

# Challenges of Eurasian integration after the Ukrainian Crisis

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*The regional situation in Eastern Europe changed significantly by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Competition between Russia and the European Union increased during the 2000s, while at the same time both actors were changing their approach to the six states of the former USSR that lie between Russia and the EU – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In order to widen and deepen their influence on those territories and to reduce uncertainty about their regional politics, Moscow and Brussels developed their own integration projects and demanded those post-Soviet states define their position in the EU – Russia competition.*

*Russian and European scholars, when trying to analyze the future of the Post-Soviet Six, mostly examine the attractiveness of the two integration projects. While important, such an approach is insufficient, as it ignores the individual internal environments. To assess the prospects for Russia's Eurasian Economic Union and the EU's Eastern Partnership, however, one must look inside the six states, which are so important for both Moscow and Brussels.*

*This article explores the aspects of the European and Eurasian integration projects that may be attractive to the six states. Within this framework, it considers what and how elements of those states' internal environment might influence their choice by examining and comparing both integration projects. It proposes focusing directly on the countries that are currently facing the dilemma of integration and are expected to choose. Despite a number of internal factors influencing the states' integration behaviour, research has shown that in such circumstances, a choice (whether it is made) cannot be considered final, given the individual internal environments of the Six. Their further integration will require additional mechanisms of stimulation, which will need to be developed by the centres of integration – namely, Moscow and Brussels.*

**Key words:** regional integration, integrations dilemma, Eastern Partnership, post-Soviet area, Eurasian Economic Union, Post-Soviet Six, European Union

## The institutionalization of post-Soviet Eastern Europe: why did it happen?

For almost two decades, the young post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe have successfully maintained their recently regained sovereignty and skillfully balanced between the European Union and Russia.<sup>1</sup> They have tried not to get involved in the increasing tension between the two regional powers and have expressed a deep interest to develop collaboration (particularly economic) in both directions.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, the Eastern European post-Soviet states refers to the three Eastern European countries – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine – and three states of the Caucasus – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. These six states (or the Post-Soviet Six) are currently included in the European Union's Eastern Partnership program.

Such a dualism in the regional politics of the six Eastern European post-Soviet states can be well explained by their transition from an administrative-command economy that followed the decisions of the Soviet Union centre (Moscow) to a market economy that required building an independent state almost from scratch. On the one hand, the transitional post-Soviet states were interested in cooperation with Russia – maintaining production and trade ties, which had been formed over many decades. There were also important social and political reasons for these ties, as they provided thousands of workplaces, which was extremely important in terms of electoral support for the state's authorities. On the other hand, the post-Soviet states were broadly understood to be technologically inferior to the West. From this point of view, economic collaboration with another regional partner – the European Union – became extremely important too, as it offered an opportunity to attract investments and new technologies.

However, despite the importance of both vectors, the possibilities of striking a balance between the EU and Russia have become substantially limited for the Post-Soviet Six since Moscow and Brussels shifted their previous bilateral approaches to regional relations in favour of a new multilateral and systemic approach by the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

For Russia, the change in its policy in Eastern Europe was caused by a failure to protect and implement its own interests in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russia's attempts to build a long-term bilateral relationship with the Eastern European post-Soviet states in the 1990s resulted in trade and economic imbalances that were not in its favour. Moscow provided them with substantial economic assistance as they still depended on external resources. For many years, the Russian market was the main importer of their uncompetitive products, and offered cheap resources to some of the six states (Belarus, Armenia and, less frequently, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova).

However, any attempt to expand (or, from a historical perspective, restore) the political influence of Russia's leadership as a form of payment for economic preference met with opposition from the newly independent states. They strongly objected to any exchange of resources for their political alignment, and characterized the Russian approach as imperial ambition and a desire to restore the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the new Russian leadership began slowly to reduce its preference for the post-Soviet economies. This shift caused various bilateral conflicts at the highest political and state levels. Moscow found itself in a kind of trap. On the one hand, maintaining economic support conflicted with its own interests and did not bring any economic or political dividends. On the other hand, abandoning this support frequently resulted in economic instability among the post-Soviet authorities and in some cases led to the rise to power of pro-European politicians whose policies in many cases threatened Russian interests and security.<sup>2</sup>

To Russian authorities, the step-by-step systematization of economic relations with CIS members seemed a good way out of this trap. Indeed, such a policy could not support the long-term interests of both the politicians and the people of the former Soviet states in a rapprochement with Russia (which only soft power could achieve). However, this policy let Moscow preserve the privileged terms of trade and economic collaboration with those states that consistently participated in Russian integration projects. In other words, Moscow tried to insure itself against the instable behaviour of its regional partners through an institutional limitation in the form of new regional integration.

Russia called its own integration project the Eurasian Economic Union, in opposition to the already existing European one. This step was provoked by growing tensions in Moscow's political dialogue with the EU and the West in general. In the 1990s, in both the Russian

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<sup>2</sup> Some post-Soviet elites could not maintain their power without an appropriate level of external support due to their lack of internal resources.

and EU academic and political communities, the prevailing view was that Russia was a much more European state than a Eurasian one [Timmerman, 2002]. Both Russia and the EU had a chance for a rapprochement.<sup>3</sup> In the 2000s, the Russian leaders reached the understanding that “the great powers do not dissolve in integration unions – they create their own” [Ivanov, 1998, p. 22–3]. In this view the Eurasian project was a response to Europe’s expanding political and economic integration, whose numbers more than doubled (to include, among others, three post-Soviet states) in the two decades since the end of the Cold War. By 2004 it had reached the Russian border.

For the European Union, systematizing relations with the countries of Eastern Europe was a logical continuation of previously used and generally successful soft power instruments, rather than a correction of past errors.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the EU did not offer the Eastern European states any short-term economic benefits. Instead, it focused on strengthening its civilizational and political attractiveness. In contrast to the fallen Soviet Union, association with Europe was positioned as more democratic with less centralized power, where the voice of every state – even the smallest – is always heard and taken into account. This approach seemed very effective in the 1990s and the 2000s, as many post-socialist (not only post-Soviet) states saw European integration as the most obvious means for quick and efficient political and economic reforms.

However, in several countries in Eastern Europe, post-communist democratization and economic transformations did not lead to a political consensus about the inevitability of European integration. For example, for Azerbaijan, which did not suffer from a lack of resources and did not need any external support, the idea of integration in any form was unacceptable, as it did not provide any benefits to its authoritarian regime. For Armenia, integration with the EU would be difficult (for example, to create a customs union) because of its geographical remoteness. In addition, there were unresolved internal conflicts in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, which could be aggravated by integration with the EU, as had happened in Cyprus. As for Belarus and Ukraine, these two countries were too close to Russia historically and culturally, which did not encourage a pro-European political stance.

As a result, the European Union and in particular some of its members (Poland, Sweden and Lithuania) started to exert influence on these states using soft power. They stimulated the development of a politically active civil society and promoted the strengthening of political competition and implementing of economic and political reforms. One of the valuable components of this soft policy in the early 21st century was the European Neighbourhood Policy, which sought to deepen EU cooperation with the countries of the region in various spheres, such as education, culture, energy, ecology, policy, economy and transport. A number of European (as well as American) non-governmental organizations and funds that financed research programs and public actions in the post-Soviet area also played an important role.

The “colour revolutions” that occurred in the mid 2000s revealed effectiveness of the EU’s soft approach. On the one hand, they resulted from the further democratization and liberalization of the Post-Soviet Six, moving them even closer to the “European family.” On the other hand, they strengthened the pro-European political parties, which had a strong impact on the regional policy of certain states. For example, Ukraine and Georgia, which became the symbols of those revolutions in Eastern Europe, declared their desire to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as soon as possible.

<sup>3</sup> Karaganov S. (2010) Soyuz Yevropy: posledniy shans? [The union of Europe: the last chance?] *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 9 July, p. 13. Available at: <http://www.rg.ru/2010/07/09/karaganov.html> (accessed 28 September 2014).

Nevertheless, European soft power alone led neither these two countries nor the more politically stable Belarus and Armenia, nor any other members of the Six, to enter any real long-term integration with the EU. The results of the European policy were thus ambiguous. The post-Soviet leaders continued to find a balance between the EU and Russia either voluntarily or by force (under the pressure of political opposition) and tried to prolong their “intermediate” regional position. In general, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century none of the six states had chosen (rather than just declared) integration with the EU as a long-term priority, and many were finding it less easy to ignore Russia’s growing power and its interests.

Consequently, the institutionalization of relations with the EU within the new project of the Eastern Partnership could help to strengthen a European vector of regional politics with the six post-Soviet states as partners and to encourage them to choose integration. As the Council of the European Union [2009] declared, the main goal of the Eastern Partnership was “to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration” with interested partner countries.

So, while soft power encouraged pro-European thinking of people and the power of the pro-European political parties, the Eastern Partnership was developed to expand soft power capabilities, to give Brussels’s policy more initiative, to strengthen and develop relations between the EU and the Six, and to create a long-term trend of integration of the political and economic future of both sides. In other words, the European Union, as well as Russia, was ready to develop political dialogue and economic cooperation with the Eastern European CIS, although only in case of a further rapprochement on its own terms (as happened earlier with other Eastern European countries, which had already become EU members).

Thus, by the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century the Eurasian and European integration projects appeared in Eastern Europe to attract the post-Soviet states either to Russia or the EU. Both projects offered potential participants different benefits, as well as different costs if they chose to ignore them.

## Economic union with Russia

Compared to the EU, the Eurasian integration project is a recent process of rapprochement for the post-Soviet states.<sup>4</sup> It is not the first such attempt. The idea of “Eurasianism” was preceded by, for example, the CIS, the Union State of Belarus and Russia, and the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), among others. However, all these forms of integration have had little success, and many agreements never came into force.

For example, after 14 years the Union State still has not reached its declared level of development – a union with strong supranational institutions. Moreover, since the beginning of the 21st century the process of Belarus-Russia integration has developed very slowly, and even stagnated. The CIS, originally created as a kind of “civilized divorce” for the post-Soviet states rather than a basis for future (re)unity, effectively became just a platform for political negotiations, one that was very unstable and often unable to prevent or resolve conflicts. It is no wonder that CIS economic agreements were very fragmentary and weak. At the same time any other attempts to create regional groups or unions without the main and the most powerful player – Russia – were even less successful (for example, GUAM).

Given the shortcomings of these organizations, Eurasian integration differs favourably from them, in stronger institutionalization and in its role for supranational bodies. Thus, within the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), which will include the existing Customs Union and

<sup>4</sup> Eurasian integration currently consists of the three steps made during since 2010: the Customs Union (2010), the Common Economic Space (2012) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU, May 2014).

Common Economic Space as of 2015, the Eurasian Economic Commission will have a role as a national operating authority (for example, it will regulate customs duties). Such an institutionalization and broad legal framework for trade and economic cooperation make the Eurasian form of economic relations more long term and stable than previous post-Soviet organizations or instruments for bilateral negotiations.

The procedure for secession from the EaEU is another important stabilization mechanism. According to article 118 of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, secession from the EaEU will automatically result in the termination of membership in all the Eurasian economic treaties [Russian Ministry of Economic Development, 2014]. Thus, the EaEU works on the all-or-nothing principle, when participating in integration (and therefore benefiting from this participation) requires choosing the Eurasian project as a regional priority.

Another strength of this all-or-nothing approach is that it provides additional motivation to join the EaEU. If a post-Soviet state with profitable economic ties with Russia refuses to join the EaEU, it could lose all these ties, such as comparatively low prices for Russian raw materials and energy resources, free access to the Russian market and migration opportunities (thousands of people from the Six currently work in Russia as migrant labourers).

The fact that Eurasian integration is at the very beginning of its development also increases its attractiveness. First, because of their “youth,” EaEU supranational institutions do not dominate state sovereignty (in contrast to, for instance, the EU). That is why many of the issues that arise in the elaboration of a coherent economic policy are resolved in the EaEU by consensus among all participants. The main body of Eurasian integration – the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council – consists of the heads of all the EaEU members, and the Eurasian Economic Commission contains an equal number of representatives from every member. This representation is especially important for small states (in terms of economic potential), as their voices are always considered in the decision-making process.

Second, as Eurasian integration is in the early stages of development, all its members are equally involved in the creation of a new legislative and institutional environment. Therefore, the earlier a state joins the project, the faster its position will be taken into account. Potential candidates for joining the EaEU – Armenia and Kyrgyzstan – will have to adapt to the existing integration environment, but once they have the status of member, they will be able to influence its further development.

One main advantage of the Eurasian integration project is that its participants create a common market rich in natural resources and with a well-developed transport infrastructure. Among the current EaEU participants this is primarily important for Belarus, whose economy depends heavily on importing Russian raw materials (including energy resources), and Kazakhstan, which is highly interested in gaining access to the European energy market through Russian transit pipelines. Thus, economic union with Russia will allow Belarus and Kazakhstan to receive direct economic benefits in the short term. According to the Eurasian Bank of Development [2012, p. 88–9], the proper use of these advantages will enable the two states to ensure additional growth of gross domestic product at 15% and 4% respectively (by 2030, compared with the base scenario without the Eurasian economic integration). Low prices for Russian raw materials can attract other post-Soviet states in great need of external economic and financial support.

At the same time, in the long run, while these strong arguments for Eurasian integration create the conditions for more competitive economic growth for members, they do not guarantee this growth. Since members retain a certain freedom to choose their own economic policies, their development in the context of Eurasian integration relates closely to and depends largely on state authorities.

The disadvantages of Eurasian integration for the countries of the former USSR include a lack of a long-term vision or specific goal for integration, as well as any agreed (by current members) strategy to achieve such a goal. From this point of view, Eurasian integration in many respects remains amorphous and inert. Thus, in the absence of the idea (or ideology) of Eurasianism, many authorities and academics in post-Soviet countries see in the EaEU echoes of the old Soviet idea, and therefore consider the economic union an attempt and aspiration of Russia to restore control over the newly independent states of Eastern Europe.

The benefits from access to inexpensive Russian raw materials and energy resources can also be considered a disadvantage of Eurasian integration. While the short-term benefits might solve many problems of post-Soviet economies, they do not stimulate states (or, in some cases, their authoritarian leaders) to continue economic reforms and improve governance, thereby preserving current shortcomings. While authorities can benefit, avoid certain social shocks and maintain power, some parts of society (primarily youth) and business may protest against such stagnation and unfinished economic and political reforms, which would decrease public support for the Eurasian project.

## Association with the European Union

At the end of the first decade and beginning of the second of the 21st century, the EU's Eastern Partnership became a very competitive alternative to the Eurasian integration project. Several aspects of it were also very attractive to the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe.

First was the idea of "Europeanness" itself. This idea includes not only economic integration (which was already implemented by most of the EU members by the end of the 20th century), but also a cultural community with shared living standards, personal values, and so on. The goal of building a democratic union of states, led by the imperative of respect for private property, human rights and freedom of discussion, was very appealing to the newly independent states of Eastern Europe, whose citizens were looking for a better life, as well as to the elites interested in political legitimation (authorities) and guarantees of property rights (business).

The primary advantage of European integration thus lies in its economic component. The establishment of a free trade area with the EU (through Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas [DCFTA], which are part of the Association Agreement) would decrease or eliminate existing trade barriers and simplify access to the large European market. In addition, convergence with the EU would offer the possibility of increased foreign investment and new technologies from EU members. In the long run, these could have a positive impact on the competitiveness of the Association Agreement participants [Aslund, 2013].

However, European integration assumes cooperation not only in economic areas, but also on political and humanitarian issues, which may be very attractive for some interest groups. For example, the Agreement on Political Association indicates the willingness of partners to align their foreign and defence policies with the EU's and to accept European values; the Agreement on Mobility and Security will gradually liberalize visa regimes (primarily to enhance academic and cultural exchanges as well as labour migration) and will join partners in the fight against illegal migration, corruption and organized crime [Kosikova, 2012].

The Comprehensive Institution Building Program is also worth mentioning. According to it, the Eastern partners must gradually revise their national legislation and adopt European standards. The EU, for its part, is ready to finance programs to improve governance in Association Agreement members, to develop further cooperation in various fields and to provide technical assistance [EuropeAid, 2014]. The six post-Soviet countries may be very interested in

such assistance as it could help them continue their economic reforms and encourage prosperity. At present, the unfinished reforms hinder such growth, so that a more reformed Ukraine significantly lags behind Belarus (which still has a administrative-command economy) in economic development (per capita) [Melville et al., 2012, p. 93].

Nevertheless, despite the obvious benefits, European integration has also certain disadvantages and in some aspects seems less attractive than the Russian Eurasian project.

First, European integration obliges the countries that conclude an Association Agreement to accept already existing norms and rules (in such areas as standardization, licensing, sanitary standards and other legal bases), despite the fact that these countries did not participate in their development [see EU, 2014]. The acceptance of these standards, as well as a reduction in customs barriers (after the creation of the free trade area), can lead to crisis and even the disappearance of some business as well as even industries unable to compete with EU companies. Thus, in demanding certain reforms, Brussels takes into account neither the national specificity of the partnering states nor the fact that the adoption of the relevant law does not mean its implementation in practice.<sup>5</sup>

The form of alignment with the EU – political and economic association – strongly limits the sovereignty of the young post-Soviet states. After signing an Association Agreement, a state must not only create a common economic territory, but also reform its policies and legislation in a short period of time, as well as rely on the Association Council in its internal and external actions.

Second, the Association Agreement includes integration in various areas in addition to economic integration. Armenia's experience has shown that a partner is not allowed to refuse any part of this package (for example, to accept economic and political reforms but not to form a common security policy with the EU).<sup>6</sup> However, such an integration of post-Soviet states with the EU in all spheres at once will most likely lead to the deterioration of relations with Russia, not only on economic issues, but also on political and humanitarian issues. Thus, European integration based on the traditions of European institutionalism is less flexible and constitutes a kind of ultimatum for the young post-Soviet states, which clearly reduces its appeal for most of them.

Finally, the EU's Eastern Partnership is very vague in terms of its ultimate prospects ("limits of convergence"). The EU's approach fosters an internal "European order," combining norms and values related to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as the economic model of governance – however, without any membership guarantees [Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012, p. 9]. Despite the fact that the EU does not deny the possibility of associated partners achieving the status of membership in the future, the current Association Agreements do not provide such an opportunity. Thus the EU sends very inconsistent signals. For example, while Brussels actively supports the EU's further enlargement by attracting new members among the Six, many EU members do not yet support this idea and are therefore not ready to talk about a timeframe for such a development.

<sup>5</sup> For example, by 2006 the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs harmonized its position with the EU's on foreign policy and security policy in 549 of 589 cases. However, in practice implementation was far from reality [Wolczuk, 2009].

<sup>6</sup> In September 2013, Armenia announced its intention to join the Customs Union and thereby rejected the creation of a free trade area with the EU. Despite this fact, Armenian authorities remained interested in engaging in a political dialogue with the EU concerning, for example, governance reform, and did not refuse political association only (without a DCFTA). However, the EU commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy denied the possibility of any kind of "decoupled" integration [see Commonsplace.eu, 2013].

## The dilemma for the six Post-Soviet states

Both integration projects have attractive advantages for the post-Soviet Six and therefore are appealing.

On the one hand, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, most of these states had come to understand that avoiding integration with either the EU or Russia was not a viable alternative. First, such behaviour would limit the external economic support from Moscow and Brussels, neither of which would provide any kind of support for free. Second, even in the case of abandoning both options, a state would have to adapt to the European or Eurasian regulatory and legislative frameworks, without any possibility of influencing it [Bordachev, 2013].

On the other hand, as competition between Moscow and Brussels in the post-Soviet area increased and became institutionalized, balancing between the two projects became less possible. As a result, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century the main challenge for the Six became deciding whether to integrate with the EU or Russia or whether to reject integration altogether and try to continue their economic development on their own, relying on internal resources without any external support or benefits from integration. For most of the Six, however, rejection was not a choice, as discussed above. Thus they had to choose one integration project and limit further association with the other.

This situation of competitive forms of integration in Eastern Europe has been called the integration dilemma, similar to the security dilemma described by Robert Jervis [1978]. Samuel Charap and Mikhail Troitskiy [2013, p. 50] characterize such a situation as follows: the integration dilemma is faced by a state that perceives its neighbours' integration into various economic groupings or military alliances that are unavailable to this state as a threat to its own security and prosperity. When two or more centres of integration compete, such a competition becomes a zero-sum game.

This interpretation holds to some degree. First, the security concept includes military as well as economic aspects, which is why economic integration, or the integration dilemma, is an integral part of the security dilemma. Second, although military and economic integration in Eastern Europe are de jure divided, they often de facto involve each other. For example, Belarus is a member of both the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); Armenia – a current CSTO member – has already announced its wish to join the EAEC; Ukraine and Georgia, by contrast, prefer to join both the European integration project and NATO.

Nevertheless, according to this line of reasoning, it is difficult to analyze the prospects of the development and enlargement of both the European and the Eurasian projects as the integration process includes but is not limited to the policy and politics of each centre. Such an approach was typical during the Cold War, when the regional affiliation of small and medium-sized states was usually determined by the Great Powers. However, in the 21st century, the choice of whether to align or not, and, if so, with which centre (Moscow or Brussels) depends more on the integrating states than on the integration centres. In Eastern Europe, to understand the reasons and prospects of such a choice, it is necessary to study the interests and policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

If the focus shifts from the integration centres to the integrating states, including potential participants, the integration dilemma in Eastern Europe takes on a different meaning and becomes a dilemma of what form the integration takes – the necessity to choose either association with the EU or a Eurasian economic union with Russia. Thus the definition of the dilemma includes the regional environments, formed by Moscow and Brussels with benefits and dis-

advantages as discussed above, as well as the interests of the states facing such a dilemma as a necessity. Thus, to study the preferences of the six post-Soviet countries still in transition from socialism to capitalism and democracy, for each one it is necessary to consider the economic and political development, the political powers and economic interests, and its society and its influence on its integration policy.

## The factors for choosing either the European or Eurasian project

In the context of the dilemma of integrating, each of the six post-Soviet states can be characterized as a potential participant in one of the two projects. By mid 2014, they were members of the Eastern Partnership while maintaining close economic relations with Russia. In many cases, they depended heavily on these relations and were already members of the EaEU.

Over the last two decades, the political and economic transformations in the six post-Soviet states were different. Despite their geographic proximity and CIS membership, they retained their essential distinctions. Indeed, this fact explains precisely why their current regional and integration policies are so individual and sometimes in opposition to one another.

In terms of choosing European or Eurasian integration, the general requirements for economic integration itself must be assessed. Some countries that need external economic and resource support require economic convergence with more powerful international actors. In international relations theory, such a policy is known as “bandwagoning for profit” [Schweller, 1994; Skriba, 2013]. At the same time, other states that have their own resources and do not suffer from financial difficulties can distance themselves from regional integration without any adverse consequences.

Five of the six post-Soviet states belong to the group that cannot do that: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Their painful transition to a market-based relationship with Russia (in particular, concerning energy costs) and the consequences of the global financial crisis have adversely affected their economic development. Only Azerbaijan, with its oil revenues, can refuse regional integration. Thus, in theory all six countries confront the dilemma of how to integrate, but in practice the issue is urgent only for five of them.

Also on the theme of economics, the level of dependence of the post-Soviet states on present conditions of trade and economic relations with Russia is also worth considering. As was noted, the refusal to create an association with the European Union would not result in a significant deterioration in the economic dialogue between a post-Soviet state and the EU, while distance from Eurasian integration would very likely result in increased prices for Russian resources and reduced access to the Russian market. Therefore, the larger and deeper economic cooperation and the level of dependence on economic relations with Russia, the more likely that the state will prefer to join the Eurasian Economic Union or will at least refrain from creating an association with the European Union.

At the same time, the economic issues in the post-Soviet countries should be examined in the context of the political situation. Any movement toward the European or the Eurasian project will entail a change in domestic economic environment, which will affect the interests of various social groups. For example, integration with the EU will require unpopular economic reforms. Joining the Eurasian Economic Union would avoid these reforms. However, it could create a negative attitude toward the authorities by economic groups, who fear the arrival of more powerful Russian capital. These economic groups greatly influence public opinion in some states. Ignoring these circumstances, as demonstrated by Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko and Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, inevitably leads to loss of power. Their experience will undoubtedly be considered by future politicians in the five post-Soviet states.

Given such pressure on authorities from within, it becomes important to study the features of the political and economic systems in these states. A strong authoritarian state, concentrated on self-legitimization, can more freely choose an integration vector without fear of pressure from less powerful economic groups or political opposition. In contrast, in an oligarchic democracy, as has resulted from the large-scale privatization of state assets in many post-communist countries, the authorities must consider the oligarchic groups and take into account their possible gains and losses from participation in the integration project.

In the context of the internal struggle for power among various political and economic groups and its influence on state's regional policy, the level of public consensus on the integration choice must be considered. If the consensus is strong, as it was in the Baltic states, the country will engage in stable and long-term participation in the economic project. In the absence of such a consensus, the choice often becomes a subject of political speculation by government, opposition and other interest groups.

Internal territorial conflicts are a relatively new factor in the integration choice. In some cases, they can become a deterrent to the association with the EU, which could further destabilize internal relations in countries such as Moldova (with Transnistria) and Georgia (with Abkhazia and South Ossetia). The recent conflict between Kyiv and the southeast part of Ukraine is another example. In other cases, internal territorial conflicts have strengthened the Eurasian integration vector, as happened in Armenia, which needed certain security guarantees that could be provided only by Russia.

In general, the dilemma over integration, as it has developed over the last decade, clearly does not benefit all six post-Soviet countries. It does not help solve their internal problems and even reinforces existing contradictions. For five of these countries, there are reasons for one or the other integration solution and, therefore, the choice that is made with a minimum advantage of any of two projects, given the countries' ongoing internal transformations, cannot be considered as a final one that will never be revised.

## The interim results

Two main conclusions can be drawn regarding the influence of internal factors (the list of which is not even final yet) on the integration policy of the post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe. First, the choice is influenced by the integration centres and their policy toward potential members of the union, and also by such members' policy, as well as their internal economic and political situation. Second, the choice cannot be made once and forever. The dilemma exists until an alternative vector of integration presents itself. Thus, the integration choice continues to be made even after the state joins an integration project.

For the six (or at least five) post-Soviet states, these conclusions mean that today they cannot be considered long-term integration participants, even if they have chosen either the European or Eurasian project. They occupy different regional positions between the EU and Russia, due to the special aspects of their internal political and economic environments and their differing levels of development. Further changes in their internal environments can transform their view of the pros and cons of integration and they can therefore change their earlier choice.

For example, for Belarus, the most active participant in the regional integration, joining the Eurasian Economic Union was a largely opportunistic step to provide resources to legitimize its authoritarian political regime. Unlike the others, for Belarus there was no alternative to Eurasian integration, due to a crisis in the political dialogue with the EU and the West in general. Nevertheless, even in the case of such a "consistent supporter of integration," there exists

the possibility of joining the European Union in the long term, according to Vladimir Makei, the Belarusian minister of foreign affairs.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Armenia's intention to join the Eurasian integration, expressed in 2013, can also be evaluated. After joining the Eurasian Economic Union, Yerevan will gain access to Russian resources and markets, as will other members of the association. Thus its interest in deepening integration will depend largely on the consensus of political and economic elites.

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are choosing European integration for now. They signed Association Agreements with the EU in June 2014 and will implement them over the next ten years. Nevertheless, of these countries only Moldova has good prospects for real, long-term European integration (despite the problem of Transdnistria), as Eurasian integration is not a full-fledged alternative because of its geography. As for Georgia and Ukraine, an association for them would mean new economic and social upheaval, the political consequences of which can hardly be predicted confidently. In other words, even after creating (or starting to create) an association with the EU, the future of this alliance would be very uncertain and will largely depend on the ability of the authorities of these countries to make the required political and economic reforms at the legislative level, and to put those reforms into practice.

In summary, as long as the post-Soviet states need external economic support, they will seek to integrate, but until there is no internal consensus on the direction of integration, how long any integration will last will remain a question, and the choice of integration will be vulnerable to revision.

In such a situation, the institutionalization of the regional environment by Moscow and Brussels only partially solves the problem. Of course, it restricts the form of relations with all the countries in the region and forces them to take more responsibility in choosing the direction of their integration. But at the same time the institutionalization itself provides stability and ensures against excessive volatility in the regional policies of the post-Soviet states, yet does not create the conditions for the long-term, sustained development of recently created economic projects. The creation of such conditions will require the clever use of soft power by Russia and the European Union. However, how that might be used is the topic for another study.

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# Вызовы и перспективы евразийской интеграции после украинского кризиса

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*Конец первого десятилетия XXI в. сопровождался важными изменениями региональной среды в Восточной Европе. По мере возрастания конкуренции между Россией и Европейским союзом менялся подход двух международных акторов к «промежуточным» государствам бывшего СССР — Азербайджану, Армении, Белоруссии, Грузии, Молдавии и Украине. Стремясь, с одной стороны, закрепить свое влияние на их территориях, а с другой — снизить спекулятивность их региональной политики, Москва и Брюссель предложили институциональные интеграционные проекты, требуя от постсоветских стран занять более определенную позицию в собственной конкуренции.*

*Пытаясь прогнозировать региональное будущее шести постсоветских стран, российские и европейские исследователи фокусируются на анализе привлекательности европейской и евразийской интеграций.*

*Такой подход является весьма полезным, однако недостаточным, поскольку он не учитывает внутригосударственные трансформации шести государств, которые в неменьшей степени влияют на интеграционный выбор. Таким образом, анализ внутренней среды интегрируемых стран видится крайне важным при определении перспектив развития Евразийского экономического союза и «Восточного партнерства».*

*В статье рассматриваются различные аспекты привлекательности евразийской и европейской интеграций для шести постсоветских стран, а также факторы внутренней среды указанных стран, способные оказать влияние на интеграционный выбор. Для этого прежде всего проводится сравнение двух конкурирующих интеграционных проектов с точки зрения их интеграционной привлекательности. При анализе перспектив присоединения шести государств к той или иной группировке автор предлагает перенести акцент с интеграционных центров на страны, перед которыми сегодня как раз и стоит дилемма интеграций. Помимо собственно факторов, влияющих на интеграционный выбор, исследование показало, что даже сделанный выбор в условиях дилеммы интеграций не может считаться окончательным, а продолжение интеграции может потребовать новых дополнительных механизмов ее стимулирования.*

**Ключевые слова:** региональная интеграция, дилемма интеграций, «Восточное партнерство», ЕАЭС, постсоветское пространство

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