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To cite this article: Gürol Baba and Emre Erşen, “Turkey and the Greater Eurasian Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in “Amalgamated” Regionalism”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 20, No 79, 2023, pp. 123-141, DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.1298205

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.1298205>

Submitted: 9 February 2022
Last Revision: 3 May 2023
Published Online: 20 May 2023
Printed Version: 17 October 2023

Uluslararası İlişkiler - International Relations
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Turkey and the Greater Eurasian Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in “Amalgamated” Regionalism

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ABSTRACT

The Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), introduced by Russia in 2015, is a regional integration project that aims to encompass the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). With this broad spectrum, it embodies various forms of regionalism, arranges a flexible institutional structure for non-/governmental actors without denting their other regional affiliations and provides commercial, developmental, and security opportunities. Such features could also facilitate the GEP's ability to enhance Turkey's recent efforts to deepen its relations with Asia. In return, Turkey could play several key roles for the GEP with its “dialogue partner” status in the SCO, “Middle Corridor” initiative for the BRI, and well-established links in Central Asia. Originating from potential mutual interests, this study applies a theoretical perspective underlining the commonalities of various regionalism categories to analyze the GEP's amalgamated nature and highlight its significance for Turkey's political-economic priorities without undermining its traditional ties with the West.

Keywords: Russia, China, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, foreign policy, geopolitics

Research Article | Received: 09 February 2022, Last Revision: 03 May 2023, Accepted: 15 May 2023

Introduction

In December 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin brought up the first proposal for a Eurasia-oriented extensive regional integration partnership aiming to link the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹ Although seemingly a Russian proposal, the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) was based on the Russian-Chinese declaration of May

1 “Address to the Federal Assembly”, *President of Russia*, 3 December 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50864> (Accessed 18 September 2021).

2015 calling for the joint development of the EAEU with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Putin's search for an institutionalized condominium with China in the Eurasian space was a strategic response to Russia's sharply deteriorating ties with the West in the aftermath of the crisis in Ukraine in 2014. GEP has also aimed to generate a regional identity for "an imaginary unified geopolitical space from 'Murmansk to Shanghai'."² GEP also aims to mitigate Russian-Chinese geo-economic rivalry in Eurasia with a "division of labor" whereby Russia is responsible for security issues, while China is responsible for economic issues.³

GEP's ambiguity in purpose creates both tardiness and versatility as it is defined as a "geopolitical enterprise, political slogan, economic aspiration, and ideological construct."⁴ However, this muddled focus caused a lackluster performance. The Chinese initiative to create a common data bank as part of the process of connecting the EAEU and the BRI and China Silk Road Fund's purchase of a 9.9 per cent stake in Russia's Yamal LNG project are probably the only remarkable developments that could be associated with the GEP.⁵ Yet, Russia's promotion of the GEP's versatility underlines the project's alluring convenience since any Eurasian actor could participate without weakening their existing ties with other organizations.

Due to its developing relations with Russia and China, Turkey is interested in improving its links with Eurasian organizations like the SCO and the EAEU. However, no significant study has been conducted so far regarding Turkey's prospects of joining the GEP. Turkey's institutional ties with the SCO as a dialogue partner, enthusiasm to play a major role in China's BRI through the "Middle Corridor" initiative, and well-established links with the Central Asian countries make it a potential partner for the GEP.

This article aims to fill the void in the literature by exploring the significance of the GEP for Turkey. The GEP's flexible and ambiguous nature is seemingly an obstacle to fit this scheme into a particular regional integration model. Therefore, this article brings up the GEP's peculiarities to clarify the regionalism model it aims for. Then, it analyzes its relevance to Turkey's political-economic priorities. The first section of the article overviews the commonalities between various regionalisms to provide a theoretical framework for the GEP. The second section underlines the GEP's meaning and value regarding these commonalities. The last section discusses the attractiveness of the GEP for Turkey.

The article also questions whether the GEP's unique structure represents a new paradigm in Russian foreign policy and to what extent this paradigm would facilitate Turkey's intensifying efforts to be more integrated into the Eurasian political-economic space. The article also elaborates on the possibility of a full-fledged establishment of the GEP in the future

2 David G. Lewis, "Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia'", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 70, No 10, 2018, p. 1612–1637.

3 *Prospects for Russian-Chinese Cooperation in Central Asia*, Moscow, NPMP RIAC, 2016.

4 Bobo Lo, "Greater Eurasia: The Emperor's New Clothes or an Idea Whose Time Has Come?", *Russie.Nei.Reports*, No 27, 2019 https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/bobo_lo_greater_eurasia_2019.pdf (Accessed 16 August 2011).

5 Ibid.

– a question which becomes even more important considering the ongoing crisis between Russia and the EU due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Commonalities between Regionalisms: A Theoretical Overview

Due to its multiple realms and the roles non-/state actors play in them, regionalism “means different things to different people.”⁶ In addition, multiple factors like institutional effectiveness, the feasibility of aims and the adaptability of identities affect regionalism’s success. Such multiplicity necessitates a multifaceted assessment of regionalism, considering the commonalities between its various types, with a variety of prefixes such as inter-, trans-, extra-, cross-, pan-, overlapping-, and mega-. The GEP as an amalgamated scheme borrows several elements from these varieties of regionalism, which necessitates a specific theoretical picture to understand what it could offer to its prospective partners.

The first commonality between various regionalism types is the role of the government. Governmental interactions particularly regarding trade generate intergovernmentalism, which both protects members’ national interests and promotes integration among them.⁷ Intergovernmental political bargaining produces binding rules for trade liberalization. Regional hegemonic governments play a significant role in this bargaining by bearing “the initial high costs,” offering “side payments” to actors “reluctant to participate” and “reassuring hesitant states about possible defections and cheating.”⁸ The regional hegemon resorts to power aggregation to rally smaller actors around its political objectives via “common institutions” to reassure “regional institutionalization”.⁹ Some notable examples include India’s role in the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, the US’s role in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and China’s role in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).¹⁰

Hegemons’ role is even more salient in security-oriented regional schemes, in which militarily weaker actors take shelter under the hegemon’s security umbrella, as seen in NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS). Yet, also in non-security schemes, since the hegemon sponsors most of the costs of cooperation and permits the smaller actors to free-ride, its interests and priorities dominate the regional

6 Fredrick Söderbaum, “Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field”, Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 17.

7 Björn Hettne et al. (eds.), *Comparing Regionalisms: Implications for Global Development*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001; Shaun Breslin et al. (eds.), *New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy: Theories and Cases*, London, Routledge, 2002.

8 Arie M. Kacowicz and Galia Press-Barnathan, “Regional Security Governance”, Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 304.

9 Thomas Pedersen, “Cooperative Hegemony: Power, Ideas and Institutions in Regional Integration”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No 4, p. 686-689.

10 Heiner Hänggi, “Interregionalism as a Multifaceted Phenomenon in Search of a Typology”, Heiner Hänggi et al. (eds.), *Interregionalism and International Relations*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 52.

mechanism – e.g., Indonesia in ASEAN, and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).¹¹ Some regional schemes, however, have multiple hegemonies such as France and Germany in the EU in a kind of reciprocal containment.¹² In this cooperative hegemonic system, the hegemonies share their power with regional institutions for long-term regional stability.

The second commonality is the role of non-state actors. Globalization reduced the divisions between state and non-state actors, which has gradually turned the latter into integral components of global structural change.¹³ With the increase in their numbers and growing roles in shaping institutions, non-state actors have become “natural partners” in regionalization initiatives.¹⁴ Especially, less powerful regional states’ dyadic partnerships with non-state actors have boosted their role in regionalism.¹⁵ Non-state actors became useful in areas where government agents do not have the political discretion or individual capacity to set agendas/standards/regulations, and monitor compliance.¹⁶

Trans-regional schemes, due to their multi-layered and complex governance systems, especially require intersecting networks of non-/state actors in the form of horizontal subsidiarity.¹⁷ These schemes establish common economic, business, political, and social-cultural spaces across regions which create “more extensive and deeper integrative links” among state and non-state actors.¹⁸ In short, non-state actors complement states in regional governance rather than rivalling or substituting them.¹⁹

The third commonality is the role of regional institutions. They set up the platforms for governments to achieve their regional aims. The Preferential Trade Agreements’ (PTAs) functions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) are good examples.²⁰ The success of these regional institutions relies on the

11 Amitav Acharya and Alistair Iain Johnston, “Comparing Regional Institutions: An Introduction”, Amitav Acharya and Alistair Iain Johnston (eds.), *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in a Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 19.

12 Alexander Cooley and Hendrik Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009.

13 Jörn Dosch, “The Post-Cold War Development of Regionalism in East Asia”, Fu-kuo K. Liu and Philippe Regnier (eds.), *Regionalism in East Asia: Paradigm Shifting?*, London, Routledge, 2003.

14 Benedicte Bull and Morten Bøås, “Multilateral Development Banks as Regionalising Actors: The Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank”, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No 2, 2003, p. 245–261.

15 Andrew F. Cooper and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

16 Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, “Hard and Soft Law in International Governance”, *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No 4, 2000, p. 421–456.

17 Wolfgang Reinecke, *Global Public Policy: Governing without Government?*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1998.

18 Christopher M. Dent, “From Inter-regionalism to Trans-regionalism? Future Challenges for ASEM”, *Asia Europe Journal*, No 1, 2003, p. 232.

19 Fredrick Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, “Conclusion: What Futures for New Regionalism?”, Fredrick Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 211–225.

20 Leonardo Baccini and Andreas Dür, “The New Regionalism and Policy Interdependence”, *British Journal of Political Science* Vol. 42, No 1, 2012, p. 57–79; Richard Baldwin and Dany Jaimovich, “Are Free Trade Agreements Contagious?”, *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 88, No 1, 2012, p. 1–16.

similarity of their members' expectations, compatibility of their members' political and economic systems, rigidity of their obligations, and the common ideology/identity.²¹

The fourth commonality is the opportunities regionalism provides in three main spheres: commerce, development and security. Commercial opportunities arise from intra-regional investments as well as capital and technology sharing.²² Regional commercial cooperation usually takes place via PTAs through trade liberalization, production-cost reduction, and export-boosting.²³ PTAs additionally create "deep integration" by harmonizing their members' regulatory systems for managing their production and trade levels, which bolsters international trade flows and networks.²⁴

Developmental opportunities mainly depend on regional actors' motivations for "regional market-making", which can be triggered by "external shocks" and "geopolitical considerations."²⁵ ASEAN-related initiatives in Southeast Asia like the Greater Mekong Sub Region, the East ASEAN Growth Area, and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle have all been encouraged by such developmental concerns.²⁶ In developmental regionalism, stronger actors invest in strengthening the capabilities of weaker actors to decrease the external pressures on them and help their integration into the new regional market, as seen in the eastern enlargement of the EU.²⁷

Regionalism's security-oriented opportunities, especially in the last decade, have helped the members counter unconventional threats like terrorism, epidemics, transnational crime, food scarcity, irregular migration, environmental degradation, and human trafficking.²⁸ The increasing weight of these threats led even trade-oriented regional organizations to focus on security, as seen in the EU, ASEAN, ECOWAS and APEC.

The fifth commonality is regionalism's potential to create a shared or group identity.²⁹ Regional initiatives as political projects create a "spatial" identity and disseminate it to boost the

21 Acharya and Johnston, "Comparing Regional Institutions".

22 Etel Solingen and Joshua Malnig, "Globalisation, Domestic Politics, and Regionalism", Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 64–87.

23 Albert O. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

24 Soo Yeon Kim, "Deep Integration and Regional Trade Agreements", Lisa L. Martin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Political Economy of International Trade*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 360–379; *The WTO and Preferential Trade Agreements: From Coexistence to Coherence*, Geneva, World Trade Organization, 2011.

25 László Bruszt and Stefano Palestini, "Regional Development Governance", Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 375, 390.

26 Christopher M. Dent and Peter Richter, "Sub-Regional Cooperation and Developmental Regionalism: The Case of BIMP-EAGA", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 33, No 1, 2011, p. 29–55.

27 László Bruszt and Julia Langbein, "Strategies of Regulatory Integration via Development: The Integration of the Polish and Romanian Dairy Industries into the EU Single Market", László Bruszt and Gerald A. McDermott (eds.), *Leveling the Playing Field: Transnational Regulatory Integration and Development*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 58–79.

28 Barry Buzan et al. (eds.), *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1998.

29 Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde et al., "Cascadia: The (Re)construction of a Bi-National Space and its Residents", *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 19, No 1, 2004, p. 59–77.

incentives for cooperation by fostering mutual trust between members.³⁰ OSCE, for example, has managed to develop a security identity for arms control and disarmament via confidence-building measures.³¹ The ASEAN Regional Forum has similarly developed confidence-building norms and preventive diplomacy to achieve lasting peace in Southeast Asia.³² The members' normative-ideational aims and values determine the identity of regional cooperation. For instance, liberal Western values have played an important role in the evolution of NATO's identity, while the EU's identity has been guided by the idea of the strategic and economic development of Western Europe, and ASEAN has fostered a unique identity known as the "ASEAN way".³³

The Novelty of the GEP from a Theoretical Perspective

While the GEP "appears to be more inspired by the new 'transcontinental' agreements ... the extent to which it could be compatible with the 'EU-like EAEU' is not clear."³⁴ Although this ambiguity makes it quite challenging to examine the GEP as a specific category of regionalism, the five commonalities outlined in the previous section could help in putting forward a clearer picture of the regional model offered by this initiative and, therefore, its theoretical peculiarity.

The GEP is a grand regional project promoted by the Russian government aiming to create some kind of Russian-Chinese cooperative hegemonic system in the Eurasian space.³⁵ This aim has a significant historical background considering that Russia and China have been developing bilateral ties in economic and security-related issues since the beginning of the 2000s, particularly within the framework of the SCO.³⁶ Russia has also been leading the economic integration process in the former Soviet space through the EAEU since 2015.³⁷ However, the EAEU's limited achievement in realizing deeper integration among its members and China's successful launch of the BRI in 2013 prompted Russia to seek a more comprehensive regional initiative that could possibly overshadow both the SCO and the EAEU.³⁸

30 Iver B. Neumann, "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 1994, p. 58; Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, London, Routledge, 2001.

31 Nuray Ibryamova, "The OSCE as a Regional Security Actor", Emil J. Kirchner and Roberto Domínguez (eds.), *The Security Governance of Regional Organizations*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, p. 79–104.

32 Katja Weber, "Lessons from the ASEAN Regional Forum: Transcending the Image of Paper Tiger?", Emil J. Kirchner and Roberto Domínguez (eds.), *The Security Governance of Regional Organizations*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, p. 219–242.

33 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009.

34 Alexander M. Libman, "Learning from the European Union? Eurasian Regionalism and the 'Global Script'", *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, Vol. 12, No 2, 2019, p. 257.

35 Dmitry Yefremenko, "The Birth of a Greater Eurasia", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 13 February 2016, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Birth-of-a-Greater-Eurasia-18591> (Accessed 6 September 2021); Nadège Rolland, "A China–Russia Condominium over Eurasia", *Survival*, Vol. 61, No 1, 2019, p. 7–22.

36 Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

37 Evgeny Vinokurov, "Eurasian Economic Union: Current State and Preliminary Results", *Russian Journal of Economics*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2017, p. 54–70.

38 Marcin Kaczmarski, "Non-western Visions of Regionalism: China's New Silk Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union", *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No 6, 2017, p. 1357–1376; Silvana Malle et al., "Greater Eurasia: More than a Vision?", *Post-Communist Economies*, Vol. 32, No 5, 2020, p. 561–590.

The deteriorating ties between Russia and the EU after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, which made Moscow gradually more dependent on Chinese political and economic support, is another factor that stimulated the Kremlin.³⁹ Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has further elevated the GEP's significance, since Moscow is now even more internationally isolated due to the new wave of Western sanctions, which has drawn it closer to Beijing. The joint statement of Putin and Xi only a few weeks before the start of the Russian invasion is an important indication of this trend since the document not only emphasizes the two countries' support for a multipolar world order but also reaffirms "their focus on building the Greater Eurasian Partnership in parallel and in coordination with the Belt and Road construction."⁴⁰

The GEP emerged out of Russia's desire to maintain its hegemony in the former Soviet space without openly challenging China's efforts to extend its trade and transport links to Central Asia through the BRI. Put differently, the GEP is designed to promote Russia's thriving economic and strategic cooperation with China, particularly in the post-2014 period, while also enabling Moscow to avoid being viewed as Beijing's junior partner in Eurasia.⁴¹ This has also been the main reason for Russia's firm resistance to China's proposal to strengthen the economic integration pillar of the SCO and its determination to promote the GEP as a brand-new initiative highlighting an equal partnership between the two countries.⁴²

Apart from the salient role it assigns to Russia and China as the two hegemonic powers in Eurasia, the GEP has specifically a Eurasian inter-governmental approach by highlighting sovereign equality, respect for territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs.⁴³ This Eurasian inter-governmentalism is strengthened by two main prospective institutional mechanisms of the GEP – EAEU and SCO – in which decision-making is dominated by national governments. Since highly authoritarian regimes are dominant in most members of these mechanisms, it would be quite difficult for non-state actors to be assertive in developing the GEP. Still, it is remarkable that the Kremlin-linked think-tank Valdai Discussion Club has played a significant intellectual role in developing the GEP's ideology.⁴⁴ Scholars like Sergey Karaganov, Timofei Bordachev, and Alexander Lukin have been quite influential in promoting the GEP in academic circles in Russia, which also shows that there is a certain degree of

39 Marcin Kaczmarski, "The Asymmetric Partnership? Russia's Turn to China", *International Politics*, Vol. 53, No 3, 2016, p. 415–434; Seçkin Köstem, "Russia's Search for a Greater Eurasia: Origins, Promises and Prospects", *Kenan Cable*, No 40, February 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/kenan_cable_no_40.pdf (Accessed 6 August 2021).

40 "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China", *President of Russia*, 4 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770> (Accessed 10 August 2022).

41 Marcin Kaczmarski and Witold Rodkiewicz. "Russia's Greater Eurasia and China's New Silk Road: Adaptation instead of Competition", *OSW Commentary*, 21 July 2016, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_219.pdf (Accessed 12 September 2021).

42 Alexander Lukin, "Russian–Chinese Cooperation in Central Asia and the Idea of Greater Eurasia", *India Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No 1, 2019, p. 1–14.

43 Sergey Karaganov, "The New Cold War and the Emerging Greater Eurasia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 9, No 2, 2018, p. 85–93.

44 "Toward the Great Ocean-3: Creating Central Eurasia", *Valdai Discussion Club*, 2015, <https://valdaiclub.com/files/17658/> (Accessed 10 July 2021).

elite consensus behind this project. Nevertheless, this is not an inter-regional consensus that includes several groups of elites from the GEP's prospective members.

The EAEU and SCO have 'some' supranationality which could provide a basis for a Eurasian regional cooperation on which the GEP could further take shape. For instance, the EAEU includes a supranational governing body resembling the European Commission. The SCO's regional anti-terrorist structure could also have a similar supranational influence. Such structures could strengthen the autonomous decision-making capacity of the GEP.

Regarding the opportunities for regional cooperation, the GEP is designed to address commercial, developmental and security-related interests simultaneously. In commercial terms, the EAEU's free trade agreements with Vietnam, Singapore, and Serbia and the interim agreement signed with Iran serve the GEP's primary purpose to create a significant economic space in Eurasia. The EAEU also signed an agreement on economic and trade cooperation with China in 2019, which could be regarded as the first significant step to connect the EAEU with BRI.⁴⁵ In addition, the EAEU is currently in negotiations for signing free trade agreements with Egypt, Israel, and India, and a separate memorandum was signed with ASEAN in 2018 to strengthen inter-organizational cooperation.⁴⁶ India and ASEAN are particularly important for the GEP as the former plays a crucial role in the Eurasian security architecture, while the latter is a key partner highlighted by Russia ever since the GEP project was launched.⁴⁷

In developmental terms, the GEP primarily aims to attract greater Chinese investment in the development of Russia's Far East region.⁴⁸ Putin highlighted Siberia and the Russian Far East as the two regions that would play a central role in Russia's economic integration with the Asia-Pacific.⁴⁹ Additionally, the integration of Northeast China (Dongbei) with Russia's Far East has been a crucial element in the conjugation of the EAEU and BRI.⁵⁰

Regarding Central Asian countries' interest in securing Russian and Chinese financial support, the GEP offers these states the opportunity to negotiate as a group, which is preferable to bilaterally dealing with Moscow or Beijing. Until 2013, there were also talks about establishing an SCO Development Bank, which was scrapped due to China's decision to launch the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The fact that all members of the

45 Richard Sakwa, "Sad Delusions: The Decline and Rise of Greater Europe", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 12, No 1, 2021, p. 5–18.

46 "Figures and Highlights: Trade", *EEC*, http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Documents/3264_EЭК_ЦИФ%20-%20Торговля_англ_04.pdf (Accessed 10 August 2021).

47 Alexander Korolev and Hryhorii Kalachyhin, "The Eurasian Dimension: Does EAEU-ASEAN Format Have a Future?", *HSE Research Paper*, 30 October 2019, <https://wp.hse.ru/data/2019/10/30/1532091780/34IR2019.pdf> (Accessed 6 September 2021).

48 Liang Shen, "How to Realise the Greater Eurasian Partnership? By Opening the Russian Far East", *Foreign Investment in China*, No 8, 2016, p. 28–29.

49 "Address to the Federal Assembly", *President of Russia*, 12 December 2012. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118> (Accessed 12 September 2021).

50 Gaye Christoffersen, "Sino-Russian Accommodation and Adaptation in Eurasian Regional Order Formation", *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 42, No 3, 2018, p. 439–462.

EAEU and SCO immediately joined the AIIB demonstrates the significance of the GEP's developmental potential.

The security-related opportunities within the GEP are best embodied in the SCO. The Sino-Russian dominance over the SCO was diluted with India and Pakistan's full membership in 2017, which also expanded the organization's outreach to South Asia. Although it is still unclear to what extent the SCO could alleviate long-standing bilateral security problems between India, Pakistan and China, the enlarged geopolitical scope of the organization serves Russia's purpose to present the GEP as a truly Eurasian platform.⁵¹

Identity has also been an important but limitedly effective factor in GEP's design. Russian decision-makers have been keen on growing the idea of a "Greater Eurasia", once it became clear after the crisis in Ukraine that their decades-long effort to find a suitable place for their country in a "Greater Europe" has been inconclusive.⁵² In this sense, "Greater Eurasia" aims to reposition Russia from the dual periphery of Europe and Asia into the center of Eurasia."⁵³ Yet, the political ideology of Eurasianism, which is well-linked with "Greater Eurasia" and promotes a geopolitical bloc between the Eurasian states against the Western dominance in world politics, plays only a partial role in the GEP, since the latter is not anti-European. In other words, the GEP is not against the EU, but its emphasis on the creation of a multipolar world could be regarded as a challenge to the US-led liberal international order.⁵⁴ Although limitedly, this dimension also enables the GEP to attract support from various national-patriotic political groups in other countries, including Turkey.

Turkey and the GEP: Prospects of Cooperation

The literature on Turkey's rising interest in the greater Eurasian region mostly tends to evaluate Ankara's developing political and economic ties with Russia and China within the framework of the so-called "shift-of-axis" in Turkish foreign policy, referring to the growing rift between Turkey and its Western allies, particularly after the failed coup attempt of July 2016. This evaluation is often accompanied by a discussion about the rising appeal of Eurasianism as an alternative foreign policy vision for Turkish decision-makers – one that advocates a strategic realignment with Eurasian countries instead of the West.⁵⁵

The strengthened influence of the national-patriotic "Turkish Eurasianists" over the Erdoğan government in the post-2016 period is related to the fact that Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Muslim cleric and the leader of a clandestine religious movement with thousands of

51 Timofei Bordachev, "The SCO as the Foundation of Greater Eurasia", *Valdai Discussion Club*, 3 July 2018, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-sco-as-the-foundation-of-greater-eurasia/> (Accessed 8 August 2021).

52 Andrej Krickovic and Igor Pellicciari, "From 'Greater Europe' to 'Greater Eurasia': Status Concerns and the Evolution of Russia's Approach to Alignment and Regional Integration", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 12, No 1, 2021, p. 86-99.

53 Glenn Diesen, "Europe as the Western Peninsula of Greater Eurasia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 12, No 1, 2021, p. 19-27.

54 Alexander Lukin, *Pivot to Asia: Russia's Foreign Policy Enters the 21st Century*, New Delhi, Vij Books, 2017.

55 Valeria Talbot (ed.), *Turkey: Towards a Eurasian Shift?*, Milano, ISPI, 2018.

devoted followers around the world, has been residing in Pennsylvania for more than twenty years. Viewing Gülen as the mastermind of the failed coup attempt of 2016, Ankara has been frustrated by Washington's reluctance to extradite him to Turkey, which also triggered the formation of an interesting political coalition between the Erdoğan government and the Turkish Eurasianists, who have long claimed that the Gülenist movement was an instrument of the US to exert pressure on Turkey. Russia, on the other hand, had outlawed the Gülen-linked institutions because of their ties with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as early as 2006, which could be regarded as one of the main reasons for the rapid development of the political, economic and military ties between Ankara and Moscow in the post-2016 period.⁵⁶ Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system despite US sanctions is a remarkable indication of the deepening of Turkish-Russian relations in the last few years.

It should be noted, however, that what makes Eurasianism so attractive for Ankara is not the prospect of forming an anti-Western geopolitical alliance led by Russia and China but rather the so-called "Eurasian values" that have been associated with this vision. In light of Turkish decision-makers' "frustration with Western values as well as their enthusiasm to embrace an alternative model whereby strong leaders and state-led reforms are essential for political, economic and social development," President Erdoğan's frequent criticisms against the Western-led liberal international order and his slogan "native-and-national," which draws attention to the necessity to improve Turkey's self-sufficiency in every sphere, could be regarded as signs of Ankara's interest in such Eurasian values.⁵⁷ At the same time, the highly centralized presidential system that Turkey adopted in 2018 also seems to be entirely compatible with the 'Eurasianist' model of development.

Yet, identity alone would not be enough to explain GEP's attractiveness to Turkey. As argued before, the GEP itself is not an anti-European project; on the contrary, it aims to include the EU.⁵⁸ Additionally, the GEP's commercial opportunities are more critical for Ankara, as also indicated by the Turkish "Asia Anew" initiative in August 2019. Therefore, Turkey's prospects concerning the GEP should be interpreted from a broader perspective of regionalism.

The predominantly intergovernmental nature of the GEP, prospectively operating via the SCO, EAEU, and ASEAN, is alluring for the current Turkish government, since each of these organizations has specific significance for Turkey. President Erdoğan's repeated statements emphasizing Turkey's interest in obtaining full membership in the SCO, which he sees as an alternative to the EU is a significant example⁵⁹. In September 2022, at the 22nd meeting of the

56 Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem (eds.), *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*, London, Routledge, 2019.

57 Ibid., p. 8.

58 "European Union Welcome in New Russian-backed' Great Eurasian Partnership', Moscow Says ... if Brussels Sees Value in Turning to East", *RT*, 7 April 2021, <https://www.rt.com/russia/520334-eu-great-urasian-partnership> (Accessed 19 September 2021).

59 "We Will Continue to Contribute to the Ongoing Political and Economic Processes within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *TCCB*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/139639/-we-will-continue-to-contribute-to-the-ongoing-political-and-economic-processes-within-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization> (Accessed 10 October 2022).

Council of Heads of State of the SCO in Samarkand, Erdoğan reiterated this interest although without directly emphasizing full membership but enhanced cooperation, which is a more realistic demand for Turkey due to the membership requirements of the organization.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, it is interesting to view that so far Ankara's efforts to be accepted as a full member of the SCO have not borne fruit and Turkish leaders had to settle with the more insignificant "dialogue partner" status, which they acquired in 2012 as well as the presidency of the SCO Energy Club in 2017. Even though Turkey was the first non-member state to assume such a role in the latter platform, it is clear that Turkish membership in NATO has prevented Ankara from establishing more extensive links with the SCO.

The same problem also prevents Turkey from developing closer ties with other pillars of the GEP. For instance, although the former Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekçi acknowledged Turkey's interest in signing a customs agreement with the EAEU, following the former Kazakh president Nazarbaev's favorable remarks on Turkey's membership, Ankara's cooperation with the EAEU remained mostly rhetorical.⁶¹ According to the latest figures, only around 5 per cent of EAEU exports are directed towards Turkey, while the EAEU's share in Turkish exports is less than 2 per cent.⁶²

Another complication is Turkey's relations with Armenia, a full member of the EAEU. However, the cautious rapprochement between the two countries that started in early 2022 could positively influence Turkey-EAEU links. The opening of the "Zangezur Corridor", which will connect Turkey with Azerbaijan through Armenia is expected to significantly boost not only Ankara's political and economic influence in the region but also the potential role it could play in the GEP as a key junction of transport between Europe and Asia.⁶³

Regarding ASEAN, Turkey's prospects in intergovernmental terms are even dimmer, considering that extra-regional countries are ineligible for membership in this organization. Therefore, even though Erdoğan expressed "Turkey's readiness" for full membership in ASEAN in 2015, Ankara had to confine itself to the status of a sectoral dialogue partner and an observer in ASEAN's multinational police force.⁶⁴

60 "Erdoğan: 'Şanghay Beşlisi İçerisinde Türkiye Niye Olmasın?' Diyorum", *Sputnik Türkiye*, 30 November 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201611201025892702-erdogan-ab-sanghay-beslisi> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

61 "Nazarbayev Invites Turkey to be a Member of the Eurasian Economic Union", *Ponars Eurasia*, 6 June 2014, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/nazarbayev-invites-turkey-to-be-a-member-of-the-eurasian-economic-union/> (Accessed 15 September 2021); "Economy Minister: Turkey Eyes Eurasian Customs Union", *Daily Sabah*, 19 August 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/08/19/economy-minister-turkey-eyes-eurasian-customs-union> (Accessed 22 September 2021).

62 "EAEU Drops Tariff Preferences for 76 Countries", *EY*, 10 March 2021, https://www.ey.com/en_ru/tax/tax-alert/2021/03/ey-eau-drops-tariff-preferences-for-76-countries-10-march-2021-customs-eng (Accessed 18 September 2021).

63 Anastasia Lavrina, "Zangezur Corridor: New Transport Route to Connect Europe and Asia", *Daily Sabah*, 9 August 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/zangezur-corridor-new-transport-route-to-connect-europe-and-asia> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

64 "Erdoğan Wants Turkey in ASEAN", *Anadolu Agency*, 31 July 2015, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/erdogan-wants-turkey-in-asean/20877> (Accessed 16 August 2021).

While the identity and intergovernmental dimensions of the GEP do not promise much to Ankara in terms of regional benefits, its commercial and developmental opportunities seem to be more remarkable mainly due to the salient Turkish role in the BRI since 2013. Ankara has been interested in participating in the BRI not only due to its hope of attracting part of the 900-billion-dollar Chinese investment program but also because of the expectation that the BRI could significantly reduce the transport time for Turkish products and services to be delivered to East and South Asia.⁶⁵ Due to such interests, Erdoğan attended the two BRI forums held in 2017 and 2019. Several remarkable infrastructure and transport projects like the Yavuz Sultan Selim and Osmangazi Bridges, Eurasia Tunnel, Marmaray commuter rail line, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and Edirne-Kars railways, and Filyos, Çandarlı and Mersin container ports have been initiated to elevate Turkey's role in the integration of the "Middle Corridor" (or the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative) within the BRI. The launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in October 2017 has been a milestone in this regard as the first train carrying goods from Turkey to China reached its destination in December 2020.

Although some argue that the BRI would significantly increase Turkey's economic dependence on China,⁶⁶ such BRI-related projects would elevate Turkish non-state actors' potential role in the GEP as leading Turkish construction companies have invested millions of dollars in these grand projects in the last few years together with their foreign partners. It should also be noted that the Turkish construction, transportation, and service sectors have been very active in Central Asia since the early 1990s.

Recently, Southeast Asia has also become attractive for Turkish businesses, and the share of this region in Turkish foreign trade has increased to 16 per cent, particularly after the conclusion of Turkey's free trade agreements with Malaysia and Singapore in the 2015-2017 period.⁶⁷ Within the framework of ASEAN, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), which is one of the leading Turkish business associations, launched a working group with the business councils of Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and Singapore to deepen links in the fields of energy, sustainable development, tourism, investment, and e-commerce.⁶⁸

65 "Çin'in Türkiye Ekonomisinin Gelişimine Nasıl Faydası Olur?", *BBC Türkçe*, 7 September 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-45430883> (Accessed 12 September 2021).

66 George Marshall Lerner, "China to the Rescue in Turkey?", *The Diplomat*, 3 July 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-to-the-rescue-in-turkey/> (Accessed 18 September 2021).

67 Ümit Alperen and Eyüp Ersoy, "Turkey and Asia Anew: A Foreign Policy Initiative in Passing", *The Diplomat*, 18 October 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/turkey-and-asia-anew-a-foreign-policy-initiative-in-passing/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

68 "DEİK, Yeniden Asya: 'Türkiye'nin Asya Ülkeleri ile Ticaretinin Geliştirilmesinde Yeni Perspektifler' Toplantısını Gerçekleştirdi", *DEİK*, 18 January 18 2021, <https://www.deik.org.tr/basin-aciklamalari-deik-yeniden-asya-turkiye-nin-asya-ulkeleri-ile-ticaretinin-gelistirilmesinde-yeni-perspektifler-toplantisini-gerceklestirdi> (Accessed 9 October 2021); "ASEAN-Turkey Sectoral Dialogue Partnership: Practical Cooperation Areas (2019-2023)", *ASEAN*, 18 July 2019, <https://asean.org/storage/2018/07/ASEAN-Turkey-PCA-adopted-at-2nd-AT-JSCC-18-July-2019.pdf> (Accessed 19 October 2021).

Commercial interests also play a significant role in the development of Turkey's relations with Russia and China as they are currently among Ankara's top three trade partners, even though the bilateral trade is imbalanced. As demonstrated by Table 1, Turkey's exports to the greater Eurasian region are far below its imports, and the GEP framework could provide Turkish businesses with some opportunities to reduce this imbalance.

Table 1. Turkey's Foreign Trade with SCO, EAEU and ASEAN members, 2021 (Thousand US\$)⁶⁹

Country	Exports	Imports	Balance
Armenia	2.342	3.684	-1.342
Belarus	915.332	269.996	645.336
Brunei Darussalam	8.701	6	2.701
Cambodia	26.334	64.298	-37.964
China	3.662.748	32.238.052	-28.575.304
India	1.304.820	7.936.146	-6.631.326
Indonesia	313.044	1.847.385	-1.534.341
Kazakhstan	1.288.142	1.595.313	-307.171
Kyrgyzstan	749.443	86.461	662.982
Lao PDR	1.189	5.030	-3.841
Malaysia	445.166	3.098.059	-2.652.893
Myanmar	21.161	45.862	-24.701
Pakistan	773.084	314.843	458.241
Philippines	112.504	157.753	-45.249
Russia	5.774.392	28.959.361	-23.184.969
Singapore	888.880	395.138	493.742
Tajikistan	258.354	195.731	62.623
Thailand	236.224	1.644.712	-1.408.488
Uzbekistan	1.841.623	1.800.044	41.579
Vietnam	336.664	1.573.071	-1.236.407

Although Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu emphasized the Turkish economic – rather than security – interests in this region in his opening speech at the “Asia Anew” workshop held in Ankara in December 2019, this does not mean that security prospects would be insignificant in Turkey – GEP relations.⁷⁰ Turkish defense industry is intertwined with Turkey's commercial and security interests. The Turkish Baykar company's Bayraktar TB2 drones have proved to be highly effective in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Libya and are currently being sold to more

⁶⁹ Data has been compiled from the official website of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Kategori/GetKategori?p=dis-ticaret-104> (Accessed 8 October 2022).

⁷⁰ “Opening Speech of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu at Asia Anew Workshop”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 26 December 2019, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-yeniden-asya-calistayi-hitabi-26-12-19.en.mfa> (Accessed 12 September 2021).

than twenty countries including Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. Ankara's recent achievements in the production of military equipment do not go unnoticed by Asian countries. Malaysia and Pakistan, for instance, have signed several agreements with Ankara for the purchase of Turkish-made military equipment, including T129 ATAK helicopters, PARS armored vehicles, and MUHAFIZ remote-controlled weapon systems.

Turkey's security cooperation with Russia has also become quite visible in the post-2016 period for the resolution of regional conflicts in Syria and Libya. The two countries also established a joint military center in Azerbaijan to monitor the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, Turkey has been actively cooperating with Russia and the Central Asian states in combating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other radical extremist groups. Turkey has also been a key actor in international efforts to bring political stability to Afghanistan, which is one of the SCO observer states. On the other hand, China views Ankara's cooperation as a crucial factor in its efforts to handle the Xinjiang issue, as many groups in Turkey are quite vocal about the violation of the rights of the Uighur community. More importantly, Turkey plays a vital role in resolving regional security issues in the BRI's China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor.

The GEP's institutional flexibility and vague membership criteria could be another major advantage in strengthening Turkey's role since Ankara would not be obliged to join the SCO, EAEU, or ASEAN as a member state to develop its cooperation with the greater Eurasian region. Turkey's presidency at the SCO Energy Club as a non-member state in 2017 provides an important example, which shows that in issues like energy Turkey's membership in NATO or extensive links with the EU may not cause a significant obstacle to greater Turkish cooperation with these institutions. Similarly, Turkey's leading role in the Organization of the Turkic States (OTS), which was founded in 2009 as the Turkic Council, could be instrumental in integrating this regional organization with the GEP, since most of its members are also active participants in either the SCO or EAEU. In this sense, the GEP could become the main platform for Turkey in reaching out to Central Asia without directly challenging Russian and Chinese political-economic interests in the region.

Conclusion

GEP's trans-regionalist structure, which includes both state/non-state members, resembles the BRI's formulation as well as the latter's aims for interconnectivity. GEP's aim to bring the EAEU and SCO under its umbrella could only be achieved without antagonizing China. Therefore, Moscow has chosen to ensure Beijing's support for the GEP at the earliest stage.

With its initial aim to cover the EU, the GEP could be regarded as the first truly Russian attempt to link the EU as a whole to an "Asian" regional institution. Even though Russia's invasion of Ukraine seems to have significantly damaged the EU prospect, this dimension of the GEP is still relevant for Turkey considering that its Western connections in the past have largely been a hindrance to its membership in purely Asian schemes like the SCO and ASEAN.

Even though Russian leaders have not openly mentioned Turkey as one of the potential partners of the GEP, some studies draw attention to the crucial role Turkey could play in the development of this initiative as a key regional power located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia.⁷¹ The flexible and open-ended structure of the GEP could enable Turkey to take an active part without sacrificing its military and economic ties with the West. Ankara's careful policy of balance between Russia and the West in the latest crisis in Ukraine is also quite noteworthy in this regard. Meanwhile, economic challenges compel the Turkish private sector to focus on a more diversified and deepened export geography, i.e., Eurasia, without curbing its decades-old commercial bonds with the EU.

However, there would still be GEP-related potential problems for Turkey. Firstly, the GEP's functionality would be based on the cooperative hegemony of Russia and China. China's role in Eurasia has become much more visible in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as Moscow's dependence on Beijing has significantly grown. Therefore, Turkey needs to decide whether it would be willing to accept Chinese hegemony for the sake of enjoying the GEP's advantages. Such a decision would inevitably discredit Ankara's efforts to act as a counter-hegemonic power, which is embodied in Erdoğan's "the world is bigger than five" slogan.⁷²

The Ukraine crisis is another complication regarding the GEP. Turkey's ongoing support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and decision to continue selling Kyiv the Bayraktar TB2 drones cause significant uneasiness in Moscow. On the other hand, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Western governments will most likely continue to perceive the GEP as an anti-Western project, which could further complicate Turkey's already strenuous relations with the US and EU.

In short, the advantages and disadvantages of Turkey's active participation in the GEP will be mainly determined by Ankara's political-economic needs as well as the vibrant geopolitical dynamics of the Eurasian space. Even though the advantages that the GEP could provide currently seem to be more profound for Turkey, the disadvantages should also be thoroughly and constantly assessed by Turkish policymakers to make sure that Turkey's relations with the West remain as intact as possible, particularly considering the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

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