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ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF THE POST-SOVIET SPACE AND SOFT POWER OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Martin Horemuž*

ABSTRACT

Under the influence of globalisation, current tendencies and trends in the area of international relations more intensively head toward the integration of relevant areas and sectors of activities within nation states. This process, taking place in local, regional and as well as in the international (global) dimension has resulted in significant political, social, economic as well as cultural transformations in the structures of nation states. A robust and constantly increasing pace along with the changing dynamics of the processes in economic and social fields redraw the political map of the world, the image of which reflects a more complicated system of factors of uncertainty and unpredictability since the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations arrangements. In the above context, the aim of the paper is the description of the potential for economic integration of the post-Soviet space in the relation to the soft power of Russia. For the above mentioned goal the author mainly identifies factors limiting or supporting the economic integration process of post-Soviet space.

Key words: Commonwealth of Independent states, Custom Union, Common economic space, Eurasian Economic Community, Post-Soviet area, Soft Power

Introduction

The question of (re-)integration of the post-Soviet space (not just economically) is not entirely new. The economic integration of post-Soviet space is the subject of several theoretical discourses and scholarly articles within the field of economics and political sciences, but of particular interest is the subject in the field of international relations (Libman – Vinokurov, 2010; Zhukov – Reznikova, 2007). From its beginning the integration process was characterised by a rather declaratory form while in reality it did not go beyond the framework of multiple formally functioning institutions and structures under the heading of

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the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS, officially established in 1991 as a free grouping of states of the former USSR, was supposed to help not only the “civilised divorce”, but principally was designed to create a regional political platform for the conservation and development of existing economic ties of the post-Soviet period (Kobrinakaya, 2007; Myant – Drahokoupil, 2013). During more than the previous two decades, the CIS undergone rather complicated internal and political development. The ambiguity of the integration concept, the absence of a systemic and “realistic” approach, complicated mutual relationships among post-Soviet republics as well as political instability and no final political profile of individual states, have from the beginning influenced the functioning of the CIS and its internally complicated institutional structures.

An important tendency, which in the 1990s substantially weakened the CIS and the entire integration process, was the constant stratification and differentiation of integration into different “levels of integration” (in the context of the EU integration process often known as the double and multi-speed model of integration). All of these have been politically and practically affirmed primarily in the constitution of the so-called unions of “four” (the agreement from 1996 about establishing a customs union between Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), or “two” (e.g. attempts to create a confederation between Russia and Belarus) but also in the attempts for integration in the region of Central Asia (Central Asian Economic Cooperation or possibly the Organisation of Central Asian Cooperation) (Stojar, 2012). After V. Putin took office in 2000 radical reassessment of the CIS strategy took place. The foreign policy and multi-vector diplomacy has concentrated on the strengthening of the bilateral dimension of the political, security and economic relations. This changed approach considerably influenced the “Colour Revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), but it also affected the geopolitical rivalry in the region of Central Asia (Vinokurov, 2007). The CIS focused the development of the RF only in those structures that had been at least partially efficient, or which were crucial for regional and international ambitions of the RF. In the context of the post-Soviet space also nowadays from the Russian Federation point of view it is put the emphasis on the security dimension (The Collective Security Treaty Organization - CSTO) as hard power. The second dimension has its economic connotations (soft power). Russia financially and with capital contributions enters into economic cycles, especially into the energy sectors of the post-Soviet countries. The current target of Russian foreign policy becomes the

strengthening of the position in the post-Soviet space by way of regional political (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation - SCO), economic (The Common Economic Space - CES, respectively Eurasian Economic Community - EurAsEC, The Customs Union - CU) and security configuration (CSTO).

1 Soft Power in International Relations

From the point of view of research focus and scholarly interests in international relations, the category and notion of power belongs among the basics in the research of political relations. In the context of transformations and changing environment in international relations, this topic started to be confronted intensely with new concepts and models, as for example the concept of soft power. The concept of soft power emphasizes and works with the tools such as attractiveness and appeal as opposed to the traditional instruments of pressure and threat of using the power. The concept of soft power is a relatively new one and it is the result and reflection of development in the last two decades of the dynamically changing practice in international relations (Nye 1990). Despite its unquestionable substantiation and relevant place in the theory of international relations, this concept remains criticised by many authors, mostly for its interpretational ambiguity as well as excessive normativity. For the purposes of this paper, soft power is considered as the essential variable, which is used to identify the sources as well as possibilities and limits of its practical application in the Russian foreign policy. In methodological and theoretical terms, it will draw from Joseph Nye's definition, which identifies three primary sources of soft power: culture, political values and foreign policy. With respect to content definition of soft power, Nye claims that it operates mainly on the principle of persuasion of other actors by means of following or agreeing with norms and institutions producing desirable behaviour. According to Nye, soft power can also rely on appealing to certain values or the ability to create the agenda in the way that it forms the others' preferences (Nye, 1990; Nye 2004).¹

The positive tools in foreign economic relations within the framework of soft

¹ European Union thinks of itself as a soft power, which is defined by Nye as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion and which can be cultivated through relations with allies, economic assistance, and cultural exchanges (Nye, 2004). The EU in that sense has soft power, which is respected, applied and used (quite successfully) in relation to non-member states, as well as regional groupings.

power are mostly economic benefits, which are usually the preferential access to the market of the given country, elimination of business barriers, developmental help with respect to third states, transfer of technologies, granting of loans and guarantees (Savigny – Marsden 2011). Furthermore, the area of soft power includes also the ideological means helping to spread ideas connected to the particular state. These tools mostly concentrate on political elite and public opinion of other countries. In this context, public diplomacy is often mentioned. It is based on the assumption that the country's image and reputation are public property, which can create environment either enabling or disabling individual action (Peterková, 2006).

In the second half of the 20th Century the rapid increase in the number of international and regional institutions became very significant for the theory and practice of international politics. This increase was reflected not only growth, quantity and number of international and regional organisations, but especially in the quality (content, scope and breadth) of the resolution to each agenda (Guzzini, 2004). In the last two decades economic power is one of the areas of international relations which assumes increasing importance under the influence of intensifying globalisation, accelerating economic development, but also cyclically recurring financial and economic crises. The actual shape and form of economic power is not linked only to the achieved degree of economic development, which is measurable by macroeconomic parameters, but chiefly with the possibility to use this component of power in diplomacy as effectively and practically as possible within the parameters of the foreign policy of the state. This situation, however, is not a novelty, for in the past the use of economic instruments in foreign policy of states was present. The new thing becomes a fundamentally changing structure of the global environment and its global interconnectedness (interdependence), which enables economic power but especially all of its individual instruments to function in order to achieve the defined objectives (Ušiak - Lasicová – Baran, 2009; Savigny – Marsden, 2011). Such a situation is also the result of the fact that in the current system of international relations there is an increase in factors that have economic and social nature.² During the 90s of the 20th Century the Russian

² Today the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, populations, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important (Nye, 1990, s. 154)

Federation in the above mentioned context went through a complex transformation process, the essence of which consisted in addition to political changes in the transition to a market economy and integrating the country into the international financial system and capital flows (Myant – Drahokoupil, 2013). After the first years of radical reforms and restructuring of the economy, accompanied by a sharp economic downturn and turbulent social situation and the critical autumn of 1998, a decade of high economic growth commenced. (Oliker et al., 2009) Thanks to this Russia's economy at the moment ranks among the ten largest economies in the world and disposes with one of the largest mineral and raw material resources, and not only in the field of fossil fuels. Their high consumption in absolute terms, presenting no other alternative and irreplaceability at the current level of scientific knowledge and available technology provides an appropriate and relatively wide manoeuvring space for their greater "engagement" in the foreign policy of states. As the use of economic instruments of power, together with Russia's international and geopolitical ambitions make evident, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is predestined to develop along imperial traditional lines.

2 The "New" Foreign Policy of Russia and the Soft Power Factor

The factor that leads to the increasingly intensive development of economic power and dimension of foreign policy of Russia is what has become known as the post-transitional political, power and military weakness of Russia, which did not create enough space for the fulfilment of superpower ambitions on the global stage. This weakness led to limiting options in foreign policy and to narrowing of the range of instruments useful for promotion and defence of the national interests, especially in the post-Soviet space. The strengthening of the tools of economic power after 2005 was a main factor in the sharp increase in prices of energy commodities on world markets, which represent Russia's main export commodity. Along with an increasing shift in power's centre of gravity and the emphasis on economic development in international policy as well as on economic cooperation and integration between countries, conditions for the new "contours" of Russian foreign policy in the economic dimension were created (Mankoff, 2009).

Russia has long been trying to improve its position in the system of international relations with focus and emphasis on the economic dimension of

this position. Priorities of the electoral mandate, which **V. Putin** confirmed in the presidential election in March 2012, were defined already during 2008-2012, in the period when he served as Prime Minister. In the article "Russia and the Changing World" for the discussion club Valdai **Putin** emphasized some important ideas. In the short term perspective the emphasis was on economic reforms that were expected to lead to the strengthening of Russian economic power in the global marketplace (Putin, 2012). The immediate objective was the integration of Russia into the top five largest economies in the world by 2015. To achieve this aim should help not only the entrance of Moscow into the WTO which formally happened in 2012, but also the foreign policy would directly reflect the economic dimension of foreign policy relations. Shortly after taking the president's office, (May 2012) Putin issued Decree No. 605 "On Measures for Implementation of the Foreign Policy Course of the Russian Federation". The decree generally points to the importance of economy within international relations. Especially it emphasizes the importance of the economic dimension of Russian foreign policy and particularly the project of Eurasian economic integration (Custom Union, Eurasian Economic Community). In an article published before the March elections, "Russia and the Changing World," President **Putin** underscored that the priority of [Russian] foreign policy is to deepen the multilateral collaboration and integration processes in the Commonwealth of Independent states area and to further boost multifaceted cooperation with the CIS member states in various fields. At the same time, all of [Russian] foreign policy is focused primarily on the creation of favourable external conditions for the long-term development of Russia, the modernization of its economy, and the strengthening of its position as an equal partner in world markets. (Denisov, 2012, p. 11)

In July 2012, while speaking at a meeting with the members of the diplomatic corps, **Putin** explicitly referred to the factor of soft power. According to **Putin**, soft power assumes the promotion of national interests through conviction and by obtaining sympathy for a particular country, in this case towards Russian Federation. Referring to the May decree the President also mentioned tasks that Russia's foreign policy and diplomacy will face in the near future. High on the list of tasks was the more effective and more aggressive use of diplomatic instruments to promote economic interests and domestic business in the world. In mid-February 2013 Putin unveiled an updated Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013), in which the above mentioned "tasks" were officially

incorporated into a doctrinal form of foreign policy objectives. The updated Concept gives relatively large space to the political importance of the financial and economic impacts of globalisation, to the growing impact of global economic competition, to the struggle for energy resources, as well as to new economic, social and cultural risks and threats that the modern world has to face (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013). According to this Concept, the foreign policy is one of the most important tools to ensure the steady development of a country and guarantee its competitiveness in the globalising world. The Conception emphasizes the importance of regional integration processes: new centres of economic growth and political power increasingly take responsibility for their respective regions (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013). Regional integration becomes an effective means to increase competitiveness of the participating states. The Concept in section IV "*Regional priorities*" defines the post-Soviet space (CIS Member States) as a priority region in terms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. From the regional organisations that are developing projects for the post-Soviet territory, it appears that except for the longest acting and wide-spectrum CIS the most important for Russia is the CSTO in the security field, and the Eurasian Economic Community in the economic sphere; i.e. those structures and institutions possibly operating on the same basis as the Customs Union and Single Economic Space (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013). Although closer economic cooperation and integration has undoubtedly had a positive regional impact this cannot be completely abstracted from the context of political integration. After unsuccessful attempts of complex (political, economic, military and security) integration within the post-Soviet space during the 1990's, within the CIS or on the platform of CIS, the EurAsEC represents an integration-wise and qualitatively new and politically ambitious project with broad geopolitical implications for the entire post-Soviet space.³

The Concept directly but rather tersely defines the factor of soft power as a

³ EurAsEc member states at present are Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia have the status of observers. Within the EurAsEc only Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus are participating in closer integration and economic cooperation through the intermediation of the Customs Union. These countries are, together with Ukraine, economically the most efficient and the most advanced ones out of the former Soviet republics standing outside the integration processes. The final goal of EurAsEc is the creation of a single (common) economic space with free movement of goods, services and capital.

comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives when building civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies rather than traditional diplomacy, and is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013). The Concept also indirectly points to the necessity for creating an effective framework for the use of soft power in the foreign policy of Russia. The fact that the Concept does not clearly define and does not deeply justify the nature and framework of the soft power factor, but possibly focuses within minimal space on what the soft power factor "should include", points to the content ambiguity, current lack of fulfilment, but also the high variability of the term soft power itself. **N. Popescu** considers the concept of sovereign democracy as one of the content attributes of the Russian soft power (Popescu 2006).

In the context of the political system, Russia has been emphasizing on a long term basis that it is not the liberal democracy of the Western type and explains the impossibility of ever becoming one. Its representatives point out historical experience, particular spiritual dimension and cultural traditions, as well as specific geographical position of the Russian state. In fact, the sovereign democracy arose with the aim of working out a new state ideology justifying Russian internal and foreign policy. The basic idea of this ideology is strengthening of the state and greater efficiency of its administration in all areas of political, social, economic, security and cultural life. In the area of economic integration, a creation of the post-Soviet regional integration model (or models) led by Russia should become one of the elements of the Russian soft power. However, this inevitably implies that Russia would become a natural gravitation (integration) centre for the post-Soviet countries whose "attraction" will be based on an economically "advanced" and strong business, social and cultural model which will be universal, accepted internationally but above all functional. However, the manner and form with which Russia builds its economic model is diametrically different from the model (models) used in the EU countries and raises legitimate doubts. Russian economic model is in fact a form of state capitalism or rather administrative-bureaucratic corporatism which is based on centralisation and concentration of key economic and industrial segments to mostly state owned corporations. Such economic model is difficult to "apply" universally in the globalised world based on liberalised market, competition and efficiency of businesses. This is one of the reasons why there are opinions and evaluations claiming that Eurasian union, or rather the whole concept of

economic integration of post-Soviet area and its structures (Customs Union and Common Economic Space) emerges from the defensive character and aims at protection of Russian interests from the influence of the EU, NATO, the United States, but also China and Islamic countries. As it happens, it is documented by evaluation by some analysts who consider the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan to be an institutionally created space and opportunity for Russian expansion and export of their production (especially cars and machinery) as a competition to the EU and China they would not otherwise be able to compete with (Jaroszewicz, Klisiński, Wiśniewska, 2010).

In spite of the increasing importance of the soft power factor in international relations, the emphasis of Russian foreign and security politics rests primarily on the assertion of national interests mostly through the hard power factor, force and “practical” (pragmatic) factors. This manifests itself significantly mostly in the context of the current Ukrainian political crisis in which Russia gives its active political, governmental and material support to separatists in the East of Ukraine. With relation to the international community (the EU, NATO, and the United States) it openly demonstrates its military power by means of large-scale “unexpected” military exercises and manoeuvres, rallying of troops on the borders with Ukraine, provoking flyovers of bombers, ballistic missile tests, etc. Reasons for such steps can be found in the actual relative as well as absolute economic power of Russia which does not allow for broader and more balanced way of applying the soft power factor into the conflict. Contemporary Russian economy as well as the state budget is based mostly on the income from the export of oil, gas, iron ore and raw materials (Connolly, 2013). For the importing countries, most of these commodities (especially oil and gas) are, from the point of view of economic functioning, basic material and their importance is heightened even more by inexistence of diversification of suppliers and transit routes. This enables Moscow to use the energetic materials in a more aggressive way as a means of asserting their foreign political objectives (Oliker et al., 2009). This is illustrated by several energy “wars” in recent years (mostly the ones with Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 (Mitrova – Pirani – Stern, 2009), but also in 2014 and “oil” war with Belarus in 2009). This indirectly includes the help and support of Russian state in aggressive penetration to the energy market of European and more particularly post-Soviet countries. The special category is formed by an increasing number of „business“ wars against post-Soviet countries which in their foreign political orientation do not favour Russia or regional organisations operating in the territory of the former USSR under the

baton of Moscow. These business wars, like the cheese and chocolate one with Ukraine, wine one with Moldavia and Georgia, but also the milk one with Belarus, referred to the import embargo on “sensitive” commodities whose import whole industrial branches of these countries are usually dependent on (in terms of employment and creation of the GDP). It is more than obvious that these wars have (geo)political character and causes. For these countries, especially when they do not have free access to European market, the relatively large Russian market with 140 million of inhabitants constitutes often the only possibility to place their production. In the same context it is possible to interpret the Russian effort in connection to the current political crisis in Ukraine. Its roots reach the period when president **Yanukovych** refused to sign the association agreement of Ukraine with the EU in November 2013. This refusal was instigated by a strong political pressure and Russian threats to close the Russian market for the Ukrainian production. These threats were to a great extent fulfilled in the Spring 2014 after the change of regime in Kiev, together with “jump” increase in the prices of gas on which the industry and inhabitants of Ukraine are strongly dependent (from the political price of 268 USD to 500 USD per 1000 m³). Development and course of events did not leave any doubts about the real Russian (geo)political intentions. However, the approach of Moscow to the Ukrainian crisis also definitively underscored Russian economic weakness, buried the idea of Eurasian union in which Ukraine would be “integrated” as a full-fledged member and to an important extent disrupted the political trust in the Russian relations with the EU, NATO and the United States. The countries of the EU and the western world are fully aware of all these circumstances and imposed sanctions on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and approach to the “solution” of the Ukrainian crisis. Even though Russia attempted to react “symmetrically” and banned import of selected commodities from the EU, ultimately it is Moscow that, in economic terms, lost and suffered defeat.

3 Project of economic integration of post-Soviet space: Russian efforts to apply soft power

In a theoretical dimension the economic integration of any geographical unit presumes in particular the existence and presence of structural factors necessary for its successful progress. This is to say that their absence, if any, to a significant extent limits the overall possibilities of the success of an integration

process. Among structural factors, the most important ones are political (ideal, ideological) conditions, and economic and business conditions. However; both such structural conditions have an insufficient contents justification, are framed internally into political, economic and socially non-reformed systems, and, moreover, stems from historically overcome approaches and positions.

Political conditions: The concept of an economic integration of the post-Soviet area implemented through the Eurasia Union and the Customs Union is primarily a project of the political-economic integration. Its principal target is to create an area of the Russian geopolitical influence, which would have both institutional and political-economic forms. The Eurasia integration is being built as a political project “from above”, with the understanding that the political principles, ethical and moral values and international relations of the power on which it stands are diametrically different than those on which the EU is being built, to which it alone often compares to. Such structural political condition follows from the fact that the “congeniality” of Russia has been and is Eurasian, statehood centric, in which a state is placed on the “pedestal” as a universally valid timeless value.⁴ Other segments (including economy, society, and culture) are subordinated to it, contrary to the Western civilisation, where they are autonomous on the state, or places to an identical level with the state. That is also reason why it will never be in line with democratic political institutions, ethical progress and geopolitical hegemony of the West. Furthermore, the biggest weak point of the entire concept and construction of the economic integration is the fact that it is preferably oriented to the past, withdraws from it through a reference to “previous economical relationships”. In case of the West-European integration, the definitive termination of conflict solutions in international relationships by military means, the anchorage of long-term rivalry between Germany and France in a strong institutional structure and the establishment of conditions for an economic growth and prosperity has become the centrepiece of the integration. The project of economic integration of the post-Soviet area on the platform EurAsEC, however, rather petrifies existing

⁴ According to Putin, Russia is the centre of a civilisation, the Russian World. A Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian community is at the core of this world, and its principal area encompasses the post-Soviet space inhabited by Russian-speaking people. Putin said: “The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world”. The identity of this integrating post-Soviet space is to be based on a presumed special spiritual and civilisational community, referred to as the “Russian world” (Russkiy mir) (Menkiszak, 2014).

conflicts or, even more – it creates new political and economic conflicts. The only existing idea on which the entire integration is established is a geopolitical realism and pragmatism, which is directly mentioned also in a revised concept of foreign policy as the principle of Russian foreign policy. A politically non-uniform position of member countries of the Customs Union is also evidenced by their behavior during a crisis in Ukraine. Contrary to Russia, neither Kazakhstan nor Belorussia supported the prohibition of import of products from the EU, not even from Ukraine. Quite on the contrary, Minsk has very conveniently responded to the introduction of retaliatory Russian sanctions for the prohibition of import of goods from EU countries and has increased import of the production falling under the sanction regime with a view of its re-export to the Russian market.

Economic conditions: Aforementioned dimension of political assessment is documented also by structural conditions of economic character. The countries of the Customs Union (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan) which is the second level within EurASeC, should by 1 January 2015 create unified economic area (market) with four freedoms (goods, services, labour, capital), the so-called Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Yesevi, 2014). In future, the common currency and extension of the Customs union to include Armenia and Kirgizstan is being considered, but the economic assets of inclusion of these two countries will be marginal. Overall, the states of the EEU create a market with 170 million of inhabitants (Russian Federation, with its 143 mil inhabitants, amounts to more than 84%). These countries contributed to the world GDP in 2013 by 3.48 percent (for comparison with other countries: the CIS 4.298 %, the EU 18.727 %, the USA 18.619 %, and China 15.621 %). (Economy Watch, 2013) On the global scale, Russia represents the largest economy of the aforementioned states, even though its ratio has been stagnating on a long-term basis (3.02% of the world GDP). Kazakhstan's (0.285%) and Belarusian (0.175%) ratios can be considered negligible. Russian market is also the most "lucrative" from the point of view of the GDP per capita (in 2013, more than 14 thousand USD per capita) (Economy Watch, 2013). The majority of the trade exchange and turnover among the EEU countries consists of the production of energy raw materials and machinery. What is more, this mutual exchange of goods among the EEU countries has been stagnating or decreasing on a long-term basis. Particularly low, practically negligible, is the mutual trade between Belarus and Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan's ratio on the overall Belarusian trade is approximately 1.2%, the Belarusian ratio in Kazakhstan is only 0.5%) (Balter – Bessonova, 2014). In this

context, also the exchange of goods within the CIS is decreasing which is, among other things, due to the trade orientation towards the advanced regions (Asia) or the world countries (the EU, the USA). It is also worth mentioning that Russia is often under the pressure from the WTO and the EU because of trade, customs and administrative obstacles it creates for third countries wishing to enter its market. A serious drawback of the EEU is absence of sufficiently strong financial and credit centre which could offer financial support in case of crisis development, despite the existence of the EurAsEC anti-crisis fund. These facts together with the already mentioned point that the project of common market and economic integration of post-Soviet area has a defensive character raise legitimate questions concerning its real (future) functioning. Furthermore, it is not only the difference in economic performance between the EEU countries, but in fact the relationship resembling the patron-client one. For example, Belarus is constantly being subsidised (practically “corrupted”) by Russia with the gas supplies whose price is lower than in the case of, for example, Ukraine; but also by the supply of oil free of export duty which is, after processing, further re-exported with profit to the Russian market. The estimated value of this form of “subsidy” is 1 billion USD per annum. Thus, what Russia offers within the framework of soft power is in fact only “cheap energy raw material”, access for workforce to its labour market (to Moldovans, Tajiks, but also Ukrainians), as well as access to its internal market as such (Ćwiek-Karpowicz, 2012). Right now, the energy policy remains the most efficient and effective tool of the Russian soft power (Hill 2006); however, very debatable and controversial, because from the aspect of utilisation and targets it is construed not to achieve bilateral advantages, but on the principle of the creation of unilateral dependency and achievements of, for Russia, favourable foreign-political, economic and safety targets.

Conclusion

As a conceptual and system attempt for a change in perceiving Russia and its efforts to create an attractive economy centre, it is possible to designate steps and measures leading to the intensification of a political process of the economic integration of the post-Soviet area. Even though the economic integration is in place continuously at various levels since the breakup of the USSR, its successful development from the beginning of the 1990s is prevented by the same problems. The concept of economic integration of the post-Soviet

area implemented through the Eurasia Economic Union is primarily a project of the political-economic integration. Its principal target is to create an area of the Russian geopolitical influence, which would have both institutional and political-economic forms. The Eurasia integration is being built as a political project “from above”, with the understanding that the political principles, ethical and moral values and international relations of the power on which it stands are diametrically different than those on which the EU is being built, to which it often compares to. The present article is an attempt to partially explain and illuminate some aspects of economic integration in the post-Soviet in the context of Russian soft power.

The key factor of the entire process of economic regional integration of the post-Soviet area is a position and standing of the Russian Federation, as a natural power-political, economic and cultural centre. In that sense, it is exactly Russia the principal “engine” of integration. On the other hand, position and standing of Russia creates objective prerequisites for a relational framework based on an asymmetric model in relations with other actors (Belarus and Kazakhstan). The Russian Federation as a global / regional power seeks to create a separate area for the fulfilment of national interests and modelling of the power lines of force and international-political configurations facilitating the fulfilment of these national interests. This is one of the reasons why Moscow deems and primarily perceives the project of economic integration as a tool and instrument to enforce a (regional) geopolitical position in the post-Soviet area. The project of economic integration, as well as the emphasis on its implementation, at the same time point to the lack and absence of so-called soft power in the Russian foreign policy. Soft power in that sense represents in particular an attractive and powerful economic and social model (area) creating a material wealth (welfare) of the citizens, higher standard of living, cultural and linguistic attractiveness, impressive lifestyle, etc. Contemporary Russia is not able to apply soft power to obtain support with individual governments in post-Soviet republics, not even with wide population of such countries. One of the reasons of such a status is the fact that Moscow still believes that policy established on liberal principles such a law-abiding country, economic cohesion and democracy has only a small significance in international relationships. This is also the reason why Russia in its foreign policy prefers (neo) realistic tools of power primarily based on realist assumptions, i.e., on power and practical factors, and not on ideological and ethical standards.

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