the 1990-s, and another one has been constructed recently. *But the most important strategic development was an agreement on constructing a gas pipeline to China had been signed just before Turkmenbashi's death.*

The high degree of political uncertainty in the Caspian Sea region has negatively affected the development of a regional energy sector. In particular, the Caspian Sea is not still properly divided into sectoral zones. The constantly shifting Russian position throughout the 1990s was a major factor behind this uncertainty. The bilateral agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan (1998) and trilateral agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (2003) mitigated the situation a bit by giving the possibility to legally exploit oil and gas deposits of the sea shelf. However, there are still lots of disagreements even between these three countries (for example, about the median line of the sea), while Turkmenistan and Iran disagree, in principle, even making territorial claims on neighboring countries.

Since the beginning of the 2000-s the export of cheap labor from Central Asian countries to Russia has turned into a major economic factor⁸⁰. Although Russian statistics did not reflect actual number of foreign workers properly, this was one of the most important sources of income for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, especially, during the oil and gas boom period. The Russian government was unsuccessfully trying to bring some order into this migration.⁸¹ Simultaneously, there were from time to time some unsuccessful attempts to organize a dialogue with Russian-speakers on the post-Soviet space (for example, there was a project 'Russkii mir' - 'Russian world'). Although, as the situation in Turkmenistan in 2003 has shown, this interest in Russian-speakers was mostly for domestic propaganda purposes.

⁷⁹ 'Caspian Gas Pipeline Gives Russia New Arguments in Energy Dialogue with the EU'. Information agency RIA-Novosti report, 13 May 2007 (in Russian).

⁸⁰ Borishpolets K., Babajanov A. Migration risks of Central Asian countries, *Analiticheskie zapiski NKSMI MGIMO*, 2 (22), February 2007 (in Russian).

⁸¹ Conception of Regulation of Migration Processes in Russian Federation, 1 March 2003; Conception of Demographic Development of Russian Federation to the Period of 2015, 24 September 2004.

The lack of complex economic influence outside of the oil and gas spheres during the oil and gas boom in Russia was one of the reasons behind the instability of Russian influence in the region. Russian ‘pipeline arrogance’⁸² constantly made Central Asian countries search for new international partners.

Russia’s share in export and import of Central Asian countries during the highest point of oil and gas boom period (2006)

	Export to Russia, %	Import from Russia, %
Kazakhstan	11,6	36,4
Kyrgyzstan	19,3	38,1
Tajikistan	4,7	24,6
Uzbekistan	23,7	27,6
Turkmenistan	Direct export to Russia was very small (usually, Gazprom re-directed Turkmen gas to Ukraine, 47,7 % of export)	9

This table shows that even during the oil and gas boom period Russian economic influence in Central Asia was far from dominant (which had been the situation in the 1990-s). Import from Russia to Central Asia is usually higher than export to Russia. The reason is that Russia is not interested in Central Asian raw materials because it also specializes in producing the same raw materials. As for Russian import to Central Asia, industrial goods that were actually produced in Europe, constituted its important share. So, some Russian firms simply distributed European goods in Central Asia. Moreover, these figures reflected not only economic circumstances, but also some political and geopolitical factors: Russian control over transportation routes of Kazakh and Turkmen energy resources and political decision of Uzbek leadership to develop relations with Russia due to Western sanctions. However, during the global economic crisis even these residual elements of Russian economic influence in the region have started to evaporate. This has very serious strategic consequences.

Already to the end of 2008 Russian influence in Central Asia started to decline once again. Low degree of Russian influence on the Central Asian states has been underlined by the fact that irrespective of Moscow’s pressure no one of them has recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia after Russian-Georgian military conflict in August 2008.

Uzbek leadership continues to consider this country as a natural center of Central Asia and this is one of the major reasons why effective Russian-Uzbek cooperation is impossible, while Russia pretends to play a key role in this region. At the December of 2008 Uzbekistan left the EvrAzEC. As Western sanctions against the Uzbek leadership were easing, so the desire of Tashkent to cooperate with Moscow disappeared. Even in 2010 Uzbekistan is still a member of CSTO, but its actual security cooperation with Russia is nearly nonexistent. Recently, it has been underlined by conspicuous absence of Uzbek units during the parade on the Red Square on the 9 May 2010, where all other CIS countries and even some Western military units took part.

The pipeline agreements signed by Russia with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not materialized at all; they have been simply forgotten after all sides used them in different

⁸² Yatsenko E. To win in Central Asia, *Vedomosti*, 5 September, 2007 (in Russian).

international talks. The major reason is growing international (especially, Chinese) competition for Central Asian oil and gas. The business of re-selling Turkmen gas (or redirecting it to Ukrainian market) was very profitable for Russian state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom in the 1990-s. However, already from 2002 to 2008 the costs of Gazprom associated with the purchases of gas (mostly, Central Asian) grew more than 20 times⁸³. According to the assessments of some experts Gazprom's trade in Central Asian gas was marginally profitable already in 2007⁸⁴. Already before the completion of Chinese gas pipeline project Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have informed Moscow that from now on the price for Central Asian gas would be equal to average European prices. In 2008 the costs of purchasing Central Asian gas became the main article of Gazprom's operational costs. Since the beginning of 2008 Gazprom due to growing Chinese competition (a new pipeline project to Turkmenistan was started) had to agree to buy Turkmen, Uzbek and Kazakh gas at the European price (300 dollars per 1000 cubic metres). When the crisis of demand for Russian gas in Europe caused by global economic crisis and competition from the LNG from the Persian Gulf became especially acute Gazprom unilaterally stopped purchasing Turkmen gas because its losses from this operation became unbearable. On the 8 April 2009 the pipeline Dawletabad-Darjalyk (part of "Central Asia – Center" pipeline) was blown up due to Gazprom's unilateral stop of receiving Turkmen gas and Turkmen leadership directly blamed Gazprom for this catastrophe⁸⁵. *Meanwhile, on the 14 December 2009 a new pipeline Turkmenistan-China has been opened.* Simultaneously, one more pipeline to Iran from Turkmenistan has been added to already existing pipeline to this country. So, although Turkmenistan has lowered prices a bit (to 222 dollars per 1000 cubic meters) and although Gazprom is still trying to save, at least, an illusion of its former omnipotence in Central Asia, in 2010 Gazprom has contracted only 10 billion cubic meters (which is even less than in 2009, when the most part of the year Gazprom did not receive Turkmen gas at all due to the blowup of the pipeline)⁸⁶. At the same time in Russia the rhetoric of "energy super-state" is officially abandoned⁸⁷.

Russian-Tajik relations have been also quickly deteriorating. After consolidation of Rakhmonov's regime old slogans of integration with Russia were step by step abandoned. New Tajik nationalism has become the main ideology of the state. The president himself has underlined this by changing his name from Russified form Rakhmonov to original Tajik form Rakhmon. The reputation of new Russian president Medvedev was negatively affected by his unsuccessful and contradictory involvement into the disputes over water and energy management between the lower country (Uzbekistan) and the upstream countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). There have been also some scandalous situations involving big Russian corporations in such countries as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that have shown to Russian oligarchs that investing in these countries is too risky.

Massive labor migration of Central Asians to Russia even before the crisis was very ambiguous from the point of view of promoting Russian influence in Central Asia. There are tens, if not hundreds of thousands of cases of extortion and beatings of Central Asian migrants by Russian police officers. Extortion has become something like semi-officially recognized way of receiving additional to low official salary money for the majority of police officers, especially, in Moscow city. Russian mass-media often promotes racist attitudes and there are racist gangs that specifically target Central Asian

⁸³ Kirill Martynov. "Zatraty na pokupku gaza za granizy lozhatsya tyazhelym bremenem na bydjet Gazproma, stav uzhe osnovnoy statyey rashodov", *Kommersant*, June 24, 2008.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Deutsche Welle, "Turkmenia obvinyat Gazprom vo vzryve na gazoprovode", Deutsche Welle, 10 April 2009, <http://www.deutschewellemusik.de/dw/article/0,,4168252,00.html> (accessed 20 April 2009).

⁸⁶ Rossbiznesskonsulting-Ukraine, "Gazprom snizil zeny na gas dlya loyalnyh Rossii stran", RBC-Ukraine, 03 June 2010, Rossbiznesskonsulting-Ukraine, <http://www.rbc.ua/rus/top/show/-gazprom-snizil-tseny-na-gaz-dlya-loyalnyh-rossii-stran-03062010102400> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁸⁷ Maslov O. New Russian energy doctrine: from archaic "energy super-state" to global energy Charter.. *Nezavisimoe analiticheskoe obozrenie*. 24.05.2009, available: <http://www.polit.nnov.ru/2009/05/24/energoconcept8/> accessed 21 March 2010; (in Russian)

labor migrants. Russian leadership that was stricken by the scale of growing racism and police corruption has recently made some public statements on both issues. The situation with the migrants in Russia has caused serious public reaction in such countries as Kyrgyzstan. The situation has even aggravated since the beginning of global economic crisis because Russian authorities (especially, Moscow city's government) have tried to expel as many Central Asian migrants as it was only possible in order "to save the workplaces for Russians". This was accompanied by mass-media campaign that portrayed the migrants as the major source of crime in Moscow.

Kazakh leadership, at least in its official rhetoric, tries to be as friendly towards Russia as it is only possible. However, oil-rich Kazakhstan has created more effective model of using its mineral wealth than Russia. It is more attractive for foreign investors and its economy is growing quicker. As a result, it is slowly turning into a model of effective development for other Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan actively invests into Kyrgyz and, to much lesser extent, Tajik economy. It attracts labor migrants from other Central Asian republics. Kazakhstan also invests a lot into development of positive international image. As a result, now Central Asia has received a new center of economic and soft power that can serve as a potential nucleus of internal Central Asian integration, which can further diminish Russian influence in the region.

The implementation of trilateral treaty between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus⁸⁸ on the establishment of customs' union (Kyrgyzstan has also applied for membership) that was supposed in 2010 has been postponed (and, actually, this is a fate of all such agreements since mid 1990-s). This was officially recognized by Putin in May of 2010⁸⁹. At the end of May prime ministers of Russia and Kazakhstan agreed to proceed with creation of Customs Union without Belarus and official date of the start of the Union was set at July 1, 2010. However, there are still many reasons that may finally doom the project of economic integration between the EvrAzEC countries, in general, and the Customs' Union, in particular.

First, there are serious political discussions inside Russian political elite since the membership in this Union contradicts another Russian aim – membership in the WTO. There was a serious dispute on this issue between Putin (who once supported the idea to implement the agreement on Customs Union even before receiving membership in WTO and then to seek membership in the WTO collectively) and Medvedev (who expressed the opinion that WTO membership is a priority from a point of view of modernization of Russia). Second, there are disagreements between the parties on the policies inside this union, and terrible and constantly worsening personal relations between prime minister Putin and the president of Belarus Lukashenko are a guarantee that these disagreements would reappear, while both stay in power. And Customs Union only between Russia and Kazakhstan may be as ineffective as Union State of Russia and Belarus that formally exists since 1999. Finally, Russia has always been afraid of opening its market for the goods from Kazakhstan because Kazakh border is too porous and because there are many security threats in Central Asia (it is not a case with Belarus because this is a major transit route for European goods that go to Russia). Realization of Customs Union may lead to increased drug trade and smuggling of Chinese goods. So, there has always been a tension between the desire to integrate with Kazakhstan and the desire to close the southern border completely. Customs Union is only about common tariffs, but one of the main problems in Russian external trade is corruption of customs and border officials that arbitrarily set the volume of payments and terms of procedures. According to Russian practice this directly corresponds to the degree of governmental control. If control on Russian-Kazakh border would still be strengthened because of security considerations, it would mean that overall pressure on Russian-Kazakh trade due to corruption of customs' and border officials could even increase irrespective of common tariffs.

⁸⁸ A treaty on creation of single customs' territory and formation of customs' union, Dushanbe, 6 October 2007.

⁸⁹ Customs union will not start its work to 1 July, available <http://top.rbc.ru/politics/22/05/2010/410258.shtml>, accessed 26 May, 2010 (in Russian).

For the western public Russian policy in Kyrgyzstan has been of special interest because it has specifically affected American military base in Bishkek international airport. In February 2009 Russia promised to president Kurmanbek Bakiev \$2 billion of investments, and he, in his turn promised to close American base. Kyrgyzstan started to apply the pressure on the Americans to withdraw. Then Washington agreed to raise the annual rent from \$17 million to \$60 million and promised more aid money. In June 2009, Bakiev agreed to allow the American base to continue its operations renamed as a “transit center”. As a result of this Russian-Kyrgyz relations deteriorated and Russian official propaganda started to criticize Bakiev (and some experts even think that Russia has undertaken some measures in order to depose Bakiev). In April of 2010 there has been a mass popular uprising against corrupt Bakiev regime caused by falling living standards and sharp raises in utility prices. As a result of the revolution, a new interim government has come to power that has included many organizers of the previous Tulip revolution (and many of them have a reputation of pro-Western politicians). However, Russian leadership has reacted to this revolution very quickly and has actively supported the new government. It has increased the suspicions in the West that the revolution has been, at least, partially, organized by the Kremlin and that the final aim is to get rid of the American military base. Moreover, the head of interim government at one moment has even asked for Russian military assistance, although, Russia seems to be very reluctant to be militarily involved in volatile Kyrgyz situation. Much will depend, in this respect, on whether this country is able to avoid slipping into full-scale chaos and who will control the situation in Kyrgyzstan after the interim government.

All these disagreements between Russia and the USA on Kyrgyzstan do not mean that there is full-scale confrontation. Due to Obama’s policy of “reloading” relations with Russia cooperation on Afghanistan (mostly, on transit issues) is developing.

However, Russian-Chinese relations are now most important for the fate of Russian power in Central Asia. As destruction of Russian monopoly on energy transportation from Central Asia has shown, Russia can not oppose to Chinese interests in the region. Some Russian experts now believe that Russian control over Central Asia is being slowly replaced with Chinese influence based on quickly growing economic might of this state. The Kremlin is now trying to follow Chinese interests even in its own territories, in Russian Far East and Siberia. So, the final result of growing Russian confrontation with the West in the NIS that has become very acute since the period of “colored revolutions” can be easily predicted (and this is a point of view of many Russian experts, not only liberal and pro-Western ones): Chinese hegemony based, mostly, on economic might of this new super-state may be established not only over Central Asia, but also over Russian Siberia and Far East.

Conclusion: Russian policy in Central Asia: non-strategically behaving and disappearing power?

Within existing literature Russian policy in Central Asia is usually analyzed within the context of the “New Great Game” theory, so Russia is considered as one of the key participants of strategic international competition over the power and influence in this region. Analysis of Russian policy within this structural context usually assumes that it *acts strategically*, i.e. that Russian policy in the region is coherent realization of specific interests of this state. Analysis of real Russian foreign policy in Central Asia shows that *this assumption is very far from reality*. In the perspective of last 20 years Russian regional policy is chaotic, understanding of the interests is very vague and sometimes it even contains very contradictory elements. Different international organizations established by Russia in the region as well as different internal bureaucratic structures do not cooperate much and often even conduct policies that contradict each other. So, one can sometimes even doubt, if there really is such single strategic player in Central Asia as Russia, which is an assumption of the “New Great Game” theory. However, this absence of strategic behavior of Russia will have a clear strategic consequence from the point of view of the structure of the “New Great Game”.

Non-strategic character of Russian policy has very clear strategic consequence that contains an answer to the question that I have formulated as at the title of this paper. Is Russian power and influence in Central Asia disappearing? In general, I would answer to this question in affirmative, *yes, it is*. At the beginning of the 1990-s Russia dominated in Central Asia militarily, economically and culturally. In the second part of the 1990-s this dominant position was lost, Russia became only one of the “poles” of regional multi-vector policy. Now we are witnessing the loss of even this role of one of independent poles of multi-polar Central Asian politics due to Russia’s quickly diminishing role inside the alliance with China. If Russia has behaved, at least, a bit more strategically this result would not be predetermined since lots of resources and opportunities have been wasted.

Of course, one should take into account that there are some variations in specific periods of time. Russian regional influence sometimes temporarily increases, but general tendency is towards diminishing influence and power. There have been two “waves” of growth of Russian influence in 1999-2001 and in 2004-2007, after which the periods of even more quick decline of influence in 2001-2003 and in 2008-2010 followed. Moreover, even now the events in Central Asia are not universally bad for Russia. For example, in Kyrgyzstan many experts think that anti-Bakiev revolution has substantially improved Russian position. And such important instrument of influence on some Central Asian states (especially, on Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) as labor migration to Russia still remains. *So, some potential of growth of Russian influence still exists and it can be used if Moscow would start behave more strategically*. This potential is especially important taking into account the volatility of the situation in the region and quickly changing strategic situation.

However, taking into account the previous Russia’s behavior one may guess that these last opportunities can be also missed. The root of this situation can be discovered already in the acute crisis of Soviet modernization of Central Asia. The model of development that was realized by the Soviet Union in the region contained many internal contradictions. Russia was not satisfied with the results of cooperation with Central Asia within the Soviet Union. There was near-consensus of absolutely different political forces to the end of the Soviet period on this issue. Russia was tired of subsidizing underdeveloped Central Asian republics and Moscow didn’t know what to do with lots of regional economic, social, demographic, ecological, cultural and political problems. That caused a desire of absolutely different Russian political forces to completely withdraw from the region in 1991. This historical background is very important in order to understand what followed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The situation in the region that made Russian political elite to try to withdraw from Central Asia in 1991 since then has become even worse. So, even those political forces in Russia that support the rhetoric of “reintegration” usually do not want, for example, integration of Central Asian labor migrants into Russian society and do not want to lower Russian living standards through economic integration with poor Central Asian states (the only exclusion seems to be Kazakhstan). These problems are underlined by growing racist attitudes towards the Central Asians in Russia.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Russia seems to have very few real economic interests in the region (mostly, they are concentrated in the sphere of oil and gas transportation and, more recently, labor migration). However, construction of Chinese pipelines has recently diminished Russian interest to Central Asian energy, while economic crisis has lowered the interest towards import of foreign labor. Security interests are much more important, but the real problem is that Russia does not want to pay much to guarantee them. The paradox is that even during the recent oil and gas boom the Kremlin actively used neo-imperial rhetoric, but, at the same time, tried to minimize the costs of its cooperation with the New Independent States.

One of the main problems of Post-Soviet Russian policy in Central Asia is that it has no clear vision, what it wants to do in this region. There are, at least, 3 competing ideas (“Postimperial ideology”, Anti-Westernism and Eurasianism) based on different broad historical conceptions, and all of them are very vague and do not contain any image of the future. Since Russia has no basic vision of

its role in the region, it has no specific Central Asian strategy defining Russian interests, strategic goals and the resources that can be used in order to realize these goals. All attempts to define Russian strategy in the region have been unsuccessful. So, Russian policy in the region since 1991 is non-systemic combination of mutually contradictory reactions to different challenges or opportunities. The attempts to “return” to the region and to make Russian regional policy more coherent that have been made by Putin after 2000 and, even earlier, by Yeltsin after 1996, in general, failed.

What will be final result of the “multi-vector” Central Asian politics in the medium and long-term perspective? Will unstable balances exist for a long period of time? And how concrete future balances may look like? It is hard to predict it now since there will be some geopolitical competition for regional influence between China and the West (USA, EU, NATO). Islamic factor will also be important. Some influential Russian experts think that Chinese power will shape the future of Central Asia⁹⁰. I myself still see, at least, medium-term uncertainty in the regional strategic situation⁹¹. But one can say for sure that if we project existing tendencies to the future Russia will continue to lose its regional influence and will, as a result, probably, even lose its role as an independent pole, or point of attraction for Central Asian “multi-vector” politics. Due to the absence of strategic approach to the Central Asian issues Russia has created the situation, when only three long term options seem to be available for Moscow: to turn into a minor partner in Chinese-Russian coalition (anti-Western choice), to exploit the contradictions between China and the West (independent policy), or to integrate with Europe and Euro-Atlantic community (pro-Western choice). Under all three scenarios, the disintegration of residual “Post-Soviet space”⁹², Russian “near abroad” or the “zone of privileged Russian interests” based on Russian power will continue.

⁹⁰ Bogaturov A. International relations in Central-Eastern Asia: geopolitical challenges and prospects for political cooperation. Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies Working Paper. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2004; Bogaturov A. Central-Eastern Asia in contemporary world politics, *Vostok*, 2005, № 1, P. 102-118.

⁹¹ Kazantsev A. The Great Game in Central Asia: yesterday, today and tomorrow, *Neprikosnovenny Zapas*, # 4 (66), 2009 (in Russian).

⁹² Nikitin A. The End of the ‘Post-Soviet Space’: The changing geopolitical orientations of the Newly Independent States. London, Chatham House, 2007.

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