

EURASIANISM

Evolution of the concept from its origins to the current implications in terms of geopolitics and security

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Abstract

This study examines Eurasianism from an ideological perspective to understand its potential threats. It explores the historical conceptualizations of Eurasianism, including Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism, and analyze how this ideology may be applied in politics. Additionally, the study analyzes the impact of Eurasianism on geopolitical balances and global security, with a focus on Ukraine. The aim is to evaluate the potential effects of Eurasianism on international relations.

Keywords

Eurasianism; ideology; geopolitics; global security

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1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2022, has caused significant instability on the global stage. This instability goes beyond just economic and political aspects; it also extends into the realms of ideology and culture.

Identity has become a critical factor since the end of the Cold War. As highlighted by Huntington, after the collapse of the strong ideological opposition between the Western and Soviet blocs, conflicts have shifted from primarily ideological to being deeply rooted in identity. Consequently, tensions have emerged primarily due to cultural and ethnic differences, often relying on weaker ideologies.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be seen as a clash of civilizations and has also drawn attention to the ideology of Neo-Eurasianism proposed by Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin's ideology revisits Eurasianism, which was elaborated after the Bolshevik revolution. One of the key reasons for this conflict is Ukraine's position within the "spiritual space" of the Russian motherland, rather than being assimilated by the West. The term "spiritual space," used by Putin in his first press conference to explain the invasion (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2022), originates from Dugin's vocabulary and refers to the inseparable nature of Russian identity and culture due to ideological, geopolitical, or security reasons (Dugin, 2009, tr. eng. 2012: 111). From the Russian perspective, Ukraine is indeed part of the East Slavic community (Yun, 2023: 243). Similarly, the United States, the EU, and NATO perceive Ukraine as a barrier to Eurasianism, as it poses a threat to the West and its values (Ivi: 248).

It is not surprising to find a significant body of literature dedicated to the cultural aspect of Eurasianism. This literature encompasses the ideas of influential figures such as Nikolay Trubetskoy (1920, tr. it. 2021; 1925, tr. it. 2005), who emphasized the need for Russia to rediscover its cultural and national roots in contrast to Western civilization. Contemporary contributions from Dugin (2009, tr. en. 2012; 2014) have transformed Eurasianism into a concrete political and geopolitical plan, as highlighted by Umland (2017). Another valuable insight is provided by Marlène Laruelle (2015), who investigates how the Eurasian thought could shape and affect the relations between the Russian Federation and the West, with a particular focus on parties associated with the European Radical Right. Lastly, Shekhovtsov (2009) delves into the connections between Eurasianism and the European New Right, specifically examining the adoption of Gramsci's doctrine on cultural hegemony.

Therefore, this study aims to delve into this cultural aspect,

specifically focusing on Eurasianism, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the potential threats it poses. This will be achieved through a reconstruction of the literature on the topic and the analysis of the Ukrainian case. Firstly, we will explore earlier conceptualizations of Eurasianism and its historical precursors. Secondly, we will examine contemporary Neo-Eurasianism as proposed by Dugin, who is known as “Putin’s brain” (Serafini, 2022). Lastly, we will analyze the political implications of Neo-Eurasianism through the case study of Ukraine, highlighting its impact on global security and geopolitical dynamics.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF THE CONCEPT

Eurasianism can be classified as an ideology because it aligns with Friedrich's concept of a system of interconnected ideas and actions that aim to change or defend the existing political order. It often serves to mobilize a political party or group engaged in a struggle. Another perspective, proposed by Easton, defines ideologies as comprehensive interpretations or ethical principles that outline political goals, structures, and boundaries. They provide insights into the past, explanations of the present, and visions for the future, acting as a blueprint for a new political, social, and anthropological order.

In essence, Eurasianism falls into what Bobbio refers to as 'weak ideologies,' as it relies more on the mindsets described by Geiger rather than a scientific and structured plan typically seen in strong ideologies. Moreover, displaying many similarities with the European Radical Right (Laruelle, 2015: 8), which is in fact populist (Ivaldi and Zankina, 2023: 18), recent iterations of Eurasianism can be seen as a form of neo-populism, posing a significant contemporary threat to democratic values and the representative nature of democratic institutions. Among the three types of neo-populism identified by Graziano, Eurasianism fits into the category of trans-sovereign identity movements, asserting identity on a larger scale than individual nations or local contexts.

Eurasianism exhibits all six constitutive characteristics of populism identified by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser. Firstly, it rejects placement on the right-left continuum, believing that taking sides would only divide the people. Secondly, it views the people as a unified community, adopting an anti-class stance. This leads to a glorification of the people, emphasizing their cultural distinctiveness and reinforcing the idea of a common good, reminiscent of Tönnies's concept of community. In the case of Neo-Eurasianism, this is exemplified by the term *ethnos* which,

according to Dugin (2009, tr. en. 2012: 41), refers to an organic community of language and culture.

Moreover, Eurasianism meets the criteria regarding organizational aspects. It features charismatic leadership, with the leader perceived as representing the entire populace, and membership is fluid, with the leader promoting participation through both value and rhetorical incentives. Lastly, Eurasianism adopts an anti-internationalist stance, viewing globalization as eroding cultural distinctiveness and fostering nationalist and xenophobic sentiments that reject supranational structures and multiculturalism. This results in a demonstration of resistance against the United States and liberalism as a whole (Laruelle, 2015: xii).

2.1. Byzantinism

Some foundational principles of Eurasianism can be traced back to Byzantinism, a concept introduced by the monk and philosopher Konstantin Nikolaevič Leont'ev in his work "Byzantinism and the Slavic World" (1875).

Byzantinism is characterized by its unique political, religious, and moral aspects. Firstly, it upholds autocracy as its political foundation, while embracing Orthodoxy in matters of religion. Morally, Byzantinism rejects earthly pursuits and the idea of humans achieving happiness, moral perfection, universal well-being, and equality during their earthly existence (Leont'ev, 1875, trans. 1987: 11-12).

Leont'ev suggests that Byzantine culture replaced Greco-Roman culture and later gave way to Romano-Germanic culture, a transition he associates with Charlemagne's coronation. Although Byzantinism declined in other places, it thrived in Russia and became deeply ingrained in its socio-cultural fabric. Both Orthodoxy and Byzantine culture strengthened the authority of the Tsarist regime and fostered national unity. They also served as powerful ideological defenses against conflicts and foreign incursions, even during Tsar Peter the Great's efforts to Europeanize Russia. This resilience positioned Byzantinism to protect Russia from European cultural imposition (Ivi: 40-41).

Furthermore, Leont'ev criticizes the concept of nationality, which is integral to European culture. He views it as a result of the liberal democratization process, which threatens the existence of distinct Western cultures. These cultures, once characterized by their unique originality, now face the risk of political liberalism and individualism that promote complete and negative equality, potentially leading to the amalgamation of all European states into a federal worker republic. This

scenario poses a tangible threat to Russia, forcing it to choose between emulating Europe or preserving its cultural distinctiveness. In the latter case, Russia would require strong internal organization, cohesion, and discipline to defend against a hypothetical European federation and to salvage any positive remnants in the event of its disintegration (Ivi: 179).

3. EURASIANISM

The October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent civil war played a crucial role in shaping the rise of Eurasianism. On November 7 and 8, 1917, the Bolsheviks took control of the Winter Palace in Moscow, putting an end to the rule of the Provisional Government led by Prince George L'vov, which was established after the February Revolution earlier that year. In 1918, the Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, formally withdrawing Russia from World War I and giving up territories, including Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, and Latvia, to Germany.

The aftermath of the peace treaty led to the emergence of armed revolutionary factions in the Don region in response to Lenin's autocratic actions aimed at spreading Bolshevik ideology. Initially comprised of former Tsarist generals and Cossack supporters of the Provisional Government, these groups later welcomed Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, coming together to form the White Army. The resulting "red terror" led to the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Under the leadership of Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak, the White Army managed to capture several cities in Siberia with support from British, American, and Italian forces. Meanwhile, General Anton Denikin achieved significant victories in Ukraine, including the capture of Kiev, before being defeated by the Red Army in October 1919. Petrograd, briefly under White Army control, was recaptured by the Red Army on October 22, 1919. Kolchak resigned in January 1920, only to be later arrested and executed by the Red Army. General Pyotr Wrangel assumed command of the White Army, attempting to reorganize its forces in Crimea in order to take control of the Donbass region. Nevertheless, his efforts proved unsuccessful, and he fled the country in November with assistance from the United Kingdom and France, effectively marking the end of the White Revolution.

The civil war triggered significant waves of migration, particularly between 1917 and 1920, known as the first wave of emigration (Lungu, 2022: 324). These migrations included various groups, such as supporters of the White movement seeking to restore tsarism, expropriated

landowners, soldiers, Cossacks, former officials of the previous regime, and opponents of Bolshevism, including Mensheviks. Four intellectuals—philosopher Nikolay Trubetskoy, economic geographer Pyotr Savitsky, theologian Georgiy Florovsky, and musicologist Pyotr Suvchinsky—were among the opponents of Bolshevism who laid the ideological foundations of Eurasianism. Lev Karsavin emerged as the primary theorist from 1926 to 1928.

In this historical context, Eurasianism emerged as a reaction to Bolshevism. Suvchinsky articulated this sentiment, asserting that the Russian intelligentsia had been heavily influenced by Western culture, which led to depersonalization and ultimately fueled the revolution. Furthermore, not only did the people immediately embrace the new ideas, but they also supported the proposals made by the most extremist faction (Mehlich, 2022: 341).

Despite the initial acceptance of the Bolshevik Revolution, early Eurasianists viewed socialism as a false doctrine. Consequently, the exiled intelligentsia aimed to reconnect with the national origins of the Russian people and advocated for reconciliation under the Orthodox Church (*ibidem*).

3.1. Main ideological contents of Eurasianism

Trubetskoy played a crucial role in shaping Eurasian ideology, primarily through his work “Europe and Mankind” (1920). He argues that cosmopolitanism and chauvinism are inherently intertwined within Romano-Germanic (or European) culture. Chauvinism dismisses the unique characteristics of individual ethnic groups within a nation, while cosmopolitanism fails to acknowledge the distinct traits of different Romano-Germanic peoples, instead focusing solely on their commonalities. Trubetskoy also recognizes the significance of peoples outside the Romano-Germanic culture who have assimilated it to the point of losing their own identity (1920, tr. it. 2021: 49).

Trubetskoy asserts that European culture does not encompass all of human culture but is rather a fusion of Roman, Germanic, and Celtic cultures. Therefore, non-Romano-Germanic peoples who have assimilated this culture should recognize its specificity to Romano-Germanic ethnic groups.

According to Trubetskoy, people striving for Europeanization place themselves at a disadvantage. Their cultural contributions, limited to what aligns with the Romano-Germanic perspective, pale in comparison to the more substantial output of Romano-Germanic peoples. As a result, non-

Romano-Germanic peoples become dependent on the Romano-Germanic world, facing criticism if their cultural expressions contradict European norms, which are synonymous with progress. Over time, Europeanized populations begin to disdain their own origins, exacerbating the erosion of social cohesion due to the absence of a unified culture and resulting in underdeveloped patriotism among these peoples (Ivi: 83).

The solution lies in non-Romano-Germanic peoples who have embraced Europeanization learning to perceive Romano-Germanic culture as just one of many potential cultures. By doing so, they can selectively adopt elements they fully comprehend and adapt them to their own needs and preferences, free from concerns about Romano-Germanic disapproval (Ivi: 96).

When considering Russia specifically, it is important to note that it has distinct geographical, climatic, and anthropological characteristics that set it apart from both Europe and Asia. This uniqueness has earned it the designation of “Eurasia” due to its potential for forming a unified state entity (Trubetskoy, 1925, tr. it. 2005: 22-24). The pursuit of this unity was historically undertaken by the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan, who first subdued the entire steppe and then extended his control over the settled populations of the region (Ivi: 25).

There were indeed reactions to Russia's incorporation into Genghis Khan's empire. However, it was precisely this process that facilitated the assimilation of the Mongol concept of the State. Despite its association with the enemy, this concept held an allure for the Russian people. They reevaluated these new ideas, merging them with Greco-Byzantine and Orthodox elements to contextualize them within a more familiar and acceptable framework. Moscow played a pivotal role in this adaptation (Ivi: 43-45). It was from Moscow that the role of the Khan transitioned to that of the Tsar. Ivan the Terrible's conquests of Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia solidified the city's position as the primary center of political power, incorporating vast territories formerly under Mongol authority (Ivi: 47-48).

The defining feature of the Russian State following this revolution was the significant intertwining of religion and culture, alongside the complete homogeneity of subjects under this paradigm (Ivi: 59-60). According to this perspective, the Tsar served as the primary representative of the national will, albeit as a fallible human being. Thus, it was imperative for him to rely on the Patriarch, the leader of the Orthodox Church and embodiment of the national conscience (Ivi: 60-61).

The process of Europeanization began during the reign of Peter the Great, leading to a substantial transformation of Russia's cultural identity.

Efforts were made to bolster its military prowess to rival European powers (Ivi: 74-75). This transformation elicited varying responses from different social classes. While the government leaned towards imperialism, militarism, and capitalism, the educated class veered towards democracy, liberalism, and socialism, often coming into conflict with the former. Meanwhile, the non-Europeanized lower classes maintained allegiance to the pre-Peter the Great state model until Europeanization permeated everyday life (Ivi: 88-90).

This process also gave rise to a semi-intelligentsia that disdained both ancient Russia and the upper classes. They disseminated Western ideas among the lower classes and paved the way for the transition to the Soviet system. Trubetskoy posits that the Soviet system was merely a consequence of the Europeanization initiated by Peter the Great, as it was founded on Western principles rather than Russian ones (Ivi: 90). Consequently, according to Trubetskoy, the only viable solution lies in rejecting European culture and cultivating an independent Eurasian culture rooted in the original Tatar and pre-Petrine nexus between individual existence, State, and religion (Ivi: 114-115).

Another pivotal concept is that of *tselostnost'*, which denotes the preservation of a set of subjectivities while mitigating potential antagonisms (Smirnov, 2020: 524). This concept comprises three sub-elements: *sobornost*, distinguishing the Orthodox Church from the Catholic Church by eschewing a hierarchy of bishops and emphasizing the collective participation of all Orthodox Christians in liturgy (Ivi: 531); *demotia*, the rejection of representative democracy in favor of a system grounded in direct democracy (Ivi: 532); and the holistic approach to sciences, aiming to transcend not only the divisions between individual sciences but also the traditional dichotomy between natural and cultural sciences (Ivi: 534).

3.2. Eurasianism after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War brought about significant changes, particularly in the nature of conflicts. The collapse of the bipolar world, characterized by the opposition of Western liberalism and Soviet communism, resulted in a shift away from ideologies as the main driving force behind conflicts. Instead, conflicts became influenced by factors related to identity. Eurasianism, too, was impacted by this shift, particularly through the contributions of Aleksandr Gel'evič Dugin within the context of the European New Right (ENR). The ENR rejects individualism, multiculturalism, and equality as the primary causes of the current crisis

in Europe. Additionally, it embraces the Gramscian doctrine of cultural hegemony (Shekhovtsov, 2009: 699-700).

Dugin introduces the concept of a fourth political theory, differentiating it from liberalism, communism, and fascism. Following the Cold War, liberalism emerged victorious over communism; however, its emphasis on complete freedom and independence of individuals without any limits, including moral ones, ultimately led to its transformation into post-liberalism. As a result, it lost its status as the first political theory and evolved into a post-political practice (2009, tr. en. 2012: 16). Being composed of individual members, society was subsequently drawn towards globalism (*ibidem*), with the United States leading this process (Ivi: 68). Globalization, and post-modernity in general, caused politics to translate into the economic dimension and contributed to the shift from the *homo politicus* to the *homo oeconomicus*, whose behavior towards material prosperity is shaped and driven by the industry of glamour and show business (Ivi: 190). The consequence of this change is the disappearance of the collective in favor of an individual experience driven by inconsistent impulses (Ivi: 190-191) and the atomization of the society. This fragmentation is also exacerbated by technology (Ivi: 68). Within this context, traditions and religions are displaced by a globalized religion resulting from the chaotic merging of elements from various beliefs and practices (Ivi: 22). The recovery of these two elements is therefore a central tenet of the fourth political theory.

Hence, Dugin proposes Eurasianism as an alternative vision for the future world order and an effective counter to the liberal Western paradigm. For achieving this goal, Russia should play a prominent role (Ivi: 113) due to its complex historical relationship with Western culture and ongoing efforts to affirm its own worldview.

Indeed, Eurasianism acknowledges both the exclusive nature of modernity to the West and the transient nature of Western culture. It recognizes the existence of different civilizations, each with its own historical model. Therefore, it advocates for these civilizations to detach themselves from the assumed universality of the Western model and reorganize around their own internal values (Ivi: 91). This appeal originates from the idea of organic democracy, where the state is subservient to the national community and the collective prevails on the individual (Laruelle, 2006: 14) in line with the concept of *tselostnost'* discussed earlier. Neo-Eurasianism builds upon this classical version by incorporating disciplines such as geopolitics, structuralism, sociology, anthropology, Heidegger's ontology, and advancements in science and

technology from the 20th and 21st centuries (Dugin, 2009, tr. en. 2012: 92). This reinterpretation offers a clearer political proposal compared to its previous version (Umland, 2017: 466) and places emphasis on Orthodoxy, the Eurasian origin of Russian civilization (Pryce, 2013: 30), Slavic nationalism, and the coexistence of the Tsarist regime and Stalinist imperialism (Lungu, 2022: 324). The outcome is a concept that positions Russia as the Third Rome, succeeding Constantinople as the only geopolitically relevant center of the Christian Orthodox religion (Ivi: 325).

However, this reinterpretation faced resistance due to its association with the previous Eurasianists, who rejected post-Enlightenment developments with extreme conservatism. Furthermore, Neo-Eurasianism clashed with the contemporary Russian political discourse, as President Boris Yeltsin aimed to establish a commercial partnership with the United States and the European Union.

Dugin's ideology began to gain support after the severe economic crisis in Russia in 1998. Atlanticism and liberal democracy were viewed as the primary causes of the country's deteriorating economic and social conditions. Even Lukin, the founder of the Atlanticist party Yabloko, acknowledged that Russia should be seen as a distinct civilization with unique characteristics, rather than a Western nation (Pryce, 2013: 31).

It is important to note that Neo-Eurasianism aligns with Russia's traditional geopolitical conceptions. Russia has always adhered to three fundamental principles: firstly, a belief in its messianic role, akin to other powers like the United States; secondly, its geographical uniqueness with only two natural borders (the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic), which has historically contributed to the country's perceived vulnerability and its pursuit of expansionist foreign policies; and finally, a determined effort to establish a strong state capable of defending itself against external threats (Kotkin, 2016: 3-4).

Dugin argues that Russia has a natural inclination towards expansion in the Eurasian region due to its historical destiny. He proposes the idea of a unified empire that brings together multiple people and opposes the Western worldview (Lungu, 2022: 324). The concept of Neo-Eurasianism, which aligns with geopolitical theory, appears to have become a part of Vladimir Putin's political strategy since 1999. This strategy draws inspiration from imperial, nationalist, and Slavophile traditions reminiscent of the tsars, as well as certain aspects of the Soviet past (Varsori, 2018: 159).

It is worth noting that a survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center revealed that 71% of respondents believe Russia is part of a unique Eurasian or Orthodox civilization, while only

13% consider Russia to be part of the broader Western civilization (Dugin, 2014: 24).

However, Putin has consistently positioned his political strategy within the framework of Russian politics, prioritizing the strengthening of the Russian state regardless of any particular ideological label (Ferrari, 2013: 3). Nonetheless, Dugin and the Eurasia International Movement have often interpreted Putin's strategy from an ideological perspective, particularly in relation to the Eurasian Union. Their support for this initiative can be attributed to the aim of creating a strategic geopolitical bloc through the reunification of former Soviet Republics, based on shared geopolitical and destiny interests (Eurasia Movement, 2001). Indeed, Eurasianism suggests the establishment of transnational political and economic institutions held together by both geographical and cultural factors. According to Dugin, Putin's proposal of the Eurasian Union perfectly embodies this idea (Dugin, 2009, tr. en. 2012: 75).

Another concept worth considering in the framework of the Eurasian Union is the concept of *Russkij Mir*, which translates to “Russian World” and was developed by Petr Shchedrovitsky and Efim Ostrovsky in the late 1990s. This idea has evolved over time. Initially, it was created as *mir Rossii* (“Russia's World”) to facilitate a peaceful reconnection with Russian identity and its diasporas. Being Russian is seen as a shared destiny (Laruelle, 2015: 4). The concept of *Russkij Mir* emphasizes the impact of twentieth-century events, including the Russian diaspora resulting from migration waves during and after the Bolshevik Revolution, and the subsequent formation of Russian-speaking communities worldwide. As a result, there is a need to globalize Russia and unite all Russians under a single global project (Ivi: 5). It is important to note that, according to this perspective, Russian identity is primarily based on language, rather than ethnicity (Ivi: 5-6), similar to the ideals of the Eurasian movement, which advocates for the creation of a multiethnic empire. Although the *Russkij Mir* concept was initially developed independently of the Russian compatriots' policy, the two have become closely intertwined since Putin's election (Kudors and Orttung, 2010: 3). The definition of “compatriot” has been complex to establish legally, and it now encompasses Russian speakers residing in neighboring countries (Ivi: 2). The concept of *Russkij Mir* has proved useful in supporting this policy, as it reflects the multiethnic composition of the Russian population, making it challenging to base compatriot policies on ethnicity (*ibidem*). As noted by Laruelle (2015: 6), Vladimir Putin used the expression during a speech at the first World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, stating that “The notion of the Russian World extends far

from Russia's geographical borders and even far from the borders of the Russian ethnicity” (Putin, 2001). This concept has significant identity implications, as it applies not only to Russian citizens and their descendants but also to those residing in the former territories of the Soviet Union and the Tsarist Empire, as well as anyone who speaks Russian or identifies with the shared destiny of the country (Laruelle, 2015: 8). From this perspective, the Eurasian Union would serve as a tangible manifestation of the *Russkij Mir*, which would provide a cultural ground (Ivi: 18). Additionally, this concept is instrumental in promoting the Neo-Eurasian conservative agenda by highlighting the uniqueness of Russian civilization (Ivi: 20-21). Putin has often employed this belief system as a tool in the so-called Near Abroad (the former Soviet space), as seen in the annexation of Crimea, where it was used to present geopolitical, historical, and ethnic justifications (Ivi: 23).

Patriarch Kirill has frequently referenced the concept of the Russian World in his speeches, including one dated April 25, 2022. During this occasion, he described the Kremlin Assumption Cathedral as a structure intended to unify all Russian lands. He then called upon God to safeguard Russia and promote the unification of the entire Rus', urging citizens to remain united under the Orthodox Church (Press-sluzhba Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseya Rusi, 2022). Another example is a speech given on November 20, 2022, in which the Patriarch expressed optimism about the unity of the entire people of the Holy Rus', despite attempts to divide them (Press-sluzhba Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseya Rusi, 2022).

The Russian World is also explicitly embraced by Russian foreign policy. It is often mentioned alongside the recognition of Russia's Eurasian heritage, positioning the country as a “unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power that brings together the Russian people and other peoples belonging to the cultural and civilizational community of the Russian world” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023).

The strong connection between these two concepts, and therefore between Russian foreign policy and Eurasianism, was further emphasized by Carlo Terracciano, who also shares the same ideologies as Eurasianism. He explains how Russia cannot do without Europe:

The only security for centuries to come can only be represented by the control in any form of the coasts of the northern Eurasian mass [...]. The necessity of the geopolitical integration of Europe and Russia imposes the definitive revision of certain oppositions” (Terracciano, 2005).

Jean Thiriart, a Belgian geopolitical thinker, offers a similar perspective.

He proposes the merger of Europe and Russia into a single imperial republic. Drawing on Carl Schmitt's work, Thiriart emphasizes the historical task of aligning continental states, which currently hold more power and influence than nation-states. In a speech given on August 18, 1992, he stated: "From a geopolitical perspective, the old borders of the USSR are the future borders of Greater Europe [...]. The European empire is, by postulate, Eurasian" and poses an alternative for Russia: either succumb to Washington's dominance or resist American thalassocratic imperialism with a continental empire. These quotations demonstrate how neo-Eurasianism, as elucidated by Dugin, carries inevitable geopolitical consequences of which foreign policy is only a method, or a form. From this perspective, war is nothing but a tool for foreign policy in order to avoid subjugation by Washington.

4. RESULTS

In the context of the reunifying the former Soviet Republics, we now examine Ukrainian case, where the Neo-Eurasian ideology can be identified. Dugin states that all Slavic peoples belong historically, organically, and culturally to the Eurasian civilization (Dugin, 2009, tr. en. 2012: 110), as discussed earlier in the concept of organic democracy. Based on what has been said so far regarding Russia's natural expansionism according to both Neo-Eurasianism and traditional geopolitics, it can be assumed that Ukraine falls within this sphere of expansion. Its attempt to approach NATO in 2021 has been interpreted by Putin, in his discourse to the nation on February 21, as a risk of having a Western outpost near Russia's borders and as an effort to stop Russian progress (Rai News, 2021).

As highlighted by Kurt (2023: 366), Dugin actively supported military intervention to protect Crimea and Donbass and liberate the entire Novorossiia region. He believed that failing to do so would pose a danger to Russia, as it would display a pro-American and anti-Russian orientation. Dugin's perspective is based on the idea that Ukraine is not a true state, but rather a part of the Russian Empire due to shared ethnicity, religion, and history. He argues that the first Russian state can be traced back to the Principality of Kyiv (Ivi: 370). Therefore, Dugin advocated for the creation of autonomous, pro-Russian states in Eastern Ukraine or their incorporation into the broader Russian territory (Ivi: 367). It is reasonable to assume that Putin has adopted the Neo-Eurasian perspective in the Ukrainian matter, drawing inspiration from various

elements of Russian political life (*ibidem*). This is in line with Russian post-Cold War foreign policy, which also takes into consideration the risk of the United States getting closer to Russian territory (Ivi: 364).

Yun (2023: 242) supports the claim that the Russo-Ukrainian war is rooted in identity issues, particularly the Neo-Eurasian project of building a Eurasian Empire. This aligns with Russia's post-Cold War foreign policy, which focuses on protecting its national security against the expanding NATO presence in Eastern Europe (Ivi: 245). Indeed, Putin sees Ukraine as a "space of vital interest" that serves as a buffer against NATO threats (Ivi: 243).

Ziegler (2016: 570) also identifies Eurasianism as a significant influence on Putin's foreign policy. This policy can be seen as part of a wider post-Cold War effort to counter the eastward expansion of NATO (Ivi: 558). It encompasses safeguarding compatriots abroad, reclaiming historically lost territories, and challenging Western hegemony (Ivi: 570). The Ukrainian question further highlights this, as seen in Putin's use of the term "Little Russia" to refer to the country (Ivi: 560) and the historical and religious justifications provided for the annexation of Crimea (Ivi: 565).

Kumar (2016: 218) also emphasizes the vulnerability of the Russian diaspora in former Soviet countries, which is believed to be further threatened by NATO expansion in alignment with the Eurasian perspective. In 2009, the Kremlin opposed the EU's Eastern European Partnership Program, viewing it as a challenge to its influence in Ukraine. This opposition ultimately led to the annexation of Crimea, which was justified on historical and ethnic grounds (Ivi: 221-222).

Given these premises, Ukraine is the most illustrative case to present here. It is also crucial to Putin's Eurasian Union project, as it represents one of the main markets for Russian gas, serves as a connection between the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe, and has a significant Russian-speaking minority in the eastern regions and the Crimean Peninsula. Furthermore, as aforementioned, Russia has always considered Ukraine to be an important part of its history. However, since the 1990s, Ukraine has shown two opposing trends: some governments believed it was necessary to move closer to the European Union and the United States, while others wanted to maintain the country's traditional relationships with Russia. This was driven by factors such as the Russian-speaking minority and Ukraine's dependence on Russian oil and gas (Varsori, 2018: 164-165). Especially since Putin came to power, these energy resources have often been used as a tool of pressure against pro-Western governments that were unfavorable to the Kremlin (Ivi: 166).

Following the events in Maidan Square, the Ukrainian government

entered a severe crisis, which led to demonstrations by the Russian-speaking population in Crimea demanding annexation to Russia. These demonstrations culminated in the declaration of independence of the districts of Donetsk and Lugansk, prompting a military response from the official Ukrainian government. From 2014 to 2016, the hacker group Fancy Bear, linked to the Russian government, distributed malware for Android devices in order to track Ukrainian artillery and aid the separatists. The malware was disguised as a legitimate Android app and distributed in Ukrainian military forums (Gazula, 2017: 61).

Additionally, between 2014 and 2015, the Wagner Group was deployed in the Donbass area. The group is a private military formation owned by entrepreneur Yevgeny Prigozhin and is the result of an experiment by the Russian Moran Security Group to establish a private militia. Initially, the Slavonic Corps Limited was established, and since spring 2013, the company began recruiting veterans of the official army to send them to Syria. In October of the same year, 267 contracts were signed (Marten, 2019: 191). The current Wagner Group was formed by some members of the Slavonic Corps and, specifically, its former leader Dmitry Utkin, after their defeat in Syria. The name of the militia is attributed to Utkin, who, due to his support for Nazi ideologies and his habit of wearing a helmet similar to those of the Wehrmacht, was previously known as Wagner during battles in Donbass (Ivi: 192).

The Wagner Group serves the purpose of providing plausible deniability for the Russian official army. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that it is not officially registered in Russia but apparently in Argentina (*ibidem*). It is therefore evident how this militia is responsible for some of the most violent military operations on average.

Due to the attacks on Ukrainian civilians, Russia is now considered a state sponsor of terrorism following the resolution of the European Parliament in November 2022. Consequently, the Council of the European Union has been requested to include the Wagner Group in the list of EU terrorist groups (European Parliament, 2022). However, the EU does not possess the authority to officially designate a state as a sponsor of terrorism. Therefore, the European Parliament has called on individual member states to include Russia in their national lists as well, in order to proceed with further sanctions (*ibidem*).

5. DISCUSSION

Based on our observations, it is clear that the ideologies associated with

Eurasianism have the potential to be highly destabilizing due to their defense of the Eurasian civilization. This is primarily because Eurasianism is a form of neo-populism that poses significant risks to the stability of democratic systems in affected countries. Furthermore, the Russo-Ukrainian war has particularly highlighted the conflict between Western democracy and Russian authoritarianism (Yun, 2023: 249), with the latter actively rejecting Western values.

Another major threat is the use of cyber warfare techniques, which have been shown to have severe consequences and are effective in supporting military and espionage operations.

We must also consider the element of terrorism embodied by the Wagner Group. If this militia is included in the list of European terrorist groups and Russia is designated as a state sponsor of terrorism, it could further strain relations between the Russian Federation and the EU. The recent revolutionary attempt by this group on June 24th, 2023, caused significant instability, which was resolved by Belarus President Lukashenko. However, tensions have arisen between Belarus and its neighbors, particularly Poland and the Baltics, who are demanding the expulsion of the mercenaries from Belarusian territory under the threat of intervention (Globalist, 2023). Additionally, the Wagner Group is currently being deployed in other regions, particularly in Africa, to protect Russian economic interests. For example, the group is currently assisting the government of the Central African Republic in its fight against rebels (The Guardian, 2023).

The deaths of Prigozhin and Utkin may have an impact on these operations. Their extensive knowledge of African regimes will take time for Russia to recover (Diallo, 2023), but it is unlikely that their loss will affect the survival of the militia, as other prominent members can easily take their place (FRANCE 24, 2023).

It is also important to consider the existence of other private militias, although they are less significant than the Wagner Group. These include Redut, which originated in 2008 and is associated with the Russian Ministry of Defense, and Patriot, a competitor of Wagner that was created in 2018 and is also linked to the Russian Ministry of Defense (Grazioli, 2023).

Finally, in relation to the EU, we are witnessing the potential formation of a European political front based on Eurasian ideologies and pro-Russia sentiments. The aim of this front would be to build a "Eurasia" that can effectively oppose the capitalist system and, on a broader scale, the United States (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2012: 38). It is worth highlighting that most European populist radical right-wing parties

supported Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. They generally view Putin's regime favorably, particularly in relation to his opposition to NATO (Ivaldi and Zankina, 2023: 19). On the other hand, Putin has often been accused of funding many of these parties with an anti-EU agenda.

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