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Editor's note

The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) Treaty has been ratified by Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, and is ready to be launched as scheduled. Moreover, the Treaty on the Accession of Armenia to the EEU was signed at the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) meeting on 10 October 2014. Therefore, the Eurasian integration project will have four full-fledged members as early as 2015. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan also hopes to join the organization really soon – the leaders of the Eurasian troika approved the roadmap for its accession at the most recent SEEC meeting.

The **Main Feature** of this Eurasian Review is the process of Armenia's Eurasian integration, its benefits and costs for the country. The article analyzes the main challenges that Armenia has encountered on its way to Eurasian integration – its transportation problems amid the absence of common borders with its Eurasian partners, the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, and need for additional approvals within the framework of the World Trade Organization. The analysis of Armenia's benefits and costs that ensue from European and Eurasian integration clarifies the reasons why the Armenian political elite opted for the Eurasian integration project. As a separate item, the article seeks to answer the question how important for the Eurasian troika is to incorporate Armenia in the EEU.

The next issues of Eurasian Review will comprise materials describing the situation in the remaining EEU member states.

The **Highlights** section addresses the popularity of the Eurasian integration idea in the EEU constituent countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia), countries that are close to acceding to the bloc (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan), as well as Ukraine. Analyst at CASE Belarus Aliaksandr Papko cites the dynamics of pro-Eurasian and anti-Eurasian sentiment in those countries throughout the last three years and outlines a trend towards a growth in eurasio-scepticism and isolationism. The increased number of opponents of both the European and Eurasian projects is not an exclusively Belarusian phenomenon – this situation can be observed in Armenia as well. BISS will get back to a more detailed analysis of the causes of this process in its following issues.

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Content:

HIGHLIGHTS

Andrei Yelisseyeu

Armenia in the EEU: the thorny path is behind, but challenges remain 2

Armenia's foreign policy tilt 2

Ambivalent attitude of Armenian society to Eurasian integration 3

Economic aspect: Eurasian integration vs. European integration 4

Absence of common borders with the Eurasian partners 5

Nagorno-Karabakh and the EEU: formally beyond, but is it? 6

Problem of different import duties within the WTO and the EEU 6

Military and political aspect of Eurasian integration 7

Significance of Armenia's EEU accession for the Eurasian troika 7

MAIN FEATURE

Aliaksandr Papko

Public support for Eurasian integration in the Eurasian Economic Union member states, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine 9

Russia: building a union without Ukraine ... 10

Belarus: integration is good, but independence is better 11

Kazakhstan: the most optimistic Eurasian . 12

Armenia: the EEU has many supporters, but isolationism is growing stronger 12

Kyrgyzstan: Eurasian integration makes Chinese products more expensive and triggers fierce political disputes 13

Ukraine: split in society has narrowed, but still remains 14

HIGHLIGHTS

Armenia in the EEU: the thorny path is behind, but challenges remain

Andrei Yeliseyeu

Just as Kyiv, Yerevan had long been balancing in its foreign policy choosing between the Association Agreement with the European Union and accession to the Customs Union (CU) and the Single Economic Space (SES). In September 2013, Armenia made a turnaround, changing its status from an assiduous student making its way towards European integration into a troubled candidate seeking membership in the Eurasian club. It was at that time that Belarus and Kazakhstan made public warnings concerning the borders, within which Armenia could join the Eurasian union. Challenges with Eurasian integration other than the status of Nagorno-Karabakh include the country's transport blockade and necessity to pursue additional negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nevertheless, owing to the political will of the Armenian administration and firm intention of the Russian side to include Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), main obstacles to Armenia's EEU integration were removed in under 12 months.

Armenia's foreign policy tilt

Throughout 2012 and 2013, Armenia remained hesitant about its ultimate foreign policy choice and continued talks over a European Union Association Agreement while exploring the possibility of collaborating with the CU and the SES. According to the 2012–2013 European integration index of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) member states¹, Armenia came third in *Approximation*, following Moldova and Georgia and leaving behind Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. In transport, energy, and its policies on education, culture, youth and information society, Armenia has made more significant progress towards the EU standards than the rest of the EaP member states. Further, Armenia concluded agreements with the European Union on visa facilitation and readmission, it started negotiations over the Mobility Partnership program, and became observer of the EU Energy Community. Armenia successfully completed the talks over a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which is part of the Armenia–European Union Association Agreement, on 24 July 2013, and it was expected that Armenia and the EU would initial the agreement at the third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013.

Both Serzh Sargsyan, who won the presidential election in February 2013 with 58.64% of the vote, and the runner-up Raffi Hovannisian (who polled 36.75% of the vote), declared in their election agendas that they were committed to European integration. The outcomes of the election raised the hopes of many observers concerning Armenia's European integration prospects. For instance, the head of the NGO "European Integration" Karen Bekaryan said when commenting on the results of the election that *"European integration processes in our country are becoming irreversible"*.

However, in September 2013, President Sargsyan and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia that he chairs swung to Eurasian integration, thus frustrating the results of many years of talks with the European Union. The meeting between Serzh Sargsyan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on 3 September 2013 became the turning point, as the two heads of state mentioned in a joint communiqué following their meeting: *"... the decision of the Republic of Armenia to join the Customs Union... and subsequently participate in the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union"*². Two weeks later, the Armenian government approved the draft plan of preparatory operations for Armenia to join the Customs Union. At the start of December, Russia offered Armenia a substantial economic bonus: it abolished export duties on rough diamonds, oil products and natural gas supplied to Armenia, with natural gas price falling from USD270 to USD189 per 1,000 cubic meters.

¹ <http://www.eap-index.eu/>

² <http://www.president.am/ru/press-release/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-and-President-Vladimir-Putin-joint-statement/>

The roadmap for Armenia to join the CU and the SES was approved at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) on 24 December 2013. The document included more than 200 arrangements; of them about half were supposed to be completed before Armenia acceded to the CU. The roadmap did not mention any specific accession dates, thus making this procedure dependent on the country's progress in the negotiating process and reforms of Armenia's regulatory framework. During the following six months, Armenia managed to perform all of the tasks outlined in the roadmap. As a result, during a regular SEEC meeting on 29 April 2014, the heads of the CU member states heard the report of the Eurasian Economic Commission on the status of work on the implementation of the Armenian roadmap and resolved that the draft treaty on Armenia's accession to the CU and the SES was to be prepared by 1 June 2014.³

The May visit to Armenia by President of France François Hollande, who said that Yerevan still ran a chance of signing the political part of the European Union Association Agreement, became the final and obviously doomed attempt of the European Union to influence Serzh Sargsyan's foreign policy choice. Against the backdrop of Ukrainian events, the price of spoiling the relationship with Russia increased for Armenia, whereas the room for maneuver for the Armenian political leaders markedly narrowed. The signing of the Treaty on the Accession of Armenia to the EEU⁴, which had been postponed since May, took place at the latest SEEC meeting on 10 October 2014.

Ambivalent attitude of Armenian society to Eurasian integration

Sargsyan's statement about the country's willingness to join the Eurasian bloc received a mixed response in Armenia. On the same day, massive rallies were staged by Armenia's pro-European forces to protest against the sudden shift in the foreign policy course — protesters were chanting slogans "No to the Customs Union", "No Putin, No Cry". On the day the agreement for Armenia to join the EEU was signed (10 October 2014), a huge opposition rally was held in Yerevan (between 14,000 and 20,000 people).

While the ruling Republican Party of Armenia approved the decision for the country to accede to the CU, opposition parties slammed Sargsyan's arrangements. The opposition parties "Prosperous Armenia" (having 36 seats in the 131-seat parliament) and "Armenian National Congress" (seven seats) attempted to play the Nagorno-Karabakh card and cited the uncertainty of its future should Armenia opt for Eurasian integration. However, they never came out against Eurasian integration per se. Sargsyan's opponents believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh should not become a bargaining chip when it comes to political choices. The Armenian Liberal Democratic Party (or the Ramgavar Party, which has five seats) came openly against Eurasian integration, and its leader Raffi Hovannisian said that as a result of the move "*Armenia's statehood and independence are threatened*".⁵

The opposition and a portion of Armenian society were discontented about the fact that the decision that appears to be life-changing for the entire country was taken at a behind-closed-doors meeting between Sargsyan and Putin in Moscow without a wide-ranging public discussion. The opposition believes that the essence of the agreements and the real ratio of benefits to costs have not been fully presented to Armenian society. As for public sentiment, most of the Armenians feel fine about Eurasian integration. In Armenia, more than 90% of the population considers Russia to be a friendly country, which is the highest level reported for the former Soviet Union (FSU) (compared to 73% in Belarus).⁶ Because Armenia has a massive Diaspora community in Russia, with about 1.2 million people, 73% of the Armenian respondents keep in touch with their family members and friends in Russia (compared to 47% in Belarus and 38% in Ukraine).⁷

3 <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Lists/EECDocs/635344726193105756.pdf>

4 See the texts of the Treaty on the Accession of Armenia to the Eurasian Economic Union of 29 May 2014 and Exhibits: <http://www.rg.ru/2014/08/14/evrazes-site-dok.html>

5 «"Statehood and independence of Armenia are threatened — Raffi Hovannisian". 1in.am, 17.09.2013, <http://ru.1in.am/35263.html>

6 Answers to the question: "Which of the countries mentioned in this card are friendly towards our country (whose support can you rely on in time of need)?" [preferences within the former Soviet Union]. Integration Barometer of the Eurasian Development Bank. Center of Integration Studies, the Eurasian Development Bank, report No.4, 2012, pp. 36-37.

7 Ibid., p. 47.

Economic aspect: Eurasian integration vs. European integration

The macroeconomic impact of European and Eurasian integration were analyzed under the auspices of both the European Commission⁸ and the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB)⁹. Interestingly, both forecasts failed to fully account for the economic losses of Armenia resulting from respective integration scenarios. The study presented by the European Commission fails to take into account the increase in prices for imports from Russia (especially natural gas), which will be inevitable once an Armenia-EU Association Agreement is signed. This omission is meticulously described in the study by the EDB, which, however, misses the likely increase in rates on import of many categories of products from third countries, which might affect living standards in Armenia. Furthermore, Armenia will see its budget revenues dwindle following the cancellation of the internal customs tariff and introduction of the new procedure for the collection of the value-added tax for some products imported in Armenia from the EEU.¹⁰

The study commissioned by the European Commission concludes that a DCFTA between the EU and the Republic of Armenia will produce “a considerable positive economic impact,” namely, an increase in the national income by 62 million euros (1.1% of GDP) in the short term and by 146 million euros (2.3% of GDP) in the long term¹¹. At the same time, the report compiled by the EDB, concludes that “*integration with the European Union ... might have certain impact; however, it cannot even be compared to the expected results of integration with the Customs Union as part of the Single Economic Space*”¹². It is expected that given the anticipated approximation of the prices of minerals to those currently effective in the CU, Armenia will see a 4% GDP growth two years after it joins the EEU.

The EDB study mentioned some real and hypothetical benefits of Eurasian integration, which draw a clear picture of Russia's leverage over Armenia:

- Preferences in having cheaper Russian energy (natural gas price is projected to decrease to USD180 from USD270 per 1,000 cubic meters), which alone will benefit the Armenian budget in the long term the same as a European Union Association Agreement, should it ever become a reality.
- Potential resolution of the Armenian transport stalemate with the help of Russian investments: it is planned to build a railway to Iran, as well as to Russia, via Georgia, and the North–South automobile corridor. JSC Russian Railways has already declared its intention to invest 15 billion Russian roubles (USD350 million) in the modernization of the Armenian railway. At the same time, in case of a European Union Association Agreement, Armenia would have a chance to use a more economical transit route via Georgia
- Russia would open its labor market to Armenian citizens within the framework of the EEU. Transfers by Armenian migrants amounted to 15% of GDP in 2012, or USD1.68 billion, and 85% of those transfers (USD1.44 billion) were from Russia. An Association Agreement with the EU would not grant Armenia the freedom of travel and would not remove obstacles to labor migration to the EU. If Russia should introduce more stringent measures against Armenian migrants, their earned incomes would be cut, which could affect the country's foreign trade balance.
- Additional inflow of Russian investments in Armenia's export sectors. Russian investments accounted for approximately 41.5% of gross foreign direct investments in the Armenian economy from 1988 to 2012 (USD2.83 billion), whereas Russian investments to Belarus and Kazakhstan amounted to approximately USD13 million during that period.
- Stable flows of Russian investments in the construction of a new power unit at the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant, which will minimize Armenia's dependence on energy imports. According to the report

8 Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment in support of negotiations of a DCFTA between the EU and the Republic of Armenia, Final Report. Rotterdam, 3 July 2013, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2013/july/tradoc_151659.pdf

9 Armenia and the Customs Union: assessment of the economic impact of integration. The Eurasian Development Bank, Center of Integration Studies, report No.20, 2013, http://www.eabr.org/general/upload/CII%20-%20izdania/2014/%D0%90%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%A2%D0%A1/doklad_20_ru_preview.pdf

10 M. Voskanyan, R. Tumanyan. Prospects of Armenia's acceding to the Customs Union: pros and cons // Eurasian economic integration, No.2 (23), May 2014, pp. 30-31.

11 Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment, p.34.

12 Armenia and the Customs Union, p. 26.

by the EDB, an Association Agreement with the European Union would result in several challenges to the Armenian energy sector.¹³ First, Russia could refuse to continue the construction of the new power unit of the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant and give up on other important energy projects (including investments in the modernization of the Hrazdan Cascade Hydropower System). Second, energy collaboration between Armenia and Iran could suffer if the EU chose to further expand sanctions against Iran. Third, if Armenia decided to join the Third Energy Package of the European Union, the country's energy companies would lose competition with Georgian companies that generate cheaper energy using water power plants (in addition to a probable increase in natural gas prices for Armenia).

Overall, Armenia's European integration would cause hikes in energy prices, higher duties and non-tariff limitations on the export of Armenian goods to the CU, lower transfers from labor migrants and decrease in direct investments from the CU member states. Apparently, these possible negative effects would outweigh the economic benefits of a DCFTA with the European Union, at least in the short and medium terms.

At the same time, on the way to Eurasian integration Armenia has encountered some serious obstacles associated primarily with the transport blockade of the country, the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, and need to hold additional talks with the WTO. Each of these challenges is described below in more detail.

Absence of common borders with the Eurasian partners

Armenia's two longest borders — those with Turkey and Azerbaijan — have been blocked because of political disagreements. Since the start of the 1990s, the Georgian route has been the only way to provide Armenia with supplies. However, the tense Georgian–Abkhazian relations and the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 complicated the use of the Abkhazian section of the railway connecting Armenia with Russia. Furthermore, because Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, the border between Armenia and Georgia started to separate the free trade area of the European Union and the EEU. Armenia has a 35-kilometer border with Iran on the Aras River; however, the transport infrastructure between these two countries is underdeveloped.

Because the need for double customs clearance makes it increasingly hard for economic entities to effectively operate, Eurasian integration will hardly succeed unless the transport challenge is effectively addressed. Chairman of the board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Viktor Khristenko admitted that existence of just one transport corridor between Armenia and the Customs Union is a *“very sensitive infrastructure restriction,”* but considered the problem resolvable *“given the current level of communications”*.¹⁴ Incidentally, in 2012, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan said, when convincing the public that integration with the European Union would continue, that *“it is unprecedented in world practice that a country with no common borders should become a Customs Union member; this would be senseless”*.¹⁵

The Georgian government of Bidzina Ivanishvili turned out to be more compliant than Saakashvili when it came to ensuring a customs-free connection between Russia and Armenia or the operation of a railway service via Abkhazia.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the future of the railway service connecting Russia and Armenia via Georgia and Abkhazia remains vague, whereas transport services between Armenia and Iran will take many years to develop.

13 Ibid., p. 33.

14 Armenia may become an exclave of the Customs Union, just as the Kaliningrad Region — Khristenko. REGNUM, 20.12.2012, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1606917.html>

15 Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia is not interested in a Customs Union within the EurAsEC. De Facto, 04.04.2012, http://defacto.am/15878.html#_VFk0tmf4J5J

16 Read more: N. Akhmeteli. Georgia–Russia: who needs a railway. BBC Russian Service, 21.06.2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/06/140620_georgia_russia_railway

Nagorno-Karabakh and the EEU: formally beyond, but is it?

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh is an exceedingly important problem in Armenia's domestic policy. The question of the borders, within which Armenia joins the EEU, became very topical during the Eurasian negotiating process.

In October 2013, President Aliaksandr Lukashenka said during a meeting with representatives of the CIS media outlets that when accepting Armenia as a Customs Union member, the bloc will have to take into account Azerbaijan's opinion, given the pending territorial issues between Baku and Yerevan. Moscow's response to that statement was quite harsh. The Russian senator Nikolay Ryzhkov, the co-chairman of the Armenian–Russian inter-parliamentary cooperation commission, said that the Karabakh issue should not be directly linked to the CU, because they are different issues: *"Lukashenka should mind his own business, he should not interfere in other countries' issues... If we put the question this way, this would mean that Armenia would never be able to join the Customs Union."*¹⁷ Kazakhstan also said at a SEEC meeting in December 2013 that countries with an uncertain status could join neither the CU nor the EEU. Nursultan Nazarbayev even assumed that Kazakhstan would sign a roadmap for Armenia's accession 'with a dissenting opinion'.

Nazarbayev's reference during a SEEC meeting of 29 May 2014 to a letter from President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev drew an even more thunderous response from the Armenian media. In his letter, Aliyev said that Armenia could join the EEU within the same borders, with which it joined the WTO, i.e. without Nagorno-Karabakh. Many Armenian media interpreted the incident as a blow to Armenia's interests in favor of Azerbaijan, which has no intention to participate in Eurasian integration.

Serzh Sargsyan admitted that Nazarbayev's statement was unpleasant, but assured the public that it would hardly do any harm to Armenia: "Who said that we were going to join the Customs Union together with Nagorno-Karabakh? Karabakh is not part of Armenia now, at least according to our legislation."¹⁸ At the same time, representatives of the Armenian government and the ruling party made repeated statements about their principled position that Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were a single economic area, and having a customs station between them would be inadmissible.

On the other hand, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia's membership in the EEU may seem overly politicized, because for the most part it is a technical issue. Officially, none of the Eurasian troika members recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh to be a part of Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh itself never applied for the EEU membership. Representatives of the member states of the Eurasian integration bloc, including Russia, have made it their point that the EEU is being created on the basis of rules of international law, and any country can join the CU, SES, or the EEU only within the borders recognized by the United Nations.

On the other hand, even though the Eurasian partners have reached a consensus on Armenia's representation in the EEU without Nagorno-Karabakh, two discrepancies still remain. First, the problem of dual standards, from the point of view of Crimea being part of the EEU as a territory, where the Russian rule has not been recognized by the international community. Second, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh being a single economic area – an idea that appears to be of particular importance to Yerevan – challenges Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the disputed territory.

Problem of different import duties within the WTO and the EEU

Armenia has an export-oriented liberal economy. Its main export commodities are aluminum foil and rolled aluminum, precious and semi-precious stones, non-ferrous metals (copper and molybdenum), and cognac. The weak diversification of export goods and prevalence of products with a low added value mean that export-wise Armenia should not expect extraordinary benefits from the anticipated accession to the CU. The potential to expand the export commodity pattern is virtually nonexistent, whereas the country's transport predicament further increases the cost of export products.¹⁹

¹⁷ Nikolay Ryzhkov has commented on Lukashenka's 'Karabakh' statements, suggesting that he mind his own business. PanARMENIAN.Net, 06.11.2013, <http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/172288/>

¹⁸ Serzh Sargsyan: "Who said that we were going to join the Customs Union together with Karabakh?" REGNUM, 31.05.2014, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1808890.html>

¹⁹ Voskanyan, R. Tumanyan. Prospects of Armenia's acceding to the Customs Union: pros and cons // Eurasian economic integration, No.2 (23), May 2014, pp. 27-28.

Table 1. Trade between the Eurasian quartet, %²⁰

	Armenia	Russia	Kazakhstan	Belarus
Armenia	X	23.5	0.2	0.7
Russia	0.8	X	2.7	4.3
Kazakhstan	0	17.4	X	0.6
Belarus	0	47.4	1	X

Armenia has a liberal foreign trade regime with two import tariff rates (10% and 0% for most tariff lines); it does not make use of tariff quotas, and all of its export supplies are on a duty-free basis. The average weighted import customs tariff applied in Armenia is one of the lowest used in the WTO (2.7%), whereas for the CU member states, the average stands at 7.6%. Therefore, the accession to the EEU means Armenia will have to revise upward the rates on many of its imports (including some crucial products, such as chemicals, wood and paper, and animals). It is forecasted that such a move will result in a serious refocusing of Armenia's demand towards commodities made in the CU/SES/EEU, i.e. lead to a considerable negative effect of trade diversion.²¹ A 1% increase in tariff rates with the simultaneous removal of internal barriers will quite likely bring about a reduction in import deliveries from third countries by a hypothetical 3%–4%, with a subsequent compensatory increase in import supplies from the CU by 2%–3%.²²

As part of the package of agreements with the Eurasian Economic Commission, Armenia has approved the list of about 800 products to be excluded from the single customs tariff. Approximation along the most sensitive tariff lines will be completed by 2022; however, according to the agreements, if goods from third countries account for more than 15% of Armenia's yearly export supplies to its Eurasian partners, then Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia will be entitled to consider amendments to the Treaty with a view to cancelling the transition period. When it comes to Armenia's obligations to the WTO, the country will have to have a new round of talks with the organization to negotiate ways for the new EEU member to make up for WTO member states' losses caused by the rise in its customs duties.

Military and political aspect of Eurasian integration

The anticipated accession of Armenia to the EEU is of major military and political importance to Armenia. When choosing integration with Russia, Armenia hopes to receive additional guarantees in its long-drawn-out conflict with Azerbaijan and maintain the status quo of Nagorno-Karabakh. For Armenia, which borders on two unfriendly countries – Turkey and Azerbaijan – the issue of military security is vital. Furthermore, the developments in the Middle East taking place around the actual disintegration of Iraq and Syria increase the likelihood of a conflict between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish state. In this case, a regional conflict will take its toll on Armenia, which borders on the Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey, where ethnic Kurds account for half of the total population.

Armenia's military security priority deserved a special reference in the agreement on the country's accession to the EEU. Article 44 of Annex 3 stipulates that import duties will not apply to *"the goods that constitute defensive products imported between 2015 and 2022 in the Republic of Armenia to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, provided that similar products are not manufactured by the rest of the Customs Union member states"*.²³

Significance of Armenia's EEU accession for the Eurasian troika

The economic aspect is the principal one for Belarus and Kazakhstan. Minsk and Astana are not interested in providing financial assistance for any new member of the Eurasian bloc to help it deal with its internal economic challenges. Moreover, although there is hardly a link between the volumes of Russian financial

²⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

²² Ibid., p. 34.

²³ <http://uicarmenia.org/news/24092014/Havelvac3.pdf>

assistance to Armenia and Belarus (Armenia's GDP amounts to a mere USD10 billion), the Belarusian administration might have some concerns that the 'subsidies pie' will shrink as soon as a new member joins the Eurasian project.

Belarus and Kazakhstan have no plans to complicate their relations with Azerbaijan or the West over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Kazakhstan has close ties with Azerbaijan, not least because of the 'Turkic brotherhood'. Belarus, as one of the permanent members of the OSCE Minsk Group to encourage a resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, is interested in maintaining its neutrality. Further, Aliaksandr Lukashenka keeps close contacts with Ilham Aliyev, who extended back in 2010 a USD200 million loan for Belarus to pay for Russian natural gas supplies, when the relationship between Belarus and Russia was quite tense.

The involvement of Armenia in the EEU is of little economic importance to Russia (Armenia accounts for only 0.1% of Russia's foreign trade turnover), but it is significant from the point of view of geopolitics and control of the South Caucasus. It is important for Russia to have its own military base in Armenia. If Armenia eventually opted for European integration, Russia could encounter problems in setting up its military base there. The escalation of the conflict in the Middle East brought about by the military success of the 'Islamic State' and rapidly changing situation in historic Kurdistan increases the relevance of Russia's military presence in the South Caucasian region. Some experts do not rule out that owing to its military integration Armenia will ultimately join "an even closer union" with Russia than Belarus, or at least overtake Kazakhstan by the degree of integration with Russia.²⁴

The entire Eurasian bloc will benefit from Armenia's accession to the EEU in the context of the development of the North–South transport corridors, which would provide a connection between the markets of South and Southeast Asia and the European Union via the EEU. The sooner Armenia deals with its transport problem, the sooner Russia will be enabled to promote its strategic cooperation with Iran.

Conclusions

The specific geographic and geopolitical location of Armenia and the fact that Russia has way more levers over Armenia than the European Union in large part account for the geopolitical choice of the Armenian political elite. The case of Armenia shows that accession to the EEU is quite a fast process, provided that Russia offers a candidate country its essential support and this candidate country has sufficient political will to integrate. For Armenia, its joining the EEU means not only the accession to the economic union, but also the pro-Russian geopolitical choice. Yerevan increasingly relies on its partnership with Russia for ensuring its military, energy and transport security, and maintaining the status quo of Nagorno-Karabakh. Further, the Armenian economy depends quite heavily on transfers from migrants working in the Russian market, as well as on Russian investments. For Belarus and Kazakhstan, the involvement of Armenia in the EEU has little economic significance and does not mean any dramatic changes in the EEU decision-making system, given that the consensus principle dominates in the EEU institutions. Despite the elimination of fundamental obstacles on its way towards EEU membership, Armenia will have to address many challenges, specifically those associated with huge problems in the transportation. In future, sporadic discrepancies between the Eurasian partners over the economic format of the relationship between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh should not be ruled out.

24 <http://www.odnako.org/blogs/soyuznaya-povestka-integracionnie-zadachi-respubliki-armeniya-ot-transkavkazskoy-zhelezki-dozashchiti-ot-mirovoy/>

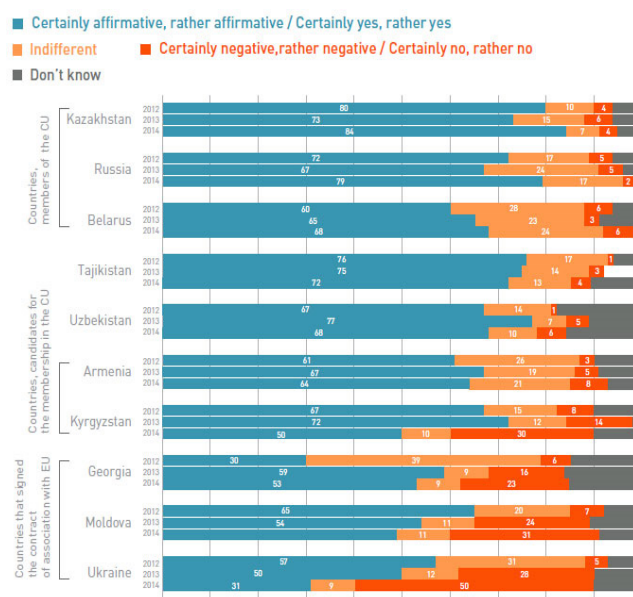
MAIN FEATURE

Public support for Eurasian integration in the Eurasian Economic Union member states, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine

Aliaksandr Papko

Opinion polls focusing on the support for the eastern or western integration dimensions are conducted in most of the former Soviet Union countries on a regular basis¹. Sociologists mostly record a rather high level of support for Eurasian integration in the countries involved in integration processes. So far in 2014, Russia and Kazakhstan have seen a significant increase in the support for Eurasian integration, while Kyrgyzstan has reported a reduction in pro-Eurasian sentiment, and, based on the findings of opinion polls, Belarus and Armenia have seen a rise in isolationism. In all of the countries involved in integration processes, except Russia, the main interests and expectations from Eurasian integration are associated with the economic factor. Russia, a more powerful political and economic player, appears to be more interested in political integration and shaping an image of the country as an attractive integration center.

Figure 1. Public support for Eurasian integration in some FSU countries



Source: EDB Integration Barometer – 2014.²

¹ Polls are conducted in Belarus by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IIEEPS), Novak Laboratory, BISS, etc.; in Ukraine by the Razumkov Centre; in Russia by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM); in Armenia by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRRC). Since 2012, the annual study of integration preferences “EDB Integration Barometer” has been carried out by the Center of Integration Studies at the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) based on nationwide polls in 11 FSU countries (except for Turkmenistan and the Baltic States). The findings of polls conducted by various organizations cannot be compared because of differences in the wording of questions. The “EDB Integration Barometer” is not flawless from the methodological point of view, as some questions concerning the assessment of Eurasian integration are worded in an emotional manner. The EDB often reports a more positive attitude to Eurasian integration than other centers conducting similar studies. However, this survey is the only regular study based on opinion polls carried out in all of the CIS countries and Georgia; therefore this analysis is mostly based on its findings, as well as on some other opinion polls.

² Question for the CU member states: “Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia have formed a customs union, which has cancelled duties in the trade between the three countries and established a single economic space (essentially a free market of the three economies). What is your opinion of this decision?” Question for countries outside the CU: “Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia have formed a customs union, which has cancelled duties in the trade between the three countries and established a single economic space (essentially

Russia: building a union without Ukraine

The level of support for Eurasian integration remains extremely high in Russia. According to research carried out by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) in July 2014, 70% of the Russians were in favor of signing the treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union, and only 4% called it a negative development.³ Furthermore, 70% of the Russians believe that the union should be expanded. The most popular country that the Russians would like to see in the EEU is Armenia (45% of the respondents support its accession)⁴, and Ukraine is the least popular option (10%). Apparently, the attitude to Ukraine dramatically deteriorated following the Maidan victory and the hostilities in Donbass.

The “EDB Integration Barometer” also reports a stronger support for integration projects and a stronger negative attitude to Ukraine. According to the poll conducted by the EDB in May 2014, 79% of the Russians take a favorable view on the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Back in 2013, Russia saw a slight decrease in the level of support for integration, but in 2014, the number of its supporters increased by 12 percentage points. At the same time, the number of people willing to integrate with Ukraine has fallen since 2013 to 24% from 33%, and the number of proponents of European integration shrank to 7% in 2014 from 18% in 2012.⁵

In 2014, Eurasian integration ceased to be a priority for the Russian media, yielding to the developments in Ukraine. Eurasia-related matters were missing from policy statements by the Russian president. Back in 2011, Vladimir Putin referred to the creation of the Single Economic Space as a ‘landmark’⁶, whereas in October 2014, he called the creation of the EEU “a significant phase in our joint work to integrate with our closest partners”⁷. This notwithstanding, Russia saw a marked increase in pro-Eurasian sentiment. This can be attributed to the aggravation of Russia’s relationships with the European Union and the United States and growing confrontation between Russia and the western world.

The Russians support the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union for both economic and political reasons. Economically, they expect higher living standards and improved competitiveness of Russian companies in the global market.⁸ Politically, the creation of the EEU is perceived by Russian citizens as evidence that Russia is the economic and political leader and the country that its neighbors look up to.⁹

Studies launched by the EDB have shown that Russia is the most attractive country for Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and some other countries when it comes to interpersonal contacts, labor migration, political support, and cultural proximity. However, the citizens of all of the said countries, except Kyrgyzstan, do not consider Russia to be the most preferred country in terms of investment inflows, or the best destination for educating children, or the state, with which their respective country should pursue cooperation in science and technology.

For example, in Belarus, investment preferences are divided almost equally between Russia with 45%, the EU with 41% and the “rest of the world,” including the United States, Japan, China, Turkey, etc., with 49%.¹⁰ According to 46% of the respondents in Belarus, the most attractive partner to collaborate in science and technology is Russia however, 47% would rather the country cooperated with the EU, and 60% would opt for the cooperation with the “rest of the world,” where China leads the way with 30%.¹¹ At the same time, only 15% of the Belarusians wish to send their children to Russia to obtain education, while 29% of the respondents would like their children to study in the EU, and 13% would rather send their children to the United

a free market of the three economies). Do you think our country should join this union?”

3 Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM), Press Issue No.2618: “The Russians on the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union”, 03.07.2014, <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=114883>

4 Armenia signed the agreement to join the EEU on 10 October 2014.

5 The Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2012, http://www.eabr.org/general//upload/CII%20-%20izdania/Integracionii%20%20barometr%20-%2009-2012/EDB_Integration_Barometer_Analytical_Report_RUS.pdf, page 79.

6 Vladimir Putin, The new integration project for Eurasia — is the future hat is born today, Izvestia, 3.10.2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

7 ITAR-TASS, Putin signs law on the ratification of the EEU Treaty, 3.10.2014, <http://itar-tass.com/politika/1484891>.

8 Romir Research Holding. Russians Support the Eurasian Economic Union, 17.09.2014, http://romir.ru/studies/595_1410897600/.

9 Deutsche Welle, Leonid Gozman: The special Eurasian path for Russia is a path into a deadlock, 03.07.2014, <http://www.dw.de/leonid-gozman-osobyy-evraziyskiy-puty-dlya-rossii-eto-puty-v-tupik/a-17754219>.

10 Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2014. Analytical Summary, page 9, Fig. 2.

11 Ibid., p. 11, Fig. 3.

States, Japan, China, and other countries.¹²

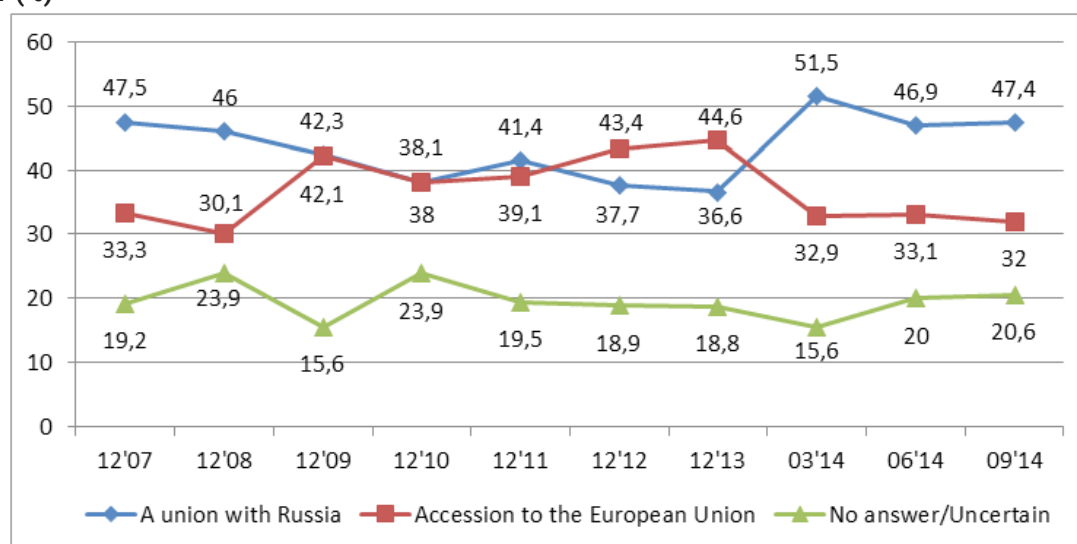
Belarus: integration is good, but independence is better

Belarus has pursued integration projects with Russia since 1996. The current administration of the country has never seriously considered any alternatives to integration with Russia. The positive attitude to the Customs Union and the EEU in Belarus can be explained by the wish of Belarusian citizens to keep Russia's economic support, as well as the cultural proximity of the two societies. Polls conducted by the EDB show a moderate increase in support for Eurasian integration in Belarus. According to the "Integration Barometer," during the last 24 months, the share of the Belarusians who take a favorable view on the creation of the Customs Union increased to 68% from 60%.

Polls measuring the attitude of the Belarusians to integration with Russia and the EU are conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) and NOVAK Laboratory on a regular basis. However, it is impossible to place their findings against the findings of the "Integration Barometer" because of the fundamental differences in wordings. IISEPS researchers ask what choice a respondent would make at hypothetical referendums on Belarus's accession to the European Union and on Belarus's merger with Russia, as well as the choice a respondent would make if he or she were to choose between acceding to Russia or the European Union. The question by NOVAK, for its part, sounds like this: *"In your opinion, in which union would the people of Belarus have a better life – in the European Union or in a union with Russia?"* As we see, the polls by the two sociological centers do not ask direct questions about a respondent's attitude to the CU or the EEU.

According to the polls conducted by the IISEPS, the number of the Belarusians who gravitate towards Russia and Europe, has remained equal during the last five years. The support for the pro-European and the pro-Russian courses fluctuates between 40% and 45%. The gap between them expands only during major international conflicts, such as the Russian–Georgian war or the Donbas conflict. Then the number of people supporting Russia grows, while the number of supporters of the European choice falls.¹³ Studies by NOVAK, on the other hand, show that support for a union with Russia increased in the period September 2013 to September 2014 from 51% to 64%.¹⁴

Figure 2. Changes in the geopolitical orientations of the Belarusians, December 2007 – September 2014. If you were to choose between a union with Russia and accession to the European Union, what would you choose? (%)



Source: IISEPS – 2014.

¹² Ibid., p. 23, Fig. 14.

¹³ Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, Relevant trends, 6.10.2014, <http://iiseps.org/trends/11>.

¹⁴ Vardamacki on the "gap of 'Belarusianness'": Belarusians believe the annexation of Crimea was fair, but condemn the separatists of Donbass, Naša Niva, 15.10.2014, <http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=137110>.

Besides the moderate increase in the pro-Eurasian orientations of the Belarusians, the EDB has recorded another curious trend – an **increase in isolationist sentiment**. The developers of the “Integration Barometer” ask their respondents to answer the following question: *“With which of the countries indicated in the card do you think our country should integrate?”*. The list comprises Russia and 12 more FSU countries, the European Union, the box “No answer/Undecided” and the box “none of the indicated countries and blocs.” Over the past two years, the number of people who selected the last box has more than doubled to 39% from 17%.¹⁵ The data pertaining to people’s wish to integrate contradict their assessment of Eurasian integration. EDB studies make it clear that at least 7% of the Belarusians believe the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union is a positive development, but still think that Belarus does not need to integrate with any country.

The polls conducted in 2010 and 2013 under the aegis of BISS attest to the increase in isolationist sentiment of the Belarusians. Their findings confirmed the sharp increase in the number of citizens who would like Belarus to join neither Russia, nor the EU (from 20.4% in 2010 to 30.9% in 2013).¹⁶ It looks like increasing numbers of Belarusians perceive integration as a threat to the political and economic stability, i.e. a threat to their welfare.¹⁷

Kazakhstan: the most optimistic Eurasian

The idea of Eurasian economic integration appears to be more popular in Kazakhstan than elsewhere in the Customs Union. According to EDB data, in May 2014, the creation of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space was favored by 84% of the citizens of Kazakhstan. As in Russia, in 2013, Kazakhstan went through a period when pro-Eurasian sentiment became weaker – from 80% to 73%, – but in 2014, it markedly increased from 73% to 84%.

One reason behind the popularity of Eurasian integration in Kazakhstan is the active promotion of this idea by the country’s administration. It is President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev who was the initiator of the Eurasian Union back in 1994. Most of the citizens of Kazakhstan rely on Russia for new technologies, increased scientific collaboration, and trade expansion.¹⁸ Kazakhstan residents believe that cooperation with Russia improves the status of their country internationally and can serve as a counterbalance to China’s growing influence. However, the administration of Kazakhstan has reiterated that Eurasian integration should have solely economic objectives, and Kazakhstan’s sovereignty should remain inviolable.¹⁹

It is quite hard to give a satisfying explanation to the sharp increase in pro-Eurasian moods in the first half of 2014. In February 2014, Astana had to devalue the national currency in order to enhance the competitiveness of its products in the market of the Customs Union. The conflict in Ukraine never mobilized the population of Kazakhstan to the extent observed in Russia. In Kazakhstan, a country with a compact Russian minority, it seems the annexation of Crimea should have evoked a negative response and disillusionment with the Customs Union. In the future, the support for Eurasian integration in Kazakhstan will likely decrease, one of the probable reasons being the expected increase in prices caused by negative developments in the Russian economy. Following Russia’s decision to place a ban on the import of foodstuffs from the European Union, food prices in Kazakhstan went up by 10%–20%.²⁰

Armenia: the EEU has many supporters, but isolationism is growing stronger

The Treaty on Armenia’s accession to the EEU was signed on 10 October 2014. In September 2013, President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan refused to initial the European Union Association Agreement and decided to seek membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. The sudden decision was slammed by a portion of Armenian society, primarily young people, intellectuals and businessmen. However, most of the population seemed to understand and respect the decision of the government. According to an EDB study, in Armenia, 64% of the population supports the country’s integration in the Eurasian Economic Union. Two years ago,

¹⁵ Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2012, p. 79 and Integration Barometer 2014, p. 8.

¹⁶ Dzianis Melyantsou, Alena Artsiomenka. Geopolitical preferences of the Belarusians: A Too Pragmatic Nation? Study by BISS, 2.04.2013, http://belinstitute.eu/sites/biss.newmediahost.info/files/attached-files/BISS_SA07_2013en.pdf

¹⁷ Belarusians prefer independence to unions, TUT.BY, 03. 04. 2013, <http://news.tut.by/politics/342058.html>.

¹⁸ Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2014, page 11.

¹⁹ Website of the Executive Office of the President of the Russian Federation, Statements for the media following a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, 24.12.2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/19918>

²⁰ Today.kz, In Kazakhstan food prices have increased, 02.09.2014, <http://today.kz/news/economics/2014-09-02/v-kazaxstane-vyrosli-ceny-na-prodovolstvennye-tovar>

the figure stood at 61%. The same figure — 64% — was seen in a study by Gallup Armenia conducted in October 2013.²¹ A November 2013 study by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) showed a lower, yet quite significant level of support for Eurasian integration, at 55%.²²

Integration with Russia is more about security for Armenia than about economic aspects. Even many of Armenia's opposition forces that enjoy the support of a considerable portion of Armenian society and actively call for the resignation of the government, do not challenge Sargsyan's course towards integration with the EEU.²³ Both the authorities and the opposition are afraid of losing Russia's support in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Other significant factors that account for Armenia's support for Eurasian integration include the high level of interpersonal contacts and economic ties. According to the "Integration Barometer," 80% of the Armenians have relatives, friends and business partners in Russia.²⁴ In Belarus, the figure stands at 47%. The intense activity of Armenian business, labor migration and the numerous Armenian Diaspora in Russia are the main reasons why interpersonal contacts between Russia and Armenia have remained very strong.²⁵

Interestingly, a poll by the EDB showed a surge in isolationist sentiment in Armenia, as in Belarus. In 2012, only 1% of the Armenians were in favor of staying out of any bloc. In 2014, the figure increased to an impressive 37%.²⁶ An EDB opinion poll carried out in Armenia shows the same discrepancy, as the survey conducted in Belarus. In 2014, 64% of the Armenians believed that their country should join the Customs Union and the SES, and at least 1% of the citizens thought that Armenia should accede to the Customs Union and simultaneously wanted the country to stay out of any union. Political expert Armen Grigoryan²⁷ believes that the category of 'isolationists' includes people who think that the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh would deteriorate if Armenia should get too close to the West or the East. They tend to support the previous 'multi-vector' foreign policy course of the country.

Kyrgyzstan: Eurasian integration makes Chinese products more expensive and triggers fierce political disputes

While Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan have all shown a trend towards a stronger support for Eurasian integration during the last 12 months, Kyrgyzstan, which also hopes to join the EEU in 2015, saw the number of supporters of the EEU integration idea fall to 50% in May 2014 from 72% in May 2013.

Kyrgyzstan has always been eager to promote integration ties with Russia and Kazakhstan — mostly because of labor migration, rather than contacts between companies or cultural ties inherited from the Soviet times. Some 600,000 Kyrgyz people work in Russia, while the population of Kyrgyzstan is approximately 5.8 million people. Another 50,000 Kyrgyz citizens currently work in Kazakhstan. Labor migrants account for almost a third of Kyrgyzstan's workforce. According to the EDB polls, 61% of Kyrgyz citizens have relatives, friends and colleagues in Russia. Of all of the CIS member states, higher figures are reported only for Armenia and Tajikistan (73%).²⁸

The marked decrease in the number of supporters of the accession to the EEU in Kyrgyzstan can be attributed to several economic and internal political factors. Kyrgyzstan's economy heavily depends on the re-export of products from China. If the country accedes to the Customs Union, customs control on the Chinese border will inevitably become much harsher, and import tariffs will hike, meaning that prices of many categories of consumer goods will hike as well. Kazakhstan's more active combat against illegal re-export from Kyrgyzstan after the establishment of the Customs Union has already affected the living standards of many Kyrgyz people and the Kyrgyz economy on the whole. The changes brought about by the cessation of the re-export of Chinese goods scare the Kyrgyz population. Eurasian integration is a key point of the political agenda of the incumbent president Almazbek Atambayev, who has seen public support dramatically

21 Panorama.am, 64 percent favor Armenia's entry into Customs Union — survey, 27.11.2013, <http://www.panorama.am/en/society/2013/11/27/survey/>.

22 Caucasus Research Resource Center — Armenia, Caucasus Barometer. Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in South Caucasus Countries. Presentation done on April 18, 2014 in Yerevan. http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2013/CB2013_public%20presentation_English.pdf.

23 Lena Ramanova, Stagnation must not become an alternative to "Maidan". An interview with Gagik Tsarukyan. Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 09.10.2014, http://www.ng.ru/cis/2014-10-09/6_armenia.html.

24 Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2014, p. 22.

25 Some 1.2 million ethnic Armenians live in Russia; the population of Armenia is currently 3 million people.

26 Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2014, p. 8.

27 Based on an interview conducted by the author.

28 Eurasian Development Bank, Integration Barometer 2014, p. 22.

decrease since the end of 2013. The growing discontent with the current course of the president leads to the criticism of his foreign policy priorities.

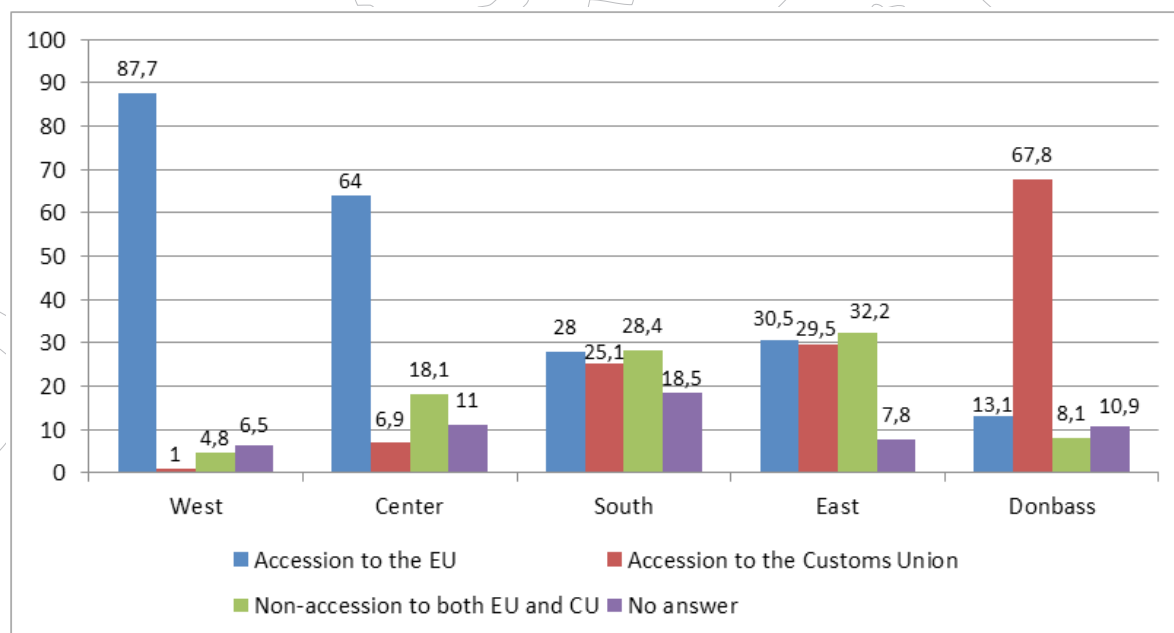
Ukraine: split in society has narrowed, but still remains

Ukraine cannot be neglected if we attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the support for Eurasian integration. According to Russia's original plans, Ukraine was supposed to become one of the fundamental components of the Eurasian bloc. As a result of the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the conflict in Donbass, and deterioration of the relationship with Russia, the integration project lost its supporters in all of the Ukrainian regions, except for the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. A survey by the Razumkov Centre shows that the share of the Ukrainians ready to join the Customs Union fell to 21% in May 2014 from 32% in December 2012.²⁹ The poll conducted by the EDB reported a drop in pro-Eurasian sentiment to 31% in May 2014 from 57% in May 2012.

According to reports by the Razumkov Centre, over the last 18 months, the support for Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union fell from 6.2% and 20.9% to 1% and 6.9%, respectively, for the western and central regions. However, in the South (exclusive of annexed Crimea) and the East, a considerable portion of the population still supports integration with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In the Kherson, Odessa, and Mykolaiv Region, the share of proponents of the Eurasian choice amounted to 25.1% in May 2014. In the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Kharkiv Regions, the figure stood at 29.5%.

While the share of supporters of Eurasian integration dropped in the South and the East of Ukraine, the proportion of the population supporting the European choice markedly increased – in May 2014, it amounted to 28% in the South and 30.5% in the East. The share of 'isolationists' was growing even faster, according to the Razumkov Centre. The proportion of citizens of the southern regions of Ukraine who oppose integration with both Russia and the EU reached 28.4%, whereas in the East, the figure stood at 32.2%.³⁰ Therefore, the population of the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine is currently divided into three virtually equal groups – 'pro-Europeans', 'pro-Eurasians', and 'isolationists'. Supporters of European integration in the East do not enjoy absolute majority, unlike the central and western parts of the country. The split in the geopolitical preferences between the residents of the West and the East has narrowed, but it still remains in place.

Figure 3. Answers to the question: "Which integration path should Ukraine follow?" (regional breakdown)



Source: The Razumkov Centre, May 2014.

²⁹ The Razumkov Centre. Which intention path should Ukraine choose to follow? (dynamics, 2011-2014), http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=865.

³⁰ The Razumkov Centre. Which intention path should Ukraine choose to follow?(regional breakdown), http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/article.php/poll.php?poll_id=966

Donbass does not fit into the overall picture of geopolitical sentiment and its transformation. In the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, the number of CU integration supporters has not fallen, but instead risen to 67.8%.

Conclusions

Sociological surveys show a high level of support for Eurasian integration in Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, as well as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The creation of the Customs Union and establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union are favored by 50% to 84% of the citizens of those countries. In all of them, except for Russia, the main interests and expectations associated with Eurasian integration stem from economic factors. The population of Russia as a more powerful player wishes to use Eurasian integration as an instrument to not only enhance the competitiveness of its economy internationally, but also confirm the status of Russia as a great state and the center of regional integration.

The Belarusians wish to preserve the high level of economic support by Russia, while Armenia and Kyrgyzstan hope to keep the Russian labor market open to their workforce and secure investments from their Eurasian partners. Furthermore, the population of Armenia wants to have Russia providing additional guarantees of its military security. The population of Kazakhstan hopes to expand its sales markets and raise investments. Another reason why Kazakhstan is positive about its prospects in the Eurasian bloc is that it is President Nazarbayev who originally initiated the creation of the Eurasian Union and has promoted the idea for many years.

In 2013, pro-Eurasian sentiment became somewhat weaker in Russia and Kazakhstan, but the following year, it grew stronger. In Russia, this increase can be attributed to the growing confrontation with the Western world, whereas in Kazakhstan, this phenomenon requires additional research. For the time being, neither foreign policy nor economic reasons can account for the boost in Eurasian enthusiasm.

Kyrgyzstan is the only country that has showed a sharp reduction in pro-Eurasian sentiment recently. The Kyrgyz have concerns – and not without a reason – that the accession to the EEU will lead to hikes in prices of many categories of imported goods, this affecting living standards. Furthermore, the marked decrease in the support for Eurasian integration is associated with the fact that President Atambayev, an ardent proponent of the Eurasian choice, has been losing his credibility.

An important trend marked by sociologists is the considerable increase in the number of opponents of any integration models in Belarus and Armenia. Presumably, many Belarusians perceive any integration project as a threat to the country's economic stability, while the Armenians are concerned that the modification of the previous 'multi-vector' course will affect the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The trend towards an increase in isolationist moods also deserves additional research.

As a result of the conflict with Russia, pro-Eurasian sentiment became significantly weaker in Ukraine, the country that was supposed to become a pivotal element of the Eurasian integration initiative. The split in the geopolitical orientations of the residents of the West and East of the country has narrowed, but it would be premature to say that the problem has been resolved. Donbass is the only Ukrainian territory, where the number of supporters of Eurasian integration increased, rather than fell.