THE POLITICS OF RUSSIAN POST-SOVIET IDENTITY: GEOPOLITICS, EURASIANISM, AND BEYOND

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the Russian post-Soviet foreign policy debate from the point of view of the emergence of two interrelated and mutually reinforcing discourses – discourse on ‘geopolitics’ and discourse on ‘Eurasianism’. Instead of equating ‘geopolitics’ with the post-1993 emphasis on great power competition for territorial control and dismissing ‘Eurasianism’ as strategically employed myth-making the way most of the existing literature does, this dissertation views the ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ constellation through the prism of the link between Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy and its evolving political identity. The discussion is placed within the poststructuralist theoretical framework that stresses identity-constitutive effects of foreign policy discourses and, more broadly, attempts to problematize the sedimentation of the social with the help of the political. In particular, different versions of the ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ constellation are analyzed from the point of view of how well they address the problem of European hegemony in the Russian political discourse and conceptualize post-Soviet Russia’s political subjectivity. The study thus draws a comparison between two discourses on ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ – the ‘pragmatic’ nationalist discourse advocated by Russian foreign-policy makers, and ‘civilizational’ geopolitical discourse critical of the official coupling of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’. Instead of reducing the ‘pragmatic’ nationalist discourse to instrumentalist foreign policy making, it is conceptualized in terms of its contribution to the process of Russian post-Soviet identity construction. Pragmatic nationalist ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ constellation is understood as an attempt to tackle European hegemony by negating relations that contradict Russia’s vision of itself and by grounding Russia’s great power status in geography. By contrast, ‘civilizational’ geopolitics is positioned as a discourse of critique and contestation whereby the Eurocentrism/Western-centrism of Russian collective self-identification is ‘destabilized’ through a reconceptualization of Russian post-Soviet foreign policy. This reconceptualization,
in turn, is achieved through a reappraisal of the conceptual legacies of European inter-war geopolitics and Russian post-revolutionary Eurasianism. Thus, the research question and, at the same time, the puzzle that informs this study is why – why did post-Soviet Russia witness a rise of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics that proceeded by way of revisiting both classical geopolitics and classical Eurasianism? In order to answer this question, the dissertation analyzes both traditions through the prism of the link between foreign policy and identity. The study concludes that while identity construction was employed instrumentally by the representatives of the classical geopolitical tradition, the classical Eurasian argument constantly oscillated between putting politics to the service of national cultural development or converting territoriality into identity. Consequently, the major contributions of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics – the geopolitical constructions ‘Continent Eurasia’ and ‘Island Russia’ – are assessed based on whether they succeed in conceptualizing Russia’s political subjectivity by way of forging a non-instrumentalist and non-essentialist link between Russia’s civilizational distinctiveness and its post-Soviet foreign policy.
Declaration

I hereby declare that no parts of this thesis have been submitted towards a degree at any other institution different from CEU. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis does not contain any unreferenced materials or ideas of other authors.

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Signature
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Chapter 1. Russian post-Soviet Discourse
on ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’:
Reconstructing the Link between Foreign Policy and Identity

My dissertation focuses on one particular feature of the Russian post-Soviet foreign policy debate – the emergence of two interrelated and mutually reinforcing discourses: discourse on Eurasianism and discourse on geopolitics. I believe that the discursive coupling of ‘Eurasianism’ and ‘geopolitics’ merits particular attention because it constitutes Russia’s most comprehensive and thorough attempt to come to terms with the Soviet collapse and the international order it gave rise to. Despite a multitude of competing ideas, blueprints and ideologies, only the ‘geopolitics/Eurasianism’ constellation succeeded in simultaneously addressing the majority of questions faced by Russia in the immediate post-Soviet years: what is Russia and what it means to be Russian, where Russia’s legitimate border runs, what constitutes Russian national interests and what poses the greatest threat to Russia’s security.

It is not in the least surprising that ‘geopolitics’ as a new, theory-based and non-ideologized blueprint for Russian foreign policy-making was in high demand in the hot-house political climate of Russian post-Soviet politics. As attempts at rationalism, objectivity and non-partisanship, geopolitical arguments were meant to imbue Russian foreign policy with a sense of novelty and consistency and bring about a much-needed domestic consensus behind its conduct. It is equally not surprising that Eurasianism came to the fore in the Russian post-Soviet discourse once the hopes of realizing an ambitious ‘universalist’ agenda and integrating Russia into West-dominated multilateral institutions faded and Russian political elites were faced with a formidable ‘particularist’ challenge - the challenge of forging the Russian nation and laying the foundations of the Russian nation-state. After all, Russian post-revolutionary Eurasians were concerned with a similar problem of substituting class-based consciousness for the consciousness of a common Eurasian culture as a basis of political allegiance to a single state at a time when,
following the Bolshevik take-over and the Civil War, Russia was relegated to the margin of world politics.

What really is surprising is that although the discursive potential of the ‘geopolitics’/‘Eurasianism’ constellation for gaining the upper hand in the highly ideologized domestic debate and for forging a single, internally homogenous and politically consolidated Russian polity was clearly appreciated by politicians of all ideological persuasions, its significance was largely overlooked in the academic literature on Russian post-Soviet politics. Although the geopolitical veneer of self-evidence and objectivity can hardly be sustained without recourse to Eurasianism, the academic attention has been directed almost exclusively at specific, geopolitics-informed foreign policy prescriptions with a view to inferring the assumptions, guidelines and blueprints that underlie Russian foreign policy-making. However, an account of what the reemergence of geopolitics in Russian foreign policy means for Russia’s neighbours and the rest of the world will remain incomplete until foreign policy is understood as a practice that simultaneously constitutes and represents both Russia itself and ‘the world out there’ upon which Russia is supposed to act. To restate, the emphasis on geopolitical revival in Russian post-1993 foreign policy glosses over the discursive link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ which, when studied properly, will shed light on the interrelationship between Russian foreign policy-making and Russia’s evolving political identity.

My dissertation represents an attempt to write a conceptual history of Russia’s historical – post-revolutionary and post-Soviet – engagement with ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’. I would like to highlight interpretive frameworks and conceptual resources that Russian post-Soviet policy-makers tapped into, the dilemmas they tried to resolve and the systems of meanings they eventually derived while trying to renegotiate and redraw the borders of Russia as a political community. The existing literature fails to account for the way ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ sustain, reinforce and empower each other because it makes use of the conceptual lens that already has ‘geopolitics’ reduced to a geostrategy that can only employ identity instrumentally.
My contribution, therefore, consists in approaching the discourse from a hermeneutical perspective which advocates a need to apply the discourse’s own idea of rationality while modeling it and calls on the social scientist to confront his or her language of explanation with the language of the object’s self-understanding.¹ In order to see why the existing literature is largely inadequate and why the link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ has to be fully accounted for, let us first take a closer look at the existing attempts to map out Russia’s post-Soviet geopolitical discourse.

1.1 The Primacy of ‘Geopolitics’ Over ‘Eurasianism’ in Russian post-Soviet Foreign Policy: The Three Stories

Fully in keeping with a truism that social scientists always think in threes, the literature on Russian post-Soviet politics distinguishes three versions of the ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ interface in the Russian discourse. All three discursive attempts to link ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ are presented as an exclusive intellectual credo of nationalist-minded foreign policy-makers and advocates, be that pragmatic nationalists in power or fundamentalist nationalists in the opposition or neo-Eurasian nationalists representing Russia’s civil – or, as some would say, - uncivil society.² The discussion of the post-Soviet re-emergence of geopolitics and Eurasianism is therefore placed within a broader narrative of Russian foreign policy thinking and making, so that peculiarities of the discursive link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ are subsumed within a more comprehensive conceptual division between pro-Western liberals and ‘Russia first’ national-patriots. As a result of a predominant research focus on Russian foreign policy, the ‘geopolitics’ bias becomes almost inevitable at the cost of under-theorizing Eurasianism.

However, instead of exploring the inherent rationality of each particular invocation of ‘geopolitics’, the existing scholarly accounts rely on the definition of geopolitics – exogenous to the actual discourse – that is said to encompass the totality of the Russian post-Soviet geopolitical discourse. The pragmatic nationalist stance that underpinned the long-sought for consensus in Russian post-1993 foreign policy has been conceptualized as a “geopolitical shift” making territory an important stake in the great power struggle for status and power. On less benign accounts ‘geopolitics’ informs much of Russia’s imperial and contemporary history, for the post-1993 reappraisal of Russian foreign policy priorities points to an immutable “geopolitical strain” that once again came to the fore in Russia’s relations with its external environment. The three discursive attempts to link ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ – the neo-Eurasian, the fundamentalist and the pragmatic nationalist ones - are therefore ranked depending on how expansionist their foreign policy prescriptions are and how pronounced is the ‘geopolitical reflex’ that binds Russia to the territory of its former empire.

In a nutshell, the existing literature on Russian post-Soviet politics produces, with very few exceptions, a surprisingly uniform and suspiciously neat conceptualization of Russia’s post-Soviet engagement with ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’. It is based on what is known in the poststructuralist literature as a logocentric procedure. ‘Geopolitics’ is prioritized as the crucial independent variable that explains both the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’: it uncovers the predominantly geopolitical mindset of Russian political elites and makes Russian post-Soviet foreign policy intelligible to an outside observer. ‘Eurasianism’ as an explication of Russia’s renewed Eurasian role, mission and identity is subsequently dismissed as either an example of blatant nationalist propaganda or an exercise in self-deception and wishful thinking that muddles our understanding of the inner workings of Russian foreign policy.

1.1.1 Neo-Eurasian Discourse on ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’

Judging by the amount of scholarly attention, the nucleus of geopolitical revival in post-Soviet Russia is invariably located in the ‘neo-Eurasian’ geopolitical camp. The prevalent
account of the neo-Eurasians’ engagement with ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ can be summarized as follows. During the Soviet times the Russians believed that history would vindicate the superiority of the Communist ideology. Now that the Soviet Union is gone, many Russian intellectuals pin their hopes for Russia’s return to greatness on the theory of geopolitics and its Russian analogue of Eurasianism which are the opposite of dialectical materialism. In the wry words of one observer, “victory is now to be found in geography rather than history; in space rather than time.”3 This latter tendency is epitomized in the writings of Alexander Dugin, whose geopolitical credo has been described as “revolutionary expansionism”, “expansionist imperialism” and “hard-line expansionist Eurasianism”.4 For Dugin and a group of his like-minded supporters, “constant accumulation of power by way of territorial expansion is the only appropriate behaviour in a world characterized by the eternal struggle of geopolitical units, specifically of sea- and land-oriented powers.”5 ‘Expansionists’ view Russia as an anti-Western state and a constantly expanding empire which can only ensure its security, sovereignty, identity and territorial integrity through ”immediate and wide-spread territorial expansion much beyond the former Soviet borders” as a counterbalance against the rival and antagonistic Atlanticist continental block.6 Once the creation of a continental Eurasian Union is presented in existential, life-or-death terms and advocated as Russia’s top foreign policy priority, it becomes quite logical to assume that “Russian political elites’ interpretations of Russia’s Eurasianist identity have been primarily instrumental” and revolved round reaping the maximum benefits from emphasizing Russia’s Asian profile, “be it as a vast country located in both Asia and Europe, in a unique

geopolitical location, or consisting of a multitude of ethnicities, religions and civilizations.”

Thus, ‘Russia as Eurasia’ should be more adequately understood as a discursive justification of Russia’s right to be a great power with a commensurable role in global and regional affairs rather than an explication of Russia’s civilizational and historical affinity with Asia. Dugin’s bold boundary-drawing provocations and space-relocating solutions for Eurasia suggest that “the major defining element in Neo-Eurasianism is geopolitics rather than a political, cultural or philosophical ideology.”

To restate, as a result of the foreign policy bias the neo-Eurasian Dugin is said to belong to the ‘expansionist’ school within Russian post-Soviet geopolitical thinking. This attempt at systematization is based on two reductionist, although quite wide-spread assumptions. ‘Geopolitics’ is understood as a foreign policy doctrine that equates territory with power. That this understanding ignores the link between foreign policy and identity will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters by revealing the ‘geopolitics’/‘geography’/‘identity’ interplay within the classical geopolitical tradition: states expand in order to protect and enrich a particular collective identity which has been ‘objectified’ through recourse to ‘natural’ geographical characteristics of a particular acquired and geopolitically constructed space. By the same token, accounts of post-revolutionary ‘Eurasianism’ are exhausted on the level of foreign policy prescriptions allegedly informed by the “concern with stability of borders and accommodation of ethnically diverse Euro-Asian periphery and domestic population”. Viewed from the vantage point of a conflict-free and geopolitically stable post-Soviet Eurasia, Dugin’s designation ‘Continent Eurasia’ can hardly avoid being labelled ‘expansionist’. Thus, the conceptualizations of the inter-war ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ - already biased towards geostrategy over identity, towards control over order - render largely irrelevant Dugin’s own complex revision of the ideocratic and geopolitical dimensions of the original Eurasian coinage ‘Russia-Eurasia’.

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8 Ibid., 380.
9 Tsygankov, “Mastering Space”, 106.
1.1.2 Fundamentalist Nationalist Discourse on ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’

Alternatively, the geopolitical musings of the leader of the Russian Communists Gennady Zyuganov are analyzed through the prism of classical Eurasianism while they, in fact, come closest to the classical geopolitical canon in terms of identity/foreign policy interplay. Quite expectedly, the major difference between the ‘expansionist’ Dugin and the ‘civilizationist’ Zyuganov consists, according to the literature, in the fact that the latter also sees Russia as an empire but “in a more limited way” and advocates the restoration of the ‘union’ within the former Soviet borders while viewing empires as independent, self-sufficient civilizations and geopolitically stable territories, not constantly expanding units.\(^\text{10}\) Next, a direct conceptual link is established between Zyuganov’s “isolationist expansionism” and the insights of classical Eurasians who were “never inclined to seek significant geographical expansion, particularly toward Europe”.\(^\text{11}\) However, the vision of Russia as a unique Eurasian civilization that can only survive by guarding itself against harmful Western influences does not do justice to the ‘ideocracy’ dimension of post-revolutionary Eurasianism, whereby the classical Eurasians’ isolationist geostrategy was accompanied by two – Russian Orthodox and pan-Eurasian nationalist - full-fledged alternatives to pan-European chauvinism. Instead of either juxtaposing the morally superior Russian Orthodox tradition to Europe and the rest of Eurasia, or dissolving Russian identity in the greater Eurasian whole, Zyuganov constructs a homogenous Eurasian identity by attributing Russian values – collectivism and communitarianism – to all non-Russian traditional societies of post-Soviet Eurasia. Then in a discursive move that fully reveals his geopolitical credentials the leader of Russian Communists invokes the legacy of the founding father of classical geopolitics in order to ground this newly found homogeneity in the immutable

\(^{10}\) Tsygankov, “Mastering Space”, 109-110.
\(^{11}\) For the conceptualization of Zyuganov’s geopolitical credo as “isolationist expansionism”, see Bassin and Aksenov, 102-105.
and objective geographical realities of the Eurasian heartland. “From Marx to Mackinder” indeed.\textsuperscript{12}

To recap, an emphasis on specific foreign policies is never sufficient for understanding a particular national foreign policy debate because foreign policy-makers are never free from the obligation to argue that a proposed foreign policy course will further enrich a privileged national vision of itself. In this they make recourse to wider societal predispositions and self-understandings in order to negotiate and renegotiate the borders of the community on whose behalf they purport to speak. In the Russian post-Soviet democratizing environment identity politics became the new name of the political game. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the ‘geopolitics’/‘Eurasianism’ constellation was at the heart of the Russian post-Soviet foreign policy debate articulating and delineating radically different identities and establishing competing links between identity and policy. However, these links are bound to be sidelined and ignored if the conceptual histories on which they draw – the legacies of European inter-war geopolitics and Russian post-revolutionary Eurasianism – are themselves presented as fully fledged foreign policy doctrines, not as articulations of identity. As a consequence, Dugin’s neo-Eurasian and Zyuganov’s neo-Soviet attempts to link ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ are treated as variations of the imperial expansionist theme despite the fact that the latter remains firmly within the classical geopolitical canon, while the former embarks on a complex revision of both European geopolitics and Russian Eurasianism.

By the same token, the all-important difference between pragmatic nationalist and fundamentalist, neo-Soviet nationalist coupling of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ – namely, a difference between identity-constitutive and identity-perpetuating geopolitics – is glossed over when viewed through the prism of Russian foreign policy-making. As the existing literature would have us to believe, Russia’s post-Soviet recourse to geopolitics - in both its official,

pragmatic nationalist and oppositional, neo-Soviet versions - reflected a thoroughly traditional stance of viewing the world through the prism of the balance of power and an age-old concern with reinstating Russia as a great power in possession of its own sphere of influence.

1.1.3 Pragmatic Nationalist Discourse on ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’

Thus, although geopolitics-informed foreign policy was presented by Russian foreign-policy makers as “objective”, “pragmatic” and, above all else, “new”, it was unanimously interpreted by analysts and commentators as Russia’s return to doing politics as usual. While a rational, pragmatic and interest-based approach implied “pro-Western alignment and integration into the world economy”, the actual post-1993 foreign policy consensus amounted to a highly ideologized and therefore thoroughly traditional stance of viewing the West with suspicion, reducing foreign policy to security provision and achieving security through territorial expansion. Characteristically torn between the two Wests – the democratic, liberal West of the Enlightenment and the threatening, military superior West embodied by the armies of Napoleon and Hitler – Russia eventually reverted to a familiar course of perceiving its relations with the West through the prism of strategic competition and political-military rivalry. It is precisely this reappraisal of Russia-US relations that has conceptually underpinned a “geopolitical” shift in Russian foreign policy.

What does a conceptualization of Russia’s post-1993 foreign policy change as a “geopolitical” shift entail? On this reading the geopolitical “strain” once again came to define Russia’s relations with its international environment. Despite the hopes that the end of bi-polar ideological confrontation would “emancipate” Russia’s truly national interests, their pursuit was soon dominated by a strategic culture steeped in zero-sum geopolitical thinking. From mid-1990s onwards the geopolitical “you win, I lose” mindset and a subsequent view of international politics in terms of conflict and competition started to prevail over benevolent, positive-sum

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13 Richard Pipes, “Is Russia Still An Enemy?”, Foreign Affairs 76, no. 5 (September-October 1997), 76-77, quoted in Lo, 100.
14 Porter, 125-126.
cooperation, especially in Russia’s relations with the United States.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, Russia’s influence, participation and indispensability in world politics were increasingly interpreted as dependent on the failures of Western military and mediation efforts, particularly those of the United States. As a result, power balancing once again came to the fore as the guiding principle of Russian foreign policy meant as a countermeasure against the negative trends towards unilateralism and excessive reliance on might in international relations.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, with relative gains privileged once again over absolute gains and all pronouncements about values shared by the whole of humanity relegated to the margins of domestic discourse, territory came to be valued as an asset “to be denied to the other so that it cannot be used against oneself”.\textsuperscript{17} Hence another “marker” of a pronouncedly geopolitical mindset of Russia’s post-1993 foreign policy elite – belief in the continuing relevance of spheres of influence for promoting national security and making credible claims to global ‘great power’ influence on the basis of military-strategic and political pre-eminence in the neighbouring regions.\textsuperscript{18}

To restate, the existing academic literature on Russian post-Soviet politics employs ‘geopolitics’ as a synonym for Russia’s increasingly assertive and self-reliant post-1993 foreign policy – not because Russian foreign policy makers extensively employed the term and imbued it with meanings of their own, but because Russian foreign policy allegedly conforms to an already preconceived notion of ‘geopolitics’ external to the actual Russian discourse. To use the language of discourse analysis, a relation of equivalence is established between Russian post-1993 foreign policy thinking and a supposedly a-historical geopolitical mindset in order to explain Russian foreign policy conduct and to make it intelligible to an outside observer. Most importantly, this line of direct conceptual continuity provides an authoritative reading of Russian foreign policy with a view to presenting it not only as thoroughly anachronistic and irrational,

\textsuperscript{15} Lo, 99.
\textsuperscript{16} Russia’s Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov, “Rossiia Itshet Novoe Mesto v Mire,” [Russia is Searching for a New Place in the World], interview in Izvestiya, March 6, 1996, quoted in Lo, 107.
\textsuperscript{18} Lo, 115.
but also as a stance that is no longer recognized as legitimate by the international community. Russia’s renewed preoccupation with territorial control after a brief liberal intermission is largely interpreted as return of ideology rather than as a pragmatic adjustment of ‘ends’ and ‘means’. However, the effects of the aforementioned ‘ideological’ turn on the still-in-the-making state-society relations within Russia are never discussed. In fact, the prevailing scholarly account of the Eurasian – identity construction - component of the official ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ constellation has been to dismiss it as instrumentalist ‘cheap talk’ and as a smokescreen for Russia’s renewed imperial ambitions. As any other great power espousing its own brand of universalism, Russia vows to accomplish its Eurasian mission in the post-Soviet space and throughout the continent and cites it as a proof of its ‘great power’ status. However, just as Russia’s great-power status should be denied international recognition, so should Eurasianism be exposed as a thoroughly self-interested and self-serving stance that does not contain even a modicum of ethical intention.

As a consequence, the resilience of traditional geopolitical concerns underpinning Russian foreign policy shift is said to manifest itself most clearly in the ‘statist’ Eurasians’ active, assertive and almost interventionist stance vis-a-vis the newly independent successor states. As has been noted by many Russian foreign policy analysts and observers, the alleged inclusiveness and universalism of Russia’s global Eurasian mission is at variance with a pronouncedly geopolitical mindset that underpins Russia’s Eurasian drive for integration in the CIS. While Russia could credibly claim its global indispensability and present its foreign policy vis-a-vis the West and the East as non-ideological and pragmatic, it failed to do so with regards to the post-Soviet ‘near abroad’. Russia’s mission in the CIS, as advocated by the pragmatic Eurasians in the Kremlin, is informed by a profoundly ideological “imperial syndrom”; instead of championing a common cause, Russia continued to pursue its own political great power agenda. In a nutshell, according to the prevailing account of Russia’s post-1993

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19 See, for example, Light’s account of Stankevich’s views in Malcolm et al, 47-48.
foreign policy shift, despite all the niceties of Russia’s global mission the operational core of Eurasianism has been the reintegration of the post-Soviet space through Russia’s continuing politico-military primacy in the region.\textsuperscript{20}

Indeed, Russia’s active involvement in the social, economic and security issues in the CIS is quite in synch with the geopolitics-inspired need to “carve out” spheres of influence. The discursive inscription of the post-Soviet space as a sphere of vital Russian interests simultaneously recasts it as a sphere of political-military responsibilities and obligations and confers a certain ‘moral right’ to interfere – either on behalf of the Russian-speaking diaspora, or in order to ensure that ethnic conflicts do not spill over onto the Russian territory.\textsuperscript{21} Eurasian rhetoric with regards to Russia’s role in the post-Soviet space goes far beyond the assertions of good neighbourliness and pragmatic, mutually beneficial engagement. In an ingenious rhetorical move reconciling cooperation and coercion Russia assumes a responsibility to ensure Eurasian stability not only through its own economic reforms and democratic revival, but also through leadership in peacekeeping, conflict resolution diplomacy and defence of its smaller neighbours.\textsuperscript{22} Finally, on the more assertive edge of the Eurasian political spectrum the ‘near abroad’ operates as a particular space bound up with Russia retrieving its status as a great power and projecting its influence world-wide.\textsuperscript{23} In the words of one commentator, as long as Russia’s great power status remains a \textit{sine qua non} of the foreign policy debate, Russia’s submission to geopolitics is inescapable; as long as Russia desires to be a great power, it must remain a Eurasian power.\textsuperscript{24}

As a result, given the great power rhetoric underpinning post-Soviet Eurasianism, the many conceptualizations of Russia-Eurasia – as either a cultural and geopolitical bridge between

\textsuperscript{20} Mette Skak, \textit{From Empire to Anarchy: Post-Communist Foreign Policy and International Relations} (London: Hurst&Co, 1996), 143.
\textsuperscript{22} Lukin, “Our Security Predicament”, 67.
Europe and Asia or as a civilizational “third way” distinct from both – are considered “Protean masks” and disguises for Russia’s great power aspirations meant to attach moral veneer to otherwise a pronouncedly geopolitical mindset. Most ominously, the geopolitics-informed understanding of power and security in terms of control over territory is revealed in its crudest in the pragmatic nationalist assertion that cultural and geopolitical uniqueness of Russia-Eurasia is characteristic of the post-Soviet space as a whole. From the vantage point of Russia’s new-found assertiveness and self-reliance in international affairs Eurasian thinking is seen as a “geopolitically constructed and contested exercise in moral justification” rather than a genuine attempt to theorize Russian civilizational distinctiveness. Taking this statement a step further, some commentators suggest that official Eurasianism is devoid of substance and that it was only Realpolitik discourse about regaining control over the ‘near abroad’ that reinvigorated the Eurasian idea and lent credence to it.

Consequently, there have appeared two conceptualizations of the official, pragmatic nationalist ‘geopolitics/Eurasianism’ constellation, and neither of them attaches any independent normative value to the idea of Russia’s Eurasian identity. Instead, Eurasianism is viewed through the prism of Russian post-1993 foreign policy which has already been conceptualized as ‘good old geopolitics’. The first, and most common, account of the rise of Eurasianism in Russian foreign policy highlights the salience of traditional geopolitical concerns in the Eurasianism-inspired foreign policy thinking. On this account ‘Eurasianism’ assumes the meaning deduced from Russia’s overarching foreign policy goal of re-animating its empire. Despite divergent views on the role of the West in the post-Cold War world order and different thoughts on how far Russia’s sphere of influence should extend, “the common denominator for all Eurasianists is a focus on relations with Russia’s non-European neighbours, particularly the post-Soviet states,

25 Smith, “The Masks of Proteus”, 482-490. See also Kerr, 987.
the so-called “near abroad”.27 Therefore, any examination of Eurasianism should concentrate on the immediate and high priority goal of re-linking Russia with former Soviet republics and maintaining a commanding presence in them.

However, despite oft-invoked apprehensions that Eurasianism enjoyed widespread success and was becoming a mainstream ideology, the reality provides ample evidence to the contrary. Since Vladimir Putin’s ascendance to power Eurasianism has become a spent force in Russian politics amidst avowals to pragmatism, growing awareness of the limits of Russian influence in the region and the much toned-down ‘great power’ rhetoric. If Eurasianism provided much of the impetus behind Russia’s quest for predominance in the post-Soviet space and if the CIS was envisioned as a counter-European project, then “Eurasianism had died, both intellectually and geopolitically” because it failed to sustain a coherent foreign policy.28 If Eurasianism was meant to provide “a needed response to “Atlanticism”, which was extending NATO into former Soviet satellites and even into constituent parts of the traditional Russian empire”, then it proved ineffective in terms of actual policies given increased Western involvement and geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space.29 If Russia can no longer claim to be the traditional centre of gravity on the continent and therefore be synonymous with ‘Eurasia’, although Russian political elites still prefer to see the CIS as a string of buffer states under Moscow’s influence, and if advocates of Eurasianism still insist on Russia’s mythical civilizational ‘third way’ despite the preponderance of European elements in Russian culture, then Eurasianism is “a dead-end: a pretentious neither-nor position erects an unnecessary barrier on the Russian-European border, while doing nothing to strengthen Russia’s position in Asia, or even the greater Middle East”.30 With Eurasian identity theorizing brushed aside as either plainly

29 James H. Billington, Russia in Search of Itself (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 72.
erroneous or blatantly self-serving and taken out of the equation, geopolitics and Eurasianism become coterminous and almost indistinguishable from each other. The discursive link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ does not even feature as part of the analysis because Eurasianism is quite simply “a geopolitical theory” and a variation of the traditional Realpolitik discourse.\textsuperscript{31}

Geopolitics as the art of territorial expansion is assumed to have exhausted, subsumed and taken over Eurasianism.

The other attempt to analyze Russia’s official discourse on Eurasianism and geopolitics is equally Eurasianism-unfriendly, although a bit more benign. Eurasianism is presented here as a fully-fledged foreign policy doctrine that did not develop into a new ‘regime of truth’ or provide an authoritative framework for understanding the world and Russia’s place in it. On this reading, while advocating Russia’s civilizational and geopolitical distinctiveness as a Eurasian power, Russian Eurasians failed to adequately conceptualize the link between the Russian national idea and Russian national interests and steer a middle way between pragmatism and ideology.\textsuperscript{32} As a result, Eurasianism did not fulfil its own conceptual promise of articulating a future-oriented idea of Russian politics domestically, while at the same time failing to provide a blueprint for a proactive foreign policy internationally. Eurasianism as a call for regional integration scored only limited success with regional leaders, who mainly saw it as a venue for channelling Russia’s renewed imperial ambitions. Even generally pro-Russian leaders were not satisfied with the degree of Russia’s commitment to performing its role of the chief peace-keeper and guarantor of security in the region. In fact, despite frequent pronouncements to the contrary, the CIS remained relatively low on the list of Russian foreign policy priorities, while Russian foreign policy in the region remained haphazard, reactionary and lacking in perspective. To crown it all, other states claimed to be much better suited to assume the role of a civilizational

\textsuperscript{31} Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland”: 9.

‘bridge’ between East and West than Russia. Therefore, by mid-1990s a new – and profoundly geopolitical – mindset had already gained momentum within Russian foreign policy circles. Geopolitics that bases its analysis on immutable, a-historical and harsh realities of international environment and therefore readily invokes the insights of classical geopolitics is assumed to have completely overtaken Eurasianism as the prevailing mode of foreign policy thinking; chronologically it marked a new phase and a new consensus on Russian foreign policy.

On this latter, more benign conceptualization of the official statist ‘geopolitics’/‘Eurasianism’ constellation Eurasianism is accorded an autonomous status vis-a-vis geopolitics. However, this conceptual autonomy does not stem either from Eurasianism’s own premises or from its salience and contribution to the Russian foreign policy debate. Instead, both ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ are treated as conceptually distinct and autonomous because they are viewed through the prism of theoretical models and classificatory frameworks already well established in Western International Relations scholarship. On this reading Eurasianism occupies a middle ground and constitutes an alternative to liberally-minded ‘Atlanticists’ attempting to reduce global anarchy through the development of multilateral institutions and regimes, and to the adherents of the realist school advocating the pursuit of Russian national interests through ‘balance of power’ security strategies.33 This categorization, in turn, comes closest to Martin Wight’s taxonomy of realism-rationalism-revolutionism, so that Eurasianism is correlated with rationalism with its focus on the multilateral dialogues between cultures and civilizations and on the need to underpin global balance of power by a civilizational equilibrium.34 Geopolitics that grew out of Eurasianism, but eventually found its kin in realism, is assumed to have shed all pretences that international norms and institutions can mediate between self-interested unitary states engaged in balance of power politics. If we extend conceptual affinity between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘realism’ beyond political-strategic analysis, we will have to speculate along the lines of E.H.Carr’s argument that proponents of geopolitics suspend moral judgement

33 Sergounin, Rossiiskaia Vneshnepoliticheskaia Mysl’, 17-18.
34 I am grateful to Prof. Astrov for drawing my attention to this point.
because of its invariably arbitrary, political and contingent character. However, this is where realism and geopolitics part company, for on geopolitical thinking national ‘visions of itself’ transcend respective national boundaries in order to underpin perfect congruence between political and civilizational experiences within particular Grossraüme.

To restate, applying already existing theoretical frameworks to the study of the Russian post-Soviet foreign policy debate generates a lot of conceptual confusion while at the same time obscuring the specificity of the Russian case. This specificity consists in the fact that every time ‘geopolitics’ is employed as a conceptual lens for revealing global political divisions and elucidating Russian foreign policy choices, it invariably necessitates recourse to Eurasianism. ‘Geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ sustain, reinforce and feed off each other; they should be treated as relational concepts rather than as self-sufficient and full-fledged foreign policy doctrines that both succeeded in capturing Russian foreign policy imagination. However, in order to see the importance of grasping the link between the two concepts let us see whether the opposite stands up to scrutiny, i.e. whether Eurasianism is nothing but a superficial and hypocritical addition to otherwise a straightforwardly geopolitical-read-geostrategic stance that has for centuries characterized Russia’s relations with its international environment. To invoke a classical exposition, this less benign and equally dismissive-of-Eurasianism conceptualization can be analyzed along two dimensions: whether it is consistent with itself and with its subject matter.

The argument that criticizes Russia’s post-1993 ‘geopolitical’ shift and suggests a strong path-dependency between Russian imperial thinking and the ‘pragmatic nationalist’ great-power nostalgia contradicts its own underlying political and normative assumptions, i.e. the universalism of economic rationality and inevitability of liberal democracy. First, the emphasis on Russia’s “geopolitical reflex” that is geared to the territory of the former empire suggests perfect alignment and continuity between the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation and

therefore begs the question of why the Soviet Union fell apart. More specifically, recasting Russia’s historical identity as uniform, homogenous and monolithic, i.e. as invariably combining ambivalence regarding its European identity and deep-seated anxiety regarding the security of its borders, leaves no place for Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” which was the epitome of Russia’s ‘going to school with Europe’ and embracing liberal values as well as substituting ‘security through cooperation’ with ‘security through expansion’. Indeed, the New Thinking reflected a new and growing awareness that “geopolitical expansion and empire-building are outdated forms of international conduct; that status and power in international affairs are determined by economic efficiency and human resources; and that interests have to be promoted through multilateral approaches and participation in international institutions”. However, in a move that seems counter-intuitive, Russia’s liberal-minded observers invoke a thoroughly deterministic “geopolitical strain” argument suggesting that Gorbachev’s New Thinking has left absolutely no imprint on Russia’s post-Soviet collective self-identification. Thus, recourse to determinism and reductionism in scripting the ‘other’ betrays a lack of faith in the universal reach of one’s own values that need to be protected through the erection of strategic and cultural walls shielding off geopolitics-obsessed ‘others’. However, that Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” was a formative phenomenon shaping Russian foreign policy discourse for years to come, that geopolitics was more than a crude strategic discourse and that Eurasianism was more than instrumentalist ‘cheap talk’ is demonstrated by the fact that the “New Thinking” provided the initial impetus for the re-emergence of Eurasianism in the late Perestroika years in both its ‘liberal’ and ‘fundamental nationalist’ versions. Prompted to action by Gorbachev’s agenda of learning from Europe and returning to the ‘Common European House’, his critics from among the ranks of nationalist-patriots as well as from within the liberal-turned-pragmatist camp outlined their own visions of

38 Ibid., 103.
Russia’s distinct Eurasian identity. Both visions, however, required and were buttressed by geopolitical arguments so that instead of being a conceptual linchpin of non-ideologized foreign policy making and objective strategic analysis, ‘geopolitics’ was part and parcel of the domestic political debate and was thoroughly implicated in, and indeed a *sine qua non* of, the process of Russian post-Soviet identity construction.

More importantly, it is one of the main contentions of this dissertation that ‘geopolitics’ emerged as an attempt to discursively dispose of the necessity to conduct ‘relations’ – specifically relations with Russia’s powerful Western ‘other’ – and, correspondingly, to ground Russian foreign policy-making in the objective conditions of Russian geography. However, the real target to be neutralized by the recourse to geopolitics was the intersubjectivity of collective self-understandings which reveals a deeply entrenched dependence of Russia’s vision of itself on the terms of the European discourse on Russia. To the extent that “European discourse has in some key instances been able to tell Russians who they should be”, it fell to Russian post-Soviet foreign policy to augur a new beginning and to confront the hegemony of the social with the challenge of the political. To the extent that Russia’s liberal identity was legitimized through international rather than domestic recognition, its destabilization and problematization required a geopolitics-informed conceptualization of Russian foreign policy in order to delineate the ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’ and to exclude powerful, identity-constitutive ‘others’. As a particular conceptualization of foreign policy, ‘geopolitics’ was called upon to guard the domestic realm against those who threatened to subvert Russia’s freedom to decide what Russians are and what makes them a community. In fact, one of the main proponents of the ‘pragmatic nationalist’ position hailed the making of the new Russian post-Soviet ‘self’ through foreign policy when he opined that “foreign policy with us does not proceed from the directions and priorities of a developed statehood” and that, conversely, “the practice of our foreign policy ...will help Russia

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become Russia.”  

Instead of adopting a rationalist view of foreign policy as an external orientation of a fixed and stable identity, it should be more appropriately understood along poststructuralist lines as specific kind of interpretive and boundary producing political performance that demonstrates how ‘we’ distinguish ourselves from ‘them’ and how ‘we’ should behave toward ‘them’.  

Fully in keeping with the poststructuralist understanding, this dissertation explores the link between Russian foreign policy and political identity by tracing the history of Russia’s engagement with ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’. However, before we proceed with the Russian case, a number of clarifications regarding the ontological and epistemological premises underlying this study are in order.  

**1.2 Mutual Constitution of Identity and Foreign Policy in Discourse**

The emphasis on the link between identity and foreign policy suggests that identity is not an inherent quality that states have in isolation from or independently of the discursive practices mobilized in presenting and implementing foreign policy. By the same token, foreign policy is not an external orientation of a pregiven and settled national identity whose articulation and representation can be safely bracketed out for the sake of discussing specific courses of action. Foreign policy makers ascribe meaning to a situation by framing it as either a threat or a security problem or a crisis. On the one hand, therefore, they invoke particular representations of other states, regions, peoples and institutions as well as representations of a national, regional and institutional Self. In order to resonate with domestic audiences and rally their support for specific policies, these representations must of necessity rely on the already existing interpretive dispositions and societal self-understandings, as well as on a wider pool of competing expert, institutional and media representations. On the other hand, in addition to legitimizing and

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conditioning particular foreign policy stances, identities are also reaffirmed and reproduced through articulations of policy. A study of how identity and foreign policy are linked through discourse requires staying on the level of the discourse and taking texts and speeches for what they are, not as indications of something else.\footnote{Ole Wæver, “Identity, Communities and Foreign Policy: Discourse Analysis as Foreign Policy Theory,” in \textit{European Integration and National Identity}, ed. Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2002), 26-27.} Instead of uncovering ‘real’ motives and intentions of policy-makers behind specific foreign policy pronouncements, the emphasis is on analyzing, on the one hand, the rules, regularities and logic internal to the discourse that make these pronouncements possible and, on the other hand, on the objects, meanings and relations created in the discourse. Thus, instead of revealing Russia’s real geopolitical ambitions behind a thin disguise of Eurasian identity the way rationalist accounts do, the current study focuses on the core ‘geopolitics’/”Eurasianism’ constellation in order to show how a geopolitics-informed conceptualization of Russian foreign policy was endorsed and sanctioned by Russian policy-makers and public intellectuals in order to discursively ‘produce’ Russia’s Eurasian identity whose vitality and integrity they purported to ensure.

The poststructuralist conceptualization of identity therefore converges around three main positions: it is discursive, political and relational.\footnote{Hansen, 5-6.} Identity is discursive because it does not exist objectively in some extra-discursive realm, but is constructed, objectified and stabilized through – and ontologically inseparable from - foreign policy. As a consequence, it cannot be conceptualized in rationalist epistemological terms as an independent causal variable against which to measure behaviour. Furthermore, identity is a relational concept that is meaningfully constituted through a positive process of linking various concepts, objects and qualities in coherent homogeneity, and a negative process of differentiation.\footnote{Hansen, 16-19.} This discursive and relational rather than a true and objective understanding of identity is made possible, in turn, through a differential view of language conceived of as a system generating meanings internally through differences among concepts. This is in contrast to a referential view of language whereby
meanings and objects are located in external reality and merely referred to through words and concepts. Finally, to argue that identity is political amounts to asserting that the stability of the link between representations of identity and foreign policy depends on the successful exclusion and marginalization of alternative and competing conceptualizations. However, although meaning and representation are indispensable for action, poststructuralists also insist that all discursive systems of inclusion and exclusion are fragile and contingent, that all conceptual closures are incomplete, that all attempts to impose stability and dispose of ambiguity are inherently unstable and problematic paving the way for contestation and critique.

If the above rendition sounds rather general, it is because it highlights the common denominator of poststructuralist research, for poststructuralists seem to disagree on just about everything else. The main bone of contention appears to be pervasiveness, ubiquity and, ultimately, the significance of ‘othering’ and ‘exclusion’ compared to non-antagonistic systems of difference. There are those who, like Ole Wæver, argue that “difference only collapses into opposition in special situations” and that despite the energizing and entrenching capacity of the pure contrast of ‘self’/’other’, “the meaning of ‘us’ will usually involve other distinctions as well”.46 The analysis of ‘us’ is then predicated on the Kissengerian assumption that collectivities will try to perpetuate their visions of themselves by making their visions of the outside world compatible with their domestic structures. Wæver thus issues a call “to investigate more systematically, theoretically as well as empirically the elements involved in the construction of the self”. In his attempt to shed light on the French and German stances on European integration Wæver comes up with a layered conception of discursive structure, whereby the basic conceptual state-nation constellation generates a particular ‘second layer’ discourse on Europe that, in turn, entrenches a particular idea of nation and state. Although concepts are never perfectly adjusted and there is always room for maneuver, the basic construction of state-nation has a highly structuring impact on the discourse on Europe, so that foreign policy can be partially explained.

46 Wæver, 24.
by a *structural* model of national discourses. In a nutshell, Wæver puts forward a fairly path-dependent, not to say deterministic understanding of politics as a “constant and relatively tight loop, where the political argumentation on a specific issue is strongly dependent on the basic conceptual logic which is available in a society, and at the same time reproduces or modifies this conceptual code, thereby setting the conditions for the next political struggle”.\(^47\) It is not surprising, therefore, that an impetus for change in conceptual realignments does not come from a sustained and deliberate critique of dominant discourses by the proponents of alternative – and marginalized – attempts at conceptual alignments. Instead, discursive change is generated through a seemingly objective change in external and internal power positions making some representations no longer relevant or sustainable.

The view that consistency and integrity of ‘us’ can be achieved by means other than pure negation of specific ‘them’ has been contested by, among others, David Campbell, who maintains that discourses of danger and representations of the ‘other’ in terms of threat serve as conditions of possibility for stabilizing the meaning of identity as inherent, true and objective. This reading of identity is closely linked with a retheorization of the state which, contrary to rationalist scholarship, does not have any natural or self-evident ontological status prior to the practices of establishing identity and fixing difference.\(^48\) In contradistinction to a conventional narrative found in traditional international relations scholarship about a clear break between the medieval period and modernity and a complete rupture between the social functions of the church and political effects of the state, both may be conceptualized in terms of performing the same role – that of securing identity in a world of difference. The ultimate spiritual authority of the church was based on instilling a fear of death as the worst enemy of the self and on the subsequent promise of salvation. However, once the death of God was proclaimed, the link between man, the world and certitude had to be forged anew, this time in order to provide the

\(^{47}\) Wæver, 30.

grounds for securing identity in the form of the state. As a result, the state project of security replicated the church project of salvation: it produced its own danger, only this time it is located in the unfinished, anarchic and inherently dangerous world ‘out there’ replete with enemies and threats.\textsuperscript{49}

As opposed to Wæver who stresses the importance of domestic historical structures of meaning in constituting specific ‘selves’, Campbell outlines a general structural condition, or operating logic, or a mode of representation characteristic of modernity. As states do not have prediscursive, stable identities, they need to align various domains such as territoriality and identity while claiming, at the same time, that this realignment is a response to (rather than constitutive of) a pre-existing and stable identity.\textsuperscript{50} In order to rid the domestic realm of all ambiguity, the differences, discontinuities and conflicts within must be converted into an absolute difference between the domestic domain, understood as an identity, and the international domain understood in terms of anarchy, ambiguity, indeterminacy and danger. The first exclusion is concealed through the second exclusion by making ‘foreign’ certain events and actors. Conceptualized this way, foreign policy “shifts from a concern with relations between states which takes place across ahistorical, frozen and pregiven boundaries, to a concern with the establishment of the boundaries that constitute, at one and the same time, the ‘state’ and the ‘international system’.\textsuperscript{51} Foreign policy then is a political practice central to the constitution, production and maintenance of the political identity in whose name it operates.

The link between foreign policy and identity in the post-Soviet Russian discourse traced through the core constellation of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ warrants ‘the best of both worlds’ approach – not because of some inherent advisability of middle grounds, but because the Russian case lends itself to the analysis through the prism of both Wæver’s insistence on the sedimentation of discourse, and Campbell’s emphasis on agency as the outcome of structural

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 54-56.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{51} Campbell, 69.
indeterminacy. Applying Wæver’s analysis of the discursive structure in terms of conceptual layers to the Russian post-Soviet discourse, Iver Neumann notes the “lingering centrality” of the Russian discourse on Europe so that the terms and modes of Russia’s self-representation either have parallels in, or have been directly borrowed from, the European discourse on the nation and the state.\(^{52}\) As a consequence, every attempt to develop a specifically Russian model of political and economic organization will have to proceed by negating some aspect of thinking which could be referred to as ‘European’. The relationship between ‘Russia’ and ‘Europe’ can thus be conceptualized as ‘antagonism’ along the lines suggested by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, i.e. as the limits of the social manifested in the presence of the ‘other’ that denies the pure presence of the self.\(^{53}\) The antagonistic nature of Russia’s engagement with Europe comes to the fore in Neumann’s analysis of the basic conceptual layers constituting Russia’s idea of itself. Neumann argues that despite different conceptualizations of the external and internal dimensions of the state as well as the divergent views of the state-nation relationship, the ‘state’ in the European discourse always and invariably means Rechtstaat, whereby “the king’s documents must be binding on all, including the king”.\(^{54}\) By contrast, in addition to ‘state’ and ‘nation’ the Russian discourse organizes itself at the most basic conceptual level around the concept of ‘the leader as the head of the household’. Antagonism consists in the fact that the two basic constellations are mutually exclusive, so that Rechtstaat remained a relatively marginalized constellation even during the perestroika years.

Expanding on this theme, Neumann suggests that Russia’s domestic structure, i.e. the regime type and form of governance, is at the heart of its centuries-long failure to secure a unanimous and unequivocal European recognition of its ‘great power’ status. While Europe developed a system of indirect rule based on an increased capacity of respective national

\(^{52}\) Iver B. Neumann, “From the USSR to Gorbachev to Putin: Perestroika as a Failed Excursion from ‘West’ to ‘Europe’ in Russian Discourse,” in The Meaning of Europe: Variety and Contention Within and Among Nations, ed. Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Strath (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 204-205.


\(^{54}\) Neumann, “From the USSR to Gorbachev”, 206.
societies to govern themselves as a counterbalance to the direct law-based sovereign rule, the Russian state could not let go of the direct control of society and replace it with a liberal and more efficient form of governance because in Russia there developed no social differentiation for the state to draw on. Unwilling “to let the sovereign’s documents count for more than the sovereign’s whim”, the Russian leadership “held on to an outmoded and inefficient mode of state power that made it anything but great”.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, the new Europe-wide standard of governance coupled with popular sovereignty became the constitutive principles of international society, while Russia insisted on the heavenly mandate for the kingly rule. As a consequence, this discrepancy with regards to the principle of domestic legitimacy cost Russia its ability to act in concert with other great powers further aggravating European doubts that Russia was part of Europe. In a word, throughout history as well as during the post-Soviet era Europe has denied Russia its vision of itself by negating the positivity of both its political and foreign policy identity.

1.3 The ‘Geopolitics’/‘Eurasianism’ Constellation: Reconstructing post-Soviet Russia’s Political Subjectivity

The conceptualization of the Russian-European discursive encounter in terms of an antagonism enables us to pose the question of post-Soviet Russia’s political subjectivity. On the one hand, the presence of the ‘other’ prevents the sedimentation of the identity of the ‘self’ so that the resulting structural indeterminacy and indecidability turns the ‘self’ into the ‘subject’ by letting him or her make political decisions and experience freedom. Put more succinctly, the limits of the social create spaces for the political. Thus, in Campbell’s account “the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state’s continued success as an impelling identity”.\textsuperscript{56} By analogy, in Laclau’s view any identity is dislocated to the extent that it depends on its own outside, which at one and the same time negates this identity and creates the


\textsuperscript{56} Campbell, 12.
Russia’s post-Soviet geopolitical discourse emerged out of the ambivalence and ambiguity of Russia’s European identity in an attempt to destabilize and problematize the sedimented structures of the social with the help of the political. ‘Geopolitics’ conceptually freed Russia from the necessity to seek international recognition for its ‘great power’ status and conduct relations that compromised Russia’s domestic idea of justice. Russian post-Soviet self-styled geopoliticians of various nationalist persuasions uncompromisingly redrew the boundary between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ in order to ‘purge’ Russia of Europe and create spaces for thinking Russia beyond and in spite of Europe. On the other hand, new hierarchies are established and new systems of meaning get objectified the moment a political decision to exclude the ‘other’ is made. Russia’s geopolitically minded policy-makers undermined the very conditions of Russia’s political subjectivity when they attempted to substitute an essentialist Russian/Eurasian identity for Russia’s ambiguous European credentials.

The above rereading of Russia’s post-Soviet engagement with ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ through the prism of discourse analysis captures well the rationale behind the emergence of the pragmatic nationalist and the Neo-Soviet nationalist conceptualizations of ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’. However, it fails to account for the contributions of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics – the ‘civil society’ segment of the discourse which partly overlaps with the Neo-Eurasian position within the traditional classification. On the one hand, exponents of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics agreed most emphatically on the primacy of foreign policy in constituting Russia as a subject of world politics as opposed to the liberal subordination of foreign policy to domestic needs conceived in highly ideological and hegemony-perpetuating terms. On the other hand, they came up with their own substantiation of the link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ by reconceptualising both. On this reading ‘geopolitics’ referred to a particular historical event as well as to a-historical immutable presence rooted in geography.

By the same token, ‘Eurasianism’ appeared as either a universal principle of political organization or as an historical, deeply contradictory and inherently unsustainable ‘regime of truth’, but never as an explication of Russia’s unproblematic essentialist identity.

The above summary of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics, brief as it is, suggests that despite sharing important political-normative assumptions, the two major representatives of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics Alexander Dugin and Vadim Tsymburskii still suggested very different ways of revising the classical legacies of European geopolitics and Russian Eurasianism and applying them to the post-Soviet Russian condition. Still, these differences are glossed over in the assertion that both representatives of New Eurasianism espouse “authoritarian nationalism rooted more in ethnicity than religion, and more in geography than in language and culture”.59 Both Tsymburskii’s isolationism and Dugin’s expansionist continental thinking are neatly placed within the same neo-liberal interpretative framework that establishes a direct correlation between Russian geopolitical thinking and ‘security through expansion’ stance as the traditional resort and fall-back position of the Russian authoritarian state unable or unwilling to democratize. Given Tsymburskii’s academic credentials and formal non-engagement in politics, the overwhelming majority of anti-geopolitics charges have been levelled against Dugin who is hailed in the academic literature as the face and the leading representative of contemporary Russian geopolitics.

Indeed, through his translation and publishing work Dugin has been instrumental in introducing the Russian public to ‘geopolitics’ as a distinct and self-sufficient tradition of theorizing international relations with its own canonical list of chief contributors and recurrent themes. These activities simultaneously establish Dugin as a rightful heir to the classical geopolitical tradition and lend additional credence and respectability to his own ideas. Indeed, Dugin’s highly idiosyncratic and even radical views expressed in his numerous geopolitical writings have earned him the title of Russia’s most prominent and prolific geopolitician, mainly

59 Billington, 70.
for confirming the worst Western fears about a wide-spread and deep-seated anti-American feeling shared by the Russian public. Consequently, Dugin’s professed ‘neo-Eurasian’ credentials have been largely ignored to the extent that relatively little in-depth analysis has been conducted into the conceptual relationship between the ‘neo-Eurasianism’ of Dugin’s making and the contributions of the original post-revolutionary Eurasians.  

However, inconsistencies begin to arise when an attempt is made to locate the specifically geopolitical in Dugin’s writings and relate his ideas to the classical geopolitical canon. On the one hand, the proposed goal of establishing control over the entire Eurasian continent makes Dugin’s ideas “the most extreme form of traditional geopolitical imagination”.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that Dugin’s contribution to geopolitics consists in taking Mackinder’s idea of the geopolitical opposition between land powers and sea powers one step further, i.e. in positing that “the two worlds are not just governed by competing strategic imperatives, but are fundamentally opposed to each other culturally.” This conclusion is consistent with Dugin’s own revelation that man’s existence is environmentally determined by relief, landscape and qualitative space and that geopolitics still in important ways draws on the metaphysical insights of sacral geography – the revelation that has not gone unnoticed by those who set out to uncover the meaning of ‘geopolitics’ in Dugin’s writings. However, universal rationality of territorial acquisition and control sits only too uneasily with particularistic morality rooted in national experiences of space that presupposes as its operationalization self-sufficient, self-enclosed and geopolitically stable entities rather than constantly expanding empires.

In fact, in assessing attempts to deduce Dugin’s understanding of ‘geopolitics’ from his foreign policy prescriptions we may recall, together with R.B.J.Walker, an old joke about the

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62 Clover, 11.
inadvisability of starting from ‘here’ if one wants to get ‘there’. Dugin’s own conceptualization of the link between ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ will be analyzed in detail in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning already at this stage that a much more productive starting point would be to elucidate the meaning of ‘Eurasia’ in Dugin’s writings first. In a nutshell, ‘Eurasia’ supplies a universally valid principle and reference point that, in Dugin’s view, must inform an ethical Russian foreign policy or foreign policy of any political collective inhabiting Eurasia. Once the primacy of ethicality and temporality over spatiality in his construction of ‘Eurasia’ comes to the fore, we will see that Dugin can hardly be a mastermind of geopolitical revival in Russia, at least not in the classical inter-war European sense of ‘geopolitics’.

In fact, I would argue that Dugin’s and Tsymburskii’s contributions should be more adequately understood as attempts at critique and contestation directed at the dominant official discursive coupling of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’. The critical impetus is provided by a different realignment of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ made possible by the revision of the contributions of both classical geopolitics and original Eurasianism. Most importantly, what makes Dugin’s conceptualization ‘Continent Eurasia’ and Tsymburskii’s coinage ‘Island Russia’ worthy of attention is the fact that these alternative constellations neither employed some seemingly universal logic or rationality, nor confined their critique to foreign policy prescriptions alone. Instead, rethinking Russia’s relations with its powerful European ‘other’ through the prism of geopolitics permits both Dugin and Tsymburskii to go one conceptual level down and reappraise the state-society complex underpinning the official orthodoxy of the Russian ‘self’. In order to highlight the importance of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics for understanding the travails of Russian post-Soviet political identity, I would like to present my research focus in the form of my research question: why has post-Soviet Russia witnessed a rise of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics that combined European inter-war geopolitics and Russian post-

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revolutionary Eurasianism by way of reconceptualising both? More broadly, what does the ‘civilizational’ account of ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ tell us about the relationship between foreign policy and political identity in post-Soviet Russia?

The remaining chapters are devoted to tracing the historical trajectory out of which contemporary Russian ‘civilizational’ geopolitics grows. Chapter 3 offers an overview of the contributions made by European self-styled geopoliticians in the inter-war years with a view to highlighting those tenets of classical geopolitics that pragmatic and fundamentalist nationalists took for granted and ‘civilizational’ geopoliticians took an issue with. Chapter 4 engages the Russian post-revolutionary Eurasians’ own attempt to conceptualize geopolitical and ideational foundations underpinning the Grossraum of ‘Russia-Eurasia’. In Chapters 5 and 6 I will focus on how the available conceptual and ideological resources of European inter-war geopolitics and Russian post-revolutionary Eurasianism were recycled and then redeployed by the leading proponents of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics Alexander Dugin and Vadim Tsymburskii respectively in order to reinstate Russia as a subject of world politics. Finally, I will conclude my discussion with some ideas on why post-Soviet Russia saw the rise of ‘civilizational’ geopolitics and what it tells us about Russia’s post-Soviet political identity. I will start my discussion in Chapter 2 with mapping out and classifying the core ‘geopolitics’/’Eurasianism’ discourse from the point of view of the link between foreign policy and identity discursively construed.