

# Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union: Problems and prospects of interregional cooperation

## La unión económica eurasiática y la unión europea: problemas y perspectivas de cooperación interregional

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#### ABSTRACT:

Integration processes in the European and Eurasian regions play an important role in the modern system of international relations. They affect not only the possibilities of the states participating in integration projects and their population, but also the general trends in the development of the world economy and international relations, the political and economic situation in third countries and the lives of peoples living in other regions. Therefore, it is obvious the importance of how relations of such regional integration projects are developing. In the case of the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, there are serious problems that prevent them from effectively interacting. The article discusses in detail the evolution of the Wider Europe concept, analyzes the stages of development of EU bilateral relations with the EEU member countries. The authors note that, despite the fact that in the current geopolitical conditions the dialogue between the EU and the EEU is difficult, there is an objective need to establish close ties between the two blocks, which is due to both historical and geographical factors, and modern geopolitical and geo-economic. As a result of the study, it was concluded that political motivation dominates over economic ones.

**Keywords:** Eurasian Economic Union, European Union, Integration, Russia, international cooperation.

#### RESUMEN:

Los procesos de integración en las regiones europea y euroasiática desempeñan un papel importante en el sistema moderno de relaciones internacionales. Estas afectan no solo las posibilidades de los estados que participan en los proyectos de integración y su población, sino también las tendencias generales en el desarrollo de la economía mundial y las relaciones internacionales, la situación política y económica en terceros países y las vidas de los pueblos en otras regiones. Por lo tanto, es evidente la importancia de cómo se desarrollan las relaciones de dichos proyectos de integración regional. En el caso de la Unión Europea y la Unión Económica de Eurasia, existen serios problemas que les impiden interactuar de manera efectiva. El artículo analiza en detalle la evolución del concepto de una Europa más amplia, las etapas de desarrollo de las relaciones bilaterales de la UE con los países miembros de la EEU. Además, se señala que, a pesar del hecho de que en las condiciones geopolíticas actuales el diálogo entre la UE y la EEU es difícil, existe una necesidad objetiva de establecer vínculos estrechos entre los dos bloques, tomando en cuenta factores tanto históricos como geográficos, en el contexto de la geopolítica y geo-económica modernas. Como resultado del estudio, se concluyó que la motivación política domina sobre las económicas.

**Palabras clave:** Unión Económica Euroasiática,

# 1. Introduction

European countries were among the first to join the integration processes, creating the most successful integration structure - the European Union. At different stages of the development of European integration, to one degree or another, the question arose of interacting with its closest neighbors, Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. However, experience has shown that interaction at the "integration structure - national state" level cannot be full-scale in nature due to the unevenness of the participants in such interaction [Zaslavskaya, 2017].

The countries of the post-Soviet space have an objective need to create an equal in status European integration association from countries interested in this. A Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) emerged, based on the European integration model. It would seem that the right moment has come and the necessary conditions have been created for the development of full-fledged cooperation between the two unions, but the events of recent years have led to the suspension of cooperation between the European Union and Russia - one of the key participants of the EEU. As a result, the intentions of the creators of the EEU to further interact with the EU at the level of integration structures at this stage have lost all reason [Lagutina, 2015]. Nevertheless, many objective factors (geographic proximity, economic interdependence, etc.) still remain, suggesting that relations will be restored in the coming years, but the question arises: on what grounds and in what geopolitical conditions?

About the possibility of unification of Europe and Eurasia (Russia (USSR), the post-Soviet space), scientists and experts have been writing and talking since the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, in the 1980s, Soviet leader M. S. Gorbachev, came up with the idea of a "common European home", which should be based on the development of integration relations in the West and East of Europe, and subsequently their merger, which should have resulted in the elimination of the dividing lines between the capitalist and socialist systems; however, miscalculations in the USSR's foreign policy and numerous concessions to the West led the USSR to a crisis and disintegration, as a result of which Russia was ousted to the periphery of Europe and the world system as a whole for several decades; and in 2011, Russian President, V. Putin and Belarusian leader A. Lukashenko, in their programmatic articles proposed the concept of "integration of integrations" - the creation of a continental block from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which was supported by the President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbov [Putin, 2011]. In turn, the President of Belarus drew attention to the fact that "... the creation of the Eurasian Union should not be seen as an attempt to divide Europe ... I see the Eurasian Union as an integral part of European integration ... We offer " integration of integrations "[Lukashenko, 2011]. Thus, according to this idea, the ultimate goal of Eurasian integration is the creation of a common market from the Atlantic to the Pacific; it was about the priority geopolitical strengthening of the EEU, in order to later unite with Europe on an equal footing. The objective and significance of the article is to identify the main factors hindering the development of cooperation between the two integration blocks.

## 2. Methodology

For the European Union, the Eastern vector of foreign policy has always been one of the leading and priority ones. In the process of establishing and developing EU relations with the countries of Eastern Europe, the post-Soviet space and Russia, a system of bilateral agreements - the so-called partnership and cooperation agreements - was developed. Evaluating this policy, it can be noted that almost all initiatives and relevant EU documents relating to the post-Soviet space were purely declarative in nature and provided for "adaptation of the Union's eastern neighbors" to the system of European values and priorities [Hettne B. & Söderbaum, 2000].

Until 2004, the EU's foreign policy was based on the idea of full-scale cooperation with the

Russian Federation, albeit on the conditions of its unconditional acceptance of the conditions of the West (democratization, freedom of speech, liberalization, etc.). In the mid-90s (twentieth century), the foundations of the regulatory framework for the EU-Russia relationship were laid: in 1994, an agreement on partnership and cooperation was signed between Russia and the European Union. During the first decade of the XXI century. This regulatory framework has expanded and improved. Most of the agreements reached in those years continue to operate to this day, despite the fact that in many respects no longer corresponds to the current political realities.

As for the integration of the common European space with the countries of the former Soviet Union, at the first stage both sides did not rule out its possibilities, although more as a distant future: "The European Union showed a noticeable interest in establishing good neighborly relations" [Doidge, 2011].

The next important stage in the evolution of EU relations with Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union was 2008. This year, the European Union launched another program of cooperation with the countries of the former Soviet Union - the Eastern Partnership program, the official goal of which was to bring the European Union closer to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine. At the same time, the program excluded Russia from the neighborhood policy.

A kind of "response" to a series of such political "challenges" to Russia and its allies in the post-Soviet space was the nomination of a Eurasian integration project. It is worth noting that this only strengthened the confrontational moods between the neighbors, even though the initial intention to complete the creation of the EEU by 2015 was initially evaluated by Western experts skeptically as unlikely. When it became obvious that the project would be implemented on time, Europe slowly began to consider options for possible integration with the emerging Eurasian integration bloc. So, until the end of 2014, leaders of countries and officials expressed support for the idea of Euro-Eurasian economic integration.

The current stage of cooperation between the EU and the EEU countries (except Russia) is based on a system of bilateral relations, formed in the mid-1990s. Despite the choice of the Eurasian integration vector by these countries, cooperation with the European Union continues and moves to new levels, but this cooperation can hardly be assessed as equal and partnership.

The EEU countries can be divided into two groups: the founding countries of the EEU (Kazakhstan and Belarus) and the new members (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan). Thus, the first group of countries undoubtedly gives priority to participation in Eurasian integration, at the same time pursuing a multi-vector policy, in accordance with which in recent years has been expanding bilateral cooperation with the EU in order to preserve a certain foundation for possible future restoration of ties between the two unions. The second group, which prior to joining the EEU, is focused on integration with the EU, also continues to cooperate with Europe, which mostly comes down to receiving grant support from the EU. At the same time, it is obvious that the EU's relations with the EEU countries are still determined by the EU's relations with Russia and the new geopolitical situation in Eurasia and the world at large [Doidge, 2011].

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### **3. Results**

At present, relations between the EU and the EEU are not easy. Experts recognize the existence of areas for mutually beneficial cooperation, especially trade and investment. For the EEU countries, the European Union is the main trading partner (with a total trade volume of more than \$ 148 billion), for the European Union the Eurasian Economic Union is the third trading partner. Russia and Kazakhstan are actively investing in EU countries. In addition, the population of the EEU member countries is positive about the European Union and endorses the potential for cooperation with the EU.

However, while the existing problems prevent the parties from reaching an agreement. Consider what exactly the problems in question. They can be divided into several groups. The first group includes institutional problems. First of all, we are talking about the difficulty

of making decisions by each regional project in the framework of existing procedures. In the EEU, decisions in major institutions, including the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council and the Supreme.

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## 4. Conclusions

Summing up, it should be emphasized that modern Eurasia is undergoing serious transformation processes, leading to a change in the balance of forces in the region and a change in the integration priorities of Eurasian states.

Unfortunately, despite the statements of European leaders about the intention to restore relations with Russia and thereby establish contacts with the EEU, in its current state, Europe is not negotiable. Losing time and refusing to cooperate with the EEU and Russia, the EU is left alone with the US proposal, which is fraught with a whole range of problems for the future development of the EU.

Nevertheless, most likely, in the long term, relations between the EU and the EEU will still be established, but it is important for European colleagues to understand that this will already happen in completely different conditions - as part of the project to recreate the Great Silk Road in modern Eurasia, aimed at the creation of not "Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok", but rather "Greater Eurasia from Lisbon to Shanghai".

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