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Russia in the process of constructing regional structures in Southeast Asia

Abstract. The article aims to show the integration processes in Southeast Asia, with regard to the participation of Russia, and to determine the reason why Russia takes part in them. Based on the demonstration of the international process, two theses have been proven: (1) The project of establishing a Greater Eurasia with the participation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and ASEAN is a grandiose and strategic goal for Russia. The project is supposed to recall the traditional policy conducted by Russia, consisting of it playing the role of a bridge between Asia and Europe drawing China's attention to this alternative proposal to the Chinese concept of the Belt and Road Initiative. (2) Russia is a player in the geopolitical game in Southeast Asia, even though it is perceived as the closest ally of China. Under the circumstances, where the relations with the EU have been destabilised, it is in the interest of Russia to further the integration and stabilisation of the region with its more active participation. Russia's more active participation in regional integration is hampered by its low level of economic cooperation with countries in the region and its image: the activities of Russia are still perceived through the prism of the actions and interests of China, its strategic ally both on a regional as well as global scale.

Keywords: international relations, regionalism, Russia, the region of Southeast Asia, ASEAN.

Theoretical assumptions and research hypotheses

The region of Southeast Asia constitutes an attractive cooperation partner for numerous states and international organisations. It continuously expands the institutional framework of the aforementioned cooperation and improves its forms. In the late 20th century the following trends overlapped: the expansion of ASEAN, the diversification of external partners and the enhancement of the prestige of the organisation at the level of the whole Asia-Pacific region. In the 21st century, the principles of ASEAN centrality have been reinforced with multilateral initiatives aimed at enhancing security and maintaining peace and regional safety. The norms governing regional cooperation are based on the “ASEAN way” which means a commitment to the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs, and consensus. ASEAN has institutionalised the role of great powers in the region, but also that the voice of small states is heard in managing regional security (Goh, 2011: 373).

This enabled the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, the East Asia Summits (EAS) in 2005, as well as the ASEAN Defence Ministers and 8 Dialogue Partners Meetings (ADMM-Plus) in 2010, which many experts construe in terms of creating a new security architecture.

In 2012 a regional all-embracing economic partnership and the ASEAN Free Trade Area were launched with the most significant ASEAN partners: China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. As a result of these discussions, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was formed. The agreement (India did not ultimately sign it) was reached at the conclusion of the 37th Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit, held in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi in 2020. Furthermore, trans-regional talks with the European Union are held indicating that ASEAN is becoming a global player.

The aforementioned mechanisms of cooperation ensue from the “ASEAN way”: where the ARF and the Defence Ministers Meetings concern the sphere of security; ASEAN+3 and RCEP are devoted to developing international economic cooperation; whilst the EAS is focused on expanding the areas of cooperation, going beyond ASEAN+3.

All these activities point to new opportunities opening up for ASEAN in the 21st century. ASEAN plays the role of the leader as regards regional processes, including in the context of establishing relations between ASEAN and the dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, European Union, Korea, Russia, and the United States).

Naturally, two out of these partners should be considered as the dominant players: the USA and China. Others, to a lesser or greater extent, see their pursuits in the context of securing the interests of these two major actors. Due to limitations, particularly of an economic nature, Russia cannot counterbalance

the impact of the aforementioned superpowers. It seems appropriate though to depict its role by means of the term *hedging*. It is applicable to minor and medium (regional) powers and consists in seeking balance by employing other tools such as multiplying interests, avoiding direct pressure and employing the tactic of “engage yourself and then refrain”. As K. Cheng-Chwee writes: hedging helps to answer the question: how to act in order to maximize benefits and at the same time protect against unwanted threats from stronger powers! (Cheng-Chwee, 2008). Hedging is a strategy of positioning oneself in the middle and thus refraining from taking one particular side. It is a combination of containment and engagement (Korolev). In the case of Russia and its role in the process of forming and expanding the scope of regional structures, the hedging strategy most adequately describes the way in which its objectives are achieved. Reinforcing its position in the region requires remarkable diligence and particularly fine diplomacy on the part of Russia, since it operates on exceptionally difficult grounds.

The research perspective which will be adopted for the purpose of analysing the subject is a realist outlook (neoclassical realism) emphasising the value of securing the state interest and adhering to the traditional principles of establishing relations between entities based on sovereignty, independence and the concept of the balance of powers. Neoclassical realism assumes that the structure of the international system in the context of domestic factors is an independent variable, whereas the state’s foreign policy constitutes a dependent variable; and also that maximising influence is the aim of states and the manner in which it can be achieved consists of preserving the *status quo*. The research method which corresponds to the assumptions adopted for the purpose of the analysis is process tracing (Czaputowicz, 2014).

The basic theses advanced in the paper are reflected in the following statements:

1) The project of establishing Greater Eurasia with the participation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and ASEAN is a grandiose and strategic goal of Russia. It should not be perceived only in terms of propaganda. The project is supposed to recall the traditional policy conducted by Russia: consisting of it playing the role of a bridge between Asia and Europe and to draw China’s attention to this alternative proposal to the Chinese concept of the Belt and Road Initiative.

2) Russia is a player in the geopolitical game in Southeast Asia even though it is perceived as the closest ally of China. Under the circumstances where relations with the EU have been destabilised, it is in the interest of Russia to further the integration and stabilisation of the region with its more active participation.

A note: it is important to stress that the following names: Greater Eurasia and the Greater Eurasian Partnership are used interchangeably.

The basics of the Russian policy in the region of East Asia

The increase in the economic significance of East Asia was one of the major reasons why Russia's political activity became more intensified in this part of the world in the first decade of the 21st century. This intensification consisted of engaging itself and taking advantage of the benefits of the economic growth ensuing from forming solid regional structures, which in the case of Russia particularly refers to a capital injection and giving impetus to the development of Siberia and the Russian Far East.

This Russian involvement in Asia is often compared to the United States resuming by its active policy in this region and thus the scheme of "Russia's pivot to Asia, Eastern Pivot" is a clear reference to the American strategy announced by President Barack Obama in 2012 called "pivot to Asia". The turning towards Asia by President Vladimir Putin highlights the erstwhile presence of Russia in this region, which also ensued from Russian Cold War traditions (its involvement in the Indochina War, the situation in Korea, the establishment of the security system in Asia).

The goal of Russia is not merely to refocus its relations with the USA and Western Europe (as well as with its traditional allies: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Belarus and the countries which belong to the Commonwealth of Independent States), but it was clearly stressed, both in practical actions and in diplomatic rhetoric, that without cooperation with the region of Asia and Pacific, Russia's development and security is not possible.

It is important to stress that the aforementioned pivot was not sudden and impulsive. It was in the period of the Cold War when Mikhail Gorbachev, who was paying a visit to Beijing while the Tiananmen Square event was taking place, endeavoured to improve Russia's relations with the major neighbour – China. Deng Xiaoping asserted that the bygone conflicts are absolutely no longer of importance (Fenby, 2009: 803). The process of the normalization of mutual relations thus began and a new non-ideological role for Russia emerged. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Russian Federation, the most often recalled concept is the one put forward by Yevgeny Primakov, who became Prime Minister in August 1998. Bearing in mind "the maintenance of balance" in foreign policy, Primakov devoted more attention to the level of relations with the East. In 1996, when he held the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Primakov put emphasis on the following priorities for Russia in the Far East:

- to develop multilateral and partnership-based relations with the states of the region;
- to ensure stability and security on Russian borders;
- to create favourable conditions for the economic reforms in Russia, including the development of the Far East (Davydov, 1998: 53–69).

The concept of “Russia’s pivot to Asia” was enshrined in the policy papers of Russian diplomacy, among others in Vladimir Putin’s decree of 7 May 2012 “On Measures to Implement Russian Federation Foreign Policy” and the amendment to the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” of 15 February 2013 (Soveshchaniye s chlenami Soveta Bezopasnosti).

The organisations such as EAS and ASEAN, as well as the states in the case of which cooperation with Russia is of particular importance, were mentioned in the said decree. It posited

to reinforce equal trust and partnership and strategic cooperation with the People’s Republic of China; strategic partnership with India; as well as with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; and to develop mutually convenient cooperation with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand and other key states of the Asia-Pacific region (Podpisan ukaz po realizatsii vneshne politicheskogo kursa).

It was also stated in the decree that Russia would take actions aimed

at working out a new security architecture and regional cooperation based on collective grounds not related to blocks of countries and founded on the principles of equal and indivisible security (Podpisan ukaz po realizatsii vneshne politicheskogo kursa).

The situation changed after the annexation of Crimea, the conflict which broke out in eastern Ukraine and the war in Syria. The sanctions and political isolation additionally enhanced the Asian direction in the activities undertaken by Russia, and Russia no longer had the possibility of diversifying its partners. However, it would be an unjustified oversimplification to assume that the reinforcement of the Asian vector in Russian policy is connected solely with the imposed sanctions.

Taking into consideration the most significant powers in the region: India, Japan, China and the USA, the most striking progress has been made by Russia as regards its relations with China, although the dialogue has not been easy. Russia and China take common or similar positions on numerous issues: the establishment of the multipolar world; refraining from interference in internal affairs; maintaining stability in Central Asia; and their response to the American-Japanese alliance. One of the significant elements of the increasing convergence of interests is the sale of Russian weapons to China. Both countries treat the strategic partnership as a possibility of furthering their own national interests and a chance to exert an influence on third countries, especially the USA. Russian scientists and experts on Asian affairs devote considerable attention to rapprochement with China. They perceive both numerous positive aspects as well as potential threats. It is worth quoting the opinion of professor A.W. Lukin in this regard who emphasises that Russia and China sustain convergent standpoints as regards many conflicts, e.g. in Syria, Iran and Libya. Russia and China are economic partners. China is needed

with regard to the development of Siberia, and the Russian Far East. They conduct cooperation in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation serves that purpose. Both countries refute being lectured by the West (Lukin, 2018: 296–297).

China has become the most prominent partner in this new situation (by some this situation is spitefully referred to as “Russia’s pivot to China”), however, most analysts point to the fact that the redirecting of the vector of cooperation to China results in the perpetuating of the technological retardation in Russia. Relying on the traditional realist ways of expounding the international order, it may tentatively be stated that presently too many external factors determine the shape of Russian policy and therefore Russia finds it difficult to fully achieve its aspirations and actually accepts it’s entering the Chinese sphere of influence. There exist justified fears that sooner or later Beijing will start dictating its conditions (Braterskiy, Suslov, 2014: 36–38, 41). It is worth taking into account yet another factor. China in its pursuance of the goal of making East Asia its sphere of influence is not likely to foster the active presence of Russia and the reinforcement of its authority in this area. Russia fears the situation in which it is excluded from Chinese global projects and, at the same time, does not want to share its influence where it still prevails (Sinienko, 2016: 128). Therefore the hedging strategy highlighted in the initial part of this paper in the best manner reflects the activities undertaken by Russia.

In August 2015 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov described relations with China as the best ever, however, he noticed that this does not translate into an increase in investment and the development of the Russian Far East and Siberia (Sinienko, 2016: 126–127).

Russia’s potential in comparison to China, Japan and the USA, as well as its influence in the region, are limited. However, the idea of multilateralism comes close to the vision of establishing international order in most Asian countries. Therefore, Russia undertakes attempts aimed at maintaining or reinforcing its relations with Asian allies.

Russia and its integration in the region of Southeast Asia

The region of Northeast Asia is given a definite priority by Russia, which is proven by the founding in June 2001 of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and tight cooperation with China. Nevertheless, Southeast Asia is also relevant for a few reasons:

1) It has well-established consultation and cooperation platforms with the most significant powers, from the point of view of Russia: the People’s Republic of China, Korea, Japan (that is Northeast Asia), India and the USA (Ignatov, 2012: 13–17).

2) It poses an opportunity for getting involved in numerous integration initiatives such as the EAS, the ARF, ASEM, APEC.

3) The region is a crucial partner in terms of security, including arms trade. It is connected with the intense modernisation processes of the army, which are underway.

4) In the era of totalitarianism the region may become a battle arena in connection with numerous dormant and open conflicts between Japan and China over the Senkaku Island; Japan and Korea regarding the Dokdo islands in the South China Sea; and in the Korean Peninsula concerning nuclear conflicts. They are all conceivably in Russia's neighbourhood.

5) It is through that region that Russia's trade routes and the deliveries of goods to its eastern borders pass, which enhances the significance of the underinvested Russian Far East.

6) It offers the possibility of implementing the Eurasian concept of Russia.

The most important formation which spurs integration in the region is ASEAN which was established in 1967. The basic feature of the system of integration in East Asia is the fact that ASEAN always lies at the heart of it. ASEAN centrality facilitates the functioning of various formats of dialogue established on the initiative of ASEAN with third countries and the EU, as well as the ARF, Defence Ministers Meetings, the EAS and ASEM. ASEAN centrality also means the possibility to maintain a security architecture based on protecting one's own interests and enhancing stability.

In 1994 a consultative partnership was set up between ASEAN and Russia. Since July 1996 Russia has been a fully-fledged dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the ARF. The Russia-ASEAN Business Council has been operating since 1998. In June 1997 the ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee (ARJCC) was founded. The Committee initiates the most favourable forms of cooperation between the parties. It is on its initiative that the financial fund allocated to cooperation was established in 2007, functioning under the following name: the Russian Federation Dialogue Partnership Financial Fund (RFDPPF); as well as the Joint Planning and Management Committee (JPMC) and other dialogue mechanisms. In November 2004 Russia became a party to the Treaty on Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and expressed its support for the efforts undertaken by ASEAN to create within its borders a nuclear-weapon-free zone and to reinforce regional and global security (SEANWFZ). When the ASEAN Charter was signed, which entered into force in January 2009, Russia started to accredit ambassadors to ASEAN. In Russia, the ASEAN Committee was set up which assembles the ambassadors of the Association residing in Moscow. The ASEAN Centre was founded at the MGIMO University on 15 June 2010, which provides expertise for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, there exists the Center for the Study of Vietnam and ASEAN which operates within the framework of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Network of ASEAN-Russia Think Tanks (NARTT) was also established (Concept Paper on Proposed Network of ASEAN-Russia Think-Tanks).

Russia is a member of the most significant regional institutions: the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); it participates in the dialogue between Europe and Asia, conducted within the framework of ASEM; it has been a fully-fledged member of the East Asia Summits (EAS) since 2010. According to Rodolfo Severino:

it is useful to keep in mind that, as the Russians have emphasized, more important than formal participation in the EAS is the substance of Russian integration with East Asia (Severino, 2007: 1).

The invitation of Russia to ADMM-Plus may be proof of this opinion. The ADMM-Plus is a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States, to strengthen security and defence cooperation in the region. The Inaugural ADMM-Plus was convened in Ha Noi, on 12 October 2010 (About the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus).

Both ASEAN and Russia are interested in tightening and reinforcing mutual cooperation. This may be construed from the declarations made by both parties. In order to make it happen, it is necessary to eliminate particular negative trends which hamper said cooperation. The economic nature of integration constitutes its basis. Meanwhile, Russia evidently lags behind other dialogue partners, which is evidenced by the following listing.

Table 1. The percentage share in commodity trade and in FDI inflows accounted for by the states in dialogue with ASEAN in 2015, 2017 and 2018

Countries	Trade			FDI		
	2015	2017	2018	2015	2017	2018
Australia and New Zealand	2.6	2.7	2.7	1.0	1.5	1.0
Canada	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.3
China	15.2	17.1	17.2	6.8	8.4	6.6
EU	10.0	10.1	10.2	16.7	18.3	14.2
India	2.6	2.9	2.9	1.3	1.3	1.1
Japan	10.5	8.5	8.2	12.1	9.9	13.7
Republik of Korea	5.4	6.0	5.7	4.4	3.7	4.2
Russia	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
USA	9.4	9.1	9.3	11.3	3.2	5.2
Other countries	43.2	42.5	42.5	45.7	52.7	53.7

Sources: Compilation based on: ASEAN statistics: <http://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AEC-Chartbook-2016-1.pdf>, p. 23 (accessed 25.02.2018); http://asean.org/storage/2015/09/Table-26_oct2016.pdf (accessed 25.02.2018); <https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/asyb-2018.pdf>, pp. 64, 142 (accessed 23.09.2019); https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ASYB_2019.pdf (accessed 12.03.2020).

Despite numerous declarations pledging an increase in turnover, trade is continuously scarce. Only Canada has a comparable trade value. All the other ASEAN+ countries definitely display a higher rate of commodity trade. The Russian level of investment in ASEAN countries is close to nil. The trade structure is obsolete and does not change and the Russian exports to ASEAN countries are limited and monotonous. Metallurgical products, chemical products, paper and cellulose constitute the majority of the exported commodities. The share accounted for by highly processed products such as machines and appliances does not grow. Russia traditionally buys rubber, latex, coconut oil, everyday consumer goods and household electronics from ASEAN countries.

There is a possibility, which is slowly materializing, of diversifying the forms of cooperation, e.g. by attracting the ASEAN capital to the service sector, industry, petroleum refining, the construction industry and to the implementation of the development programmes of Siberia and the Russian Far East (Voronin, 2010: 316).

For ASEAN, Russia plays an important role in strengthening ties within the Association, including relations with superpowers. As Russian experts note, Russia's strategy is vague and often developed on an *ad hoc* basis rather than in a long-term manner. Engaging the Russian Far East in that cooperation opens a whole new dimension and the RFE may become a member of the integration structures. Meanwhile, up till now the capital of the states in the Asia-Pacific Region has been predominantly allocated to those branches in the case of which such capital injections are not necessary, e.g. trade, restaurants and hotels. There are prospects for cooperation in the fields which require state-of-the-art technologies, including nuclear power, medicine, nanotechnology, and nanomineralogy; however, the implementation of these projects progresses at a very slow pace. In order to ensure that there is adequate personnel to put into practice regional cooperation in Vladivostok, a School of Regional and International Studies has been established at the Far Eastern Federal University, in the FEFU Institute of Oriental Studies. It is here where students from the ASEAN countries are supposed to study. Vladivostok has the necessary development facilities and has taken the initiative to mark its presence as a player in, or even an initiator of, regional integration processes. A new possibility of economic consultations is guaranteed by the Eastern Economic Forum, which has been held since 2015 in Vladivostok, in which ASEAN member states participate, as well as the representatives of companies based in this region.

ASEAN leaders point to the fact that it is impossible to apply the European model in the region of Asia-Pacific; in this regard, they fully agree with Russia. In the face of these challenges, ASEAN is trying to affect the global system and come up with its own solutions. The number of free trade agreements is growing. Southeast Asia is considered the obligatory target of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region and therefore the Regional Comprehensive Economic

Partnership, RCEP (Żołądkiewicz, 2016: 335–344), which encompasses major regional powers such as Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, has become an additional development instrument and may have an impact on boosting the economic situation. This direction of regionalism, so different from the strict rules imposed by the WTO, is becoming, as K. Żołądkiewicz puts it, “one of the key instruments of global trade liberalisation” (Żołądkiewicz, 2016: 335). The said direction matches the specific character of the Asian region and it could be added that it matches the specific character of Russia as well. However, Russia remains apart from the RCEP initiative and this fact, besides the Chinese concept of the Belt and Road Initiative, encourages Russia to work out its own strategy towards Southeast Asia.

Greater Eurasia

Not only the initiatives undertaken by ASEAN serve the purpose of “integrating the integrated”. In order to answer the question posed in the initial part of the paper which regards the way in which the dialogue states affect integration processes, one may come up with the Chinese concept of the Belt and Road, which so far has been the most advanced. In 2013, President Xi Jinping, in a speech made in Kazakhstan entitled “Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future”, endorsed the concept of the Silk Road Economic Belt (President Xi Jinping proposes to build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian countries). At the same time in 2013 strategic partnership relations were established between Russia and China. Russian scientists have come up with divergent opinions on the advantages for Russia ensuing from the Chinese concept. They have ranged from very positive or even enthusiastic ones: assuming that Russia may benefit from the implementation of the idea, especially with regard to expanding its infrastructure and the inflow of investment capital; to less favourable ones: suggesting that China intends to supersede the USSR in Central Asia (Timofeev, Lissovlik, Filippova, 2017: 62–77). Relying on realist assumptions, it is possible to formulate a conclusion that rivalry between Russia and China is inevitable; however, on the other hand, if we take into account the interests of the USA in the region it may be stated that cooperation with China may only jeopardize them and help Russia in integrating Eurasia.

Thus Russia has committed itself to the Chinese project regarding it as beneficial in terms of reinforcing Eurasia, but at the same time, it asserted that its interests should be more intensely emphasized and more effectively protected. In December 2015, in his address, Putin recommended consultations on a possible economic partnership with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), as well as with the countries

which are members of the Organisation. A few statements were issued in this regard which culminated in the Sochi Declaration which promoted the idea of free trade between ASEAN, the SCO and the EAEU (Sochi Declaration).

During the summit in Sochi, in May 2016, it was decided to upgrade the status of the relations with ASEAN. The parties signed a joint declaration which provided for the development of cooperation. As regards Russia, it entailed the implementation of the concept of creating the Eurasian macro-region, and as for ASEAN, it was connected with the fulfilment of the objectives adopted in the ASEAN Community Blueprint 2025 and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025. In the view of Russian strategists, the plans related to “integrating the integrated”, creating macro-regions, including the Belt and Road Initiative, Greater Eurasia or even the North-South International Transport Corridor remain in the interests of ASEAN. If this wide-ranging concept turns out to be successful, Russia could achieve its aspirations. It could engage the most concerned regions of Siberia and the Russian Far East, gain the support of new partners and thus correct its excessively pro-China course. It should be highlighted at this point that integration projects play an additional role. They not only assume the integration of Siberia and the Russian Far East with Asia, but an emphasis is also put on internal integration and reinvigorating the less developed regions of Asia. The projects which are devoted especially to the RFE prove that this region is treated on special terms (Diesen, 2017: 67).

Moscow is convinced that integration macro-projects are beneficial for all the involved parties, since only together are they able to constitute an asymmetric power and enhance their bargaining potential in relation to other countries. They can introduce collective privileges which will not apply to others, e.g. customs tariffs or barriers directed at “non-members”. They can create politically favourable conditions for development with regard to entering third countries’ markets (Diesen, 2017: 21). From this ensues the determination to convince potential Eurasian partners to these projects. Kazakhstan is the most eager supporter. President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced the concept of Eurasian integration as early as 1994 and it can be acknowledged that, after a few stages of talks, it has taken the form of the Eurasian Economic Union. It is the EAEU that is a starting point for the next stages of Eurasian integration.

Some experts, including the Russian ones, consider to be justified the fears that, despite the “strategic partnership”, China will not want to help Russia to become a fully-fledged participant of the integration process in the Asia-Pacific region. From the Chinese perspective, it is most significant that Russia is the supplier of strategic raw materials and it is not in the interest of China to facilitate the process of Russia conquering new markets. Russian experts express their scepticism about China’s support for the Eurasian project. In 2017 Chen Yu, a renowned researcher from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), in his comment on Eurasian integration, stated that

As regards the prospects of China's joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) I think that in reality, such a possibility does not exist. On the one hand, I believe that the EAEU is an integration mechanism for the countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States which earlier constituted the USSR. China does not belong to this category. At the same time, Russia plays the central role and even if China wanted to join the EAEU Russia would not agree to it. On the other hand, Beijing conducts a policy consisting of not joining any blocks of countries. Although the EAEU constitutes an economic block we can find political overtones in it as well (Chen Yu).

However, official assurances and actions taken by both parties point to the existence of a will for, and the necessity of, cooperation.

The common neighbourhood is perceived by Russia and China as a source of different resources and possibilities which mean labour force in the former case and space for investment expansion in the latter one. However, both countries have a vested interest in regional security and stable political regimes (Luzyanin).

A.V. Lukin, an expert in the field of East Asia, advises not to go to extremes. It is recommendable for Russia to, on the one hand, take into account the necessity to expand its range of allies, to diversify partners and not to limit itself only to cooperation with China, but to reinvigorate the relations with geopolitical friends such as Vietnam, India, Iran and even with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and, on the other hand, to conduct talks with China and to pursue the goal of putting into effect common integration initiatives.

The question remains as to what the project of Greater Eurasia is supposed to consist of. It is founded on the rapprochement of Russia and China yet on terms based to a larger extent on partnership. Other non-Western organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, ASEAN and even BRICS have enhanced their role in the said rapprochement. Thus, returning to the question concerning the role of the ASEAN dialogue partners in integrating the region, it can be asserted that Russia puts forward a proposal addressed to the Association to expand integration towards Greater Eurasia. For the time being Greater Eurasia is not an organization but an idea of partnership that comprises the interests of non-Western states. Two kinds of the convergence of interests are possible: the political one, connected with the response to the USA's hegemony and the struggle against the unipolar world, reinforcing the role of the UN and the Security Council and respecting selected cultural trends and differences. This is very close to the Bandung Declaration of 1955. Economic interests constitute the other kind, and encompass first and foremost the establishment of a free trade zone within the framework of the EAEU, resembling the one which exists between China and ASEAN. Creating new trade corridors, including the Maritime Silk Road connecting Eurasia with ASEAN, is an important undertaking not only

for Russia. It is also emphasized that Greater Eurasia will be constructed not in the old Europe but in the new Eurasia and pluralism will constitute the basis for integration (Lukin, 2018: 318–319).

After the USA had withdrawn from the TPP project, the chances of mega-blocks initiated by China and subsequently Russia enhanced. For Russia, this step was a favourable one as it perceived the TPP in terms of China's isolation and ensuing from it Russia's isolation. As, among others, Anton Tsvetov indicates, another stimulus is provided by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership initiative, ASEAN+6 FTA. China and ASEAN occupy a central position as regards the RCEP negotiations, whereas Russia remains on the margins. According to Anton Tsvetov, in order to enable Russia to be an active participant in the free trade talks, the process should be carried out through the Eurasian Economic Union, EAEU (Tsvetov). A. Tsvetov, however, points to the following problem – the idea of Greater Eurasia, which could stimulate integration processes, is relatively vague. He claims that it is a display of Russia's ability to engage in global projects. Unfortunately, Russia's economic ties with Southeast Asia are weak and apart from the traditional spheres such as crude oil, gas, heavy industry and nuclear technology, Russia does not have anything to offer.

Regardless of arising doubts and the scepticism of some potential participants, the Russian idea remains in the political game. In a joint communiqué issued after the last summit in Singapore ASEAN+Russia (14 November 2018) it was stated that there is a need for further consultations between ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and independently between ASEAN and the EAEU (Joint Statement of the 3rd ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit on Strategic Partnership). In April 2019, within the framework of the session of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, Nursultan Nazarbayev put forward a proposal of creating a new political reality which he called “Three D”, which means the need of establishing three dialogues. The first is supposed to concern the following great powers: the USA-the EU-China-Russia, the second is supposed to focus on the security issues in Asia and Europe and the third is to centre around the economic dialogue between the EAEU-the EU, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and ASEAN. The Fourth Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries, Parliaments in Nur Sultan was devoted to the leading subject i.e. Greater Eurasia (“*Wielka Euroazja*”. *Na drodze do wspólnej przyszłości*).

In conclusion

Southeast Asia is significant for Russia due to strategic as well as economic reasons, although the latter ones lag behind in comparison to other ASEAN dialogue partners. The activities of Russia are still perceived through the prism of the actions

and interests of China, its strategic ally both on a regional as well as global scale. Being aware of the international determinants of the Russian policy, many Russian experts, nevertheless, alert the decision-makers to the fact that by engaging itself only in the actions which are beneficial for China, Russia may lose its traditional allies in the region and maybe deprived of its major asset which is the balancing of the influence of the two most significant players: the USA and China.

The article cites evidence for the theses posited in the introduction. Russia participates in almost all integration structures in Southeast Asia and propounds the expansion of such structures by creating macro-regions. The project of establishing the Greater Eurasian Partnership, with the participation of the EAEU, the SCO and ASEAN, is a gigantic and strategic goal of Russia's and it should not be perceived only in terms of propaganda. The project is supposed to recall the traditional policy conducted by Russia, consisting of it playing the role of a bridge between Asia and Europe and to draw China's attention to this alternative proposal to the Chinese concept of the Belt and Road Initiative. However, it should not be considered that it in any way competes with the Chinese initiative, which ASEAN leaders do notice. Its role is rather to remind all the parties concerned that Russia is still in the game as regards Southeast Asia and to highlight the attractiveness of Russia's Asian part: Siberia and the Russian Far East. So far the programmes devoted to their development have not been effective in terms of expected results, although the targets concerning the enhancement of the role of the RFE in the integration processes are very ambitious.

The project of the Greater Eurasian Partnership is still at the concept stage. Russian experts point to numerous advantages of integrating the regions which are already integrated. ASEAN leaders are rather detached, although willing to discuss this issue. In the Singapore Declaration, a reference was made to the idea put forward in Sochi by President Putin, however, the concept was slightly diluted. The said diluting consisted of, among other things, separating the talks between ASEAN and the SCO and the EAEU and devoting two separate sections to them, thus ensuring the continuation of talks in this regard but not on such a scale as proposed by Russia.

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