


Chapter 3

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) From the Perspective of International Relations (IR) Theories

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) from the perspective of the main theories in the Discipline of International Relations (IR). The author sketches out the main stages of the development of the EAEU cooperation by highlighting the conceptualization of the scheme by President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in 1994, the establishment of the Customs Union (CU), and the Common Economic Space (CES) between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 2010. Theories analyzed include Neo-Realism, Neo-Classic Realism, Hegemonic Stability Theory, Liberalism, Functionalism, Neo-Functionalism, Neo-Institutionalism, the English School, Constructivism, and Neo-Gramscian Theory. The author makes an overall evaluation and stresses the need for an eclectic approach for analyzing the EAEU experience.

INTRODUCTION

In terms of both its theory and practice, the discipline of International Relations (IR) has been shaped by a narrow focus on the Euro-Atlantic region. In modern times, Anglo-Saxon powers have set the main rules of the international order. Consequently, the theoretical frameworks have been dominantly developed to account for their behaviors. The integration theories in IR illustrate this point well. Whereas Functionalism of David Mitrany and Neo-Functionalism of Ernst Haas center on the experience of the European Union (EU), Karl Deutsch's concept of security community focuses on the experience of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, the center of gravity is shifting towards Eurasia now. Moreover, we have recently seen many developments that cast doubt on the Euro-Atlantic inte-

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gration and cooperation, such as BREXIT and Trump's harsh criticisms on NATO. In this context, IR theories on integration need to pay close attention to the integration and regional cooperation in Eurasia.

For the researchers focusing on Eurasia, integration schemes and regionalism are hotly debated issues. As the main framework of integration in the region, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) attracts remarkable attention from academic circles. The high number of studies examining the subject illustrates the significance of the issue. However, there are only a very limited number of studies with a theoretical perspective. Moreover, the existing studies with a theoretical insight examine the EAEU by relying on a single theoretical tradition. They predominantly utilize Realism to analyze the subject. Due to avoiding an eclectic approach, the literature is devoid of a rich analytical tool to account for the Eurasian integration. It is necessary to go beyond the existing studies and utilize an eclectic approach, which is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of all relevant theories in IR.

This study aims to examine the EAEU from the perspective of the main theories in International Relations (IR). It follows an eclectic approach in examining the subject. The objective is to shed light on the explanatory power of each IR theory covered by the study. The study eschews giving precedence to an IR theory over others. The theories used for analyzing the EAEU are Neo-Realism, Neo-Classic Realism, Liberalism, Functionalism, Neo-Functionalism, English School, Constructivism, and Neo-Gramscian Theory.

The Global IR Approach of Acharya is a source of inspiration for the study. This approach calls for taking previously ignored sources of IR knowledge into account and integrating the study of regions and regionalisms into the main concerns of IR. Acharya also urges the IR community to move beyond Eurocentric regionalism and Westphalian world vision and consider the features of the emerging post-Western world order (Acharya, 2014, p. 647). Following this advice, the study focuses on regionalism in the Eurasian region to see in what ways this relatively less studied part of the world can contribute to the study of IR.

The study is structured as follows. After the literature review in the following section, the third section first sketches out the main stages of the development of the EAEU cooperation by highlighting the conceptualization of the scheme by President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in 1994, the establishment of the Customs Union (CU) and the Common Economic Space (CES) between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 2010. Afterward, the section analyzes the EAEU from the perspective of IR theories. The theoretical analysis comprises Neo-Realism, Neo-Classic Realism, Hegemonic Stability Theory, Liberalism, Functionalism, Neo-Functionalism, Neo-Institutionalism, the English School, Constructivism, and Neo-Gramscian Theory. The conclusion makes an overall evaluation and stresses the need for an eclectic approach for analyzing the EAEU experience.

BACKGROUND

This section reviews the literature on the EAEU, which is marked by some trends. First, as illustrated by the studies of Andreichenko, Mostafa and Mahmood, Vinokurov and Libman, and Wirminghaus, it is common to draw attention to several attempts at regional integration before the initiation of the EAEU. As another important trend, there are some studies (Bordachev and Skriba, 2014; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012; Sergi, 2018; Lagutina, 2015) that differentiate between the regionalism before the initiation of the EAEU and the regionalism of the EAEU. Third, the future trajectory of the EAEU attracts significant attention and there are both optimistic (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012; Sergi, 2018; and Lagutina, 2015;

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