

# Multi-faceted Eurasianism: a comparison in practice

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – After the collapse of the USSR, Eurasian integration projects, proposed by Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey, began to develop in the post-Soviet space. Hence, there is growing interest in Eurasianism as an ideology. In this context, the study of the use of the Eurasianism's ideas in practice becomes relevant. The argument of this article is that Russia, Turkey, and Kazakhstan have their own interpretations of Eurasianism's ideas to develop the ideological basis of their own integration projects. The purpose of the article is to answer the question: How is the Eurasianism used in integration projects of Russia, Turkey and Kazakhstan?

**Design/methodology/approach** – The concept of Eurasianism has been viewed in terms of constructivism. On the basis of the principles of social constructivism, and in particular the works of constructivist ideologue Alexander Wendt, a comparative analysis was made. The ideas of Eurasianism in the integration processes of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey has been carried out based on the criteria such as the role of common ideas, identity, consciousness, memory and culture. The examples of mentioned countries were compared, to consider the development of the ideas of Eurasianism in practice.

**Findings** – The ideas of Eurasianism have a significant impact on the integration processes of the post-Soviet space. Eurasianism advocates for important factors such as respect for cultural and civilizational differences between different nations, their equality in the overall union and common development opportunities. Such factors are undoubtedly important for the success of integration projects. The reflection of many individual thoughts of classical Eurasians and Neo-Eurasians can be seen in the statements of various ministers and leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey. The initiatives of these countries in creating integration projects also show the influence of the Eurasian concept.

**Originality/value** – In the 1990s, the study of Eurasianism gained new significance in academic circles. Articles and periodicals devoted to this concept were published. However, all parallels between variations in concepts of Eurasianism have been conducted on a theoretical level. The importance of this article lies in the fact that conceptual differences are compared in practice. Researchers had not previously considered the study of the relevance and productivity of Eurasianism in practice by comparing examples and experiences from different countries. The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to solve this problem.

**Keywords** Neo-Eurasianism, Pragmatic Eurasianism, EAEU, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Social constructivism

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The concept of Eurasianism, which emerged among Russian emigrants in Europe in the early 1920s, now exists in the modern world as a historical concept, philosophical direction and political doctrine.

It was developed by Russian intellectual exiles, including art historian P. Suvchinsky, economist-geographer P. Savitsky, and ethnographer and linguist N. Trubetskoy. Like other Russian thinkers of the revolutionary era, they looked to Eurasianism for answers to problems concerning Russia's future and fate. These young scientists were urged to accept



the dangers of the Europeanization of Russia and preserve the uniqueness of its development. They equated Russia with Eurasia, arguing that the country's geographical and cultural characteristics are shared by the entire region. The founders of the concept believed that the center and the margin were all components of the same natural whole, thus any distinctions between them had to be removed. The newly developed concept was based on several Slavic ideological tenets. The nationality mentioned by the classical Eurasianists suggested a unique synthesis of Orthodox–Slavic and Muslim–Turkic cultures. They were convinced that the Russian culture was neither European nor Asian, nor the sum or mechanical compound of their elements. It is a very special, unique culture, having no less internal value and historical significance than European and Asian. Once the fundamental theorists passed away, Russian intellectuals ceased developing Eurasianism. Lev Gumilev, who made numerous references to this concept in his works, revived interest in it during the Soviet period. Later, it attracted interest in other countries. The rise of Neo-Eurasianism in post-Soviet Russia coincided with the development of this concept in regional countries like Turkey and Kazakhstan. Scholars and politicians from these countries have interpreted their own versions of Eurasianism, which has brought variety to the notion of the concept. There are two significant works by Marlene Laruelle on Turkish and wider Eurasianism (Laruelle, 2008a, b). These pieces focus on how Eurasian concepts are thought upon in Turkey. However, even though Laruelle is delving deeper into classical and Neo-Eurasian studies, her research on Turkish Eurasia is severely constrained because it does not provide an all-encompassing perspective on Turkish Eurasianism and its discourses. Such approach is proposed by Imanov (2008). In Turkish Eurasianism, he identifies six divisions. Although these units are well designed, they do not maintain the current data. Another division is made by Perinçek and Akçali (2009). They identify three primary discourses surrounding Turkish Eurasianism in their article. Right-wing, religious and ultranationalist political movements that support forging deeper links with the Turkic nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus are supporters of the first discourse. Center-right and liberal political parties that are looking to Eurasianism for geoeconomic potential are proponents of the second discourse. Kemalist Eurasianism is the third and last discourse. However, this article cannot be viewed as a whole in terms of its coverage of all discussions. Additionally significant in this perspective is the work of Doğu Perinçek, who established the Kemalist school of thought in Turkey (Perinçek, 1996). The other Turkish researcher, Özgür Tüfekçi, first systematized the various Turkish interpretations of Eurasianism and compared them to Russian Eurasianism in his writings (Tüfekçi, 2016, 2017). But it is necessary to underline that all of the comparisons between the various Eurasianism principles mentioned above were made in a theoretical context. From the standpoint of how it is used in practice, Eurasianism has not been thoroughly studied. Thus, the ideas of Eurasianism are currently being discussed in Russia and abroad. Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey are presenting different elucidations of Eurasianism and trying to include them into their integration projects in the post-Soviet space.

In the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR, the study of Eurasianism gained new significance in academic circles. Articles and periodicals devoted to this ideological and political direction were published. One could say that Eurasianism as a whole and its individual aspects have been repeatedly studied in Russia and abroad. However, it is important to note that all parallels between variations in Eurasianism concepts have been conducted on a theoretical level. The importance of this article lies in the fact that conceptual differences are compared in practice. Therefore, the article tries to answer the question: How is the Eurasianism used in integration projects of Russia, Turkey and Kazakhstan?

### Theoretical and methodological framework

The article emphasized the principles by which the concepts of Eurasianism in different countries are compared with the help of social constructivism's key principles. One of the

most prominent and important developments in the 20th century theory of international relations is constructivism. One of the most prominent and important developments in the 20th century theory of international relations is constructivism. The relevance of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture and arguments in politics is emphasized by constructivists, which put particular attention on the importance of shared beliefs and understandings in social life with others. In particular, social constructivism uses constructivism as its tool for social analysis (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001).

Social constructivism emphasizes that triumphs and defeats in the history of the people are reproduced in casts of historical memory, through images of the collective self and the hostile/friendly *Other* (Pavlenko, 2015).

Alexander Wendt, a prominent figure in the field of social constructivism, stresses the significance of shared ideas in shaping common identity. According to Wendt, the fundamental principle of constructivist social theory is that people act on objects based on the meanings that these objects have for them. In other words, the ways in which people associate with each other are largely shaped by shared beliefs and ideas rather than solely by material factors (Jackson and Sorensen, 2007). In turn, interacting ideas shape people's behavior and form the identity and interests of individuals (Abdelal *et al.*, 2005). Wendt believed that the identity of subjects formed motivational and behavioral attitudes. So identities are important because they provide the basis for interests. Identity is the foundation of interests and thus more fundamental (Wendt, 1999). According to Wendt's constructivist approach, the system of international relations is understood in a philosophical and historical sense not as a material world but as a multi-level social structure. This approach makes it possible to highlight the role of such fundamental concepts as friend, enemy, rival, competitor and ally in international politics (Wendt, 1999). According to Wendt's constructivist perspective, shared beliefs give rise to shared interests. In Wendt's view, everything has a material basis, such as a body for people and territory for states. But what really distinguishes these actors with different identities are common ideas such as consciousness and memory (Jackson and Sorensen, 2007). Common ideas, being part of social structure, form culture. According to Wendt, culture takes on many concrete forms, including norms, rules, institutions, ideologies, organizations, systems of coercion and so on. This perspective implies that culture is not a sector or sphere of society distinct from the economy or politics (Wendt, 1999).

Thus, to answer the research question, the comparative analysis has been used. The ideas of Eurasianism in the integration processes of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey has been carried out based on the criteria of social constructivism such as the role of common ideas, identity, consciousness, memory and culture.

### **The case of Russia**

Eurasianism was put forward by representatives of the Russian intellectual elite in the early 20th century. A group of Russian intellectuals set out to determine Russia's possible future and its place and role in the world's development. Linguist Prince N. Trubetzkoy and geographer P. Savitsky founded this concept. In August 1921, a collective monograph entitled "Outlook to the East. Premonitions and Realizations. Eurasianists' Affirmation" was published in Sofia. After this, the authors began to develop the ideas of Eurasianism in their further works. They were joined by intellectuals such as P. Suvchinsky, G. Florovsky, N. Alekseev, G. Vernadsky, L. Karsavin, etc. Some criteria of social constructivism, such as the role of identity and consciousness, can be seen in the works of classic eurasianists. Its founders believed that the Russian people were a special ethnic type, converging both with the Asian type and with the European type. They considered that Eurasia was a special part of the world, a special continent. "A certain closed and typical whole, both in terms of climatic and other geographical conditions" (Savitsky, 1997). According to Savitsky, the Russian

world is special in many ways, both in geographical, linguistic, historical, economic and other senses. It is a “third world” of the Old World, not a part of either Europe or Asia but distinct from them and yet equal to them (Savitsky, 1997). The other important criteria of social constructivism, such as the need for a common culture, can be seen in Savitsky’s works. According to him, Russia cannot be compared to European states because the foundation of Russia (Russia–Eurasia) is cultural and continental unity, not national (Savitsky, 1997). Thus, common ideas, being part of the social structure, can form a common culture. Thus, Eurasianism, on the basis of the geographical and cultural features of the region, on the one hand emphasizes its uniqueness, and on the other, it pays attention to the equality and unity of the nations living in the Eurasian space.

From the mid-1930s on, Eurasianism as an organized movement ceased to exist. Interest in Eurasianism was revived in the 1980s in connection with the works of Lev Gumilev. Gumilev considered himself a follower of the ideas of Eurasianism. He was personally familiar with and corresponded with Savitsky and referred to himself as the “last Eurasianist.” The aspects of self-consciousness and identity are presented in different ways in the works of Gumilev. According to his approach, the transformation of classical Eurasianism into the “theory of ethnogenesis” is clearly visible. From Eurasianism, he took ecological determinism and “historical cycles.” In his works, he wanted to show that Russia is a continuation of the Horde, and many Russians are descendants of baptized Tatars. His concept of ethnogenesis and the Eurasian entity implies the evolution of Russia into a qualitatively new inter-ethnic union of peoples (Orlik, 2010). Gumilev referred to this “multi-ethnic nation” as a “superethnos.” In the 1990s, the Neo-Eurasianists continued this ideological trend, represented by Aleksandr Panarin and Boris Yerasov, who primarily focused on theory and politics, emphasizing the national diversity of Eurasia. Bagratov and his journal “Eurasia” mainly considered culture and folklore and Slavic–Turkic blending, while Aleksandr Dugin emphasized the political foundations of Eurasianism (Orlik, 2010).

From the perspective of the methodological criteria chosen for this research, the key ideas that characterize the essence of Neo-Eurasianism can be distinguished:

- (1) Polycentrism as a social-historical process with the concept of parallel coexistence and development of different civilizations, each of which has its own logic of development, its own cultural dominance, and its own values, goals and priorities.
- (2) The significance of the development of national cultures, the uniqueness and incomparability of each nation and people, the role of its own higher national idea, and independent non-imitative development in the life of a people.
- (3) Recognition of Eurasia as a distinct geographic, ethnic and cultural-historical system, with Russia playing an integrating role and serving as a cultural magnet not only for Slavic but also for Turkic, Finno–Ugric, and other nations.
- (4) The objective predisposition of the Eurasian nations of the post-Soviet space towards various forms of integration, determined by a combination of basic or socio-cultural codes (ed. Osadchey, 2018).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasian ideas in Russia gained a political dimension in connection with the need to create integration projects. To answer the question of why Eurasianism can become the ideological basis for integration processes in the post-Soviet space, it is necessary to take into account the circumstances in which this idea was formulated. It developed in the conditions of the Civil War and was revived in the post-Soviet crisis period. Eurasianism is interpreted differently, but it became popular after the collapse of the Soviet Union and largely served as the basis for state policy. The thesis that Russia should be viewed as a Eurasian country, with its main interests concentrated in Asia that Russia is unique in that it combines Eastern and Western origins, became increasingly relevant (Sokolov, 2003).

The transformation of Russia into an independent Eurasian center of power has been the official policy of the Kremlin since the 2000s. This has been repeatedly emphasized by Russian President Vladimir Putin. In his speeches, he emphasized the importance of the common idea in establishing such a center. Speaking at the L.N. Gumilyov University on October 10, 2000, in Astana, Putin emphasized: "The charge that the ideas of Eurasianism carry is especially important today as we establish truly equal relationships between the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. On this path, it is important for us to preserve all the best that has been accumulated over the centuries of civilization, both in the East and the West" ([Eurasianism. Theory and practice, 2001](#)). According to Putin, "Eurasianism is a tradition of our political thought. It has deep roots in Russia and now takes on a completely new meaning, especially in light of the intensification of integration processes in the post-Soviet space" ([Paderina, 2019](#)). Upon taking office as President in May 2012, Putin stated that "the historical perspective of our nation's state depends today on our ability to become leaders and the center of attraction for all of Eurasia" ([Kremlin.ru, 2012](#)).

In 2013, Putin stated that Russia's top priority is close integration with its neighbors. "The future Eurasian economic union that we have declared and that we talk about so much lately is not just a set of mutually beneficial agreements. The Eurasian Union is a project aimed at preserving the nations' identities and historical Eurasian space in the new century and world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent center of global development, not a periphery for Europe or Asia. I want to emphasize that Eurasian integration will also be built on the principle of diversity. It is a union in which each will maintain its own face, its own uniqueness, and its own political subjectivity" ([Kremlin.ru, 2013](#)). This highlights Putin's idea that preserving individuality is the foundation of interests. It should be noted that this is exactly what the Soviet and Russian philosopher, political scientist and Neo-Eurasianist Panarin wrote about. The idea of shared memory is presented in the works of Panarin. He believed that the unity and differentiation of the peoples who comprised the new unified civilization space must be preserved as "valuable diversity" ([Panarin, 1996](#)). According to Panarin, diversity is the foundation of the common Eurasian civilization. People of the post-Soviet space, who experienced the hardships of economic collapse and the horrors of inter-ethnic strife, are gradually returning to their Eurasian identity and the acceptance of a common national fate. Hence, by analyzing Panarin's ideas on the formation of a common civilization, it is important to note the significance of expressing historical memory.

The creation of Eurasian integration was discussed by Dugin in the early 2000s. He proposed the formation of the Eurasian Continental Block through the consecutive and multilevel integration of the CIS countries into the Eurasian Union with the subsequent entry of other European-Asian countries into the system of strategic alliances. In Dugin's formulations, one can see images of a collective *Self* and a hostile *Other*. According to him, strategic alliances may be based on common rejection of American-centric globalization, economic mutual benefit and political calculation ([Dugin, 2000](#)). Dugin claimed that multipolarity must be established in the world. His ideas were partially reflected in the Eurasian integration projects.

Practical implementation of the ideas of Eurasianism was given in the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Priority objectives of the EAEU are recognized:

- (1) Providing conditions that will allow member states' economy to grow steadily in order to raise the standard of life for their populations;
- (2) Pursuit of a single market for goods, services, capital and labor within the Union;
- (3) Comprehensive modernization, cooperation and competitiveness of national economies in the global economy (ed. [Osadchey, 2018](#)).

Cultural ties between the countries also play an important role in Eurasian integration. This can be seen in the Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration, which states: “the comprehensive development of cooperation in the fields of culture, parliamentary and business community connections, and contacts between people” ([Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration, 2011](#)). The example of the EAEU shows that integration is not limited to the economy. It has other objectives that are just as important as economic ones. These are social-cultural aspects, including family ties, permanent and temporary migration, educational links, tourism, cultural ties and more (ed. [Vinokourova, 2017](#)). Integration strengthens inter-ethnic and interreligious peace not only in the international arena but also within the states involved. It should be noted that Russia plays an important role as an integrator. Strengthening educational relationships is important and a key tool for building long-term integration.

Thus, Eurasianism emphasizes polycentrism, national cultures and Eurasia as a distinct geographic and cultural entity with Russia playing an integrating role. It views Russia as a unique and distinct part of the world, combining both European and Asian cultural elements.

### **The case of Kazakhstan**

Eurasianism developed in Kazakhstan as a school of thought, rhetoric and political ideology. It found its literary embodiment in the works of Olzhas Suleimenov. In his writings and speeches, Suleimenov has almost always stressed the common past of post-Soviet states and the importance of their shared memory and culture. In one of his interviews, Suleimenov said: “I already wrote in the early 90s that the collapse of the Soviet Union is historically justified only in one case: if it helps to form the Eurasian Confederation of States throughout our supercontinent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific (from West to East) and from the Arctic to the Indian (from North to South). The current European and tomorrow’s Eurasian unions will be the basic elements of this complex future structure. The creation of such a system is inevitable. Perhaps it has already happened in the first half of the 21st century. If the political elite consciousness of the EU and the Eurasian Union is tuned to this strategic idea, prepared by the whole history of meetings and departures of nations, the course of global integration processes will naturally accelerate” ([Kosenov, 2014](#)).

The political and economic reflections of Eurasianism can be found in the speeches of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev. This version of Eurasianism differs from the Russian versions. Despite the fact that Russian Eurasianism is frequently perceived as a philosophy, ideology or even a scientific school, Nazarbayev claims that it actually refers to a system of foreign policy, thoughts about foreign economies and goals for international cooperation. For Kazakhstan, Eurasianism implies unconditional openness to the world. It is not hostile to modernization. On the contrary, it is compatible with the modernization policy of the economy, the state apparatus and society being carried out in Kazakhstan over the past 30 years (ed. [Vinokourova, 2017](#)).

On March 29, 1994, the concept for the Eurasian Union, which later evolved into the EAEU, was first presented. Speaking at a lecture at Moscow State University, the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, noted: “The need has arisen to transition to a higher level of relations between our countries based on a new intergovernmental union formed on the principles of voluntariness and equality. Such a union could be the Eurasian Union” ([Nazarbayev, 2012](#)). In the same year, while speaking in London, the President stated the need for the reform of the “Commonwealth of Independent States,” which would ensure the creation of a belt of stability and security in the region, increase the predictability of political evolution and control the post-Soviet space. In our view, it is advisable to build a real, functioning union of states based on “core” countries with the possible name of the Euro-Asian Union. “Other states could join its composition upon the fulfillment of certain conditions: cessation of military actions, strict compliance with



inter-state agreements, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, renunciation of any forms of economic pressure, etc. ([khabar.kz, 2021](#))”

Nazarbayev’s model of Eurasianism was based on the following principles:

- (1) Economic pragmatism. It was suggested to base integration primarily on economic pragmatism, while acknowledging the significance of cultural and civilizational components. This is because economic interests, not abstract geopolitical notions and slogans, are what drive integration processes.
- (2) Voluntary integration. Each state and society should independently come to the understanding that in a globalizing world, it makes no sense to continually indulge in one’s own uniqueness and being confident within one’s own boundaries. Such understanding should be based on the interests of the people and the country.
- (3) Equality, respect for one another’s sovereignty, non-interference in one another’s internal affairs and immovable state borders.
- (4) Consensus when making decisions by the supranational bodies of the Eurasian Union, taking into account the interests of each member country.
- (5) Political sovereignty, equality of integration partners.
- (6) The clarity and reality of the Eurasian Union’s supranational bodies’ powers (ed. [Osadcheh, 2018](#)).

Thus, while emphasizing the importance of having a common idea, Nazarbayev also highlighted the principle of respecting one another’s consciousness and identity.

The former president can be called one of the founders of pragmatic Eurasianism. It is based on an understanding of integration not as a goal, but as a tool for solving the pressing economic problems of the countries involved, the main one being modernization of the economy. Pragmatic Eurasianism combines the following elements: the treatment of integration as a means rather than an end; the emphasis on “bottom-up integration”; the multiplicity of states as locomotives of integration; the primacy of economic integration; the principle of subsidiarity; socio-cultural integration; open regionalism (ed. [Osadcheh, 2018](#)). These points are connected to such criteria as the existence of a common idea, shared memory and culture. Otherwise, it is impossible to imagine “bottom-up integration” or socio-cultural integration. Pragmatic Eurasianism is based on the ideology of openness to the world: the regional integration block does not enclose itself and recognizes the need for integration with partners both in the West and in the East. Nazarbayev highlighted this in his speech of 1994: “The establishment of national sovereignty and the integration of the CIS countries are currently the two tendencies that will define how the post-Soviet space develops. That is natural. The only way to survive in an environment of quick scientific and technological development as well as a harsh struggle for markets is through unionization. Look at how the Western European countries with long-standing sovereignty are coming together. They are fully aware of how the world market is polarizing sharply” ([Nazarbayev, 2012](#)).

In regards to Eurasian integration, Nazarbayev showed its common idea by referring to it as the single Eurasian concept: “Three pillars of the Eurasian idea, practically realized through the initiative of Kazakhstan: The Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). And these are three different practical expressions of one inexpressible center, the single Eurasian idea. Astana could be the spiritual capital, the heart of Eurasia. Today, in Kazakhstan, the main conditions have been created for the free development of a market economy. The results of the reforms implemented are obvious. The Kazakh economy has become one of the fastest growing in the world” ([Nazarbayev, 2006](#)).

The question of why Kazakhstan was one of the first countries in the post-Soviet region to promote the ideas of Eurasianism emerges when discussing the role of Kazakhstan and Nazarbayev in Eurasian integration initiatives. It is important to underline that the Republic of Kazakhstan started developing a strategy for maintaining international and interreligious peace nearly as soon as it gained independence, which is close to the essence of Eurasianism. The presence of different ethnic groups in Kazakhstan has long created a unique experience of peace and good neighborliness. Thus, the ideas of Eurasianism were tested in practice in a separate part of Eurasia. According to Nazarbayev, Eurasianism is a knowledge base that forms the cornerstone of Eurasia's integration processes. The reasons for becoming such an ideological base are the existence of shared memory, common culture and similar consciousness among the people living in the region. He emphasizes that "it is impossible to simply dismiss the fact that throughout history a special civilization type has developed in our common territory, marked by similarity of spirituality, education, mentality and experience. Our reading of Eurasia eliminates conjunctural geopolitical fluctuations and takes into account the deep logic of history. We proceed from the cultural and historical proximity of our peoples" (Nazarbayev, 2000). Thus, at the same time, the importance of both the identity of the peoples of Eurasia and the collective consciousness of being part of a common civilization are emphasized. The relevance of international integration in the field of education was also reflected in the Eurasian project of Nursultan Nazarbayev. At the International Eurasian Integration Forum in Astana in 2004, the President very clearly expressed his vision for the development of the concepts of Eurasianism and the role of the scientific community. "The countries of the Eurasian space have a huge aggregate potential, which we should use to the full. Every effort should be made by the scientific community to define the future strategy, its stages, modern mechanisms and tools for the implementation of our common idea. The scientific world has an important role to play here" (Abdraimov, 2023). For many years, Nazarbayev fostered the concepts of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan. He understood the importance of both a developing economy and a growing general culture. He supported the creation and operation of the following cultural and educational institutions: the Eurasian National University, named after L.N. Gumilyov; the Eurasian Media Forum and the Eurasian Academy of Television and Radio.

It can be seen that Eurasianism is a political and economic concept that developed in Kazakhstan as a response to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It emphasizes the need for a confederation of states across the Eurasian continent.

### The case of Turkey

The term "Eurasia" in the political and ideological discourse of modern Turkey has a more politicized meaning than a scientific definition. Some politologists and researchers consider Eurasia as a region primarily inhabited by Turkic peoples, including Turkey, the Balkans, and parts of the Caucasus, the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and northern Afghanistan (Safrastyan, 2006). So the continent is seen from the perspective of a common identity. Similar approaches became widespread among various circles of the Turkish elite, especially in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, Turkey had an academic notion of Eurasianism. One of the first followers of this idea in Turkey was the poet and journalist Attila İlhan. He wrote that Turkey and Russia are the most similar to each other, compared to, for example, Turkey and Saudi Arabia (as suggested by Middle Eastern studies) or Russia and Slovenia (as suggested by post-communist studies). Even in the midst of the Cold War, İlhan wrote about the Turkish–Russian alliance and is credited with popularizing the notion of a historically entrenched Russian–Turkish partnership that was predestined by geopolitics and nature. He argued that the difference between the elite and the masses in Western countries is that the elite is simply better off materially than the masses but shares the same culture. On the other hand, there is a distinction between the elite and the masses in Russia



and Turkey, with the elite belonging to a separate civilization and having a Western culture than the Asian/Eurasian culture of the masses ([Akturk, 2004](#)). This has been seen as an issue by İlhan, as he underlined the importance of sharing culture and consciousness among people of all classes of Eurasia. According to İlhan, since intellectuals play a key role in Russia and Turkey, the most important problems in these countries are a result of the cultural alienation of the elites from the masses. The solution proposed by İlhan is the same in both cases: the elites should reject foreign culture and formulate their own “national cultural synthesis” within a contemporary framework ([Akturk, 2004](#)).

There are different Eurasian discourses in Turkey nowadays. One of the popular discourses has become the Western-oriented discourse. Reflecting primarily a Europeanized view of Turkey’s traditional foreign policy line, this version considers Turkey’s foreign policy towards Eurasia as an integral part of its relations with Western countries and institutions. Therefore, this Western-oriented discourse views the expansion of Turkish influence in the Eurasian region as an important factor that can attract Western support for Turkey’s aim to join the European Union and other Western institutions. In other words, this Eurasian discourse represents the secular modernist vision of political elites who sought to export the Turkish model of Europeanization to non-European parts of the world, especially in Eurasia and the Middle East ([Tanrısever, 2018](#)). Due to the crisis in the process of Turkey’s accession to the EU since the early 2010s, this version of Turkish Eurasianism has lost its relevance.

An important impetus in the development of Eurasian ideas in Turkey was the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the results of the dissolution of the USSR was the political independence of the five Turkic republics. Their appearance gave rise to expectations in Turkey that all these Turkic-speaking states would build a union of Turkic states in which Turkey would play the role of “big brother.” Turkey’s President Turgut Özal wanted to take advantage of this opportunity. According to him, this was a historic opportunity to become a regional power. Turkey was presented as a model for Turkic-speaking states to protect these newly independent republics from the influence of Russia and Iran. Özal stated that it is necessary that the Turkic-speaking states participate in the creation of the political structure of the union; he said that this should be within the framework of integration and development. His Turkism was based on cultural and economic unification rather than solely on ethnic criteria. Overall, Özal’s foreign policy thinking can be defined according to Eurasianism. He sought to improve relations between neighboring states regardless of religion, sects, races, etc. He believed that this was the only way to make Turkey a valuable asset to the Western world.

In 1995, the leader of the Democratic Left Party (DLP), Bülent Ecevit, insisted on a “regionally-oriented foreign policy.” He believed that using European and Asian elements would establish the integrity of countries in the Eurasian super-region led by Turkey. He even used the term “Eurasianization” (*Avrupalasma* in Turkish) to describe the process of integration between Europe and Asia. According to him, Turkey occupied a central place in this process ([Safrastyan, 2006](#)). In 1998, the Turkish Minister of Defense, Hüseyin Kâmi Türk, emphasized the following while speaking at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: “Turkey not only faces the West but also maintains traditional ties with the Islamic world. It takes its roots from Central Asia, the Middle East, Anatolia and Europe. In short, Turkey is a Eurasian country” ([Safrastyan, 2006](#)). Former Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem viewed Turkey as a strategic center of Eurasia because it has shared history, a common state and a common fate over the centuries with neighboring countries. From his perspective, it is precisely this feature that gives Turkey an advantage, providing peace, stability and prosperity in Eurasia ([Cem, 2001](#)). The continuation of these ideas can be seen in the statements of former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. He believes that Turkey is a link that connects Europe and Asia, just as Russia was in the Eurasian worldview of the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, Turkey is destined to play a significant role in this region and not follow a passive foreign policy. Davutoğlu notes that strengthening political dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural interaction will be the main stages of

creating the Union. “It is necessary to move towards a new vision to restore the historical significance of the Eurasian region . . . If peace and prosperity do not reign in Eurasia, it is impossible to achieve peace and prosperity throughout the world . . . The Western and Eastern ends of Eurasia must be reconnected” ([Daily Today's Zaman, 2010](#)). Comparing with the previous examples, it can be noted that Davutoğlu added another important component to the concept of Turkish Eurasianism multiculturalism. From the aforementioned examples, it is clear that various politicians in Turkey during the 1990s underlined the role of shared culture, self-consciousness and the common idea that Turkey is the core and center of Eurasia.

There is also a pan-Turkic discourse on Eurasianism in Turkey. In it, Eurasia is viewed as a region primarily inhabited by Turkic peoples (i.e. Turkey, the North and South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Turkic regions of the Russian Federation, and northern Afghanistan). According to this discourse, Eurasia is destined to be under the rule of the Turks, as their control over the central parts of Eurasia could only lead to their dominance over Eurasia ([Landau, 1995](#)). The most remarkable and complete geopolitical concept underlying the Pan-Turkic version of Eurasianism was developed by Ramazan Özey (a professor at Marmara University). The main elements of Özey's concept can be summarized as follows: Anatolia is the “World Fortress” (*Dunya kalesi* in Turkish or *Hartland* in the classical sense), and the ruler-country in Anatolia, Turkey, possessing this acropolis has the ability to take control of the regions of the “Inner Circle.” According to the Turkish scholar, these are the Balkans and Eurasia. Thus, Özey legitimizes Turkey's rule over the Balkans and Eurasia, considering it a natural result of the geography of the country. Then he sees Turkey's rule in Eurasia not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve a greater result—world dominance ([Safraştıyan, 2006](#)). Pan-Turkist Eurasians view Russia as the main rival of Turkey in Eurasia and assert that the Turkic peoples of different countries have geographical and cultural advantages over Russians and Russia, which is considered a declining power in Eurasia. They therefore argue that Turkic peoples might implement their geopolitical ambitions in Eurasia by utilizing the potential for unification of Turkish ethnicity and culture ([Landau, 1995](#)).

However, there is a third direction: Kemalist Eurasianism. Kemalists, social democrats and some socialist intellectuals and political figures, such as supporters of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and the Workers' Party (İP), have defined the Western, and particularly pro-American, policy of the Turkish government as the main reason for the decline of Kemalism and, consequently, the secular and social Turkish national state. Their position found support among the National Association of Producers and Entrepreneurs as well as representatives of the Turkish military elite ([Perinçek and Akçali, 2009](#)). Representatives of Kemalist Eurasianism, Doğu Perinçek and Mehmet Perinçek, argue that cooperation between Turkey and Russia, as the main Eurasian states, could weaken “Western imperialism” and create an international multipolar system. According to Doğu Perinçek, Eurasianism could also allow Turkey to conduct a more independent foreign policy ([Perinçek, 1996](#)). It should be noted that Perinçek and Dugin were in close relations and Perinçek drew many of his ideas from Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism. At Perinçek's invitation, Dugin frequently visited Turkey, and his books were translated into Turkish in large numbers. The former Minister of Culture, Namık Kemal Zeybek, also spoke of cooperation with Russia. He identified two different institutes in relation to the Eurasian Union. The first type of union will be the Eurasian Union, which will include all Turkic states, including Tajikistan. This should be based on Turkish identity. The second will be the Eurasian partnership, and in this respect, Russia should be an ally within this partnership. Furthermore, this partnership should reach and cover the most remote parts of Asia. Similarly, politician Özcan Yeniceri makes a statement that the concept of Eurasia should cover all nations, cultures and religions in the region and create opportunities for cooperation among these cultures, nations, and religions. This depends on the development of relations between Turkey and Russia ([Tüfekçi, 2016](#)). In the given examples, it is easy to distinguish the accents of Turkish politicians and scientists on the importance of the role

of the common idea, consciousness, memory and culture in the creation of a common Eurasia for the Turkic peoples.

The rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule in Turkey in the 2000s added political and ideological elements to the primarily economic interest in the post-Soviet space. However, the dominant strategy was a new foreign policy strategy with nostalgia for the imperial past and memories of the "Ottoman geopolitical space." The development of the Eurasian concept in Turkey during this period included the rapprochement with Russia and the strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation, which were important components (Shlikov, 2017).

It should be noted that the attitude towards Eurasianism in general and Russian Eurasianism in particular in academic circles in Turkey is not unambiguous. Turkish researcher, Tanrısever Oktay, believes that both Turkish and Russian discourses on Eurasianism have several common features. Essentially, they both consider Eurasianism an ideology aimed at unifying and expanding the opportunities of Eurasian peoples by developing a common cultural identity and geopolitical strategy to justify both Russian and Turkish political ambitions. The basis for these ambitions is the fact that some Eurasian nations in the post-Soviet or post-Ottoman space are willing to accept Russia or Turkey as the "original Eurasian elder brother" in order to unite and solve their regional problems (Tanrısever, 2018). However, not all Turkish researchers unambiguously perceive Russian Eurasianism. For example, Okan Ancak writes that if Russian Eurasianism continues to develop as a Russian-centered movement, Eurasian thought and movement will inevitably lose their potential for integration in Eurasia. He emphasizes that Russia's preference for policies that encourage the economic, political and cultural development of Eurasian states rather than the restoration of Russian hegemony within Neo-Eurasianism will contribute to a positive course of relations between Turkey and Russia. This will be in the interests of both Turkey and Russia in the short and long term (Ancak, 2020). Another Turkish scholar, Ozgur Tufekci, compares Russian and Turkish Eurasianism, saying that both Turkey and the Russian Federation are post-imperial states. In this sense, while Russian Eurasianists claim to return at least all the territories of the Soviet Union, Turkish Eurasians do not have claims on all the territories of the Ottoman Empire (Tufekci, 2016). Another intellectual, Ali Külebi, asserts that before creating a union, Turkey should integrate with Azerbaijan. Then this union can become a center of attraction for Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Persians and Turkmen. To achieve this goal, Külebi suggests that Turkey should develop the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which was created in 1985 by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan (Tufekci, 2016).

Hereby, in the political and ideological discourse of modern Turkey, the term "Eurasia" has a politicized meaning and refers to a region primarily inhabited by Turkic peoples, including Turkey and its neighbors. In Turkey, there are various debates surrounding Eurasianism, which center on the issue of Turkey's role and significance in the region, and various perspectives on the relations between Russia and Turkey.

## Conclusion

How is the Eurasianism used in integration projects of Russia, Turkey and Kazakhstan? The task of the article is to identify the manifestations of the concepts of Eurasianism and their importance in the projects of regional integration of these countries.

Summing up all the examples given above, it can be concluded that the ideas of Eurasianism reflects in the integration processes of the post-Soviet space. The reflection of many individual thoughts of classical Eurasians and Neo-Eurasians can be seen in the statements of various ministers and leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey. The initiatives of these countries in creating integration projects also show the influence of the Eurasian concept. However, the research has also shown that Eurasianism is considered and explained in various ways. It means that different countries have their own interpretations of the ideas put forth by the classical eurasianists at the beginning of the 20th century. These

interpretations have developed in many different ways, and at some point, they evolved from only philosophical and ideological concepts and started to be used in political discourses. The reasons for such evolution can be seen in some factors of Eurasianism that advocate for respect for cultural and civilizational diversity among nations, their equality within the union, and shared development opportunities and, in parallel, highlight the role of common ideas, identity, consciousness, memory and culture. Such factors are undoubtedly important for the success of integration projects. Thus, the ideas of Eurasianism are expressed in the EAEU. But these ideas have not found full reflection there. Different views on the concept are mainly of a general philosophical nature, whereas the former president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has tried to level it up into pragmatic Eurasianism. This approach has become one of the results of using Eurasianism in politics.

This approach has become one of the results of using Eurasianism in politics. It is at different stages of development in different countries. For example, while Dugin constantly spoke of a “Eurasian empire” led by Russia, for Turkish nationalists, Eurasianism represented an anti-Western project, the main goal of which was to protect the Turkish “national state.” In comparison to Russian Eurasianism, Turkish Eurasianism lacks historical, philosophical and theoretical foundations. And, of course, each of the three mentioned countries describes itself as the center and core actor of Eurasia, which decreases the possibility of cooperation between them in a future union.

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