

Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism

Marlène Laruelle

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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Introduction

The issues concerning relations between Russia and Central Asia in the geo-strategic and economic realms are well-known. Much has been said about the rapprochement between these countries, which has been very visible since 2000 and even more pronounced since 2005, as it undermines the power of influence the United States and Europe have in the region. But very little is known about the specific place that Central Asia occupies in Russian political and intellectual life. However, with the rise of nationalism and xenophobia in Russian society, a detailed analysis is warranted of the opinions held by the various nationalist currents in relation to Central Asia. Indeed, for many years now, a profound reordering of the Russian political scene has been underway: the so-called liberal currents have been marginalized, while the nationalist parties have enjoyed a rapid rise.

A presidential party, United Russia, has emerged that embodies official patriotism propagated by the Kremlin. Nationalist parties that support the policies of President Vladimir Putin, like Rodina in 2003-2006 and Fair Russia, created at the end of 2006, have developed, further marginalizing the Communist Party led by Gennadii Ziuganov. Even the opposition movement Another Russia which groups together former chess champion Garri Kasparov and his anti-Putin movement, the United Civic Front, the former Prime Minister and now leader of the People's Democratic Union of Russia, Mikhail Kasiyanov, and Vladimir Ryzhkov of the Republican Party, works with the National-Bolshevik Party, which is part of the nationalist movement. The Russian Presidential elections on March 2, 2008 are unlikely to bring any surprises. Vladimir Putin has anointed his successor in Dmitrii Medvedev, currently the Vice-Prime Minister in charge of implementing so-called "projects of national priority" (such as housing and health) and the President of the Administrative Council of natural gas giant Gazprom.

In this very *managed democracy*, nationalism constitutes one of the central elements of the social consensus that has emerged between the authorities and society in recent years. The success of the “Russian *marsh*” since 2005, not to mention the rise of xenophobia, avers the strong underlying social tensions traversing Russia that this nationalism expresses. The slogan “Russia for Russians” put about by the skinhead movements has been adopted by most groups for which xenophobia is the stock in trade. Thus, for some years, the Levada Center has registered a decrease in the number of Russian citizens who think that Russia is “a house shared by many peoples” (from 49% in 2003 to 44% in 2006). At the same time, the number of persons interviewed who agree with the slogan “Russia for Russians” has been constantly increasing. A quarter of the people interviewed would like to see the idea put into effect “with moderation”, 12% think that it is time to implement it without restriction (this figure is 22% in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, where xenophobia is most extreme), and 34% agree with the slogan on the proviso that by “Russian” is meant all the citizens of Russia excluding migrants.¹

In Russian public opinion, Central Asia is constantly amalgamated with notions of Islamism, terrorism, and mafia, while positive references emphasizing the historical and cultural ties to Central Asian peoples are extremely rare. Central Asia is not unaffected by this situation: more than two million seasonal workers work in Russia;² relations between the new states and the former metropolis are still significant in the areas of economics, strategy, and culture; and large Russian companies are becoming more and more active in the region. This paper thus analyzes the role played by the Russian nationalist movements in this evolving situation: what is the place of Central Asia in their discourses? What are their positions on current relations between Russia and the new states? What topics preoccupy them the most? On which do they agree or disagree? Which lobbies possess the power

¹ “V Rossii vozroslo chislo storonnikov idei ‘Rossiia dlia russkikh’” [In Russia the number of those who subscribe to the maxim ‘Russia for Russians’ is increasing], *Russkaia tsivilizatsiia*, December 12, 2006, <<http://www.rustrana.ru/article.php?nid=30193>> (August 12, 2007). See also the Levada Center web site, <<http://www.levada.ru>>.

² Marlène Laruelle. “Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia: The ‘Diasporization’ of the Central Asian States?,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2007), pp. 101-119.

to influence Russian foreign policy in Central Asia? The aim of this research is twofold: first, to identify the Russian nationalist political circles and their opinions on Central Asia; and second, to understand, by means of this, what the major stakes are between Russia and Central Asia and how they are perceived in Russian society.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first provides the overall picture of Russia's regaining of influence in Central Asia in the political, geopolitical, military and economic sectors: though Moscow does not consider this area to be the most important strategically, it remains an essential element for the assertion of Russian power. The second part looks at the place Central Asia has traditionally occupied in Russian nationalist discourses since the nineteenth century: while scorned on the cultural level and considered to be an area of instability, Central Asia is a key factor in messianic discourses about Russia's role in Asia. The third part develops a broad tripartite classification of Russian nationalist milieus according to their attitude toward Central Asia: an isolationist current; one dedicated to the defense of the Russian "diaspora" of the Near Abroad; and another that endorses a more or less radical "imperialist" politics. The fourth and final part concentrates on the three key stakes of current Russian-Central Asian relations: the question of Russian *soft power* in the region; that of Russians of the Near Abroad and of their repatriation; and finally, the migration issue. The latter remains the most contentious given the growing xenophobia and the difficulties the authorities are having in defining what the identity of Russia ought to be. The influence of Russian nationalist milieus and their doctrines on these issues are therefore bound to have at least some bearing on determining the future of Russo-Central Asian relations.

The “Return” of Russian Influence in Central Asia

Having been uninterested in Central Asia throughout the 1990s, Putin’s Russia was aspiring to regain its status as a superpower as early as 2000. This can only occur, however, via a reaffirmation of its presence in the post-Soviet space. As such, Central Asia now finds itself at the heart of a new logic: since the Central Asian states generally have much less room for manoeuvre than the Ukraine, Moldavia and the South Caucasus, they turn out to be favorable, albeit somewhat reluctantly on occasion, to a renewal of Russia’s regional leadership. The post-Soviet space has in effect become a space of rivalry for influence, the Russian presence within it varying according to the state in question. In Central Asia, this presence is noticeable as much on the political (the Kremlin’s support of the regimes currently in power, particularly the most authoritarian) and geopolitical levels (Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization) as in the economic domain (Eurasian Economic Community and the shoring up control of energy resources in Central Asia by Russian companies). Russia’s “return” to Central Asia confirms that Moscow wishes to preserve its control over the former post-Soviet republics and to continue, according to the principles of *soft power*, to wield influence on the unstable situation in Central Asia. This has led to the five Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan, returning back into Russia’s fold after many years of rapprochement with the West, whose influence is in decline throughout the region. It has also led to a process by which, through their inclusion in a “continental” bloc partly centred on the new Russia-China partnership in Asia, these state actors are being integrated in the international scene.

The Political Return of Russia in Central Asia

In the 1990s, the Russian authorities appeared unconcerned with maintaining the leadership of Central Asia that they had inherited from Soviet times. Moscow’s foreign policy was chaotic and contradictory; it appeared reactive

and had no long-term outlook. Russia did not seek, for example, to defend the sizeable Russian minority in the region (amounting to nearly 10 million people in 1989), and it invested little in those “Russophone” structures (schools, universities, the media, etc.) so crucial to preserving cultural influence.³ Only the decree of September 14, 1995 declared that the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was “a space of vital interest” for Russia, meaning that Moscow wanted to reserve a right of inspection over the southern borders of the former Soviet Union. The Federation thus seemed content solely to remain present in Central Asia on a strategic level. This included measures as renting the site of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan; maintaining Russian troops in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan along the borders with China, Afghanistan and Iran; engaging militarily in Tajikistan both during the civil war (1992-1996) and after the 1997 peace accords; and putting political pressure on the new states to ensure they adhered to the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS.⁴ But, on the economic level, Boris Yeltsin’s Russia gradually stepped aside, allowing a space to open up into which both western companies, American ones in particular, and the new Asian and Middle-Eastern partners of Central Asia (Turkey, Iran, China, etc.) rushed to take advantage.

Putin’s rise to the prime ministership in the fall of 1999, and then to the presidency in March 2000, signalled a turning point in the Federation’s domestic and foreign policy. In the preceding decade, the Russian population had experienced many disappointments: economic and political democratization led to a drastic decrease in the standard of living, to savage privatization, to the economic crisis of summer 1998, and to the birth of a class of oligarchs. The country was shocked by western criticisms during the war in Chechnya, then by NATO’s bombing of Serbia, and yet again by the European position on Kosovo. The climate, then, became one in which there was both a considerable political tightening, and a return to the notion of Russia as a great power on the international scene, especially in the post-Soviet space. Following the lack of coordination and of policy throughout the

³ Marlène Laruelle. “La Question des Russes du proche-étranger en Russie (1991-2006),” *Étude du CERI*, Paris, CERI, no. 126, May (2006).

⁴ In Central Asia only Turkmenistan refuses to join the Collective Security Treaty.

Yeltsin years, Putin's "taking things in hand" signalled a first readjustment in relations between Russia and Central Asia.

In November and December 1999, Russia's new strongman went to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, followed in May 2000 by another visit to Uzbekistan and one to Turkmenistan. On June 28 2000, Putin formulated a new foreign policy for the Federation, one that recognized its limited capacities and the need to make a certain amount of political concessions. Priority was given both to CIS states and to developing active diplomatic relations with strategic partners such as India, Iran, and China. For its part, Russia called for the strengthening of the CIS Collective Security Treaty in order to deal with Islamist threats in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and it declared its desire to regain control of the energy resources of the region, particularly those in the Caspian Sea. Relations with the two states most resistant to Russian influence, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, slowly improved, and Putin's visit to the capitals of both countries in 2000 was considered a diplomatic success. The three remaining states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), the policies of which all attempted to strike something of a balance between the West and Russia, also showed that they positively welcomed the signs of revival emanating from the Kremlin.

The increasingly hard-line positions taken by the Central Asian regimes throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in effect led to deteriorating diplomatic relations with western countries, especially with the United States, and also with international organizations. The Central Asian authorities criticized the constant reproaches they received concerning democratization, civil society, good governance and human rights, arguing that their societies did not have the conditions to import criteria that were specific to western countries.⁵ The Russian and CIS envoys sent to act as observers for the various legislative and presidential elections that took place

⁵ Marlène Laruelle, Sébastien Peyrouse, *Asie centrale, la dérive autoritaire. Cinq républiques entre héritage soviétique, dictature et islam*, Paris, Autrement – CERI, 2006; Frederic Starr. *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, *Silk Road Papers*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, June 2006; Erica Marat. *The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, *Silk Road Paper*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, October 2006.

in Central Asia declared the elections to be above-board, although western organizations like the OSCE denounced what they saw as flagrant violations of minimal conditions for political diversity. Further, a political rapprochement between Russia and Central Asia was facilitated by the common struggle against the Islamist threat. The new states agreed to support Russia in its war in Chechnya in exchange for the Kremlin's backing of their fight against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut-Tahrir,⁶ and against political opposition more generally. The discourse on the post-September 11 "war on terror" has enabled Russia and the Central Asian states to claim that they also have been victims of globalized Islamism, which has enabled local governments to find common ground and create new links, even if Uzbekistan played this card since the second half of the 1990s.

The cooperation between Russia and America following September 11 was short-lived: the war in Iraq and the positions adopted by both powers on numerous international issues, notably on those of Iran, North-Korea and Kosovo, led to more offensive foreign policies. The "colored revolutions" in Georgia in 2003, in the Ukraine in 2004, and in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, further strengthened the political rapprochement between the Central Asian states and Russia. Moscow refused to accept that such vitally strategic neighboring countries could wind up in the hands of pro-western political regimes. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, Uzbek president Islam Karimov and Tajik president Emomali Rakhmonov all perceived that these revolutions were indirectly aimed at them and sought support forces to enable them to keep their regimes. Even Kurmanbek Bakiyev's "post-revolutionary" Kyrgyzstan remained and continues to remain more or less Russophile in terms of its geopolitical outlook. In this climate, all fell into line behind Putin: they repeated his accusations of unacceptable western interference, argued for the need to have strong regimes to avoid being destabilized by Islamists, and adopted stricter legislation concerning NGOs.

⁶ Vitaly V. Naumkin. *Radical Islam in Central Asia. Between Pen and Rifle*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005; Zeyno Baran, Frederic Starr, Svante Cornell. *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU, Silk Road Papers*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, June 2006.

This alliance between Russia and Central Asian regimes reached its apogee during the Andijan insurrection of May 13, 2005, which was repressed by the Uzbek authorities. Whereas western countries condemned Islam Karimov's regime for its immoderate use of force, for the massacring of civilians, and whereas they rejected Tashkent's official explanation of an attempted Islamist *coup d'état*, the Kremlin, as did Beijing, came to the rescue of the Uzbek regime.⁷ In November 2005, the United States was asked to leave the base at Karshi-Khanabad, a symbol of Tashkent's strategic turnaround back toward Moscow and China. The basis of this political rapprochement was essentially a common condemnation of western influence in the region: it was not without reluctance that the Central Asian regimes returned into the Russian "big brother's" fold, but they appreciated the pragmatic position the Kremlin was taking. Russia's desire to promote strategic cooperation and common economic development without insisting on the right to have a say in the domestic affairs of other countries could only please Central Asian regimes bent on maintaining the Putin principle of "vertical power" and on refusing to envisage political alternation.

Regional Reorganization: The Multilateral Reinforcement of Central Asia-Russia Links

Russia's return to Central Asia is not solely political: it is accompanied by a military and strategic rapprochement that has taken the form both of bilateral cooperation and of regional cooperation. The reasons for the Kremlin's strategy in such matters are multiple. Putin's Russia has opted for a foreign policy that is chiefly marked by its pragmatism: the Federation alone cannot manage the countries of Central Asia; it lacks the political will and the financial means to do so, and so must find partners with whom to share this

⁷ Sébastien Peyrouse. "Le tournant ouzbek de 2005. Eléments d'interprétation de l'insurrection d'Andijan," *La Revue internationale et stratégique*, no. 64 (2006), pp. 78-87. On the differing viewpoints in this polemic see : Fiona Hill, Kevin Jones. "Fear of Democracy or Revolution: The Reaction to Andijan," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2006), pp. 111-125; Martha Brill Olcott, Marina Barnett. *The Andijan Uprising, Akramiya and Akram Yuldashev*, June 22, 2006, <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18453&prog=zru>> (October 2006, 28); Shirin Akiner. *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assessment*, *Silk Road Paper*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, July 2005.

responsibility. Among the Asian allies, China has been given preference, as has Iran, though to a much lesser extent. Russian realism also explains Moscow's acceptance of the American military presence in Central Asia as part of operation *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan. The opening of two American bases – one in Manas in Kyrgyzstan and one in Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan – after September 11, gave the international community the impression that the Russo-American “Great Game” had become pacified. However, since 2003, benefiting from the deterioration in relations between Central Asia and Washington, Russia has put in place strategies for the “containment” of western influence in the region. The coalition phase with the United States seems to have given way to a logic of competition and to the strategic and economic restructuring of a part of post-Soviet space.

Bilateral and Multilateral Military Cooperation

Russia began by retaking control of military cooperation. This strategic sector requires all the more aid from Moscow as the Central Asian armies are badly trained, lack quality equipment and materials, are undermined by corruption, and dispose of a military personnel that is small in number and unmotivated due to mediocre living conditions.⁸ Moscow itself wants to regain ground on the military terrain in order to counter cooperation with NATO (the five Central Asian countries became members of the Partnership for Peace in 1994) and to stop the flow of American aid to the Central Asian states, which has taken the form of military personnel training and donations of strategic military materials. Hence, in 1999, Putin offered the Central Asian regimes a series of multilateral security initiatives, the objective of which is the collective fight against “the terrorist threat”. Although military relations are tight with Kazakhstan (joint operations, Astana's buying of Russian military material, etc.) Moscow considers its priorities to lie with the weakest links, that is, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Both countries benefit from Russian

⁸ Central Asia's armed forces are relatively weak: 60,000 persons each in Kazakhstan and in Uzbekistan, 12,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 6,000 in Tajikistan, and close to 20,000 in Turkmenistan. See Erica Marat. “Soviet Military Legacy and Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2007), pp. 83-114.

support and the more the local authorities show that they are favorable to Russia's stabilizing presence, the more substantial that support is.⁹

At the outset of civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, Russian forces, under the aegis of the CIS, gave their support to President Emomali Rakhmonov. The terms of an accord signed in 1999 led to the replacement of the peacekeeping forces of the CIS with Russian military troops, whose principal function was the protection of Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. The 201st motor division patrolled the length of the 1,400 kilometer-long Tajik-Afghan border. Made up of conscripts, and contracted and professional soldiers (mostly Tajiks, supervised by Russian officers), it numbered around 15,000 persons.¹⁰ In 2002, Tajikistan slowly began taking back control of its borders, ensuring above all surveillance over the 500-kilometer border with China. In October 2005, Russia ceded total control of the Afghanistan border to the Tajik army. Despite this withdrawal, Moscow is still very present on a military level in Tajikistan. At the end of 2004, it opened its first permanent base there, the largest one outside the Federation's borders. This base is composed of many sites: the Aini air base close to Dushanbe; the spatial surveillance center "Okno" near Nurek on the Chinese border; and several installations near Dushanbe and in the Kulob region in the South of the country.¹¹ The base is home to a battalion of the 201st motor division, which is part of the Collective Rapid Deployment Force (cf. *infra*), and altogether numbers close to 5,000 men. Russia has acquired these installations in exchange for both a substantial reduction in Tajikistan's debt of nearly US\$242 million and for the implantation of Russian companies in the country.

In Kyrgyzstan, having deployed close to 3,000 Russian soldiers on the Sino-Kyrgyz border from 1992 to 1999, Russia opened, in 2003, a military base at

⁹ Leszek Buszynski. "Russia's New Role in Central Asia," *Asian Survey*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2005), pp. 546-565.

¹⁰ Roy Allison. "Strategic reassertion in Russia's Central Asian Policy," *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no 2 (2004), pp. 277-293.

¹¹ Zafar Abdullayev. "Tajikistan, Russia Probe Military Partnership," *Eurasianet.org*, April 3, 2004, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav030404.shtml>> (January 15, 2007); Vladimir Socor. "Russian Army Base in Tajikistan Legalized; Border Troops to Withdraw," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 19, 2004, <http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2368712> (January 15, 2007).

Kant. This base is home to part of the Collective Rapid Deployment Force and supports the Russian presence in neighboring Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan is thus the only country in the world that has on its territory both a Russian (in Kant) and an American base (in Manas), only 30 km from each other. In 2005, Bishkek, concerned with the unpredictability of Uzbekistan, began negotiations with Moscow over the opening of a second Russian base at Osh in the country's South.¹² As of yet no accord has been reached on the matter. In 2006, Russia announced that the 300 troops based in Kant would have their numbers strengthened to around 750, and that it would invest considerable sums in military equipment (US\$5 million of military aid and deleting half of the Kyrgyz debt to Russia).¹³ This reinforcement of the Russian military presence has taken place against the background of Bishkek's renegotiations with Washington. The Kyrgyz government decided in effect to raise the rental price of the Manas base to 150 million for 2007, about 100 times more than the rent the United States was currently paying.¹⁴ Hence, it appears that Russia, at least for the moment, is about to gain a long-term presence in Kyrgyzstan at the expense of its American rival.

Between Uzbekistan and Russia, military cooperation had remained relatively weak until Tashkent's geopolitical turnaround in Russia's favor in 2005.¹⁵ In that year, both countries signed a major accord on strategic cooperation in which Moscow committed both to support the Uzbek regime in case of political unrest and to provide Tashkent with various types of crowd dispersing equipment. In exchange, Uzbekistan has undertaken to grant Russian troops access to 10 airports and permit them to open a military

¹² Roger McDermott. "Russia Studies Osh for Possible New Military Base in Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 2, 2005, <http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2369829> (January 15, 2007).

¹³ "Russia To Expand Military Base In Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasia Insight*, August 21, 2007, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/insight/082107kyr.shtml>> (August 25, 2007).

¹⁴ Washington finally agreed to pay 15 million dollars per year to station its soldiers in Manas and proposed an aid programme and a compensation package of 150 million dollars.

¹⁵ Gregory Gleason. "The Uzbek Expulsion of U.S. Forces and Realignment in Central Asia," *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 53, no.2 (2006), pp. 49-60; John Daly, Kurt Meppen, Vladimir Socor, Frederic Starr. *Anatomy of a Crisis: US-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005, Silk Road Papers*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, February 2006.

base on their national territory. This last point has not yet been implemented but it appears that Russia has been authorized to use the Navoiy airport.¹⁶ As for Turkmenistan, it has led a sort of boycott politics within the CIS in the name of its status of “permanent neutrality”. It has not developed any advanced military cooperation with Russia, despite the joint signing of a global security agreement in April 2003. The new regime of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, however, is vastly more Russophile than the previous one of Saparmurad Niyazov and appears to want to reintegrate, at least partially, into the regional Central Asian and post-Soviet institutions.

The CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization

Upon coming to power, Putin very quickly understood the CIS’s ineffectiveness and its inability to master the geopolitical developments that agitated the post-Soviet space since the 1990s.¹⁷ Russia has, however, decided to revive certain of its institutions, such as the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Councils, which enables the Kremlin to keep a hand on the political mechanisms of the Central Asian regimes. But it is in the Collective Security Treaty, the sole strategic instrument adapted to the current situation, that Moscow has placed all its hopes.¹⁸

In May 2002, Russia transformed the Collective Security Treaty, originally agreed upon in Tashkent in 1992, into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which, in the first place, gathered together Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Belarus. The CSTO was endowed with a Secretary General, namely the former Secretary of the

¹⁶ Stephen Blank. “An Uzbek Air Base: Russia’s Newest Achievement in Central Asia,” *Eurasia Insight*, January 11, 2007, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011107a.shtml>> (February 10, 2007). Nevertheless, numerous tensions exist between the two countries, like those that emerged, for example, in November 2006 surrounding Tashkent’s production of Russian military planes and refuelling tankers destined for China. Cf. “IL-76s will be assembled in Russia,” *Ferghana.ru*, February 2, 2007, <<http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=1817>> (February 10, 2007).

¹⁷ Thomas Gomart. “Quelle influence russe dans l’espace post-soviétique?,” *Le courrier des Pays de l’Est*, no. 1055 (2006), pp. 4-13.

¹⁸ Isabelle Facon. “Entre intérêts politiques et enjeux de sécurité: les dilemmes de la Russie en Asie centrale,” *Cahiers de Mars*, no. 177 (2003), pp. 77-90; Isabelle Facon. “Les enjeux de sécurité en Asie centrale: la politique de la Russie,” *Annuaire français de relations internationales*, Bruylant, 2004, pp. 653-666.

Russian Security Council, General Nikolai Bordiuzha. In August 2001, the Presidents of the member states issued a decree to establish a Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) for Central Asia. This force is comprised by Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, and Tajik units, which form 10 battalions totalling around 4,000 persons. In a meeting at Dushanbe in April 2003, the member states declared that the principal missions of the CSTO were to combat terrorism and drug trafficking in Central Asia. However, Armenia and Belarus barely have any involvement in this organization, which increasingly resembles a Russo-Central Asian partnership. Common military exercises called "Rubezh", which simulate terrorist attacks, were carried out in Kyrgyzstan in 2004, and then in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan in 2006. In 2007, the OTSC and the SCO led a conjoint "Rubezh-peace mission" in the Cheliabinsk region that took place alongside the 7th Summit of the SCO in Bishkek.¹⁹ The member countries are also to implement a common air defense network.

In June 2006, the CSTO was strengthened in its new role by the reintegration of Uzbekistan, one of the founding members of the treaty. Islam Karimov had decided to quit the organization in 1999, officially due to the incursions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan into Kyrgyzstan and the lack of assistance coming from the CST members. This reintegration completed the total reversal of Tashkent's alliance after the events in Andijan, confirming the depth of the break with the West, and reinforcing the strategic partnership with Russia. Tashkent stated its intention to participate in the Collective Rapid Deployment Force. The CSTO also includes a provision for the preferential sale of Russian military material to member states, which is of great interest to Central Asia. In fact, in 2007, the five states of the region increased military expenditure by an average of 50%, the highest increase being in Kazakhstan.²⁰ Through the CSTO, Moscow thus aspires to weaken

¹⁹ For the occasion, the collective officers' staff was based at Urumqi whereas the troops were in Russia. They involved more than 4 000 men, including 2,000 Russian soldiers, 1,700 Chinese soldiers, a Kazakh company (200 soldiers), a Tajik company, and special assault forces from Kyrgyzstan; Uzbekistan sent 20 officers, but not a single soldier.

²⁰ "Strany TsentrAsii rezko uvelichivaiut voennye raskhody," [The countries of Central Asia are dramatically increasing their military expenditure], *CentrAsia*,

America's military partnerships in the region, and hopes to become the indispensable intermediary of military relations between the West and the Central Asian regimes. The Kremlin aims in effect for the CSTO to be on a par with NATO, so that it can speak to the latter as an equal and oblige the Central Asian regimes to go through Moscow before engaging in any common military initiatives with the West.²¹

The Eurasian Economic Community

While the strategic domain is henceforth in the hands of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Russia's revival in Central Asia on the economic level has taken shape through the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). Created in October 2000 at the initiative of Kazak President Nazarbayev, it came to replace the customs union that had been in force until that point between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The EurAsEC has a coercive character since it is authorized to sanction states that do not adhere to the collectively imposed rules.²² Russia has also sought to strengthen its economic role in Central Asia by becoming a member, in October 2004, of the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC), which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Established in 1994 and restructured in 2001, this organization has proven ineffective in unifying the economic policies of its member states. Russia's hope in joining was to have the two economic institutions dissolve into one and thereby to bring the reluctant Uzbek pupil back into its fold, as it was a member of the OCAC but not of the EurAsEC. The gamble paid off with the OCAC's announcement in October 2005 that it would dissolve into the Eurasian Economic Community.

January 23, 2007, <<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1169551200>> (March 15, 2007).

²¹ Aleksandr Nikitin. "Post-Soviet Military-Political Integration: The Collective Security Treaty Organization and its Relations with the EU and NATO," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2007), pp. 35-44.

²² See the institution web site, <www.evrases.com>.

With the confirmation of Uzbekistan's membership in January 2006, the EurAsEC has received fresh impetus.²³ Until then, Tashkent had in fact given preference to the competing organization GUAM, which it joined in 1999 only to leave it in 2002. GUAM, established in 1997 by Georgia, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldavia to form an economic and strategic anti-Russian bloc (it was readying itself for a possible membership in NATO), did not succeed in eliminating Russia's presence in the region. Uzbekistan's membership in the Eurasian Economic Community was therefore perceived as a great victory for Moscow, particularly as its strategies in Central Asia made dealing with the most populous state in the region unavoidable. Henceforth, the four countries of Central Asia (Turkmenistan having chosen isolation) now constitute an economic space that is in part unified with Russia and Belarus. Putin has been quite open about the fact that his ultimate objective is the fusion of the CSTO, on the strategic level, with the EurAsEC, on the economic level. Nikolai Bordiuzha has announced that the two institutions will from now on work to form a common political, economic and military agenda. With Uzbekistan's rejoining the two institutions, the establishing of a unified structure combining the CSTO and the EurAsEC, significantly more effective than the moribund CIS, could contribute to reunifying a "hard core" of countries seeking integration comprised of the four Central Asian states (Turkmenistan's position on this issue is still unclear), Belarus, and Russia.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

A third regional authority that has facilitated Russia's return in Central Asia is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Initially established in 1996 under the name of the "Shanghai five" (Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan), this first grouping was transformed, in June 2001, into a much more solid structure, the SCO, which includes a sixth member that had formerly been disinclined to join, Uzbekistan. The SCO activities have multiplied in the last few years. Initially, the organization was given the

²³ "Uzbekistan Joins Eurasian Economic Community," January 25, 2006, <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/1/A0064D5E-1409-4D4E-AFCA-E285D649940B.html>> (September 18, 2006).

mainly strategic function of demilitarizing and defining the borders of its member states. Since 2002, however, it has added to its objectives the fight against terrorism, Islamism and separatism, the aim being to appease Russia's concerns about Chechnya, China's about Xinjiang, and those of the Central Asian states about the Islamist movements. A regional anti-terrorist Structure was, at the suggestion of Kyrgyzstan in 1999, established in Tashkent in 2004 in order to cement Uzbekistan more firmly within the Organization. The SCO has had proven success in geopolitical and military matters: conjoint antiterrorist operations are regularly organized in the various countries and member states are mutually supportive of each other's policies.²⁴

China, for example, has backed the Kremlin in its war in Chechnya, Russia and the Central Asian states have supported the Chinese policy on Xinjiang and Taiwan, and Moscow and Beijing have contributed their technological and military know-how to aid the Central Asian regimes fight Islamist opposition. The official declarations issuing from the SCO meetings revolve around denouncing American interference and calling for the dismantling of American bases in Central Asia. Since 2005, the SCO has taken a more distinctly economic direction, China having proposed to develop commerce, and also the banking services, to assist the Central Asian countries. In this way, the latter hope to benefit from the promised Chinese manna, all the while hoping that if their large neighbor becomes invasive, Moscow will be able to "neutralize" it.²⁵ The overall regional ambitions of the SCO in Asia and its desire to form a site for the construction of a new multipolar world were corroborated in 2005 by the accession of India, Iran and Pakistan to observer status.²⁶

²⁴ On SCO, see, among others: Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pal Dunay, Pan Guang, Mikhail Troitskiy. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, May 2007.

²⁵ Chjao Khuashen. *Kitai, Tsentral'naia Aziia i Shankhaiskaia Organizatsiia sotrudnichestva*, Rabochie materialy, no. 5, Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.

²⁶ Annie Jafalian. "Equilibres géopolitiques en Asie centrale: la montée en puissance de la Chine," *Annuaire stratégique et militaire*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2005, pp. 135-149; Isabelle Facon. "L'organisation de coopération de Shanghai. Ambitions et intérêts russes," *Le courrier des Pays de l'Est*, no. 1055 (2006), pp. 26-36.

An Essential Economic Force: Russia's Control over the Resources of Central Asia

Economic resources obviously constitute one of the primary stakes of Russia's presence in Central Asia. Whereas in the 1990s the major Russian companies followed their own policies, often in contradiction with those decided by the Kremlin, under Putin state interests and those of the major companies have been unified. Henceforth, the Russian government has undertaken to support the expansion of its state-run firms in the post-Soviet space provided that in return they work to consolidate Moscow's political logic in the region. Although the petroleum sector is privatized and competition-based, it is also an instrument of Russian foreign policy with the same status as state-run companies with monopolies on gas and electricity. Russia is still Central Asian chief commercial partner.²⁷ In 2006, it became Kazakhstan's main trading partner (trade figures rose to over US\$10 billion). It has also once again become the premier commercial partner of Uzbekistan, with more than a quarter of its total foreign exchange (almost US\$3 billion in 2006). In addition, Moscow is the second largest commercial partner of Kyrgyzstan, trailing the United Arab Emirates for exports (mainly gold) and China for imports. In Turkmenistan, Russia has until now been behind the Ukraine, Iran, and various European countries, but Gazprom's growing role is likely to alter its position beginning in 2008. Lastly, in Tajikistan, Russia is the leading commercial partner for imports, but not for exports. In the trade sector, however, Russia will in all likelihood be overtaken by China, if it is not already the case for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.²⁸

The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline since 1999 was a serious slap in the face for Russian diplomacy. It spelled the end of Russia's ambition to curb the development of new routes for exporting hydrocarbons, attempting to channel the process to its own advantage. The Kremlin hence

²⁷ Keith Crane, D. J. Peterson, Olga Oliker. "Russian Investment in the Commonwealth of Independent States," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 46, no.6 (2005), pp. 405-444.

²⁸ Sébastien Peyrouse. *The Economic Aspects of the Chinese-Central-Asia Rapprochement*, *Silk Road Papers*, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, SAIS, September 2007.

quickly switched from a policy of obstruction to a policy of cooperation.²⁹ In 2001, the three principal Russian companies, Yukos, Lukoil and Gazprom, joined together to form the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, running Tengiz oil to Novorossiysk, in the wake of Putin's statements declaring the Caspian to be a zone of vital interest for Russia. Since 2003, numerous western companies who invested in the region in the 1990s have been doubled by Russian companies who have succeeded in obtaining long-term preferential agreements enabling them to retain quasi-monopolies over the exportation of Central Asian energy resources.³⁰ Moscow is not opposed to having other large international companies exploit the main Tengiz and Kashagan deposits, since Russian companies are unable to finance the exploration of these off-shore sites by themselves. In addition, Russia has retained control of the factor it considers most important, namely, the export oil pipelines. Kazakhstan remains the privileged oil partner, although in the three years between 2002 and 2005, Russia also signed new contracts with all of the Central Asian states.

Although Russian companies have not managed to gain a part in the exploitation of Tengiz and Kashagan, Russia has nevertheless visibly succeeded in making a comeback on the Kazakh market in recent years. In 2003, Moscow concluded an agreement with the state Company KazMunayGas over the joint exploitation of three sites – Kurmangazy (Rosneft), Tsentralnoye (Gazprom) and Khvalinskoye (Lukoil), the reserves of which are estimated to be around 1.5 billion tonnes of oil and around 800 bcm of gas. In January 2004, Lukoil outdid many large western companies by securing an exploitation contract with KazMunayGas to develop the Tiyub-Karagan structure; this ensures Russia's influence in the Kazakh energy sector for the next forty years.³¹ In 2005, Gazprom and KazMunayGas also agreed to embark on a joint venture allowing the exploitation of the Imashevskoye gas

²⁹ Pavel Baev. "Assessing Russia's Cards: Three Petty Games in Central Asia," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2004), pp. 269-283.

³⁰ Sally N. Cummings. "Happier Bedfellows? Russia and Central Asia under Putin," *Asian Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2001), pp. 412-452.

³¹ Jeronym Perovic. "From Disengagement to Active Economic Competition: Russia's return to the South Caucasus and Central Asia," *Demokratizatsiya*, no. 1 (2005), pp. 61-85.

fields situated in the Caspian Sea on the border between both countries. In the same year, the Russo-Kazakh joint venture KazRosGas established itself on the Orenburg gas processing plant, which is set to process around 15 bcm per year from the Kazakh site of Karachaganak.³²

Russian companies have also managed to set themselves up durably in the other Central Asian states like Uzbekistan. In 2002, Gazprom signed an agreement with Uzbekneftegas in which Russia committed to buy Uzbek gas until 2012 (about 10 bcm per year). In 2004, Gazprom signed a new contract to participate in the development of the gas resources on the Ustyurt Plateau in the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan, situated in the country's Northeast. In 2006, a 25-year production sharing agreement (PSA) between Gazprom and Tashkent was signed for the Urga, Kuanysh and Akchalak deposits.³³ Lukoil, for its part, has obtained a contract for oil exploration in the country.³⁴ In 2004, Lukoil and Uzbekneftegas confirmed the birth of a joint venture whose mission for the next 35 years will be to exploit the gas fields of Khauzak, Shady and Kandym, with estimated reserves of 280bcm. In February 2007, Uzbekneftegas and the Russian company Soyuzneftegas reached an agreement jointly to exploit, also over the next 35 years, fields located in Ustyurt and in the Hissar region in the country's Southeast. In August 2006, Lukoil joined in an international consortium including Uzbekneftegas, Petronas (Malaysia), the CNPC (China) and Korea National Oil Corporation (South Korea) to conclude a production sharing agreement concerning the Aral Sea deposits.³⁵

In 2003, Gazprom signed a contract with Turkmenistan, which guarantees it a quasi-monopoly over the purchase of Turkmen gas (around 80 bcm in 2008)

³² Sergei Blagov. "New Deal Will Process Kazakh Gas at Nearby Russian Facility," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 6, 2006, <http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371524> (June 24, 2007).

³³ "Gazprom, Uzbekistan to sign 2nd Ustyurt PSA in 2007," *New Europe*, May 19, 2007, <http://www.neweurope.eu/view_news.php?id=73923> (June 24, 2007).

³⁴ Vladimir Saprykin. "Gazprom of Russia in the Central Asian Countries," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 5 (2004), pp. 81-93.

³⁵ "PSA for Development of Hydrocarbon Fields in Uzbek Section of Aral Sea Signed," August 31, 2006, <<http://www.gov.uz/en/content.scm?contentId=22437>> (June 24, 2007).

and over its exportation to Europe.³⁶ Through this agreement, Russia has become the obligatory intermediary between Ashgabat and its traditional Ukrainian client. As the 2005-2006 winter crisis showed, Moscow is now able to pass on to Kiev the price increases Gazprom or Turkmenistan implement, and, in so doing, to put pressure on the Ukraine, as well as on Western Europe. In 2003, Gazprom also signed important agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which guarantee its participation in the exploitation of local energy resources and in the maintenance of transport pipelines for the next 25 years.³⁷ In May 2007, Putin won another diplomatic victory: Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan signed an agreement for the construction of a new gas pipeline running alongside the coast of the Caspian Sea. This would enable Moscow to maintain its control of the export of Central Asian gas and to reduce the profitability of the Transcaspian project backed by the European Union and the United States.³⁸

Russia largely dominates the Central Asian market for hydrocarbon exports: in the gas sector, 100% of Kazakh and Uzbek production is still currently exported by Russia via the Central Asia-Centre gas pipeline, a pipeline dating from the Soviet era which is currently repaired and extended by Gazprom. But this Russian monopoly might soon be undermined by China, and perhaps by the Transcaspian. In the petroleum sector, Russian domination of the export routes largely relies on the Atyrau-Samara and Kenyiaq-Orsk pipelines, and, above all, the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, however it no longer enjoys a monopoly. Kazakhstan has an alternate pipeline that goes to Xinjiang and exports oil by tankers to BTC and – like Turkmenistan – to Iran.

Russian companies are also investing in the very promising electricity sector. In Russia, this domain is in the hands of the state-run Unified Energy System of Russia (RAO-UES), headed since 1998 by Anatolii Chubais. One

³⁶ Rauf Guseynov. "Russian Energy Companies in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 5 (2004), pp. 60-69.

³⁷ Marika S. Karayianni. "Russia's Foreign Policy for Central Asia passes through Energy Agreements," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 90-96.

³⁸ "Prikaspiisky Pipeline: Temporary Delay or Fundamental Problem?," *Eurasianet.org*, June 26, 2007, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eavo62607.shtml>> (August 3, 2007).

of its objectives is to take advantage of Central Asian production with a view toward developing export capacities: to generate worthwhile profit, the Russian company is seeking to reduce production, export, and distribution costs by creating a unified "Eurasian Electricity Market".³⁹ To do so, RAO-UES has projected the development of a North-South bridge which would unify the electricity companies of the five Central Asian republics – together they have at their disposition 80 electricity plants with a total capacity of 92 billion kw/h – which would grant Moscow access to the very promising Asian market. The first stage of this "Eurasian Electricity Market" was completed in 2000 with the almost integral reconstitution of the Soviet Electricity System: in June 2000, the Russia Electricity Network and that of the North of Kazakhstan were reconnected, a feat followed in August of the same year by that of reconnecting Southern Central Asia (with the exception of Turkmenistan).

In order to settle its debts – estimated to be US\$240 million – Kazakhstan's national company, the Kazakh Energy Grid Operating Company (KEGOC), accepted to sell several of its electrical power plants to RAO-UES in 2000. However, Astana has refused to hand over its transit rights, which were set to increase in the coming years. In 2006, RAO-UES confirmed the construction of a new electricity power plant on the Ekibastuz site close to Pavlodar, and put in effect the Ekibastuz-Barnaul high-tension line. The Russian firm has also set itself up in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, respectively the second and the third largest producer of hydroelectricity in the CIS after Russia.⁴⁰ Tajikistan has benefited from RAO-UES investments in the Sangtuda-1 hydropower station, the second largest in the country (670 MW capacity).⁴¹ However, the Russian company RusAl, headed by the oligarch Oleg Deripaska, and the Tajik government were not able to reach an

³⁹ Gregory Gleason. "Russia and the Politics of the Central Asian Electricity Grid," *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2003), pp. 42-52.

⁴⁰ Gennadi Petrov. "Tajikistan's hydropower resources," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 3 (2003), pp. 153-161.

⁴¹ Gennadi Petrov. "Tajikistan's Energy Projects: Past, Present, and Future," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 5 (2004), pp. 93-103.

agreement about the Rogun dam and RusAl withdrew from this project.⁴² In Kyrgyzstan, RAO-UES has committed to take charge of the construction of the Kamarata-2 station and to provide a large sum for investment in Kamarata-1. This latter is mainly being financed by RusAl, which is interested in the aluminium factory attached to it.⁴³

Russia is also becoming more and more present in the mineral industry. Central Asia has significant reserves of gold, uranium, copper, zinc, iron, tungsten, molybdenum, etc. Various Russian firms have managed to establish themselves in this industry, despite facing stiff competition both from European and American companies, and from Central Asian state-run companies with political backing. Cooperation in the area of uranium is the most crucial, since it is the most strategic, and also here Russia has recently gained ground in the Central Asian market. In 2006, Putin proposed to establish a “Eurasian Nuclear Bloc” to unify the countries of the region, particularly Kazakhstan – which seeks to become one of the world’s main producers by 2015 by increasing annual production from 3,000 to 12,000 tonnes – and Uzbekistan – which produced a large part of the uranium used for the Soviet military-industrial complex.⁴⁴ In 2006, the Russo-Kazakh nuclear rapprochement was concretized with the creation of three joint ventures for a total value of US\$10 billion. The first is the setting up of a joint venture for Kazakh uranium enrichment in the Angarsk plant, located in Eastern Siberia near Irkutsk; the second is for the construction and export of new atomic reactors of low and medium power, one of which will go into the first nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan; the third joint venture is for the exploitation of

⁴² “Tadzhikistan otkazal RusAlu v prave na stroitel’stvo Rogunskoi GES,” April 23, 2007,

<<http://www.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=5838&mode=snews&PHPSESSID=5dfad75a113d5714b55223de50fa1f13>> (August 16, 2007).

⁴³ Theresa Sabonis-Helf. “Notes for Russia/Kazakhstan: The Energy Issues,” TOSCCA Workshop: *Kazakhstan Between East and West*, November 28, 2005, St. Anthony’s College Oxford, <<http://www.toscca.co.uk/lecture%20notes/SabonisKazRusEnergy.doc>> (August 16, 2007).

⁴⁴ Moukhtar Dzhakishev. “Uranium Production in Kazakhstan as a Potential Source for Covering the World Uranium Shortage,” World Nuclear Association Annual Symposium 2004, <www.world-nuclear.org/sym/2004/dzhakishev.htm> (July 22, 2007).

the uranium deposits of Yuzhnoe Zarechnoe and Budenovsk in the southern Steppes of the country.⁴⁵

All these economic agreements enable Moscow to remain in force in a significant way in Central Asia and to give it considerable control over local resources. Russia seems thus to have found a single solution for its multiple objectives: first, to maintain political influence over the Central Asian regimes through the control of resources; second, to continue to collect considerable transit revenues from these landlocked countries; third, to slow down the emergence of competing export routes to China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey; and finally, to meet the growing energy demands of the West. Since 2000, Russia seems to have been trying to redefine its power according to the principles of *soft power*: it has proven its ability to move from issuing military threats and applying direct political pressure to working more complex tactics of strategic and economic implantation. If the reintegration of the most independent-minded countries like the Ukraine and Georgia into Russia's fold seems improbable, Russia has, thanks to the Central Asian states, nonetheless succeeded in restoring its leading status in a part of the post-Soviet space.

Having learnt its lesson from the CIS failure to establish any real economic and political identity, Moscow today hopes to replace it with smaller but more effective structures, such as the CSTO and the EurAsEC, so as to create a dynamic of integration limited to certain states. Strategic cooperation, hitherto fundamental, seems to be completed by new logics of economic implantation. The income from oil and gas provides Russia with a new lever for influence that it did not previously have. The idea, then, of creating a "gas OPEC" which would unify the Eurasian Economic Community with the backing, or even the participation, of Iran, would further strengthen Russia's capacity to make itself heard, for example, during energy negotiations with

⁴⁵ "Russia, Kazakhstan sign Deal on Uranium Enrichment Center," *Global Security*, May 10, 2007, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/russia/2007/russia-070510-rianovostio3.htm>>, (July 22, 2007); "Uranium and Nuclear Power in Kazakhstan," <<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf89.html>> (July 22, 2007).

European countries.⁴⁶ The ultimate aim of partially reunifying the post-Soviet space under Russian leadership, therefore, is undoubtedly likely to give Russia greater confidence on the international scene.

⁴⁶ “What the Russian papers say,” *Rian.ru*, February 22, 2007, <<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20070222/61154212.html>> (March 15, 2007).

Central Asia in Russian Nationalism: Centrality or Marginality?

Within this strategy, the ambiguous relations that Russia maintains with Central Asia are one of the central elements of the future of the post-Soviet space. The role that the nationalist milieus play in it is very specific, insofar as they consider the region an intrinsic part of Russia's sphere of influence in Eurasia. Before looking in more detail the different policy solutions Russian nationalists propose in relation to the Central Asian states, a survey of the paradoxical place the region occupies in their discourses is necessary.

In fact, Central Asia is at once present and absent from Russian nationalist preoccupations. Ever since the nineteenth century, the influential currents of Russian nationalism have been significantly more focused on the western fringes of the empire (Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states and the Caucasus) than on its eastern fringes. The latter, considered to be economically and culturally backward, were presented as an additional weight that Russia had accepted to shoulder, not as a region with a great culture that it had proudly conquered. However, at the same time Russia's imperial legitimacy relies directly on maintaining rule over Central Asia: the glorification of the land's vastness, of expansion into Asia, of the "great game" with western powers, the idea of being the meeting point of the Christian and Muslim worlds – all these notions were made possible by the colonization of the Steppes and of Turkistan. This asymmetrical relation is indicative of the purely instrumental role that Central Asia plays in Russian nationalist arguments. In this regard, the Eurasianist movement, though it is considered the most favorable to a rapprochement with Asia, is no different.

The Birth of Imperialist Theories at the End of the Nineteenth Century

At the end of the nineteenth century, the imperial advance of western powers into Asia and Africa gave rise to many discourses of legitimization that relied

not only on political and economic, but also cultural and scientific arguments. Administrators, colonists, missionaries and explorers developed a vivid literature on the civilizing mission of the “Whites” in the rest of the world. Imperial Russia was also caught up in this great European trend and itself developed discourses of legitimization justifying its advance into Central Asia.

Starting with the Slavophiles in the 1830-1840s, many Russian intellectuals saw the question of Europeanness as the main problem of Russia’s nationhood. The fact that Russia’s identity was developed under, through, and for Western eyes provoked profound resentment and prompted many to turn toward regions where Russia would be recognized as the dominant power. Petr Chaadaev remarked as early as 1829: “We are situated at the Orient of Europe, which is positive, but for all that we have never been of the Orient.”⁴⁷ This maxim sums up much of what underlies many debates about the Russian nation as does Fiodor Dostoevskii’s retort from 1881: “In Europe we were Tatars, but in Asia we too are Europeans”.⁴⁸ Does this mean that these intellectuals supported the idea of cultural rapprochement with Asia? Whereas the conquest of the Caucasus had provoked no real interest outside the realm of literature,⁴⁹ the advance into Asia and the Far East at the end of the nineteenth century gave rise to more elaborate attempts at intellectual legitimation and prompted reflections about the nature of Russia: was it a European state with Asian colonies, or a specific Eurasian state? Much was at stake in this search for a definition as it sought to reflect changes in Russia’s position in the international arena, its new attitude toward the administration of its national minorities, and a different view of Russia’s past and its conflict-laden relationship with the Turkic and Mongol nomads.

Immediately after the Crimean defeat of 1855, Alexander II’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Alexander Gorchakov (1798-1883), called upon the

⁴⁷ Petr A. Chaadaev. *Lettres philosophiques adressées à une dame*, Paris, Librairie des cinq continents, 1970, p. 205.

⁴⁸ Fiodor Dostoevskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v 15-i tomakh. Dnevnik pisatelii, 1881* [Works in fifteen volumes. The Diary of a Writer, 1881], Moscow, Nauka, 1995, vol. 14, p. 509.

⁴⁹ See Susan Layton. *Russian Literature and Empire. Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Tsar to turn his back on Europe and to reorient Russian expansion toward Asia. After the Berlin Treaty of 1878, which was perceived as a humiliation in Russia, several intellectuals, who were disappointed with pan-Slavism, decided to turn their gaze eastward. Their aims were ambiguous: they were looking not for new allies but for a purely imperialist endeavor.⁵⁰ These so-called “Orientals” (*vostochniki*) were the first ones to incorporate the country's imperial character into a definition of Russia's identity. The Orientals were split into two political tendencies: on the one hand, a progressist current among which figured the well-known liberal thinker, Mikhail I. Veniukov (1832-1901), and a former populist, Sergey N. Iuzhakov (1849-1910); on the other, a much more conservative one chiefly associated with two figures, a jurist, Fiodor F. Martens (1845-1909), and a Sinologist, Vasily P. Vasiliev (1818-1900).

Their conception of a Russian specificity prefigured Vladimir I. Lamanskii's (1833-1914) theory, which advanced the idea of Russia as a Third Continent via arguments about the intrinsic unity of the Empire. Lamanskii's book, *The Three Worlds of the Euro-Asian Continent* (*Tri mira aziisko-evropeiskogo materika*) published in 1892, provided the first vision of Russia as Euro-Asian. In it he suggested a re-reading of its space, rejected the usual way of dividing the European and Asian continents along the Urals, and proclaimed the existence of three radically distinct spaces in the old world, Europe, Eurasia and Asia. For him, “Russia is a specific new world within the old continent (...). Russia, like America, has the right to be called a new world in the old; indeed, what neither the Romans, nor the Greeks succeeded in doing in the West, nor the Persians, the Indians, or the Chinese, in the East, we have done, we, the Russians.”⁵¹ The *vostochniki* likewise all vacillated between the classic vision of a state with Asian possessions and the new idea of a specific Empire astride both continents. Lamanskii was the first to give the Empire's

⁵⁰ See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan*, Dekalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2001.

⁵¹ Vassili P. Vasiliev. *Sovremennye voprosy* [Current Questions], Saint-Petersburg, 1873, p. 87.

geographical situation and its national diversity a major role in his attempt to define Russian state identity.

A contemporary of Lamanskii's, the writer and thinker Konstantin N. Leontiev (1831-1891) took this idea even further, displaying a real readiness to embrace the Asian, and specifically Turkic, world. His work constitutes a significant turning point in Russian thinking, in which he displays an awareness of the difference between Russians in particular and Slavs in general. He thus prefigured, albeit ambiguously, the turn toward the East the Eurasianists would later make: replacing references to national language with references to religion, he showed a marked preference for Greeks over other Slavs. In other words, the shift to the East came about, paradoxically, through a renewed emphasis on religion: what "Byzantinism" provided access to was an encounter with Asia, since, as the door to the Orient, Constantinople was apt to blur the boundaries between the "Christian Orient" and "Asia". As Russia strove to assert itself against Europe, Leontiev was the first to understand the importance of the so-called "Turanian" (i.e. Turkic) element in Russian culture and identity.

From the *vostochniki* to Lamanskii and Leontiev, nationalist-minded intellectuals thus argued for a more Asian-inflected view of Russian identity: they no longer defined the nation through its linguistic affiliation with the Slavic world, as had the Slavophiles, but on the basis of its imperial policies in Asia. Yet on many points they remained ambiguous; despite this turn toward Asia, they still maintained that the Christian and "Aryan" character of the Russians was more important than the empire's national and territorial reality. Although this reality had come to be seen as needing to be included in accounts of Russian identity, there remained a deep-seated feeling that an Asian destiny was being imposed upon Russia by a disdainful Europe. For the *vostochniki* as well as for Lamanskii, the turn toward Asia was merely a geo-strategic palliative for Russia's failure in Europe, not an acknowledgment of the existence of natural links between Russia and Asia. The attraction these Russian intellectuals had to Asia was only a lure, a way of challenging the West's centrality. In the Russian imperialist theories of the nineteenth century, Central Asia was never considered a conquered area to be proud of having subdued in itself: instead, for Russia, which remained focused on the

West, it functioned purely and simply as an instrument to assert the greatness of its power.

The Eurasianist Tradition; or How to Conceive the Empire

This instrumental vision was only partially modified by the birth of the so-called Eurasianist current. Eurasianist ideology was developed in the early 1920s inside Russian intellectual circles that emigrated to Western Europe after the October revolution and the civil war.⁵² Its founders were relatively young at the time of their emigration and came from intellectual circles that had been privileged under the former regime. Settled in various European capitals, they very often obtained academic positions in their host countries while continuing to take part in the activities of the diaspora. Thus they played the role of mediators of political ideas that were in fashion in the West (“the third way”, “the conservative revolution”) and attempted to make them functional in a Russia that they could no longer gain entry to.⁵³ The Eurasianist movement appeared in Sofia in 1921 but quickly found its centre in Prague with the settlement of some of its main theoreticians: geographer and economist Petr N. Savitskii (1895-1968), historian George Vernadskii (1887-1973) and linguist Nikolai S. Troubetzkoy (1890-1938), a professor at the University of Vienna and an eminent member of the Prague Linguistic Circle.⁵⁴ Some of the organization's important figures could also be found in Paris, including the philosopher and historian of culture Lev Karsavin (1882-

⁵² Marlène Laruelle. *L'Idéologie eurasiste russe ou Comment penser l'empire*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999; Sergei Glebov. *The Challenge of the Modern. The Eurasianist Ideology and Movement, 1920-29*, unpublished Ph.D., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2004; Otto Böss. *Die Lehre des Eurasier*, Wiesbaden, 1961.

⁵³ Martin Beisswenger. “Konservativnaia revoliutsiia v Germanii i dvizhenie evraziitsev – tochki soprikosnoveniia,” [The Conservative Revolution in Germany and Eurasianist movement – Points of Contact], *Konservativizm v Rossii i v mire*, no. 3 (2004), pp. 49-73; Leonid Luks. “Evraziistvo i konservativnaia revoliutsiia. Soblazn antizapadnichestva v Rossii i Germanii” [Eurasianism and the Conservative Revolution. The temptation of Anti-Westernism in Russia and Germany], *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 6 (1996), pp. 57-69.

⁵⁴ On the role of Eurasianism in the birth of structuralism, see Patrick Seriot. *Structure et totalité. Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en Europe centrale et orientale*, Paris, PUF, 1999.

1952), musician and music critic Petr Suvchinskii (1892-1985), and the literary critic Prince Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii (1890-1939?).

Eurasianism was a conservative utopia born of a desire to account for the fact of the revolution, yet it called for a kind of “revolutionary reaction”⁵⁵ that differed from the political conservatism shared by the entire Russian right in exile. Eurasianist ideology was the Russian version of Western currents known as the “third way” but stressed its differences with them by upholding Russian cultural distinctiveness. If Russia had to choose a third way between capitalism and socialism and between liberalism and dictatorship, this was not a strictly political choice as Russia, they argued, was a third continent in its very “essence”. This third way was thus not that of a Europe stuck between the expansion of communism and the purported failure of the liberal Western model, but rather a statement of Russia’s cultural irreducibility to the West. Eurasianist terminology held that Russia and its margins occupied a *dual* or *median* position between Europe and Asia, that their specific traits had to do with their culture being a “mix” born of the fusion of Slavic and Turkic-Muslim peoples, and that Russia should specifically highlight its Asian features. It rejected the view that Russia was on the *periphery* of Europe, and on the contrary interpreted the country’s geographic location as grounds for choosing a messianic third way.

In their writings on historiography, the Eurasianists attacked the classic Kiev/Moscow/Saint Petersburg triad in Russian history, which they considered Eurocentric. Rehabilitating the East entailed formulating a new theoretical grid: Eurasian history was divided into dialectical stages (from opposition to domination and then to symbiosis) by “rhythms” resulting from the meeting of two principles: forest and steppe. Eurasian history was, on this account, composed of two elements, the Russian and the Turanian: “Slavdom’s cohabitation with Turandom is the central fact of Russian history.”⁵⁶ Kievan Rus and the St. Petersburg period were denounced as

⁵⁵ Petr P. Suvchinskii. “Inobytiie russkoi religioznosti” [The Other Being of Russian Religiosity], *Evrasiiskii vremennik*, vol. III, 1923, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Nikolai S. Trubetskoi. “O turanskom elemente v russkoi kul’ture” [The Turanian Factor in Russian Culture], *Rossiiia mezhdu Evropoi i Aziei* [Russia between Europe and Asia], Moscow, Nauka, 1993, p. 59.

expressions of a European rather than a Eurasian Russianness. Eurasianist historiography thus focused on the Mongol period and on 14th-16th century Muscovy.⁵⁷

Central Asia occupies a complex place in Eurasianist thinking: it was included in all the movement's geographical definitions of Eurasia but not in its historiographical or ethnological discourses. In this way, Russia was systematically portrayed as the inheritor of the Mongol empire and its nomadic culture, whereas Turkistan remained comparatively ignored. Glorification of the Turkic-Mongol world therefore only concerned the nomads of the Steppes and not the sedentary populations of current Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Timurid Empire was even occasionally presented as non-Eurasian, as closer to Asian cultures, especially to the Persian world, than it was to Russian culture. This ambiguous gaze on Central Asia confirms, once again, the fact that the region was only of interest to Russian nationalists insofar as it provided an occasion to exalt the Empire's, or even the Soviet Union's, territorial vastness, political immensity, and internal diversity. The culture, Muslim past and languages of Central Asia aroused no interest and were often denigrated or quite simply ignored.

The Eurasianist movement, initially quite active, collapsed in the first half of the 1930s after many internal schisms that divided it into two sub-groups: those who favored reconciliation with the Stalinist Soviet Union against those who opposed this measure. Another reason for the collapse, though, was the general change in the European political climate: the end of the NEP in the Soviet Union and the rise of Nazism in Europe necessitated a political radicalization that had negative consequences for the complexity of Eurasianist thinking. The idea of Eurasia, then, slowly faded, a fact that corresponded historically to the birth of the bipolar world of the post-1945. The clash between the two superpowers and the Cold War left geopolitical room for only two entities, the "East" and the "West", later joined by the "Third World". The notion of Eurasia, then, became submerged under the

⁵⁷ Charles J. Halperin. "George Vernadsky, Eurasianism, the Mongols, and Russia," *Slavic Review*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1982), pp.477-93; Charles J. Halperin. "Russia and the Steppe," *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte*, Wiesbaden, vol. 36 (1985), pp.55-194.

concept of the Eastern block on the grounds that the Soviet political experiment constituted sufficient justification for grouping under one banner all the different peoples and populations of Northern Asia and Eastern Europe.

Neo-Eurasianism: Avoiding Central Asia?

At the same time, however, Eurasianism was discreetly propagated in the USSR by Lev N. Gumilev⁵⁸ (1912-1992). In the 1980s, Gumilev became a sort of prism through which many post-Soviet academics and politicians could claim to adhere to the movement or take interest in it. Even today, although the texts of the founding fathers have been re-published on a massive scale, neo-Eurasianists often seem to be more familiar with Gumilev's vocabulary than with the Eurasianist vocabulary developed within exile circles during the interwar years. The neo-Eurasianism that emerged in Russia in the 1990s is far from representative of a unified system of thought or force, offering instead the image of a heterogeneous constellation torn between personalities with competing ambitions. Nonetheless, neo-Eurasianism is not limited to institutionalized currents. Indeed, the strength of the neo-Eurasianist propagators lies in their capacity to present Eurasianism as a new ideology for the post-bipolar world based on the culturalist trend and the idea that new so-called "post-modern" values are now emerging.

Eurasianist ideas resurfaced in the USSR in the 1980s within Pamiat, an organization which at the time encompassed most of the Russian nationalist movement. From 1993 onward, neo-Eurasianism began to become more widespread thanks partly to the efforts of the two main nationalist parties of the time, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and

⁵⁸ On Gumilev, see: Bruno Naarden. "I am a genius, but no more than that', Lev Gumilev, *Ethnogenesis, The Russian Past and World History*," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1996), pp. 54-82; Richard Paradowski. "The Eurasian Idea and Leo Gumilëv's Scientific Ideology," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 41, no. 1 (1999), pp. 19-32; Viktor Shnirelman, Sergei Panarin. "Lev Gumilev: his pretention as a Founder of Ethnology and his Eurasian Theories," *Inner Asia*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2001), pp. 1-18; Viktor Shnirel'man. "Lev Gumilev: ot *passionarnogo napriazheniia* do *nesovmestimosti kul'tur*" [Lev Gumilev: from the *pressure of passionarity* to the *incompatibility of cultures*], *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, no. 3 (2006), pp. 8-21.

Gennadii Ziuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The leaders of both parties sought to stress neo-Eurasianism's geopolitical aspects, bracketing out the other levels of the doctrine. But the two best-known doctrinaires of neo-Eurasianism to this day are Alexander S. Panarin⁵⁹ (1940-2003) and Alexander G. Dugin⁶⁰ (1962). Both thinkers hold the same beliefs: that there exists a cultural unity and a community of historical destiny that is shared by Russians and the peoples of the post-Soviet space, if not also by other peoples of Asia; that the geographic centrality of the so-called Eurasian space in the old continent entails an unavoidable political reality, namely, empire; and that there are cultural invariants which can explain the deeper meaning of contemporary political events. Both propagate a rhetorical cult of national diversity but refuse to grant autonomy to minorities and reject Europe, the West, and capitalism by denouncing the idea of man's universality; and, finally, both criticize "Atlanticist" domination, considered to be nefarious for the rest of mankind.

After four years (1994-1998) spent at Eduard Limonov's side in the National-Bolshevik Party (*Natsional-bolshevitskaia partiia* or NBP), the period of 1998-2000 saw a transformation of Dugin's political leanings. Out of this transformation developed a specific current which deployed multiple strategies of entryism, targeting both youth counter-culture and parliamentary structures. Dugin moved away from opposition parties such as the CPRF and the LDPR and closer to centrist groups, lending his support to the then Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov. On April 21, 2001 he resolved to lay his cards on the table and created a movement named Evraziia, of which he was elected president. During its founding convention, Evraziia officially

⁵⁹ On Panarin, see: Andrei Tsygankov. "Aleksandr Panarin kak zerkalo rossiiskoi revoliutsii" [Alexander Panarin as a mirror of Russia's revolution], *Vestnik MGU: Sotsiologiya i Politologiya*, no. 4 (2005), pp.166-177; no. 1, 2006, pp. 120-149; Andrei Tsygankov. "Natsional'nyi liberalizm Aleksandra Panarina" [The National Liberalism of Alexander Panarin], *Svobodnaia mysl'*, no. 9 (2005), pp. 100-117.

⁶⁰ On Dugin, see: Marlène Laruelle. *Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?*, *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers*, Washington D.C., no. 294, 2006; John B. Dunlop. "Aleksandr Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasian' Textbook and Dmitrii Trenin's Ambivalent Response," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. XXV, no. 1-2 (2001), pp.91-127; Alan Ingram. "Alexander Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-Fascism in Post-Soviet Russia," *Political Geography*, vol. 20 (2001), pp. 1029-1051.

rallied to Putin and offered to participate in the next elections as part of a governmental coalition. In 2003, Dugin hoped to acquire influence within a promising new electoral formation, the Rodina bloc. But when his hopes in Rodina dashed, Dugin began to reorient his strategies away from the electoral sphere and toward the expert community. His International Eurasianist Movement (IEM), born on November 20, 2003, includes members from twenty countries, and its main foreign support seems to come from Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Neo-Eurasianism has also been spreading within some of the Turkic and Muslim elite circles which reside in the post-Soviet territory: it can be found in political parties which claim to be Eurasianist as much as Islamic; in the opposing ideological conflicts of the different Muslim Spiritual Boards about the appropriation of this rhetoric; in the development of discourses regarding “Euro-Islam”; and in the discourses held by many subjects of the Federation (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Altay, Buryatia, Yakutia-Sakha, Kalmykia, etc.). Eurasianism is, in these instances, conceived of as a “friendship between peoples” which permits non-Russian intellectuals and politicians to claim a central role for their people in Russia’s future. It has also been recognized as the official ideology of Nursultan Nazarbayev’s Kazakhstan. Since the early 2000s it has aroused the interest of those in Turkey who have been searching for new strategies to elaborate their country’s “Eurasian” geographical and cultural space, its difficulties with the European Union, its desire for an increased presence in Central Asia, and its mixed feeling of being both competitor and ally of Russia.⁶¹ References to Eurasia have thus shaken loose of the Russian framework, spreading not only among Turkic and Muslim peoples – who were the first to take notice of these orientalist discourses – but also, in a less theorized way, throughout the whole post-Soviet territory, if not beyond. However, Russian nationalism is not limited to Eurasianist currents and these latter cannot be regarded as the currents with the most influence on the policies Moscow adopts on Central Asia.

⁶¹ Marlène Laruelle. “Russo-Turkish Rapprochement through the Idea of Eurasia: Alexander Dugin’s Networks in Turkey,” *Jamestown Occasional Papers*, forthcoming.

The Multiple Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism

In all of the post-Socialist countries, whether in Central and Eastern Europe, or in the former Soviet Union, the radical right of the 1990s was often more ideologically driven, and more openly anti-democratic than in western countries. Its field of action, however, was limited because nationalist rhetoric was already monopolized by the authorities, finding expression in a variety of public domains.⁶² In the 1990s, the Russian Federation underwent profound changes that were as much political as cultural and social, and which forced it to focus on its new national and state identity. The “return to order” championed by Putin since 2000, and the will of the authorities to take things in hand – very noticeable since the second half of the last decade – have now become increasingly obviously bolstered by rising patriotic sentiment.

Official re-appropriation of the nationalist idea, considered marginal at the start of the 1990s, was particularly obvious during the parliamentary elections in December 2003. Indeed, the four parties that scraped over the 5% threshold needed to sit in the Duma, all sang the nationalist line, albeit in different keys: the Rodina bloc, which surprised everyone by garnering 9 percent of the votes; Gennadii Ziuganov's Communist Party, which only received 13 percent; Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia with 12 percent; and the government party United Russia, which ruled with 36 percent of the votes. In December 2007, the parliamentary elections confirmed the dominance that the Kremlin has over Russian politics: 64% of Russian voters endorsed Putin's party United Russia, and the overwhelming margin of victory surprised few. The Communist Party came a distant second with only 11% of votes, followed by two parties who side with the Kremlin on all policy matters: the Liberal-Democratic Party and Fair Russia, both of which only just scraped over the 7% threshold. Meaningful opposition to the Presidency is as non-existent in the Parliament as it is in society at large.

⁶² Sabrina Ramet (ed.), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Nationalism in one form or another today dominates the entirety of the Russian electoral field, confirming both the narrowing of political life in the country around the figure of the president, and Kremlin's drive to monopolize the discourse on national identity.⁶³ The presidential apparatus strongly contributes to developing this new ideology through state programmes promoting patriotic education at school, and through the institutionalising/institutionalizing of new public holidays and various commemorations. This ideology is also diffused through an army cult, through the officialization of certain references to Orthodoxy, and through a juridical essentialism that is quite especially evident in matters concerning the "ethnic" rights of the national subjects of the Federation.

The media seems to play a crucial role in disseminating this nationalism. Indeed, the massive submission of this "fourth power" to the political authorities highlights its status as a proponent of nationalist discourse in its own right. Whether one speaks of the press and the television, which the Kremlin has brought under control, or of the more apparently autonomous sectors, such as the internet and the cinema, it is quite apparent that, at the present time, the large majority of the media plays an increasingly large role in exacerbating xenophobic tensions within Russian society. This nationalist climate is not solely restricted to political and media circles, but is also to be found in certain sections of cultural and academic life. Thus, in Russia today, the notion that certain sciences have as their mission to justify so-called Russian specificity is very widespread in academic milieus, as are approaches defined as "civilizationist" or culturalist. Disciplines such as history, sociology, economics, and literature as well as the new disciplines of

⁶³ On Putin's Russia, see Michael Mc Faul, Nikolai Petrov, Andrei Ryabov. *Between Dictatorship and Democracy. Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2004; Dale R. Herspring (ed.), *Putin's Russia. Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. In Russian see the analysis by Alexander M. Verkhovski, Ekaterina V. Mikhailovskaia, Vladimir V. Pribylovski. *Rossiiia Putina: pristrastnyi vzgliad* [A Biased Look at Putin's Russia], Moscow, Panorama, 2003.

culturology and geopolitics, propagate nationalist and, more generally, ethnic precepts with as yet little studied consequences.⁶⁴

This new Russian patriotism puts forward reformulations, modernized by post-Soviet conditions, of former Soviet ideology and traditional Russian nationalism. What is most characteristic of this discourse is the desire for social consensus, and the idea that there is a fundamental historical continuity in the Russian state over and above any political ruptures. Such ruptures are indeed not considered pertinent insofar as the “essence” of Russia is said not to lie in its political regime – Tsarism, communism, presidentialist republic, etc. – but instead in the country’s greatness, in its place on the international stage, in the existence of a sphere of influence over its neighboring countries, and in the sense of a world mission. This glorifying of a nation emptied of any civic objective clearly indicates a desire to “exit from the political”: focusing on the national is designed to circumvent every challenge to the current political authorities, and indirectly to justify the development of authoritarian practices. This development in part explains the consensual rallying to an elective autocracy by the majority of the population, whose demand for authority and has been remarked upon by all western observers for some years.

The country’s principal political leaders, then, have worked to change their tune to fit in with the general climate, notably by concentrating on those issues which are most electorally significant: xenophobia toward “Southerners”; demographic anxieties; the desire to re-establish a great Russian power, i.e., one that is respected on the international scene and in the Near Abroad; concern over ethnic questions, and over the balance between “Russians” and “national minorities”. These mounting issues having permitted a re-centering of the political stage on patriotism, and diverse nationalist milieus have rushed in to take advantage.

The extremely varied field of Russian nationalism may thus be divided into several concentric circles. The first circle is that of the men of power, of the president Putin, and of the “techno-political scientists” (*polit-tekhnologi*) of the

⁶⁴ Cf. Marlène Laruelle. “The Discipline of Culturology: A New ‘Ready-made Thought’ for Russia?,” *Diogenes*, no. 204 (2004), pp. 21-36.

presidential apparatus responsible for formulating the political precepts of the day, such as Vladislav Surkov and Gleb Pavlovskii, and of United Russia. The second circle comprises the principal political parties with electoral representation: the Communist Party and the LDPR were the only two until the 2003 elections at which time they were joined by a newcomer, the Rodina Bloc, transformed since 2006 in Fair Russia. A third circle groups together those political parties with no electoral presence, but which have been stable for many years, have charismatic leaders, and have both an identifiable discourse and strategy. This group includes Alexander Barkashov's Russian National Unity (*Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo*), which has more or less disappeared since 2000, and Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party, stripped of its registration in 2005. A fourth and last circle includes the set of radical groupuscules of various durations, and of ambiguous syncretistic, as fascist as Stalinist, ideologies.

Also to be noted is the growing role of skinheads (consisting of 20,000 to 50,000 persons), whose groups are becoming increasingly institutionalized, recruited around the central slogan "Russia for Russians". Since 2006, the main nationalist movement with increased influence on the Russian political scene is the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (*Dvizhenie protiv nelegal'noi immigratsii*) or DPNI, created in 2002 and headed by Alexander Belov. The DPNI does not present itself as a political party but as an ally of the organs of state, to which it offers its services: overseeing the application of measures against illegal immigration; giving support to those politicians who advocate tougher legislation on migrants; and founding voluntary associations of citizens to collaborate with the police.⁶⁵ Its success has confirmed that xenophobia, especially "migrantophobia", has become one of the central elements of the social and political consensus in Russia.

The vast majority of Russian nationalist currents, no matter which ideological movements they are attached to ("ethno-nationalists", "imperialists", "Eurasianists", etc.), have little interest in Central Asia. The area does not occupy a central place in what might be called their "mental

⁶⁵ Henri Duquenne. "Les mouvements extrémistes en Russie," *Le Courrier des pays de l'Est*, no. 1060 (2007), pp. 70-86. See the DNPI web site, <www.dpni.org>.

map". Their attention is focused on the western fringes of the empire: every loss of territory or of influence in the West is perceived to be an unacceptable undermining of Russia's great power status as it attempts to assert itself against the West. Central Asia enjoys even less attention than does the Caucasus: its peoples are scorned and considered backwards, and the area is conceived of as a burden for Russia. At the same time, the territory of Central Asia is actively incorporated into mythologizing discourses about the immensity of the Russian sphere of influence and its geopolitical role in Asia. Russian influence in Central Asia is therefore considered as obvious, as an established fact that is not worth insisting on, and for which, by contrast to the western fringes, it is not necessary to fight. This paradoxical vision reappears in the analysis that the Russian nationalist milieus have of the current standing of Russo-Central Asian relations.

Russian Nationalist Lobbies and their Opinions on Central Asia

The different Russian nationalist movements do not all enjoy the same access to public opinion and to political decision-making circles. Some are only interested in problems internal to Russia and have no clear views on Russian foreign policy. Their attitude toward Central Asia can be divided into three broad categories, which are neither definitive nor exclusive of one another and can intersect or recombine depending on the issues of the day. The first current is an isolationist one; it is not very large and its representatives do not occupy any important political positions. The second, which defends the rights of Russians of the Near Abroad, is more widely represented and has some active lobbies in the Duma. The third, which stands for a return to Russian domination over former Soviet countries, is the most widely represented in the organs of the Federation, but it is also divided into multiple sub-sections, the key issue of which is whether to conceive of Russia as a soft power or as a hard power.

Advocates of Isolationist Policy toward the South

The first category, often defined as “ethno-nationalist”, endorses leaving Central Asia to its own devices and calls for Russia to adopt an isolationist policy on its southern border. Since the 1970s, some nationalist currents have maintained that the Russian people paid dearly for the attempt to maintain its empire during the Soviet period. They allege that, through their own sacrifices, the Russians financed the economic and cultural development of other Soviet peoples, particularly the Central Asians and Caucasians, whom then went on to claim their independence. This discourse was revived in the 1990s and 2000s after re-centring on the Russian Federation. For their advocates, Russia runs the risk of the same implosion that occurred with the Soviet Union, that is, it risks seeing the autonomous republics obtaining as many rights as possible before finally declaring independence. As a result,

they call for the Federation's "nationalization" and for the abolition of its federal character, which supposedly benefits the national republics to the detriment of the Russian regions. Among their main claims, one worth noting is the desire to give "ethnic" Russians (*russkie*) the official status of a titular people, whereas the 1993 Constitution and the state organs recognize only citizens of Russia (*rossiyane*). In this world vision, Central Asia is considered as a dangerous zone that will only cause Russia problems. This current is also distinguished by its strong Islamophobia; for it, Islam has become one of the main cultural and geopolitical threats to the survival of the Russian people. It would therefore like to close the Federation's border to all migratory flows from the South.

Among the representatives of this current in the 1990s, several small radical nationalist groupuscules should be noted, such as the People's National Party (*Narodnaia natsional'naia partiia*) of Alexander Ivanov-Sukharevskii and the Russian National Union (*Russkii natsional'nyi soiuz*) of Aleksei Vdovin and Konstantin Kassimovskii. Russian National Unity can also be included in this group insofar as its leader, Alexander Barkashov, does not refrain from denouncing the alleged criminality linked to Central Asian and Caucasian migrants.⁶⁶ In the 2000s, the main movements have been the secessionist group "Russian Republic" (*russkaia respublika*),⁶⁷ the National Socialist Society (*Natsional'noe sotsialisticheskoe obshchestvo*) of Dmitrii Rumiantsev⁶⁸ and the racist and neo-pagan movements like the journal *Atenei* and the

⁶⁶ John B. Dunlop. "Alexander Barkashov and the Rise of National Socialism in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya*, no. 4 (1996), pp. 519-530; Sven G. Simonsen. "Alexandr Barkashov and Russian National Unity: Blackshirt Friends of the Nation," *Nationalities Papers*, no. 4 (1996), pp. 625-639.

⁶⁷ The movement calls for ethnic Russians to secede from the Federal Russian state by proclaiming a "Russian republic". This group claimed responsibility for Nikolai Girenko's assassination in 2004, and posted it under the heading "verdict no. 1". See their web site, <<http://www.rusrepublic.ru/>>.

⁶⁸ The National Socialist Society has published on its website one of the most detailed "lists of enemies of the Russian people", and has called for these enemies to be assassinated. To be noted among the accused were journalists such as Anna Politkovskaia, human rights defenders like Svetlana Gannushkina, and university professors such as Emil Pain and Valeri Tishkov.

group headed by Alexander N. Sevastianov.⁶⁹ The best known among this current today is incontestably Belov's Movement Against Illegal Immigration, the rhetoric of which is based precisely on an amalgamation of Central Asia, terrorism, mafia, and Islamism. The Skinhead groups can also be placed in this current: their political conceptions are clearly "ethno-nationalist", even racist, and a number of groups take their direct inspiration from the American White Power movement.⁷⁰ The southern migrants remain their foremost enemy, followed by the gypsies, the homeless, and the Jews. In 2007, the SOVA center registered at least 632 racist attacks in Russia, 67 of which were fatal.⁷¹

However, the influence of this nationalist current on Russian public life does not issue solely from these marginal groups but from esteemed intellectual figures that enjoy greater public visibility. One of the main advocates of Russian isolationism toward Central Asia is Ksenia Mialo (1936), a former researcher of various institutes of the Academy of Sciences and now a member of the Institute of Russian Civilization, which was created in 2003 to develop the very conservative ideas advocated by Metropolitan Ioann of Saint Petersburg and Lagoda.⁷² Mialo first drew attention to herself by the virulent stance she took against Eurasianist ideas in numerous of publicist works: in texts such as *The Eurasianist Temptation (Evraziiskii soblazn)* of 1996, she tries to show that Eurasianism ideologically justifies Turkic-Muslim secession, the superiority of Islam over Orthodoxy, and the effacing of Russia's historic role in Central Asia to the advantage of Turkey and western powers.⁷³ For her as for other famous nationalist figures like Vadim Kozhinov (1930-2001), a well-known nationalist literary scholar, Russia has no interest in thinking its

⁶⁹ See. Viktor Shnirelman. "Les nouveaux Aryens et l'antisémitisme. D'un faux manuscrit au racisme aryaniste," in Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Le rouge et le noir. Extrême droite et nationalisme en Russie*, Paris, CNRS-Éditions, 2007, pp. 189-224.

⁷⁰ Alexander Tarasov. "Le phénomène skinhead en Russie. Un malaise jeune en cours de politisation ?," in Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Le rouge et le noir. Extrême droite et nationalisme en Russie*, op. cit., pp. 173-188.

⁷¹ For more information, see their website, <<http://xeno.sova-center.ru>>.

⁷² See the Institute for Russian Civilization web site, <www.rusinst.ru>.

⁷³ Ksenia Mialo. "Evraziiskii soblazn" [The Eurasianist Temptation], *Moskva*, no. 11-12 (1996), <http://www.patriotica.ru/gosudarstvo/mialo_euras.html> (July 22, 2007).

mission lies in Asia since western Russophobia is precisely founded on a vision of Russia as an Asian country.⁷⁴

Defenders of Russians of the Near Abroad

The second category has as its principal objective the defense of Russians of the Near Abroad. It can be qualified as ethno-nationalist insofar as it advocates above all else the defense of “ethnic” Russians and of all those who themselves claim to be Russian, and as imperialist insofar as it encourages Moscow to keep its right to have a say in what happens in the new states. This current is thus not as radical as the first in its disregard for the Near Abroad since it does not advocate any isolationist policies. On the contrary, it appeals to Moscow not to relinquish its ability to exercise influence over any states refractory to its geopolitical superiority, but does not want supra-national economic or political structures to be created at a post-Soviet level. It wants privileged relations with the Russian “diaspora” to be maintained, but not relations with Central Asian societies as such. Moscow’s influence over the new states is therefore conceived on the basis of asymmetrical bilateral relations between a powerful Russian state and weak post-Soviet states, and not on the basis of a symmetrical multilateral regulation within collective institutions.

This current is very widely represented in the Russian nationalist milieus. Some small, extreme right-wing movements were part of it, like the National Republican Party of Russia (*Natsional’no-respublikanskaia partiia Rossii*) founded by Nikolai Lysenko, which disappeared at the end of the 1990s. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, this party created a “Russian national legion” which sent militia into conflict zones like Transnistria and South Ossetia. It is also the case with the National-Bolshevik Party of Eduard Limonov, which has never concealed its imperialist aims over neighboring republics, in particular over the Baltic countries and Kazakhstan. Limonov advocates the reconstitution of a so-called great Russian power, that is to say, a Russian empire in which priority would be given to ethnic Russians and in

⁷⁴ Vadim Kozhinov. “Markiz de Kiustin kak voskhishchennyi sozertsatel’ Rossii” [The Marquis of Custine, Enchanted Contemplator of Russia], <<http://www.hrono.ru/statii/2001/kojinov.html>> (July 22, 2007).

which the rights of non-native peoples, while not inexistent, would be extremely limited. The NBP has drawn attention to itself many times with the militant actions it has carried out in Latvia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In 2001, Limonov was arrested and accused of having organized a “*coup d'état*” in the Cossack milieus in Kazakhstan with the aim of fomenting secession of the Altay region and uniting it with Russia.⁷⁵ He was imprisoned until 2003 for the possession of arms and the illegal constitution of armed groups. In 2005, the Party protested against the signing of a Russo-Kazakh treaty defining the border between the two countries on the grounds that several towns on the Kazakh side had historically belonged to Russia (Uralsk, Kustanai, Petropavlovsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, etc.), in addition to Altay and the northern shore of the Caspian Sea.⁷⁶

This current's real capacity for influence does not depend on these small parties but on the activity of two large influential lobbies in Moscow, one linked to the Rodina bloc, and one from the Institute of Diaspora and Integration. Both these lobbies became known at the beginning of the 1990s with a slogan asserting the “divided character of the Russian people” (*razdelennost' russkogo naroda*). Both of them call for the “regrouping of Russian lands” (*sobranie russkikh zemel'*) through Moscow's adoption of a voluntarist politics in favor of the 20 million Russians of the so-called diaspora.

The Institute of Diaspora and Integration (*Institut diaspori i integratsii*) was created in April 1996 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the municipality of Moscow and the Academy of Sciences.⁷⁷ Headed by Konstantin Zatulin (1958) ever since its creation, it includes twenty researchers and political figures such as the former leader of the Slavic Party of Kazakhstan Lad, Alexandra Dokuchaeva, and the former president of the Crimea, Iurii

⁷⁵ Marlène Laruelle, Sébastien Peyrouse. *Les Russes du Kazakhstan. Identités nationales et nouveaux États dans l'espace post-soviétique*, Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004, pp.227-229.

⁷⁶ “Zaiavlenie NBP po Kazakhstanu” [PNB's declaration on Kazakhstan] <<http://www.nbp-info.ru/2100.html>> (July 15, 2007).

⁷⁷ It was initially called the Institute of the CIS Countries, of the Diaspora and of Integration (*Institut stran SNG, diaspori i integratsii*).

Meshkov.⁷⁸ The Institute organizes numerous conferences on questions concerning the “compatriots” (*sootchestvenniki*), works in close collaboration with the Council of Compatriots at the Duma and the Forum of Displaced Persons Organizations (*Forum pereselencheskikh organizatsii*), and has opened offices in Belarus and Armenia. It combines academic works focusing on the social and political developments in the new states with juridical, cultural and political activism in support of “compatriots”. Since March 2000, the Institute has been publishing a bi-weekly bulletin, set up an extremely dynamic internet site around the issue of compatriots (www.materik.ru) and, since February 2002, has run a televised program called Materik on the channel TV-Tsentr.

Born in Batumi into a family of former Cossacks, Zatulin may be considered one of the main figures of Russian nationalism, possessing some influence on decisions taken in relation to Central Asia. Since the demise of the USSR, he has succeeded in joining nearly all the institutions linked to the question of the Russian “diaspora” of the Near Abroad: between 1993 and 1995, he presided over the Duma Committee for the Affairs of the CIS and Relations with Compatriots; in the 1995 legislative elections, he militated in the Congress of Russian Communities (*Kongress russkikh obshchin*) at the sides of Dmitrii Rogozin and Alexander Lebed,⁷⁹ and then was named president of the Council of Compatriots and a member of the Parliamentary Commission for the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad. Since 1995, he has developed ties with Iurii Luzhkov, became a close advisor to the Mayor, and has greatly influenced the municipality’s attitude with regard to the question of compatriots. In 1998, he was a member of the Great Power party (*Derzhava*), created by his friend Alexander V. Rutskoï, former vice-president of Russia, and then supported Luzhkov’s attempt to found a party of the regional nomenklatura called Fatherland (*Otechestvo*). Following the unification of Fatherland with the pro-Putin party Unity (*Edinstvo*) in 2001, Zatulin became a member of the central political council of United Russia (*Edinaia Rossiia*)

⁷⁸ Interviews conducted at the Institute of the Diaspora and Integration in May 2002 and October 2005.

⁷⁹ Alan Ingram. “A Nation Split into Fragments’: The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian Nationalist Ideology,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, no.4 (1999), pp.687-704.

and was elected, in the 2003 and the 2007 elections, to the Duma from a district of Moscow. He is known for his numerous appearances in the Russian media on all issues concerning the Near Abroad.

The second network associated with the issue of Russians of the Near Abroad is that of Dmitrii Rogozin (1963) and the Rodina Party. A parliamentary bloc, Rodina was a conglomerate of diverse nationalist movements: lobbies for the defense of Russians of the diaspora; politicians nostalgic for the Soviet Union and leftist militants who cannot identify with the CPRF; defenders of political orthodoxy such as Natalia A. Narochnitskaia, who played an important role in the World Russian National Council (*Vsemirnyi russkii narodnyi sobor*)⁸⁰ in the first half of the 1990s; and partisans of Sergei Baburin's party, People's Will (*Narodnaia volia*). In October 2006, Rodina created, along with the Party of Life and the Pensioners' Party, a new movement called Fair Russia (*Spravedlivaia Rossiia*), which is headed by Sergei Mironov. The constitutive congress of the new party took place on February 26, 2007 and, at the March 11 regional assembly elections, it succeeded in gaining more seats than the Communist Party. Current practice in Russia would seem to suggest the impossibility of gaining such a score without the use of administrative resources, that is, the support of local authorities. The creation of this new party is seen by many as a consolidation of some of the pro-Kremlin leftist parties and the institutionalization of extremely xenophobic currents.

Rogozin's career is indicative of the growing place occupied by this nationalist current. In February 1992, he was elected a member of the presidium of the National Assembly of Russia (*Rossiiskoe narodnoe sobranie*), which gathers together several patriotic organizations like the Union of Cossack Troops of Russia, Nikolai Lysenko's National Republican Party and the Russian Christian Democrat Movement. Following this he was an adherent of the Union for the Rebirth of Russia (*Soiuz vrozhdeniia Rossii*), of which he became the president in October 1993, and of the Congress of

⁸⁰ This institution was established between 1990 and 1993 and enjoys in the first place the direct patronage of the Patriarch but its political radicalism (in particular its calls to restore the monarchy) caused concern in the Orthodox hierarchy, which moved in 1996 to have registered a competing association headed by the Metropolitan Kirill and from which the most radical figures are absent.

Russian Communities, of which he was, at the side of Iurii Skokov, one of the principal leaders. In the second half of the 1990s, he succeeded in developing ties with decision-making circles and left the marginal milieus in which he received his informal training, thanks in particular to the sponsorship of Lebed. In 1997, as an elected MP, he joined the parliamentary group called Regions of Russia (*Regiony Rossii*) and was named vice-president of the Duma Committee for National Policy. Re-elected in 1999, he then joined the parliamentary faction of the People's Party (*Narodnaia partiia*), headed the Duma Committee for International Affairs as well as the Duma's permanent delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In 2003, he became the leader of the newly formed electoral bloc Rodina. Propelled to the fourth largest political group in Russia and to the third largest parliamentary fraction in the Duma, Rogozin succeeded in distinguishing himself to become one of the major figures of contemporary Russian politics and was appointed in January 2008 to represent Russia at NATO.

Zatulin's career in the think tank-related field, and of Rogozin's on the political scene, demonstrate the process of institutionalization of lobbies for the defense of the "diaspora". Both belonged, in the first half of the 1990s, to circles on the fringes of ultra-nationalism, including both those of orthodox radicalism and those of Soviet nostalgia. They managed little by little to get included into larger structures, penetrate decision-making circles, and develop ties with the presidential apparatus. A certain political radicalism has therefore passed from marginality to being politically correct. This development was made possible by the capacity of associations for the defense of Russians in the Near Abroad to make their claims in line with what is acceptable in the public space, but also by the rise of nationalist attitudes, which enabled the claims to become part of the official discourse. Both these groups contain networks which enable them to have a real influence on decisions concerning Central Asia: Zatulin's network gives him access to organs of state power, and Rogozin and his associates have access to the political circles and the Duma. However, here also, as we shall see, Central Asia remains much less important than the western fringes of Russia: this current is in effect distinguished by its pan-Slavism and Orthodoxy,

which leads it to focus its attention on the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, the Baltic states and the Balkans, and to neglect the Muslim countries situated on its southern borders.

Militants for Russian Domination in Central Asia

The third category of Russian Nationalism can be defined as “imperialist”. Its desire is for Russia to reassert its leadership role in Central Asia and throughout the whole of the post-Soviet space. Its standpoint is that Moscow will never be able to re-establish its status as a great power except by dominating, in an uncontested manner, its Eurasian sphere of influence. Despite this common vision, the current holds many contradictory geopolitical conceptions. Some advocate the reconstitution of the Soviet Union, but these hard-line nostalgics are in an insignificant minority. The second, and most numerous, group pushes for the creation of new political and economic institutions to strengthen relations between the former republics, taking the union created between Russia and Belarus in 1996 as a model. Some others, also very numerous, do not militate for new institutions but solely for a modernized form of Russian domination in Central Eurasia, one founded exclusively on economic coercion. For the latter, Russian cultural influence in Central Asia and the preservation of symbolic or institutional links between post-Soviet states have less importance than Moscow’s having control over Central Asia’s natural resources.

This current obviously encompasses Ziuganov, Zhirinovskiy and all the neo-Eurasianists, including Dugin, who thinks of himself as the current theoretician of the Eurasian Economic Community. The Communist Party advocates reinforcing the relations between Russia and Central Asia and believes this zone to be one of the premier spaces in which Russian power must assert itself. In 2001, Ziuganov severely criticized Putin’s authorization of the establishment of American military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, an act he characterized as “capitulation” to Washington.⁸¹ The CPRF favors the reconstitution of a unified state covering the entirety of ex-

⁸¹ “Ziuganov obviniaet Putina v kapituliatsii” [Ziuganov accuses Putin of capitulation], *BBC Russian.com*, January 19, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/news/newsid_1770000/1770255.stm> (July 12, 2007).

Soviet territory and denounces the activities of anti-Russian regional institutions such as GUAM. In the 1990s, he violently criticized Uzbekistan's pro-American policies, and was quite visibly pleased about its foreign policy reversal in 2005. He regards the "colored revolutions", including the one that occurred in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, and the Andijan insurrection in May of the same year, as products of the CIA: for him, the United States aims to strike right at the heart of Russia by destabilizing its margins.⁸² Today, his critiques are largely centered on the Ukraine and Georgia, whereas Central Asia is presented as being once more in Russia's grip.

Zhirinovskiy's LDPR holds a very similar discourse to that of the CPRF. Its leader, originally from Kazakhstan, wrote a best-selling book – *The Last Thrust to the South (Poslednii brodok na iug)* published at the height of his popularity in 1993 – in which he denounces the nationalism of Central Asians and the policies of ethnic favoritism from which they have benefited since Soviet times. However, although his books focus on the Caucasus, Afghanistan and the "Turkish threat",⁸³ he has never really developed an opinion on Central Asia and prefers to limit himself to denouncing, in a provocative style, the *chabany* ("herders", an extremely pejorative term to designate "southerners").⁸⁴ Like the CPRF, he denounces western influence in the post-Soviet space, criticizes the "colored revolutions", and wants Moscow to reassert its power in the region. Although the LDPR is less precise than the CPRF when it comes to its policy objectives, the Communist Party does not await the birth of a unified state and seems content with the current state of

⁸² "Ziuganov ne iskluchil, chto v sobytiakh v Uzbekistane 'vidny takzhe ushi razvedsluzhb SSHA'" [Ziuganov does not discount the fact that the ears of the American secret services were also present at the events in Uzbekistan], News.ru, May 14, 2005, <<http://www.newsru.com/russia/14may2005/zug.html>> (July 13, 2007).

⁸³ See, for example, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. *Chechnia vsegda budet v sostave Rossii* [Chechnya will always be part of Russia], Moscow, Izdanie LDPR, 1999; *Kavkaz – iarmo Rossii* [The Caucasus, Russia's Chore], Moscow, Izdanie LDPR, 2001; *Sarancha* [Saranja], Izdanie LDPR, 2002.

⁸⁴ Mischa Gabowitsch. "L'Asie centrale dans la sphère publique en Russie: la grande absence," *Russie-Asie centrale: regards réciproques. Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* (CEMOTI), no. 34 (2002), pp. 77-99.

post-Soviet political division so long as Russia's domination over its neighboring countries is assured.⁸⁵

This so-called “imperialist” movement also gathers advocates of Russian soft power in Central Asia, that is, power based on the control of energy resources – currently the prevailing opinion in the official instances of the Russian State and one that corresponds precisely to the Kremlin's foreign policy choices. Several official figures were educated in Orientalist Soviet milieus, the most prestigious institutions of which were the Far East Institute and the Institute of Diplomatic Relations. During the 1990s, the tutelary figures of this school were of course Evgenii Primakov, who held both the positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996–8) and of Prime Minister (September 1998–May 1999), and, to a lesser degree, the state Advisor Sergei Stankevich.⁸⁶ This school appeals to a pragmatic *balanced policy* that would permit Russia to develop its relations with Asian countries (in the first place, China, India and Japan, today joined by Iran) at the same time as maintaining neighborly relations with Europe. Undoubtedly, NATO's eastward expansion plays a major part in Russia's current increased focus on Asia. Within this policy framework, Central Asia constitutes an important element of Russian strategy since it plays a part in relations with China (within the SCO) and cannot not be ignored in the development of privileged relations with India, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Dugin's Networks in Central Asia

Among the nationalist milieus, Dugin is one of the only ones seeking to establish a network in ex-Soviet republics and to have local interlocutors capable of relaying his theories. He works mostly within the structure of the International Eurasianist Movement and its youth branch, the Eurasianist Youth Union (*Evraziiskii soiuz molodezhi*). Having thus been able to go beyond the confines of a political party, Dugin is pleased to be able to operate at the level of an international organization. He now spends time cultivating his

⁸⁵ See Zhirinovskiy's numerous speeches on line on the site of the LDPR, <<http://www.ldpr.ru>>.

⁸⁶ Paradorn Rangsimaporn. “Interpretations of Eurasianism: Justifying Russia's Role in East Asia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2006), pp. 371–89.

image in neighboring countries; his visits to Turkey, like those to Kazakhstan, always win him substantial publicity.

In Kazakhstan, Eurasianism is entirely associated with President Nazarbayev's regime. Some Kazakh intellectuals denounced it as a rhetorical illusion intended to mask the country's ethnic polarization. Indeed, Eurasianism may be considered the newspeak of independent Kazakhstan in terms of nationalities policy, and the country's main Eurasianist publications are very clearly in the hands of people close to the president. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev has sought to recreate supra-national organs and already in 1994 proposed the creation of a Union of Eurasian States. Throughout the 1990s, Kazakhstan and its president constantly stood out on the post-Soviet scene due to their commitment to a rapprochement among the Soviet successor states. Several economic and customs treaties were signed, mainly between Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan; but Nazarbayev's greatest victory was the creation of the Eurasian Economic Community in 2000. Nevertheless, official Kazakh Eurasianism cannot be interpreted exclusively as a foreign policy strategy and a doctrine of economic realism favorable to the preservation of privileged relations with the former Soviet republics and especially with Russia. Kazakh Eurasianism also has a domestic aspect relating to the country's ethnic balance. Both the sizeable Russian minority (30 percent of the population) and Kazakh society's disregard for its Uzbek neighbor have compelled Nazarbayev to emphasize strongly the "mixed culture" of the Kazakhs and their affinity not with the South but with the North.

Nazarbayev regularly makes Eurasianist speeches at the Lev N. Gumilev Eurasianist University in Astana, held up as an example of Kazakhstan's integrationist goodwill, but also of the institutionalization of Eurasianism as the official ideology of independent Kazakhstan. This new university, founded in 1996 by presidential decree, is in fact the city's old Pedagogical Institute, now rebranded as an elite institution. The president gave his blessing to the proposal to name the new university after Lev Gumilev. He created a Eurasianist Center at the university from scratch, giving it the mission of formulating a distinctive Kazakh ideology that is differentiated from its Russian "competitors." The Center organizes several annual

conferences on Eurasianism, and the president of the republic opens the plenary sessions in person. Each year the fall semester starts with lectures on Eurasianism and Gumilev's work. The vast majority of Kazakh Eurasianists reject the Russo-centric ideas of 1920s Eurasianism and, for some, what they call "Soviet Eurasianism," i.e. Moscow's nationalities policy, which, they argue, was aimed at leveling national differences. They all condemn the fascist tendencies of Neo-Eurasianists such as Dugin, and several articles in Kazakh academic periodicals denounce this "revival of Russian messianism and imperialism."⁸⁷

However, while Dugin was openly criticized by the Eurasianist Center in Astana in the late 1990s, perceptions have rapidly altered since 2002. His increasing public respectability in Russia and his own support for Kazakh-style pragmatic economic Eurasianism seem to have facilitated reconciliation with the Kazakh Eurasianists, or, more precisely, made them aware of a number of common interests. In 2004, Dugin published a book lauding President Nazarbayev, *The Eurasian Mission of Nursultan Nazarbayev*,⁸⁸ and this naturally contributed to his rehabilitation in the Kazakh media. He organized a tour to launch his book encompassing several Kazakh cities, was invited to the Academy of Sciences, and presented his views in a show on *Rakhat* (a TV channel belonging to Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga), and widely publicized his meeting with the Kazakh members of the International Eurasianist Movement, including Gani Kasymov, the leader of the small Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan. On April 2, 2004, Dugin was even received, with great pomp, at a conference organized at Gumilev University by the Ministry of Education and the presidential administration, along with many high-ranking officials.

Not only has Dugin managed to establish himself on the Kazakh scene as he did in Russia by monopolizing Eurasianism; he has also succeeded in seducing

⁸⁷ M. Shaikhutdinov. "A. Dugin i imperskaia modifikatsiia evraziiskoi idei" [A. Dugin and the imperial inflection of the notion of Eurasia], *Evrasiiskoe soobshchestvo*, no. 2 (2002), pp. 26-32; and M. Shaikhutdinov. "Imperskie proekty geopoliticheskoi identichnosti Rossii" [The imperial projects pertaining to Russia's geopolitical identity], *Evrasiiskoe soobshchestvo*, no. 2 (2003), pp. 5-14.

⁸⁸ Alexander Dugin. *Evrasiiskaia missiia Nursultana Nazarbaeva* [The Eurasian Mission of Nursultan Nazarbayev], Moscow, Arktogeia, 2004.

the Kazakh administration by bracketing out his esoteric and traditionalist ideas and giving prominence to a view of Eurasianism that functions as an economic model for post-Soviet integration.⁸⁹ Despite Dugin's success in Astana, many Kazakh official documents very clearly state that Nursultan Nazarbayev's Eurasianism must be considered the third and final stage in the development of that ideology: after the interwar movement and Gumilev, the Kazakh president, they say, has established a definitive understanding of Eurasia, finally abandoning political philosophy to start implementing Eurasianist ideas in practice.⁹⁰

The Supreme Council of the IEM includes several prominent Central Asian members: for Kazakhstan, Sarsengali Abdymanapov, the rector of the Eurasianist University of Astana and Tuiakbai Rysbekov, the rector of the M. Utemisov State University of Uralsk. Kyrgyzstan is represented by Apas Dzhumagulov, the ambassador of Kyrgyzstan and director of the Postnoff Society, and Vladimir Nifadiyev, the rector of the Slavic Russo-Kyrgyz University in Bishkek. In Tajikistan, Dugin's main conduits are none other than Rakhim Masov, the very influential director of the History Institute of the Academy of Sciences, a well-known public figure who does not conceal his Russophile and Uzbekophobe views. He is seconded by a member of the Center of Geopolitical Expertise headed by Dugin, Viktor Dubovitskii, who himself has an important position within the History Institute and directs the Council of Russian Compatriots of Tajikistan. In view of the difficult political conditions in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, no public official from either of these two countries has declared being a member of Dugin's networks.

⁸⁹ However, not everyone falls for Dugin's stratagem. In September 2003, during a public debate between Dugin and the Kazakh nationalist scholar Azimbai Gali, the latter stated that Nazarbayev could not be considered a Eurasianist in Dugin's sense, since he is neither anti-Atlanticist, not anti-Semitic, nor anti-liberal—three features Gali says are defining of Dugin's thought. See Alexander Dugin, *Evraziiskaia missiia Nursultana Nazarbaeva*, *op. cit.* p. 158.

⁹⁰ S. Bulekbaev, E. Unnarbaev. "Evraziistvo kak ideologiya gosudarstvennosti" [Eurasianism as Statehood ideology], *Evraziiskoe soobshchestvo*, no. 3 (2001), p. 5-12; E. Saudanbekova. "Evraziistvo Gumileva i klassicheskoe russkoe evraziistvo" [Gumilev's Eurasianism and classical Russian Eurasianism], *Mysl'*, no. 8 (1997), pp. 30-34.

Neo-Eurasianist influence is also being disseminated by means of the Eurasianist Union of Youth headed by Pavel Zarifullin. Although Zarifullin's actions are focused on the Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, on Belarus and Moldova, the Union has opened offices in Almaty and in Dushanbe.⁹¹ Dugin very often quotes from the two great Central Asian writers, the Kazakh Olzhas Suleimenov and the Kyrgyz Chingiz Aitmatov, both of whom he presents as adepts of his neo-Eurasianist theories, but this viewpoint ought to be qualified: while both writers do publicly support all the discourses and the actions in support of strengthening relations with post-Soviet states in the name of Eurasian unity, their Eurasianist theories are specific and are based more on cultural and spiritual convictions than on political ones, and they therefore diverge significantly from Dugin's.⁹² With the exception of these neo-Eurasianist milieus, the other Russian nationalist movements do not have any developed networks in Central Asia. The CPRF, the LDPR and Rodina have some adherents in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, principally among pro-Russian activists but also within small local parties with communist or nationalist outlooks; however, they do not seek to cultivate their presence locally, which confirms their disinterest for Central Asian societies.

Central Asia does not occupy the centre of interests of Russian nationalists. The isolationist current takes no interest in the region and only refers to it negatively, whenever the issue is to present the threats that risk submerging Russia, chiefly Islamism, terrorism, and the mafia networks. The second current, centred on the rights of compatriots, also has a negative vision of Central Asia since the new states stand accused of discriminating against their Russian/Russophone minorities. Partisans of the "diaspora" desire a strengthening of Russian influence in Central Asia solely as a means of defense of Russians and of assertion of Russian power over its neighbors. The idea of reconstructing close political or economic relations is often discounted by these groups and denounced as a strategy that would be pointlessly

⁹¹ "Evraziiskoe nashestvie v Kazakhstane," [The wave of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan], *Evrasia*, October 11, 2006 <<http://www.evrasia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3321>> (July 15, 2007).

⁹² Marlène Laruelle. *Eurasianism in Russia. The Ideology of Empire*, Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson Press – Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2008.

burdensome on Moscow's budget. The first two currents therefore share the same ethnocentric conception of the Russian people, though the second is more active in foreign policy with its call for Russian people to be "regrouped".

Paradoxically, even in the third "imperialist" movement, the apparent interest taken in Central Asia only rarely goes beyond a rhetorical level. For Dugin, Ziuganov or Zhirinovskiy, the region is mostly only invoked, once again, for its potentially destabilizing influence on Russia: Islamism, drugs, arms, American presence, western influence, etc. The will to dominate this space is explicable only by means of geo-strategic concerns: the argument claiming cultural similarity between the Russian people and the populations of Central Asia is not well-conceived and rarely goes beyond a simple declaration of intention. This is the case even with Dugin, who supposedly emblemizes a neo-Eurasianist ideology that would be favorable to the "Asianization" of Russia. Thus, if Central Asia works as an element to help Russian nationalist milieus indirectly express their concerns, it does not enjoy the interest that the latter have in the "Gordian knots" that are the Baltic countries, the Ukraine and Georgia. This situation can be explained in part by an unconcealed cultural scorn toward Central Asian societies, but also by the fact that the region is considered to be less problematic than other post-Soviet zones: despite the "permanent neutrality" of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's independent stance in the 1990s, Central Asia remains one of Moscow's most faithful partners. This situation has further galvanized since 2005 with the rapprochement between Moscow and the Central Asian capitals, which stand in great contrast to the recurrent "dissidence" of Kiev and Tbilisi.

Three Chief Issues in Current Russian-Central Asian Relations

These three ideological currents existed at the time the Soviet Union imploded. The second of them, which demands the defense of Russians of the Near Abroad, has evolved the most in foreign-policy terms: in the 1990s it was closer to the first “ethno-nationalist” current, then throughout Putin’s two presidential mandates, it has gradually moved closer to the “imperialists”. In the 1990s, the discourses of Russian nationalist milieus on Central Asia remained, at any rate, on a very rhetorical level that cared little about the region itself: they denounced above all the independence of the new states and the arrival of foreign actors in the region. In the 2000s, the debate between Russian nationalists on Central Asia has become more precise: some issues have become more zone specific (migration issues), and the stakes have become more concrete (control of local resources). Today, discussions are dominated by three key policy issues that will become increasingly important in relations between Russia and Central Asia in coming years: the question of Russian soft power, the issue of the diaspora, and the migration issue. Studying these three issues help us to better determine the influence of Russian nationalist milieus have over policy decisions.

The Soft Power Issue

The stake of most importance in relations between Central Asia and Russia for Russian nationalists concerns Moscow’s mode of influence in the region. With the exception of the CPRF, LDPR, and some small radical groupuscules, few nationalists still favor the reconstitution of a unified state covering post-Soviet territory. The majority of them want for Russia to have the benefits of its status as a great power without having to incur the negative consequences of a new empire, especially of having to support financially states regarded as barely viable (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and politically unstable (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan). These nationalist currents are therefore

in favor of a form of soft power that Russia could exercise in Central Asia in two ways: by supporting collective institutions that enable it to keep the new states under its thumb; and by controlling Central Asian economies through large Russian companies to prevent any competitors from establishing themselves there.

With the exception of advocates of isolationism and those of Rodina-type sensibility, the other currents of Russian nationalism support the development of institutions for regional cooperation. In this regard, the process of economic unification happening under the auspices of the Eurasian Economic Community is considered the most appropriate solution to all the countries of the region, assuring Russia a right to oversee neighboring countries and confirming its role as the economic motor of the entire region. The strengthening of the Collective Security Treaty is also looked upon favorably: by means of this treaty, Russia quickly won back its role as the provider of military equipment to the new states. In addition, Russo-Central Asian military cooperation is a means to curb the influence of the latter's western partners, in particular NATO. When Uzbekistan, which had been reluctant to do so, joined these two institutions in 2006, it was welcomed by Russian nationalists as confirmation of the idea that Central Asian countries could not but be the natural allies of Moscow. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is also highly valued, even though long-term cooperation with China provokes contrasting reactions amongst Russian nationalists. The alliance of the most "anti-Russian" countries in GUAM on the other hand has been systematically denounced as a process financed and fomented by the United States to weaken Moscow. The wave of "colored revolutions", first in Georgia in 2003, then in the Ukraine in 2004, and in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, were obviously occasions that aroused the wrath of nationalist milieus: every undermining of Russian pre-eminence in the post-Soviet zone is regarded as an attack on Russia itself.

The cautious Russophone linguistic policy launched by the Kremlin (organization of days of Slavic culture, furnishing school textbooks to Russophone schools, exchange and cooperation programmes for professors and students, recognition of diplomas from the new states in Russia, etc.) also has the unanimous support of all the nationalist milieus. They had already

long called for all post-Soviet states to give the Russian language an official status and are thus pleased that Moscow has finally become interested in conserving a Russophone space. This renewal of the Russian language and culture in the post-Soviet space is regarded as a key element of soft power, but it also provokes the national pride of being a “great culture” recognized by all. All the nationalist movements also support the aggressive policies in Central Asia adopted in 2001 by the large Russian firms: the victories of Gazprom, Rosneft, Lukoil and RAO-UES are invariably presented as a victory for Russia itself. The geopolitical stakes of pipelines routes has in particular aroused the interest of the Russian nationalists, who condemn what they refer to as the “intrusion” of large western firms in Central Asia. Theories of a world plot against Moscow’s interests contribute to this analysis of hydrocarbons geopolitics.

On all these geopolitical questions, the majority of nationalist milieus are in agreement with the current policies of the Kremlin. They would like for Moscow to assert itself more firmly on the international stage but they are on the whole satisfied with current foreign policy, which has taken the opposite path to that of the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin. The majority of nationalist currents has, however, adopted a more radical line concerning the borders resulting from the dislocation of the USSR, and maintains an irredentist position. Thus, the small radical groupuscules fairly regularly demand the unification of Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus and the North of Kazakhstan, on the model proposed by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in *Rebuilding Russia* (1990). Zatulin himself, during the first Congress of compatriots in 2001, stated that “in the North and the East of Kazakhstan, and the Eastern regions of the Ukraine and the Crimea, the Russian population was there before the arrival of the peoples that have now become the titular peoples of the new states”⁹³ and called for the political consequences of this to be drawn concerning the borders. In 2003, Rodina’s provisional programme raised the possibility of creating a supra-state encompassing Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, including also Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, i.e. pro-Russian

⁹³ *Ot S’ezda do kongressa sootchestvennikov* [From Council to the Congress of Compatriots], Moscow, Institut Stran SNG, 2001, p. 7.

secessionist zones of other republics.⁹⁴ In 2005, Zhirinovskiy stated that “Kazakhstan is a pure and simple invention of Stalin. Such a state does not exist, nor does the Kazakh language, over there everyone speaks Russian. The only thing that exists is the Southern Urals and Southern Siberia. But that is all part of Russia, the authentic Russia.”⁹⁵ This declaration earned him a rebuke from the Kazakh authorities and a ban on visiting Kazakhstan. In June 2007 Dugin himself was declared a *persona non grata* in the Ukraine until 2011 for having openly endorsed partitioning the country into two, with the eastern part to be attached to Russia,⁹⁶ but has not expressed such opinions about the Central Asian states.

The main points of contention of Russian nationalists with official foreign policy are linked to the complex question of visa-issuing procedures as well as the issue of dual citizenship. Indeed, the Eurasian Economic Community entails a gradual elimination of the administrative barriers that hinder the free circulation of goods and people in member states. Russian nationalist milieus are much divided on this question: those that subscribe to “imperialist” traditions wish that all the states of the region recognize dual citizenship with Russia, that visa-issuing procedures between countries be eliminated, and that a common space on the model of the European Union is established. This is the case, for example, with Zatulin, who in 2002 militated against Russia's leaving the Bishkek accords (1992), which were to have established a space in which visas were not required for former Soviet citizens, and even today he still opposes the fact that the current law for

⁹⁴ Sergei Glaz'ev. “K voprosu ob ideologii organizatsii” [The Question of the Ideology of the Organization], Glaziev's web page, <<http://glazev.ru/print.php?article=87>> (September 20, 2006).

⁹⁵ “Kazakhstan trebuet osudit' Zhirinovskogo za razzhiganie natsional'noi rozni” [Kazakhstan requires Zhirinovskiy to be tried for inciting national hatred], *Lenta.ru*, February 10, 2005, <<http://lenta.ru/russia/2005/02/10/zhirinovskiy/>> (July 25, 2007).

⁹⁶ Andreas Umland. “Aleksandr Dugin, evropeiskii fashizm i Vitrenko. Chto obshchego?” [Alexandr Dugin, European Fascism and Vitrenko. What do they have in common?], *Ukrainskaia pravda*, July 20, 2007, <<http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2007/7/20/61687.htm>> (July 22, 2007).

foreigners staying in Russia is equally applicable to nationals from CIS countries.⁹⁷

Others, on the contrary, are more inspired by “ethno-nationalist” conceptions and are troubled by the impact of these juridical changes: uncontrolled migratory flows supposedly constitute a threat to Russia. Rogozin has, for example, protested against the simplifying of visa procedures between Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community.⁹⁸ At the same time, the former leader of Rodina drew attention to himself in 2003 with his virulent protests against Ashgabat’s elimination of dual Russo-Turkmen citizenship. This prompted him at the time to encourage Moscow to take strong retaliatory measures against Saparmurad Niyazov, and he declared that the Russians in Turkmenistan were “hostages of Oriental despotism”.⁹⁹ For him, all the “ethnic” Russians of the Near Abroad ought to have dual citizenship, but there should be no simplification of legislation for the indigenous populations of Central Asia themselves. The CPRF has declared itself favorable to dual Russo-Ukrainian citizenship but has not taken a position on Central Asia. We thus again find here a dissociation between currents that call for the reconstitution of a more or less unified post-Soviet space and those who above all fear that Russians will be “submerged” by neighboring peoples. It seems clear, then, that current Russian foreign policy in Central Asia, which is based on the use of soft power rather than military or political coercion, is supported by all the nationalist milieus and does not constitute an element of divergence except concerning the issue of migratory flows (cf. *infra*).

⁹⁷ It requires that they register in three days with the appropriate authorities (OVIR) and is coupled with the principle of the “migration card”: all citizens of the CIS present in Russia without visa are obliged to have this document proving their registration in each of the visited regions.

⁹⁸ “Rodina: soglashenie ob uproshchenii vizovogo rezhima podryvaet bezopasnost’ Rossii” [Rodina: The Agreement on the Simplification of the Visa System is a Threat to Russia’s Security], *Materik*, no. 134, October 28, 2005, <www.materik.ru/index.php?section=analitics&bulid=123&bulsectionid=12> (May 24, 2006).

⁹⁹ “Dmitri Rogozin: rossiiskie grazhdane Turkmenistana – zalozhniki vostochnoi despotii” [Dmitri Rogozin: Russian citizens in Turkmenistan are hostages of Oriental despotism], *Radio Maiak*, September 18, 2003, <<http://mayak.rfn.ru/society/03/09/18/24378.html>> (July 25, 2007).

The Diaspora Issue

At the beginning of the 1990s, when the public authorities had no interest in Russians of the Near Abroad, the communist and nationalist opposition took the initiative to make public the so-called “diaspora question”. In the second half of the 1990s, this theme was gradually adopted by the state until it became, under Putin, one of the central elements of presidential discourse. The current interest the Kremlin takes in the issue of the Russians of the Near Abroad thus indicates how much, in the space of fifteen years, it has gone from being marginal – a concern of nationalist milieus and those nostalgic for the USSR – to being politically correct. The implementation in 2006 of a State programme for the repatriation of Russians confirms that the “compatriots question” has today become an integral part of the Russian state’s new strategies to assert its revival and its status as a great power in the Near Abroad.

One of the major arguments of Russian nationalist milieus for militating for the “return” of Russians pertains to demography. Several statistical forecasts confirm that, without massive immigration, a radical change in reproductive behavior, and rapid improvement in the quality of life and medical services to counteract the premature adult mortality, Russia, in around 2050, will have no more than 100 million inhabitants.¹⁰⁰ The consequences of this depopulation, partly foreseeable already in the 1960s, will have considerable social effects: the country will have several more millions retirees than wage-earners (a third of the population will be over 60 years) and a large labor shortage, which is indeed already beginning to make itself felt. Moreover, in a few years from now, the military needs will no longer be able to be fulfilled, while the stalemate in the Caucasus is continuing to cost a lot in human lives. Lastly, this depopulation is accompanied by an increase in regional disparities and large population flows within the Federation (from Siberia, the Far East and the Far North to Central Russia).

Confronted with these difficulties, nationalist milieus invoke the extraordinary resource that the “compatriots” comprise: returning them to

¹⁰⁰ Julie DaVanzo, Clifford A. Grammich. *Dire Demographics. Population Trends in the Russian Federation*, Washington D.C., Rand Corporation, 2001.

Russia would counteract the decreases in the population and furnish the nation with the live forces required for the army and work. These compatriots come mostly from republics where life expectancy is higher than in Russia; they belong statistically to the more educated social classes well above the Russian average, and thus constitute a great labor-force potential. Moreover, a large number of applicants wishing to return, although urbanites, would be willing to move to disaffected towns in Siberia and the Far North, and invest themselves in agriculture outside of the Chernozem belts. The ethnic argument is also regularly invoked: to counteract the growing importance of Russia's non-Russian (*ne russkie*) populations, whether migrants from abroad or native peoples of Russia, the return of "compatriots" shall guarantee growth of the ethnically Russian population and thereby strengthen the mono-national character of the country.

The status granted to compatriots is regulated by several laws that have evolved over the course of the last decade. All the same, these laws sometimes contradict one another, making them unclear on many points concerning the juridical definition of "compatriot", and they are regarded by nationalist milieus as quite inadequate, and even unjust, in their treatment of the "diaspora". Zatulin, who in this regard is the most active in the Duma, devotes a large part of his work as a deputy to putting forward amendments to this set of laws. In December 2004, for example, he submitted some amendments to modify two laws, "On the juridical situation of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation"¹⁰¹ and "On entering and leaving the Russian Federation".¹⁰² As in the law of citizenship voted in 2002, the compatriots are not specifically mentioned and are subject to the same obligations as any other foreign citizen. Zatulin had requested that they be granted a specific right of entry into Russia to visit their birthplaces and the burial sites of family members, and made calls to award a special status to veterans of the Second World War that fought under the Soviet flag. In December 2005, he succeeded in obtaining from Putin an extension until January 1, 2008 of the simplified application procedure for citizenship of the Federation for former Soviet citizens.

¹⁰¹ О правовом положении иностранных граждан в Российской Федерации, 2002.

¹⁰² О порядке выезда из Российской Федерации и въезда в Российскую Федерацию, 2003.

The Committee for the Affairs of the CIS and Compatriots as well as Zatulin have continued to demand a significant modification to the law of May 24 1999 entitled “On the policy of the Russian Federation in its relations with compatriots from abroad”¹⁰³. They declaim the strictly declarative, non-effective character of the stated compatriot, and its absence of juridical definition, but these demands have never been met. In 2005, the Institute of Diaspora and Integration submitted a bill on repatriation that was not adopted as such by the Duma.¹⁰⁴ It nonetheless confirms that activists fighting for this issue have at their disposal parliamentarians who support their initiatives, and who are regularly willing to reintroduce into political space submissions for the repatriation of “compatriots”. Their efforts have ended up bearing fruit, since on June 22 2006 Putin implemented a “State Programme to Aid the voluntary relocation of compatriots to Russia”.¹⁰⁵ Spanning over six years (2007-2012), it contains guidelines for the return of compatriots, which it defines as “those educated in the traditions of Russian culture, who possess the Russian language, and who do not desire to lose their connection to Russia”.¹⁰⁶

The state organs acknowledge having put priority on the return of expatriated Russian citizens as well as those with dual nationality, whether they live in the Near Abroad or much further away. To this end, the Federal Service of Migration has opened offices in nearly all the post-Soviet republics, as well as in the United States, Germany, and Israel, to attract potential repatriates. However, it appears that the program's volunteers are not from the Far Abroad, and are in only rare cases Russian citizens. In reality, the programme targets Russians or Russophones possessing the citizenship of a neighboring republic, in particular Central Asian or Caucasian, who have not yet succeeded in emigrating and who seek to obtain citizenship of the Federation.

¹⁰³ *Federal'nyi zakon o gosudarstvennoi politike Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootechestvennikov za rubezhom.*

¹⁰⁴ “O repatriatsii v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu” [On the Repatriation to the Russian Federation], *Materik*, no. 122, May 1, 2005, <<http://www.materik.ru/index.php?year=2005&month=5&day=1>> (May 30, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ *Gosudarstvennaia programma po okazaniu sodeistviia dobrovol'nomu pereseleniiu v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu sootechestvennikov prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom.*

¹⁰⁶ The text can be consulted at <<http://www.perekrestok.de/?mn=2#programma2>> (September 25, 2006).

Evgenii Maniatkin, director of the Section of Relations with Compatriots of the Federal Migration Service, estimates that around 6 million “compatriots” are potentially interested in returning, a distinctively high number, and one which the program cannot realistically accommodate. The program anticipates the more modest repatriation of 50,000 persons in 2007, 100,000 in 2008 and 2009, and thereafter many years of around 150,000 persons.¹⁰⁷ Twelve pilot regions have been selected for the first phase of the program, which are situated principally in Siberia (Tiumen, Novosibirsk, Krasnoiark, Primorie, Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, and Amur), in the central Chernozem belts (Tver, Kaluga, Lipets, Tambov), and the enclave of Kaliningrad. The federal budget for the program is a very modest sum with regard to the stated objective: it has set aside 17 billion roubles, that is, US\$635 million, the remaining costs then fall to the regional administration.

The program’s implementation presently appears very complex and quite ineffectual. The service responsible for gathering information and putting migrants in contact with the region has had a difficult time matching offers and requests. Migrants have put their names on waiting lists, but until now the regions have only been able to make a modest number of propositions to some thousands of people. Although no figures are yet available for 2007, several sources have confirmed that the initial number of volunteers has increased for all the states of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan: the applications for emigration received by the consulates and the offices of the Federal Migration Service have multiplied.¹⁰⁸ There thus appear to be several thousand Russians from Central Asia wanting to leave the republics, in particular Kyrgyzstan, where chronic political instability and growing criminality have cast doubt upon the country’s stability in coming years.

¹⁰⁷ The text can be consulted at <<http://www.perekrestok.de/?mn=2#programma2>> (September 25, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Elena Zakharova. “V Kirgizii s kazhdym dnem rastet chislo zhelaiushchikh uchastovat’ v rossiiskoi programme po pereseleniiu sootchestvennikov” [In Kyrgyzstan, the number of persons desiring to participate in the Russia compatriot repatriation programme is daily increasing], *Ferghana.ru*, February 13, 2007, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4902>> (July 1, 2007).

All the Russian nationalist milieus, as well as the associations representing Russian communities in the various post-Soviet republics, have stated that although the principle of the program was good, it had come too late: the majority of Russians wanting to move to Russia have already done so, and those remaining have been relatively well integrated. In addition, Moscow's modest financial support, which leaves local regions to bear the major brunt of the costs, despite the fact that the country is currently benefiting from a rise in hydrocarbon prices, has left a bitter taste in the mouths of the lobbies defending the rights of Russians. Several of them have declared that they see in it nothing more than a publicity stunt by the authorities to gain votes from communist and nationalist milieus in the legislative elections in December 2007 and the presidential elections in March 2008. The Central Asian authorities, for their part, have complained about the program, which risks further weakening the local economies by promoting the departure of engineers, and health and education personnel of Russian origin.¹⁰⁹ Bishkek, in particular, has repeatedly criticized this project, which it perceives as a new form of abandon on Moscow's part. Here again, Russian nationalist milieus appreciate the interest that Putin has taken in the "compatriots" issue and support his policies, even if they would like them to be bolder, more active, and much larger in scope.

The Migration Issue

The migration issue – much more sensitive than the diaspora issue – today lies at the heart of debates between different Russian political currents. This issue does not only concern Central Asians, but also Caucasians, as well as populations external to the post-Soviet space like the Chinese, the Vietnamese, and the Afghans. As is the case for the diaspora issue, some nationalist milieus are having a real influence on issues that directly affect the populations of Central Asia.

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Christophe Peuch. "Russia: Putin's Repatriation Scheme Off To Slow Start," *RFE/RL news*, April 18, 2007, <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticleprint/2007/04/edd35041-7b9a-4200-adcoo4b44f650bdf.html>> (August 18, 2007).

After having refused for a long time to implement any migration policy of consequence, Russian political power has suddenly changed its viewpoint. Since 2006, the Russian authorities have become aware of the importance of regulating migratory flows and have passed laws for the selection of immigrants. New legislation was voted on July 18, 2006 and passed into law on January 15, 2007. This law reduces requirements for registration and for the obtaining of work permits for those migrants who cross, or have crossed, the border legally. It does not, however, regularize those already present on Russian territory with no legal status. More than 700,000 foreigners received work permits in 2006, a small number compared to the millions of illegal immigrants.¹¹⁰ Thanks to this law, the Russian authorities now have the right to establish quotas for economic migrants from countries that do not need visas to enter Russia: for 2008, their number is fixed at only two million.¹¹¹

Since April 1, 2007, another law concerning limitations on the number of foreigners in bazaars and retail commerce entered into effect. Its objective clearly seems to be to appease the xenophobic concerns of the majority of Russian citizens regarding Central Asians and Caucasians in the small business sector. On October 2006, Putin gave such feelings public endorsement, denouncing the “semi-gangs, some of them ethnic” that control Russia’s wholesale and retail markets, where many migrants work. He said markets should be regulated “with a view to protect the interests of Russian producers and those of the native population of Russia.”¹¹² The effect of these laws is therefore complex: they facilitate the legal migration of seasonal workers (albeit in numbers quite below demand) and worsen the working conditions of millions of illegals seeking to move permanently or for long-term periods to Russia.

¹¹⁰ Feruza Dzhani. “Rossiia: novye pravila dlia torgovtsev-inostrantsev kak ‘fornazhorne obstoiatel’stva’,” [Russia: new rules for foreign vendors presented as ‘a case of major importance’] January 16, 2007, *Ferghana.ru*, <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4847>> (May 4, 2007).

¹¹¹ Erica Marat. “Russia decreases Immigration Quota threefold in 2008,” *The Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst*, January 9, 2008, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4771>> (January 30, 2008).

¹¹² Steven Lee Myers. “Anti-immigrant views in Russia enter mainstream,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 2006, <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/22/news/russia.php>> (July 24, 2007).

With some exception, the Russians nationalist milieus have almost unanimously criticized this relaxation of migration policy but have rejoiced over the law prohibiting small business to foreigners; it corresponds to the xenophobic slogans nationalist milieus have sported for many years. Advocates of isolationist policy have continuously pointed to the risks of Russia being “invaded” by southerners. The same goes for the CPRF, which devotes a large part of its airtime to complaining about the rise of Central Asian and Caucasian mafia networks in Russia.¹¹³ The skinhead groups, which today recruit from the lower middle-classes, have also made this slogan their major claim: they argue that the Central Asians and Caucasians steal work from Russians in the small business sector, which they claim should be reserved for citizens of the country. The acts of violence that have targeted Central Asians are practically never mentioned by Russian nationalist milieus. When they are, they are often legitimized, or at least presented as a “natural attempt” on the part of Russians to struggle against the violence to which migrants subject them.¹¹⁴

All political figures united under the banner of the Rodina bloc, and now of the Fair Russia, have made similar remarks expressing at once their support of prohibiting foreigners in small business and their opposition to the new migration laws. At a roundtable discussion on the migration issue in Moscow in the fall of 2005, Rogozin and a close collaborator, Andrei Saveliev, stated that criminality was increasing in the capital as a result of the illegal commercial activities of migrants busy enriching themselves at the expense of Russians.¹¹⁵ Rogozin declared that “illegal migration is the reason behind Russia’s misfortunes and the corrupt nature of state power. Those who are most interested in illegal migration are (...) the large corporations (...),

¹¹³ See Ziuganov’s personal webpage and the texts published on the site, <<http://www.kprf.ru/personal/zyuganov/>> (July 23, 2007).

¹¹⁴ “Dmitrii Rogozin: migranty mechtaiut otomstit’ za rabskoe polozhenie” [Dmitrii Rogozin: the migrants dream of revenge for their servile condition], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, November 8, 2005, <http://www.ng.ru/politics/2005-11-08/1_rogozin.html> (September 28, 2006).

¹¹⁵ “Problemy migratsii?” [Are migrations problematic?], *Materik*, no. 131, October 1, 2005, <<http://www.materik.ru/index.php?year=2005&month=10&day=1>> (September 28, 2006).

commercial mafia (...) and drug traffickers”.¹¹⁶ The legalization of hundreds of thousands of migrants thus aroused Rogozin’s ire. For him, the Kremlin refuses to accept its responsibilities and indirectly justifies both the threat of terrorism and of illegal immigration.¹¹⁷ This xenophobic rhetoric is one of Rodina’s central planks. In November 2005, the court prohibited the party from participating in elections at the Duma of the city of Moscow on grounds of “inciting racial hatred”: the party’s publicity campaign showed Caucasians throwing the skins of watermelons they had just eaten under the wheels of a baby carriage being pushed by a young blonde woman with the slogan “clean the city of garbage”.¹¹⁸ The 2007 rapprochement of the Rodina movement with Belov’s movement seems unambiguous: Andreï Saveliev is a DNPI member, while Sergeï Baburin, leader of the “People’s Will” party, proposed to DPNI members to include them in his electoral list for the December 2007 elections.¹¹⁹

Only Dugin, whose stance is more nuanced, has not jumped on the popular xenophobia bandwagon and only rarely raises the migrant issue. He has nevertheless not refrained from saying that foreigners should respect Russian national feelings and be divided into migrants from friendly countries and

¹¹⁶ “Russkie i predstaviteli drugikh korennykh narodov Rossii dolzhny poluchat’ grazhdanstvo RF avtomaticheskii” [The Russians and the Representatives of the Indigenous Peoples of Russia should automatically receive citizenship of the Russian Federation], *Delovaia Pressa*, November 21, 2005, <http://www.businesspress.ru/newspaper/article_mId_33_aId_361175.html> (September 28, 2006).

¹¹⁷ “Dmitrii Rogozin osudil planiruemuuiu v 2006 g. amnistiiu nelegal’nykh migrantov” [Dmitrii Rogozin condemns the amnesty planned for 2006 for illegal migrants], *Regnum.ru*, November 9, 2005, <<http://www.regnum.ru/news/moskva/541341.html>> (July 12, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Although the racist allusion appears obvious, Rodina attempted to dispute the verdict by appealing to the fact that polls predicted it would gain a score of close to 25%, putting it in second place behind United Russia. It claimed that the authorities had simply become scared because of this unforeseen competition. The paradox is that complaint against Rodina was lodged by Zhirinovskiy’s LDPR. “Moscow Elections as Dress Rehearsal for National Elections,” *Rian.ru*, December 2, 2005, <<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20051202/42288603.html>> (April 10, 2006). On this topic, see Marlène Laruelle. “Rodina: les mouvances nationalistes russes, du loyalisme à l’opposition,” *Kiosque du CERI*, May 2006, <<http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/maio6/artml.pdf>>.

¹¹⁹ “Vitse-spiker Gosdumy nameren ‘naiti obshchii iazyk’ s liderami DPNI” [The vice-speaker of the Duma seeks common ground with the leaders of the DPNI], *Lenta.ru*, January 03, 2007, <<http://www.lenta.ru/news/2007/01/03/baburin/>> (July 28, 2007).

migrants from enemy countries.¹²⁰ The LDPR has a paradoxical position. It waves the flag of popular xenophobia, and is constantly denouncing the Caucasian and Central Asian mafia, which it holds responsible for Russia's social problems. In December 2006, Zhirinovskii stated: "All the illegals should be sent to camps! We do not need any foreign labour force. We must stop railway links with the countries sending us illegals".¹²¹ At the same time, it holds firm to the idea that Central Asians should occupy the positions that are vacant in Russia. It even accepted to represent Kyrgyzstan at the Russo-Kyrgyz parliamentary commission on cooperation in the education, tourism, and migration sectors, which, in summer 2006, did in effect take place to facilitate migration flows into the Federation.¹²² This distinction between the rejection of illegal migrants and the acceptance of legal migrants is quite ambiguous, since it enables the nationalists to play many hands at once and to present themselves as the most radical and as the most pragmatic.

The Institute of the Diaspora and Integration has also adopted a complex position. In numerous media events, Zatulin has denounced the influx of southerners into Russia and the public authorities' inability to control this "invasion", but, at that same time, he calls upon Moscow to adopt a real migration policy. According to him, immigration should be facilitated in the first place for "ethnic" Russians and for the members of national communities whose entity is in Russia (Tatars, etc.). In the second place, all the titular citizens of the new states, who are still very largely Russophone and former Soviets, are to be accepted, whereas the flows of non-Soviet foreigners should be completely stopped. In defending this stance, the Institute of the Diaspora and Integration has even organized some common actions with the Forum of Organizations of the Displaced, directed by Lidiia

¹²⁰ See, for example, his interview in "Vopros dnia. Chego ot migrantov bol'she – vreda ili pol'zy?" [Issue of the day. Do migrants bring more harm than good?], *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, June 08, 2007, <<http://www.kp.ru/daily/23915.4/68382/>> (June 28, 2007).

¹²¹ Cited in Lidiia Grafova. "Srochno neobkhodima immigratsionnaia amnistiia" [Amnesty of Migrants as a matter of extreme urgency], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, December 11, 2006, <http://www.ng.ru/courier/2006-12-11/19_amnistiia.html> (July 27, 2007).

¹²² "Zhirinovskii budet predstavitelem Kyrgyzstana v Gosdume" [Zhirinovskii to be Kyrgyzstan's representative at the Duma], *Zakon.ru*, July 25, 2006, <www.zakon.kz/our/news/news.asp?id=30063484> (July 12, 2007).

Grafova, who, for her part, endorses that Russia open up massively to all categories of migrants. The Institute also violently criticized Belov's position and that of the DPNI at the round-table discussion on Russian migration policy held in September 2006.¹²³ On the migration issue, Zatulin is, then, inclined to agree with the decisions taken by Kremlin: he desires the opening of borders to legal migrants, having strict control over the activities of illegal migrants, and giving Russian citizens priority in small business.

The migration issue is one of the very few policy topics on which Russian nationalist groups are divided. The most radical are fearful of the influx of Central Asians and of Caucasians, even legalized ones, and think that any diluting of Russia's ethnic Russian character is the foremost danger. For them, although they are Russophone and former Soviets, these migrants are first and foremost Muslims and therefore carriers of a culture they consider too different to be assimilated. They thus call upon the authorities to exercise caution in relation to the opening of borders and suggest making up for the demographic dilution of the Federation by returning "ethnic" compatriots and implementing a voluntarist birth policy. For the other currents, including the neo-Eurasianists and the Institute of Diaspora and Integration, Russia has no choice except to open its borders. They therefore endorse a policy of controlled immigration which promotes legal immigration and severely penalizes illegals. They also wave the flag of post-Soviet solidarity: it's better to encourage migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, who are much closer culturally, than migrants from Asia or the Middle East. Despite these variations, it is clear that all the nationalist currents endorse an ethnicization of policy logic: giving specific juridical status to "ethnic" Russians, be they citizens of Russia or of Central Asia; and regulating migration flows according to ethnic origin, i.e. the acceptance of former Soviet citizens immigration but the refusal of all non-Soviet persons.

It results from this analysis of the three principal policy issues of Central Asian-Russian relations that the majority of nationalist milieus support Russian official foreign policy. The groupuscules that push for the

¹²³ Aleksandr Kolesnichenko. "Protivniki i storonniki privlecheniia migrantov vstretilis' v Moskve" [Opponents and Advocates of accepting migrants met in Moscow], *Novye izvestiia*, September 18, 2006, <www.newizv.ru/news/2006-09-18/54166/> (July 10, 2007).

reconstitution of the Soviet Union, the constitution of a great Slavic state encompassing the Ukraine, Belarus and North Kazakhstan, and for making modifications to the borders of the new states, are very marginal or eccentric like Zhirinovskiy, and do not possess any real political influence. The other currents, which are more representative, broadly back the line taken by the Kremlin. During the 1990s, nationalist milieus felt themselves to be dissidents, opposed to the western-oriented elites supported by Boris Yeltsin; by contrast, the policy reversal undertaken by Putin has seen some of their demands met. These include “vertical power”; asserting Russia on the international scene; the revival of Moscow’s influence in post-Soviet space; bringing under state control the large companies specialized in primary resources; and a discourse (although the implementation remains very moderate) in support of the “diaspora” of the Near Abroad. However, the one major foreign policy issue that continues to divide nationalists amongst themselves and create difficulties in their relation to the political authorities is that of migration. Now that, having been successfully re-asserted, the greatness of Russian power in international affairs is no longer a point of contention between the Kremlin and the nationalists, the issue has been displaced, leaving the international scene to re-emerge in the space of domestic policy, most significantly relating to the major issue of the definition of the “Russian people”.

This is exactly the point at which the future of the Federation is being played out: the great power of Russia cannot afford to close itself off if it continues, in the coming years, to suffer a stark demographic crisis. The migration issue is going to be absolutely central: not only does Russia lack adequate labor power, a situation that is likely to worsen in the future, but for millions of migrants from Central Asia, the Caucasus and other adjacent countries, it is regarded as an attractive country—and it is sure to entertain complex relations with overpopulated China. The country’s future will thus necessitate a reflection on what it means “to be Russian”: migration policy will depend on it, as will the procedures for obtaining citizenship and the place granted to non-Russians in Russia, to national minorities and to Islam, which is already the second largest religion in the Federation. The fact that Russian nationalists are divided into two camps is really only a material-

ization of the two possible strategies to which all the country's citizens will have to face up: one camp endorses a very restrictive migration policy hoping for an "ethnically Russian" Russia, though it is hard to see how it could be viable demographically; the other, more pragmatic camp promotes a policy of opening up to the Near Abroad, which possesses a wealth and a labor force that Russia needs. If the Russian authorities opt for the latter, they will give the country new opportunities for development, but will equally promote the creation of a new Russian identity in which Central Asian and Caucasians will become more and more numerous, Islam more and more present, and the relations with countries situated on its southern fringes more and more important.

Conclusions

The idea that Russia will only become a great power once again if it regains its imperial pride is one of the most classic clichés of Russian nationalism in general. Its most radical supporters want the Federation to recover its political pre-eminence in the former Soviet Union by reconstructing a supra-state unity, while more moderate proponents want it to wield greater geopolitical clout by having its sphere of influence in Eurasia internationally recognized, or exercise economic influence by bringing the weak economies of the new post-Soviet states under its control and shaping their economic choices. Anatolii Chubais's statements on "liberal empire" (*liberal'naia imperiia*) in 2003 indicate to what extent the belief in Russia's natural imperial destiny, far from being a defining feature of Far Right, is also espoused by "Westernizers".¹²⁴

However, the idea of Russia as a great power (*velikoderzhava*), which is clearly becoming dominant in Russia today, is not strictly synonymous with Eurasianism. In foreign policy, stating that Russian interests do not coincide with those of the West, wanting to play a major role in international crises, e.g. in the Middle East, at eye-level with the United States, or supporting Serbia or Iran on certain issues, are supported by all the nationalist currents and not only the "imperialist" movement. In domestic policy, the authoritarian tendencies of the Putin regime as well as the official talk about the special features of "Orthodox civilization" and the insurmountable distinctiveness of the "Russian national character" express the revival of a certain kind of nationalism and the elevation of a new patriotic ideology to the rank of official doctrine. But this is not a direct result of Neo-Eurasianism, nor does it confirm the success of authors such as Alexander

¹²⁴ Statement by Anatolii Chubais, an important figure in the first Yeltsin governments and current director of United Energy Systems, made in October 2003, <<http://newsfromrussia.com/main/2003/09/25/50165.html>> (April 12, 2005).

Dugin. These ideologies are not specific expressions of Eurasianism; they are common to all nationalist movements, whose views of contemporary Russia are heavily influenced by nostalgia for the great power that was the Soviet Union.

Regardless of their doctrinal references, all the Russian nationalist currents, even that of neo-Eurasianism, clearly distinguish between the western and the eastern fringes of the empire: they acknowledge that Russian domination over the first is not to be taken for granted and must be constantly reasserted, whereas Central Asia is considered to be “won in advance”. For them, the region has no more than three choices: remain in the Russian fold, sink into a state of chronic instability – whether this is because of Islamism or the criminalization of the state by mafia networks – or come under Chinese domination. The policy-oriented debates about Russian soft power in Central Asia and the protection of “compatriots” confirm that the five states are conceived of as an intrinsic and natural part of the Russian sphere of influence: political submission and economic control are desired, but not cultural proximity, which provokes anxiety. Amalgamations between Islamism, terrorism and mafia thus largely continue to dominate the public space and the entirety of the Russian political spectrum: Central Asia is conceived – negatively – as being necessary but burdensome for Russia.

Here is where the migration issue takes on major importance: it is the sole policy issue in which Central Asia is no longer a simple object of Russian desire but an actor in its own right. Russian nationalists are aware that such massive migratory flows, which correspond to real economic needs, cannot be slowed down: even with tougher legislation, migrants will continue to work, but clandestinely. The Central Asian populations thus are, on the symbolic level, taking a form of “revenge” on Russia, since they have a young and mobile working population. Their massive presence in Russia is part of an uncontrolled element in the post-Soviet “decolonisation”: the cultural influences between Russia and Central Asia, the linguistic and social exchanges, mixed marriages, and the increase in the number of Muslims within the Federation are no longer factors decided on by Moscow, but depend in part on Central Asian societies themselves. The old question about the “nature” of Russia is then effectively resurfacing in a pragmatic fashion.

The nineteenth century-anchored debate about whether Russia was a European state with Asian colonies or a specific Eurasian state has taken a very concrete form: as a result of migration, the Russian Federation is going to become “Orientalized”, to count more and more ethnic non-Russians, more and more Muslims, and to enter in new relations with Central Asia – not to mention with China.

With the legislative elections of December 2007 and the presidential elections of March 2008, nationalism on the Russian political scene has come under the microscope. The stakes of patriotic recovery can be likened to a feeling of “revenge” for the upheavals of the 1990s, but equally to a desire of Russian citizens for “normality.” They want to live in a politically and economically functioning state, in which they can imagine a future. This situation has for now meant a narrowing of political life and a hardening of Moscow’s relations with western countries. The ideological cards all appear to have been reshuffled: there are no longer “nationalist parties” distinct from “non-nationalist parties” in the political life of the Russian Federation. Nationalism is, on the contrary, a doctrine that every public figure ought to be able to wield if he/she wants access to the media and to sway public opinion, although the term “Nationalist” can refer to very divergent conceptions of the Russian nation and of its status as a great power.

Even if the various nationalist lobbies will change on the institutional level (for example Rodina’s dissolution into Fair Russia), the issues these evolutions raise as well as the three main lines of foreign policy they imply will be determining in years to come. Given this framework, the elections will probably not significantly change the current order of things so much as confirm the fundamental movement that currently traverses the whole of Russian society. The Central Asian states will thus likely have to continue to come to compromises in the areas of politics, geopolitics and economics with their large neighbour; a neighbour, however, whose xenophobic society in which tensions with Central Asian and Caucasian migrants are not about to die down.