



SVENSKA FORSKNINGSSINSTITUTET I ISTANBUL
SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL

The Eurasia Discourse

Workshop organized by Stockholm International Program for Central Asian Studies
31 May, 2012
Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul İstiklal Caddesi 247, Tünel, Beyoğlu
(next to the Consulate General of Sweden)

PROGRAM

10.00

Registration and introductory remarks
Birgit Schlyter

10.30

Perceptions of "Eurasia"

Konuralp Ercilasun

Central Eurasia – Heartland Again?: On Definitions of the Notion of Eurasia

Geir Helgesen

EurAsia and the Challenge of Culture in International Politics

Ildikó Bellér-Hann

Eurasia in Historical and Anthropological Perspectives

Anita Sengupta

Maps of Meaning: The Eurasia Discourse in Central Asia

12.30

Lunch

14.00

"Eurasia" as Geopolitical Space

Timur Dadabaev

Vision of Self/Other in the Construction of a New Eurasia

Anar Somuncuoğlu

Russian Official Perspective on Eurasia

Güljanat Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun

Kazakhstan's Perspective on Eurasian Integration

Y. Emre Gürbüz

Kyrgyzstan on the Margins of Eurasia

16.00

Summary and concluding remarks

Birgit Schlyter

The aim of **Stockholm International Program for Central Asian Studies (SIPCAS)** is to work for a united Eurasian research network through the exchange of students, scholars and research results. The point-of-departure is an agenda that is general enough to allow a large range of thesis topics and, at the same time, specific enough to constitute a framework within which different types of research work will contribute to one recurrent theoretical discussion of the defining civilizational features of Central Asian societies from a regional as well as local perspective.

For further information about SIPCAS, see www.srii.org/Page/Collaboration

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There is already talk of a future “Union of Eurasia” between Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, and Armenia, at the same time as the US government is preparing the groundwork for a new Asia Pacific policy, strengthening its engagement in that region and suspending its engagement in Europe and what could perhaps be called Central Eurasia.

Who is going to monopolize the notion of Eurasia – the newly elected Russian President Putin or somebody else – and what does “Central Eurasia” designate?

ABSTRACTS

in the order of appearance in the workshop

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Central Eurasia – Heartland Again?: On Definitions of the Notion of Eurasia

My presentation will mainly focus on the concept of *Eurasia* and its differing perceptions. The heartland of Mackinder seems to gain its pivotal position once again. There are many publications and discussions of the revival of the so-called “Great Game” since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The region was named with different names throughout history and each name bore a different scope and emphasis in it. The last and the trendy term Eurasia is not an exception. In the past, different ideologies preferred to use “their own” terms reflecting corresponding viewpoints. On the contrary, nowadays each ideology is struggling to fill a particular term, i.e. *Eurasia*. Mainly, there are geographical, ideological, economic and academic approaches to the term Eurasia.

Considering all these aspects, I plan to make some remarks on the debate on terminology in order to lay down the basis for a discussion.

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EurAsia and the Challenge of Culture in International Politics

When the concept globalization became part of our everyday language a little more than 30 years ago, there was a widespread belief, fueled by media as well as prominent social scientists that we had arrived at “the end of history”. The implicit assumption was that with communism dead, or rapidly dying, the West had won. Capitalist market economy and liberal democracy was the final stage of human development, and the highest form of civilization. What was anticipated was a leveling of differences, a development towards a common global rationale, guiding all international relations between people, businesses and governments. In this perspective culture became irrelevant, or rather disturbing to the process of development.

The period of Western self-satisfaction became rather short, however. The idea of a single-track, free-speed main road towards the highest form of human civilization was challenged by unexpected occurrences in the real world: Asian economic growth challenged the Western economic hegemony; a rising concern regarding climate change and global warming questioned the growth paradigm of Western capitalism and Western economic theory; and last but not least, the Western claim of representing the highest form of human civilization expressed by liberal democracy and human rights was also met with a growing skepticism. These three issues in particular informed the international intellectual dialogue in the final decade of the last millennium. These issues are interrelated, and they still inform international relations. So instead of enjoying the final victory, the Western world invited to and engaged in a new major debate about the future of mankind, this time with culture as the main and contested concept.

The most die-hard idealists deny the existence of cultural differences, and refuse to enter into debates where culture and politics are interconnected. A more positive, creative and future-oriented way of dealing with culture in politics would be to investigate how to secure peaceful coexistence between different political cultures. Asia and Europe have in fact tried to do exactly this by creating such fora as ASEM – Asia Europe Meeting – and ASEF – Asia Europe Foundation – with the goal of promoting intellectual, cultural and personal interaction between Asia and Europe

In a prologue to the exiting little book “The United Nordic Federation” (Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2010) the Swedish author Gunnar Wetterberg writes “Geography is the economy, and it rests in the hands of politicians. From the establishment of Switzerland and the liberation of the Netherlands to the unification of Italy, the reunification of Germany and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, political geography has been created and re-created over and over again, leaving deep traces in history.”

I would add that geography is culture, and culture is psychology. Freed from the straightjacket of the Cold War, confronting the challenge of a globalized world, this insight leave us with no choice but to find ways to create partnerships across cultural differences. A glance at the map tells us that Turkey – the country hosting our workshop – is geographically central between East and West, South and North. With its geographical position Turkey could

play a particularly important role in a world where ideological diversities more and more are replaced by cultural differences. Europe and Asia are still far apart, geographically as well as culturally. Turkey might be called a door or a bridge. However, it is first and foremost a major country and a civilization that integrates elements from West and East. In order to create a EurAsia based on mutual understanding I guess that much could be learned from Turkey.

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Eurasia in Historical and Anthropological Perspectives

The concept of Eurasia is used in some contexts quite naturally, while in others it is viewed with suspicion and may even be discarded altogether. At the same time the concepts of Asia and Europe are hardly ever questioned and have an implicit primordial status. My approach to Eurasia will start from the premise that we should try to get away from the taken-for-granted division of Europe and Asia and recognise the constructed nature of the boundary between these entities. Instead, we should emphasise the numerous historical and cultural continuities across this vast landmass which render its societies both in the past and in the present comparable and does justice to the complex processes of interconnectedness, exchange and entanglement between east and west both in the political and cultural realms. This perspective assumes that we need to go beyond the superficial instrumentalisation of the concept of Eurasia for ideological purposes and consider the possibility of new classifications. The paper will show how anthropologists, historians and regional specialists are increasingly using this term productively and argues that this trend represents a conscious effort to get away from entrenched academic Eurocentrism.

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Maps of Meaning: The Eurasia Discourse in Central Asia

The discourse on Eurasia has moved in manifold directions with varied geographical and cultural interpretations based on perceptions of interest. This presentation will focus on how Eurasia has been creatively appropriated by contemporary Central Asian politics through an analysis of some of the

discourses that have conceptualized the idea from a generalized 'space' into particular 'places'. It argues that these re-conceptualizations have been impelled by transformations not just within the Eurasian space but also in global politics calling for a rethinking of conventional geopolitical assumptions. The resulting clash of imaginations is not just about how major actors imagine Central Asia within Eurasia and implant maps of meaning on the diverse landscape but also about how meanings are read into each other's imaginations. These imaginations and representations assume significance as they influence the mental maps of policy makers. As the twenty-first century unfolds there will be growing contestation over the meaning of the Eurasian space impelled by the global quest for energy security. This presentation therefore underlines the fact that there are as many 'Eurasias' as there are interests that represent them. However, while varied definitions of Eurasia have had their adherents what remains significant and debated is the problem of gaining the most meaningful perspective of the idea at any given moment. A series of alternative 'Eurasias' have emerged over time and changing realities call for taking note of the possibilities that they represent. It is within this context that contemporary definitions, which provide a number of alternatives, will be explored from a Central Asian perspective.

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Vision of Self/Other in the Construction of New Eurasia

In 2011, three states of former Soviet Union, namely Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan again confirmed their intention to construct New Eurasia. According to the leadership of these countries, the New Eurasia will consist of Eurasian Customs Union, closer economic integration and possible Eurasian Union. In my paper I argue that although these ideas are presented as single coordinated plan of actions, the reasons for their emergence within three constituting states differ one from another depending on how the dominating school of thoughts (Westernist, Statist and Civilizational) or ideologies in these states picture their roles in international affairs. I further argue that in Russia this initiative needs to be understood as a by-product of the Statist and Civilizational schools' debate on the role of Russia in the world, while in Belarus the support of this initiative comes purely from Statist rhetoric and in Kazakhstan it has more of Civilizational nature. In Russia, the Eurasian idea is still trapped in between two schools: the one regarding Eurasian construction as an idea that will allow Russia to consolidate the former and present strength of the state (Statist) and the other, depicting Russia as distinct from West and Asia (Civilizational schools' premise), thus unique state. In Belarusian context, political support towards New Eurasian integration is primarily rooted in an attempt to consolidate the state resources and potential in its debate with the West about the path of development. And Kazakhstan's vision represents another pole of the debate continuously and persistently depicting Kazakhstan (throughout 1990s to present) as a unique Eurasian state which is both Asian, yet adhering to European values. Understanding these differences is a key to understanding why there is frequent impression that although these states proclaim building the same Eurasian space, they in fact attempt to build three distinct "New Eurasias".

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Russian Official Perspective on Eurasia

This presentation examines Russian official understanding of Eurasia in geographical and civilizational terms and discusses supposed influence of neo-Eurasianism on Russian foreign policy after 2000. It claims that Russian foreign policy after 2000 cannot be defined as Eurasianist, since Russian decision-makers and first of all, Vladimir Putin, while using the term of Eurasia in relation with the post-Soviet territory, don't accept the civilizational dimension of this term. It can be said that the most influential foreign policy decision-maker in Russia perceives Russia as a part of European civilization, even if a different one. This is why the proposed Eurasian Union, was described by Vladimir Putin as a link between Europe and Asian-Pacific region, but as an "unalienable part of Greater Europe". For current Russian decision-makers, Russia can, but not necessarily should have interests which are in contradiction with Western ones. Russia seeks acceptance of its dominant role in the so-called "Eurasia" (post-Soviet space) by the West, but not the acceptance of unique civilizational character of this space, thus partly embracing and partly rejecting Eurasianist thought. Russian political leadership, while sometimes presenting Russia as an advocate of the Third World or rising powers, and trying to re-integrate the post-Soviet area, in contradiction with the neo-Eurasianist expectations doesn't question the universality of Western values, even if it defends nations' right to choose their way toward these values. In conclusion, relations between neo-Eurasianism and views of Russian decision-makers are generally being examined in one direction. It seems that rather than Aleksandr Dugin and other neo-Eurasianists have influenced Russian leadership, neo-Eurasianists were influenced by general concerns of statist part of Russian decision-making elite which were in place already at the beginning of 1990's.

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Kazakhstan's Perspective on Eurasian Integration

This presentation deals with Kazakhstan's participation and role in regional organizations, and it focuses on country's pace towards the intended Eurasian Union as well as its place within Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), Customs Union and the path of Common Economic Space. It will also analyze the grounds and aims of cooperation, ongoing discussions on advantages and disadvantages of these integration policies, and the current outcomes.

In 2000, EurAsEC and in 2011, Customs Union were founded; and Common Economic Space has been planned for the current year. The understanding of the concept of Eurasianism, or what is mentioned by this policy, may vary from country to country, or from leader to leader. Necessity and vitality of the Eurasian Union is emphasized by Kazakhstan's President

Nazarbayev as well. President Nazarbayev's vision of integration of the Eurasian space is based on three main dimensions: firstly, economic; secondly, military and political, and thirdly, cultural and social aspects.

So-called "Eurasian integration" process, which plays a significant role in Kazakhstan's foreign policy, engendering new discussions within the society: Eurasian integration and regional organizations are questioned as a threat to country's sovereignty. Therefore, this ongoing dissent can be named as Eurasianism vs. national patriotism.

In sum, Kazakhstan's perspective on *Eurasia* and its steps towards *Eurasian integration* will be analyzed in this paper, which will be supported by published materials, periodicals, and internet sources.

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Kyrgyzstan on the Margins of Eurasia

The notion of "Eurasia" is today applied in official discourse by states with political motives for regional interests surpassing national boundaries. The Eurasian Union, which is in a process of realization, is also an example of this transnational zeal. The union was first mentioned by Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev rather for domestic problems in 1994; with economic success and more daring visions Kazakhstan and its capital's motto became "in the center of Eurasia". In 2011 Russian Prime Minister Putin announced Eurasian Union and it will probably become his main motive in his new presidential period. In Kyrgyzstan, however, neither eurasianist ideas nor the use of the notion of Eurasia are as popular as they are in Russia and Kazakhstan. In official speeches and in exhaustive international visits Eurasia is not a point of reference. The Eurasian Union, on the other hand, is one of the main international goals of Kyrgyzstan, but even here the main point of reference is the economic necessity such as the customs union rather than political aims. The policy of Kyrgyzstan is shaped by domestic problems related to economic difficulties, stability and state-building process. Kyrgyzstan's international goal is also related to them. The marginal use of the term Eurasia in Kyrgyzstan seems to be an outcome of weaker international political zeal. This marginal use also draws the border of "Eurasia" in its realization. The central role given to the notion of Eurasia is more dominant in countries with international political visions. Thus the notion of Eurasia will be also be monopolized by such countries namely by Russia and then by Kazakhstan.