



Asya Studies

Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar / Academic Social Studies

Year: 9, Number: 33, p. 439-456, Autumn 2025

Russia's Regional and Global Integration Strategy: An Evaluation on CIS, CSTO, EAEU, and BRICS

Rusya'nın Bölgesel ve Küresel Entegrasyon Stratejisi: BDT, KGAÖ, AEB ve BRICS Üzerinden Bir Değerlendirme

ISSN: 2602-2877 / E-ISSN: 2602-263X

Araştırma Makalesi
Research Article

Makale Geliş Tarihi
Article Arrival Date
25/03/2025

Makale Kabul Tarihi
Article Accepted Date
06/09/2025

Makale Yayın Tarihi
Article Publication Date
25/09/2025

Asya Studies

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Abstract

This study analyzes Russia's participation in organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as a reflection of its regional and global policy strategies. Historically, Russia has aimed to consolidate its status as a global power, particularly in its near abroad, and these platforms have been considered important tools in realizing its foreign policy objectives. Through active participation in these organizations, Russia seeks to promote its strategic interests, reinforce its influence in Eurasia, and maintain a multipolar world vision to balance Western alliances. However, Russia's objectives are constrained by internal challenges within these organizations and by global developments. Diverging interests among member states, power asymmetries, and periodic political tensions limit Moscow's influence over these platforms. The findings indicate that although Russia attempts to use these multilateral organizations to consolidate its power and promote the ideal of a multipolar world order, these platforms remain insufficient in fully counterbalancing Western influence and in realizing Moscow's envisioned global balance.

Keywords: Russia, CIS, CSTO, EAEU, BRICS

Öz

Bu çalışma, Rusya'nın Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu (BDT), Kolektif Güvenlik Antlaşması Örgütü (KGAÖ), Avrasya Ekonomik Birliği (AEB) ve BRICS (Brezilya, Rusya, Hindistan, Çin, Güney Afrika) gibi örgütlerdeki katılımını, bölgesel ve küresel politika stratejilerinin bir yansıması olarak analiz etmektedir. Tarihsel olarak Rusya, özellikle yakın çevresinde olmak üzere, küresel bir güç statüsünü pekiştirmeyi amaçlamıştır ve bu platformlar, dış politika hedeflerini gerçekleştirmede önemli araçlar olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Rusya, bu örgütlerdeki aktif katılımı aracılığıyla stratejik çıkarlarını desteklemeyi, Avrasya'daki etkisini pekiştirmeyi ve Batı ittifaklarına denge oluşturacak çok kutuplu bir dünya vizyonunu sürdürmeyi hedeflemektedir. Ancak Rusya'nın bu hedefleri, örgütler içerisindeki içsel zorluklar ve küresel gelişmeler nedeniyle sınırlanmaktadır. Üye devletler arasındaki çıkar farklılıkları, güç dengesizlikleri ve dönemsel siyasi gerilimler gibi etkenler, Moskova'nın bu platformlar üzerindeki etkisini kısıtlamaktadır. Bulgular, Rusya'nın, bu çok taraflı örgütleri gücünü pekiştirmek ve çok kutuplu dünya düzeni idealini savunmak için birer araç olarak kullanmaya çalışsa da, bu platformların Batı etkisini tam anlamıyla dengelemekten uzak olduğunu ve Moskova'nın idealleştirdiği küresel denge vizyonunu gerçekleştirmek konusunda yetersiz kaldığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya, BDT, KGAÖ, AEB, BRICS

Citation Information / Atıf Bilgisi

Ketenci, A. (2025). Russia's regional and global integration strategy: An evaluation on CIS, CSTO, EAEU, and BRICS. *Asya Studies*, 9(33), 439-456. <https://doi.org/10.31455/asya.1665068>

INTRODUCTION

Russia's engagement in international platforms has been a key pillar of its foreign policy, reflecting its strategic ambitions and evolving global stance. As geopolitical tensions escalate and Western alliances increasingly marginalize Moscow, Russia has sought to reinforce its influence by actively participating in alternative multilateral platforms. Russia positions itself as a pivotal actor, leveraging regional and global platforms to maintain its standing in an evolving world order. This study examines the rationale behind Russia's participation in key international organizations, while also analyzing the challenges it faces within these spheres. Given the breadth of Russia's involvement, this study selectively focuses on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and BRICS platforms where Moscow exerts its most significant efforts to assert leadership and geopolitical dominance. Moreover, these organizations have been deliberately chosen as platforms where Russia can play a more active role due to the relatively limited influence of Western alliances. By doing so, the study aims to streamline the analysis and concentrate on the core arenas shaping Russia's international engagement.

Sokolski (2015) suggests that Russia's endeavor to assert itself as a distinctive power and pivotal actor in Eurasia is evidenced by its pursuit of power balancing, transitioning its focus from Western Alliances to Asia-Pacific alliances. Sokolski also underlines that, as a manifestation of Russia's effort to become a key actor in Eurasia, Moscow is endeavoring to recalibrate its current power dynamics, shifting its international focus from Western alliances to Asia-Pacific counterparts. It can be argued that Russia has been increasingly marginalized recently by Western alliances, especially due to its conflict and war with Ukraine. In response to this pivotal development, Russia has been strategically maneuvering to leverage its geopolitical influence against this perceived exclusion. A key tactic in this venture involves actively engaging in international platforms such as CIS, SCTO, EAEU, and BRICS.

According to Lo (2016), Russia's efforts to play an active role in international organizations, an alternative to Western alliances, could be explained by its desire to avoid the responsibility/burden of competing with Western states in these organizations. Russia's desire to direct international organizations in line with its interests without competing with Western states makes these platforms attractive for Russia. In addition, Russia sees international organizations as an important tool to overcome the economic sanctions it has been subjected to and to improve its economic relations with actors in the Asia-Pacific region.

It can be further deepened by examining the case of the CIS, where Russia's ability to maintain regional cohesion has significantly weakened over time. Petrovich, Eremin and Bokeriya (2019) maintain that Russia's sphere of influence within the CIS geography is on a gradual decline, because the states that gained their independence after the Cold War do not have enough experience in self-governance, which allows Russia to intervene in the CIS geography and use the power vacuum in this area in its favor. They also maintain that Russia's sphere of influence within the CIS region is on a gradual decline. This is attributed to the lack of governance experience among these weak post-Soviet states that gained independence in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, thus providing Russia with the geopolitical leverage to exploit the resulting power vacuum in the CIS region to its advantage.

Russia's new interventionist attitude towards its near-abroad causes discomfort among the CIS members and is widely criticized. Consequently, Russia has witnessed a significant decline in its influence over some of its former Soviet Republics, which were once integral parts of the same Union. The decline of Russia's influence and power in the CIS could be seen as a partial reaction to this Russian power shift and expansionism. According to McFaul (2020), after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian state has maintained its vision of becoming a great power and has sought to participate in international platforms, particularly in this direction.

The study first delved into Russia's engagement in international platforms from a historical perspective, aiming to provide a comprehensive background on Moscow's rationale behind this geopolitical decision. Afterwards, separate sections were dedicated to the discussion of the CIS, EAEU, CSTO, and BRICS, each elucidating information about them under distinct headings. Throughout the exploration of each topic, a concerted effort was made to ensure that the content remained aligned with the primary research questions. The main questions of the study were delineated as follows: "What are Russia's main motives for membership and proactive involvement in international platforms such as the CIS, SCTO, EAEU, and BRISC? What obstacles and hurdles does Russia encounter in pursuing its objectives? How are global and regional developments reflected in Russia's policies on these platforms?"

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing a comprehensive literature review and a selective case study approach. The literature review systematically examines recent academic publications, official documents, and policy papers focusing on Russia's foreign policy orientation and its engagement within specific international organizations. For the case study, Russia's shift away from Western-centered structures toward Eastern-oriented multilateral platforms is analyzed. The selection of cases — CIS, CSTO, EAEU, and BRICS — was based on a purposive sampling strategy, emphasizing Russia's efforts to strengthen its influence in a multipolar global order amid increasing tensions with Western alliances. This combined methodology enables a deeper understanding of Russia's strategic use of regional and global organizations to pursue its geopolitical objectives. While Russia maintains membership in several other platforms -organizations- for the sake of thematic focus, emphasis was placed on selecting those where Russia seeks to exert maximal influence, and which hold considerable sway in the international landscape.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF RUSSIA'S PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In line with its centuries-old vision of being a great power, the Russian state has used/uses many tools in the international arena. Russia undertakes significant activities on various international platforms, but only a select few are discussed in this study. This limitation is due to the study's attempt to focus on a specific area, namely the CSTO, CIS, EAEU, and BRICS, in which Russia plays the most active role and tries to expand its sphere of influence, and where the power of Western alliances is relatively less.

While territorial expansion was a primary objective for states in earlier epochs, in the 18th and 19th centuries, this expansionary paradigm was replaced by more profound and

multidimensional expansions in various economic, social, and cultural domains. For instance, while the Soviet Union largely shared the same geographic scope as the Russian State in the 17th century, it suffered a significant territorial loss with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Consequently, Russia has since sought to re-establish a sphere of influence within the former Soviet territories by employing soft power tactics extensively.

The Kremlin viewed Russia's influence in its neighboring geography as crucial for regaining its former Soviet era prestige and enhancing its current influence on the international stage. Therefore, Russia perceived the states in the former Soviet CIS geography as being drawn to other international major power centers contrary to its crucial interests and aspirations, which hindered its ability to regain its historical influence and re-emerge as an influential power (Rumer, 2007: 24-25).

The bipolar world order that defined the Cold War era underwent a significant transformation with the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet Russia continued to maintain its status as a great power. The systemic shifts brought by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent reconfiguration of the global order had a profound impact on Russia's foreign policy stance. In this period of transition, globalization accelerated, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was established, Europe's nuclear dependence on the United States diminished, China emerged as a global power, and the nature of international threats and challenges underwent a structural transformation on a global scale. (Primakov, 2005: 207-209). Despite the changes in the global arena and losing extensive territories and most of its former alliances, Russia has maintained its global power status, largely even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Inter alia, among Russia's array of policy choices and strategic options, participating in international and regional organizations emerged as the overriding geo-economic and geostrategic priority goal (McFaul, 2020: 100-103). In fact, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has already been in close relations and engagements with various international organizations, such as CSTO and EAEU, to maintain its dominance over the post-Soviet space. The close cooperation with these organizations is directly linked to Russia's multipolar world vision and rhetoric, as organizations are important tools used to achieve the goal (McFaul, 2020: 95). An analysis of the policies of the Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia era reveals that the most fundamental task of foreign policy is to make Russia a world power as it was in the Soviet Union. For example, Russia's presence in the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) and its veto power show that the UNSC is used as a platform for this purpose. Russia uses its veto power to play an active role in issues it deems contrary to its interests (Remler, 2020).

To bolster its strategic objectives, Russia has also employed regional multilateralism as a foreign policy tool, utilizing it either as a means of overt influence or as a guise to expand its sway within the region. For instance, Russia has vigorously supported and even focused its efforts on the multilateral regional organizations that have emerged in Eurasia since the end of the Cold War, particularly during the 2000s. Moscow has directly exploited the weakness and power vacuum in this part of the former Soviet states and their regional organizations. The motivations of Russia and the other states in participating in these organizations were quite different. These regional platforms are dominated by states that are economically and politically weaker than Russia. These states become members of the organizations to benefit economically and gain

control of relative power and shield themselves from total dominance. Although Russia holds a significant influence over and sponsors various organizations, it also encounters certain limitations and constraints imposed by these organizations (multilateralism) and by its own. Although Russia plays a more active role in the decision-making mechanisms of these organizations than smaller states (for example, EAEU takes decisions by simple majority, and small states have a significant say in EAEU), Russia does not have absolute power and influence in these international organizations (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018:1040 -1041).

Russia is fully aware of the profound influence that global economic transformations and shifts in international security dynamics exert on its strategic economic and security equilibria, thus necessitating essential recalibration. In a main strategic response, Russia is fostering significant regional cooperation and partnerships with its neighboring countries, particularly those formerly part of the Soviet Union, and actively engaging in numerous other international organizations. As part of its overarching grand strategy, which prioritizes asserting its geopolitical influence, increasing geo-economic interdependency, and leveraging soft power assets, Russia's main initial foreign policy objectives include developing its economic-political sphere of influence and effectively deploying elements such as the promotion of the Russian language and culture. Russia builds its foreign policy vision on the goals of breaking the US (United States) dominance in the international system and moving away from the unipolar system, and takes an active role in international organizations to achieve these goals. Russia is challenging the unipolar world order and is on its way to becoming a regional power by trying to stand out as an active and leading actor in the implementation and activation of many international organizations. Russia's main foreign policy objectives are to develop its economic-political sphere of influence and to use its soft power elements effectively by maintaining and spreading the Russian language and culture. From this policy standpoint, Russia aims to establish itself as a central power in the Eurasian region, thereby reshaping the regional global order away from the influential zone of the Atlantic alliances towards Eurasian powers. In addition to its regional approaches, strengthening Russia's overall position and projections via enhancing its influence on the international stage are pivotal objectives underpinning this strategy. Following the 2014 intervention in Crimea, Russia faced substantial sanctions from countries aligned with Atlantic alliances. In encountering these blockages, Russia has actively sought to enhance cooperation with alliances as a neutralizing strategy to mitigate the adverse effects of this situation. In the face of diplomatic isolation and the detrimental effects of Western sanctions, Russia is spending crucial efforts to address its weakened international position. International organizations like BRICS and EAEU are viewed as pivotal avenues for Russia to both broaden and bolster its geopolitical influence (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2015).

Russia's efforts to become an effective actor in multilateral organizations are parallel to Russia's efforts to become a great power and to gain privileges accordingly. Russia prefers international organizations that act and take decisions within the framework of agreements rather than organizations that would impose responsibilities and obligations on their members within the framework of supranational powers (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2015).

Although Russia, in line with its great power strategy, seeks to keep the Central Asian states within its geopolitical orbit, many of these countries are increasingly reducing their dependence on Moscow. Since the early 2000s, Russia has aimed to integrate the Central Asian

republics into international organizations in which it assumes a leadership role. However, despite these efforts, the region's pursuit of a "multi-vector" foreign policy and its growing desire to establish economic and political partnerships with alternative actors have significantly undermined Russia's strategic ambitions in Central Asia (Silvan, 2021).

Over the past two decades, Russia has consistently aimed to assert its influence in Central Asia primarily through multilateral frameworks such as CSTO and EAEU. However, despite these institutional efforts, Russia's foreign policy in the region continues to rely heavily on bilateral relations with key Central Asian capitals - Ashgabat, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Nur-Sultan, and Tashkent. This enduring bilateral focus stems largely from the reluctance of Central Asian governments to delegate authority to supranational bodies, as well as the persistent rivalries and lack of cohesion among the region's leadership (Silvan, 2021). Also, Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a turning point that accelerated the erosion of its influence in Central Asia. For instance, despite the CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan in early 2022, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev soon distanced himself from Moscow, openly criticizing President Putin and pursuing closer ties with Western countries. In response to Russian restrictions on Kazakh oil exports via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, Kazakhstan diversified its export routes by increasing oil shipments through Azerbaijan and Turkey. While Kazakhstan remains a member of the EAEU, it has adopted a more independent stance in resisting Moscow's economic pressures. Putin's war in Ukraine has significantly undermined Russia's traditional hegemonic position in Central Asia. As regional states increasingly pursue multi-vector strategies in the fields of energy, economy, and foreign policy, the credibility and functionality of Russian-led institutions such as the CSTO and EAEU have come under growing scrutiny. This shift has considerably weakened Moscow's capacity to maintain regional leadership and influence (Hess, 2023).

Russia's policies regarding participation in international organizations are also reflected in its official policy documents. In its foreign policy documents, Russia often incorporates assessments on its involvement in international organizations and the evolving global order. In particular, the 2013 Foreign Policy Doctrine underlines the importance and support of the UN (United Nations) as a global (rather than regional) organization that embraces all countries of the world to create a just and sustainable world order. On global level, Russia strives to bring organizations such as BRICS and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) to the forefront to counter the influence of the Western alliances such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the EU (European Union) (Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii - Russian Foreign Policy Concept- 2013) The 2016 Foreign Policy Doctrine states that Russia effectively uses soft power elements in solving problems, emphasizes diplomacy, information, communication, technology and civil society, and that this understanding is the basis/integral part of Russia's international policy (Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii - Russian Foreign Policy Concept- 2016).

RUSSIA'S GLOBAL INTEGRATION STRATEGY ON CIS, CSTO, EAEU, AND BRICS

The study initially delved into Russia's historical engagement with selected international platforms, aiming to furnish comprehensive background information on the rationale behind its participation. Subsequently, separate sections were dedicated to analyzing the CIS, EAEU, CSTO, and BRICS, each explored under distinct headings to offer insights into these platforms.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

CIS¹ was established in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the Alma-Ata Declaration, the founding Treaty, in which the member states committed to developing cooperation in their domestic and foreign policies. The CIS's coordinating bodies ensure mutual coordination between member states, and the community does not have supranational powers.

The independent states that emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union have been a priority agenda for Russia until today. The 1992 Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine states that the independent states will maintain their ties with each other. The joint protection of the CIS borders and the establishment of a CIS Peace Force were included in the doctrine (Saraçlı, 2015: 71-72).

For Russia, the main purpose of the CIS was to become a major power in Eurasia and a leading advocate of a multipolar world despite Russia's relative disadvantage in terms of economic and political power compared to Western alliances (Secieru, 2006). Therefore, Russia has maintained very close relations with the CIS countries. Russia's policy priorities are the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS countries neighboring its geography and the strengthening of Russian-backed integration efforts in the CIS (Kontsepsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Russian Foreign Policy Concept, 2016).

The CIS countries are an important priority for Putin, and at a meeting of CIS member states in 2000, Putin raised the issues of a joint fight against terrorism and increased economic and military cooperation. According to the 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept document, it is of great importance to coordinate and work on agreements on the protection of the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens living in the CIS member states in the educational, linguistic, social, and humanitarian spheres (Kontsepsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Russian Foreign Policy Concept, 2016).

Despite Russia's endeavors aiming at control over them, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet countries have achieved considerable success in becoming independent, acting and developing their international relations according to their own goals and identities. Hence, it could be argued that the states within the CIS region have often demonstrated quite significant autonomy from Moscow's directives on numerous pivotal global matters following the collapse of the Union. Moreover, Russia has encountered significant challenges in effectively executing agreements made within the framework of the CIS. For example, out of the nearly 800 multilateral CIS agreements signed in 1997, more than 200 have been implemented (Solchanyk, 1996: 34).

¹ For more information: CIS official website: <https://e-cis.info/>, accessed on 10.01.2025

One of the key policy objectives of Russia was to bolster its influence across the CIS through economic integration. In the early years of his administration, Putin pursued a pragmatic foreign policy concept, aiming to pursue multi-vector policies prioritizing economic interests and increasing relations with the US and Western countries. However, Russia has also been observing a gradual decline in its influence over the CIS countries. The decline of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space is due to a variety of factors; Russia's weakening and increasing vulnerabilities in the global economy have led regional actors to rapprochement with alternative integrations and diversify their political agendas. The CIS countries are pragmatic in their political approach, prioritizing economic priorities, and the interests of the CIS countries and Russia's interests sometimes do not coincide. Since the CIS states do not have sufficient experience in self-governance, Russia can sometimes intervene in these states, which can lead to conflicts between Russia and other CIS member states. The rhetoric of the leaders of the CIS countries often reflects these actions. The development of multilateral cooperation could be more advantageous than a pro-Russian stance, so leaders design their actions and rhetoric accordingly (Oleg et al., 2019: 98-99).

The CIS countries are critical to Russia's economic, security, and political interests, and Russia values having the newly independent states as its allies. In the absence of an alliance, Russia's power would be weakened, and Russia would move away from being a global power/leader and even face a challenge. If Russia loses control over the CIS, it risks economic downturns, heightened security threats, and a shrinking global influence. To counter these challenges, Moscow actively seeks to maintain its presence through economic incentives, military partnerships, and diplomatic pressure (Oliker et al., 2009, 93-94). However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has significantly undermined its soft power in the CIS region. Traditional instruments of influence -such as the Russian language, the Orthodox Church, and shared Soviet-era identity - are rapidly losing legitimacy. Countries like Kazakhstan, Armenia, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan have taken active steps to promote national identity and de-Sovietisation through language reforms, media restrictions, and distancing from Russian cultural narratives. These shifts have weakened Moscow's ability to use the CIS as a coherent geopolitical platform, reflecting a broader erosion of Russian leadership in the post-Soviet space (Cenusa, 2024).

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)

CSTO² promotes cooperation in the field of security and states that if any of the member states is attacked, the other states will help it. A common defense mechanism against external forces is aimed at an understanding similar to NATO.

CSTO was established in 1992 with an agreement signed by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Shifts in regional dynamics have led to changes in the membership composition of CSTO over time. After the establishment of the organization, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Georgia became members. In the following years, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Georgia left the organization. The CSTO was the first organization in this region after the collapse of the Soviet Union, aiming to provide collective security in this geography,

² For more information, CSTO official website: <http://www.odkb.gov.ru/a/c.htm>

and sought to create a mechanism of coordinated actions to protect the territorial integrity of the participating countries. As a rule, member states cannot take part in military alliances with third countries and cannot participate in actions directed against member states. Crisis intervention must be called for by a member state (Nikolski, 2022). Hence, it could be contended that Russia has attained its strategic goal by successfully isolating member countries from joining other security alliances.

Russia has also endeavored to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, which was an extremely effective organization to counter the threats posed by the Western Alliance. NATO and the Warsaw Pact were both established during the Cold War due to security concerns between the East and West blocs against each other. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Warsaw Pact, there was a need to establish a new security organization to eliminate security threats in Eurasia. However, the gradual expansion of NATO over former Soviet territories has increased the concerns and anxieties of Russia over time. The fact that the Warsaw Pact countries later became NATO members and the former Soviet countries established close relations with the Western alliances was perceived as a serious threat by Russia. In countering this serious security threat, the Collective Security Treaty Organization was established in this atmosphere. With the help of the organization, Russia aims to construct a security and defense structure in the Soviet geography in its favor, impose its sphere of influence, and become a dominant power in the region (Berls, 2021).

With the establishment of the CSTO, Russia aimed to expand its military dominance in Central Asia and eliminate possible terrorist threats from geographies such as Chechnya and Afghanistan, which pose serious security risks. The CSTO is very important for Russia, as it has enabled Russia to conduct many military activities, sell subsidized arms, share intelligence with Central Asian states, organize joint exercises, provide training support to soldiers in various countries, thus significantly increase its military influence and sphere of influence in the region (Blank, 2015: 22-24). Russia and the CIS member states have made rhetorical statements in support of the CSTO. This effort shows that the purpose of integration is not only military, but also political, as well as collective defense, and the evolution of military objectives into political ones is an indication of Russia's instrumentalization (using as a tool) of the Organization.

Member states can apply to the CSTO when they face security crises. For example, in 2010, Kyrgyzstan applied to the CSTO following the Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic conflicts in the south of the country. The organization did not use military force, stating that the issue was an internal matter of Kyrgyzstan, assisted in suppressing the activities of terrorist groups, and provided necessary cooperation. In 2021, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated; however, the CSTO said it was a "border incident" and outside its jurisdiction. Due to a security threat on the Tajik-Afghan border in 2021, Tajikistan appealed to the CSTO, and the organization announced that it would take the necessary measures, and work was carried out to strengthen the Tajik-Afghan border. In 2022, Tokayev requested the CSTO's assistance due to civil unrest in Kazakhstan. The Organization briefly sent its collective peacekeeping forces to the republic to stabilize the country (Nikolski, 2022).

The region has experienced a notable security development recently, revealing Russia's challenges and handicaps in striking or maintaining a delicate balance among its members. In

2023, conflicts based on disagreements occurred between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and Armenia requested help from Moscow. CSTO responded to this request by sending a working group to the conflict zone, which was sharply criticized by Armenia. Following these developments, Yerevan refused to sign the CSTO's final declaration. Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia, stated that CSTO member Armenia was left defenseless, and this negatively affected the organization's reputation. Border clashes occurred between CSTO members Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and civilians lost their lives. CSTO did not intervene in these disputes, with both countries criticizing CSTO for remaining inactive. Although Putin acknowledged that there were problems in the CSTO, he tried to support the organization, saying, "It helps to ensure the protection of our countries' national interests, sovereignty and independence." Many experts state that the developments have made CSTO weaker and even brought it to the verge of collapse. High-ranking Ukrainian officials emphasized that the CSTO Summits were organized to artificially give the impression that Russia was supported and stated that Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsened the problems facing the CSTO (Altynbayev, 2022). In June 2024, Pashinyan confirmed that Armenia would withdraw from the CSTO, accusing member states, particularly Russia, of failing to protect Armenia's security and even colluding with Azerbaijan. This decision reflects Armenia's loss of trust in the CSTO and marks a shift toward closer ties with Western actors. The organization's inaction during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, despite Russian peacekeepers on the ground, has significantly undermined its credibility. As a result, the CSTO has become a less effective instrument for Russia to project regional influence and maintain cohesion within its former sphere of dominance (Euractiv, 2024).

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

EAEU³ was founded on May 29, 2014, by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and operates as both a Customs Union and an economic bloc, giving the largest member, Russia, significant sway over the institution's governance. EAEU members enjoy the benefits of free movement for goods and services within the union, like any other regional integration movement. The proposal for the establishment of the Union came from Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in 1994, but the first work on the creation of the Union started in 2000. EurAsEC was officially dissolved in 2015 after the establishment of the EAEU. This Eurasian Economic Union spans a vast geographical area and encompasses a significant human population. Additionally, approximately 15% of the world's oil and gas reserves are situated within this region (Nicharapova, 2020: 123-124).

The analysis suggesting that EAEU will incentivize closer economic ties among states in the former Soviet sphere, followed by potential political realignment with Moscow, reflects Russia's strategic ambition to establish a sphere of influence as a regional power in this geographical area. Russia's reactions to the growing alignment of regional CIS member states with Western alliances underscore its efforts to establish a strong sphere of influence in Eurasia, via deploying elements of soft foreign policy power. Through initiatives like EAEU, Russia seeks to use trade, economic policy, climate of cooperation, and other regional economic integration,

³ For more information EAEU official website <https://eec.EAEUnion.org/>

economic policy instruments, aiming to bolster its influence in the region and lessen the influence of non-regional powers (Özcan, 2019: 190-191).

It is well established that EAEU serves as an effective countermeasure against initiatives like the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership Initiatives, which are perceived by Russia as attempts by Atlantic alliances to expand their influence within the former Soviet territories. Within this framework, the EAEU can be viewed as a tool to advance Russia's strategic objectives in neutralizing non-regional powers and implementing its policy agenda in the region. In essence, this initiative served its intended objective in isolating the region from Western influence. Hillary Clinton (when she was US Secretary of State) stated that she saw the Organization as the reincarnation of the Soviet Union (Libman, 2017: 81-82). When assessing EAEU as an alternative to the EU, one may interpret its establishment as stemming from Russia's post-imperialist expansionist motives and its desire to extend its sphere of influence, thus embodying hegemonic aspirations (Kirkham, 2016: 112). However, the primary goal of the EAEU is to elevate Russia to a global player. Russia is making great efforts to turn the organization into a new power center and geopolitical player (Nicharapova, 2020: 126-127). While the EAEU was initially envisioned as a mechanism to elevate Russia's status as a global power, this ambition inherently shaped the organization's internal dynamics. Russia's dominant role and its pursuit of strategic leadership led to a hierarchical and Moscow-centric structure, which ultimately undermined the principles of equal partnership and inclusive cooperation among member states.

Just as the member states of the EU must be democratic, the member states of the EAEU could be considered homogeneous in terms of their political regimes (autocratic). In this context, it is generally believed that the organization is used as a tool to strengthen and consolidate the rule of autocracy. Although the EAEU is designed as an economic organization that influences the political structures of the member states, it is not clear how this influence will be exerted (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018:1040).

Although EAEU was envisioned as a cornerstone of Russia's regional integration strategy, recent developments indicate a weakening of Moscow's influence within and around the bloc. Key neighboring states such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have resisted full membership, citing concerns over sovereignty, limited economic benefits, and rising Chinese investment in the region. Moldova has shifted decisively toward European integration, while Armenia's closer alignment with the EU raises further doubts about the bloc's cohesion. Even within current member states, enthusiasm for deeper integration appears to be waning. Kazakhstan, while central to the EAEU's formation, has received limited returns, and Russia's diplomatic pressure has yielded minimal results. The bloc faces significant challenges in expanding and maintaining unity, as national interests diverge and Russia's geopolitical leverage declines. Despite efforts to promote the EAEU as a counterweight to Western alliances, its future as a cohesive and influential regional body remains uncertain (Rodeheffer, 2025).

Despite economic advantages, the level of trust among EAEU member states remains low, and overall interest in the organization is limited. Kazakhstan has openly voiced its doubts regarding the effectiveness of the union, while Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have refused to join due to sovereignty concerns and a stronger orientation toward Chinese investments. Moldova has

shifted its focus toward European integration, and Armenia's growing engagement with the EU has further weakened the cohesion of the EAEU. Moreover, the union has failed to deliver significant economic benefits to its members. The organization's Moscow-centric and hierarchical structure has obstructed inclusive cooperation. In particular, Russia's unilateral actions, such as the suspension of grain exports in 2022 without consulting other members, have undermined trust in the principle of mutual benefit. Russia's aim to position the EAEU as a buffer zone against EU initiatives like the Eastern Partnership has also weakened due to diminishing regional support. Nevertheless, following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, the EAEU has regained functionality as a tool for circumventing international sanctions. Member states such as Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan have experienced economic growth by re-exporting Russian goods and hosting Russian entrepreneurs and migrants. However, these benefits reflect not deep integration, but rather pragmatic and temporary adaptations to the conditions of wartime economy (Waal, 2024).

BRICS

Representing a coalition of major states aiming to assert collective influence on global affairs and challenge the dominance of traditional Western powers, BRICS⁴ appears to be the primary global bloc through which Russia exerts its influence on the world stage. BRICS is preparing to have an important place in the world economy by gaining economic momentum by 2050. BRICS aims to realize cooperation in the fields of economic development of its members, international influence, cultural exchanges, and social and technological cooperation. The BRICS member states have significant economic, political, and policy resources that have the potential to influence and even shape the international order. The BRICS member states assert their representation of a distinct approach to world order, adopting a contrasting stance within the capitalist and neoliberal order. Many experts believe that the anticipated sustained positive economic growth of these member states in the coming years could potentially reshape the established global order (Hurrel, 2006: 5-8).

Russia stands out among the members of the BRICS for its efforts to leverage the full power, synergy, and potential of the organization for geopolitical purposes. The relative isolation of BRICS from the sphere of influence of major Western countries renders the organization crucial for Russia, positioning Moscow as an influential state within the institution. Unlike forums such as the G8 and G20, where great powers compete for influence, BRICS offers Russia a platform to assert its status without such rivalry. This makes the organization particularly appealing, allowing Russia to shape its agenda more freely (Lo, 2016). Russia's foreign policy underwent a significant shift after 2010, marked by strengthening ties with BRICS countries while escalating tensions with the US and European nations. In this context, it can be argued that Moscow's overall relations and integration efforts have predominantly pivoted from the West to the East, from Western to BRICS and Eurasian Organizations. For Russia, the perception of enemies in foreign policy has radically changed over time, and European countries are no longer categorized as friends (Çakmak, 2014: 151).

⁴ For more information: BRICS official web site <https://infobrics.org/>, accessed on 10.01.2025

On the other hand, one can argue the efficacy of the BRICS as a foreign policy tool for Russia to exert global influence since BRICS also faces serious economic vulnerabilities. BRICS members have not been able to take a leading role in other international organizations besides actively participating in discussions among themselves. For example, the New Development Bank established by the BRICS is far from being accountable and transparent compared to its counterparts since information about the bank is not easy to access, and it is unclear which institution will be held responsible if the bank causes losses. As the bank has for a long time only dealt with economic issues, the risk of making mistakes in other areas, such as governance and institutional integrity or humanitarian developments, is high (Bradlow, 2017).

Russia views BRICS not only as a crucial international security instrument but also as a potential tool and catalyst for its economic development. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, sanctions were imposed on Russia, resulting in a decrease in foreign investment. Russia sees BRICS as a compelling rationale for reversing this trend, promoting economic recovery, and facilitating investment (Lo, 2016).

African countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and South Africa have close ties with Russia historically, economically, and politically, providing Russia with extra leverage on the continent to counter Western influence and break the isolation imposed on Moscow. Putin, for instance, attended the BRICS summit in 2023 online, as the International Criminal Court had issued an arrest warrant against him, causing him to postpone his various trips to several countries. China and Russia are in favor of BRICS expanding its geographical reach and making the Organization more effective and influential in the medium and long term. At the 2023 BRICS meeting, Iran, Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, and many other countries applied to become members of the organization. The expansion of the organization requires a consensus of the member states and is seen as a challenge to Western alliances. BRICS criticizes the dominant influence of the West in international organizations such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the UN to the detriment of developing countries. The organization emphasizes that its main goal is not to take a stance against Western alliances but to protect the interests of developing countries and to produce a new alternative to dollar-based trade (Imray, 2023).

However, BRICS is not without disagreements and does not always speak as a unified bloc with one voice. Occasional political disagreements among BRICS members cannot be avoided, such as the border tensions between China and India. Social and demographic differences between the members can make it difficult to develop mutually beneficial policies; for example, China and India have populations of over a billion people, while other member countries have smaller populations. While India-US relations are in a positive atmosphere, the growing economic-military cooperation between Russia and Pakistan raises questions about the strength and future of BRICS (Ballard, 2010). When the relations between China and India are analyzed, it can be assessed that India has moved closer to the US due to the tensions between the two countries. Although India is part of organizations such as BRICS and SCO, it is also developing close relations with rival Western alliances. Many experts argue that India's rapprochement with the U.S. has played a "blocking" role in the balance of power that great powers like China and Russia are trying to shape in their interests. BRICS's expansion and cooperation with actors that are likely to move along the China-Russia axis puts India in a difficult position (Zeeshan, 2023).

In recent years, the internal balance of power within BRICS has gradually shifted away from Russia. The war in Ukraine, coupled with unprecedented levels of international sanctions and diplomatic isolation, has significantly weakened Moscow's ability to project leadership within the organization. While Russia was once perceived as a co-equal pillar alongside China within BRICS, recent developments suggest that Beijing is increasingly assuming a dominant role in shaping the group's strategic direction. The 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg offered a clear illustration of this shift. Russia's representation at the summit was notably constrained due to President Putin's international arrest warrant, leading him to participate remotely. This not only symbolized Russia's constrained diplomatic posture but also allowed China to play a more assertive role in advancing its preferences, particularly regarding BRICS expansion and new membership criteria. Moreover, as Russia's economic and political capacity has been eroded by the ongoing war, it now finds itself more dependent on the preferences and support of other member states, especially China. While Moscow continues to use BRICS as a platform to counter Western influence and signal strategic resilience, its actual leverage within the organization has diminished. As a result, Russia's role within BRICS has become increasingly reactive rather than directive, raising questions about the future of its influence in a bloc where intra-member asymmetries are growing more pronounced (Gabuev, 2023). The weakening of Russia's position within the BRICS framework has become increasingly evident, not only due to its declining economic and diplomatic capacity following the Ukraine war but also due to the growing strategic activism of other member states, particularly India. Initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) underscore the extent to which BRICS members are pursuing their geopolitical priorities beyond the confines of the organization. India's ambition to position itself as a central node in East-West trade corridors through IMEC further illustrates the diversification of strategic trajectories among member states, thereby accentuating existing asymmetries within BRICS and constraining Russia's ability to shape the bloc's overall strategic orientation.

At the G20 Summit held in 2023, the IMEC (India– Middle East– Europe Economic Corridor Project) was proposed as an important agenda giving India a central role in this regard. The Corridor, starting from India and stretching to Europe via the Middle East, is strategically perceived as a means to counterbalance China's escalating influence and proactive engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. It is positioned as a response to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR), aiming to mitigate China's dominance in regional connectivity and trade. Therefore, one can argue that the BRICS members' geopolitical motivations do not work coherently in all global issues. For instance, China is trying to develop cooperation with Arab and Gulf countries in economic, diplomatic, and many other fields. At the August 2023 BRICS Summit, the joining of new members to the organization led to comments that BRICS will expand under the leadership of China. The IMEC Corridor has the potential to undermine cooperation between China and the Gulf countries. On the other hand, IMEC may open the door for India to have a better command of trade and logistics routes and to occupy a critical position in the east-west axis. India is making intense efforts for the IMEC project and is the driving force of the project (Akbulut, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, Russia, with its vast territorial expanse, has consistently perceived itself as a great power and has sought to exert influence over its near abroad. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia interpreted the loss of significant territories and its subsequent economic and political weakening as a major strategic setback. Consequently, Russia has consistently opposed the post-Cold War "unipolar world order" promoted by Western powers, instead placing multipolarity—where non-Western blocs play active roles—at the center of its international agenda. In pursuit of this goal, Russia has utilized a variety of foreign policy tools and security mechanisms to assert its influence, with international organizations serving as a critical avenue. Institutions such as CIS, CSTO, EAEU, and BRICS have become platforms through which Russia attempts to expand its geopolitical influence and counterbalance Western-led alliances such as NATO and the European Union. These organizations allow Russia to operate in environments where Western competition is limited, enabling Moscow to play a more directive and influential role.

While Russia has achieved some successes in leveraging these organizations to bolster its international standing, significant limitations persist. Internal divisions, competing national interests, and structural fragilities among member states often hinder cohesive action and constrain Russia's ability to fully realize its strategic objectives. For instance, despite numerous agreements within the CIS, implementation has remained inconsistent, and many member states advocate a multilateral approach rather than aligning strictly with Russian interests. Similarly, challenges within the CSTO—such as Armenia's growing disillusionment following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts and ongoing border tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—highlight the fragile nature of Russia's leadership in the region.

The dynamics within the EAEU further illustrate these constraints. Although it was envisioned as a counterweight to the European Union, the EAEU has struggled with institutional development, and major regional actors like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have resisted deeper integration into Russian-led frameworks. Ukraine's withdrawal from the CIS after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 symbolized the shrinking of Moscow's influence in its near abroad.

In the broader global context, BRICS has emerged as a coalition aimed at challenging Western global dominance by promoting economic development, cultural exchange, and technological cooperation. Russia actively engages within BRICS to pursue its geopolitical objectives in a less competitive environment compared to Western-dominated forums. However, internal tensions—such as Sino-Indian border disputes, India's closer ties with the United States, and transparency concerns within the New Development Bank—limit the group's coherence and Russia's influence. The Russia-Ukraine War, coupled with increasing Western sanctions and international isolation, has further weakened Moscow's leadership role within BRICS, as illustrated by President Putin's virtual participation in the 2023 summit. China's rising influence within BRICS and India's initiatives, such as the IMEC project, underscore the diverging geopolitical priorities among member states, challenging Russia's efforts to steer the bloc in a direction aligned with its strategic interests.

Therefore, while Russia remains a significant actor within these organizations, it cannot be conclusively stated that it has succeeded in establishing a fully autonomous counter-bloc to

the West. Moscow's influence is considerable but constrained by the complex political and economic realities of member states and the evolving global environment. Russia's aspiration to reinforce its great power status and promote a multipolar world through international organizations, while strategically significant, faces enduring structural and political challenges that complicate the achievement of its broader objectives.

Authorship Contribution

This study was conducted with a single author.

Ethics Committee Declaration

Ethics committee approval is not required for this research.

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