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MAJOR TRENDS IN RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS AFTER 1991

ABSTRACT Russian geopolitical thought after the collapse of the USSR can be classified in different ways. However, it always remains under the influence of the same conditions (the trauma of a historical downfall) and proposes clear indications for the foreign policy of the state. The article presents a preliminary view of some directions in Russian geopolitical thought from the point of view of their origin. The study focuses on seven trends: the visions of Great Russia in a multipolar world order, Neo-Eurasianism, the insular theory, military geopolitics, the thought of political geographers, the geopolitics of the Russian World doctrine with its varieties in the form of *information geopolitics* and *cyber-geopolitics*, and, last but not least, geoeconomics. A typological study of contemporary Russian geopolitical thought reveals two developmental tendencies: one aiming at radical and ideological concepts and the other proposing a semi-scientific approach.

Key words: Russia, geopolitics, foreign policy, political thought

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Geopolitical theories as essential constructive elements of Russian foreign policy and state ideology in the international perspective became Russia's obsession in the 20th century, displacing the prevalence of the philosophy of history, which dominated in Russian political thought a century before. Historiosophy associated in Western Europe with the influential ideas of German Romanticism, especially Hegelianism, and in Russia represented by monk Philotheus of Pskov (the founder of "Moscow, Third Rome" theory), P.I. Chaadaev, the Slavophiles, M.A. Bakunin, K.N. Leontiev, V.S. Solovyov and many other thinkers, provided a simplified explanation of the historical and political development of humanity. As a matter of fact, Russian Marxism was an equally productive attempt to describe a universal pattern of the world society's development. In most of these theories, relatively simple, usually triadic models were applied with Russia elevated in the last stage, uniting all leading directions of historical development and striving for "the yawning heights"¹.

In the 20th century, historiosophical ideas in Russia gave way to another conceptual paradigm – geopolitics. All this, of course, did not happen right away; geopolitics was not born in the Eurasian steppe, all of its founding fathers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, Sir Halford Mackinder, and Alfred Thayer Mahan came from the North Atlantic West. As far as Russia is concerned, already in 1901 **Dmitry Andreevich Koropchevsky (1842-1903)** draws an image of political geography, where the peculiar features of the territory are supposed to have a significant connection with the development of social ties, economics, and statehood (Коропчевский, 1901). However, Mukhaev's belief that geopolitics received "citizenship rights" in Russia only in the 1990s is probably true.² At that time, the associations of geopolitics with German or even Nazi influence had already been overcome, and, most importantly, the monopoly of Marxism in the state narrative was destroyed.

Theoretical perspective of Russian geopolitics, in accordance with the traditions of Russian political thought, developed in close connection with other types of intellectual activity: as a political theory of international relations conditioned by geographical determinism, it repeatedly intersected with classical realism, geostrategy, the theory of civilization, cultural studies, or even religious thought. Quite often in the Russian tradition, the terms *geopolitics* and *geopolitical* are used in a broader sense – of the competition on the international stage, interstate feuds and alliances, civilizational development and confrontation, not necessarily associated with the geographical factor. In the history of geopolitical thought in Russia of the twentieth century several trends have appeared and are still being continued, to varying degrees, until the present day. The article's objective is to provide a brief typology of the main trends in Russian geopolitical thought after 1991. We would also like to

¹ The title of Alexandr Zinov'ev first novel, highly critical about Soviet utopian Marxism.

² P.T. Мухаев, *Геополитика*, Москва 2018, p. 3.

examine whether it is encompassed by a uniform system of goals and ways of thinking or whether its objectives and design assumptions refer to various paradigms and perceived interests.

THE VISIONARIES OF MULTIPOLARITY: GREAT RUSSIA AGAINST AMERICAN HEGEMONISM

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a couple of years before Samuel Huntington, Russian thinkers began to ask the question about the real or most possible new world order. One of the early answers was given by the founder of the nationalist and imperialist Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia – **Vladimir Volfovich Zhirinovskiy** (born 1946), whose book *The Last Leap to the South* (Последний бросок на юг) of 1993 opened the discussion and immediately led the stream of Russian geopolitics against the Western powers. The first edition of the extremely popular work was quite interesting with its autobiographical, apologetic part, which was erased from the text in the next, revised editions. The geopolitical sense of the publication consists in presenting the United States (and the rest of the Western world) as a collective actor achieving its objectives by creating hostility and oppositions in the global dimension. The previous Cold War opposition between the East and the West is now being transformed into the opposition between the Orthodox North and the Muslim South. However, the leader of LDPR does not reject Russia's liberation mission and supposes that the option of Great Russia, whose army reaches the Indian ocean, saving Europe from the Southern threats, is ultimately inevitable.³

Zhirinovskiy initiates the Russian style of geopolitics, where he points out three main aspects:

- the “traditional” military and political content;
- the economic one with such topics as economic security, economic self-reliance or the country's position in the international division of labor;
- the cultural and historical aspects, which help to interpret real or potential civilizational quakes.⁴

The proposed formula illustrates well the Russian understanding of geopolitics, which will genuinely combine all of these elements in the coming decades, going beyond the original tradition worked out by F. Ratzel, R. Kjellen or H. Mackinder, who generally limit the research field of geopolitics to the geographical, economic, and strategic aspects, ignoring the cultural, religious or historical issues.

The intuition of multifaceted geopolitics was continued by other thinkers such as **Konstantin Eduardovich Sorokin** (born 1959), a specialist in American affairs, whose main conclusions appeared after the research internship at the Center for International

³ В.В. Жириновский, *Последний бросок на юг*, Москва 1993.

⁴ Idem, “Заметки по геополитике”, in Б.А. Исаев (ed.), *Геополитики и геостратегии. Хрестоматия по геополитике*, pt. 5, vol. 1, Санкт-Петербург 2004, p. 80.

Security and Arms Control at Stanford University.⁵ Sorokin writes about the necessity to create a discipline about multilayered international politics in the situation of multipolarity. He proposes to take into consideration the military sphere as the object of research, as well as information technology, scientific achievements, the level of arts and humanities, education among the population, the effectiveness of governance, and the influence of world religions. Sorokin is aware that in the IT era the importance of traditional “virtues” in geopolitics such as the spatial perspective has been significantly reduced and that the same can be said about some basic terms in the research of international relations, including the notion of national interest.

Sorokin clearly rejects the idea of unipolarity after the end of Cold War, equally criticizing the naive idea of a single world without the points of concentration of power. In other words, he points to the phenomenon of complexity in today’s world, where the multipolarity of power (embracing both single states and influential communities) is accompanied with the tendency to cooperate. There are no obvious areas of conflict, however, competition in a multipolar world strengthens the possibility of confrontation. Moreover, the contemporary international drama includes the dialectic of attacks and withdrawals, because of the changes of self-esteem and identities of states. What has to be taken into account is a rapprochement between two possible centers of power against another actor (with Russia being a possible victim). Sorokin claims that the dilution of the previous position of Russia also disqualifies the notions of traditional geopolitics, especially Mackinder’s belief in the inviolable importance of the Heartland. To restore the imperial position of Russia, Sorokin advises to keep the post-Soviet zone (the “near abroad”) in the sphere of Russian interests and to conduct a policy of balancing the powers in the outer zone (the “far abroad”).⁶

The terms and ideas Sorokin applied in his works have become enormously productive in most of Russia’s narratives concerning international relations. The doctrine of multipolarity remained even in the official concepts of Russia’s foreign policy and the tendency to treat the “near abroad” as the family silver never lost its importance. Last but not least, the main objective in the form of Great Russia remained unchanged.

The skeptical approach to the concept of limitless American dominance after the Cold War was also developed in the works of **Anatoly Ivanovich Utkin** (born 1944) who draws several possible scenarios of the emerging world order. The vision of a unipolar system, promoted by Hamish McRae, is only one of the options but the other four have to be considered as well:

- a new bipolarity with China or the EU as America’s major competitor,
- a multipolar order, where the hegemonic power is accompanied by several regional centers with their zones of influence,
- six or seven world civilizations, which develop according to their own religious and

⁵ Later: Center for International Security and Cooperation.

⁶ К.Э. Сорокин, *Геополитика современности и геостратегия России*, Москва 1996, pp. 35-37, 50-54, 56-66, 152-154, 158-160.

cultural convictions (a variant, which is most likely if the modernist paradigm loses productivity and disappoints the nations with miserable effects of modernization),

- an apocalyptic scenario, where military force is used as the ultimate argument to overcome the growing contradictions.⁷

Utkin's concept of multipolarity concretizes the shape of Russian anti-Americanism officially labeled as anti-hegemonism in the global perspective. He does not suggest a system of 200 poles (a community of sovereign and equal states) but puts the burden of responsibility for a peaceful future of the world on the shoulders of regional powers, ignoring the significance of the fears of the lesser players, which direct their hopes toward the lonely superpower.

In general, the visionaries of the new world order construct theories or expectations, which seem to satisfy the syndrome of "Weimar Russia": they reject the hegemony of the traditional opponent and present a "just" distribution of power. It should not be concentrated in one state or civilization but surround the globe to create balance and security. The problem is that they completely reject the same principle in the regional perspective, where, as they believe, dominance is unavoidable to take care of the smaller brothers. Multipolarity is reduced to not more than seven centers of power, with Russia as one of the leading actors.

The works of the visionaries of Great Russia and multipolarity, although being referred to as "geopolitical" in Russia, may also be comprehended as another explication of classical realism or, at least, as the continuation of Brzezinski's *Grand Chessboard* paradigm, where geopolitical terminology mingles with the explication of a realistic strategy.

NEO-EURASIANISM

The Eurasianist ideology began after the Russian revolution as an anti-Western theory placing itself between political geography and the cultural theory of civilization. A group of émigrés such as N. Trubetskoy, P. Savitsky, P. Suvchinsky, G. Florovsky, L. Karsavin or Nikolai Alexeev continued the idea of Russia as a distinctive civilization placed in the "Eurasian continent" between the European and Asian cultural circles. The idea of homogeneity of the geographical characteristics of the region (the former Russian Empire or the USSR) was accompanied by the belief in the illusionary unity of the ethnic component of Russia-Eurasia. This concept was later developed by the theory of *ethnogenesis* created by the famous ethnologist, L.N. Gumilyov, where some extraordinary events in space determine the creation of the "passionary energy" of ethnic groups, which modulates their dynamics (the original struggle for greatness and gradual loss of stamina).

After 1991, the recreation of Eurasianism would not be possible without the leading figure representing this trend – **Alexandr G. Dugin** (born 1962), a son of a Main

⁷ А.И. Уткин, *Мировой порядок XXI века*, Москва 2001, pp. 143-150.

Intelligence Directorate (GRU) general-lieutenant. During his studies at Moscow Aviation Institute, he was forced to leave the academia as a sophomore (according to Dugin's own version) because of presenting an anti-regime poster. After the dissolution of the USSR, he created a heterogenic neo-Eurasianist doctrine being for some time accompanied by other thinkers such as **Alexandr Panarin (1940-2003)** or **Geidar Dzhemal (1947-2015)**, the author of an Islamic variation of Eurasianism. Dugin's concept, laid out predominantly in his famous *Foundations of Geopolitics (Основы геополитики)* of 1997 emphasizes the essential difference between *tellurocracy* – the force of the continental Land, which is supposed to be the bearer of the conservative tradition, socialist economy, communitarian lifestyle as well as autocracy and – *tal-assocracy*, the Sea force, an embodiment of progress, free market, individualism, and democracy.⁸

In fact, Dugin exploits the old Western opposition (which goes back to Mackinder's studies) to promote ideas that grew up on the soil of resentment after Russia's defeat in the Cold War and of disappointment in the pro-Atlantic turn in Russian foreign policy after 1991. The new element in Neo-Eurasianist geopolitics lies in the axiology added to the old scheme of the contradiction between Land and Sea: the realistic attitude to the contemporary trends in international relations received a specific justification. Dugin warns "the Rest" against the West and calls for a worldwide coalition of continental and traditional forces to hold back the offensive of the so called *mondialism* (read: Western liberalism and democratization) against traditional commitments and ties. He proposes several severe and assertive steps such as attempts to transform all local conflicts into a global confrontation with the West, spoil American-Russian and American-Japanese relations, strengthen the military potential of Islamic and Confucian states, dismantle and weaken pro-Western groups in non-Western countries or support pacifist movements in the US.⁹

The Neo-Eurasianist geopolitics was to a large extent based on two not-always-detectable assumptions. One of them was to strive for historical revenge: note that Alexandr Panarin's well-known book was even titled *The Revenge of History*.¹⁰ The other was not always correctly masked longing for expansion. Dugin and some of his adherents, hidden behind the mask of "conservatism" and "tradition", actually deconstructed the religious and national archetypes of Russia turning back to the pattern of Soviet activism, a product of the Marxist obsession to save the world from social injustice and American imperialism.

The Eurasianist tradition is being continued in various ways. After Dugin, it is probably **Valery Korovin** (born 1977), who represents the younger generation of the Eurasian Committee. His efforts represent an extreme and militant version of the

⁸ А.Г. Дугин, *Основы геополитики. Геополитическое будущее России*, Москва 1997, p. 15.

⁹ Idem, "The Rest against the West", in idem, *Основы геополитики* (a modified edition), Москва 2000, at <<http://arctogaia.com/public/osnovygeo/7rest.htm>>.

¹⁰ А.С. Панарин, *Ревани истории. Российская стратегическая инициатива в XXI веке*, Москва 2005.

movement. Korovin perceives American foreign policy as a crusade against Russia – the continental power, which should be wary of the doctrines and pressures from the global monetary system, which fits the interest of the US only. The campaign against “the Rest”, which has not been subordinated to the Atlantic world, embraces the actions against Russia, with the Ukrainian affairs being the most representative example. Korovin perceives the events of the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan as elements of an anti-Russian campaign. According to his Eurasianist beliefs, there is no such thing as a separate Ukrainian nation. Ukraine is a part of the Russian Orthodox civilization and even the Western Ukrainian (Galician) Greek-Catholic nationalism should be comprehended as a product of Western manipulation (in analogy to dividing the Serbian people). However, as he believes, independent and pro-Western Ukraine as an anti-Russian project is ultimately doomed to failure: the only prospective future for Ukraine is in the Eurasian Empire.¹¹

The Eurasianist perspective is by no means reduced to the circle of radical visionaries. The fact that it puts on academic robes is illustrated in some intellectual outcomes such as the monograph of **Igor Fyodorovich Kefeli** (born 1945) and **Dmitry Ivanovich Kuznetsov** (born 1957), where the authors argue that the Westernist project of Great Europe is declining giving way to another construct – Great Eurasia – where Russia should be treated as its Western boundary.

Although some authors believe that the anti-Western and pro-assertive change in Russia's behavior in international politics was caused by the disappointment of the failure of democratic and liberal reforms in the 1990s as well as by the Ukrainian crises¹² interpreted as directed against Russia, the analysis of most representative works created by Russian geopolitical thinkers after 1991 contradicts this conviction. As a matter of fact, the soil for an aggressive anti-Western turn toward the East was prepared much earlier by Neo-Eurasianism, a late child of the Eurasianist ideology, created after the Russian Revolution by those who actively condemned Western cultural aspirations having escaped from their own country to the hated West.

THE INSULAR THEORY

The Eurasianist crusade against the Western forces was ruthlessly criticized by **Vadim Tsymbursky (1957-2009)**, a distinguished philosopher, philologist, ethnologist, and historian; probably the best known member of the Institute of Philosophy in the Russian Academy of Sciences. After a time, he became a prominent figure in Russian political thought in the field of geopolitics. He consciously became devoted to it as well as to a newly designed project – *chronopolitics*, which, however, was not successfully

¹¹ Ideas presented in: В.М. Коровин, *Конец проекта 'Украина'*, Санкт-Петербург 2015, p. 63nn, 90nn.

¹² Comp. D. Svarin, “The Construction of ‘Geopolitical Spaces’ in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse before and after the Ukraine Crisis”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2016), pp.129-140.

developed in his works. The thinker perceives geopolitics as an “immediately overwhelming” intellectual paradigm, and as a certain type of attitude towards the world, which leads to “spatial and political designing”.¹³

Tsymbursky was not a Westernist at all, but he identified Dugin’s considerations with “geopolitics from a position of weakness” and generally treated Eurasianists as luminaries of the journalistic postmodern of Russia, with its paradoxical play of scripts, which sometimes resembles the bizarre “autonomous reality” of computer games. Moreover, according to the historian, the Eurasianist ideology is dangerous for the Russian people, depriving their country of natural borders and turning them into Mamluks of Great Eurasia at the same time. Dugin’s postmodern concept exposes Russia to war and conflict, dependence on Western technology, and ecological degradation. In this understanding of imperial Eurasia, the Russians would in fact be deprived of their own statehood in the name of abstract objectives. In reality, however, the unified forces of this empire would only be joined by superficial anti-Americanism.¹⁴

What Tsymbursky proposes instead is a rather defensive type of geopolitical neorealism. His concept of insular Russia identifies the idea of security and reliable protection of the state’s own interests with the limitation of political claims and risks associated with invading a foreign zone because of existential interests. He generally criticizes Russia’s obsession with the West, pointing at the incompatibility of those two civilizational circles. Russia as an island is a huge country hidden behind the transitional zone – the *Grand Limitroph*, which stretches from Central and Eastern Europe in the North-West through Transnistria, the Caucasus, Central Asia to the Great Steppe with some minor ethno-geographical phenomena such as Buryatia or Tuva. The limitrophic area, as a kind of Rimland and border area, usually suffers from certain indeterminacy and is characterized by culturally heterogenic traits. Russian offensive towards the West, where the transitional areas such as Poland became the battlefield, usually turned into disaster and never fulfilled the nation’s genuine interests.¹⁵

The general direction of Tsymbursky’s thinking can be described as defensive, insular, and practical. As Ilyin correctly points out, the insular theory overcomes the “dreamers’ geopolitics” and gives up the *geo-mystical* tendencies of the 1990s.¹⁶

¹³ В.Л. Цымбурский, “Геополитика как мировидение и род занятий”, *Полис*, no. 4 (1999), pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Idem, *Геополитика с позиции слабости, Агентство политических новостей*, 2007, at <<https://libking.ru/books/nonf-/nonf-publicism/589166-2-vadim-tsymburskiy-geopolitika-s-pozitsii-slabosti.html#book>>.

¹⁵ Idem, *Остров Россия. Геополитические и хронополитические работы, 1993-2007*, Москва 2007, pp. 57-58, 187.

¹⁶ М.В. Ильин, “Диалог об островах и проливах, междуморьях и междумирях”, *Тетради по консерватизму*, no. 1 (2015), p. 129.

MILITARY GEOPOLITICS

Another type of geopolitics in contemporary Russia is rooted in the interests and ideas of the power structures. This type of geopolitics emphasizes the need for mobilization and preparation for the struggle against never-dying threats from geopolitical competition. The origins of the trend are linked to the **Academy of Geopolitical Problems**, which was officially founded on April 16, 1999 by general-lieutenant **Alexandr Ignatyevich Paliy (1922-2006)**.¹⁷ However, the tendency was detectable a couple of years earlier. It is represented by several personalities (i.e. Igor Khodakov, Vasily Belozеров) but the leading position is held by **Leonid Grigorevich Ivashov** (born 1943). Ivashov is a graduate of Tashkent Suvorov Military School (Ташкентское Суворовское военное училище). He worked for 8 years as a senior aide to the Soviet Minister of Defense until 1984. In 1987, he began to head the Department for General Affairs in the Ministry of Defense. In post-Soviet Russia, he continued to work for the Ministry heading the Department of Military Cooperation and being responsible for the collaboration between the previous USSR republics. He was the genuine initiator and the author of the draft of the Collective Security Treaty signed in Tashkent in 1992. From 1996-2001, he was chief of the military cooperation department at the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense. He was in charge of military co-operation between members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. General Ivashov belonged to the team that initiated and organized the march of Russian paratroopers to Pristina in 1999.

In his classical work of 2002, he presents not only a geopolitical and tactical position but provides a theoretical insight into the field in question. First of all, he strongly defends the scientific status of geopolitics. He even believes that it is geopolitics that ought to become the scientific base of the state's foreign policy, especially in the area of security. In other words, geopolitics is studied in his works both as the political practice concerning the implementation of strategies that realize the state's interests in time and space and as a scientific theory with all necessary attributes such as its object of studies, principles, regularities, functions, notional apparatus, and methods. Second, Ivashov and his adherents emphasize a close relationship between the theory of geopolitics and security of states. This is because the latter significantly broadened its conceptual range embracing not only the military sphere but the economic, social or political as well. On the other hand, contemporary geopolitics needs to consider "new spaces" such as the ones concerning politics, information or civilization. Third, Ivashov claims that the geopolitical model of national security allowed its authors to create an indispensable device in today's security policies: a debugged decision-making mechanism. Fourth, according to military geopoliticians, global and regional security is conditioned by a geopolitically conditioned process. It is unquestionably necessary to draw geopolitical models of regional security, where the interests of particular states could be

¹⁷ See: "История Академии", *Академия геополитических проблем*, at <<https://akademiagp.ru/about/history/>>.

optimized. Fifth, contemporary international relations are evolving from the previous bipolar structure to an unknown system. What has to be considered is the changing potential of particular actors as well as the process of globalization with its tendency to polarize them: strengthening the power of some and leading the other ones to the gutter. Sixth, in the situation of genuine multipolarity the probability and intensity of regional conflicts grows and most of them can be categorized as geopolitical. Seventh, the geopolitical structure of the world is supposed to depend strongly on the time needed by Russia to overcome its temporary crisis and take the correct position in Eurasia and in the global system. This is because it preserved its status of a leading power in spite of the collapse of the USRR. Eight, after the year 2000, Russia made a significant step forward in the area of national security.¹⁸

The military trend of Russian geopolitics gradually evolved into a kind of handbook containing a diagnosis of threats and a list of imperatives for the Russian state. In 2015, Ivashov realizes the collapse of the system of multi- and bilateral treaties providing a strategic balance such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 or START II of 1993. Ivashov notes the conclusions of politicians and experts from different countries that the US-Russian nuclear parity as a deterrence factor does not meet US interests. Ivashov also criticizes the innovations in the US Nuclear Doctrine of 2010, where a preemptive nuclear strike is seriously taken into consideration.

These phenomena are elements of the contemporary clash of civilizations, which takes the shape of a geopolitical conflict. In other words, the struggle for space and resources covers a deeper controversy between axiological structures, represented, as Huntington correctly points out, by world civilizations. The lack of respect toward civilizational uniqueness, epitomized in the attempts to westernize “the uncivilized rest”, leads to natural resistance among the non-Western states, and provokes the policy of double standards. Russia in this situation is forced to protect itself against foreign (especially Western) transformational forces on the one hand, and avoid to provoke an inter-civilizational conflict between the Orthodox root and the Muslim/Turkic element, on the other. Russian history in Gorbachev and Yeltsin’s decades was a miserable example of geopolitical collapse: the ancient principle of “collecting areas” was replaced by disintegration of the “single space”; that is why the unfortunate tendency has to be reversed.¹⁹

The characteristics of Russia as the core of the post-Soviet space are defined precisely and can be divided into geohistorical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic components. In the **geohistorical** perspective Russia can be described as the country of:

- centralized economy, which is capable of sustaining an immense military force,
- hierarchical authoritarian or totalitarian political system supported by a Messianic ideology,
- imperialist expansionism,
- unconditioned social acceptance of the regime.

¹⁸ Л.Г. Ивашов, *Россия или Московия? Геополитическое измерение национальной безопасности России*, Москва 2002, р. 408, 414.

¹⁹ Idem, *Геополитика русской цивилизации*, Москва 2015, pp. 738-751.

Ivashov understands that these tendencies led Russia to the abnormal, extensive type of development, which differs from the one that occurs in the situation of geopolitical homeostasis.

There is no wonder that the **gloeconomic** aspect of the geopolitical situation of Russia is perceived by Ivashov as extremely inadequate to realities and to the Russian civilizational (centralistic) grounds. The only positive characteristic of Russia's present economy is its sufficient potential to secure the needs of the military sector.

The **geostrategic** peculiarities of Russia are predominantly determined by geographical and demographic aspects. Ivashov points out such issues as the Eurasian character of the country, its importance in the transportation perspective, the necessity to provide security for very big and sometimes abandoned territories, disproportions of the density of population, and energy intensity in various regions of the Russian Federation.

According to the Russian general, Russia can be still treated as an influential power with its immense resources and strategic potential in spite of some subjective dysfunctionality due to the lack of a national idea or the disability of the elites to solve the basic economic and social problems of the country.²⁰ To reach its goals, Russia has to successfully confront the difficulties in its near and further neighborhood, especially the ones caused by the conflict with Ukraine. However, as he believes, Russia's attitude to Ukraine, which has been formed throughout decades or centuries even, may be actually fallacious. Russia, treating the Ukrainians as "brothers", was always able to sacrifice sharing some territories or natural resources. In fact it is Ukraine, not the Asian partners, that let Moscow down several times and most actively pushed for the collapse of the USSR. That is why the durability of Ukraine's current shape has been called into question²¹

The militaristic version of Russian geopolitics represented most vigorously by Ivashov, is actually an eclectic doctrine constructed for the realization of strategic objectives. The main preoccupation of this trend lies in the extension of Russia's international influence and in the possible reintegration of the post-Soviet space. Ivashov's geopolitics applies some terminology created by Tsymbursky but, contrary to this classical thinker, its ideological positions gravitate more towards Eurasianism. The main links are the strong anti-Western and confrontational tone of militaristic geopolitics as well as the belief that Russia's best allies are in Central Asia rather than in Eastern Europe.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHERS

As part of Russian geopolitics after 1991 continued the original Koropchevsky's legacy. It turned up among geographers, whose attitude to the object of research was most distant if compared to the other circles of Russian geopolitical thinkers. The most prominent figures representing this trend were **Nikolai Semenovich Mironenko**

²⁰ Ibid., p. 759nn.

²¹ Idem, *Радикальная доктрина Новороссии*, Москва 2014, p. 47nn.

(1941-2014) and Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kolosov (born 1953), who in the years 2012-2016 held the position of Senior Officer of the International Geographical Union. Their main work – originally planned as a handbook of geopolitics and political geography²² – was published in 2002 and still attracts attention of scholars.

The perspective of geopolitics, which Mironenko created in this book, goes much beyond Mackinder and Haushofer's concept of continental power, traditionally exploited in Russia. Mironenko distinguishes two aspects of geopolitics: the *cultural-psychological* dimension and the *conceptual* one. As he states, geopolitics is cultural and psychological because the formation of geopolitical space is not only conditioned by strictly objective factors such as the size of the territory or its geographical position, natural resources, demographics, economic and military potentials but also by "the spirit of the peoples and nations inhabiting the space of states". A geopolitical crash usually creates the need for a new geopolitical idea, which is either directed toward nativism (the case of Iran in late 1970s) or to cosmopolitanism (e.g. Spain after Franco). On the other hand, we also observe attempts to create conceptual geopolitics, comprehended as a discipline of science, which may be conditioned by political objectives. However, the historical core of geopolitics always lies in geography whereas the methodological one in various forms of "modelling" the global space.²³

Kolosov, the younger representative of the geographic orientation became popular because of his theoretical attempts. One of them is the border theory, in which he distinguished four types of boundaries: *alienating* (characteristic of states threatened by separatisms); *semipermeable* (which blend historical memory and political realism with the prospects of cooperation); *connecting* (with large-scale cooperation, which realizes a wide range of common interests), and *integrative* (where the importance of the border is minimized because of transferring most of the competences to the international level). Kolosov's border theory is generally conditioned by the experience of the growing importance of uncontrolled areas such as Chechnya before 2000, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Kosovo, etc.

Another interesting point in Kolosov's geopolitics lies in his study of the interdependence between public opinion and foreign policy. According to the Russian geographer, geographical images form the basis of the so-called *low geopolitics*, which includes a set of symbols and social ideas about the country's place in the world, its foreign policy orientation, potential allies, and main rivals. "High" geopolitics, as opposed to "low" (in accordance with the concept of "high" and "low" geopolitics proposed by Gerard Ó Tuathail) includes official foreign policy documents and analyses. In a modern democratic society, "high" and "low" geopolitics cannot exist without each other: one constantly feeds the other, although the nature of their interaction varies from country to country and changes over time.²⁴

²² В.А. Колосов, Н.С. Мироненко, *Геополитика и политическая география*, Москва 2001.

²³ Ibid., pp. 10-24.

²⁴ В.А. Колосов, "Низкая' и 'высокая' геополитика. Образы зарубежных стран в представлениях российских граждан", *Отечественные записки*, no. 3 (2002), at <<https://magazines.gorky.media/>

THE “RUSSIAN WORLD” CONCEPT

Another important and slightly younger trend in Russian geopolitics is the “Russian World” ideology, which is usually associated with the government circles. However, its origins date back to the establishment of the Congress of Russian Communities (Конгресс русских общин) and of the Homeland Party (Партия Родина) in 1993. Their initiator – Dmitry Rogozin and all the other founding fathers originally tried to build a platform of solidarity with the Russian compatriots scattered around the post-Soviet era. This idea of solidarity later turned into a basic element of the “Russian World” (Русский мир, Russkiy Mir) concept. Its institutional embodiment lies in the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Фонд “Русский мир”) created by a presidential decree in 2007. The foundation is supposed to promote the Russian language and culture abroad as well as to reconnect the “the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges, and assistance in relocation”.²⁵

The idea of the Russian World is a consequence of two basically different factors. On the one hand, it obviously reflects the trauma of the collapse of the great empire, which brought about an awkward situation of many Russians or Russian-speaking inhabitants of the new states built from the previous Soviet republics. On the other, however, it has another theoretical aspect, creating a new concept of state.

In the “genetic” perspective, the geopolitics of the Russkiy Mir concept is quite heterogenous because of being rooted both in the supranational Eurasianist (or Soviet) imperialism and in the nationalistic doctrines. However, no matter where the real intention of particular authors lies, the Russian World ideology aims at a certain kind of unity of all Russian territories (populated by Russian-speaking inhabitants) and the unity of all people belonging to the Russian culture, to a specific Russian world outlook.

The geopolitical interpretation of the Russkiy Mir concept is pursued predominantly by **Sergei Penteleev** (born: 1972), the head of the Institute of Russia Abroad (Институт Русского зарубежья). The conceptual structure of his narrative is based on the idea of geopolitical centers: “If we speak in a geopolitical context, then geopolitics has its own laws. One of the laws of geopolitics, one of the important phenomena, is the phenomenon of *geopolitical points of resistance* that keep the total field under the control of the metropolis.” Nowadays, as Penteleev believes, the points are in Transnistria, Donbas, and Crimea, forming the New Russia Triangle (Новороссийский треугольник).²⁶

oz/2002/3/nizkaya-i-vysokaya-geopolitika.html>. See also: J. O’Loughlin, G. Ó Tuathail (G. Toal), V. Kolosov, “Russian Geopolitical Culture and Public Opinion: The Masks of Proteus Revisited”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers. New Series*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2005), pp. 322-335.

²⁵ “About Russkiy Mir Foundation”, *Russkiy Mir Foundation*, at <<https://web.archive.org/web/20130921054100/http://www.russkiymir.ru/russkiymir/en/fund/about>> (archive).

²⁶ С. Пантелеев, “Донбасс в геополитике Русского мира”, *Russkie.org*, 3 April 2019, at <<http://www.russkie.org/articles/donbass-v-geopolitike-russkogo-mira/>>.

This kind of reasoning leads to political reunion of territories associated with the widespread use of the Russian language and the influence of Russian culture. It is a civilizational rather than ethnic phenomenon combining Orthodox religion, common history, specific culture, language, and the tradition of statehood.²⁷ The same kind of reasoning can be found in the writings of **Natalya Narochitskaya** (born 1948), one of the most characteristic nationalist politicians in Russia (her political career actually began in the Party of People's Liberty but later her political views radicalized and in 2003, she was elected to the State Duma representing the Rodina faction). Narochitskaya consistently defends the idea of one great Russian nation, which was tragically divided after the dissolution of the USSR. Ukraine is historically a part of the Russian nation and separating it from Moscow was an American geopolitical project. The real objective of NATO's policy was not the liquidation of world communism but the elimination of a geopolitical adversary in the East. Narochitskaya also emphasized the importance of Crimea as the place, where, thanks to the presence of Crimean Tartars, the scenario of Kosovo can be repeated. However, the idea of separating the Ukrainian South and East from Kiev seems to be even more dangerous because this would realize the historical plans of the Vatican and the Polish Commonwealth to overwhelm Kiev – the birthplace of Russian religiosity and statehood – by the Western project.²⁸

Some geopolitical thinkers who represent the ideology of the Russian World facing the dispersion of the Russian ethnic element tried to find a way toward a new paradigm of unification. In 2000, **Petr G. Shchedrovitsky** (born 1958), an active political technologist, proposes a new understanding of the Russian World – as a **net structure**. According to this concept, in the 20th century, under the influence of tectonic historical shifts, world wars, and revolutions of the planet, the Russian World was formed as the network structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian. Nowadays, he states, nearly half of them are located beyond the boundaries of the Russian state. Schedrovitsky, however, is rather pessimistic about the possibilities of Russian influence in the contemporary, multilayered geopolitical world. He believes that the attempts to find a similar model of development in the past 15 years and, moreover, to create sociocultural and institutional conditions for its implementation should be recognized as bankrupt. Russia is increasingly losing its strength and the opportunities for its balanced development are melting every year.²⁹

A much more assertive embodiment of the same trend can be traced in the narrative proposed by Korovin in his most popular publication. He understands that in the postmodern era it is necessary to apply another type of influence and puts out the idea of a **net empire**. Such a model is supposed to attract states and nations and encourage

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Н.А. Нарочницкая, "Украина: историческая ретроспектива и геополитическая перспектива", in eadem, *Русский Мир*, Москва 2008, pp. 282-290.

²⁹ П.Г. Щедровицкий, "Русский мир", *Независимая Газета*, 11 February 2000, at <http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2000-02-11/8_russian_world.html>.

them to accept the Eurasian project, contrary to the American ambitions.³⁰ A similar idea is suggested by Kefeli and Kuznetsov, who believe that the question of the place and role of the Russian World in the space of Eurasian integration should be analyzed and resolved by means of the laws of geopolitics, given the acquisition by geopolitics of a new quality – **information geopolitics**. The fate of spatial relations between states is increasingly determined by superiority in cyberspace, and the main geopolitical potential of the state, the symbolic capital of culture, dominates in information warfare.³¹ Another outcome of this trend is **cyber-geopolitics**, promoted in Russia by **Leonid Savin** (born: 1974), the editor-in-chief of “Geopolitika” journal, who admits that so far the priority in cyber security should definitely be attributed to the United States.³²

THE GEOECONOMISTS

A certain group of Russian theoreticians (rather than ideologists) represent *geo-economics* – a discipline, which combines the geographical, global aspect of international relations and adequate socio-political processes with economy as the leading factor of today’s world development. Some researchers refuse to associate it with politics and tend to understand it rather in terms of an independent theoretical activity that arose in the mainstream of economic sciences. Russian geoeconomics of the first decades of the 21st century has two main incarnations in the form of the concepts of **Ernest Georgievich Kochetov** (born 1938), the director of the Center for Strategic Studies of Geoeconomics of the All-Russian Research Institute of Foreign Economic Relations at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and **Alexandr Ivanovich Neklessa** (born 1949), the head of the Center for Geoeconomic Studies (the North & South Lab) of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Kochetov’s geoeconomics is evidently not based on traditional geographic determinism. Moreover, even the “realistic” rivalry in terms of physical power in international relations can be placed absolutely beyond the thinker’s main interests. He only defines geopolitical concepts as ideological or military strategies “played out on a political map of the world, formed under the influence of geographical factors”.³³ Kochetov’s conceptual paradigm is comprehended by himself as “humanitarian cosmology”. He calls for the appearance and respect for “the New People”, who would be able to avoid and dismantle the main fatal fallacies of the contemporary world. To debunk the world’s adversity of

³⁰ В.М. Коровин, *Геополитика и предчувствие войны. Удар по России*, Санкт-Петербург 2018, pp. 191-193.

³¹ И.Ф. Кефели, Д.И. Кузнецов, *Евразийский вектор геополитики*, Москва 2018, p. 238.

³² Л. Савин, “Введение в кибергеополитику”, *Геополитика (Кибер)*, vol. 22 (2013); idem, “Кибергеополитика”, *Geopolitika.ru*, 11 December 2017, at <<https://www.geopolitica.ru/studio/leonid-savin-kiberpolitika>>; idem, “Геополитика и киберпространство: новая парадигма безопасности”, *Geopolitika.ru*, 28 December 2017, at <<https://www.geopolitica.ru/article/geopolitika-i-kiberprostranstvo-novaya-paradigma-bezopasnosti>>.

³³ Э.Г. Кочетов, *Геоэкономика. Энциклопедия*, Москва 2016, p. 70.

our times, he points to several basic problem blocks that need to be considered to avoid a global disaster. They can generally be described as the *faults of consciousness* caused by deliberate or incidental distortion of human nature and of the natural image of the world. The main forms of those fallacies are *ideologies* (the source of *misleading*) – parasitic forms of abstract thinking. The world has been undergoing a process of forming *Global Hypocrisy*, a first rank consciousness error consisting in the tendency to avoid being oneself, which results in pathological hatred of everything healthy, strong, nascent, and in turning a blind eye to anything obvious. Ideologists maintain misconceptions and make a living from them. The natural trend of human mind is to develop a balanced economy, whereas the ideological tendencies produce the *development mania* in parallel to *militarism*. Contemporary states suffer from *geopolitical blindness*: geopolitical ideologists cannot exist without threats, challenges, and dangers, they need the atmosphere of hatred, which is their daily bread. In their state of minds the greatest danger lies in the human will to exist whereas the world actually needs to develop the geoeconomic paradigm and harmonize interests to participate in the global development.³⁴

Alexandr Neklessa's approach does not seem to be demonstratively anti-geopolitical but the thinker is aware that geoeconomics and geopolitics are not synonymous notions. As he states, some geoeconomic questions were put up for discussion by geopolitical authors in the past, especially the theoreticians of the Heartland as an autarkic zone and the Rimland as the zone of exchange. Geoeconomics, however, has actually a different perspective and developed in parallel to geopolitics in the interwar time, overlapping with the latter in the aspect of political geography. Nowadays, he believes, the system of international relations is being transformed into a different state; within the framework of transit, a new organization of world order appears; the *world market* is becoming an original form of *world order*. The emerging geoeconomic structure (*geoccon*) can be described as a specific subordination of six areas:

- the transnational space of the “headquarters economy” (the New North),
- the transgeographic shadow space of the underground and the “trophy economy” (the Deep South), integrating the remains of failed or bankrupt statehood, as well as the developing forms of socio-economic practice and global marginalization,
- the high-tech North Atlantic region (the West),
- the Big Pacific Ring (the New East) associated with mass industrial production,
- the traditional South as the supplier of raw materials and cheap labor,
- the “land ocean” of Northern Eurasia, which has not found a clear geoeconomic profile, associated with the prospects for the development or degradation of Russian statehood.³⁵

As in many other cases mentioned above, it is quite controversial to bracket Neklessa with contemporary Russian geopolitics. However, some sources do so, especially the

³⁴ Idem, *Миры. Прологамены к философии преобразования человека и его бытия в мирах гуманитарного космоса*, Москва 2015, p. 104nn.

³⁵ А.И. Неклесса, “Геоэкономическая формула мироустройства”, *Развитие и экономика*, no. 7 (2013), pp. 112-122.

influential portal geopolitika.ru, which published Neklessa's theses about the new global but culturally diversified world order in July 2015.³⁶ The problem, however, does not refer to Neklessa only. It lies in the relationship between geopolitics and geoeconomics, which, according to Tsymbursky, took a specific shape in Russia. It is actually a "damn question" of today's Russian intellectual narrative. Geopolitics, in Tsymbursky's view, is in contrast to political geography, which provides readers, including politicians, with objective information about realities and acts as a procedure of political design. Through a variety of geographic data, it opens up political opportunities both positive and destructive. Geopolitics in a way embodies vague forms of social demand by means of geographic design laced with such attitudes as confrontation and rivalry, cooperation, or domination. Geopolitics in Tsymbursky's theory is a kind of political hermeneutics that seeks how to identify and translate those attitudes into approximate geographic schemes (suggestive maps), often not yet fully realized by the customer's community itself. It is the hermeneutic spirit of geopolitics that determines its position in post-Soviet Russia.³⁷

Russian geoeconomics, in general, remains in some relation to geopolitics on the one hand, provides a convincing criticism of it on the other. It also proposes very different, globalist and economically determined paradigms, which are partially visionary and only to some extent scientific. However, one should note the indisputable fact that Russian geoeconomics, contrary to the dominant geopolitical trends (especially Neo-Eurasianism and military geopolitics), serves as a peacemaking theory based on the idea of the harmony of interests and on the scientific approach to global processes. In this way, Russian geoeconomic thinkers place themselves on the pole opposite to traditional realism and hitherto to geopolitics.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of the main trends of post-Soviet Russian geopolitics presented above lists only seven developmental currents, which is obviously an arbitrary choice. Although the contemporary geopolitical concepts in Russia are heterogenous, originating from unique personalities as well as from different objectives and advocacy groups, it is possible to highlight some common elements among them. First of all, it would be advisable to agree with Ištók and Plavčanová, who point out that Russian geopolitics is a result of the new Russian self-reflection, which after the collapse of the USSR "ranged between exaggerated overstatement of its own importance and inferiority complexes"³⁸.

This tendency is represented by **radical and ideological** trends of Russian geopolitics, which try to overcome Western dominance in the military, economic, and cultural

³⁶ Idem, "Сложный мир культурно-цивилизационного разнообразия", *Геополитика.ру*, 6 July 2015, at <<https://www.geopolitica.ru/article/slozhnyy-mir-kulturno-civilizacionnogo-raznoobraziya>>.

³⁷ В.А. Цымбурский, "Русские и геэкономика", *Pro et Contra*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2003), pp. 178-179.

³⁸ R. Ištók, D. Plavčanová, "Russian Geopolitics and Geopolitics of Russia: Phenomenon of Space", *European Journal of Geopolitics*, no. 1 (2013), p. 61.

space in today's world. "Weimar Russia" embodied in the obsessively returning ideas of multipolarity, new imperialism, Neo-Eurasianism or in the idea of the Russian World, calls for overcoming the feeling of inferiority and the humiliating dismemberment of the imperial nation as well as for building a new, more favorable world order.

However, in the other, **semi-scientific** trends in Russian geopolitics: in the insular theory, political geography or geoeconomics, we see a call for prudence and analytical distance towards current events. The authors tend to perceive geopolitical and geoeconomic problems in the global perspective and understand the necessity to harmonize interests in order to establish natural and continual development.

The radical ideologists are strikingly anti-Western, especially anti-American. This kind of narrative is constantly served to the citizens thanks to the state-controlled media, which results in the shaping of public opinion. The semi-scientists, however, especially Tsymbursky, do not see the need to confront the Western world. In some cases, like in the works of Kochetov, we even find a deep and coherent accusation of ideological geopolitics as a trend, which contradicts the interests of the Russian people.

Several phenomena concerning the contemporary distribution of power or economic processes are commonly ascertained by the representatives of all leading trends in Russian geopolitics. This refers especially to the rise of Asian powers such as India and China. Some authors perceive it with a new hope to balance Western dominance; some, however, treat the changes only as new material for consideration.

One of the most interesting elements of contemporary geopolitics in Russia is the appreciation of the cyber space as a new environment for competition and rising power. Russian radically ideological authors pick up the idea of the *net empire*, which enriches them with a proper device for regaining power by taking a shortcut via the new media, which sculpt the state of mind. This point of view, however, is not supported by the representatives of semi-scientific theories, where technological modernity is rather an important aspect changing the consciousness of humankind as a whole, showing new challenges, needs, and opportunities.

In general, the attempt to create a more detailed and generalized typology of contemporary Russian geopolitical theories indicates a clear divergence not only in the theoretical and methodological perspective but also in the main objectives, which range from simplified militaristic revanchism to advanced globalism.

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