

# Building the Diverse Community

## Beyond Regionalism in East Asia

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Contemporary Asian Studies Series



WYDAWNICTWO  
UNIWERSYTETU  
ŁÓDZKIEGO

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## **Between Reality and Dreams: Russia's Pivot to Asia**

Russia's pivot to Asia was proclaimed for the first time in 2010. Since then, however, it turned out to be more words than actions. This is supposed to change now, after the signing of Russia-China gas contract in May 2014. Moreover, the constant worsening of Russia-West relations due to the Ukrainian crisis further makes Moscow look eastwards. Russia now officially declares her turn to Asia. So far, however, these attempts have been half-hearted at best; it is likely that if there is to be any real Russian pivot to Asia, then it would be a pivot to China only.

This paper gives an insight into Russia's pivot to Asia and examines it from the neorealist perspective. It shows the ineffective attempts to develop the Far Eastern region of the Russian Federation, Chinese influence and agenda and Russian "pivot" discourse. Additionally, it presents Russian (mis)understanding of Asia and the consequences of the May 2014 gas contract with China. It concludes that Russia's pivot to Asia remains more in the sphere of dreams than in reality. Consequently, the outcome is Russia's marginalization in Asia.

### **Theoretical introduction**

When researching Russian foreign policy one must use adequate theoretical and methodological tools, consistent with the tradition of political thinking in Russia and her political culture. Here the task is quite easy – one school of political thinking, realism, is unrivalled. Realism – no matter in which form, classical or neo – in political science believes that the nature of all politics is quite universal. Politics, like society in general,

is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature, the main one being the concept of interest defined in terms of power. Realism believes that the world, just as mankind, is imperfect and full of contradictions – opposing interests and conflicts. In this approach, the interests, not values, constitute the core of politics and – therefore – moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states or other actors in their abstract universal formulation, but must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place, which means that the moral principles cannot be fully realized. Realism, in spite of believing in any universal values, puts trust in a system of check and balances – “aims at the realization of the lesser evil than the absolute good” (Morgenthau 2006, 3).

Realism is an adequate theoretical form here as Russia's ruling political elites have been “brought up in a realistic strategic culture that emphasizes the element of struggle in an often viciously competitive world, where power relations dominate at the expense of allegedly universal values” (Lo 2008, 176). In this approach, international systems are considered to be anarchic, based on power politics and, consequently, build on an “organized hypocrisy” rule. It is a place where logic of expected consequences prevails over the logic of appropriateness: “the stronger state can pick and choose among those norms that best suits their material interests or ignore norms altogether, because they can impose their choices on weaker states” (Krasner 1999, 9). International politics, therefore, are based on great powers and Russia is one – and certainly perceives herself as one – of the great powers. Her political behavior is based on traditional, 19<sup>th</sup> century *realpolitik* imperatives: national security, power projection, management of the strategic balance and emphasis on the primacy of state sovereignty. The only difference, although significant, is the discourse: “Moscow eschews its vocabulary, preferring to couch (her) objectives in more modern and inclusive language: soft power, interdependency, globalization, and ‘universal threats and challenges’ have displaced zero-sum calculus, the balance of power, and spheres of influence as the lingua franca of international relations” (Lo 2008, 176).

Russia's pivot to Asia has been born out of realistic consideration: a balance of power (the rising Asia as a chance to balance United States (US) hegemony) and bandwagoning to a place where global commercial and political center is moving to. Moscow properly understood that her status as one of global powers depends on her position in Asia-Pacific region. To maintain her shrinking global position, Russia had to improve

her stand in Asia. The truer, when a global superpower – the US – has already pivoted to Asia. Russia could not be worse than the US – at least rhetorically – so proclaimed her own pivot, too.

## **The 2012 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit and the Dilemma of the Far Eastern Region's Development**

Russia's pivot to Asia was supposed to be coined in 2010. The stimulus for this was provided by a special meeting held in Khabarovsk on July 2, 2010, by the then president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev. The general idea was formulated in the "Russian Strategy in the Asia-Pacific region" from 2010 (Rodkiewicz 2014). Russia's pivot was internationally declared during an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok in September 2012. This summit was aimed to symbolize the beginning of Russia's pivot to Asia and a more active Russian policy there. As Moscow Carnegie Director Dmitri Trenin wrote in his well-known article (and well-understood allusion to Hillary Clinton's article in *Foreign Affairs*) "Russia can pivot to Pacific, too." Trenin compared the present situation of Russia to that in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and elaborated that "If Peter the Great were alive today, he would almost certainly leave behind the old Russian capital, Moscow (...) simply pack up and move his court and his administration to an already-built city, Vladivostok" (*Trenin, Russia Can Pivot...* 2012). As if to emphasize Trenin's comparison, Russia invested heavily in Vladivostok to stress the genuineness of her pivotal attitude and to show Asia her better face: the city's infrastructure (roads, bridges, buildings) underwent intensive investment, amounting to USD 21 million: this was the largest one time investment in Russian/Soviet history for any Russian city (Yu Bin 2012).

The main reason behind "pivot to Asia" had been the understanding of Asia's value to global position of Russia. It has both geostrategic and geo-economics goals: "Moscow wants to retain its strategic independence and not to wind up as a junior partner to either Washington or Beijing" (*Trenin, Russia Can Pivot...* 2012). Simply, Russia's primarily goal is to remain in the world game of powers. But to achieve it Moscow needs to develop its Far Eastern region: "the future of Russia on the East depends on what will Moscow do with her eastern provinces" (Civic Forum interviews, Moscow, September 2013).

So far, all attempts to develop the region have proved a failure. Not to mention the chaotic Yeltsin's years, even since 2000 Moscow has been constantly unable to create a strategy of development of this region. Although the Russian government in 2009 adopted a "Strategy of Social and Economic Development of Eastern Siberia and Russian Far East until 2025" (*Стратегия...* 2012), this document remains on paper only. The Far Eastern region remains one of the most backward regions of Russia; its economy is dependent on Chinese goods, services and labor; depopulation continues and "Moscow policy towards Russian Far East is barely more effective (state investments in economic and social infrastructure remains inadequate; Putin's centralizing political reforms have not significantly reduced corruption and misgovernment by local administration) than during the dismal Yeltsin years" (Lo 2008, 66–70). Russia's lack of ideas is evident in the return of Soviet-style big energy projects to help revive the region. Such projects are not labor-incentive, so their impact on regional unemployment is minimal. Moreover, these projects are often more virtual than real (e.g. the Korean Peninsula railway or pipeline) and even if they did materialize (ESPO oil pipeline), they are always dependent on present geopolitics (the power of the Siberian gas pipeline, see below) and usually the economic benefits go to Moscow. Therefore, these kinds of projects "make them a most unreliable basis for the region's economic revival" (Lo 2008, 67).

The basic dilemma for Russia – how to solve the Far Eastern Region's problems – remains unresolved until now. Russia, although aware of the importance of this issue is nevertheless unable to solve it. The result is concentration on half-way schemes, such as attracting people from Western Russia or lifting of Vladivostok for APEC summit. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has regularly proclaimed the urgency of counteracting the Russian Far East's decline and created elaborate bureaucratic institutions to challenge this threat. This applies to the special corporation for development of the Russian Far East, "comparable in its prerogatives probably to Soviet Dalstroy or British East India Company only" (Kaczmarek, Konończuk 2012) or to the Ministry for Russian Far East, established in May 2012 (*Вказ...* 2012). Although "the urgency of the need to spur development of the country's easternmost regions is correctly recognized," this is "not the most creative solution, surely" (Trenin, *Moscow...* 2012). These actions must be considered a typical bureaucratic sweeping the problems under the carpet by creating the illusion of action. The truth is that Russia is too poor to develop this region by herself. In the



conditions of worsening economic conditions, "Russia is unable to spend million-dollars investments into this underdeveloped for decades Russian Far East" and even if does invest there, "the until now experiences showed that sources allocated for investment haven't provided benefits and were used ineffectively, sometimes even defrauded" (*Rosyjski...* 2013).

The latest idea has been attracting foreign investments. Russians want to "catch the Chinese wind," as Putin himself wrote in the article "Russia and the Changing World" in February 2012 (Путин 2012). The aim is to turn this Russian "fortress" into "fortune," (Rozman 2000, 177–203) which is not a new idea, but the tools are new. It is based on the hope of attracting investors to the Far Eastern region from China, but not only – Japan and Korea are also targeted. The leitmotiv of the Vladivostok Summit and its final declaration, "Integrate to Grow, Innovate to Prosper" attested it (*Владивостокская...* 2012). The idea of attracting foreign investment, by the way, is quite new to Russia – so far the privileging mood here was that of suspicion and fear over dominance of external capital. The success of this new attitude, therefore, is uncertain at best: old habits die hard in Russia.

## **Is the Sinicization of the Russian Far East on the Horizon?**

So far the only major attempt to develop the region on external capital – The Program of Cooperation between Regions of the Far East and Eastern Siberia and Regions of the Northeast of China for 2009–2018 – is a failure. The Program itself was adopted in 2009 and signed by the presidents of Russia and China in September 2009. It includes 205 joint projects in such spheres as: technology, energy, infrastructure development, and envisions setting up special economic zones, industrial and technological clusters with preferential conditions for foreign investors. The Project includes a Chinese share in: building a power plant in Amur Oblast; the management of coal deposits in Chukotka and Magadan Oblast; development of the forestry industry in Sakhalin; creating a tourist center in Baikal; and building a railway bridge on the Amur River, amongst others. These projects are estimated at USD 13 billion: 1.7 billion from the central budget and the rest from foreign investors (*Программа сотрудничества...* 2010).

Russia's acceptance of this project shows how the perception of China has changed within the Russian Federation. A few years ago Russians

were asking whether the Chinese have TV sets, now they see how powerful China has become (Ларин 2009: 237). When the Russians look at China today, they see “an economic giant; a financial power armed with the world’s largest foreign exchange reserves; a new science power and technology producer; and an increasingly capable military force” (Trenin, *Верные...* 2012). Russia, despite being anxious, decided therefore to bandwagon to Chinese success and attract Chinese investments into the Far Eastern region. By doing so, Moscow “made a virtue out of necessity,” because due to several reasons nobody else (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) is willing to invest there.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of October 2014 the program cannot be considered successful. Only a few projects have been fulfilled, the rest remain on paper. This is due to the fact that – as one Russian expert euphemistically concluded – “the mechanisms of realization had not been included in the Program” (Кулешев 2010, 67). The general conclusion is that “the Program is not being implemented” (Ларин 2009: 19). The Chinese are not willing to invest en masse in the region due to several factors. First, the development model of Northeast China (*Dongbei*) has changed. Before, cooperation with the Russian Far East was believed to be the key to success. Now, this idea is being abandoned for an intensified cooperation with China’s southern provinces (far richer than the Russian Far East). Second, the Chinese are unwilling to invest into the Far Eastern Region, “they just want to take the resources and that’s all” (LEAM 2013, interviews, Łódź, June 2013). The Program therefore, in spite of being the motor of development for the Russian Far East, becomes another proof of the continuing slide of this region into becoming China’s raw material appendage. This policy of Russia contributes to the “region’s economic and financial dependency on Asian investors, particularly extensive Chinese companies interested in acquiring Russian resources” (Rosyjski..., 2013). Therefore, the present situation benefits first and foremost Chinese interests. Russia, on the other hand, agrees to the inevitable – cooperation with China only, on Chinese conditions – and considers getting something better than getting nothing.

Consequently, Russia’s regional dependence on China only increases, which may lead to a situation where cooperation with China becomes a vital necessity and inevitability. In these circumstances the Far Eastern Russians would not afford anti-Chinese actions (this would undermine the basis of their existence) and would accept the inevitability: Chinese dominance (China Institute of International Studies interviews, Beijing,

June 2010). They are already facing the realities where “revival and modernization are impossible without cooperation with China, which is interested in many forms of cooperation for her own development” (Ларин 2009: 317). Economic Sinicization of the Russian Far East, not its military annexation, therefore, seems the most probable future scenario, the more real, when the only alternative – mass central investments into the region – seems unlikely. Dmitri Trenin summarizes: “Russian leaders realize that the country’s most serious geopolitical challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is in the east. Russians need to find a way to develop the country’s eastern provinces, and to integrate them better with the rest of the country. These provinces will then help to integrate Russia itself with the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. Failing that, Russia may not necessarily ‘lose’ those provinces in a formal way to China, but it will see them increasingly gravitate towards it. In another great reversal, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Khabarovsk, a Russian border city on the Amur, may look like the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Harbin, founded by Russian merchants and railway men in the middle of Chinese Manchuria: a foreign outpost in a neighboring country, and the centre of an expanding zone of influence” (Trenin, *Верные...* 2012).

## **Pivot to Asia. Russian discourse**

Russia is perfectly aware of the far-fetched consequences of becoming too dependent on China. One of the main reasons of Russia’s pivot to Asia has been to contradict this scenario. The 2012 Vladivostok APEC summit was supposed to be a symbolic beginning of Russia’s new Asian policy, but then for a year almost nothing happened. Although since the APEC summit Putin has conducted several meetings with Asian leaders, Russian diplomacy activated itself on the Asian dimension, and Asian matters became more popular in everyday media, these steps “are in reality quite ritual, symbolic” (Лукьянов, *Мы ...* 2013). In autumn 2013 Russia’s pivot still remained “uncertain,” there was “no rapprochement with Asia – words only, no rapprochement,” and in general, Russia’s future in the East remained “uncertain at best” (Civic Forum interviews, Moscow, September 2013). Although Asia remained important for Russia, there was always something more important – Syria, Snowden, Ukraine etc. To achieve a genuine “pivot to Asia” Russia “requires much more than a facelift for Vladivostok” (Yu Bin 2012). So far, it has ended only up with this. Vladivostok, understood in a wider political and economic sense,



has quickly been forgotten. After the summit the enthusiasm evaporated and everything remained as always – without any idea for the long-term development of region. The state's efforts have been concentrated on another big event – Sochi. The results of Russia's pivot to Asia therefore, have been best summarized by a one Russian voice: "The Russia's pivot to Asia ended up on Russian Island" (The Russian island in Vladivostok is the place where the Summit was held) (LEAM 2013, interviews, Lodz, June 2013).

The Russian government came back to the idea at the end of 2013, and intensified this rhetoric after the Ukrainian crisis broke out. Although there is no policy paper on "Russia's pivot to Asia," the following documents/speeches can be considered representative: Russian World's (Русский Мир) document "Asia-Pacific Strategy of Russia" (*Тихоокеанская стратегия...* 2010); Putin's address to the Federal Assembly on December 12, 2013, where he proclaimed "Russia's reorientation toward the Pacific Ocean" and the development of Russian Far East "a national priority" (*Послание...* 2013); "Russia's Energetic Strategy until 2020," according to which 22–25% of oil and 19–20% of gas should be exported to Asia (*Энергетическая...* 2014); and National Council for Foreign and Defense Policy "21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategy," where the Asia-Pacific region is considered to be a key one (*Стратегия – XXI ...* 2014). Between Russian analysts/researchers the main supporters of pivoting to Asia are Fiodor Lukyanov, Dmitri Trenin and Alexander Larin.

The "Russian pivot" – as Lukyanov writes – is understood as a grand, comprehensive strategy towards Asia: a project coordinating domestic development (the Russian Far East) with foreign policy. The latter means positioning in the Asia-Pacific, enhancing and deepening ties with Japan, South Korea, India, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia, in such a way that cooperation with Asia-Pacific would not be limited to only China (Лукьянов, *Логичное...* 2014). Regional cooperation – away from "great politics" – plays a vital role here. The Great Tumen Initiative is a good example (*Overview. Greater Tumen Initiative* 2014). In the domestic sphere the most important challenge is a "new colonization" of Siberia and the Russian Far East: intensification of exploiting these regions. Without doing so, "Russia cannot dream about playing important role in Asia." This "new colonization" cannot be done by mobilization methods. Russia needs to attract human capital into the Eastern part of the country, needs a comprehensive action plan of not only economic activities, but also of advertising this area: "it must cease to be associated as a depressing prov-

ince, but to become seen as a perspective territory" (Лукьянов, *Азия...* 2013). This "new colonization" should be stimulated by setting up twenty-five regional centers of development, "from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok" (*Стратегия – XXI...* 2014). Some even say that Russia needs a dynamic administration center in the Asian part of the country: "an actual capital in Siberia is very much needed" (although "implementation of this project remains in the realm of fantasy") (Лукьянов, *Азия...* 2013). This is combined with the necessity of developing Siberia and the Far Eastern region with infrastructural projects (Ларин 2014, 19).

In foreign policy Russia needs to use "dynamism of Asia" for the development of her Asian provinces. It is not only direct foreign investments (it goes without saying) but bringing about conditions where Siberia and the Russian Far East would become meeting places of Europe and America. The main goal is – of course – to maintain the major power position by Russia: "300 years old the major power status dependent on position in the Baltic and Black Seas, nowadays it depends on the position on Pacific Ocean" (Лукьянов: *Мы...* 2013). This is because "Russia is still a world power because of a long stretch of the Pacific coastline and what lies between the Pacific coast and the Urals: Siberia with its resources (...) Making full use of this potential is a passport to the future; failure to integrate the east would spell the demise of Russia as a major player" (Trenin, *Moscow...* 2012).

The ultimate success of the Russian pivot is nevertheless uncertain due to domestic reasons. As Lilia Shevtsova noted, "The elites are too busy worrying about day-to-day survival to draw up a consistent policy for relations with Asia as a region or with individual countries." This makes "The Kremlin's Asian policy for the most part imitation," and the "Asian pivot will most likely prove to be the same kind of Potemkin village that Moscow built for the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok: all façade and no substance." Shevtsova concludes plans for the Russian pivot in a devastating way: "It is no surprise that journalists joked that the summit looked just as absurd as a man in a bird suit flying with Siberian cranes (as Putin tried to do). Putin's Asian fling is likely to end in mutual estrangement, disappointment and perhaps even hostility" (Shevtsova, 2013).

Even the pivot's supporters note significant challenges facing its fulfillment. Alexandr Larin demonstrates that the favorite way of development, preferred by current political elites (grand energy projects), "cannot be applied as a successful model of Russian Far East's development, because the economic and social conditions of this part of Russia do not

favor it." In this outlook, a strategy based on energy resources slides the region into being a raw material appendage to China, so it perfectly serves the basic Chinese interest of reshaping this region into a raw material base (Ларин 2014, 19–20).

The mental factor is another obstacle. As Lukyanov claims, in time when the world's most important events are already taking place in Pacific and Indian Oceans, Russia remains a European country in her mental and axiological approach; therefore, "consciousness is most difficult task." Russians, as inhabitants of a European country, have traditionally orientated themselves to the West and see the world through a Western prism. Nowadays, however, a new situation emerges: the Russian system of values and mentality remains European, whereas the most important events are already taking place in Asia. Thus "the Russian eagle, although two headed, out of habit looks only to the West" (Лукьянов: *Мы...* 2013).

## Moving Beyond China?

One of the main goals of Russia's pivot to Asia has been to diversify Russian policy in Asia, to go beyond China in other words. The key countries to achieve this goal have been India and Japan. The Korean countries, Vietnam and Burma (Myanmar) also matter here, as well as regional multilateral organizations. Although Russia indeed intensified her actions towards these countries, the results are modest so far.

For a long time India has been one of Russia's closest friends in Asia, her "most privileged strategic partner." Russia and India have no conflicting interests in international politics, while having converging regional interests (Central Asia, radical Islam). Moreover, they both perceive China's growing power as a problem in the long term. Their cooperation is developing smoothly, particularly in the military sector (Russia sells India products from the machine-building industry as well). India accounts for around 30% of total Russian arms exports, and is a united country, one of the very few ones whom Russia sells the most advanced military technology and a broad range of weapons (ranging from small arms to warships) (Rodkiewicz 2014). One of the most promising aspects of cooperation is energy. So far India has been importing only small amounts of Russian oil. This is supposed to change after the oil/gas contract between Rosneft and ESSAR were signed in December 2014. The fulfillment of this contract, however, is uncertain, and even if this materializes, this will not change

the general image of Russia-India relations. For both partners Russia-India relations are important, but not the most important.. For India, Russia is a useful tool, though one of secondary importance. As the relations with the US is the most important to India, the Indian government cannot move too close to Russia. For the Russian government, as long as India cannot balance China's importance, Russia's diversification in Asia will not be complete. So, in the Indian dimension, Russia has done a step forward, but this must be considered an improvement of the previous policy, not a decisive turn.

Russia's key to the real game in Asia-Pacific has always been Japan. The Japanese government has a surprisingly good image in Russia – Japan “stands as the epitome of the ‘good East,’ an East at once politically sophisticated, economically prosperous, technologically ambitious and strategically unthreatening” (Lo 2008, 121). Nevertheless, Russian-Japanese relations remained cold and have long been overshadowed by the unresolved territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands. Russia has adopted the method of “strategic patience,” hoping that Japan will sooner or later become ready to accept a compromise on this matter. Russia's move almost succeeded in April 2013, when it came to a “small breakthrough” regarding the disputed islands, followed by a 2+2 format meeting (ministers of foreign affairs and defense from both countries) in November 2013. Moreover, the economic relations seemed favorable and have been developing very dynamically, with Japan being the biggest Asian investor in Russia (Rodzinski 2014). At the turn of 2014 there were big hopes for a new Russia-Japanese opening, strengthened by Shinzo Abe's Sochi visit. These hopes, however, were dashed once the Ukrainian crisis broke out and Japan joined, albeit reluctantly, the Western sanctions on Russia. Since then Russia-Japan relations have stalled or even regressed, with no hopes in the short term. Therefore, the opportunities of the Japanese dimension of Russia's pivot to Asia remain unfulfilled.

The Russian approach towards the Korean Peninsula for long have illustrated Moscow's hopes for a concert of Asia – a 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of 19<sup>th</sup> century's concert of powers in Europe (Lo 2008, 123). Although Putin repaired Yeltsin's mistakes and equalized relations with both Korean countries (that gave Russian entry into the six-party talks) he has been unable to do more. South Korea, though important, has not become Russia's entrance into East Asia and rather will not be, given the close ties between South Korea and the US. South Korea is not particularly willing to invest in the Russian Far East and the future of Russian pro-

posed inter-Korean projects (pipeline and railway) depends on the unpredictable situation between the two Korean countries. As for North Korea, since Kim Jung Un's took power relations have accelerated, particularly in the Fall 2014. Russia cancelled North Korean debt, declared interest in modernizing North Korean railways and power plants and intensified her activity in Rason Port. In exchange, Kim Jung Un was invited to Moscow for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War Two victory. All this looks good on paper, but fulfillment of these plans remain uncertain at best. It is questionable, for example, how Moscow would finance those undertakings given her economic condition under Western sanction. And even if she does, the results would come only after (many) years (Pietrewicz 2015). Taking into account even the most optimistic scenario, it is doubtful that a success in North Korea would prejudice the ultimate success of Russia's pivot to Asia (the very success itself here is uncertain). So far Russia did improve in this dimension but this doesn't make a big difference. A similar scenario appears in Vietnam. Here, as in the previous years, Russia successfully sells weapons, even the most sophisticated ones, but nothing more. Vietnam, having had strained relations with China over disputed islands, looks to the US more, and correctly so, given the fact that Russia cannot support Vietnam without risking damaging relations with China. Therefore, the options in Vietnam for Russia are limited. The same story goes with Burma. Here, again, Russia sells arms (sometimes in a way damaging to Chinese interests) but has little more to offer. Burma, like Russia, is a big energy exporter (not importer), and although the Burmese government is interested in balancing Chinese influence, the Burmese elites turn towards the US. As Burmese generals-turned-democrats try to maneuver themselves a place between China and the US, Russia is out of the picture here.

Finally, Russian efforts to join the multilateral regional organizations (or became a partner of them), like the APEC forum, the Associated South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN)–ARF Regional Forum, the Defense Ministers Meeting ASEAN+8, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the “Asia-Europe” Forum). The idea behind these was that they would be another element of Russia's strategy aimed at reinforcing its position in the Asia-Pacific region. Unfortunately for Russia, either it is considered a “Beijing's assistant” (Rodkiewicz 2014) or has been unable to create any major initiatives to make Russia be seen as a “model citizen of the region” (Lo 2014, 21). The latter has to something with Russia misreading Asia. Generally, Russia has difficulties with understanding Asia (or the Asia-Pacific region).



Although Putin himself attends almost every important summit in Asia and Russia officially claims that it follows the “ASEAN Way,” in the moments of truth – like the Ukrainian crisis – Russia always resorts to arms. This breaks almost all the principles of ASEAN and alienates her from Asia, where different methods of conduct are preferable. Russia gains respect as a powerful country, but at the same time it unwittingly confirms its bad stereotype in Asia as “a European power” that happened to be in Asia “through historical and imperialistic accident” (*Lo 2008*, 126). Sometimes Russia even fosters this stereotype. Choosing Vladivostok as the APEC summit center showed how Russia is out of touch with Asian reality. Making Vladivostok a center of Russian pivot was an unconscious reference to 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian imperialistic policy, best symbolized by Vladivostok’s name (“the Ruler of East” in Russian).<sup>1</sup> Contrary to geographical benefits emphasized by Trenin (“it is within 60 to 90 minutes flying time of several key capitals: Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul. And places like Shanghai, Hong Kong and Taipei are also within easy reach,” Trenin, *Russia...* 2012), it is precisely how it was interpreted in Asia, where Russia is still associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonial attempt: “For many Asians Russia had ‘pivoted’ to the region at least a century and half before when Russia got its ‘Treaty of Aigun’ (1858) in the wake of the second Opium War” (Yu Bin 2012). Russia misreading the Asian reality is even more obvious now, during the Ukrainian crisis. The 13<sup>th</sup> Shangri-La dialogue in Singapore (30.05-01.06.) showcased this. Russia sent a low-level delegation for this important Asia-Pacific event, headed by deputy minister of defense, Anatoiy Antonov. He made a speech about the need for Asia-Pacific to stand up to “color revolutions,” which Russian portrayed as a Western plot to overthrow legitimate governments like Ukraine’s previous one. Attendee Alexander Gabuev bitterly concluded:

“Antonov did not even mention most of the questions relevant for the audience, such as maritime security in the South China Sea, the role of U.S. military presence or the application of international law to maritime disputes in the region (...) most people remembered only the Ukrainian part of Antonov’s speech. Given the fact that majority of the participants didn’t accept Russia’s actions in Crimea, for fear that they could be a possible model for China to settle disputes with its neighbors unilaterally,

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Khabarovsk was an equally bad choice, for its name comes from the Russian adventurer who is considered an occupant and invader by the Chinese; other cities in the Russian Far East are too small to be hosting such events. Probably the nearest possible “neutral” option would have been Irkutsk, but it is too far away.

this was not a good sign. Some Asian participants concluded that Russia completely lacks understanding of what is going on in Asia in terms of security architecture. Some were more blunt and even expressed their condolences to me" (Gabuev 2014).

To sum it up: all these Russian plans focus on liberating Russia from overdependence on China in Asia-Pacific region. Judging from the perspective at the beginning of 2015, one must conclude that despite its attempts, Russia fails to do so. This is mainly due to the situation in Ukraine. The Ukrainian crisis has overshadowed Russia's pivot to Asia and forced her to accept the inevitability: Chinese dominance.

## May 2014 Gas Contract with China and beyond

The May 2014 gas contract with China is supposed to be a new beginning in Russia's Asia policy. The Russian commentators emphasize that since that summit "the pivot has just started" (*Поворот...* 2014) and that the Ukrainian crisis "catalyzed the Russian pivot to Asia" (Лукьянов, Логичное... 2014). The gas contract with China is supposed to be a beginning of true, long term cooperation, finally "acquiring truly strategic depth" (Trenin, *Gas...* 2012). If it would mean reorientation of Russian policy towards Asia, making the Asia-Pacific the main vector of foreign policy and connecting to a new global center, the Russian pivot would indeed be real.

The gas contract, however, is unlikely to make the pivot real for two reasons. First, it should be understood in geopolitical terms. Under the Ukrainian crisis circumstance it is more a clear signal to the West than the decisive turn in foreign policy. Reintegration of the former Soviet area remains Russia's top priority, not the pivot to Asia. Trenin's words are symptomatic here: the signing of the contract is supposed to "reshape and rebalance Eurasia, whose center of gravity will now move from Moscow to Beijing. Such an outcome would certainly benefit China, but it will give Russia a chance to withstand U.S. geopolitical pressure, compensate for the EU's coming energy re-orientation, develop Siberia and the Far East, and link itself to the Asia-Pacific region" (Trenin, *Russia...* 2014). Simply: China has concretes, Russia has plans. As one Polish, sarcastic commentator summarized: "Putin is like a gambler who leaves his savings in a Chinese pawnshop to play for higher stakes with the West" (Korejba 2014).

Second, the gas contract, in spite of reducing regional dependence on grand energy projects and decreasing Chinese influence, increases both.

It is, again, a grand energy project that is *not labor-incentive and its impact on reviving regional economics is unlikely at best*. Furthermore, *accepting this project* alienates Russia from other Asian countries. If the words of a Japanese analyst, Akio Kawate, turn true, then Russia's behavior in May 2014 "will largely determine her position in East Asia for years" (Akio 2014). And this means the deepening of asymmetrical model of Russian-Sino relations: this contract "being a further step towards intensification of Russian-Chinese economic co-operation, does in practice accentuate the asymmetric nature of this co-operation, consistently turning the Russian 'partner' into an 'energy vassal' of China" (*The Eastern...* 2014). Russia, then, instead of liberating herself from Chinese dependence, drains into it even further. Russia's pivot to Asia turns into a "pivot to China" (Trenin, *Russia: Pivoting...* 2014).

## Conclusion

The outlined here state of affairs is causing that, despite Putin's engagement in Asia, "Russia's orientation in Asia is becoming more, not less, China-dependent" (Lo 2008, 129–131). The Chinese direction remains key in Russia's Asia policy, and "Russia has de facto surrendered to China and ceased to be an independent factor in Asian geopolitics" (Blank 2010). Therefore, the words of Bobo Lo, as those quoted above, look surprisingly accurate now: "Russia gains profile and the illusion of influence, while China obtains energy, natural resources, and arms. In short, the relationship works precisely because it is based on expediency, pragmatism, and no small degree of cynicism" (Lo 2008, 131). This means Russia's marginalization in Asian policy and becoming China's junior partner. The threat of sliding into being China's raw material appendage and economic Sinicization of the Russian Far East in spite of decreasing increases. Moscow nevertheless accepts these facts, albeit quietly, because Russian foreign policy vectors are concentrated on reintegration of the post-Soviet area. Without Chinese support, or at least not interfering and not disturbing, this dream is impossible to fulfill. Therefore, for dreaming this dream, Russians accept the drawback: marginalization in the Asia-Pacific region.

Therefore, in Fall 2014 Russia's pivot to Asia can be metaphorically summarized by paraphrasing Deng Xiaoping's words about Vladivostok. While negotiating with Henry Kissinger, Deng remarked that different names given to this city reflect different political goals. The original Chinese

name, *Haishenwai*, meant “sea cucumber bay” (or “sea cucumber cliff”), whereas in Russian it means “ruler of the East” (Kissinger 2014, 82). Today, despite Russian plans and dreams about pivoting to Asia, Vladivostok in the political sphere is more a “sea cucumber” than “ruler of the East”.

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# Building the Diverse Community

## Beyond Regionalism in East Asia

The processes in East and South Asian became a peculiar subject for global community of international relations in the field. The presented volume is a collection of papers dealing with the processes of regionalization in East and South Asia. We collected papers from different academic unit both from Europe and Asia. Taking regionalization as a core subject of the volume the readers will discover the complexity of ongoing processes in East and South Asia. We present collection of papers from a very different perspectives starting from the theoretical debates, through economic dimensions of integration to political and military scope of regionalization in East and South Asia. The whole volume presents the diversity of understanding among international relations scholars community. By shaping the diverse view we can possess the better and in depth understanding of East Asia.



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The book is also available  
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ISBN 978-83-8088-153-2



9 788380 881532