EURASIA:
AN EMERGING CONCEPT?

Editors:

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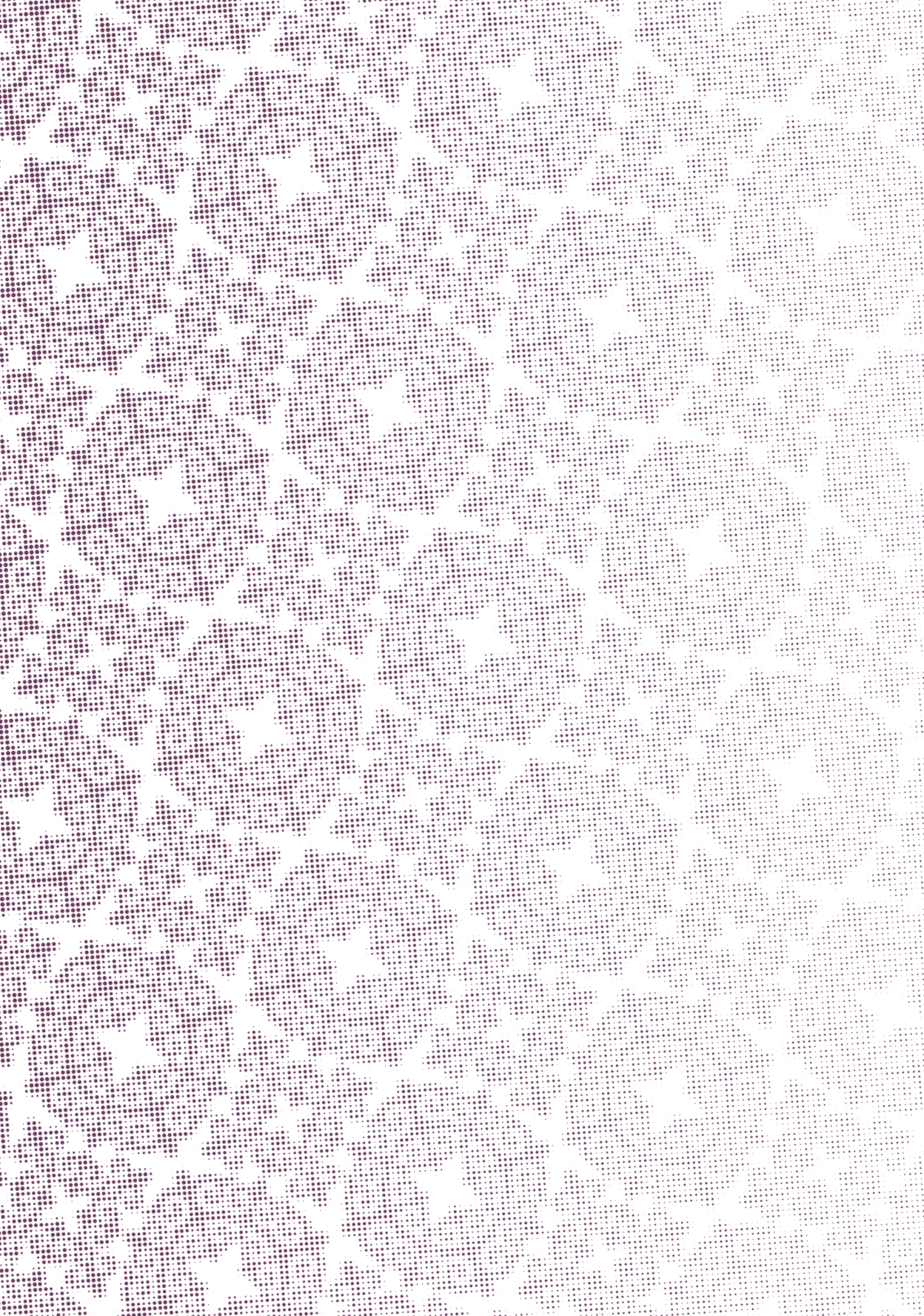
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Contents

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Foreword

In our days the world seems to become more diverse in many ways. The risk of SARS-CoV-2 (coronavirus) pandemic has still been with us, while new challenges and conflicts signalize the fact that after three decades of post-Cold War "Atlantic" world order, the wish and endeavors towards a multipolar political and economic system can be heard with increasing loudness. In fact, two actors—Russia and China—are the powers who challenge the American dominance in the most spectacular way, however, India and the ASEAN region are also players who may have important role in the formation and development of the world in the future. The economy of the world is in turmoil, which can be seen in the disruption of global supply and value chains, energy crisis, growing inflation, moreover the Russia-Ukraine conflict projects comprehensive changes in security as well.

The concept of Eurasia derives from the natural endowment that dozens of countries are located in the hugest landmass of the Globe, including the biggest country, Russia, and the two most populous ones—China and India as well. Moreover, successful integrations, like the European Union and the ASEAN are also here, these two organizations with their 27+10 member states represent nearly another one billion people. Beyond the present, abovementioned challenges, no need to refer to those "classic" global problems and difficulties that also hit all countries to a great extent, and that the world has been striving to overcome for many years. And all these are connected to the concept of sustainability as climatic changes, food safety and security, the health condition of people, which all give a lot of tasks for the present and future generations to solve.

In the present book of studies—*Eurasia: An Emerging Concept?*—the esteemed Reader may find a collection of five studies—being authored by professors and scholars from five different European and Asian countries. The scope of these studies is merely broad, from the issues of economic collaboration till security and political co-operation. The core concepts of these studies are sustainability and regionalism.

Besides two comprehensive, analytical studies, Eurasia and Post-Soviet Space: Spatial Analysis and The Relational Meanings of Eurasia, the book contains case studies on Kyrgyzstan, on the economic relations of South Korea and the Visegrad Group (V4), and also on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in reflection to the Chinese foreign policy.

Having seen the content of these valuable studies, I am confident that they will be not only interesting, but also give ideas and further impetus for professionals and scholars for future research or practical implementation.

Budapest, May 2022

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Oneness and Connectivity:
The Relational Meanings of Eurasia[1]

Emilian Kavalski

1. Introduction

This study undertakes an analytical journey into the post-Western flavors of the con-cept of Eurasia. While much of contemporary analyses of Eurasia have been spurred by the world-making power of large-scale connectivity projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, the American "Build Back Better World," the European Union's "Global Gateway", etc. projects, important aspects about the meaning and practices of Eurasia are occluded by the focus on trade figures and investments associated with such state-backed status projects. Instead, the following account uncovers the poten-tial of the Eurasian label to re-arrange trade and bilateral relations to reflect mutu-ality rather than equality. Such co-production of new norms and practices, goals and institutions is an indelible part and parcel of the intellectual history of Eurasia. After all, its designation is quite fungible, if not fuzzy: "Eurasia can be described as a 'not very precise, but functional' region, that most flexible, indeed indefinite designation of place" (Gleason 2010, p. 26). As such, the concept bears the potential of reconciling the usual disjunctures in globalization and development: e.g., tradition versus moder-nity, the local versus the global, state versus society, the material versus the rela-tional. In this setting, it appears that the so-called "shift to the East" in global politics has laid bare the difficulty of mainstream social scientific inquiry to foster different ways of seeing and encountering the world (Fisher-Onar – Kavalski, forthcoming; Ling et al., 2016; Sakwa, 2018; Wisniewski et al., 2019).

And such Eurasian alternatives are sorely need if our inquiries were to engender meaningful answers to the pressing questions of our times (Fisher-Onar 2018; Kavalski 2022). A growing number of scholars have ascertained that the models dom-inating social scientific interpretations are implicated in the construction of a world that is unravelling socially, fracturing economically, and deteriorating ecologically. As

a result, there is an urgent need for a change in perception, outlook, and vision that can help uncover new modes of thinking and doing social scientific research, while—at the same time—transcending established paradigms and practices (Kavalski, 2020). A major part of such rethink of the disciplinary purview has been its *worlding*, which has been associated significantly with the growing attention to the concept and practices of Eurasia. More than a mere call for interdisciplinarity, worlding entailed by Eurasian endeavors propounds strategies for going beyond the Eurocentric frame of the social sciences both by decolonizing their analytical framework and by widening the set of actors whose agency it can meaningfully explain and understand. Glossed as global life, the worlding endeavor discloses a multitude of ever-changing and polyphonous worlds (Fernández-Götz – Krause, 2016; Kavalski, 2015; Ling, 2015).

It has to be pointed at the outset that the projects of worlding, globalizing, and decolonizing the study of global life are treated here as coterminous, simultaneous, and overlapping endeavors in the current conversation on Eurasia. On the one hand, what these projects share is an ability to engage other ontologies as a way of learning different ways to observe and encounter the world, ourselves, and the problems that embroil us, and to put such alternatives into a nuanced comparative conversation with more familiar critical political lexicons and procedures inherited from Anglophone academic scholarship (Zhao, 2006). On the other hand, the projects of worlding, globalization, and decolonizing disclose the world as a multiversal space where alternative realities can and do coexist and have done so for quite some time (Cunliffe, 2017). As such, the relational knowledge-production underpinning the worlding of the study of global life mandates tolerance of at least as much diversity and contradictions as evident in the social relations being narrated.

It should therefore not be surprising that in the context of the growing prominence of Eurasian actors, many observers have begun enlisting histories, traditions, and ideas from across this region to rethink the understanding and explanation of global life. In spite of the diversity of experiences and practices that such worlding has uncovered, it seems that many of the contributions focusing on Eurasia have been drawing attention to the radical relationality of global life (Brzezinski, 2018; Katman, 2018; Kavalski, 2018b; Niaz, 2014). Such relationality contests the Eurocentrism (and its attendant epistemic violence and marginalization) which still informs mainstream accounts of global life. And it is in this setting that the concept of Eurasia appears to gain particular prominence in such worlding endeavors by making available much-needed vocabularies and optics for engaging phenomena, practices, and dynamics that cut across the turbulent pluriverse of global life. In particular, trans-Eurasian

connectivity seems to have been deployed both as an alternative and a critique of the stultified Eurocentric imaginary associated with the trans-Atlantic mainstream which has dominated the study and practice of world affairs since the end of World War II (Cho – Kavalski, 2015; Emerson, 2014; Glebov, 2019). The former underscores connectivity, diversity, and cross-cultural cosmopolitanism; whereas the latter emphasizes individualistic competition in an environment of inter-state rivalry. Thus, the "international" produced in this manner is an artefact of ontological and historical constructs with significant epistemic and ethical effects.

It appears that a shared point of departure for such critical Eurasian scholarship is the recognition that our understanding and explanation of global life is marked by a poignant lack of ontological, epistemic, and ethical pluralism. Thus, proponents of Eurasian perspectives embark on offering a more "complex" picture of the world. For some, such complexification entails a recognition as well as appreciation of the "extensive ways in which we are connected to and inextricably one with the rest of the people, creatures, and things on earth" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 33). For others, the complexity of global life is uncovered by the numinous interactions among "multiple meanings, categories, and forms of knowledge," "circulating multiple times and multiple directions", and across the "multiple interlocking 'circuits'… and patterns of connections across the Afro-Eurasian world" (Sen, 2017, p. 122). In this way, the reference to Eurasia suggests that global life resonates with and through complex and interpenetrating presences whose sociability is infused with the contingent opportunities inherent in the encounter with the other. The irruptive translation of such coexistence brings in dialogue the form and the substance of the languages and experiences of the diverse and infinitely complex worlds cohabiting in global life (Anthony, 2007; Cho – Kavalski, 2018; Smith, 2019).

Before detailing the relational knowledge-production of the Eurasian endeavor, the following sections detail two of its key elements: (i) the harmonious oneness propounded by Eurasian cultural traditions and (ii) the contingent contexts of historical connectivity. The suggestion is that the underlying aim of relational knowledge-production is to aid the ability to engage and thrive in an ever-changing world (Chen et al., 2009; Ersen, 2013; Niaz, 2014). The point then is to account for the possibilities, attendant in the living, in an abundant, yet profoundly entangled world. The concluding section evokes these registers of worlding mutuality by elaborating the ways in which the relational modality of knowledge-production promoted by the concept and practices of Eurasia embraces the ethical and political promise of transcending the expected by engaging creatively with the contradictions, challenges, and opportunities of an entangled and unpredictable global life. Such relationality becomes coextensive of,

and standing together with the interpolating spontaneity of surrounding events and things (Cudworth et al., 2018; Ling et al., 2016; Zarakol, 2017).

2. Eurasia and the Worlding of Global Regions

The notions of worlding, globalization, decentering, and decolonizing of regionalism are treated in this study as coterminous, simultaneous, and overlapping endeavors (Kavalski, 2018c; Zarakol, 2017). As such, the worlding endeavor reveals a certain degree of wishful thinking in the disciplinary mainstream that global issues are not only "amenable to the identification of a clear linear causation," but also that what matters in the study of world politics are phenomena that can be observed through such a "deterministic mode of efficient linear inquiry" (Cudworth et al., 2018, pp. 272-285; Kavalski, 2002a). The discussion of Eurasia and the multiple connectivity projects that span its complex expanse provide a meaningful point of departure for the worlding, the analytical study of regionalism. Commentators have long insisted that the analyses of Eurasian affairs need to abandon not only the "hegemony of their singular worldview," but also acknowledge the "'multiple worlds' that crowd its dynamics through the various, entwined legacies of worldviews, traditions, practices, institutions, and norms that have interwoven peoples, societies, and civilizations for millennia, making world politics what it is" (Walton – Kavalski, 2017, pp. 207-221). This is not least possible, because "Eurasia is also a trope, a figure of speech" (Gleason 2010, p. 32) owing to its characterization as a "set of continually shifting alignments" (Smith – Richardson, 2017, p. 1).

As such, the worlding endeavor both invites and legitimizes post-Western contributions to the study and practice of both regionalism and international relations (IR). On the one hand, such worlding intends to pluralize disciplinary inquiry by engaging previously excluded alternatives for thinking and doing world politics that have been forged both historically and in contemporary times by scholars, practitioners, and activists. On the other hand, such worlding offers productive openings for bringing into a meaningful conversation a wide range of cosmologies, power relations, and vulnerabilities than are typically accounted for by the narratives of IR (Frankopan, 2011; Kavalski, 2011; Ling 2015; Ohanyan, 2022). Thus, by demonstrating the "radical interdependence", mutual co-constitution, and embeddedness of a multiplicity of figurations of regional relations, the project of worlding regionalism seeks to disrupt the linear reductionism and problem-solving impulse backstopping the Eurocentric accounts of regionalism. The starting point for this investigation is not what one calls regionalization, but how it is *done*. Such investigation disrupts the perception of a

singular and uniform accounts of Eurasia, which largely draw on the international political economy of various connectivity projects crisscrossing its expanse.

The claim of such worlding of Eurasia is that such geopolitical locales are constituted neither only by clusters of proximate states, nor represent geographic or geostrategic "mental images" (Acharya, 2007) "politically made" (Katzenstein, 2005), "geo-psychologically arranged" (Pempel, 2005), or "spoken into existence" (Neumann, 1999). Instead, regional spaces such as Eurasia are also—if not, mainly—constituted by the social practices and through the communities of interacting international actors. The point here is that the worlding endeavor helps the study of Eurasia the assumption that the world is populated by isolated individual actors, who are socialized to make rational decisions on the basis of self-interest alone (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Kavalski, 2013b). Such dynamic multiplicity of worlding practices engenders a relational realm whose complexity is only partially known to the participating actors. Such propensity derives from the cultivation of a resonant capacity to respond to "the context of the changing world". It is thus, through continually "improving our competence for coping with situations that gives us a sense of affecting order and harmony" (Kavalski, 2019, p. 96). Eurasia, thereby, is invariably an emergent regional word, embedded in contingent spatio-temporal contexts, shaped by interrelations with others (and the multitude of meanings that such interactions engender as their iterations are themselves inseparable from the multiple webs of relations through which such communication gets refracted).

In other words, the relationality of such deliberate relations recalls an outlook which favors contextual sensitivity to the subtleties of specific interactions at the expense of strict adherence to precise and rigid formulations (Goody, 2010; Kavalski, 2012; Neumann – Wigen, 2018; Schouenborg, 2016). In other words, to capture the idea of Eurasia, it is necessary to engage its interactions as something not merely fixed in geography or driven solely by connectivity projects for great power domination (Kavalski, 2006; Millward, 2007; Niaz, 2014; Sengupta, 2009). Instead, Eurasia as a historically located notion and a mercurial warren of practices, reflects a dynamic of ongoing co-creation produced by contingency and contradictory sets of forces (Hann, 2016; Ling et al., 2016; Pan – Kavalski, 2022; Smith – Richardson, 2017). In this setting, the notion of Eurasia furnishes a "mental space" to simultaneously theorize and investigate empirically "the unity-in-civilizational-diversity" of trans-continental dialogical connectivity which bears the promise and potential for a "genuine global political cooperation" (Hann, 2016, pp. 8-9). The following sections outline two aspects of such understanding of Eurasia: the ideas of harmony and connected history.

3. The Eurasian Harmony of Global Life

Brimming with the coexistence of multiple "worlds", "domains", "projects", and "texts" of ongoing and overlapping interconnections, the interconnectedness of Eurasian spaces draws attention to the mercurial entanglements in which any occurrence does not exist merely in isolation, but reflect a nexus of innumerable interactions which interpenetrate one another in the shifting tapestry of social relations (Cudworth et al., 2018; Kavalski, 2015). The recognition of such interwovenness of life invokes Eurasia not merely as a stage for small, middle, regional, and/or great powers, but as an ever-changing and polyphonous pattern of fluid exchanges and social transactions that percolate and gain salience in the context of ongoing interactions and encounters with others (Goody, 2010; Pieper, 2021; Kavalski, 2018b). Its analysis then calls for relational knowledge-production capable of assisting the dialogical encounter *with* and *between* pluralities of different perspectives and experiences. A number of scholars have disclosed this mode of relations as harmony and/or *oneness* (Ivanhoe, 2017; Ling, 2017). Drawing on pre-Westphalian intellectual sources and traditions, the notion of harmonious oneness seeks to tackle primarily (but not only) the ethics of anthropocentrism dominating mainstream accounts of Eurasian life.

For instance, Ivanhoe (2017, p. 22) notes, under the influence of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs, "neo-Confucians developed a more robust and dramatic sense of oneness as a kind of identity between self and world." At its most basic, such harmonious oneness relates to the intimate and intricate entanglements between people, environments, objects, and living beings. The coexistence implicit in this understanding of Eurasia's relational knowledge-production offers a "view of the nature of the world; its primary moral aspect concerns the nature of the relationship between the self and other people, creatures, and things of the world" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 1; Ling, 2015). Framed in this way, Eurasia's harmonious oneness is a utopic, yet pragmatic "stance and attitude towards the world, perhaps as the expression of an ideal of what human being can be" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 27). In other words, the emphasis on harmony furnishes an "account of the Eurasian world that is consistent with our best science but still underwrites and supports an imperative of care" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 27; Sneath, 2007, p. 43).

The very claim that the Eurasian world is populated by and emerges through the continuous interactions between plentiful varieties of life and matter calls for the positing of alternative ontologies that exceed what is possible (and imaginable) under the established (largely, Newtonian) metanarrative of global life (Hann, 2016; Kavalski, 2016; Smith – Richardson, 2017). Harmony, thereby, is promoted as the alternative

to the hyper-individualism associated with Western neoliberal thought. By drawing attention to ongoing interpenetration between actors, structure, and order, amongst the diversity of agency, form, and matter implicated in, enacting, and enabling global life, the harmonious oneness of Eurasia challenges the conviction that the proper way for encountering and learning about the world is through the modelling of linear relationships with homogeneous independent variables that discern between discreet stochastic and systemic effects (Mações, 2018; Zolkos – Kavalski, 2016). As such, the myriad entanglements of people, powers, and environments (as well as their complex histories, cultures, and agency) stimulates an awareness of the dynamically-inter-twined contingencies through which different paradigms have come to be articulated and assembled.

The attention to Eurasian solidarities and the coexistence, which it nurtures, draws attention to the contrast between relational and autonomous self (Katzenstein, 2005; Kavalski, 2017). Associated primarily with Western intellectual traditions, the latter insists on discrete subjectivities, praises individualism, and values and normalizes the lack of dependence on others. In short, it produces "self-centered maximizers of [their] own best interests" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 4). The relational self, on the other hand, insists that individuals do not and cannot exist unless they are enmeshed in relations with others. In other words, the self is neither insulated nor detached. Thus, while Eurocentric conceptualizations of identity have been associated with assumptions that the individual has (or should have) absolute authority in making independent ethical judgements, the neo-Confucian framing suggests that an individual can be thought of as an entity only, and as long as it is located within a network of relation-ships (Walton – Kavalski, 2017). The point about the relational self, however, is not to deny the existence of individuality, but to provide an understanding and explanation of individuality which is distinct from the atomistic dualism dominating mainstream (and primarily Western) conceptualizations of subjectivity. A relational self would imply something different altogether—namely, the actuality and possibility of relations. As such, the relational self can occupy multiple social roles simultaneously and gains fulfilment through living within multiple webs of relations (Arnason – Hann, 2018; Kavalski, 213; Ling, 2015).

Eurasian scholarship is then steeped in the disclosure of a mercurial network of roles and relationships adopted by international actors (Anthony, 2007; Horesh – Kavalski, 2014; Katman, 2018; Ohanyan, 2022). It is the co-constitutive dynamics of interaction and actorness that reveal the transactional capacity to play different roles in the context of circumstantial and contingent interactions. In this respect, it is not so much the subjectivity of the self and other that are reflected in the ontology of relations,

but the roles that they play over time with one another (McCullock – Kavalski, 2005; Pan – Kavalski, 2018; Sneath, 2007). The interdependence and reciprocity characterizing such relational self, accords social relations much greater significance and relations are often seen as ends in and of themselves rather than means for realizing various individual goals. The inference is that the identification of such particularity can happen only relationally *through* and *in* oneness with the world. The relational self, thereby, is not merely intensely aware of its social location within an entangled global life, it also has a profound sense of co-constitutive connectedness to the world (Ling et al., 2016).

The normative verso of this framing of Eurasia is that while harmonious oneness might have different interpretations and may take different forms across multiple time-space continuums, its "most viable and attractive forms will engage and enlist particular features of the world and use these to support a larger vision of our intricate and inextricable connection with other people, creatures, and things" (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 30). The complex modality of such framing of Eurasia's harmonious oneness provides a robust and meaningful ethical alternative for the study and practice of world affairs. This element comes to indicate that relational action can be and, more often than not, is self-interested. This comes as a corrective to the altruistic underpinnings of established accounts of relationality, which treat relational actors as always and only other-oriented. Difference—including radical difference—is not merely desirable, it is the very condition of possibility for the self-organizing emergence of oneness (Huang – Shih, 2014; Kavalski, 2018; Zarakol, 2017).

In other words, the relational sociality of Eurasia does not imply a global life where agents merely find themselves; it is a venue where they get lost in the complexity of interactions and circulations. Oneness, thereby, creates openings that make it possible to flee the atomistic partitioning of the world. At the same time, the intent of oneness is not to "efface the variety and texture of our magnificently diverse and dabbled world" (Ling, 2015, p. 153). By virtue of both of their location in a dynamic social context and perceiving the world as a complex non-additive composition of ongoing relations, relational actors do not seek to merge into some sort of a homogenous global life, but aspire for the dialogical management of their differences through interaction so that these do not lead to disorder. In such a context, the harmonious oneness underpinning the concept of Eurasia reveals not only the interdependence between international actors, but also their mutual implication in each other's interactions and roles as well as the overwhelming embeddedness of these relations in the world (Arnason – Hann, 2018; Simmons, 2008). In the context of such ongoing and contingent co-constitution, any occurrence does not exist merely in isolation (as a

standalone event), but reflects a nexus of innumerable interactions which interpenetrate one another in the shifting tapestry of Eurasian social relations. Hence, the attentiveness to harmonious oneness makes a powerful case both for envisioning the fluid iterations of social transactions that percolate and gain salience in the context of ongoing interactions and for creating ethical openings to reimagine the complex webs of encounters framing global life.

4. The Connected History of Eurasia

It is to be expected that any relationship—be it bilateral or multilateral—will seek to utilize the past experience of its interlocutors. The interactions between Eurasian states are no strangers to this trend (Acharya, 2007; Kavalski, 2010a; Smith – Richardson, 2017). Thus, time, history, and memory tend to be deployed as important dimensions of national self-perception that draw attention to the multiple currents of distinctive (and oftentimes disparate) flows underpinning the international interactions of Eurasia. At the same time, foreign policy-makers often resort to linking the past and the future in the contextual exigencies of the present. The discussion of the past thereby becomes a prologue for the contemporary modalities of Eurasian affairs. Yet, a number of commentators have indicated that such foreign policy articulations are profoundly and irreparably flawed because of their misguided point of departure—namely, the recent, yet overwhelming experience of national statehood (Frankopan, 2011; Sen, 2017; Ling, 2015). History, in this setting, becomes a powerful ideology for the consolidation of a conflict-ridden domestic political stage through the projection of strategic fantasies and dreams into the past. Meaning—in particular, national meaning—is created by choosing what to remember.

Prior historical experience therefore morphs into a potent cognitive strategy for the ongoing re-articulation of narrow national perceptions of international order, self-identity, etc. and, at the same time, becomes a compelling discursive context enabling the continuous framing and reframing of the Eurasian foreign policy space (Arnason – Hann, 2018; Brzezinski, 2015; Kavalski, 2010b; Millward, 2007). Foreign policy emerges from the contingent amalgam of such a historical memory, whose legacy furnishes viable connections between "the present, future, and a re-created past" in the articulation of ideas, interests, and institutions (Kavalski, 2003, p. 260; Neumann – Wigen, 2018; Ohanyan, 2022). Foreign policy articulations can be read as sequences of explicit national-identity reproductions and reconstructions that draw attention to what remains figurative, implicit and inter-textual in the practices of international interactions (Cunliffe, 2017; Kavalski, 2021b; Ling et al., 2016).

In contrast, to such tendency to project the present into the past, Eurasian scholarship has sought to "delink the contemporary nation-states from the historical interaction that took place between the two geographical regions" (Sen, 2017, p. 14). As is the case with so many other places and relationships, the labels of nation states make no sense prior to the emergence of the Westphalian system in the modern period and its imposition across the expense of Eurasia (Arnason – Hann, 2018; Kavalski, 2010b; Smith – Richardson, 2017). Therefore, the emphasis on Eurasia goes back to uncovering the interactions between the geohistorical domains over which the contemporary states are located. In fact, more often than not, rather than of states, domains, or geographical areas, Eurasia demonstrates the coexistence of multiple porous circuits. And each of these circuits are sustained by multiple networks of exchange—economic, political, cultural, social, religious, etc. "commercial goods, Buddhist objects, and tribute items circulated through these connected yet self-contained" networks of exchange (Sen, 2017, p. 122).

Connectivity therefore is not merely associated with commerce or infrastructure projects as it tends to be interpreted predominantly today (Horesh – Kavalski, 2014). Instead, most of Eurasia has been historically integrated into networks that connected through the webs of "movement of people, the translation of texts, the use of medical and astronomical knowledge, the re-imagination/reinterpretation of knowledge and long-distance commercial activity" (Sen, 2017, p. 106). What emerges is an unusually vivid picture of dense networks of relations, which can no longer be treated as merely "bilateral" in the narrow state-to-state sense of this term. Furthermore, such analyses demonstrate the difficulty of identifying the specific "national" elements in such interactions. Such difficulty is provoked not merely because of the intertwined and intermingled character of exchanges, but also because the relationship involved participation in global networks and circulations occurring in other parts of the world, and which do not belong to any individual actor (Fernández-Götz – Krausse, 2016; Kavalski, 2017a). In this sense, the unique contribution by this kind of scholarship is not merely to assert the connected nature of Eurasian interactions, but that such interconnections themselves are deeply and meaningfully embedded in broader matrices of sociality. Connectivity, in this setting, represents more than a mere strip of geography, a place for commerce, barter and trade. Thus, despite ongoing conflict and cooperation, the connected history of Eurasia weaves profoundly relational ways of global life in a world populated by multiplicity and complexity, exchanges and flows, languages, religions, and goods.

At the same time, Eurasian relations are themselves enabled by actors, patterns, practices, and "trends in distant places" (Sen, 2017, p. 192). Such connected histories

of Eurasia suggest that global life is enmeshed in wider web of participants, rela-
tions, and experiences. People, ideas, objects, and commodities circulated across
the complex Eurasian networks of relations and intimately connected the exchanges,
supply chains, and experiences of actors strewn across its wide expanse (Anthony,
2007; Kavalski, 2013; Millward, 2007; Rudakowska – Kavalski, 2021). Such capacious
framing of Eurasia provides a detailed account of the long experience of exchanges
and relations that predated the modern period. Such an assertion flies in the face of
most revisionist accounts of provided by nationalist pundits, who seek to deny and
expunge such multiplicity and hybridity from the current historical record (Gleason,
2010; Maçães, 2018; McCullock – Kavalski, 2005). To all intents and purposes, there-
fore, it was in the particular modalities of modern national statehood that Eurasian
actors to self-imposed disconnection both from each other and the world (Kavalski,
2007a).

Hence, alternative connected histories around non-alignment, shared civilizational
and cultural experiences can be read both as instances of, and sources for connectiv-
ity across Eurasia. The unknowability of the different causes involved in the produc-
tion of events intimates those interactions cannot be understood solely in terms of the
behavior of participating actors; instead, it is the very relationality that produces com-
plexly connected behavior. Such dynamic multiplicity of interdependent conditioning
factors calls for a contextual attunement to the transient constellations of factors
and actors impacting on the content, trajectories, and possible transformations of
any circuit and its multiple interactions. As such, the understanding of connected his-
tory underpinning the concept and practices of Eurasia simultaneously backstops and
encourages the cultivation of relational practices and nuanced adaptations sensitive
to the emergent, historically-contingent, and self-organizing character of global life.

5. Conclusion

It seems that an unintended outcome of the turbulence that marked the post-Cold
War period has been the gradual shift in the focus of world affairs to the East. It
is in this setting that attention to Eurasian affairs have also gain growing attention
(Kavalski, 2007b). In this setting, the preceding sections have undertaken a parallel
assessment of some of the key inflections associated with the Eurasian move—the
emphasis on the concepts and practices of connectivity and harmonious oneness. It
has to be acknowledged that such relational framing of the Eurasian world will make
its explanation and understanding in the social sciences doubtlessly messy, but it also
promises to heal the habits of control, manipulation, and exploitation associated the

insistence on the separation between subject and object, knower and known, self and other, mind and matter. In this setting, Eurasian modes of theorizing offer practices, figurations, and optics for thinking through the paradoxes of modernity, the limits of knowledge (and its production), and the contingency of global life (Huang – Shih, 2014; Kavalski, 2021a; Niaz, 2014).

The contention is that the relational knowledge-production suggested by the concept and practices of Eurasia offer novel opportunities for a thorough reconsideration of the explanation and understanding of global life. Such an endeavor is not intended to brandish Eurasian relationality as either a panacea for the crises plaguing the global condition or the flaws of the social scientific mainstream. Instead, the relational framing of the Eurasian world offers a range of alternative stories that need to be heard. It is integral to the project of producing "worlds and knowledge otherwise" by actively seeking to change "the terms and not just the content of the conversations" (Zokos – Kavalski 2008, p. 12). Such decentering of the notion and practices of global life resonates with the emancipatory mutuality of many different ways of knowing and being in Eurasia. In this setting, the relationality lens of the Eurasian label helps outline the contested terrain of social scientific inquiry as a space for dialogical learning, which encourages engagement with the possibilities afforded by the interactions of multiple worlds and privileges the experiences and narratives of neither of them.

In this respect, the relational study of global life should be read neither as a mode, nor a figuration of a relativism premised on disinterest and detachment, but as an ethical (and not only) stance of emancipatory relationality (Cudworth et al., 2018). As Sen (2017, p. 30) eloquently demonstrates, Eurasian interactions are not a "linear, evolutionary process founded on the continuing accumulation of knowledge over time. Rather, changes, perplexities, and loss of knowledge form an import part of the past, current, and future trajectories of Eurasia." This endeavor does not shy away from the struggles, tensions, and inconsistencies of global life. Such a move has a palpable relational flavor associated with the convivial, yet dissonant cross-pollination of values, narratives, and practices in the study of global life (Kavalski, 2015; Ling et al., 2016; Pempel, 2005).

The point here is that such knowledge-production becomes a relational process of irruptive translation that brings in dialogue the form and substance of the languages and experiences of diverse and infinitely complex worlds. The capillary permeability of Eurasia also elucidates how difference (as well as different worlds and worldviews) can coexist without an existential container to bind them together. In other words, rather than positing difference as an obstacle to coexistence, the relationality

of Eurasian interactions illuminates (as well as enables) creative capacities for transformation, as well as encountering the multiplicity of experiences animating the world (Kavalski, 2016). Thus, Eurasia—as a concept, practice, space, and experience of dynamic encounters—discloses alternate ways of discovering, questioning and reflecting about existence, normative problems, and the nature and meaning of events.

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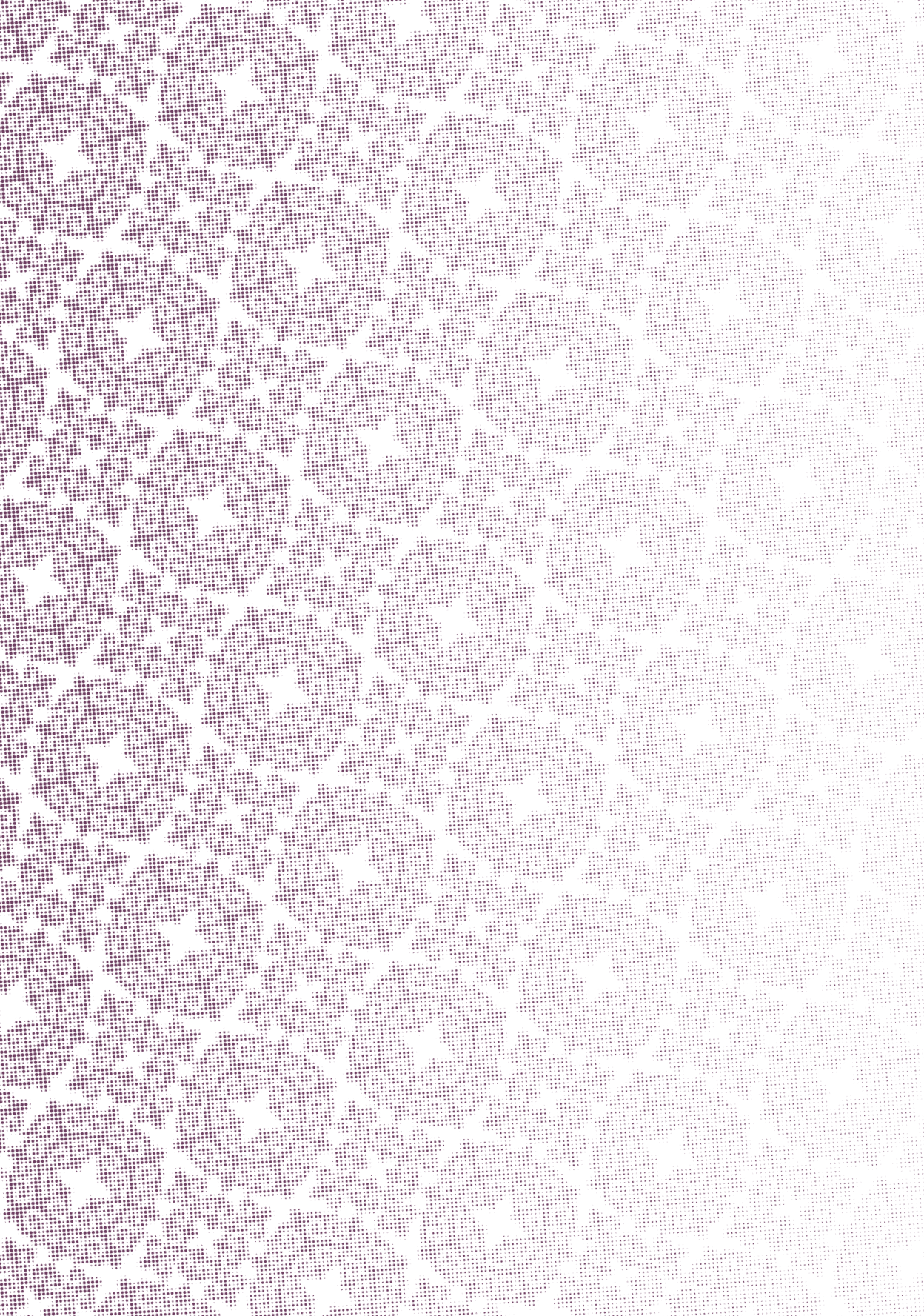
Eurasia and Post-Soviet Space: Spatial Analysis

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1. Approaches to Eurasian Region

The term "Eurasia" is constantly used in various contexts, nevertheless the definition of the term remains unclear. At least three notions of "Eurasia" can be distinguished, namely Eurasia as a continent, Eurasia in terms of Eurasianism and post-Soviet Eurasia (Vinokurov – Libman, 2012; Transition in Post-Soviet Eurasia, 2021).

From the geographical perspective, Eurasia is defined as a large continent in the Northern and Eastern Hemispheres. It is believed that it was the geologist, the Austrian scientist Eduard Suess, who first coined the term "Eurasia" to emphasize the internal unity of the divided parts of the continent at least in the geological and geographical sense (Lukin, 2018). Although there is no single opinion even on the origin of the term: other researchers attribute its introduction to the middle of the 19th century by the colonial government of India, from where it was borrowed in French in 1865 and in a number of other languages (Bruneau, 2018).

The understanding of the concept of "continent" used in political geography is predominantly of historical and cultural origin. This is a large land area with nearby islands, which is distinguished by significant historical and cultural originality. The division of the world into parts is conditional, so the boundaries between continents can also be only conventional. The border between Europe and Asia is particularly controversial and it has a rich history of interpretations.

It is widely acknowledged that the Eurasian continent is not a homogeneous space. It is usually divided into several macro-regions, which are Europe, Northern and Central Asia, West Asia, East Asia and South Asia. Macro-regions are distinguished on the basis of geographical closeness, but also on the idea about its proximity in historical, political, social, economic or cultural terms. Some macro-regions form stable regional subsystems of international relations, which could become the basis for the integration process in the future.

The most fundamental attempt to find a geographical explanation for the separation of the North Eurasian into a macro-region is connected with the analysis of the factor of the coastal or continental position of the leading powers. The main authors belong to the Anglo-American classical school of geopolitics. They are A. T. Mahan, H. J. Mackinder and N. Spykman (Mahan, 1890; Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). As a result of this approach, the models of concentric geopolitical systems of the Heartland, Lenaland and Rimland were developed, which should be considered the most significant evidence of the presence of Northern Eurasia as a separate macro-region in the world.

Based on Spykman's Rimland theory, concentric geopolitical models had a great influence on the development of Russian geopolitical thought. The school of Eurasianism agreeing with the Anglo-Saxon thesis on the key role of the Heartland, developed approaches on how to strengthen Russia's position in this zone.

Located in the Eurasian heartland, Northern and Central Asia constitutes the geopolitical core of the Eurasian continent. Although it is disputable whether this region has purely geographical grounds for being considered a separate macro-region. On the one hand, Northern and Central Asia occupies the Eurasian geological plate, and in this sense, it can be considered as a continent; however, the dimensions of this plate are much wider than the borders of Northern Eurasia and include all of Europe and East Asia. Thus, it is impossible to confirm geological grounds for the considering of the post-Soviet space into a separate macro-region.

On the other hand, in the north of Eurasia there exists a zone cut off from the world ocean, in which all river basins are inland or arctic. That indicates the existence of a special natural community of lands in northern Eurasia and it can be interpreted as an integrating geographic factor.

Some authors see the unique geographic position of landlocked small economies of Central Asia as critical for the region, since Central Asia serves as a strategically important land bridge between Europe and Asia. (Linn, 2012). Others underline the inherent resilience of Central Eurasian states connected with its geographic position (Prajakti, 2021). This geographic uniqueness is getting even stronger when analyzing not only five Central Asian countries but also the post-Soviet space with Russia in the center. Geographical proximity is a precondition for promoting integration, since it is easier for neighboring countries to cooperate due to a common history, cultural proximity, or even lower logistics costs. Historic, social and economic similarities facilitate looking for common answers to similar challenges.

Eurasia in terms of Eurasianism as an ideological concept implies a kind of cultural, historical and geo-political commonality between the included countries. At the same time, some elements of this commonality are based on the opposition to "Europe" (Laruelle, 2008). In this approach, Europe is excluded and treated as the "Other" constituting Eurasia while Asia is partly included depending upon the particular approach. Another element of the ideology is the rejection of modernization through Westernization and search for "another way" (Vinokurov – Libman, 2012).

This approach has similarities, however, differs from the traditional view of Eurasia as a synonym for the post-Soviet space. It assumed that the former soviet countries had a common history (since the time of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union) and a number of resulting elements of closeness. These elements include economic, transport and logistics ties, previously established unified security complexes, similar social systems as well as civilizational and value proximity with the Russian language as a single communicative system of education, science and culture in this space.

Several questions arise from this approach. Firstly, as mentioned before, in terms of geography it is unclear if there are geographical grounds to separate the Northern part of Eurasia as a macro-region unifying together the countries of the former USSR and separating them from the countries of Europe and South Asia. Secondly, it is questionable if the common history and social and economic ties are sufficient to integrate the space into a "stable region" or to ensure a sustainable integration process.

As some approaches give an explanation to the first question, it is better to focus on the significance of the different social factors from the prospective of the region's closeness.

It is worth mentioning that some research uses the expression "pragmatic Eurasianism" to describe Russia's desire to accentuate its political and economic presence in Asia. The idea of "pragmatic Eurasianism" means to support interaction between various parts of the continent with the stress on actual economic and political ties between countries (Vinokurov, 2013).

In our study by the term "Eurasia" we understand the members of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) with Russia as a regional leader. The countries situated there are characterized by geographical closeness as well as presumed social similarities. Although, the closeness of these countries should not be overestimated, as it was noted by Rawi Abdelal that during the 1990s, the post-Soviet countries did not demonstrate wide regional cooperation (Abdelal, 2001).

The study aims to check the initial hypothesis that the spatial closeness in Eurasia is accompanied by similarities in demographic, political, social and economic indicators. These factors have a substantial impact on the long-term social, economic and political development of countries.

2. Spatial Analysis of Closeness in Eurasia

In our study we apply spatial analysis to evaluate the closeness and cohesion in Eurasia in terms of demography, politics, economy and culture. According to the hypothesis, Eurasian states belong to a single spatial cluster with similarity in key social fields. To test the hypothesis, we had to identify the probable existence of a cluster in the Eurasian region and to estimate the density of ties between Eurasian countries. We assume that the network of similarities is dense enough to form a single regional cluster and that such cluster is stable.

To use spatial analysis methods, it was not enough to collect statistics for only selected countries. The study forms a part of a larger project on the spatial analysis of global trends. Within the framework of this project, statistics were collected for 193 countries of the world. The list of specific indicators for the project was selected based on the recommendations of experts in various fields (economics, politics, demography, culture). The availability of recent data for each indicator for the maximum number of countries was also taken into account, as it was a necessary condition for a more accurate application of spatial analysis methods.

Based on experts' recommendations to test the initial hypothesis, we selected a set of 10 indicators that allow the analysis of the basic phenomena in Eurasian countries from different perspectives. Since we assumed that neighboring countries should be similar in terms of economy, demography, and social and political development, we decided to use 10 indicators that include annual population growth; urban population rate; gross domestic product (GDP) per capita; exports of goods and services; corruption perception; female labor participation; bioethics freedom; enrollment rate in secondary education; natural resource depletion, protected areas.

Our analysis is based on data from several sources. The most valuable source was the World Bank Data Base where statistics of eight indicators were found (these were annual population growth; urban population rate; GDP per capita; exports of goods and services; female labor participation; enrollment rate in secondary and tertiary education; natural resource depletion, protected areas). The World Bank estimates

natural resource depletion as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) as the sum of net forest depletion, energy depletion, and mineral depletion. The estimation was based on sources and methods in the World Bank's "The Changing Wealth of Nations: Measuring Sustainable Development in the New Millennium". The data source for "Protected areas" is the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). In most cases for our analysis, we selected data from 2018.

The "Corruption perception" indicator is based on the Corruption Perception Index 2019 by the Transparency International that ranks 180 countries and territories by the perceived levels of public sector corruption.

"Bioethics freedom" is a part of the World Index of Moral Freedom (WIMF) calculated by the Foundation for the Advancement of Liberty (Spain). The bioethics indicators show how free is individual decision making on the main matters and issues that pose a bioethical dilemma (abortion, euthanasia and surrogacy). In the paper, the third biennial edition of the World Index was used.

All statistics are available in the indicated resources. For the study, statistics were collected for 193 countries and converted into a format used in special geographic information systems allowing the visualization of the results (Fig. 1).

The indicators were selected to illustrate different aspects from demographic trends to social values and environmental situation, including sustainability. The problem of sustainable development is of particular interest for Eurasia, especially when it comes to the northern part of the continent. Extreme natural conditions and sparsely distributed human populations characterize the Russian Arctic and Far East. Central Asia, which occupies a vast territory on the Asian continent, has significant differences in the elevation of parts of this territory that leads to a variety of climate and landscape forms. Severe conditions along with natural resources potential in the region pose challenges for developing and implementing sustainable, climate-resilient economic policies.

Sustainability should be considered in a deeper sense as consisting of three pillars, namely economic, environmental, and social. The latter includes creating an effective, democratic system of governance, relying on collaborative efforts to manage crises and promoting literacy and education. At least two indicators serve to assess these aspects of sustainability.

Figure 1.
Percentile cartogram "Corruption perception index"

CPI

■ < 1% (2) [9 : 12.270]
■ 1% – 10% (14) [12.270 : 20]
■ 10% – 50% (71) [20 : 39]
□ 50% – 90% (72) [39 : 73.800]
□ 90% – 99% (16) [73.800 : 86.730]
□ > 99% (2) [86.730 : 87]
□ undefined (16)
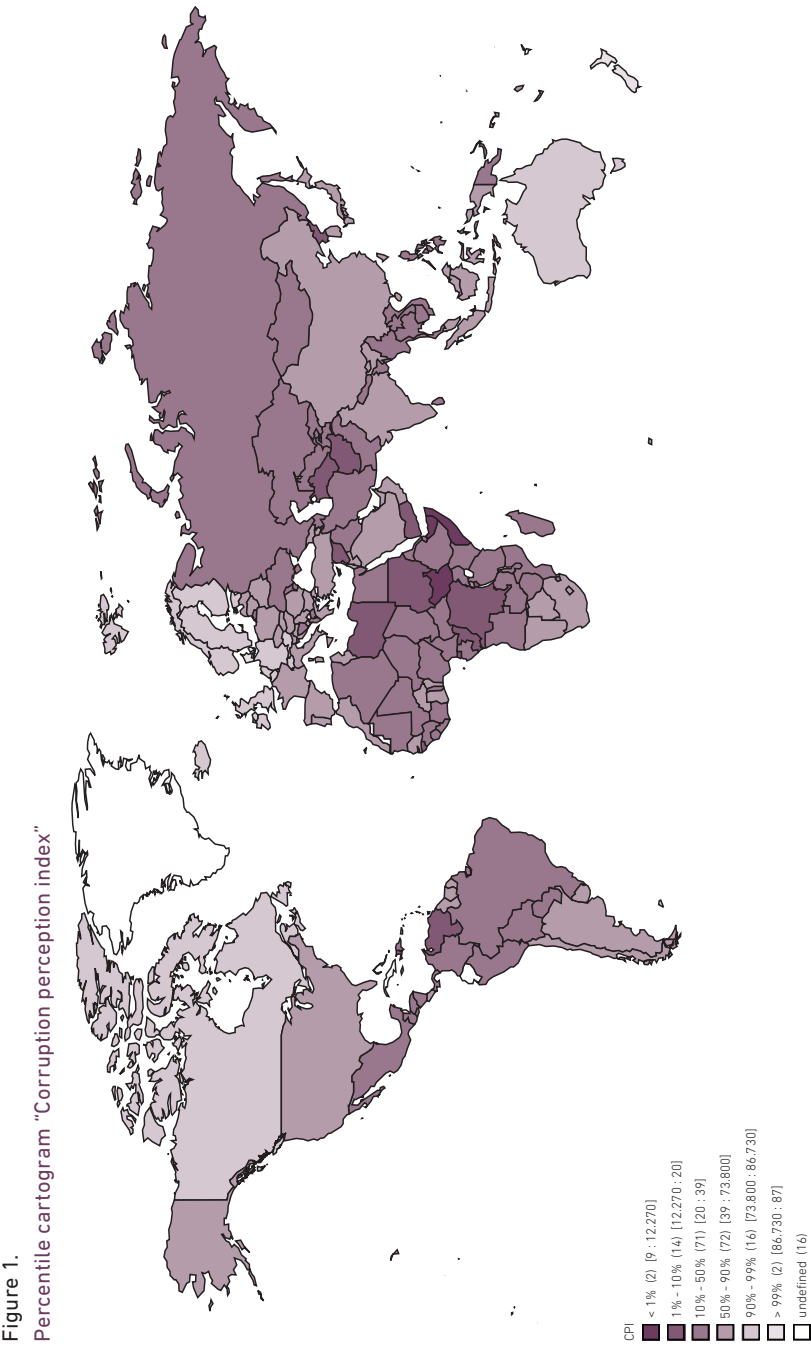
Source: authors' own compilation.

2.1. Spatial Autocorrelation Analysis Method

There are several indexes and methods for determining spatial autocorrelation. One of the most popular is Moran's Spatial Autocorrelation Index (Moran I) (Moran, 1948). Moran's I assesses the correlation between a phenomenon's level in a country under analysis compared to neighboring states. In order to determine the degree of spatial correlation, we calculated Moran's I for all selected indicators.

At the next stage of verifying our hypothesis, we used the method of calculating Local Indicators of Spatial Autocorrelation (LISA) to weigh the spatial autocorrelation between adjacent units (Anselin, 1995).

For that purpose, we calculated LISA. This method identified four local clusters:

• high-high: spatial autocorrelation cluster with high phenomenon indicators,
• low-low: spatial autocorrelation cluster with low phenomenon indicators,
• high-low: cells where statistically one would expect spatial autocorrelation with high phenomenon indicators, while in fact they are not observed,
• low-high: cells where statistically one would expect spatial autocorrelation with low phenomenon indicators, while in fact they are not observed (Ord – Getis, 1995).

To perform autocorrelation analysis, we had to set neighborhood parameters for countries (the neighborhood weights matrix). Traditionally, it was assumed that the optimal type of neighborhood was a neighborhood in topological relationships between objects (i.e., neighborhood by adjacency). Adjacency was determined by the "queen's rule," whereby any contact of countries is counted as a neighborhood. The disadvantage of this method is that island states that do not share land borders will be ignored when determining their neighborhood.

To reduce the effect of isolated territories, two alternative specially designed matrices were used in the analyses. The first or geometric matrix was designed to describe more precisely the geometric (or topological) neighborhood of the countries of the world, i.e., the real political map of the world. It relied on the legal borders of the countries of the world. Based on the median number of neighbors for all countries of the world, including island countries, the k-nearest neighbor method for each country was determined by the three nearest states. For each specific neighbor of the country, the weight of its influence in the neighborhood matrix was set. The operation was performed using the inverse distance weighting (IDW) method. The distance between the capitals of the countries was used as the distance. In other words, the weight of

the influence of the country located closer to the capital of the country under analysis was greater than the weight of the country, whose capital is located farther from the main city of the country under analysis.

The second or geopolitical matrix of the neighborhood was formed with regard to the political and geographical proximity of the countries. It is based on their membership in political and economic regional integration associations. For analysis, we chose the regional blocs where the highest degree of integration was achieved in each region. The participation in less advanced integration associations of the same region or limited (associated, suspended, planned, etc.) membership was taken into account with a coefficient of 0.5 of the main one.

By using the geopolitical matrix, we received a new political map of the world where continents are formed not physically but by politically close countries of the world. This allowed us to carry out spatial autocorrelation analysis in both physical and political space and analyze similarities and differences between them.

There are several regional and integration blocs in the post-Soviet space. The most advanced integration is achieved in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). It includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. All of them, as well as Tajikistan, belong to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These six countries' membership was counted as full membership (or of a coefficient of 1) in the geopolitical matrix. Four other countries (Azerbaijan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) are members of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) with a coefficient of 0.5.

At the next stage, we used the method of a local neighbor match test (Anselin – Li, 2020). It is used to assess the extent of overlap between the sixteen nearest neighbors in geographical space and those 16 countries that have the closest results in the described indicator. The number sixteen was chosen as a maximum number of official neighbors among all countries of the world (Russia).

2.2. Spatial Analysis and Dissimilarities of the Eurasian Countries

Using methods of spatial cluster analysis, we evaluate the expected closeness of countries in the Eurasian region. In terms of spatial analysis, our hypothesis means that countries having similar demographic, economic, political, and social statistics should form a localized cluster of high (or positive) spatial autocorrelation.

As was mentioned, Moran's I assesses the correlation between an indicator's level in the country under analysis compared to its neighbors. For the most selected indicators Moran's I reached relatively high level worldwide. It means that neighboring states tended to have the same results in such phenomena, e.g., in education ("Enrollment rate in secondary education" with Moran's I of 0.623), economy ("GDP per capita" with Moran's I of 0.603) or demography ("Annual population growth" with Moran's I of 594). Other results are calculated close to 0.5 (Urban population rate – 0.441; Corruption perception index – 0.499; Bioethics freedom – 0.482 and Female labor participation – 0.404). However, the "Natural resource depletion", the "Exports of goods and services", and the "Protected areas" demonstrated relatively low results (Moran's I of 0.291, 0.289 and 0.200 respectively).

At the next stage of verifying our hypothesis, we used the method of calculating Local Indicators of Spatial Autocorrelation (LISA) for each indicator. Both matrices were used, and it was assumed that spatial autocorrelation in the geopolitical matrix should be proved by clusters. If our hypothesis is true, countries from the Eurasian geopolitical blocs (the EAEU-CSTO-CIS) should form spatial clusters of each indicator to demonstrate their closeness relative to their neighbors from other blocs.

For the visualization of the results, we used LISA. As a visual example of LISA, the clusterization of the "Corruption perception index" indicator was mapped in Fig. 2 (geometric matrix) and Fig. 3 (geopolitical matrix).

Figure 2.
LISA cartogram by Corruption perception index (geometric matrix)

CPI
- ☐ Not Significant (138)
- ☐ High-High (16)
- ☐ Low-Low (20)
- ☐ Low-High (1)
- ☐ High-Low (2)
- ☐ Undefined (16)
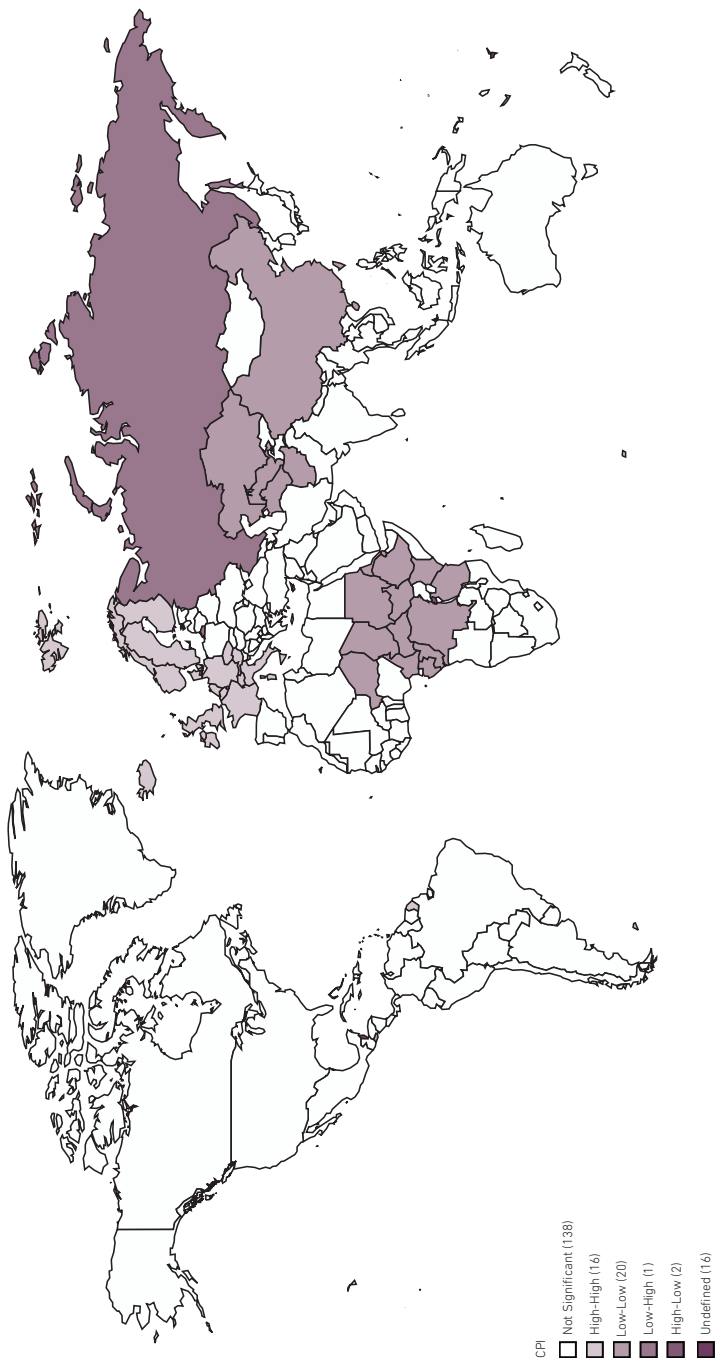
Source: authors' own compilation.

Figure 3.
LISA cartogram by Corruption perception index (geopolitical matrix)

CPI
☐ Not Significant (121)
☐ High-High (34)
☐ Low-Low (8)
☐ Low-High (8)
☐ High-Low (2)
☐ Undefined (20)
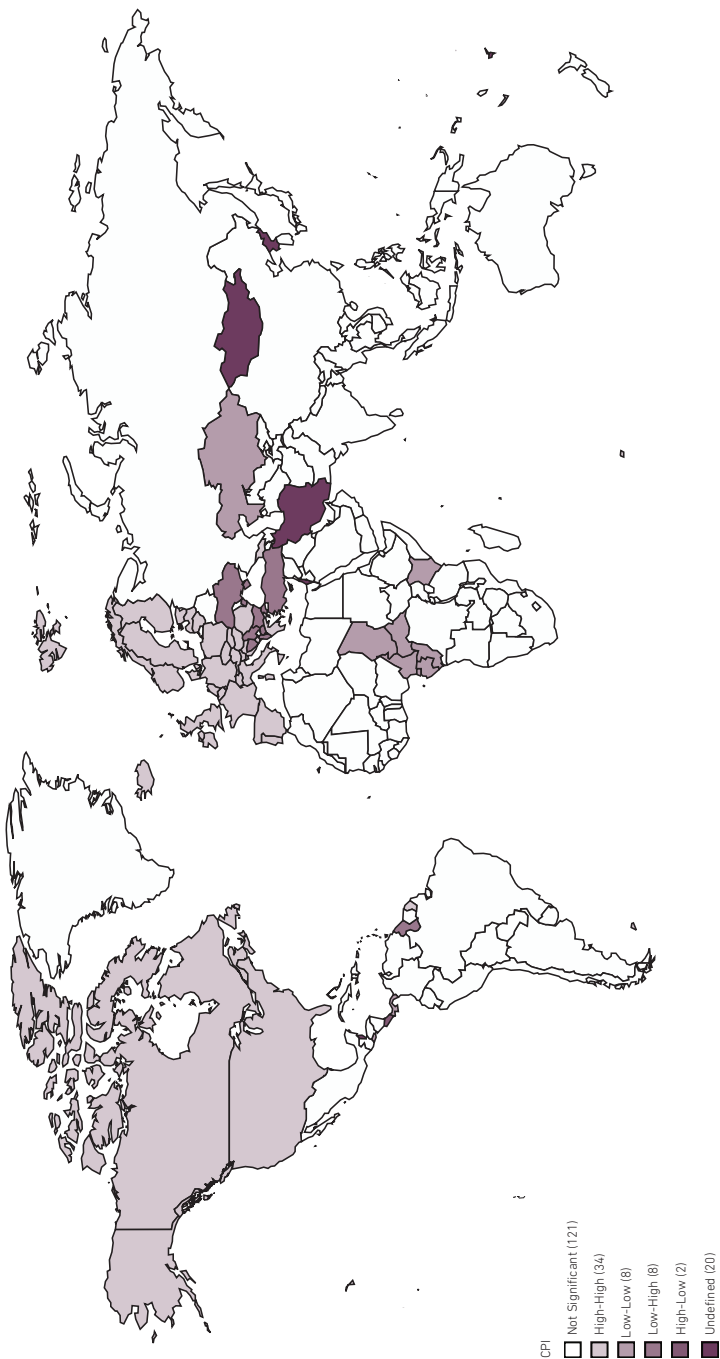
Source: authors' own compilation.

The test of 10 selected indicators showed the following results.

Calculating LISA on the geometric matrix for the "GDP per capita" indicator, we got a large cluster of high results in GDP per capita that includes most Western European countries and Russia, but no other Eurasian countries. The countries from this cluster have diversified economic systems and high labor productivity. There are no clusters among the countries of the Eurasian blocs in terms of GDP when the geopolitical matrix is used. The economic differences among countries are obvious. Nevertheless, this disproportion could be a prerequisite for close integration, rather than an obstacle in the case of the integration process.

The local neighbor match test shows cases when geographical neighbors are also countries with the closest value of the indicator. There are hardly any matches for the "GDP per capita" indicator in the post-Soviet space. It confirms a high level of differentiation in this region.

One of the most interesting demographic indicators is the "Annual population growth". On the spatial autocorrelation cartogram with the geometric matrix, a cluster with high population growth values is formed in Central and Eastern Europe including Russia. All of these countries are characterized by a low birth rate and relatively low migration growth. The geopolitical matrix shows no clusters in the Eurasian geopolitical blocs that are a result of multidirectional trends in population growth in the region, with growing population in Central Asian countries and reducing numbers in Russia, Belarus and Moldova. The local neighbor match test demonstrates only a small number of overlaps among the CIS countries.

The population growth trends have significant impact in the long-term integration process as it influences the labor market situation. In turn, the migration processes taking place among the countries of the region can affect the results of the indicator.

Different results can be seen in LISA for the "Export of services and goods", another strictly economic indicator. The spatial autocorrelation cluster of high values is formed in the northern hemisphere and include North America, Western Europe and East Asia, where Russia is an "error". That means that it also has a relatively high score but is surrounded by countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia with relatively few exports. LISA analysis of the geopolitical matrix demonstrates no spatial autocorrelation in the Eurasian blocs reflecting different trends in exports in the countries of the region. The local neighbor match test shows few matches among the

countries under analysis within the CIS, although some of them have matches with neighbors outside the bloc.

However, the lack of autocorrelation in export indicator means some possibilities for close integration between neighboring countries and it could be beneficial for some countries taking part in regional integration.

The most dramatic results are demonstrated by the next indicator, "Natural resources depletion". None of the analyzed countries belongs to a cluster in the geometry matrix, whereas with the geopolitical matrix most of the countries form a cluster with high indicator values, with the exception of Belarus, Armenia and Tajikistan where the level of natural resources depletion is relatively low in comparison to other "bloc neighbors". This result proves similarities in challenges faced by most post-Soviet countries due to the common economic legacy of the socialist economy.

The local neighbor match test also identifies closeness of countries in Central Asia as having a similar economic structure, namely raw materials economies.

Geographical and economic closeness demand coordinated measures in the field of the environment. Central Asian countries face a number of challenges. A combination with traditional economic and development patterns could badly affect the regional environmental system. Nevertheless, the situation could be grounds for common efforts towards more responsible economic policies with attention on sustainable approaches. Shared responses to these challenges could be the basis for more close cooperation and result in renewed integrating elements.

An interesting result can be seen when analyzing the Bioethics freedom index. On the spatial autocorrelation cartogram on the geometry matrix, a large single cluster of countries on the Eurasian continent is formed. This cluster also includes a rather large number of post-Soviet countries, namely Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan. Although in some other post-Soviet countries the Index is also relatively high, they have neighbors with apparently different bioethics policies (with bans on abortion, euthanasia, or surrogacy, or all of them) and do not belong to this cluster. The local neighbor match test demonstrates a number of matches among the countries under analysis. However, the differences between post-Soviet countries in the field of bioethics policy are sufficient, so that they do not form a cluster on the geopolitical matrix and no cluster in the Eurasia bloc.

The LISA method, with geometry matrix for analyzing "Corruption perception index" demonstrates that the whole Eurasian continent breaks up into several parts. Western European countries belong to a cluster with high scores (i.e., low level of corruption) on the Index while a good number of Central Asia countries as well as Afghanistan and China form a cluster with low values on the Index. Russia is located between two clusters and can be seen as an exception. According to the neighborhood effect, Russia should also have a low level of corruption, however, it is higher than in European countries, which did not allow the country to enter the European cluster.

Interestingly, no cluster is formed by the post-Soviet countries on the geopolitical neighborhood matrix despite relatively similar results in CPI in almost all of them.

As in many other cases, there are no clear clusters on the Corruption perception index when using the local neighbor match test. Although, some of the countries of Central Asia demonstrate a closeness to their Asian neighbors.

Quite informative results can be seen in the LISA analysis of "Enrollment rate in secondary education". The spatial autocorrelation cartogram of the geometric matrix shows a high secondary enrollment cluster in northern Europe. The countries of the cluster, which include the Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, Belgium, Russia and Belarus, are distinguished by high scores on the indicator and have post-Soviet neighbors with high scores (i.e., Ukraine, Georgia, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan).

When using the geopolitical neighborhood matrix, Russia and Belarus no longer fall into any cluster of secondary education enrollment, since they belong to the geopolitical bloc where this indicator is not the same for all members and some have relatively low enrollment rates in secondary education.

Almost the same pattern (with differences in the European part of the cluster) can be seen in the enrollment rate in tertiary education. Despite the high coverage of higher education in the USSR, there is no large cluster based on the geopolitical neighborhood matrix within the integration group. The local neighbor match test shows that there are not many matches in the post-Soviet space. It indicates a profound difference in the degree of coverage of the population with secondary education in Russia and the countries of Central Asia. There are also only a few matches in terms of coverage by tertiary education in the region. It may show that the education system is losing its importance as a unity factor. The post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe

are more integrated into the common European space while Asian countries are more similar to Asian neighbors.

The two last indicators' result confirmed a need to develop comprehensive sustainable policies for the region in a wider sense rather than in strict environmental terms.

It is important to bear in mind that in terms of geometry neighborhood, some Central Asian countries are closer to Iran and Afghanistan rather than to Russia. A result of this closeness we can see by analyzing the indicator of "Female labor force participation". There is no common cluster including post-Soviet countries neither on the geometric nor on the geopolitical matrix, whereas Turkmenistan belongs to a low-value Asian cluster formed by countries from Algeria to India. We can see hardly any matches in the region with the local neighbor match test for "Female labor force participation".

Some indicators demonstrate that there are no spatial autocorrelation clusters among post-Soviet countries when any of the matrices are used. These indicators include "Urban population rate" and "Protected areas".

The lack of clusterization both on geometric and geopolitical levels can be explained again in terms of an asymmetric development level between Russia and its neighbors. Russia with a 74 percent urban population rate does not have matches among countries neighboring it. In addition, most of the rest of the countries under analysis only have a few matches; however, it is noticeable that there are several matches between Central Asian countries and their Asian neighbors.

The local neighbor match test for "Protected areas" shows also a number of matches in the region, but the absence of matching neighbors with Russia (as well as China). It indicates the uniqueness of the nature protection policies in these countries in comparison with their neighbors. Such uniqueness is explained mostly by the size of the territory and the exceptionally high level of industrial development of the countries.

As for the last indicator, it is worth mentioning that many of the CIS countries, including Russia, as well as countries in the Persian Gulf and some countries in South Asia and North Africa belong to countries with a low share of protected areas.

Along with the fact noted above that the countries of Eurasia are united by a high level of depletion of natural resources, we assume that they face the same challenges in terms of sustainable development. Considering that large areas of most Eurasian countries have difficult natural conditions, and the economies of the countries actively

exploit natural resources, the issues of joint development of responsible economic, environmental and social policies can be considered as an example of mutually important tasks.

Although Russia should have a particular interest in forming policies to exploit and to develop territories in the Arctic in a sustainable way, there are other areas of common interest in terms of promoting sustainable development for the long-term benefit, e.g., the Caspian Sea.

3. Conclusion

The overall conclusion is that the spatial analysis produced ambiguous results for the hypothesis of the greater closeness among post-Soviet countries.

To prove our hypothesis, we analyzed 10 different indicators ranging from strictly economic indicators (GDP per capita) to complex indexes reflecting political and social development trends (e.g., Corruption perception or Bioethics freedom).

As the method of calculating Local Indicators of Spatial Autocorrelation (LISA) demonstrated, the chosen countries had significant differences in almost every analyzed aspect. In some cases, the countries under analysis showed higher level similarities with other neighbors rather than among themselves. Russia, which seems to be the engine of the integration in the region, demonstrated, in most cases, clear spatial closeness to European countries or similarities in some results with China.

The study revealed that the degree of similarity between the countries of Eurasia does not reach a level sufficient for the formation of stable clusters. It proved that most of the post-Soviet countries have differences in demographic, social, and economic trends.

The analyses confirmed the key role of past history in the formation of the post-Soviet space. It was clearly illustrated by the fact that the only spatial cluster formed by this geopolitical bloc is of an environmental-connected indicator "Natural resources depletion".

At the same time, this result means that all countries in the region have a common need to pay attention to sustainability principles and to work out common policies in the field.

The observed heterogeneity of characteristics influences the prospects of regional integration in Eurasia and cooperation in different fields. Some of the differences could be seen as preventing regional integration in a traditional way. The others could become prospective grounds for more closeness in terms of economic integration.

In addition, since the spatial methods are used relatively rarely in analysis of trends in integration, especially toward the post-Soviet space, these are preliminary results. Also, the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic still cannot be fully assessed at the moment. Thus, these results should be further tested with the involvement of other groups of indicators to assess socio-economic similarity between the countries of the region in a particular field or to describe observed trends or within certain periods.

Overall, the analysis demonstrated that the level of connectivity in the post-Soviet space is insufficient to advance integration. Given the revealed dissimilarities the further efficient development of Russian-led integration blocs in the region is questionable. The recent crises will not facilitate the convergence of the countries, merely bolstering the heterogeneity of intra-regional processes.

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Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an Example of Development of Regionalism and Geopolitical Strategies in Chinese Foreign Policy

Ljiljana Stevic and Slobodan Popovic

1. Introduction

Due to obvious economic, political and security reasons, countries all around the world tend to understand and interpret China, in the most cases, from its own identity prism, national interests, and their relations with and perceptions on (One) China. This "simplification" could lead the world community into a misperception in analyzing Chinese global dynamism and positioning in the Global Governance, particularly since the end of the Cold War, when China lost its balancing position between the Soviet Union and the USA. The end of the Cold War and bipolar international order brought many uncertainties in regard to the Chinese, both domestic and foreign security, diplomatic and economic interests. This tectonic change pushed China to reinforce its policy of reforms and opening up initiated in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping. The result of that was not only the Chinese first projection of continental geopolitical and strategies of creating regional (Central Asian) order, but the Chinese stepping in pursuing multilateralism and confidence building measures. Using these strategies, China established its first multilateral organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and for the very first time, it started to create a regional common approach based on partnership identity, long-term vision of sustainability and development, and not on hierarchical Sino-centric world order.

China is still facing many challenges in promoting the SCO region identity and active role of its member states. Challenges are geopolitical, geo-economic, diplomatic, security and financial in nature. But those challenges are providing the Organization with numerous opportunities to improve management capacities, to deepen the cooperation between member states and to harmonize allegedly insurmountable member states' national interests. By overcoming challenges, the atmosphere of cooperation within the SCO framework will be perceived as the essential factor and fore for maintaining regional security and promoting economic development. Consequently, the SCO's global prestige, strategic credibility and attractiveness will be even more notable. For that reason, already, many other states are striving to take a more active role in SCO connection plans and partnership development. As an illustrative example

we are taking Mongolia (SCO observer state)—one of the pivotal actors in USA Indo-Pacific strategy. The Mongolian president on the sidelines of the SCO summit initiated a campaign of China-Russia-Mongolia trilateral meetings, because Mongolia is ambitiously striving to be more involved in Asian security and economy offered by SCO (Pieper, 2022).

2. Theoretical Understanding of (Asian) Regionalism

Regionalism already became one of the most important theoretical approaches or levels of analysis on global governance. The word "regionalism" implies that analyses based on it are geographically focused on some particular part of the globe, that is, region. Region which is analyzed can be: 1) an existing region; 2) a region which is emerging as projection of one state's constructive or assertive ambitions to make regional balance of power more suitable for its national interests and 3) an existing region whose institutional, political, cultural and economic features and processes the state is changing by employing its capacities of relational power.[1]

Professor Stefanovic-Stambuk (2012) claims that regions became the third level of analysis of international relations. Regions overtook that position from the "level of international". Therefore, the first level is individual, the second is state, the third is regional and the fourth is the international level. In the same context, Fredrik Soderbaum (2011) advocates that regionalism has become a research field in itself, rather than being limited to a narrower state—or policy driven process conceptualized in terms of "regional integration" in the classical sense. Hence, regionalism as an analytical tool provides us with new knowledge and information on how world politics is made (Stefanovic-Stambuk, 2009). The increasing importance of regionalism, as an analytical tool, testify that international relations and interstate relations are becoming even more puzzled, multidimensional, interconnected and jeopardized by more complex and unpredictable, both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. At the same time, it is a testimony that for conducting comprehensive analysis of the international relations or global governance, we have to divide global landscape not

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1 For the purpose of this research, it will be used the understanding of relational power offered by relational theory of international relations. According to this theory, it means that power comes from relations, or simply, relations are power. Power is not a possession of a particular actor. Rather, it is a process of constantly manipulating and managing one's relational circles to one's advantage. An actor is more powerful because it has larger relational circles, more intimate and important others in these circles, and more social prestige because of these circles. It is not the relational circles themselves but the manipulation of such circles that makes her more able to influence others (Yaqing, 2016, p. 42).

only into different units of regions, but on the processes by which those regions are also sustained, created or reshaped.

Although, regionalism as an analytical concept has this position within the political sciences, there is no one definition of it, because it is apparent that neither the object of study (ontology), nor the method of studying it (epistemology) has remained static (Soderbaum, 2011). Recently, scholars have been focusing their attention on Asian regionalism, because Asia is one of the most dynamic, vibrant and, in many aspects, still unpredictable part of the globe. Besides that, Asia is, in terms of political system and institutional arrangements, different to the West. Dynamism of Asia is also brought by fact that in this part of the globe, besides the complex geographical map of Asian states and their (non-defined) territorial boundaries, there are countries whose leaders declare that protection of their national interests is directly conditioned by their geopolitical, military and geo-economic presence in Asia.

For some authors, regionalism as a new framework of the interstate relations creates the atmosphere for the revival of protectionism and/or neo-mercantilism (Soderbaum, 2011). On the other hand, there are understandings that regionalism is speeding up global interconnectedness, since globalism and regionalism are two mutually intertwined processes (Stefanovic-Stambuk, 2009). The same vision on interconnectedness of regionalism and globalism is also promoted by the SCO. Namely, in the *Beijing Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the SCO on Building a Region of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity* from 2012, we can read the following: the heads of state noted the on-going complex changes in the international system since the beginning of the twenty-first century, featuring an increasingly multipolar landscape, stronger regional coordination, deepening globalization, closer interdependence between countries and a larger role for information technologies (SCO, 2012). Regardless of the scope, regionalism is a voluntary process created by two or more governments, or two or more states/societies. Involved stakeholders invest and develop their knowledge, expectations and interests with the aim to establish particular type of (inter)relations by signing treaties, agreements both formal and informal (Mace – Belanger, 1999). Therefore, regionalism is multidimensional, political, economic, security and a cultural process of two or more states within the space, which is defined as a region (Stefanovic-Stambuk, 2009).

The success of regionalism (Hettne-Soderbaum, 2000, p. 469) is measured by the concept of *regionness.* According to them, regionness indicates the multidimensional result of the process of regionalization of a particular geographic area. "Regionness" is therefore the process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive

object to an active subject, capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region. Regionness thus implies that a region can be a region "more or less". The level of regionness can both increase and decrease. The concept of region-ness is particularly important with regard to the SCO. As it was previously said, the SCO is the first multilateral organization initiated by China, and represents the insti-tutionalization of the Chinese power and the strategies of (geo)economic and (geo) political regionalism in Asia. By investing material and nonmaterial resources, China in active cooperation with other SCO member states is striving to create an "SCO Region". In the Chinese understanding, if this region is capable to act towards both internal and external challenges and opportunities, at the same time it is mirroring great achievements of the Chinese good neighborhood diplomacy, adaptability and resilience to global turmoil and accepting Chinese strategic ambitions as a crucial part of regional stability.

By following the logic of regionness, it is obvious that sustainability and resilience are amongst guiding principles in and of Chinese foreign policy, particularly in making a supporting environment in regard to the long-term business and partnership deals. Sustainability and resilience are highly positioned, because China has evolved into one of the most important, and sometimes the most important, participant in existing structures, agreements and relationships at the regional and global level, as well as an initiator, re-constructor and architect of many new ones, which are based on prin-ciples substantially differing the ones that had been dominant in the contemporary world until recently (Mitrovic, 2018, p. 18). Hence, China by investing its resources, which it possesses on the requested level, is determining the criteria of sustaina-bility and resilience. As noted by Michael Yahuda (2007, p. 75), the continuing rise of China and its energetic diplomacy (and proactivity) in Asia, which has been taking an increasingly multilateral form, is changing the character of the international politics of the region. In doing so, China has not only been changing the form and scrutiny of its relations with neighbors, but also it is remodeling the regional geopolitical and the geo-economic landscape. At the same time, it implies the rise of Chinese nationalism, because the Chinese people could believe that China is the pillar of global stability.

Although Chinese strategies in making, reshaping or sustaining regions belong to the so-called "new regionalism", for the purpose of this article, we will not analyze the waves of regionalism.[2] Our attention will be focused on the—scientific and practical—

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2 More detailed on the waves of regionalism consult: Soderbaum, F. – Shaw, T.M. (Eds.) (2003): Theo-ries of New Regionalism. A Palgrave Reader. Basingstoke: Palgrave; Lake, D. – Morgan, P.A. (Eds.) (1997): Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World. USA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

idea of Asian regionalism. In literature, there are different understandings of what are the main characteristics of Asian regionalism. For example, Acharya and Johnston (2007, p. 246) accentuate informality. In their analysis, Asian regionalism is characterized by "formal informality". Stephen Aris (2009, p. 455) suggests the main feature or shaper of Asian regionalism is taking the desire of national elites to eliminate challenges to their political authority and legitimacy. The regime stability is particularly important for leaders of the Chinese Communist Party to sustain party legitimacy, which they are equating with Chinese stability and the realization of the Chinese dream. Peter Katzenstein (2002, p. 3) claims that Asian regionalism is unofficial and grounded on market, ethnic or national lines and capital. Mie Oba (2019, p. 128), similarly to Peter Katzenstein, advocates that Asian regionalism eschewed formal institutions, which makes it more open compared to the European one, which is more based on politically established discriminatory arrangements. In regard to this informality, constantly maturing and evolving Asian regionalism shows that it is possible to deepen ties of sincerity, (interests) and trust between nation-states in the same region not only via legal treaties and charters, but also through the generation of common principles and patterns of behavior on the basis of shared values and beliefs (Aris, 2009, p. 458). As noted by Acharya (2001), it may be argued that while common values are necessary for community building, these need not be liberal democratic values. A shared commitment to economic development, regime security and political stability could compensate for a lack of high degree of institutionalism understood in the European way. Therefore, involved stakeholders in making Asian regionalism are striving to create the atmosphere of mutual trust, sincerity and constant harmonization of national interests, which are important given the changes that occurred in their history of mutual relations. As illustrative examples of historical changes, we can accentuate Sino-Indian and Sino-Russian relations. Due to this historical suspicion between neighbors and European expansionism in Asia, sovereignty is a label mark of Asian stability and identity, it is understandable why Asian regionalism is characterized by strong protection of sovereignty in mutual cooperation (Stefanovic-Stambuk, 2009; Acharya, 2001). Therefore, an organization that attempts to legally bind them and develop sovereign control over areas of domestic policy is not likely to win the favor of the region's political actors (Aris, 2009, p. 457). Historical mistrust represents a great issue for the SCO sustainability and global prestige. Because China is putting sovereignty on the list of core and undisputable questions, China was accused of being selective in its regionalism and guided by selfish national interests. According to this view, China is much more eager to promote further institutionalization (of relations) when the organization's distribution of power favors China and when issues dealt with by the organization are significant for China (Cheng, 2018, p. 13). As a demonstration of this, we can underline South and East China Sea disputes.

For some authors, Asian regionalism is grounded on the "institutional hedging" strategy, because Asian states are using multilateral institutions, instead of traditional military measures, to compete for power and influence in international politics (Mie, 2019). For this reason, the majority of Asian countries are nurturing different systems of values compared to Western countries, Asian regionalism was defined as rival regionalism. In the view of Ellen Frost (2014), rival regionalism emerges because Asian regionalism in some cases is led by states which are indifferent or even hostile towards US geopolitical strategies and visions of how Asian security architecture and supply chains should be organized. As the most prominent example, she underlines the SCO, which was not supported by the West. Contrary, it was discredited as a "talk-show" and "club of dictators" (Mitrovic, 2008). Joel Wuthnow (2017) in his analysis shows that the USA in the majority of situations discredits Chinese endeavors to be more involved in creating Asian security architecture, because the USA is afraid that China can create Asian security without the USA. In other words, there is a tendency to dismiss collective identity building in most non-Western regional organizations that is not based on juxtaposition to the West, as part of the Western-centric focus on a "traditional" geopolitical perspective (Aris – Snetkow, 2013, p. 219). In the same context, we can say that SCO regionness and strategic credibility are on a high level, which makes the USA anxious about future Chinese might and US position in its attempts to achieve the goals proclaimed in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

3. Chinese Understanding of International Relations and Regionalism

Prior to the presenting of the Chinese understanding of regionalism and international relations (IR), we present the thesis of Alistair Johnston who supports "sociological turn" in IR theory. He explains that the behavior of actors converges because of endogenous changes in the normative characteristics and identities of the actors or because of social identity-based nonmaterial desires to conform (Johnston, 2008, p. 15). From our point of view, socialization, integration in the world community and incremental expanding of Chinese ambitions help explain China's cooperation in major security institutions in the 1990s. We will show some Chinese views on theories of international relations, and how China sees its regional cooperation within its foreign policy.

The beginning of the 21st century IR saw a global turnover. As the world entered the globalization era, deeper pluralization occurred which indicated the need for development of the new platform of IR theories. One significant change was development of non-western theories of IR instigated by Archaraya (Archaraya, 2019), Buzan (Buzan,

2016) and Tickner (Tickner, 2016). Parallel to this, we saw the development of theories on regionalism, particularly Chinese, attempting to explain the world from a Chinese point of view. The Chinese race in promoting its norms, values and practice goes along with, what traditional geopolitical reading understood, competitions in the sphere of resources, markets and political relevance.

To understand the Chinese view on regionalism, we consider it important to analyze the speech *Diplomacy with the Neighboring Countries Characterized by Friendship, Sincerity, Reciprocity and Inclusiveness* delivered by Xi Jinping. The first word we marked is "reciprocity". But, in that reciprocity China is a much more powerful economic, political and military partner, which is striving to become a global superpower. In addition, China is their biggest trading partner and creditor, and this relationship is not a *vice versa* case. Having this in mind, we ask, by what means would Chinese partners/neighbors pursue reciprocity towards China? If they cannot realize the Chinese vision, pace and strength of reciprocity signed by legally binding agreements, how will reciprocity influence the principle of non-interference in other states' internal affairs that China insists on? These questions should be answered by following the development of the Chinese regional and neighborhood geopolitical strategies and peripheral diplomacy (周边外交 – *zhoubian waijio*).[3] In the abovementioned speech, Xi Jinping stated as follows: Regions around our borders are strategically significant to our country in terms of geography, the environment, and relationships[...] to achieve these strategic aims, we must maintain and make best use of the strategic opportunities we now enjoy, and safeguard China's state sovereignty, national security, and development interests[...]. We should work with our neighbors to speed up connections of infrastructure between China and our neighboring countries[...]. We must develop a comprehensive security strategy with neighboring countries, actively participate in regional and sub-regional security initiatives, push forward cooperation and enhance mutual trust (Xi, 2014). Several features, which Chinese regional and neighboring/peripheral geopolitical strategies will be grounded on, have been accentuated. Chinese leaders, that is, CCP leaders will pay full attention to the neighboring regions. Attention will be on the level that China will not miss any opportunity to be an involved actor in future regional security initiatives. Since security and economy are not separated, China will exert influence/pressure on economic initiatives too. Thus, China is taking an even more decisive position, or in the Chinese view, inclusive, in making neighboring regions. In the same context, China is striving to be more influential, if not the most influential actor, in creating the rules of the game. This is

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3 The scope of this diplomatic approach for China is to be presented as a propitiator with aim to reinforce its pivotal position in Asia (Avijucki, 2009, p. 508).

important for China, because in its relations with neighboring states, it strives to be accepted as a no-strings attached provider of goods. In doing so, China is creating a structure of interstate relations, which will be suitable for what China perceives as a period of strategic opportunities and overcoming environmental challenges and hostilities. One of the methods in achieving this goal, is China's selected development of infrastructural (inter)connectivity with and between its neighbors. This could be important for several reasons. First, by construction of infrastructure, China is speeding up the emergence of the physical, in time and space, presented web. Through the same infrastructure, China is accelerating the flow of goods, capital, services and people. Having in mind that China is the biggest financier of this infrastructural connectivity, China is more directly present in the other states' territories and involved in their political, economic and security initiatives. Chinese leaders promote the idea that if there is wider physical/infrastructural connectivity with neighboring states, they will consider China as their natural partner and not as a stakeholder who is imposing its ideas, norms, values and interests. In a wider sense, it benefits China to export its financial, labor and overcapacities in the steel, cement and glass industries (Mitrovic, 2016).

The next section will analyze the Chinese understanding of regionalism mirrored in development of the SCO.

4. SCO Regionalism in Practice – Harmonization and Challenges

When the SCO was founded in 2001, it attracted Western suspicions and criticism of its form, sustainability and scope. It was accentuated that the SCO would not be a lasting phenomenon for two main reasons. The first was that at the very beginning of its foundation, the SCO did not embrace countries which were defined as democratic by Western criteria. The second was that it was not based on the strict and exclusive legislative procedures and liberal-democratic values. However, the evolvement was quite to the contrary. The SCO, after two decades of its existence, demonstrated that rigorous legal rules, liberal-democratic values presented by Western way are not the only precondition for successful regionalism, that is, regionness. By the foundation of the SCO, China demonstrated to the international community that constant harmonization of interests, nurturing political pluralism and economic diversity, and respecting differences in expectations are driving forces for one voice decision making and developing regionalism. By insisting on these principles, China is encouraging other countries to follow the SCO's pattern in making cooperation and a developing common approach to what it believes to be a more suitable method for overcoming

contemporary regional and global challenges and to some extent, domestic ones. At the same time, by constantly enhancing capacities and creating new spheres of cooperation, i.e., mutual interests, China, through the SCO, is bringing new geopolitical dynamism not only in Central Asia, but also to South and West Asian regions, the Indian Ocean and Pacific region, and indirectly to Eastern Europe.

By showing that the doubts in its scope and durability did not bring about the expected failures, the SCO has attracted more and more countries to take participation in its work. It implies that SCO is understood as a prestigious organization that we can rely on. One of the many results of such perception of the SCO happened in 2017 when Pakistan and India—the most populous democratic country—became full member states of the SCO. After that, during the summit of the SCO Heads of States held in 2021, Iran also became a full member state. Currently, there are nine SCO member states: China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Besides member states, in loose SCO institutionalism, the following statuses are also recognized: dialogue partners (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka), observer states (Mongolia, Belarus, Afghanistan), and guest attendance (ASEAN, UN, Commonwealth of the Independent States and Turkmenistan). By enlarging the number of its member states, the SCO as the independent unit of the Asian geopolitical, security and geo-economic landscape and diplomatic space, believes that it possesses the institutional capacities for resolving the issue of complex interstate Asian relations. However, several objective reasons of the SCO member structure imply huge SCO potential. First, there are two permanent and veto members of the UN Security Council—Russia and China. Second, Russia, China and India (and Pakistan) are nuclear powers. Third, China is the second largest world economy, and the world's largest trading country. In terms of energy security, the SCO embraces the countries which are amongst the biggest producers and exports—Russia and Kazakhstan—and countries which are amongst the world's biggest consumers, China and India. After that, the geographic position of the SCO region implies globally important transit and strategic potential of the SCO and its member states.

For the purpose of this article, we are focusing on how China is transforming this potential into a real SCO advantage. First of all, the SCO region is interconnected by Chinese financed economic corridors. Namely, five of the six of these economic corridors are going across SCO countries. The six economic corridors labeled as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are: 1. China-Pakistan; 2. China-Central Asia-West Asia; 3. Bangladesh-China-Myanmar; 4. China-Mongolia-Russia; 5. New Eurasian Land Bridge; and 6. China-Indochina Peninsula (Vang, 2018). Apart from abundant

Chinese financing of the SCO projects, in 2020, SCO member states pledged to invest US$8.6 billion in twenty major projects in the areas of infrastructure, equipment manufacturing, international logistics, trade, two-way investment, e-commerce, business and cultural exchanges, and bio-medicine (China.org.cn, 2020). In financing projects of the SCO region, particularly in changing Central Asian landlocked geopolitical character, there are non-SCO countries and organizations involved, which confirms that the SCO is not targeted against any third country and that the SCO region is an open region. As an example, we can take the railway between Ferghana valley and Tashkent as a joint project of the World Bank and the Chinese Eximbank (International Crisis Group, 2017). China, both independently and in cooperation with its partners all around the globe, is trying to transform the SCO's region tremendous transit potential into one of the Chinese linchpins of global interconnectedness. But many authors see this as Chinese ambition to create a greater China zone of influence and revoke the Sino-centric world order. Further, they advocate that China is challenging world stability and is a revisionist state (Mearsheimer, 2017). On the other hand, some authors have different views on Chinese proactivity in making the world more interconnected by requiring reciprocity from its partners. According to Mitrovic (1995), China abandoned the concept of the Central Empire, and it is pursuing a foreign policy grounded in requests for "world interdependence".

By using the SCO's evolving institutional capacities in re-making the Asian geopolitical landscape, China makes the West anxious. Keeping in mind the geographical structure of the SCO, we notice that the Organization includes two geopolitical concepts, which Western scholars have defined as crucial for ruling the world. The first geopolitical concept is the *Heartland–pivot of world history*,[4] brought into the science of geopolitics by Halford Mackinder. The second geopolitical concept is *Rimland*,[5] brought into the science of geopolitics by Nicholas John Spaykmen. Not only does the SCO embrace these two concepts, but through SCO planned and finalized infrastructural projects, China is (inter)connecting these two geopolitical regions. China, as the biggest financier of the SCO plans, is offering a completely new understanding of the landlocked geopolitical character of Central Asia. At the same time, China is giving them new possibilities in their politics of balancing. Besides that, by pursuing the plans of infrastructural development, China is giving to landlocked states the real chance to be connected with the vibrant markets of the Pacific region and wider. But there are reasons why China is the biggest financier of SCO infrastructural projects,

4 In the direction east-west Heartland is covering the space from Volga to Yangtze River and in north-south direction from Arctic to Himalayas.
5 Rimland includes Middle East, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

beginning with power position, to controlling the flow of goods, capital, services and ideas. With such a power position, China is the actor who is maneuvering Central Asian activities and even national interests. In the wider perspective, it is creating the atmosphere to employ its military and to deepen military diplomacy with other involved stakeholders in the SCO region. Chinese leaders believe in representing China as a military partner, not as a military threat (Popovic, 2021). Following this logic, China will be in a much better position to prevent the inflow of military influence or the developing of military trends which Beijing perceives as a possible or real challenge. For Stephen Aris and Aglaya Snetkov (2013), Chinese ambitions to (inter) connect the Heartland with the Rimland is perceived by the West as a great challenge, because the Western perspective is shaped by the traditional reading of geopolitics grounded in the assumption that states inevitably compete for influence, status, and control over resources vis-à-vis one another and in terms of their hierarchical position within the international system. Nevertheless, this tendency to view Others in the world through your own (self) geopolitical imagination and identity, often leads to misrepresentation of the perspective (and ambitions) of the Other (Aris – Snetkov, 2013).

Although in terms of geography, the SCO covers a vast maritime space, there is no SCO mechanism, which tackles the development of the SCO maritime potential. Besides the Caspian basin, Indian Ocean, Pacific and Arctic Ocean, the SCO region possesses tremendous hydro potential, because in this region are located some of the longest rivers in the world. However, so far, there is no harmonization or common approach in the SCO as to how member states should manage cooperation in this sphere. For some authors, the biggest problem lies in the fact that member states cannot synchronize their views on which maritime area should be prioritized, be that ocean, seas or rivers (He – Wang, 2018). The problem encompasses unresolved Chinese territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea, and also disputes between Russia and Japan on Kuril Island/Northern territories to name but a few. In the sense of prioritization, there are emerging doubts about which means and manner the security of the maritime part of the SCO region should be secured. Should it be by abiding by a security-militaristic approach–fighting against terrorism or by securing sea lanes of communication in economic terms? Should member states employ their own power projection capabilities or should they create an SCO combat force? But the SCO has many multilateral organizations and cannot claim to present a fully coherent and collective representation of all of its member–states' geopolitical perspectives and interests. Indeed, as with all collective groupings, the SCO is the subject of competition and a divergence of voices among its membership. These areas of contention among the SCO members have centered on whether it should primarily focus on security or economics (Aris – Sentkov, 2013, p. 204). After that, the big

obstacle in promoting SCO maritime potential is that some member states are members of other security alliances that are suspicious of it or their actions are (in)directly targeted against Chinese and SCO ambitions and strategies. Namely, India is a supporter of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. According to this strategy from 2021, Beijing is perceived as an aggressive actor, which is claiming open seas as their own, distorting open markets through subsidies to its own state-run companies, denying exports or revoking deals from countries whose policies it does not agree with, and engaging in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities. Countries across the region want this behavior to change (U.S. Department of State, 2021). In the same strategy from 2019, China was defined as a revisionist power because China's economic, political, and military rise is one of the defining (disturbing) elements of the 21st century. Today, the Indo-Pacific is increasingly confronted with a more confident and assertive China that is willing to accept friction in the pursuit of a more expansive set of political, economic, and security interests (U.S. Departments of Defense, 2019, p. 7). Apart from that, India with the USA, Japan and Australia is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Following the logic of the Indian close security cooperation with the USA and its alliances, it is becoming understandable why India is the only SCO member state which does not at the SCO official level support the realization of BRI and cooperation between BRI and Eurasian Economic Union. Namely, in the Dushanbe Declaration from 2021 we can read the following: the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, while reaffirming their support for China's One Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR), note the on-going work to jointly implement the project, including efforts to build a bridge between the Eurasian Economic Union and the OBOR (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2021). Apart from its close cooperation with the USA, Indian objection is also guided by different geopolitical reasons. One of the Indian concerns is that China is creating the environment for achieving the goals of the String of Pearls Strategy (珍珠链战略 – *zhenzhu lian zhanlue*). This strategy was widely discredited in China as a goal of Chinese foreign policy, but it is in line with Chinese strategic plans presented as possible locations for strategic points and maritime military bases in the Indian Ocean and Africa (Zaric, 2018, p. 48).

In promoting further SCO maritime interests, China has to be cautious not to give more impetus to the already present anti-Chinese coalition in Asia. If China does, it will open up additional space for the USA to become involved as an initiator of, or mediator in Asian affairs. Nevertheless, it will give more power to the USA to enforce its military alliances and to achieve its maritime goal of the Great Wall in Reverse (放波堤 – *fangbodi*) (Kaplan, 2009; Mitrovic, 2017). Moreover, China could give a "green light" to the USA to read the Asian geopolitical landscape in the framework of traditional geopolitical reading.

Another question/uncertainty that is jeopardizing the stability of the SCO region and strategic credibility/prestige of the SCO are the territorial disputes amongst member states. Borders remain one of the boldest issues in domestic politics of all modern national states, but also in international relations, emerging geopolitics and in the prevailing interpretation of international law—with the exception of the cases in which power overshadows the law (Mitrovic, 2012, p. 140). This represents the problem regarded as the Regulation on Admission of New Members to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. According to this Regulation, the following requests should be respected: 1) belong to the Euro-Asian region; 2) have diplomatic relations with all SCO member states; 3) have the status of SCO observer or dialogue partner; 4) maintain active trade, economic and humanitarian relations with SCO member states; 5) international commitments in the field of security should not be contrary to the relevant international treaties and other instruments adopted within the SCO; 6) have no armed conflict with another state or states; 7) meet, in good faith, its obligations under the United Nations Charter and comply with the generally recognized norms and principles of international law; 8) should have no sanctions imposed on it by the United Nations Security Council (SCO, 2002). The question in regard to the SCO stability lays in principle 6. Namely, when India was admitted to the SCO it had military skirmishes with China. Military confrontations occurred in 2017, when the Indian army objected to road construction by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Chinese claimed that it was constructing the road on its territory. The PLA's aim was to connect Xinjiang with Xizang. But India took the Chinese action as a direct violation of Indian sovereignty. India and China accused each other of not respecting territorial sovereignty and the illegal deployment of military force (ClearIAS, 2017). Apart from the violation of the above mentioned regulation, the two sides exchanging fire made meaningless the principles of demilitarized zones defined in an agreement between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and the People's Republic of China on confidence building in the military field in the border area and The Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas, signed in 1996 and 1997 respectively (Popovic, 2021). Border issues influence people's daily life and their future, this places a great pressure on Chinese ambitions to build an SCO identity that will be perceived as an actor who has the capacities to bring and respect the criteria of good and bad behavior. The territorial boundary issues impose challenges to the "maturity" of Chinese diplomacy, mainly, can China resolve pressing issues through diplomatic channels and skills, without resorting to money?

5. Conclusion

Although the SCO was not supported, but more discredited by the West, China is making great progress in creating an Asian security concept. By Asian we mean, in its form, nature and geographic sense, particularly in terms of state sovereignty. SCO member states abide by a realistic understanding of sovereignty, but at the same time, the same states are breaking this framework of realism by creating power through relations. This implies promoting common, but not unified, strategic approaches for overcoming particular types of challenges. Thus, the SCO is taking a form somewhere between partnership and alliance.

The West has been trying to depict the SCO in accordance with its understanding of the Western position in Asia and the SCO position towards the Western understanding of human rights, democracy, business praxis and fighting terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. But the SCO is constructing a collective identity according to local dynamics that are not directly constructed through their relationship with the West (Aris – Snetkov, 2013). On the other hand, we cannot say that member states do not use the SCO to cooperate and/or exert pressure on the West. The SCO has evolved from the commitment to a normative agenda of promoting self-sustaining and deepening processes for regional security cooperation in Central Asia, to the ultimate aim of fostering a regional security community through the inculcation of common values (Allison, 2004). Through this process, China has succeeded in changing its relations with neighboring states and has become an actor without which neighboring states cannot plan domestic and foreign political, economic and security initiatives. In doing so, China is diminishing the space, which external actors can use to interfere in Chinese internal affairs. However, there is a paradox in regard to interference in Chinese internal affairs. Namely, through constant communication and changing intelligence, Chinese SCO partners are an important factor in both Chinese internal and external security. According to this logic, China has to debate with them on questions which are part of the Chinese core national interests. If Beijing does not pursue this course, its discourse on connectivity, openness and inclusivity and policy practice of states equality will be questioned only by Chinese behavior. Thereafter, Chinese foreign policy behavior will not be understood as flexible, proactive and creative, but as assertive and hegemonistic, which China itself is portraying as obsolete and dangerous to global stability.

During the past years, the SCO has demonstrated great capacities in creating Asian interstate relations and changing Asian positions in international affairs. Apart from that, the organization demonstrated great capacities in changing positions

in international affairs in Asia. Keeping in mind that China is the initiator and main financier of the SCO infrastructure and other projects in connecting *Rimland* with *Heartland*, China is gaining a better position in Global Governance. A better position means that China is institutionalizing its power on a global scale. In doing so, China will have more capacity in agenda setting and defining the discourses of the Eurasian geopolitical order. This opens many new themes yet to be analyzed in researching Asia in both the wider and narrower sense. But there is still a list of both internal/ SCO and external issues which offer the SCO the opportunity to demonstrate to the international community that it possesses the requested capacity to put member states' cooperation on a higher grade and make a (Eur)Asia gateway instead of a shattered belt.

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Kyrgyzstan's Three Revolutions (2005, 2010, 2020) and the Political Sustainability of the Kyrgyz Parliamentary Experiment (2010–2021)

Pál Gyene

1. Introduction

Following Juan Linz's 1990 paper about The Perils of Presidentialism, a fruitful discussion has emerged about the effects parliamentarian and presidential forms of government may have on democratic transition and the consolidation of democracy. The present paper uses the "neo-institutional debate" as a theoretical framework to analyze the experience of the so-called "Kyrgyz parliamentarian experiment" following the 2010 revolution. The Kyrgyz political system is characterized by a low level of political institutionalization and party formation, strong person-centered political culture and the informal dominance of regional clans. Many analysts—among them the author of the present article—shared the hope that switching to the parliamentary form of government might have a lasting effect on these features: it might catalyze the process of party formation and could lessen the person-centered character of Kyrgyz internal politics, while boosting cooperation between regional elite groups. In 2021, from a perspective of 10 years, these hopes seem to have been overly optimistic and unrealistic. Since the 2010 revolution, the Kyrgyz political system has successfully preserved its overall competitive "democratic" character, the parliamentary framework failed to adapt to the Kyrgyz context and has not provided genuine stability. In the last ten years, ideology-based political parties have been unable to take root in Kyrgyz politics; instead, regionally affiliated clans continue to be the deep power structures. The presidential elections of 2020 were repeatedly accompanied by widespread revolutionary violence. Ultimately, at the initiative of the newly elected President Sadyr Japarov—who genuinely grabbed power during the violent street demonstrations—the country adopted a new constitution in 2021, dropped parliamentarism and returned to the presidential form of government. Kyrgyz politics might break out of the suffocating clan-based politics in the near future, but the direction it takes is not towards the adoption of western style parliamentarism. The newly elected president's fierce hyper-populist nationalism and anti-establishment rhetoric offer a seemingly more attractive alternative for the Kyrgyz citizenry.

2. Framing the Problem – Kyrgyzstan as a "Deviant Case"

According to the narrative regarded as dominant over the past three decades, the lit-erature dealing with post-Soviet Central Asia has seen an independent Kyrgyzstan—officially known as the Kyrgyz Republic—as unique, or in Lijphart's terminology, as "a deviant case" (Lijphart, 1971, pp. 691-692) among the Central Asian political sys-tems. Several studies in the 1990s described Kyrgyzstan as an "island of democracy" surrounded by authoritarian neighbors, referring primarily to the Akayev regime's certainly more liberal press policy (Anderson, 1999; Huskey, 1997). Since the sec-ond half of the 2000s, the development of the Kyrgyz political regime has been even more markedly divergent from those of the other Central Asian countries (Vasa, 2016). According to the international organizations' assessment, the authoritarian features of exercising power in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have clearly grown stronger; the extremely personality centered Turkmenistan has survived the presidential succes-sion surprisingly smoothly; even in Tajikistan, which in the 1990s was torn by civil war, the Rahmanov regime has been consolidated. In contrast, in Kyrgyzstan, the president in power was toppled in bloody riots three times: in 2005, 2010, and ulti-mately in 2020.

Moreover, the 2010 regime change was followed by major institutional reforms: it seemed that the Kyrgyz political elite (or at least a part of it) seriously intended to break with the former personality-centered exercise of power. Thus, with a con-stitutional amendment supported by a referendum, Kyrgyzstan has been the only Central Asian soviet successor state to introduce the parliamentary form of govern-ment. According to Samuel P. Huntington's much cited thesis, the best indicator that the consolidation of a democratic regime change has been successful is if the first, "regime changing" elections are followed by a second, free and multi-party election, or in other words, there is also a second peaceful transfer of power between political forces vying for electors (Huntington, 1991). After the 2010 revolution, Kyrgyzstan conducted one free and fair (and remarkably peaceful) parliamentary election, and also one presidential election in 2017, which was the first example for a Central Asian president peacefully handing over power to his successor. However, ultimately the presidential power transition did not prove to be so peaceful: two years later, Suronbay Djinbeekov arrested his predecessor Almazbek Atambayev, which caused a violent and boisterous incident at Atambayev's residency close to Bishkek. Probably because of the large-scale election fraud, the 2020 elections were also held amid mass violence in the streets, especially in the capital Bishkek. In the course of the "third revolution", the people, or rather the will of the bands in the streets, managed to swiftly catapult the anti-elite and populist Sadyr Japarov into the presidential seat,

although he had just recently been freed from jail. In January 2021, the new president confirmed his power in a direct presidential election, which had a rather low turnout. At the same time, a referendum was held on the system of government, where the sweeping majority of voters (but not of those eligible to vote) wanted a return to the presidential system, which Japarov himself also preferred. The constitution of the new presidential republic was confirmed in April 2021.

The present paper is a continuation of the author's 2016 analysis: Perspectives of the Kyrgyz Parliamentary Experiment in the Light of Two Elections (Gyene, 2016). Applying the "neo-institutionalist debate" conceptual framework of comparative political science, the 2016 paper, as well as the present one, intend to outline the prospects of parliamentary reforms launched in 2010. Looking back from 2021, it may be stated that the experiment has been completed; Kyrgyzstan has returned to the presidential form of government. Thus, it is justifiable to draw conclusions concerning the past eleven-year period. Consequently, following the introduction of the theoretical framework and background in political history, the present paper's primary goal is to take account of the decade of Kyrgyz parliamentary experiment.

3. Theoretical Frames - The Neo-institutional Debate

About the effects of parliamentary and presidential forms of government on the democratic transition and consolidation of political democracy, there is a fruitful debate in political science, which had been primarily triggered by Juan J. Linz's by now classic paper about the "perils" of the presidential model (Linz, 1990). Linz argues that it is basically because of its "rigidity" that the presidential model is an obstacle in the way of consolidating multi-party democracy. This is because in the presidential system the mandate of both the president and the legislative branch is for a strictly defined period. Thus, the relatively frequent decision-making stalemate between the legislature and the president of the opposite party cannot be resolved either by the dissolution of parliament or by a no-confidence motion against the president. This is strongly associated with the unavoidable problem of "dual legitimation" in the relationship between the president and the legislature: both the president and members of parliament are directly accountable to the citizens, thus in decision making, perhaps due to their different party affiliations, there might be a permanent opposition between them. The contradiction is practically irresolvable as to which of them represents the electors' will. (Linz, 1990, p. 63).

Although the weight that the head of state carries within the government varies considerably with parliamentary countries, the relationship between the premier and the members of the government is more collegial than the relationship between the president and the ministers in the presidential system. Thus, Linz argues, policy making is less person-centered, and is more about the competition or coalition of parties and interest groups. From this, Linz draws the conclusion that, although parliamentary government may often appear instable, applying the motion of no-confidence or, if necessary, early elections, and replacing the government, it is still better able to make corrections than the presidential model (Linz, 1990, p. 55).

Empirical research by Mainwaring and Shugart seems to partially support Linz's conclusions. Of 31 countries that in the 25 years between 1967 and 1992 had continuous political democracy, 24 were parliamentary and only four were presidential systems[1] (Mainwaring – Shugart, 1993, p. 4). Mainwaring calculates that between 1945 and 1993, in some 50 countries did democratic governments suffer civil war or a military coup, 27 of which had presidential systems, while only 19 had parliamentary systems. Thus, the success rate of the parliamentary form of government[2] (58.1 percent) is much higher than that of presidential systems (22.6 percent) (Mainwaring – Shugart, 1993, p. 4). In harmony with these findings, Stepan and Skatch establish that in their survey of 53 non-OECD countries, in over 60 percent of the parliamentary countries, while only in about 20 percent of presidential systems has democracy proved to be lasting (i.e., continuously prevailing for at least ten years). Presidential systems are over twice as likely to suffer military coups as parliamentary governments (Stepan – Skatch, 1994, pp. 124-125).

However, as Donald L. Horowitz points out, because Linz's research is geographically rather limited, his conclusions are drawn primarily on the basis of Latin American countries. On the other hand, in a number of West African countries (former British colonies), the Westminster type of parliamentary government led to authoritarian solutions, while in Nigeria and Sri Lanka, among others, it was exactly by switching from the parliamentarian to the presidential system that they managed to consolidate democracy (Horowitz, 1990, pp. 144-147). Although Mainwaring and Shugart partly agree with Linz's conclusion, they emphasize the importance of distinguishing

1 Arend Lijphart uses stricter criteria for defining a lasting democracy. Based on his definition, democracies that have continuously existed since at least 1945 are to be regarded as lasting. Thirty of the 36 lasting democracies he studied have parliamentary, while five have presidential forms of government (Lijphart, 1999. p. 118).
2 The number of successful democracies in the given type of government divided by the sum of successful and failed democracies.

between the subtypes of presidential and parliamentary systems. They argue that the "winner takes all" logic depends much more on the given election system than on the form of government and, for example, in the Westminster model this logic is stronger than in most presidential models (Mainwaring – Shugart, 1993, p. 9). Besides, the instability of some parliamentary governments in third world countries, such as Thailand, Sudan and Somalia, led to complete state failure (Mainwaring – Shugart, 1993, p. 12). Giovanni Sartori's argument is that the low level of party penetration and the lack of disciplined parliamentary parties in parliamentary systems may lead to more serious functional problems than in the case of presidential models (Sartori, 1994, pp. 112-114). According to Mainwaring and Shugart, the spectacularly higher success rate of parliamentary systems can be partly accounted for by the fact that most of them are developed industrial states, while except for the US, the majority of presidential systems are developing Latin American, African and Asian countries. In the developing world, many examples can be found of such formations of states where contrary to the legitimate role of the parliament, in fact the president and/or the armed forces are the real power, like in the case of Egypt before and even after the Arab Spring (Neszmélyi, 2013; 2016). We know that in the third world the failure rate of both types of systems is very high, which would suggest that the successful consolidation of democracy depends more on the socio-economic development of a given state rather than on its form of government (Mainwaring – Shugart, 1993, p. 6).

4. A Short Political History of Kyrgyzstan from Independence to 2010

Kyrgyzstan became a presidential type of independent republic in 1991, similarly to the other Central Asian members of the former Soviet Union. Due to the relatively late emergence of the Kyrgyz national consciousness and because Kyrgyz national development was controlled from above and was inorganic in nature, even today, the majority of Kyrgyz society is strongly divided along the lines of sub-ethnic regional identities, which played a crucial role already in the socialist party leadership's internal fights in the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. As the outcome of power games within the upper echelons of the Kyrgyz SSR in the perestroika years, the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan (from 1991 to 2005) was Askar Akayev, the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences but an outsider to grand politics, who, however, was associated with the Naryn clan that had already dominated the SSR's leadership (Haghayeghi, 1997, pp. 135-136).

In the first years of his presidency, Akayev seemed to be honestly committed to carrying out his reform program aimed at economic liberalization and by Central Asian

standards, radical privatization. However, over the years his government became more authoritarian, which was reflected in placing an increasingly stronger emphasis on his presidential power (e.g., by the establishment of the Committee to Protect the President's Honor), as well as in restricting the press more and more (Huskey, 1997, pp. 257-259). International observers as well, were starting to view Akayev, who had earlier been considered of democratic affiliations, as becoming a "liberal autocrat" like the Kazakh Nursultan Nazarbayev. Thus, the first fifteen years of his presidency were characterized by a constantly growing concentration of power and corruption, which does not contradict the fact that, overall, state power continued to be weak.

The Akayev era clearly favored the northern, primarily the Naryn lobby's dominance against the southern clans. It seems that this power imbalance of regional clans contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with President Akayev's rule (Engvall, 2011, p. 42). Nevertheless, the fact that the unrest in the southern regions led to the "Tulip Revolution" and to the end of the president's rule was not because his era was more corrupt or more oppressive than any of the neighboring Central Asian regimes; instead, it seems to have happened because, unlike Uzbek President Karimov, Akayev was reluctant to use violence and cause bloodshed among the civilian population.

Following the unrest, Akayev fled to Kazakhstan and subsequently to Moscow, where he signed his resignation, while the election results were declared void. Finally, the 2005 parliamentary elections were not repeated, but the presidential elections held in July 2005 brought a sweeping victory for the southern politician Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who in the revolutionary days had grown into the failed president's main rival. Bakiyev was a member of the same political elite socialized in the Soviet period, and although he was prime minister in 2001–2002, he was not a close member of Akayev's "northern circle". He was clearly associated with Jalalabad: this is where his career started as a factory director and where he became one of the richest men in independent Kyrgyzstan. Both the local and the international public had heightened expectations of the new president's democratic commitment, but Bakiyev's main ambition was to reshuffle power positions in favor of southern clans, including his own family. Bakiyev did this so unscrupulously that in the words of Engvall, his regime may be labelled as a "kleptocracy" Omurbek Tekebayev, the head of the centrist Ata-Meken (Homeland) party described the situation as follows: "Kyrgyzstan's economic and social goods have been privatized earlier, and at present, Kurmanbek Bakiyev intends to privatize state power itself" (Engvall, 2011, p. 53).

In order to expropriate state patronage positions without any obstacles, Bakiyev tried to concentrate even more power in his hands than his predecessor. The constitutional amendments confirmed by the 2007 referendum created a veritable "hyper-presidential" system, in which intelligence services, foreign affairs, home affairs and the defense ministry were placed under Bakiyev's personal control. Appointing the head of government and the country's chief judges was also relegated to the president's discretion. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the overwhelming majority of parliamentary mandates were secured by the Ak Jol (Bright Way) party. In the 2009 presidential election, Bakiyev won over three quarters of the votes cast, while his main rival received less than 8 percent. According to international observers, both elections were characterized by serious fraud and abuse.

Nevertheless, in the southern region Bakiyev's power enjoyed a solid social base. Because of a Talas opposition politician's arrest in April 2010, the unrest in the northern provinces soon spread to the capital (BBC, 2010). Bakiyev first fled to the south, then the president eventually found political asylum and citizenship in Belarus (Nasha Niva, 2012). Analysts say that a civil war was a realistic danger in the days after Bakiyev's fall, when deprived of his power, the president fled to his hinterland in the southern regions. The power struggle between northern and southern-bound elite groups became even more manifest after the 2010 revolution: the Interim Government, which was formed after the ousting of Bakiyev, was built from northern affiliated parties, like the Social-Democrats, Ata Meken and Ak-Shumkar.

The establishment of the Interim Government did not soothe people in the southern regions. Clashes between Uzbek organized criminal groups that had earlier supported Bakiyev, and Kyrgyz bands were becoming more intense, culminating in a nearly three-day long anti-Uzbek pogrom in the city of Osh in June 2010 (Huskey – Hill, 2013, p. 239; Radnitz, 2010).

5. The Kyrgyz Parliamentary Experiment (2010–2021)

At the Interim Government's initiative, a referendum was held in June 2010, right before the outbreak of major unrest, about the amendment of the constitution, the outcome of which was that they introduced a parliamentary system, which was unique among the Central Asian states. Following the successful referendum, early parliamentary and presidential elections were to be held on October 10. Eventually, however, the presidential elections were postponed because of the uncertainties that the unrest in Jalalabad and Osh had caused, and Roza Otunbayev was to become the

interim head of state up to December 31, 2011 at the latest. On the other hand, they managed to hold the parliamentary elections, which international observers qualified as free and fair. Admittedly, they did not bring such a clean victory to the "revolutionary forces" as many had expected (Dzubyenko, 2010).

Following the first free parliamentary elections of Kyrgyzstan's—and most probably in Central Asia's—history in 2010 (OSCE Press Release, 2010), parliamentary parties still seemed to represent either one of the regions, or blocs centered around certain charismatic personalities. Kyrgyz voters' party preferences were mostly guided by regional and ethnic identities, and personal ties rather than ideologies or such socio-economic status indices as income or education (Huskey – Hill, 2013, p. 238). In the October 2010 parliamentary elections, six political formations secured more than 5 percent of the votes, and five parties got into parliament.

Table 1

Kyrgyz parties after the 2010 parliamentary elections

Party	Primary regional base	Pro and anti-Interim Government	Seats in the Parliament
Ata-Jurt	South	Anti-Interim Government	28
Socialdemocrats	South	Pro-Interim Government	26
Ar-Namys	North	Anti-Interim Government	25
Respublica	North/South	Anti-Interim Government	23
Ata Meken	North	Pro-Interim Government	18
Butun Kyrgyzstan	North	Anti-Interim Government	0

Source: the author's own compilation based on Huskey – Hill, 2013, p. 243.

In the 2010 elections, the Ata Jurt (Homeland) Party, which was in favor of re-inviting President Bakiyev, obtained the most parliamentary seats (28) with 16 percent of the votes. The party enjoyed significantly more support in the southern Osh and Jalalabad provinces (the third southern province, Batken, was primarily the base of the Butun Kyrgyzstan Party mostly because of the Batken clan ties of party leader Adahan Mamadurov). In contrast, among voters of the Social Democrats (26 mandates) and Ata Meken (18 mandates) the northern regions were clearly overrepresented.

In comparison, the Ar Namys (Dignity, 25 mandates) and the Republic Party (23 mandates) obtained regionally much more balanced results. This is partly due to the fact that the two political formations were associated more with personalities than with regions. Ar Namys is close to the former head of state Felix Kulov, while the Republic Party is close to the very rich businessman Omurbek Babanov (who was also prime minister in 2011-12). The success of Felix Kulov and Ar Namys in the southern regions

is partly explained by the party positioning itself as a protector of ethnic minorities[3] in the 2010 campaign, thus obtaining a large share of the Uzbek voters in Osh and Jalalabad. The relatively balanced results of Respublica led by the northern Omurbek Babanov was defined by the party's protest character: it was not involved in the Provisional Government so unpopular in the southern regions, while unlike Ata Jurt and Butun Kyrgyzstan, it was not the successor to Akayev's Ak Jol either (Huskey – Hill, 2013, pp. 238-248). Only the previously much supported Communists[4] and the more western-oriented upper middle class-based Al Sumkar could be regarded as "genuine" political parties in the 2010 campaign. It is not surprising that in 2010, neither of these political formations got into parliament, as the main forces were clearly regional and interpersonal ties.

Initially, three "northern" parties, the Social Democrats, Ata Meken and Respublica, intended to form a coalition, but when despite their parliamentary majority, they were unable to elect the head of Ata Meken, Omurbek Tekebayev as the Speaker of Parliament, the coalition collapsed. To many people's great surprise, in order to avoid civil war, eventually the Social Democrats and Respublica formed a coalition with the southern Ata Jurt. The prime minister was a Social Democrat, Almazbek Atambayev, who similarly to President Akayev, had northern and pro-Russian affiliations. At the same time, the Speaker of Parliament Ahmatbek Keldibekov came from Ata Jurt.

The 2011 presidential elections repeatedly sharpened conflicts within the government coalition. Ata Jurt went into opposition while, despite party head Felix Kulov's reluctance, Ata Meken and Ar Namys joined the government. Parliament elected Omurbek Babayev of the Respublica Party as head of government, but because of corruption charges, he had to resign in August of the same year. In September 2012, the Kyrgyz parliament elected Jantoro Satubaldiyev as prime minister. This former head of the presidential administration was also a Social Democrat, but was seen primarily as a technocrat (Dzubyenko, 2012). The new premier was most probably

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3 Felix Kulov's mother tongue was Russian, and in the 2000 presidential elections he was banned because he did not have a good command of Kyrgyz, the state language. Thus, Kulov could hardly have been an authentic "Kyrgyz nationalist" politician. It is to be noted though that Kulov's party, representing the "homo sovieticus" in the Kyrgyz political life, was preferred by Uzbeks in the south as well as by Slavs in the capital. Thus, he was the Kremlin's preferred candidate in the 2010 presidential elections, the only one that Russian president Dmitry Medvedev had his photo taken with (Huskey – Hill, 2013, p. 250).
4 In the 2000 parliamentary elections the Communists still received five individual mandates and one on a list, but in the 2010 elections they no longer got into parliament (Elections in Asia, 2001, pp. 440-447). In 2010 the Ak-Sumkar Party led by businessman Temir Sariyev had a market-friendly program aimed primarily at urban middle classes but did not manage to get into parliament (Huskey – Hill, 2013, p. 241).

mandated by the head of state rather than the coalition parties. The new government continued to enjoy the parliamentary support of Respublica, as well as of the three other government parties (Trilling, 2012). At least this was the situation up to March 2013, when Satubaldiyev and Omurbek Tekebayev, the head of Ata Meken had such a fierce fight over the concessions of the Kumtor gold mine, that Ata Meken left the coalition again. In April 2014, the government coalition of the Social Democrats, Ar Namys and Ata Meken was reorganized with another technocrat at the helm: Jumart Otorbayev (Trilling, 2014). He stayed in this position for a short year, as in early 2015, he too had to leave on corruption charges. Thus, the government coalition faced the 2015 elections with its fifth acting Prime Minister Semir Tariyev.

The low degree of consolidation of the Kyrgyz party system is indicated by the fact that the October 2015 elections brought landslides. Six parties got into parliament, i.e., one more than earlier. Three of them were new political formations: the Kyrgyzstan Party, Onuguu and Bir-Bol. The governing Social Democrats had the largest parliamentary faction, while Respublica, which had been seen as more of a northern affiliation, fused with the southern-nationalist Ata Jurt, thus forming the largest opposition bloc together with the 2014-born Bir-Bol (Let there be Unity), which is rather a technocratic formation without clear regional associations. Of the old parties, Ata Meken had been able to preserve its presence in parliament, while because of internal fighting, Ar Namys, one of the decisive forces in the previous cycle, fell apart and did not get into the 2015 parliament (Eurasianet.org, 2015). Eventually, a wider than before four-party coalition government was formed with the Social Democrats, the Kyrgyzstan Party, Onuguu and Ata Meken with Temir Sariyev as prime minister. But in 2016, premiership was again reshuffled with Suronbay Jeenbekov as the new prime minister. In comparison with the former government cycle, it was a major development that the parliamentary majority of the four-party coalition was no longer threatened if one of the parties, apart from the Social Democrats, should opt to leave the coalition.

In the governing coalition, the Social Democrats and Ata Meken were primarily northern affiliated. The strongest opposition was the Ata Jurt – Respublica bloc, however, it was not clearly "southern". Several factions broke off Respublica in the following years. For example, the Intimak group, who organized the Kyrgyzstan Party, which managed to obtain the third largest number of mandates following the Social Democrats and the Ata Jurt – Respublica joint list, and its voters were recruited from the southern regions. A new parliamentary faction was formed under the name Onuguu (Progress), which had also originated from Respublica and also had mostly rural and southern voters.

Table 2

Kyrgyz parliamentary parties after the 2015 elections

Party	Primary regional base	Government/opposition	Seats in the Parliament
Socialdemocrats	North	Government	38
Ata-Jurt – Respublica	South/North	Opposition	28
Kyrgyzstan Party	South	Government/Opposition	18
Onuguu	South	Government/Opposition	13
Bir-Bol	South/North	Government/Opposition	12
Ata Meken	North	Government/Opposition	12

Source: the author's own compilation based on Huskey – Hill, 2013.

The general situation was further complicated by the collapse of the government coalition on the eve of the referendum about Atambayev constitutional amendment package in November 2016.[5] The Onuguu and the Ata-Meken parties left, because they objected to the reforms proposed by the head of state. The coalition was reborn two weeks later with the participation of the Social Democrats, the Kyrgyzstan Party and Bir-Bol (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, 2016).

Following the 2015 elections, it would have been hard to speak of a clear north-south divide in Kyrgyz internal politics, because both the government coalition and the opposition bloc contained northern and southern elements. Thus, the pro-government versus opposition division seemed to crosscut and weaken the traditional regional lines.

In the world of frequently changing parties and heads of states, Almazbek Atambayev was the only one that for six years lent some semblance of stability to the system from 2011 to 2017 (and prior to that, he had also acted as prime minister). It might have seemed that the presidential election in October 2017 would be a watershed, where the incumbent President Atambayev was not allowed to run again and which promised to be the first multi-party democratic presidential election in the history of Central Asia, as well as one whose results were unpredictable.

5 In November 2016, President Atambayev requested a referendum on a constitutional amendment reform package. Although based on its very wording, the 2010 Constitution could not have been amended before 2020, still with a 42 percent participation rate, the overwhelming majority of voters were in favor. The amendments that came into force in 2017 declared, among other things, the prohibition of homosexual marriage and strengthened the acting prime minister's rights against the head of state. Most analysts at the time presumed that this was a step towards Atambayev intending to become prime minister when his presidential mandate was over (Abdurasulov, 2016).

There were two strong candidates from the main governing Social Democratic Party: the party's official candidate was Suronbay Jeenbekov, the head of state in office. In addition, Parliament's social democratic speaker Chynybai Tursunbekov also announced his intention to run for presidency. In the ranks of the largest opposition bloc of Ata Jurt and Respublica, the candidates had three challengers. Kamchubek Tasiyev and Ahmatbek Keldibekov were the party's official candidates, while the head of their parliamentary group, Omurbek Babanov ran as an "independent" candidate. Among the additional competitors there was the former Prime Minister Temir Sariyev. The candidacy of the opposition politician Omurbek Tekebayev, head of the Ata Meken party was, however, prevented by the courts on grounds of what many saw as politically motivated corruption charges (Putz, 2017).

In the final stage of the campaign, the competition was narrowed down to the fight between Jeenbekov, who enjoyed Atambayev's and the Social Democrats' support, and Omurbek Babanov. Finally, as expected by most, Suronbay Jeenbekov won a surprising 55 percent of the votes in the first round. Regarded as Atambayev's puppet, Jeenbekov's victory confirmed the assumptions that he probably intended to maintain his power continuing his career as prime minister, following in the footsteps of the Putin-Medvedev duo (Djanibekova, 2017).

Several analysts saw the inauguration of President Suronbay as a milestone (Djuraev, 2018) because at the time, it still seemed that for the first time in post-Soviet Central Asia, power had been handed over in a democratic and peaceful manner. Unfortunately, in the light of later developments, this handover was not peaceful and smooth either. Although winning the presidential elections as Atambayev's political protégé and the Social Democratic Party's candidate, Jeenbekov was a son of the Osh region and received a much higher share of the votes in the southern districts than in the northern districts (Electoral Geography 2.0, 2017). Once again, clan affiliations proved to be more important than party membership. The gesture that the northern affiliated Atambayev handed over the position of president to a southern politician may have suggested a type of informal power division between southern and northern clans. Even if this pact did exist, Jeenbekov did not observe it (which he had to pay the price for a few years later). Surprisingly, the new head of state turned out to be a fairly autonomous political actor rather than Atambayev's "puppet".

In 2018, Suronbay Jeenbekov launched a wide anti-corruption campaign, and thus ousted his predecessor's cadres, primarily Sapar Isakov, the man seen as Atambayev's right-hand man (Lynch, 2019). As still the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Atambayev responded with major political mobilization against Jeenbekov,

accusing him of corruption and with mafia ties to Rayimbek Matraimov, a powerful figure behind the power and former head of the Customs Office. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, Atambayev was clearly planning to become prime minister as the Social Democrats' candidate, while the governing party was split into the wings supporting Atambayev, and another one behind the president. Jeenbekov, in turn, did not let the matter pass: In April 2019 the Jogorku Kenesh, the Kyrgyz parliament passed a new bill, banning former heads of states from taking up state positions and acting as leaders of political parties.[6] In June of the same year, the Kyrgyz parliament waived Atambayev's parliamentary immunity. In the arena of internal politics, when his latitude was narrowed, he paid a demonstrative visit to Vladimir Putin, the fellow president he had maintained warm relations with. However, Putin was unwilling to interfere with Kyrgyz internal politics in favor of the cornered politician. On the contrary, the Russian President voiced his view that he had a vested interest in the fast consolidation of relations between Russia and President Jeenbekov's power (Umarov, 2019).

From this point, things moved ahead rapidly. Parliament was pressing corruption and criminal charges against the former president[7] and withdrew his immunity. In answer, Atambayev's family and supporters marched to the president's summer residence in Hoy Tash near Bishkek in order to protect their patron. The operation the Kyrgyz police started on August 7 for arresting Atambayev, led to a nearly two-day siege. Supporters of the barricaded off president injured several members of the special force and killed one of them (Reuters, 2019). Eventually, in June 2020, the ex-president received an eleven-year prison sentence, everything he owned was confiscated, and he was stripped off his former state awards[8] (Putz, 2020a). Thus, the political career of Kyrgyzstan's first president came to an ignominious end. Getting rid of his old mentor, President Suronbay Jeenbekov could feel that he had successfully consolidated his personal power and had the right to be optimistic concerning the October

6 The law was aimed at Atambayev, as he was the only former head of state living in the country that was actively dealing with politics: Akayev and Bakiyev were forced into exile, and after the 2010 revolution, interim president Roza Otumbayeva withdrew from grand politics and was involved in managing a civilian NGO. (Umarov, 2019).

7 The charges brought against Atambayev were related to the "Batukayev scandal": Aziz Batukayev is a drug merchant of Chechen origin, who was arrested by the Kyrgyz authorities in 2006 and accused, among other things, of murdering a Kyrgyz MP and an official in the Home Office. In 2013, Atambayev gave amnesty to Batukayev because of his medical condition (leukaemia), although the diagnosis he presented later proved to be fake. Batukayev disappeared: most probably he left the country (Putz, 2020).

8 It is a part of Atambayev's later story that for a few days he was freed from his prison in the 2020 Bishkek unrest, which also toppled Jeenbekov. In the course of these events, he even survived an attempt against him (Aljazeera, 2020a), but eventually had to return to jail (Eurasianet, 2020).

2020 parliamentary elections, although his country did not avoid the Covid pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis (Gyene – Engelberth, 2021).

6. The 2020 Evolution and the Presidential Reorganization

As typical of the history of Kyrgyz parliamentarism, the 2021 elections brought another landslide reshuffle of the party system. Only four parties managed to enter parliament, all of them had southern affiliations. Three formations supported President Jeenbekov more or less openly, and only the fourth may be labelled as oppositional (Pannier, 2020a).

The Birimdik (Unity) party, which had been reorganized for the October 5, 2020 elections, comprised the president's closest personal allies and family (e.g., his brother Asilbek Jeenbekov). It obtained the most mandates (46) in the 120-member Jogorku Kenesh. The joint list made up through the fusion of the southern Kyrgyz nationalist Ata Jurt party and Rajimbek Matraimov's[9] Mekenim Kyrgyzstan (My Homeland Kyrgyzstan), known by the name of the latter, received a similar number of seats (45). The southern Kyrgyzstan Party, which had already been in parliament in 2015, can also be regarded as in support of the president. On the other hand, this was the first time the southern-based Butun Kyrgyzstan (ca. Kyrgyzstan Unite!) got into parliament, which defined itself as in opposition to President Jeenbekov. Partly because of the 7 percent threshold, the former presidential party, the Social Democrats, which had fallen apart in the Atambayev–Jeenbekov duel, the technocratic region-neutral Bir-Bol, the northern-liberal Ata-Meken and the successor parties breaking off the Respublica movement did not get into parliament (Aljazeera, 2020b).

Table 3

The Kyrgyz party system according to the 2020 (invalidated) parliamentary elections

Party	Primary Regional base	Pro- presidential/opposition	Seats in the Parliament
Birimdik	South	Pro-presidential	46
Mekenim Kyrgystan	South	Pro-presidential	45
Kyrgyzstan Party	South	Pro-presidential	16
Butun Kyrgyzstan	South	Opposition	13

Source: the author's own compilation.

9 The former head of the Customs Office was one of Atambayev's major political rivals (Pannier, 2020).

Overall, international observers qualified the election as free and fair, although there was noticeable abuse (mainly buying votes), and the oppositional parties requested that due to the Covid-19 pandemic the voting should be postponed (AFP, 2020). It is unsurprising that in the northern regions, and especially in the capital Bishkek, people were not impressed with the results. First the police tried to use teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the mob that took to the streets chanting "election fraud", but then the protesters proved to be more determined, storming and taking over the "White House" of Bishkek, where the president's offices and parliament are located. Prime Minister Kubatbek Boronov soon resigned, and the following day, on October 6, the Election Committee declared that the results were invalid (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2020). A few days after the invalidation of the election, President Suronbay Jeenbekov, who was in hiding, also resigned (Putz, 2020b). This was the third time in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan that the will of the man in the street had managed to over-write the will of the elite groups holding institutionalized positions.

The will of the "man in the street", or at least that of the most aggressive groups in Bishkek's downtown area that had been hardly known by the international public, seems to have catapulted Sadyr Japarov from his prison cell to the presidential seat. Far from being an outsider to Kyrgyz internal politics, Japarov had a long and eventful political background: Coming from the north, he first worked as a policeman in the Issyk-Kul region, then up to 2005 managed a smaller oil refinery of the Nurneftegaz company in the lake-side town of Balykchy (Pannier, 2020b). Despite his roots in the north, his political career was associated more with the southern clans' successes: In 2005, he became an MP for President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's Ak Jol party (Putz, 2020c). Following Bakiyev's fall, he joined the southern nationalist Ata Jurt party. During the ethnic riots accompanying the 2010 revolution, he stayed in the southern region and was active in stirring ethnic tensions (Umarov, 2020). As a vociferous sup-porter of Kyrgyz nationalism, with his comrade Kamchibek Tashiyev, who has been a major political ally of the new president, he launched a political campaign in 2012 marked by some violent incidents for the nationalization of the Kumtor goldmine, which accounts for 8-12 percent of the Kyrgyz GDP. The rioters led by Japarov and Tashiyev launched an unsuccessful attack against the Bishkek "White House". The two politicians were under arrest for a short time, but this did not prevent Japarov from another violent action in 2013, taking hostage for a short while Emil Kaptagayev, then governor of the Issyk-Kul region (Putz, 2020c).

The rebellious Japarov had to face a more severe prison sentence. Instead of going to prison, he left for Kazakhstan, from where, for reasons still unclarified, he returned in 2017. On his homecoming, he was immediately arrested and sentenced to eleven and

a half years in prison (Umarov, 2020). In the October 2020 revolutionary days, together with several other politicians (with Atambayev among them), he was freed from incarceration. Out in the street, he soon assumed the role of spokesman for violent protesters. In the meantime, some of the members of parliament were gathering in the Dostuk Hotel in Bishkek where, presumably under threats and pressure, they elected the popular Japarov prime minister. Although the decision of this assembly was not based on solid ground, nothing has been able to stop Japarov since then. Following the resignation of President Jeenbekov and Speaker of the Supreme Council Kanat Isayev, on October 15 he assumed the position of acting president (Putz, 2020b).

The rocket-fast progression of Japarov's political career is not merely because of the popularity he earned in the streets in the revolutionary days. Neither is it a sufficient explanation in itself that he is the most active Kyrgyz politician in using social media (Baialieva – Kutmanaliev, 2020). In fact, the anti-elite, populist Japarov has a large number of influential supporters behind him: his old friend Kamchibek Tashiyev is currently the Chairman of the State Committee for National Security, and as such, he is a fierce enemy of terrorists, corrupt politicians and Japarov's political rivals (Putz, 2021a). It is widely assumed that the Japarov – Tashiyev duo enjoys the backing of certain underground circles, as well as that of the Kyrk Choro (Forty Knights) nationalist movement. Allegedly, they also maintain friendly relations with the most influential background figure in Kyrgyz politics, Rayimbek Matraimov.[10] Having his roots in the north certainly helps Japarov. In addition, at the time of the 2010 pogroms against the Uzbeks with Tashiyev's assistance, he also gained wide-ranging popularity with the Kyrgyz of the southern region. Thus, his personality has turned into a kind of symbol of pan-Kyrgyz nationalism that bridges the regions (Umarov, 2020). This is testified to by the results of the early election held on January 21, 2021. Although turnout was not high (only 39 percent), he received a huge majority of the votes (79 percent with 16 candidates running), thereby strengthening his position. Admittedly, the low turnout reflects Kyrgyz voters' strong annoyance with their internal politics during the turbulent years of parliamentarism. On the other hand, it may be a promising sign for Japarov that of all the presidents elected so far, he is the one to have received the most balanced number of votes (Kyzy, 2021).

The presidential election was accompanied by a referendum where citizens voted on whether they wanted to replace the parliamentary system with the presidential model

10 The former head of the Kyrgyz Customs Office, who probably has wide-ranging business interests in the Emirates, was arrested twice for short periods when the Japarov – Tashiyev duo came to power, but then was given economic amnesty (Putz, 2021a).

that Japarov favored. Over 80 percent of voters supported a return to the presidential form of government. The "hyper-presidential" constitution subsequently elaborated was confirmed in the April 2021 referendum. In the English-medium press, this form is sarcastically referred to as "khanstitutional" rather than "constitutional" (Putz, 2020d; Aljazeera, 2021), where all meaningful decision-making is again concentrated in the president's hands. He is the one to appoint the government and the judges, and the number of representatives has been reduced from 120 to 90. Parliament's political monitoring role would be taken over by the kurultay, a body of the "white-bearded wise old" traditional chiefs, whose role, however, is still somewhat unclear. It seems that its rights will comprise proposing policy bills. Analysts tend to think, however, that this consultative body will work as an alternative legitimating basis against parliament and a way of bypassing parliamentary procedures (Imanaliyeva, 2021).

Table 4

Kyrgyz parliamentary elections 2021

Party	Primary Regional base	Pro-presidential/opposition	Seats in the Parliament
Ata-Zhurt Kyrgyzstan	no data as of February 2022	Pro-presidential	14
Ishenim	no data as of February 2022	Pro-presidential	12
Yntymak	no data as of February 2022	Pro-presidential	10
Alliance	no data as of February 2022	?	7
Yiman Nuru	no data as of February 2022	?	6
Butun Kyrgyzstan	south	?	5

Source: the author's own compilation.

For the consolidation of Japarov's power the parliamentary election of November 2021 does not offer many clues. It repeatedly reflects the fluid character of the Kyrgyz party system. With a record low turnout of 34 percent, of the seven parties that got in, only Butun Kyrgyzstan may be familiar from past decades. The formation called Alliance has come about through the fusion of the remains of the old Respublica and Bir-Bol. The three parties forming the strongest faction and supporting Japarov have no precedents: Ata-Jurt- Kyrgyzstan, Intimak (Unity) and Ishenim (Trust). Ata-Jurt-Kyrgyzstan is not to be confused with the former southern Ata-Jurt party (!), as it is the successor of Japarov's former Mekenchil (Patriotic) party (Putz, 2021b). Anyhow, irrespective of the future of inter-party and inter-clan relations, in the old-new presidential system of Kyrgyzstan, the role of parliament will certainly be much smaller than that of the president.

7. Conclusions

In its nearly thirty years of independence, Kyrgyzstan has had 24 prime ministers and six presidents. The rate of changing premiers has been similar: roughly each year they have been replaced. Of the six presidents, it has been only the temporary head Roza Otumbayeva in 2010-2011 who was able to withdraw peacefully; three others were toppled by revolutions, and one was thrown into prison. With this history behind him, Sadyr Japarov seems to have demonstrated boldness when accepting the position.

Among the reasons for the instability of the Kyrgyz political system, the one that is to be emphasized is the strong volatility of the party system. The parliamentary elections that could be regarded as fairly free and competitive (in 2010, 2015, 2020, and perhaps in 2021) have always led to a landslide transformation of the Kyrgyz party system. There is practically no parliamentary party to have been a decisive political force from the beginning to the end of the decade of the "parliamentary experiment". This suggests that western-type ideological or program-based political parties have still been unable to take root. Parties continue to be fluid groups organized around certain decisive personalities; inter-party and, within them, even regional "inter-clan" fault lines appear to be stronger (as demonstrated by the split of the Social Democratic Party in the fight between Atambayev and Jeenbekov). The penetration of party-formation was not increasing considerably in the parliamentary period either. In the parliamentary framework, Kyrgyz internal politics have not been domesticated, the political system has not been stabilized, and the election process has not become less violent.

Even after the parliamentarization processes of 2010, the logic of the Kyrgyz government system was closer to semi-presidential systems. Even in the parliamentary period, the president was more than a representative figure. He continued to receive his legitimation in elections directly from the people, independent of parliament. In theory, the government was accountable to parliament. However, because there was never a party gaining an absolute majority in the elections, it always depended on the president's decision whom he asked to form a government. Therefore, the frequently changing premiers have always had a secondary role to the president as the primary figure in the executive system. Statistics also reveal that presidential elections have always received more attention, as Kyrgyz voters seem to regard the head of state as their country's primary political leader. Thus, even in the period of the parliamentary experiment, the president's informal power and prestige exceeded that of the prime ministers'.

With President Japarov's "presidential restoration" the Kyrgyz constitutional framework seems to mirror the realities of the personality-centered Kyrgyz political culture, even though to analysts, it seems to be less democratic than the parliamentary form of government. It is possible that at one point, the Kyrgyz political life will be able to go beyond its destructive inter-clan rivalry, but it seems that the way out is offered by the strongly personality-centered nationalist populism represented by Japarov, rather than the western-type party-based politics.

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South Korea and V4 in a New Asia-EU Era: Hungary and Poland as Dual Manufacturing Hubs

To-hai Liou

1. Introduction

Asia-EU economic relations have entered into a new era, given that the EU's free trade agreement (FTA) deal with South Korea was implemented in 2011, then the EU and Japan's Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force on February 1, 2019 plus China's growing economic interactions with the EU, notwithstanding pending Sino-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI). Against this background, northeast Asia has now viewed Visegrad Four (V4) countries, namely, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic[1], as a gateway to the EU. Investors from Taiwan, South Korea, China and Japan have greatly increased their investments in the V4 countries. Currently, the EU is Korea's third-largest trading partner and the largest foreign investor for the country, while Korea is the EU's 9th largest trading partner. South Korea-EU bilateral trade volume in 2020 recorded about US$103 billion, an increase of 3.8 percent compared to the previous year, despite the negative impact of the pandemics (Brzozowski, 2021).

As for South Korea's relations with V4 countries, the second-largest market in Europe with many Korean firms in the fields of batteries and electric vehicles increasingly relocating their European production bases to the V4 due to geographical advantages, South Korean conglomerates focus their investment on Hungary and Poland, regarding the two countries as manufacturing hubs to tap into the EU market as a whole, electric vehicles (EV) inter alia. As a result, South Korea is one of Hungary's most important investors, with its investment of more than US$5 billion in Hungary to date and its capital investments in 2019 had surpassed those of Germany, a key trade partner for Hungary (Spike, 2021). According to the Polish Investments and Trade Agency (PAIH), there are currently around 260 Korean companies operating in Poland, making South Korea one of the largest non-EU foreign investors in the country. Thanks to

1 After anticipating the collapse of the Soviet Union, which happened in December 1991, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia formed Visegrad Triangle on February 15, 1991. After the split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, Visegrad Triangle thus changed to V4 (Otieno, 2017).

the LG investment, Poland has become the main center for the production of lithi-um-ion batteries for the automotive industry in Europe, given the commencement of the plant's construction in October 2017. Another salient example is that SK Innovation announced in March 2019 plans to build a plant that manufactures lithium-ion bat-tery separator (LiBS), the main material for electric vehicles, in Silesia, Poland. The annual production volume of the new factory in Poland will be 340 million square meters with an investment of some 430 billion South Korean won. The most recent representative example to show that South Korea is paying special attention to the V4 is President Moon Jae-in's Budapest summit with V4 countries in November 2021. On the sidelines of the meetings, a business forum, the first of its kind, was also held to explore business opportunities for Korean firms in the dynamic economic region.[2]

In this paper, the author intends to explore South Korea's economic relations with V4 countries, in particular Hungary and Poland in terms of trade and investment as case studies. It begins with a briefing on South Korea-EU economic relations since the implementation of their bilateral FTA in 2011, then South Korea-V4 economic relations with a focus on South Korea's economic relations with Hungary and Poland from the South Korean perspective primarily, as well as Hungarian and Polish relevant policies, and finally the future prospects and challenges of the bilateral economic relationship.

2. South Korea-EU Economic Relations since 2011

It has been more than eleven years since South Korea and the EU signed an FTA in October 2010. During the period from 2010-2018, EU's merchandize exports to South Korea increased by 77 percent. As a result, the balance of EU's merchandize trade with South Korea turned from a €10.5 billion deficit in 2010 to equal in 2018. On the other hand, South Korea's goods export to the EU decreased in the same period and suffered a trade deficit for the first time in 2012 since the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Wu, 2016, p.114). South Korea did not have a trade surplus with the EU until 2017. Nevertheless, the trade balance of South Korea with the EU again turned to a €1.2 billion deficit in 2020, with a bilateral trade volume totaling €89.3 billion, accounting for 2.5 percent of the total EU trade volume in the year. EU's merchandize exports to South Korea were at €45.2 billion, accounting for 2.3 percent of the EU's total exports.

2 Moon's visit is the second state visit to Hungary by a South Korean president. The previous one was made by former President Kim Dae-jung back in 2001. Hungary was the final leg of Moon's European trip after his travel to Rome for the G-20 gathering and Glasgow, Scotland, for the COP26 climate sum-mit (Lee, Ji-Yoon, 2021).

South Korea was the EU's 9th largest export market and the 8th largest source of imports. The EU's imports from South Korea were at €44 billion, accounting for 2.6 percent of the EU's total imports.

South Korean Trade Minister Yeo Han-Koo gave an overall positive assessment of the FTA by saying "When we compare trade and investment before and after the FTA, we see that world trade contracted by 4 percent, but our bilateral trade volume increased by 4.8 percent. Korea's investment in the EU really experienced a boom during this time, namely a 333 percent increase of the investment flow from Korea to the EU. And the EU is the largest foreign investor in Korea." He believes the agreement now needs an upgrade, since his government is now seeking to modernize it by including investment protection and new technologies (Ammann, 2021).

3. South Korea-V4 Economic Relations

Companies originating from the six Asian countries are engaged in several manufacturing and services sectors in the V4. Among them, Völgyi and Peragovics (2020, pp. 119-149) pay special attention to the automotive and electronics sectors, which are the most preferred sectors. Similar to their Korean counterparts, Taiwanese companies invested in the manufacturing sector in the V4 countries, thus benefitting from lower labor costs and proximity to the EU market. However, their investments are different in the focused sectors and favored destinations. South Korea's investments tend to revolve around the EV related sector, while Taiwan's revolve around the electronics sector. In terms of their investment destinations, South Korean conglomerates prefer Hungary and Poland, while Taiwanese enterprises prefer the Czech Republic. By June 2020, the Czech Republic is Taiwan's fourth biggest investment destination in Europe, behind Germany, Holland, and the UK. Taiwanese firms have been operating in the Czech Republic since 1995, with electronics manufacturing services (EMS) accounting for most of the investment. Taiwan's leading enterprises such as Foxconn, Asus, Acer, AU Optronics all have factories in the country (Chang, 2020). Foxconn has factories in Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Turkey. But the Czech Republic is Foxconn's most important European site and the hub for export-oriented electronics industry (Andrijasevic – Sacchetto, 2014, p. 45), given that it is the second-largest exporter in the Czech Republic.

Among the Visegrad Group countries, Poland and the Czech Republic had the largest number of enterprises manufacturing motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers. In 2010-2017, production in the automotive sector in Slovakia and Hungary grew

especially rapidly, doubling in Slovakia in current prices and increasing by almost 90 percent in Hungary. In 2010-2017, value added in current prices generated by the automotive sector increased the fastest in Poland (by four-fifths) and Slovakia (by 78 percent) and only slightly more slowly in Hungary and the Czech Republic (by 68 percent and 63 percent). In the EU27, it increased much more slowly, by 53 percent. According to key economic figures, the Czech automotive sector is the best developed in all the V4 countries. The role of the automotive industry in the V4 countries (except Poland) is much more important than in the EU27 as a whole. The automotive sector is one of the biggest employers in the V4 countries' industry, accounting for 11-13 percent of employment in industry and 2-3 percent of the entire labor market. Since 2010, employment in the automotive sector in the V4 countries has grown constantly, at a faster rate than in the EU27. It rose the most in Slovakia, by 54 percent (Dębkowska et al., 2019).

As Chancellor Hong Hyun-Ik of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA) pointed out, making the first state visit by a Korean leader to Hungary in 20 years, President Moon Jae-in "enabled the opening of the *New Eurasia Route* connecting Northeast and Central Asia, Russia and Central Europe through strengthening ties with the four V4 countries." (Hong, 2021). President Moon emphasized that the V4 Group is South Korea's number one target for investment in the EU. At present, there are more than 650 Korean enterprises in the region. He further specified it is worth mentioning that "While Western Europe is economically stagnated at this moment, V4 countries have demonstrated their potential for economic growth (Yonhap News, 2021). During the V4 summit, it is worth noting that South Korea and the V4 countries found sustainability a common goal of the five countries. In particular, President Moon Jae-in promised to help Hungary and Poland with nuclear power ambitions, despite his own phasing-out of nuclear power at home, through the signing of two agreements concerning Korea's assistance with building nuclear power plants in Hungary and Poland. Moon looks forward to working with the V4 on hydrogen power and other renewable energy sources (Kang, 2021). Obviously, Moon Jae-in intends to build a strategic linkage between South Korea's energy grand strategy based upon hydrogen power and renewable energy exports to the V4. President Moon's ambition is to transform South Korea from an energy-paucity country in a fossil energy era into an energy powerhouse in the hydrogen powered energy era for the 21st century (The Republic of Korea Cheong Wa Dae, 2019).

3.1. Poland

South Korea's relations with Poland since the end of World War II can be divided into four periods, period I: the Cold War era through the establishment of diplomatic ties on November 1, 1989, period II: from November 1989 to May 1, 2004, when Poland joined the EU, period III: from May 2004 to July 1, 2011, when the Korea-EU FTA took effect, period IV: from July 1, 2011 until now.

In the first period, South Korea's foreign policy toward Poland was politically oriented, because the two countries belonged to two ideologically hostile camps. Poland was a member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization under the Soviet Union guardianship and a strong ally of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). During the period, South Korea and Poland were enemies and had no contact at all. With the Sino-US détente, South Korean President Park Chung-hee forwarded the June 23 Declaration in 1973, in which he stated that South Korea no longer opposed the two Koreas joining the U.N. together and that the South was ready to establish diplomatic ties with communist countries. Poland was one of targeted countries of this demarche. However, the two countries did not have meaningful interactions until the late 1980s. South Korea under President Chun Doo-hwan won the bid to host the 1988 Olympic Games in 1981, followed by his Northern Diplomacy (*Nordpolitik* or *Bukbang jeong-chaek*) designed to improve relations with communist states in June 1983. The Chun Doo-hwan government creatively employed the Olympic Games diplomacy for diplomatic purposes. Consequently, former Eastern European countries including Poland established diplomatic ties with South Korea in less than one year after the conclusion of the Seoul Olympic Games in 1989 under President Roh Tae-woo, even before those countries sought democracy and market economic reforms. Obviously, this breakthrough was a diplomatic triumph over North Korea for South Korea in terms of their long-term tug of war of diplomatic recognition (Liou, 1991). In November 1989, the ROK became the first Asian country that offered official development assistance (ODA) of US$450 million to Poland after it was reborn as a democratic country (Los Angeles Times, 1989).

Then, South Korea-Poland relations entered into the second period. There were not many interactions between the two countries during this period for Poland was in a transitional stage to democracy and to a market economy. Under the Lech Wałęsa leadership, Poland joined Czechoslovakia (later, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and Hungary to form the Visegrad Group in 1991, with an eye on facilitating integrating these states with European and Transatlantic institutions. As a result, Poland became a member of NATO in 1999 and the EU on May 1, 2004. This brought about the third

period of South Korea-Poland relations, with a feature of South Korea's increasing economic pivot to Poland, not only because of Poland's affiliation with the EU, but also because of President Roh Moo-hyun's focus on signing an FTA to revitalize Korea's economy (Liou, 2008). That was why President Roh paid a state visit to Poland in December 2004 with an aim to timely upgrading their bilateral economic relations.

South Korea's investment in Poland in recent years have become a major characteristic of this bilateral economic relationship. This is because South Korean conglomerates have regarded Poland as a part of their overall strategy to the EU, targeting especially electric vehicles (EVs). According to the Polish Investments and Trade Agency (PAIH), there are currently around 260 Korean companies operating in Poland, making South Korea one of the largest non-EU foreign investors in the country. In fact, South Korea investment in Poland surpassed that of China in September 2018. The value of South Korean investments in Poland is close to €1.9 billion, almost 500 million more than Chinese investment in Poland for 2017.

The LG Chem factory intended to become the largest electric vehicle battery factory in Europe in 2018. They made an investment of more than €1.3 billion in the factory. LG chose Poland as the most competitive location for production to satisfy the needs of European and global car producers. The LG Chem factory has brought a new quality in direct investments in Poland, which serves as a milestone in the development of electromobility. Thanks to the LG investment, Poland has become the main center for the production of lithium-ion batteries for the automotive industry in Europe, given the commencement of the plant's construction in October 2017. LG Chem's board of directors later approved an investment of US$571 million in LG Chem Wroclaw Energy to fund the expansion. The project would triple the unit's output capacity in Poland to 300,000 EV batteries annually from the current 100,000 (Argus Media, 2018).

LG Energy Solution is the battery-making subsidiary of South Korea's LG Chem. Nevertheless, electric vehicle batteries were a signature business for Koo Bon-moo, the former LG Group chairman who died suddenly in 2018. Chairman Koo dreamed of making LG the world's biggest EV battery producer. Furthermore, current Chief Executive Kwon Young-soo also saw the importance of batteries as the EV age dawned and then threw himself into research and development. He made customers of General Motors and Ford Motor of the US and Renault in France. He pushed ahead of rival Samsung, giving LG the second largest EV battery business in the world after China's Contemporary Amperex Technology (CATL). More importantly, Kwon successfully raised a market capitalization of around US$97 billion from an initial public offering (IPO) in 2021; allowing the expansion of production at six battery plants around

the world, and to speed up development of the next generation of batteries, thereby closing the gap on CATL (宁德时代). Chief Executive Kwon is confident that LG Energy is on course to become the world's biggest EV battery maker (Hosokawa, 2022).

LG Energy Solution and SK Innovation are dominating the European cell market. Daimler AG is working with South Korean battery makers, already using their technology for electric sport utility vehicles (SUVs) of Mercedes-Benz, as the automaker aims to only develop new models with all-electric capability from 2025. Nevertheless, Mercedes-Benz plans to invest €40 billion (US$47.3 billion) for eight giga battery plants to meet its goal to go 100 percent electric without South Korea. It is set to construct four in Europe and is considering the United States and China for the rest, so as to have a production footprint in the three largest auto markets in the world, namely Europe, Asia and North America (Kim, 2021a). South Korea's battery manufactures in the EU are facing severe challenges from its Chinese rivals, CATL in particular. In response, LG Energy Solution for example has its sights on taking the EV battery crown from China's CATL, with plans to expand production in six countries and to develop cutting-edge power cells through its record-breaking US$10.7 billion IPO in January 2022 (Hosokawa – Kawakami, 2022). South Korea's LG Energy Solution and SK Innovation have been manufacturing pouch-type batteries for Volkswagen, while CATL and Samsung SDI have supplied it with prismatic ones. However, Volkswagen plans to gradually switch the type of battery used in its electric vehicles, moving away from the technology supplied under current deals with South Korea's LG Energy Solution and SK Innovation. Volkswagen plans to use the prismatic type of battery, increasingly turning to supplies from China's CATL (Yang, 2021).

3.2. Hungary

In recent years, Asian investors have turned Hungary into an auto hub in the EU as well as a frontrunner in electric battery production in Europe. South Korea's investment is a key contributor to this trend, given that the country's conglomerates favor the first mover strategy. With its political stability, the skill and diligence of the Hungarian people and the lowest taxes in Europe, including the lowest corporate tax in Europe, Hungary has emerged as one of the most favored investment destinations for South Korean conglomerates in Europe in recent years. In 2019, South Korean companies decided to invest more than €2.5 billion in Hungary, which accounted for 48 percent of all investments in the country, these investments created more than 4,500 jobs. As a result, for the first time in decades, South Korea replaced Germany as Hungary's biggest foreign investor. This is largely due to the largest electric

battery companies in South Korea bringing their factories to Hungary—the largest electric battery factories in the world. Four South Korean enterprises are investing a total of €211.5 million in Hungary, creating 300 new jobs. "Thanks to the state-of-the-art electric automotive industry and healthcare industry investments, South Korean investment in Hungary for this year is increasing to 900 billion Hungarian forints (€2.72 billion), which is unparalleled in the history of the Hungarian economy," said Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó after a meeting with his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-Wha. "As a result, South Korea will be the largest investor in Hungary this year." Thirty percent of Hungarian industrial output comes from the automotive industry. "Accordingly, it is vitally important for Hungary to also be able to attract investment projects that include the most modern technology possible and create a large number of high added value jobs based on research and development in the new automotive industry era, the era of electromobility," continued Mr Szijjártó. "The leader of the section of the automotive industry that is built on electric drives is clearly South Korea and South Korean corporations are the world market leaders in the manufacturing of electric batteries."

Thanks to the South Korean automotive industry investment projects, in contrast to European and global trends, the performance of the Hungarian automotive industry has increased by 14 percent in 2019 (Patricolo, 2019). In addition, Samyang Biopharm also established a medical device plant in Gödöllő with an investment of 8.6 billion forints, creating 55 jobs in the first phase. The government will also provide 1.3 billion forints in non-refundable support for the project. The plant in Gödöllő will be the first one in Europe for Samyang Group's medical device manufacturing division and the first Korean pharmaceutical investment in Hungary (Hungarian Insider, 2020).

With 40 gigawatt-hours of battery production capacity per year in the US, China, Hungary and South Korea's manufacturing lines, SK Innovation has plans to expand capacity to 85 GWh in 2023, 200 GWh in 2025 and eventually 500 GWh in 2030. One gigawatt-hour equals one billion watt-hours of energy. SK Innovation is currently the world's sixth-largest EV battery maker. It finished the first half of 2021 with a 5.2 percent share of the market, according to SNE Research. China's CATL led with a 29.9 percent share, followed by South Korea's LG Energy Solution with 24.5 percent. Japan's Panasonic was no. 3 with 15 percent (Kim, 2021b).

By January 2021, 32 major South Korean companies have made investments in Hungary over the past six years, adding that bilateral trade turnover had increased by 28 percent in 2020. The salient example is that South Korea's largest energy and chemicals company SK Innovation decided to build a new US$2.3 billion battery plant

in Iváncsa, the largest in Europe, with an annual capacity of 30 GWh in January 2021. This will be the biggest ever greenfield investment in Hungary's history. SK Innovation called the site's location "optimal" in terms of logistics and labor. The development in Fejér County, in central Hungary, will create 2,500 jobs. The company's first two overseas plants are located in Komárom, in northern Hungary, and its third European plant producing batteries for electric cars will also be located in Hungary. The government is providing financial support, and this agreement is in the process of being finalized, and if it materializes, it is going to be the largest single government grant in Hungarian investment history. Construction of the 700,000 square meter plant is scheduled to begin in the third quarter of 2021, adding that the government has already approved a large-scale regional transport and electricity infrastructure development project serving the plant. [3]

With a record number of greenfield investments arriving from China, for the first time, China became the leading investor in Hungary in 2020, accounting for an almost 30 percent of share in the country's inbound foreign direct investment (FDI). Hungary absorbed a total investment worth almost €4.1 billion, creating 12,900 new jobs in the year. In particular, Chinese battery material companies' investments added up to €664 million, 27.1 percent of the total, led by the Semcorp (恩捷) Group's investment of more than €183 million to build a lithium-ion battery separator film plant in Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, 231 km east of Budapest. This is the first production unit of the company outside China and it will create 440 new jobs (Budapest Business Journal, 2021). Then, Shanghai Energy New Materials Technology invested €184 million and Lenovo (联想) and Shenzhen Kedali (深圳科达利实业公司) made large investments as well.

Despite the enormous health and economic challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, China made the largest investment in the industry in Hungary in 2020. South Korea, which was the largest investor in the industry in Hungary in 2019, slid to third with €436 million in 2020. South Korea's electric component maker Solus Advanced Materials is currently running foil manufacturing facilities with an annual capacity of 10,000 tons in Hungary and has invested €205 million. The capacity is scheduled to be increased to 75,000 tons by 2025. In addition, Korean companies like Iljin Materials and Dongwha Enterprise also decided in 2020 to build copper foil and electrolyte production facilities in Hungary, respectively. In January 2021, SK innovation announced that it would build its third plant in Hungary in Iváncsa at an investment of US$2.29

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3 "Foreign Minister: South Korea brings biggest greenfield investment in Hungary's history." (Daily News Hungary, 2021).

billion. In January 2020, Samsung SDI announced a plan to invest 940 billion won in Samsung SDI Hungary as well. The company has its first plant in Göd and the investment will be made for its second plant, which will increase its annual production capacity to 40 GWh (Herh, 2021).

4. Conclusion: Prospects and Challenges

With the advent of the 21st century, South Korea's policy toward the EU has been economically and commercially oriented. For South Korean conglomerates, they view V4 countries as a gateway to the EU and in particular regard, Hungary and Poland as production hubs. EV has been the primary sector that they favor most. In addition, as a sandwich between the two giant neighbors geographically, China and Japan, South Korea believes that the best strategy for survival is to act as swiftly and nimbly as a rabbit. As a result, most of the time South Korea prefers the first mover strategy so as to create a favorable operational environment, no matter in terms of diplomacy or business operations. This characteristic can be easily observed from South Korea-EU FTA negotiations, the first Northeast Asian country to conclude FTA with the EU, especially ahead of its primary FTA competitor Japan (Liou, 2008, pp. 194-195), and the investment strategy of Korean conglomerates in Poland such as LG and SK Innovation investment in battery factories before the arrival of Chinese rivals.

Moreover, the actions of LG and SK Innovation investment in battery factories are also quite well planned, strategically forward-looking and exceptionally bold. Four Korean auto makers have their EV factories in Hungary, while LG and SK Innovation produce batteries in Poland. So, their batteries can be delivered conveniently not only to Korean auto makers in Hungary but also to German and other EU auto makers at low cost. Furthermore, the calculation of Korean enterprises is also correct and timely, given their eyes on the battery factory investment. In 2020, nearly 1.4 million battery-electric vehicles (BEVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) were registered in Europe, 137 percent more than in 2019. Europe has superseded China (1.3 million EVs) as the motor of EV growth. For the first time since 2015, EV sales in Europe have outpaced new energy vehicles (NEVs) sales in China. Europe is further ahead in terms of EV share: BEVs plus PHEVs increased from 3.3 percent in 2019 to 10.2 percent in 2020, counting the EU and EFTA countries, including UK. The NEV share in China grew from 5.1 percent to 5.5 percent during this period.[4]

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4 "Global Plug-in Vehicle Sales Reached over 3.2 million in 2020" (Irle, 2020).

What is more, it is obvious that there are converging economic interests between South Korea and the V4 countries in addition to economic complementarity. From the Seoul perspective, South Korea and the group cooperation in electric vehicles, batteries and nuclear power and a shared vision of leading the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution by connecting the V4's basic science capacity with Korea's prowess in applied sciences like information and communications technology. Alternatively, as Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said in the Budapest Summit that the V4 Group is South Korea's most important cooperative partner in the EU, given that nearly 30 percent of all South Korean exports to the EU go to the V4 countries. Morawiecki in particular indicated that his country attaches importance to innovation and sectors relevant to the future of Poland and European economic prospects, when it comes to bilateral economic interactions with South Korea (TVP World, 2021). The increasing exports from South Korea to the V4 countries also demonstrate the unique investment-driven trade pattern of the export-oriented Northeast Asia economy.

With growing concern about climate change, more and more governments intend to ban fossil-fueled cars by the 2030s as well as consumer interest in electric vehicles increasing (Liou, 2021, p. 41), the global market for EV batteries has grown to US$27 billion in 2021 and is expected to continue expanding. Even though this is promising for South Korea's EV battery manufacturers, their challenges in the near future are at least two-fold, Chinese rivals and accelerating the EU's localization trend in manufacturing batteries to avoid shortage risks amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Sino-US tech war. At present, the ten EV battery manufacturers with the highest market share in terms of battery capacity newly registered in 2021 are all headquartered in Asian countries, mainly China, South Korea and Japan. Together EV battery makers of the three countries account for more than 90 percent of the global production. As data from SNE Research shows, the industry's top five manufacturers—CATL (32.5 percent), LG (21.5 percent), Panasonic (14.7 percent), BYD (6.9 percent) and Samsung (5.4 percent)—together account for over 80 percent of global automotive battery production (OilPrice.com, 2022). Hence, competition is fierce given the growth of the EV battery market, which is expected to reach US$89 billion in size by 2023 (Kim, 2021c). By 2026, Wood Mackenzie expects Europe's share of the world's lithium-ion cell factories to triple to 30 percent. With global production capacity expected to hit 1 terawatt-hour by then, that puts Europe on track to have factories capable of cranking out 300 gigawatt-hours in just six years, compared to its 4.5 gigawatt-hours of capacity today, according to the European Commission. Europe's lithium-ion cell manufacturing sector has been relatively slow to get going. Merely 10 percent of the world's battery production capacity was located in Europe in 2019, compared to Asia-Pacific's 75 percent, according to Wood Mackenzie data. Incumbent battery makers

like France's Saft are racing to scale up, and startups like Sweden's Northvolt are investing huge sums of money to get ready for the opportunity ahead. Foreign producers such as LG Chem and CATL are expanding on European soil. Under a US$2 billion project, China's CATL is building Europe's biggest EV battery plant outside the German town of Arnstadt. This is one of about a half dozen battery factories under construction in Germany alone (Lombrana – Reiter – Weiss, 2020). In fact, in the period from January until November 2021, CATL with a market share of 17.0 percent has already emerged as the second largest EV battery provider for the EU market, only next to LG Innovation and ahead of Samsung SDI (12.5 percent) SK On (12.0 percent) and Panasonic (7.0 percent) (金一圭、金亨奎，2022年). Saft is already serving the stationary battery market, using cells from China to keep costs down. A deal signed in 2019 with Tianneng Energy Technology (天能集團) for Chinese cells was an attempt to "identify where we can leverage cost and where we can maximize value", says Sébastien Hita Perona, General Manager of Saft's energy storage solutions segment (Parnell, 2020).

On top of that, Chinese EV startup Nio (蔚來) has started its first overseas venture with a plan to sell cars to Norwegians from September, given that its first overseas store opened in Oslo in September 2021, together with an 18,000 square meter service center. The company aims to deliver the Nio ES8, an all-electric seven-seater sport utility vehicle, later in the same year and to start taking orders for the ET7, a premium sedan, in 2022. Nio founder and Chief Executive William Li said Norway is among the countries most friendly toward electric vehicles, which prompted him to make it the company's first overseas foray. The Chinese company also plans to build stations in Norway where drivers can charge and swap batteries. In fact, Nio is not alone. Its Chinese rivals Xpeng (小鵬) Motors and Airways (愛馳) have already started delivering to Europe, but they have not been very well received by local customers judging from sales. Their common challenge is that European customers appear to prefer EVs from established carmakers over those from emerging brands (Sun, 2021). Chinese EV makers, are definitely going to pose a serious challenge to Korean EV rivals as Hyundai and Kia in the EU market for the foreseeable future.

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