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RUSSIAN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CASPIAN SEA REGION

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The tasks that Russian policy tried to solve in Central Asia during Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000–2008) were formulated by Russian political and expert elite circles in the mid-1990s. Boris Yeltsin's presidential decree of 14 September 1995 proclaimed the reintegration of post-Soviet space around Russia as the major foreign policy priority.¹ As a whole, the Russian political class wanted to compensate for the substantial loss of regional influence that occurred in the 1990s (Zvyagelskaya 2004). There was the possibility of realizing this aspiration since the rapid voluntary Russian withdrawal from Central Asia at the beginning of the 1990s had caused terrible chaos that had not compensated for by the regional involvement of other major international players. An understanding of the necessity for cooperation with Russia for solving important regional problems was expressed by important political and expert figures in the USA and Europe.² Achievement of Russian aspirations in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region can be separated into the following tasks:

- 1) Bringing order into Russian foreign policy; defining Russia's Central Asian interests and priorities; concentrating resources on key directions; overcoming the contradictory character of Russian regional policy;
- 2) Developing pro-Russian integration projects; overcoming inefficiency of cooperation within the CIS framework;
- 3) Defining the modalities of Russian cooperation with other key extra-regional powers in Central Asia (especially, with the USA, China, and EU);
- 4) Guaranteeing security in the region as a way of stabilizing the situation in Russia itself, especially, in the context of spreading terrorism, Islamic extremism and the drugs trade;
- 5) Preserving Russian control over the routes of transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea region.

¹ Decree of the President of Russian Federation 'On the Strategic course of Russian Federation towards the CIS States', 14 September 1995, No. 940.

² Strobe Talbott, 'A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia', Report, 21 July, 1997; Sherman W. Garnett, Alexander Rahr, Koji Watanabe, *The New Central Asia: In Search of Stability*, Task Force Report, No. 54, The Trilateral Commission, 2000.

In this paper we will examine the degree to which these tasks were fulfilled during Vladimir Putin's presidency.

The growth of Russian influence in Central Asia as a result of increasing strategic instability, 1999 – 2001

In 1999 – 2001 security problems in Central Asia became very acute. The balance of power abruptly changed. The Taliban radical Islamic movement first appeared in Pakistan among Afghan refugees in 1994. It was widely believed in Central Asia that the Taliban was originally linked to the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, which had close ties with the American CIA, at least from the period of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The argument about 'US support of Taliban' was widely used to reinforce cooperation between anti-Taliban forces and Russia (Lomagin 2000). It was reminiscent of the historic case of the period in the nineteenth century of the Great Game, when Pushtu tribes headed by the Afghan emir and supported by the British empire, the leading western country of the period, conquered Uzbek and Tajik principalities of the left bank of the Amu-Darya river. These principalities were in coalition with the Bukhara emirate, situated on the territory of modern Uzbekistan, and Russia (Halpin 1960).

The Taliban had a clearly defined Pushtu character. This provoked the opposition of ethnic minorities predominant in the North of the country that formed the 'Northern Alliance'. Of especial importance for Russia and the Central Asian countries were the Uzbek forces of general Rashid Dustum (supported by Uzbekistan, Russia and Turkey) and Tajik forces of interim president Burhanuddin Rabbani and the famous warlord Ahmad Shah Masud (they were linked to Tajikistan and Russia). The growth of the Taliban's influence was perceived as a direct threat for all neighbouring countries. Afghanistan quickly turned into the focus of attraction for all extremist Islamic groups of the world, including the Central Asian countries, the Russian North Caucasus, and Chinese Xinjiang. In 1996 the Taliban captured the Afghan capital Kabul, and by 1998 it controlled 90% of Afghan territory. The only exclusion was Tajik territory controlled by warlord Masud, who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda terrorists just before 9/11. After the Taliban had captured almost all of Afghan territory, the Central Asian countries became frontline states. Only Turkmenistan established friendly relations with the Taliban. Besides, there was a dangerous combination of Islamic extremism and crime in Afghanistan. This country in the 1990s turned into a major producer of opium poppies. One of the important routes of Afghan heroin trade was organized through Central Asia and Russia to Western Europe.

After the blowing up of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the US position towards the Taliban became very negative. But the Central Asian political elites thought that the American emphasis on democracy and human rights did not allow them the possibility of suppressing Islamic opposition within the region, which was allied to the Taliban. At the same time, Russia itself had threats similar to those in Central Asia. The de facto independent Chechen republic in the North Caucasus harboured terrorists and religious extremists from all over Russia. Besides, the Chechen Republic and Taliban's Afghanistan officially recognized each other and became allies. This is why Russia was seen in Central Asia as a major potential stabilizer.

Support by the Taliban and financial assistance from Al-Qaeda made Islamic extremists in Central Asia more active. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), headed by Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani, became the main extremist force in the region. Its aim was to establish an Islamic emirate including all the Central Asian states. In the autumns of 1999 and 2000 IMU forces invaded Kyrgyzstan from Tajik territory. For Central Asian countries, and even some Russian Islamic regions with their weak statehood and strong alienation between the governments and populations, it entailed the possibility of a snowballing Islamic revolution. On both occasions the

forces and resources of not only Kyrgyzstan, but also of other Central Asian countries and Russia were used to repel the aggression. This cooperation, as well as common opposition to the Taliban, became the starting point for the formation of a new Russian-centered security system for the region based on the Collective Security Treaty (See Chapter 9 and below).

In September 1999 the war in the Northern Caucasus started once again after the invasion of Islamic militants from Chechnya to Dagestan, an Islamic region loyal to Russian government. Decisiveness and sometimes even brutality of the new Russian government headed by Vladimir Putin indicated to Central Asian political elites that Russia could actively use force also in Central Asia in case of a new crisis. On 16 February 1999 a series of terrorist acts occurred in the Uzbek capital Tashkent. Russia in the same period also experienced brutal terrorist attacks on Moscow. Common threats (terrorist attacks and invasions of Islamic militants) increased mutual understanding between political elites of Russia and Central Asian New Independent States.

Putin's attempts to bring doctrinal and organizational order into Russian policy in Central Asia: a limited success story

Putin's coming to power brought a new style to Russian foreign policy. Already during Putin's first year the aspiration to bring conceptual and organizational order into all spheres became the characteristic feature of Russian foreign policy. In the first months after Putin's election three key doctrinal documents defining future Russian foreign and security policy were adopted: the National Security Concept (10 January 2000), the Military Doctrine (21 April 2000), and the Foreign Policy Concept (28 June 2000). In the last document Russian relations with post-Soviet countries were once again described as the main priority. It is very important that this was put in the context of guaranteeing national security, especially in the field of fighting international terrorism and extremism.³ Economic cooperation with the New Independent States was also proclaimed a priority, thus the Concept discussed the problem of the sectoral division of the Caspian Sea.

The very attempt to bring some order into Russian foreign policy was quite positive. However, the principles formulated in the documents adopted in 2000 were too general. They had to be concretely defined in some kind of a regional strategy, with a certain set of priorities and material means allocated for their realization. This task was not carried out even by 2008.

The work of the CIS throughout the 1990s was absolutely ineffective. Decisions made within the context of this organization were not obligatory and they mostly were not fulfilled. It was an organization for the 'civilized divorce' of former Soviet republics, and not for real cooperation. As a result, at the beginning of Putin's presidency a 'new generation' of pro-Russian integration structures were created. Decisions made within this new generation of post-Soviet structures were much more obligatory for all participants.

At the end of Yeltsin's presidency, on 26 February 1999, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed a treaty on forming a Customs Union and Common Economic Space. It foresaw the formation of a unified customs zone as well as conducting associated customs, monetary, currency and trade policies with the purpose of the free movement of 'goods, services, capital and workforce'.⁴ On this basis, on 10 October 2000 the same participants together with Tajikistan signed a Treaty on Establishing the Eurasian Economic Community'. This idea was originally proposed by Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is a proponent of Eurasianist ideology (Nazarbaev 1997). The same tasks of forming a unified customs and economic union were proclaimed by this

³ *Foreign Policy Concept of Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

⁴ *A Treaty on Customs Union and Single Economic Space*, 26 February 1999.

treaty.⁵ Thus, a new bureaucratic mechanism outside of the CIS was created for deepening economic integration. The Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) has a predominant Central Asian character since four of its six members are situated in this region.

The formation of the customs union turned out to be too hard to realize. In August 2006 it was decided to create a customs union with only three participants (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) that were 'economically ready' for this. However, in the period 2000-2008 the customs union and single economic space did not function even in this 'minimal version'. The members of the EurAsEC were unable to unify their legal acts in the economic sphere. As the research of the 'Eurasian Legacy' foundation has indicated, most experts on the post-Soviet space evaluate economic integration, even within new generation of organizations, as ineffective.⁶ However, trade between the former Soviet republics (and not only between members of the EurAsEC) is growing. Besides, the Central Asian NIS in 2000 – 2008 avoided repeating the customs wars which they had during the emerging markets' crises of the 1990s.

In addition to the new economic cooperation organization, there also emerged also a new collective security organization. It was formed on the basis of the old CIS Collective Security Treaty. This Treaty was originally signed by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Tashkent on 15 May 1992. Later, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus joined it. On 2 April 1999 Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan prolonged the treaty. However, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan refused to do this.

On 7 October 2002 in Chisinau (Moldova) Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and an agreement on the Legal Status of the CSTO. According to the Charter the members of the CSTO 'set themselves the objective of maintaining and nurturing a close and comprehensive alliance in the foreign policy, military and military technology fields and in the sphere of countering transnational challenges and threats to the security of States and peoples'.⁷ Article 8 foresees coordination in 'combating international terrorism and extremism, the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and arms, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other threats to the security of the member States'.⁸ The CSTO Charter also provides for cooperation in case of external military threat. These agreements came into force on 18 September 2003. Within the framework of the CSTO Russia has proposed to its partners the purchase of arms at subsidized prices and receiving military education in Russia at low prices.

The CSTO as well as the EurAsEC has a specific Central Asian character. Four out of its seven members are situated in this region. The CSTO has 3 'regions of collective security': Central Asia, Europe and the South Caucasus. However, the European and South Caucasian CSTO security regions exist only nominally; each of them is represented by bilateral agreements of Russia with its allies (Belarus and Armenia) outside of the CSTO framework. At the same time, in Central Asia a specific mechanism of Collective Rapid Response Forces was created. These forces were 1,500-strong in 2003 and now have about 4000 members. They regularly conduct military exercises. These forces can also in case of crisis be supported by Russia's 201st infantry division stationed in Tajikistan and by 10 warplanes and 14 military helicopters situated in the Russian aviation base in Kant (Kyrgyzstan). Mechanism of peace-keeping and unified air defense systems are being created within the CSTO framework..

⁵ *A Treaty on the Establishment of Eurasian Economic Community*, 10 October 2000.

⁶ Eurasian Legacy Foundation, *Perception of Integration Projects on the Post-Soviet Space*, Report, 2005.

⁷ *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, 7 October 2002.

⁸ Ibid.

The CSTO is not repeating the scandalous situations as occurred within the CIS in the 1990s, when two members of the block de facto were in a state of war (Armenia and Azerbaijan), or two states accused each other of supporting separatist, extremist and subversive movements (Russia and Georgia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). At the same time, integration within the CSTO has also some problems. Decisions of CSTO's bodies are not realized in due time, especially in the sphere of financing different programmes. Besides, Russia (the main proponent of the CSTO and chief financier of its work) conducts within it a contradictory policy. For example, out of 10 agreements signed within the CSTO only 8 have come into force. And out of these 8 agreements that have come into force, 4 were not ratified by Russia!

Uzbekistan, having recently joined the CSTO, continues its isolationist policy within the organization. The degree of Uzbek cooperation within the organization is very weak. There are also some problems of cooperation of the CSTO with other international security organizations. For example, modus vivendi between the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO, see below) is not clearly defined, although both organizations represent Russian interests and sometimes even cooperate (for example, in conducting military exercises). The same problems of parallelism and contradictions exist between all contemporary pro-Russian post-Soviet integration structures (CIS, CSTO, EurAsEC and SCO). Paradoxically, each organization represents almost the same states and is Russian-centered, yet at the same time realizes its own integration project. Contradictions between these organizations can be explained by the fact that they represent different groups of Russian interests that are not correlated within a unified regional strategy.

The problem of coordinating pro-Russian integration projects with other vectors of international cooperation of Central Asian states is even more acute. It should be mentioned in this respect that the absence of any cooperation in this sphere and the resulting geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia is only partially a result of Russian policy. Very often Russia wants to cooperate while its partner is more reluctant. For example, now in Central Asia two military blocs, the CSTO and NATO, have military bases, but they do not even talk with each other. On 18 June 2004 the Collective Security Council, the CSTO's supreme body, proposed the establishment of official relations with NATO for the purpose of solving Central Asian security problems. This proposal was repeated in the letter of CSTO's Secretary General, Nikolai Bordyuzha, to NATO's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. However, NATO replied that bilateral cooperation with separate members of the CSTO is a priority for the Alliance.

Irrespective of Russian attempts to reintegrate post-Soviet space around a new generation of international organizations, new groups of states appeared within this space and new division lines have emerged (Nikitin 2007). Azerbaijan, which also is situated in the Caspian Sea region, is still a member of GUAM, an integration structure alternative to pro-Russian ones. This organization was established by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova in 1997. Uzbekistan joined GUAM in 1999, after that the name of the organization changed to GUUAM. Uzbekistan recently left GUUAM and joined the EurAsEC and the CSTO. However, it still has very specific position inside both organizations. Turkmenistan is not a member of any second generation pro-Russian organization. It continues to pursue an isolationist policy. Former Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) even within the CIS, which is an absolutely non-binding organization, proclaimed 'associational status' and withdrew from full membership.

The situation is even more complicated by the fact that many Central Asian countries participate in different integration projects. For example, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are simultaneously members of the CSTO and participants of programmes of cooperation with NATO ('Partnership for Peace', individual programmes of cooperation). But, as we have already mentioned, the CSTO and NATO even do not officially recognize each other. Lack of cooperation between different integration organizations headed by Russia reinforces the disintegration of post-

Soviet space that has affected Central Asia and Caspian Sea region. However, if we take the situation of 1990s as a reference point, the formation of second generation integration structures in the post-Soviet space under Putin has, to certain extent, brought some order into Russian interaction with Central Asian countries.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and limits of Russian cooperation with China in Central Asia

The step by step development of a 'border dialogue' between Russia, China and the Central Asian countries in the 1990s led to the creation of the 'Shanghai Five' group and, finally, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). A declaration on its creation was signed on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai simultaneously with the Shanghai Convention on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO proclaimed 'strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good-neighbourly relations among the member countries; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, ecology and other fields; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region, to establish a new, democratic, just and rational political and economic international order'⁹ as its goals. At present, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the SCO. Four out of six SCO members are situated in Central Asia, and thus the Organization's interests are concentrated mainly in this region. However, the SCO is essentially different from the EurAsEC and the CSTO. It is not an organization designed to reintegrate post-Soviet Central Asia around Russia. The SCO has two main sponsors that finance the lion's share of the Organization's activities: Russia and China. The Secretariat of the SCO is situated in Beijing, and its Regional Antiterrorist Center in Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

Cooperation in security sphere includes fighting international terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. However, economic and trade cooperation also became one of the foci of organization's activities (Lukin 2007; Lukin, Mochulsky 2005). On 14 September 2001 in Almaty (Kazakhstan) the heads of governments of SCO member states signed a memorandum on the Main Objectives and Directions of Regional Economic Cooperation. On 23 September 2003 in Beijing the heads of governments of SCO member states approved the 20-year 'Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation among SCO Member States'. In 2004 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) a plan of concrete measures to implement the Program was adopted. It includes more than 100 common projects and directions of cooperation in the spheres of transport, energy, telecommunications, agriculture, tourism, water supply and ecology. At present, energy is turning into the main direction of economic cooperation due to creation of an 'Energy club' within the SCO. The aim of this 'club' is to develop a unified energy policy.

There are some disagreements between Russia and China within the SCO. Beijing is interested in the formation of a single economic space inside the SCO within a short-term perspective. But Moscow is afraid of Chinese economic hegemony inside the Organization. Cheap Chinese goods can fully occupy not only Central Asian but also domestic Russian markets, and all SCO members can turn simply into raw-material suppliers dependent on China. Already now raw-materials constitute up to 90% of Russian export to China. Russian arms, chemical products and chemical fertilizers are the only substantial manufactured items in Russian-Chinese trade. But Chinese exports to Russia are almost fully composed of manufactured goods. Russia is also afraid of political repercussions of Chinese migration to the depopulated Russian Far Eastern regions.

⁹ *Declaration on the Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 1*, 15 June 2001; *Declaration on the Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 2*, 15 June 2001.

Besides, there are potential disagreements between Russia and China on transportation routes of Central Asian oil and gas. For example, now both countries have contracts according to which they purchase large volumes of Turkmen natural gas. However, the true size of Turkmen gas deposits is unknown so it may well turn out that Russia and China lay claim to purchasing the same gas. Russia, in turn, believes that economic integration within the SCO zone is a long-term priority. At present, only post-Soviet countries having comparable economies can integrate. Russia will inevitably be a leader of this process. In the short term, inside the SCO Russia is interested in political and security cooperation (fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism).

The SCO, as an organization representing two great international powers, also has great potential in world affairs. Russia is now interested in this instrument of potential pressure upon the USA and the EU much more than China. For China economic cooperation with the USA is now considerably more important than political and military cooperation with Russia. In Central Asian affairs the large political role of the SCO became apparent in 2005. On 5 July 2005, during the SCO summit in Astana (Kazakhstan), a declaration calling on the USA to clearly define the terms of withdrawal of American bases from the region, where they supported antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, was adopted. 'Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consider it necessary, that respective members of the Antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states'.¹⁰ In response, the House of Representatives of the US Congress adopted a resolution expressing concern with the attempts of Russia and China to force the USA out of the region. However, later the US military had to leave the military base of Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan (see below).

In general, from the Russian point of view, the role of the SCO in Central Asia is twofold. On the one hand, through the SCO mechanism Russia is trying to restrain growing Chinese economic influence in Central Asia and to find an acceptable mode of regional coexistence with China. On the other hand, Russia has created a legitimate channel of Chinese regional influence that helps to overcome traditional fears and alienation between the Central Asian peoples and the Chinese. This fear was well expressed by Buhar-Jirau, an advisor to Abulai-Khan, the famous Kazakh eighteenth century political leader, who expressed the historically formed perception of the difference between China and Russia using the traditional nomadic metaphor of a rider and a horse. Kazakhs have a choice between two potential yokes: Russian and Chinese. The Russian yoke is made of leather. It can gradually be worn out. But the Chinese yoke is made of iron. One can never free oneself from it (Iskalyev 1995, p. 66).

Reduction of Russian regional influence during the war on terror in Central Asia, 2001 – 2003.

During Putin's presidency Russia periodically showed its readiness to cooperate with the USA in Central Asia. It was best manifested in the period of the war on terror in the region. 9/11 abruptly changed the strategic balance in Central Asia. On 7 October 2001 US operation against the Taliban started. It consisted of a mass bombardment accompanied by special operations and the support of Northern Alliance forces. Russian assistance was of great importance in establishing American contacts with Tajik and Uzbek forces. In fact, Russia shared its Afghan allies with the USA. The Russian motive was very simple: it had a unique opportunity to destroy its worst enemies with American hands.

¹⁰ *Declaration of the Heads of States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – 1*, 5 July 2005.

However, the USA lacked an adequate military presence in Central Asia for effectively conducting operation in Afghanistan. Otherwise, US forces would have attacked Taliban only from the south, from Pakistani bases. But the positions of Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the south of Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistani provinces were very strong. This American interest directly collided with Russian interests in Central Asia. From the standpoint of a substantial part of the Russian political class, the insertion of American forces in the region could lead to the final loss of Russian influence. Moreover, Uzbekistan had permitted use of its territory for an American military base even before Russian agreement to this. So, Russia could not prevent the US military presence in Central Asia. Resistance by the Russian leadership would only have caused a break in relations with Russia's regional allies. In this situation, president Putin grudgingly supported the temporary stationing of forces of the anti-terrorist coalition in Central Asia. Besides, Russia itself allowed its territory to be used for the delivery of American military cargoes.

The antiterrorist coalition received permission to use bases on the territories of four Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan). In Kyrgyzstan, the American military airbase Ganci was established in Bishkek's international airport Manas. In Uzbekistan an airbase Karshi-Khanabad was created in Kashkadarya region in the south of the country. There were talks with Tajikistan on placing a US base in the Kulyab region near the Afghan border on the territory of former Soviet military unit. However, this Soviet base was plundered during the Tajik civil war and it could not be used. Originally, only some Antiterrorist coalitions' auxiliary services were situated in Tajikistan. Later, on Tajik territory in Dushanbe a French military base was created to support NATO operations in Afghanistan. The issue of using Kazakh territory was discussed during the first stage of the war in Afghanistan. In particular, airfields in Khimkent and Lugovoe were planned to be used by American military aviation, and one motorized infantry brigade could be quartered near Karaganda. However, it turned out later that there was no necessity for this since the Taliban was destroyed very quickly. Only Turkmenistan, which had good relations with the Taliban and enjoyed a UN-sanctioned official neutral status, stayed apart.

On the whole, the Russian political elite negatively appreciated the American military presence in Central Asia. It was afraid that America was trying to encircle Russia with its military bases and to create a *cordon sanitaire* around Russian territory. Besides, the majority of experts believed that the Americans would stay even after the operation. Opposition to this expectation was a point of consolidation for the Russian political class. For example, Konstantin Totskii, the director of the Federal Border Guard Service, said: 'We cannot agree with the permanent presence of the USA and other countries here [in Central Asia]'. Gennady Seleznev, speaker of the State Duma, declared: 'Russia will not welcome the creation of permanent American military bases in Central Asia' (Torbakov 2002).

After a month of bombardment, the combat ability of Taliban forces substantially decreased. On 9 November 2001 the Northern Alliance captured Mazar-i-Sharif, the biggest city in Northern Afghanistan. After that many warlords, who supported Taliban, deserted to Northern Alliance. On 13 November Taliban forces left Kabul. Active fighting continued until 17 December when American forces captured the Tora Bora caves, where Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters were hidden. For Russia and Central Asian countries the most positive aspect of American operation was the destruction of the Taliban's Al-Qaeda allies. Among them there were lots of fighters from the Russian North Caucasus and from Central Asian countries. After the end of the active phase of the antiterrorist operation the UN sanctioned a NATO military mission in Afghanistan, named the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). As the USA was drawn into a new war in Iraq, EU forces started to play a major role inside the ISAF.

The stationing of American forces in Central Asia justified the worst fears of Moscow. Russian political influence in the region quickly evaporated. Uzbekistan tried to play the role of an

alternative to Russia regional leadership, and it pushed through a decision to reform the Central Asian Economic Community. This organization was created as the Central Asian Union in 1994. In 1998 it was renamed the Central Asian Economic Community. Previous renaming meant a change of position towards Russia. The Central Asian integration structure was originally designed as a form of integration alternative to pro-Russian ones. After the reorganization of 1998 Russia was invited as an observer. The new reorganization of 2001-2002 was designed to underline the strengthening of military and political cooperation within Central Asia. This was perceived as an alternative to the Russian role in the region. Thus, responsibility for guaranteeing security in the region would have been transferred to such military structures as the joint Central Asian battalion, which was created in 1996 with US support. The agreement to transform the Central Asian Economic Community was worked out during the summit of heads of states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in December 2001 in Tashkent. The treaty establishing a new international body, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, was signed on 28 February 2002 in Almaty.

A very alarming situation developed in Turkmenistan. After unsuccessful attempts to assassinate the Turkmen life-long president Saparmurat Turkmenbashi on 25 November 2002, a new wave of mass repressions started in Turkmenistan. The Turkmen authorities wanted to close for their own population all possibilities to communicate with the outer world. The agreement with Russia on double citizenship came in the way of this, and in the beginning of 2003 Turkmenbashi decided unilaterally to repeal this agreement. All Turkmen citizens had quickly to decide which citizenship they would want, Russian or Turkmen. The Russian-speaking population of Turkmenistan perceived double citizenship as the only guarantee from the arbitrariness of the Turkmen authorities. As a result, this decision of Turkmenbashi was equal to the proscription of virtually all Russian-speakers from the country. Falling property prices and different bureaucratic barriers for selling property meant also the confiscation of their property. The Russian government did not seriously try to put pressure upon Turkmenbashi and did not even try to help the refugees to start a new life in Russia. Public opinion in Russia suggested that this was because of the agreement to purchase Turkmen gas by Gazprom, which had been successfully signed before.

At the April 2003 talks on the withdrawal of Russian border guards from the Tajik-Afghan border started. In 2005 this withdrawal was completed. The absence of Russian border guards resulted in a rapid increase of drug trafficking along the route Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Russia-Western Europe. Already in 2003-2004 the Taliban regrouped its forces and started a partisan war in the south of Afghanistan and in the northwest of Pakistan. North Afghanistan was controlled by warlords actively involved in the drugs trade. Neither Western forces nor the Khamid Karzai government in Kabul could control drug trafficking. Hopes of Central Asian countries to get substantial Western assistance did not materialize since the West was preoccupied with Iraq. The USA through different foundations actively supported opposition forces in the region. Besides, they continued their criticism of Central Asian regimes' policy on human rights issues. This once again shifted the sympathies of Central Asian political elites towards Russia.

'Colour' revolutions and a new wave of Russian regional influence.

In 2003 – 2005 the post-Soviet space experienced a series of 'colour revolutions'. This new pattern of political development was provoked by the 'Rose revolution' in Georgia (November 2003) and the 'Orange revolution' in Ukraine (November-December 2004). Both revolutions were actively supported by the US government and by some European countries. Activities of some Western non-governmental foundations played a role in organizing the revolutions. Besides, political forces that came to power in Georgia and Ukraine were characterized by anti-Russian rhetoric. Thus, 'colour

revolutions' were perceived by a large part of the Russian political class as a kind of 'Western assault' on Russian interests. Besides, all post-Soviet political elites, including the Central Asian ones, were afraid of losing power as a result of possible 'colour revolution' in their respective countries. In this situation good relations with Russia became for Central Asian leaders a guarantee of preventing 'colour revolutions'.

A wave of 'colour revolutions' quickly reached the Central Asia and Caspian Sea region. But the outcome was quite different from that in other regions of the former Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan in 2003 opposition unsuccessfully tried to prevent the transfer of power from Geidar Aliev to his son Ilham. In March 2005 Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev, who had earned the reputation of being the most pro-Western and most liberal in the region, was ousted during 'tulip revolution'. The government that replaced Akaev turned out to be less liberal and more pro-Russian than the previous one. In May 2005 there was a mass rebellion in the Uzbek city of Andijan (Ferghana valley). Its suppression by government forces turned into a major bloodshed. Uzbek authorities accused the US non-government foundations and, indirectly, the US government in organizing the rebellion. Cooperation with the USA was stopped and US forces left their base Karshi-Khanabad on Uzbek soil. At the same time, Putin supported Uzbek president Islam Karimov's tough course. Specific Central Asian reaction to color revolutions was consolidation around Russia and integration organizations supported by it. Uzbekistan was opposed to the work of GUUAM even before colour revolutions. It proclaimed its desire to leave the organization already in 2002. After that it simply ignored GUUAM meetings. However, Uzbekistan officially left GUUAM in May 2005.

The shifting regional balance of power also affected the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, which, as we have already mentioned, was created in order to serve as an alternative to pro-Russian integration structures. On 18 October 2004 during the Dushanbe (Tajikistan) summit Russia joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organization. Thus, the key Russian role in guaranteeing regional stability was underlined. On 7 October 2005, during the Saint-Petersburg summit of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, it was decided to merge this organization with the EurAsEC. After that the Central Asian integration structure disappeared. On 25 January 2006 Uzbekistan joined the EurAsEC. Finally, on 16 August 2006 Uzbekistan also became a member of the CSTO.

One can say that formally Russia to the middle of 2006 achieved its aim to include Central Asian countries into pro-Russian integration structures and to push all alternative organizations out of the region. The only exclusion was isolationist Turkmenistan. But at the end of 2006 Saparmurat Turkmenbashi died. His successor Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov is less isolationist. So, there is a potential for the evolution of Turkmen foreign policy according to the Uzbek model. But, as we have already discussed above, Russian organizational success in Central Asia was very limited due to the mutually contradictory nature of pro-Russian organizations.

Russian economic and energy policy in Central Asia

Putin's speech at the meeting of the Russian Security Council at the end of 2005 gave rise to discussion of a new foreign policy idea – Russia as an 'energy superstate' (Putin 2005). This conception is supported by the Russian political class (Simonov 2006, Kokoshin 2006). So, one can expect that the preoccupation of Russian economic policy in Central Asia with oil and gas will be preserved. Russian domination in the sphere of energy was associated with preventing the building of trans-Caspian pipelines: an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. In general, this purpose was achieved by Putin. In 2008 northern (Russian) routes of oil and gas transportation from the region are still the main ones, and construction of Trans-Caspian pipelines is

far from being started. However, to the end of Putin's presidency, China appeared as a new major player on regional oil and gas market, while Iran has a small scale, but stable share.

Kazakh oil is now transported mainly through Russian territory via old Soviet pipelines (Atyrau-Samara, Kenkiyak-Orsk, Mahachkala-Novorossiisk) as well as via the new Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) system (Tengiz-Novorossiisk). First agreements on the creation of CPC were signed in 1992, its construction started in May 1999, and first oil was exported in October 2001. The CPC includes major transnational oil companies. At present, a quick expansion of the project is blocked by Russia because of disagreements over oil pumping tariffs and profits of the shareholders. But the Russian position may change because of the construction of a new pipeline, Burgas-Alexandropoulos, in the Balkans. It is planned to pump Kazakh oil through this new pipeline.

Russia up to now has managed to block the construction of a Trans-Caspian oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan. However, Kazakh exports through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan is expanding. For this purpose, a fleet of large capacity tankers has been built. Besides, regardless of American opposition many international companies working on the Caspian shore make swapping operations with Iran. In this way Iran supplies the energy deficit in the north of the country, providing the same amount of oil at the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, a new major participant has appeared in this game. At the 15 December 2005 ceremony of opening of the first stage (Atasu-Alashankou) of a large-scale pipeline project Kazakhstan-China (Atyrau-Alashankou) was held. It should be mentioned, however, that mostly Russian oil is exported to China through this pipeline now. But this situation will change shortly; the second stage of the project will be finalized in 2009.

Turkmen gas along the Northern route is transported mostly through old Soviet pipeline system Central Asia-Center. Russia has for a long period blocked independent appearance of Turkmen gas on the European markets. Russian companies (Gazprom, Itera) either purchased Turkmen gas themselves or served as intermediaries in its supply to other post-Soviet countries (especially, Ukraine). As a result, Turkmenistan earned much less than current world prices permitted. This was the greatest stimulus to search for new transportation routes.

Russian preoccupation not to permit construction of Trans-Caspian gas pipeline has led to a decision to expand the existing infrastructure of the northern route. In May 2007 the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan reached an agreement on constructing the Caspian pipeline as an alternative to the Trans-Caspian one. A formal treaty was signed on 20 December 2007. Observers noticed that this agreement strengthened Russian positions in energy discussions with the EU.¹¹ In May 2007 there was also an agreement of 4 countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) on expanding the gas pipeline system, Central Asia-Centre. At the same time, there is already a small capacity gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran (Korpeje – Kurt-Kui), and an agreement on constructing a gas pipeline to China had been signed just before Turkmenbashi's death.

The high degree of political uncertainty in the Caspian Sea region negatively affects the development of a regional energy sector. In particular, the Caspian Sea is not still properly divided into sectoral zones. The constantly shifting Russian position throughout the 1990s was a major factor behind this uncertainty. The bilateral agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan (1998) and trilateral agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (2003) mitigated the situation a bit by giving the possibility to legally exploit oil and gas deposits of the sea shelf. However, there are still lots of disagreements even between these three countries (for example, about the median line of

¹¹ 'Caspian Gas Pipeline Gives Russia New Arguments in Energy Dialogue with the EU'. Information agency RIA-Novosti report, 13 May 2007.

the sea), while Turkmenistan and Iran disagree, in principle, even making territorial claims on neighboring countries.

In recent years the export of cheap labour from Central Asian countries (especially, Tajikistan) to Russia has turned into a major economic factor (Borishpolets, Babajanov 2007). The Russian government is unsuccessfully trying to bring some order into this migration.¹² Simultaneously, there are from time to time some attempts to organize a dialogue with Russian-speakers on the post-Soviet space (for example, at present, there is a project 'Russkii mir' - 'Russian world'). Although, as the situation in Turkmenistan in 2003 has shown, this interest in Russian-speakers is mostly for domestic propaganda purposes.

The lack of complex economic influence outside of the oil and gas spheres is one of the reasons behind the instability of Russian influence in the region. Russian 'pipeline arrogance' (Yatsenko 2007) constantly makes Central Asian countries search for new international partners. This makes many observers cast doubt on all present Russian political successes in the region. For example, just after the dissolution of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, plans to reintegrate Central Asia without Russia re-emerged. This time it was Kazakhstan's initiative, to which Kyrgyzstan was tempted to join.

Overall results of Russian Putin-era policy in Central Asia and Caspian Sea region

Our analysis has demonstrated, first of all, a very high degree of regional uncertainty. For example, it was made clearly visible by the 'waves' of regional influence of outside players (1999-2001, 2001-2003; 2004-2008), especially, of Russia and the USA, that constantly shifted regional balances of power. The situation with Caspian sectoral division is also very uncertain. In this situation, many aims of Russian foreign policy, formulated before Putin's coming to power that we have described at the beginning of this paper, were achieved. However, all these achievements are very limited and unstable. Russian interests and aims in Central Asia and Caspian Sea region were defined more concretely. However, these interests were not mutually agreed in the form of long term strategy. Neither certain stable amount of resources was allocated for realizing Russian Central Asian policy. As a result, this policy turned into a set of accidental decisions reacting to certain short-term challenges or opportunities.

In Central Asia Russia has carried out the task of neutralizing alternatives to pro-Russian projects of integration in the post-Soviet space (GUUAM and Central Asian integration structures). However, there is no deep unity between four simultaneously realized in Central Asia and Caspian Sea region pro-Russian integration projects (CIS, Eurasec, SCO, CSTO). Russian regional political influence has no real economic base, and thus it is quite unstable. The alternatives to Russian orientation for Central Asian countries still exist. They are realized either through bilateral cooperation with major international players or through such multilateral organizations as the SCO (cooperation with China), the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Economic Cooperation Organization (interaction with Islamic countries), programmes of cooperation with the EU and NATO.

Irrespective of Russian attempts to establish cooperation in the region with other great powers, this task was not performed. This is especially clear in the case of the USA and EU. Russian interaction with these powers is still perceived mostly as a 'zero sum' game. There were fewer conflicts with China or Iran. However, even with these countries there are big potential disagreements on economic issues (especially, on oil and gas transportation routes).

¹² *Conception of Regulation of Migration Processes in Russian Federation*, 1 March 2003; *Conception of Demographic Development of Russian Federation to the Period of 2015*, 24 September 2004.

Russia has made some sincere attempts to establish cooperation with the USA within the framework of the Antiterrorist coalition and with China within the SCO. However, there were many contradictions in these Russian policies throughout Putin's era. For example, it is unclear, how Russia can save its military and political domination in the region simultaneously by placing some costs for supporting regional stability on the USA and China. Besides, Russia cannot pretend to be a decisive economic player in the region without showing readiness to seriously invest financial resources into Central Asian economies.

Two main achievements of Russian Putin-era policy in Central Asia (political stabilization of the region to 2003 and serious increase of Russian influence in 2004 – 2008) were achieved mostly because of specific American policies. First, the antiterrorist coalition seriously weakened Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in the region in 2001 – 2003. However, the deep roots of regional instability (poverty, Islamic extremism, drug's trade, weak statehoods and total alienation between the governments and the peoples) have not been liquidated. Russia will now be fully responsible for stabilizing the region within the CSTO mechanism in case of a new large-scale destabilization. And it is absolutely unclear whether Russia is really ready for this. Second, American support for 'colour revolutions' alienated regional political elites while Russia showed its loyalty to these elites. However, even this last success has serious limitations. Russia supports political elites that it really does not consider to be sincerely pro-Russian and does not really trust.¹³ The Trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines, Russia's worst Caspian sea region nightmare, are still blocked. However, neither the West, nor Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have given up the idea of constructing them. In addition, China is showing more and more appetite for Central Asian energy resources.

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¹³ Speech of M.A. Kolerov, a Head of Department of Presidential Administration on Interregional and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries in Bilingua Club, 29 June 2006.

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