

Сопряжение Евразийского экономического союза и Экономического пояса Шелкового пути: преимущества, риски, достижения

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Аннотация: Статья посвящена преимуществам, рискам и достижениям сотрудничества между российским интеграционным проектом «Евразийский экономический союз» и китайской инициативой «Экономический пояс Шелкового пути». Так как евразийское пространство имеет для России и Китая стратегическое значение, политическими лидерами этих глобальных держав, было принято решение в пользу сопряжения ЕАЭС и ЭПШП для развития, укрепления и расширения сотрудничества в области экономики. С одной стороны, взаимодействие двух интеграционных проектов открывает широкие возможности для всех ее участников: экономический подъем, технологическую модернизацию, создание транспортно-логистической инфраструктуры. Россию и Китай объединяет общее видение будущих основ нового мирового порядка. В противовес западной модели организации международных отношений по принципу однополярности Россия и Китай отстаивают модель полицентричного мирового порядка. С другой стороны, на фоне всех объединяющих факторов выделяются проблемы, которые могут вызвать конкуренцию между Россией и Китаем. Речь идет о проблемах индустриализации стран-участников ЕАЭС и конкуренции, которая может возникнуть между российскими и китайскими товарами на евразийском рынке, а также в области промышленной техники. При этом важно понимать, что интересы России и Китая во многом совпадают, нежели расходятся. Интересы обоих государств носят не только экономический характер, но и во многом обусловлены заинтересованностью в обеспечении евразийской безопасности.

В рамках Сопряжения ЕАЭС и ЭПШП заключены первые взаимовыгодные проекты, направленные на развитие транспортной инфраструктуры и оказание финансовой помощи государствам-участникам. На фоне трепетного отношения постсоветских государств к национальному суверенитету китайский проект ЭПШП выглядит наиболее привлекательным благодаря отсутствию наднационального органа. Однако это обстоятельство не исключает вероятности попадания Центральноазиатских государств в чрезмерную финансовую зависимость от Китая. Между тем ЕАЭС позволит сбалансировать экономические и политические отношения Китая с государствами Центральной Азии.

В условиях глобализации Сопряжение ЕАЭС и ЭПШП может стать первым шагом на пути к созданию крупной международной экономической структуры. Сотрудничество рос-

сийского и китайского проектов имеет колоссальный потенциал для эффективного взаимовыгодного развития и открывает широкие возможности для государств-участников, что в свою очередь, позволит укрепить геополитические позиции России и Китая в Евразии в противовес геополитической активности США.

Ключевые слова: Россия, Китай, Евразийский экономический союз, Экономический пояс Шелкового пути, сотрудничество, «Один пояс - один путь», Центральная Азия

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Cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt: Benefits, Risks, Achievements

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the advantages, risks and achievements of cooperation between the Russian integration project “Eurasian Economic Union” (EAEU) and the Chinese initiative “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB). The Eurasian space has a strategic importance for Russia and China, so the political leaders of these global powers decided to join together the EAEU and the SREB for the development, strengthening and expansion of cooperation in the field of economy. On the one hand, the interaction of the two integration projects opens wide opportunities for all participants: economic growth, technological modernization, creation of transport and logistics infrastructure. Russia and China share a common vision of the future foundations of the New World Order. In contrast to the Western model of the organization of international relations on the principle of unipolarity, Russia and China defend the model of a polycentric world order. On the other hand, there are problems that can cause competition between Russia and China. The problems of industrialization of the EAEU member-states, the possible competition between Russian and Chinese goods in the Eurasian market as well as in the field of industrial technology may appear. At the same time, it is important to understand that the interests of Russia and China largely coincide rather than diverge. The interests of both states are not only economic in nature but also related to Eurasian security issues.

The first beneficial projects having been signed within the cooperation between EAEU and SREB aim at the development of transport infrastructure and financial assistance to the member-states. Considering the reverent attitude of the post-soviet states to national sovereignty the Chinese project looks the most attractive due to the absence of a supranational body. However, this fact does not exclude the possibility of getting the Central Asian states into excessive financial dependence on China. Meanwhile, the EAEU will help to balance China's economic and political relations with the Central Asian states.

In the context of globalization the cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB could be the first step towards the creation of major international economic structure. Cooperation between the Russian and Chinese projects has enormous potential for effective mutually beneficial development and opens wide opportunities for the participating states. The cooperation of the two projects will strengthen the geopolitical position of Russia and China in Eurasia as opposed to the geopolitical activity of the United States.

Keywords: Russia, China, the Eurasian economic Union, the Silk Road Economic Belt, cooperation, One Belt – One Road, Central Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic projects promoted by Russia and China are in wide demand among the participants of international communication. In September 2013 during a state visit to Kazakhstan, XI Jinping put forward the idea of forming the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB). In October 2013 during his visit to South-East Asia, the political leader of China invited the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASAN) to build the “Maritime silk road of the 21st century” together. Both initiatives were combined into a single political and economic strategy of China, which was named “One Belt - One Road” (OBOR). In March 2015 China published a document entitled “Excellent prospects and practical actions for the joint creation of the economic belt of the silk road and the Maritime silk road of the XXI

century”, which noted that the main routes of the Silk Road Economic Belt would pass: 1) from China through Central Asia and Russia to Europe (to the Baltic sea); 2) from China through Central Asia and West Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean sea; 3) from China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, to the Indian ocean. The directions of the Silk Road Economic Belt include two ways: 1) from the sea ports of China through the South China sea to the Indian ocean and further to Europe; 2) from the Chinese ports through the South China sea to the South Pacific ocean. Thus, China has aimed at strengthening its political, trade and economic influence in the entire Eurasian space, South-East and South Asia.

Along with the initiative proposed by China, the Eurasian economic Union (EAEU) accel-

erated. Having passed several key integration stages (Customs Union, Common economic space) by February 2012, the member countries of the Eurasian integration launched the work of the supranational authority - the Single economic Commission (EEC). In May 2012 the plan for the preparation of the draft Treaty of the EAEU was approved. On May 29 2014 the Treaty of the establishment of the EAEU was signed by the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. In January 2015 Armenia joined the Union, in the middle of the same year Kyrgyzstan became a full participant of the integration.

Through their projects Russia and China have identified the Eurasian space as a strategic direction of foreign policy. In order to avoid confrontation and ensure gradual economic development, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed in May 2015 a joint statement on Cooperation between the Eurasian economic Union and the Silk road Economic belt. A distinctive feature of the EAEU is its institutional nature based on supranational structures while the SREB is a project aimed at creating transport communications that facilitate access of Chinese goods to the Eurasian market and do not impose any obligations on the states joining the project.

An important part of the cooperation between EAEU-SREB is the agreement between the heads of governments of Russia and China on plans to build the "Ice silk road" (2017). This Arctic route involves the construction of infrastructure along the "South – North" lines to ensure the development of the coastal space of the Arctic [1].

In May 17 2018 the EAEU and China signed a trade and economic agreement proving the desire of both parties to "strengthen the joint partnership". On the one hand, the agreement is non-preferential and does not imply automatic reduction of trade barriers but on the

other hand, it allows targeted reduction of barriers to entry into the Chinese market for interested businesses and increases the transparency of regulation [2]. The agreement will enter into force in early 2019. It will be an important milestone in the intensification of trade, economic and investment cooperation between the EAEU countries and China.

The cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB can be accompanied by both advantages and risks. However, three years after signing the Joint statement on Cooperation, a number of achievements were reached.

BENEFITS OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EAEU AND THE SREB

1. **Trade and economic potential.** The EAEU member-states and China are characterized by a high level of cooperation in the trade and economic sphere. At the end of 2017 the trade turnover between them reached 102.7 billion dollars (including the export of Eurasian goods to China-45.3 billion dollars, imports - \$ 57.4 billion), an increase of 30.7% (export – by 37.7%, import – by 25.6%) [3]. In 2017 the share of China in the EAEU foreign trade amounted to 16.2%. According to Chinese analysts the further development of trade and economic relations between the EAEU and China should include the following basic tasks [4]: 1) standardization and interaction between the actors within the framework of the EAEU interface and Beijing's initiative should take place in accordance with WTO rules; 2) elimination of trade barriers and gradual progress to the EAEU-China free trade zone.
2. **The Construction of "Grand Eurasia".** The integration of all the leading economic associations in the Eurasian space into a large-scale project "Greater Eurasia" will be possible to occur in the future. A broad economic cooperation between the Eura-

sian economic Union, the Silk Road Economic Belt, ASAN and EU is coming. In the current political realities when relations between Russia and the EU have deteriorated and clearly lack confidence, the mega-project "The Grand Eurasia" is seen as unpromising.

3. **Cooperation in the high-tech sphere.** The EAEU member-states and China have a huge potential for cooperation in the implementation of innovative and technological projects. To improve the competitiveness of economies the EAEU member-states need technological changes in the context of deep integration. Cooperation with China would make it possible to replenish the innovative potential of the countries participating in the Eurasian integration and open up new opportunities in technological development. Russian expert S. Afontsev believes that cooperation in the high - tech sector will be "a real opportunity for Russia to ensure the solution of the priority task of increasing the share of non-raw materials in exports, for China to further expand its export potential through the production of fundamentally new products customized for specific markets of the EAEU and EAEU's partner countries" [5]. Such a judgement may be referred not only to Russia, but also to the other EAEU's member-states. For example, the development of information technologies is a priority for Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Despite the fact that the field of IT-technology in China is very young, however, in recent years, China has demonstrated impressive success in this area. In 2013 China overtook the US in terms of e-Commerce market and online sales. Thus, cooperation in the implementation of joint projects in the field of innovation will allow China and the EAEU member-states to develop and implement large-scale innovation and technology projects.
4. **Transport infrastructure.** The cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB will connect the West with the East and create an extensive network of railways, pipelines and ports as well as logistics infrastructure. This confirms the transcontinental importance of the Cooperation. China is interested in rail freight transport with Europe which will be an alternative to slower Maritime transport as well as more expensive air transport. At the same time the countries along the SREB will benefit not only from transit, but also from intensive trade which will be stimulated by the development of railway communications. Special attention will be paid to the development of transport infrastructure in the direction of the Arctic space.
5. **Economic globalization.** The cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB will transform the Eurasian space into a single economic zone, which will affect not only upon the formation of a new economic system, but also political relations. The Cooperation will simplify interaction between the countries of Eurasia, create conditions for the free movement of capital, goods and services and make an important contribution to trade liberalization.
6. **Political multipolarity.** Russia and China, on the example of their strategic cooperation, offer the world a model of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation. Russia and China share approaches to solving important international problems: the Syrian and Ukrainian crises, Iran's nuclear program and the Korean nuclear crisis. In 2013 Chinese President Xi Jinping, speaking for the first time with the initiative to build the SREB, stressed the special "spirit of the Silk Road" which is characterized by peace, cooperation, openness, exchange of

experience and mutual benefit. China has shown its commitment to such principles as “joint consultations, joint construction and sharing of the fruits of development”. The concept of the “OBOR” is aimed at the implementation of the following objectives [6, p. 242]: 1) promotion of comprehensive and sustainable security in Asia on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation, peaceful settlement of disputes, development of partnership, harmonious relations between countries; 2) development of cultural exchange between countries which will contribute to the joint development of different civilizations. The main principles of the “OBOR” initiative are mutual benefit, joint development and respect for the interests of all peoples living in the country within the sphere of the project realization.

RISKS OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EAEU AND THE SREB

1. **The probability of fierce competition.** The cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB can contribute to the emergence of competition between Russian and Chinese companies that supply their goods to the Eurasian market.
2. **Problems with industrialization.** Experts believe that trade with China will slow down the industrialization of the EAEU member-states as well as eliminate the support of local producers.
3. **Competition in the field of industrial engineering.** By entering into credit and investment agreements, China seeks to use equipment of its own production. The question is how the EAEU member-states will be able to test their equipment.
4. **Transition from bilateral to multilateral format of interaction.** In foreign policy China is inclined to conclude agreements on a bilateral basis, the cooperation be-

tween the EAEU and the SREB prioritizes a multilateral format of interaction.

5. **Problems of the EAEU perception as a whole structure.** China is developing cooperation with the actors of world politics on the basis of a certain hierarchy laid down in the concept of “diplomacy of a large country with Chinese specifics”. This concept is a structure according to which the countries of the world are divided into subgroups, i.e. large powers (Russia, USA), neighboring powers (border China countries), developing states. Consequently, China perceives the EAEU as Russia and other member-states of the integration.
6. **Possible contradictions between Russian and Chinese projects.** Experts believe that in recent years Russia’s influence in Central Asia is declining, as China is gradually strengthening its economic position thanks to financial opportunities [7]. However, it is too early to talk about reducing Russian influence in the region. Russia and the Central Asian states continue to develop political, military and cultural interaction. China does not need to aggravate relations with anyone as the government of this country has repeatedly stated its desire for peaceful cooperation, to promote prosperity and Eurasian stability. The probability of a collision between Russian and Chinese interests in Central Asia is very small because ensuring the security of the region is a priority for China and other member-states. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) tries to resist effectively to the threats, coming from the Xinjiang and Afghanistan.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EAEU AND THE SREB

1. In March 2017 the Eurasian economic Commission identified 39 priority projects that will be implemented by the EAEU member-states with China. The projects in-

- clude the construction of new and modernization of existing roads, the development of transport hubs, the creation of transport and logistics centers. Among these projects are the following: 1) construction of new roads within the international transport route “Western Europe – Western China”; 2) construction of high-speed railway “Moscow-Kazan”; 3) development of the Armenia-Iran railway line with access of Armenia through Iran to Kazakhstan, China and further; 4) construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway which will connect Chinese Railways with Uzbekistan and further through Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey with the European railway network.
2. The Asian infrastructure investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund have been established in China to provide financial assistance to the Cooperation of the EAEU-SREB. The SCO Interbank Association also provides financial support to the Cooperation.
 3. Within the Cooperation of the EAEU-SREB China has concluded lucrative contracts with the Central Asian states. In 2015 China and Uzbekistan signed a Protocol on expanding mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation within the Cooperation. Kazakhstan and China are implementing 51 joint projects in the field of industry, transport and logistics totaling about \$28 billion [8]. China is implementing gas projects with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. A contract was signed with Kyrgyzstan for the construction of a gas pipeline to complement the Tajik gas branch through which gas will be transported from Turkmenistan to China.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB covers a vast area of Eurasia, creating the basis for economic and techno-

logical growth of the states, located in the territory of the Cooperation. The time for the cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB has come: Russia and China take the weak economy of the Eurasian states under their control and offer a wide range of economic possibilities. There are certain obstacles to the implementation of the integration but they can be overcome if the leaders of these integration projects have the political will. Of all the above-mentioned risks, the positioning of the SREB as a purely economic project excluding political goals deserves special attention. Experts from China emphasize that the SREB is mainly an economic project aimed at the accelerated development of the Western provinces of China and the formation of close relations between the states of the region in the economic, political and humanitarian fields [9, p. 61]. Therefore, unlike the EAEU with its existing supranational body of the EEC, the SREB will look more attractive to the post-soviet states which are sensitive to their sovereignty. However, it is a mistake to believe that if there is no institutional structure in the SREB, then this project is more relaxed and non-binding compared to the EAEU. China allocates substantial loans to the Central Asian states, provides funding for various investment projects. Consequently, the financial dependence of the Central Asian states on China is increasing. Against the background of the emerging risks from the Cooperation a wide range of significant factors mentioned above should be noted. In the Cooperation between the EAEU and the SREB one can see not only a great economic importance, but also a focus on the problems of ensuring security and stability. In addition, in contrast to the geopolitical activity of the US in Eurasia the geopolitical positions of Russia and China are strengthened through the mechanism of the Cooperation of the Eurasian integration structure and the Chinese initiative.

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