

## Chapter 2

# Eurasian Regionalism: Specifics, Problems, and Prospects

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The term ‘Eurasia’ is an ambiguous concept that includes in different studies: ‘Greater Eurasia’, which is associated with the Eurasian continent; ‘Central Eurasia’ as a post-Soviet space; and the term Eurasia can be associated with specific integration projects in Eurasia, such as Eurasian Economic Union. This chapter defines Eurasian regionalism and prospects for its development. Authors analyze modern scientific discourse around Eurasian integration and Eurasian regionalism. They examine modern approaches to regionalism and identify some of the distinctive features of the construction of regions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Eurasian regionalism is certainly amongst the most complex phenomena to study (Obydenkova & Libman, 2019). A large number of works are dedicated to Eurasia and the processes of integration within it. ‘Eurasian regionalism’ is a term usually used in the English-language scientific discourse (Molchanov, 2005; Aris, 2011; Gast, 2017; Kavalski, 2012; Obydenkova & Libman, 2019). These authors apply the term ‘Eurasian regionalism’ to completely different integration projects: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In Russian discourse, authors predominantly apply terms such as ‘integration in the post-Soviet space’ and ‘integration projects in Eurasia’ (Zhiltsov, 2016; Zinoviev & Troitskij, 2016; Vasilieva & Lagutina, 2017; Lagutina, 2017). Nevertheless, the terms ‘integration’ and ‘regionalism’ are quite different from each other. Integration can be viewed either as a unification process in world politics, which is used by different countries in order to effectively solve global and regional problems—the ‘challenges’

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1950-9.ch002

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of globalisation (Lagutina, 2018)—or as a model of conscious and active participation by a group of countries in the process of global stratification of the world (Butorina, 2011).

The term ‘Eurasia’ is an ambiguous concept which manifests in different studies as ‘Greater Eurasia’ associated with the Eurasian continent; ‘Central Eurasia’ as a post-Soviet space; and finally, the term ‘Eurasia’ can also be associated with specific integration projects in Eurasia, such as the Eurasian Economic Union.

An analysis of contemporary Russian scientific discourse demonstrates that researchers practically do not apply the concept of Eurasian regionalism. Eurasian regionalism is often synonymous with Eurasian integration, which is considered either as a project of the Russian Federation aimed at building macro-regional/trans-regional integration (Vinokurov & Libman, 2012a), or as a process of building integration organisations in Eurasia.

In this study, the authors set an ambitious task to determine what Eurasian regionalism is and what the prospects for its development are, by applying a regionalism-based approach. Regionalism is a complex concept that explains the process of political regional integration as a process of building a ‘relatively independent subsystem of interstate relations, united primarily in order to solve the concrete political problems, which are specific to this particular region’ (Voskresensky, 2012). However, it also explains the processes by which regions are made and unmade, i.e., regionalisation and region-building (Söderbaum, 2016).

The logic of the paper follows this structure: in the first part of the study, the authors will analyse the modern scientific discourse around Eurasian integration and Eurasian regionalism and determine the main concepts used in the study; in the second part, the authors will analyse modern approaches to regionalism and identify some of the distinctive features of the construction of regions at the present stage; the third part of the paper will analyse the distinctive features of modern Eurasian regionalism, challenges and the prospects for its development. At the end of the chapter, there will be some recommendations for the development of Eurasian regionalism.

The novelty of the research lies in the comparison of contemporary Russian discourse around Eurasian regionalism with the modern views of the theorists of regionalism, as well as in the application of theoretical experience to the implementation of Eurasian regionalism. Another objective of the study is to show that despite the common history and economic relations of the Soviet period, several regional projects are developing parallelly in the post-Soviet space, initiated by countries of the region and by non-regional actors.

## **Background**

There is no clear understanding of what Eurasian regionalism is per se. While assessing the Russian Science Citation Index, there are only a few papers where the term ‘Eurasian regionalism’ is used at least in the title or in the list of keywords. In general, in Russian discourse, there is no clear differentiation between regionalism and integration. Practically all papers discuss the different forms of integration in the Eurasian space, such as the CIS, the SCO, etc. The only original approach to regional integration in the post-Soviet space is Vinokurov and Libman’s (2012a) approach of ‘holding-together regionalism’. This approach explains the regional integration of countries which were until recently a part of a single political entity.

The second challenge for researchers is how to define what ‘Eurasia’ is. Here the authors agree with Vinokurov and Libman (2012b) that Eurasia is a relatively clear concept in terms of physical geography,

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