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Why Is the ‘Post-Soviet’ Regionalism Post-Soviet? Historical Legacies and Regional Integration in Eurasia*

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The goal of the paper is to systematically review the variety of arguments describing how the Soviet past influences the development of the Eurasian regionalism. While many references to the ‘post-Soviet’ regionalism imply that history should matter substantially for its evolution, to our knowledge, the arguments about particular effects of the historical legacies are scattered throughout the literature and rarely compared with each other. We argue that the historical legacies can matter for the Eurasian regionalism in two instances: by affecting the environment for the development of regional organizations and through the path-dependent evolution of organizations themselves. The paper concludes that the development of the Eurasian regionalism should indeed differ from that observed in many other parts of the world because of the Soviet legacies.

Keywords: Eurasian regionalism, historical legacies, historical institutionalism

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1. Introduction

The notion of the ‘post-Soviet’ regional integration is well established in the literature and only recently gave way to the concept of ‘Eurasian’ regionalism, with the borders of ‘Eurasia’ still mostly defined by the borders of the former Soviet Union (Hancock and Libman 2016). This makes the discussion of this part of the world rather unique in international comparison: the regional space is defined by the legacies of the historical past. While colonial legacy for sure shapes the borders of regional organizations in Africa and in Latin America, Eurasia still remains unique in terms of extreme heterogeneity of the countries participating in the regional integration projects beyond their common Soviet legacy. From this point of view, a discussion of the Eurasian regionalism should inevitably take the impact of the common historical legacies into account as an important predictor of the institutional design and outcomes of functioning of regional organizations.

While this point is hardly disputed, there is no consensus as to how the common Soviet past should affect the specific features of the Eurasian regionalism. In some sense, one can ask: what exactly makes the post-Soviet regionalism ‘post-Soviet’? The goal of this paper is to review the existing scholarly evidence and theoretical arguments on this topic. It tries to patch together various arguments present in the literature, which describe how the historical past shapes the development of the Eurasian regionalism. As such, it can be seen as yet another exercise in the research on the role of historical legacies in the contemporary political and economic development (Simpser et al. 2017), in particular the legacies of Soviet regime, which have been examined in a number of influential studies (Beissinger and Kotkin 2014; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017). Our goal is to look at a very specific and under-studied case of the Eurasian regionalism from this point of view.

The set of Eurasian regional organizations we discuss in this study, includes regional organizations comprised exclusively of the former Soviet republics: the list of the currently functioning regional organizations of this group includes the Commonwealth of Independent

States (with multiple smaller organizations under its umbrella), the Eurasian Economic Union (as well as the Eurasian Development Bank and the Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Union State of Russia and Belarus. All of these organizations can be called ‘post-Soviet’ without any caveats: in some cases, one can trace their development through multiple institutional forms from the 1990s. Thus, the EAEU first came into existence as the Customs Union in 2010; it was preceded by the Eurasian Economic Community (2000-2014), which in turn followed the Customs Union of 1995-2000.¹ Even in its official self-representation the EAEU traces its origins from the discussion of the Eurasian Union in the early 1990s, particularly the 1994 speech by Nazarbayev.² Similarly, the CSTO started with the Tashkent Treaty (within the framework of the CIS), and even the Eurasian Development Bank is the second attempt at creating an intergovernmental financial institution in the post-Soviet Eurasia after the Interstate Bank.³

Generally speaking, there are two ways of discussing the Eurasian regionalism in the context of historical legacies. On the one hand, we can look at the existing organizations and try to explain the specifics of their functioning by how they (or their members) are affected by the historical past. On the other hand, however, one can see the Eurasian organizations *themselves* as an example of ‘institutional’ legacies (LaPorte and Lussier 2011). The onset of the post-Soviet regionalism, as it will be discussed in what follows, coincides with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a widespread perception of Eurasian regional organizations for at least

¹ One should also probably mention the Common Economic Space agreement of 2003, which, however, was never implemented because of the Orange Revolution.

² <http://www.eaeunion.org/#about-history>

³ The list could probably be expanded by two organizations, which did not include Russia: the defunct Central Asian Cooperation Organization (merged with the EurAsEC in 2005) and the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, which, however, do not include Russia and thus differ from the organizations we discuss in a number of important respects.

one and a half decades after 1991 was that they serve as tools of ‘civilized divorce’, reducing the frictions associated with the dissolution of the USSR. This paper subscribes to the first perspective, which appears to be more interesting if one intends to put the Eurasian regionalism in the comparative regionalism perspective.

Within this first perspective, however, two further angles can be identified. On the one hand, we can look at how the *environment* in which the Eurasian regionalism develops is shaped by the Soviet legacies and how it changes the design and the outcomes of the regional organizations. Soviet legacies can, for instance, affect the governance of the member states of Eurasian regional organizations; the physical infrastructure and the type of economic interdependence between member states; the social ties and identities; and the perception of the Eurasian regionalism by the public and the elites. As a result, Eurasian regionalism could turn out different from what one would expect if one looked only at the contemporary predictors (like economic development or power asymmetry).⁴ On the other hand, we can use the arguments of the historical institutionalism (Pierson 1996): in this case we need to trace the evolution of the *organizations themselves*, where, through the path dependence logic, current state is shaped by the past decisions. We will consider both perspectives, paying a somewhat larger attention to the first one.

2. Historical legacies and environment for the post-Soviet regionalism

2.1. Economic ties and physical infrastructure

The existing research on regionalism considers the extent of economic and social ties between countries to be one of the major factors of development of regional projects. Deutsch’s (1957) arguments about ‘political community’ and Krugman’s (1991) idea of ‘natural’ regionalism

⁴ Note that these contemporary characteristics are of course also historically driven, which remains beyond the scope of this article.

highlight that regional organizations should be created by highly interconnected countries, and will in turn reinforce the ties between them. Eurasia is of course a prominent example of extremely high interdependencies created by the way Soviet economy was organized: Soviet central planners explicitly structured supply chains to go across the borders of individual Soviet republics, with plants in many cases having only a single supplier and a single customer. The equipment and machinery was developed in a way creating strong technological complementarities: plants were perfectly adjusted to a particular supply chain, so that exiting it and searching for new customers required large investments into equipment and was impractical (Libman and Obydenkova 2014). Furthermore, Soviet republics depend on each other in terms of the infrastructure necessary to access global markets: the pipeline system in Eurasia, for example, is almost unique as many pipelines cross borders of numerous countries – typically states try to avoid it because of the (justified) fear of hold-up problems and redistributive conflicts, but in the Soviet Union all republics were considered part of a single economic organism. From this point of view, the most intuitive effect of the ‘common past’ appears to be that countries of Eurasia should be interested in developing economic regionalism to manage the common infrastructure and to benefit from economic interdependencies.

However, the actual effects of economic interdependencies are more complex than that. Libman and Vinokurov (2012a, 2012b, 2017) and Vinokurov and Libman (2014), in particular, identify three important effects associated with the existence of interdependencies, which make the path of Eurasian regionalism strikingly different from that of other parts of the world (see, however, the critical discussion in Samokhvalov 2015 for the case of Ukraine).

- First, in combination with authoritarian nature of the states of Eurasia, interdependencies should increase fear of what Stone (2011) refers to as manipulation – the abuse of the bargaining power by individual countries – and rather encourage the states to attempt to limit their dependence on their neighbors (this mechanism was also analyzed within post-

Soviet context in Libman and Obydenkova 2013a). Hence, high interdependencies actually limited economic regionalism and not supported it.

- Second, under the conditions of very high interdependencies, Eurasian regionalism seems to flourish during the periods of economic crises and becomes less successful during the eras of economic growth (*crisis-driven integration*). This is because when the economy is growing, countries have larger ability to search for alternatives in terms of developing new economic ties: but during the phases of contraction they have no choice but to stick to each other.
- Third, the incentives of bureaucrats in an environment of high interdependencies also differ. While in a standard ‘coming together’ regional organization supranational bureaucracies benefit from expanding their agenda, in an already highly integrated space rents can be better extracted from disintegration (requiring creating substantial new and costly infrastructure). Bureaucrats are, as the public choice literature suggests, budget-maximizers, and in the post-Soviet context, unlike many other organizations, budget maximization is achieved through disintegration (associated with the creation of new infrastructure and assets) rather than integration (which simply means that the old infrastructure has to be maintained). Hence, the functionalist argument about spillovers does not apply to the Eurasian case.

These three observations seem to explain some of the features of the Eurasian economic regionalism. First, although there have been some examples of successful low-politics economic cooperation resulting from the inevitability to jointly manage certain types of infrastructure (railroads or electricity grids), they did not create spillover effects for the regional integration. Second, the main progress in Eurasian economic regionalism – the establishment of the Customs Union of 2010 – happened as a direct consequence of a major economic crisis (note though that not any crisis did encourage the progress of Eurasian regionalism). Third, in the same way, the Customs Union and the EAEU materialized when the level of economic

interdependence of the states of Eurasia was much lower than in the 1990s – paradoxically, decline of economic ties encouraged the success of economic ROs.

As a result, the extreme extent of the economic interdependencies in Eurasia, as well as the particular way how Soviet planners ‘integrated’ their economic space (involving creation of strong technological complementarities) does not necessarily encourage regionalism in Eurasia, but most certainly changes the way common factors of regional development affect the evolution of the Eurasian organizations. An interesting question is of course at which moment we can expect this ‘peculiarity’ of the Eurasian regionalism to disappear. The early observers of Eurasian region expected the economic between countries to vanish over time, as the new infrastructure is created and the companies establish new ties. However, in practice we observe the emergence of new, market-driven ties, which build upon the geographical proximity, common language and culture etc. Gigantic labor migration in Eurasia, for example, follows the laws of the market economy; and the expansion of Russian retail chains and telecom companies in Eurasia is also a product of the simple business logic (Libman 2015). These market-driven ties should be free from the problem of technological complementarities (because the standard logic of avoiding excessive dependence should apply, see Williamson 2002), but at the same time they keep countries highly interdependent, which could still trigger some of the effects described above. The fact that marketization of the states of Eurasia even now is imperfect and incomplete complicates matters substantially.

2.2. Social ties

The legacies of economic interdependence are not the only aspect Eurasian countries inherited from the Soviet (and, to some extent, the Russian Imperial) past: equally important are social ties between countries. Public opinion surveys show a very high share of people in most

Eurasian countries, who have relatives or friends in other states of the region;⁵ Russian language is still widely understood and, as a reaction to this, Eurasia still to some extent remains integrated in terms of culture (e.g., Russian-language books are sold in most Eurasian countries,⁶ Russian media are widely consumed beyond the Russian borders etc.).⁷ This cultural commonality seems to be going down though, partly because of the weakening position of the Russian language and partly because of the conscious effort of the national governments (Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity has been particularly active in this respect, imposing numerous legal restrictions).⁸

The effects of these cultural ties are, however, more heterogeneous than they appear to be. There are two possible causal channels one has to consider. On the one hand, common culture could lead to common identity, which is a very important prerequisite for the success of economic and security regionalism. Common identity is less important in authoritarian context, where governments pay less attention to the public opinion (Obydenkova and Libman 2017), but still should not be discarded entirely.⁹ The extent to which Eurasian countries share a

⁵ For surveys on social ties within the Eurasian space and the popularity of the Eurasian regional organizations see, for instance, the data of the Eurasian Monitor (<http://www.eurasiamonitor.org/rus/>) and the more recent EDB Integration Barometer (http://old.eabr.org/r/research/centre/projectsCII/integration_barometer/).

⁶ Ukraine, for example, has traditionally not only exhibited a very large Russian-language book market, but even developed a substantial illegal sector of reprinting Russian books, see <https://eksmo.ru/news/1919430/>

⁷ Notably, the Russian media itself became the subject of Western international influences, such as the European Union for example (Obydenkova 2008).

⁸ Nevertheless, as of 2017, Russian publishers, for example, estimated that about 50% of the Ukrainian book market still belongs to Russian-language publications, see <https://rns.online/it-and-media/V-Eksmo-aST-zayavili-o-fakticheskoi-potere-ukrainskogo-rinka-dlya-rossiiskih-knig-2017-09-08/>

⁹ Thus, in spite of the very widespread xenophobic sentiments, Russia does maintain a relatively liberal migration regime vis-à-vis Central Asia, which is used as a leverage ensuring Russian control over the region (see Shlapentokh 2013).

common identity is debatable. Many survey in Russia show that a big part of the population subscribes to a specific 'Eurasian' identity Russia has (Rose and Munro 2008). These results, however, should not be over-estimated: in many cases Russians refer to their 'Eurasian' identity not to point out the commonalities with the neighboring states of the Soviet Union (on the contrary, migrants from the post-Soviet states are rejected by the Russian society, see Schenck 2010; Reeve 2015; Round and Kuznetsova 2016),¹⁰ but because they want to point out their special 'civilizational' identity, making them different from Europe or Asia. Eurasian idea for many Russians is about Russian exceptionalism, not about Eurasian commonality. Surveys concerning the self-identification with nation states or with the broader Eurasian space show little evidence that peoples of Eurasia see themselves primarily as part of the common entity (Libman and Vinokurov 2012a). Nevertheless, social ties, combined with the Soviet nostalgia, make the idea of Eurasian regionalism extremely popular, partly explaining the attention paid to it by the post-Soviet governments.

On the other hand, however, precisely the fact that most Eurasian states emerged only recently out of the collapse of the Soviet Union makes it crucial for them to engage in the nation building (Kuzio 2001), which has a negative effect on the Eurasian regionalism. Instrumentally, elites of the Eurasian states may be concerned to develop widespread regional integration agreements because it could encourage minorities opposing their nation-building project or even directly aligning themselves to Russia (see Hale 2008). From the constructivist point of view, nation-building projects often rely on the use of the formal metropolitan power as the Other in Benedict Anderson's sense to constitute the new national identity; this makes advanced regional integration very difficult. The fact that nation-building projects individual states of

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, in Russia negative attitude towards migrants does not discriminate between 'foreigners' in the legal sense (i.e., migrants from Central Asia) and internal migrants from ethnic regions (like the Northern Caucasus): both are equally rejected by the xenophobic sentiments in Russia. This can again be seen as part of the Soviet legacy and is very different from the anti-migration sentiments in Europe.

Eurasia pursued mattered a lot for their attitude towards regionalism is acknowledged in the literature (Abdelal 2001). Furthermore, the existence of social and cultural ties, as well as historical memories of the past (which we will discuss in what follows) make Eurasian regionalism highly politicized (Libman and Vinokurov 2012a): it is much more difficult for the states of Eurasia to develop it as a purely technocratic project, which would face less public opposition. The EAEU is a case in point: in spite of significant effort to present it as a purely economic integration initiative, the organization is in many cases discussed from the point of view of its alleged political consequences. On the other side, Smith (2016) conjectures that the historical legacies also shape how Russia itself behaves in the post-Soviet space and undermine the success of regionalism. One can speculate that for the given level of economic interdependencies regional cooperation in Eurasia could have been more successful without the need to deal with the social and cultural legacies.

2.3. Historical memories and ideas

While discussing the historical legacies of the USSR, we need to make a further refinement in our arguments. On the one hand, to understand the current performance of the Eurasian regionalism, we can refer to the studies of the *Soviet legacies* in the narrow sense, i.e., to understand how institutions and practices of the past influence the contemporary institutions and practices. On the other hand, the functioning of the CIS could be influenced by the socially constructed image of the Soviet past – how Soviet era is perceived and interpreted by the elites and the population of the post-Soviet countries. Historians in this context frequently talk about *Soviet Union memories*. They could be (and frequently are) an inaccurate representation of the past, influenced by social myths and governmental propaganda; yet they also can provide an important explanation for the performance of the regional organizations (Gel'man 2017). The previous discussion focused on *legacies*; in what follows we proceed to *memories*.

From this point of view, two important factors should have mentioned. First, the widespread Soviet nostalgia (White 2010) existing in many countries of Eurasia is one of the factors encouraging the development of Eurasian regionalism, as already mentioned. In this respect, the positive perception of the Eurasian regionalism is to some extent an outcome of the predominance of the historical myths presenting a very positive picture of the Soviet past.¹¹ The same applies to the Russian elites. In a country where substantial portion of the elites (including president Putin himself) see the collapse of the Soviet Union as a clearly negative phenomenon (Putin's reference to the collapse of the USSR as a 'geopolitical catastrophe'¹² is well known), Eurasian regionalism as the last remaining institution bringing the broad group of post-Soviet countries together is perceived as worth saving and maintaining, in spite of the apparent lack of its effects for economic cooperation.

At the same time, second, precisely the fact that the Eurasian regionalism is frequently viewed through the lense of the Soviet nostalgia, explains that political capture of the integration agenda by the conservative forces, with a very specific point of view on how Eurasian regionalism has to be developed. In Russia, it has been the Communist opposition, which has been particularly vocal in supporting Eurasian regionalism for many years (although of course, the incumbent governments under Yeltsin and Putin also paid a lot of attention to the topic). One of the key proponents of the Eurasian regionalism in Russia, Sergey Glaz'yev, is also known for his support of dirigist economic policies (Aslund 2013). Darden (2009) generally shows that there is a link between the acceptance of Eurasian regionalism and the non-liberal economic ideologies. In turn, it implies that supporters of more liberal economic reforms are typically very skeptical about the Eurasian regionalism and most certainly do not

¹¹ This is of course not to say that there are no tangible economic benefits of the Eurasian regionalism – of course, they are present, but it is not clear whether the public perception is driven by these tangible effects or by the Soviet nostalgia.

¹² <https://ria.ru/accents/20160819/1474769420.html>

dominate the discussion: while there are also rational reasons to be skeptical about it, one can only speculate how the attitude of the liberal reformers towards Eurasian integration would if the topic were not ‘hijacked’ by their conservative opponents. At the extreme, for a certain period, Russian epistemic communities doing research on Eurasian regionalism were almost entirely dominated by the researchers, who in the past focused on the COMECON. This is probably one of the explanations why Eurasian regionalism has a strong inclination to take the shape of a protectionist regional alliance.¹³ In Russia, where the conservative forces traditionally have a very limited impact on the economic policies, it generally reduces the de-facto support of regionalism from the side of decision-makers in the government.¹⁴

2.4. Governance

Finally, we also need to acknowledge the traditional arguments of the legacy of the Soviet regime typically highlighted in the literature – the prevalence of inefficient institutions, corrupt bureaucracies and authoritarian regimes (Libman and Obydenkova 2013b; 2015; Obydenkova and Libman 2015). Numerous studies have shown that various aspects of Soviet legacies could have had a negative influence on democratization and the quality of governance.¹⁵ Arguably, it is not always possible to separate these legacies and the more temporary distant legacies (e.g., that of the Tsarist empire) in this respect (Pop-Eleches 2007); Lankina et al. (2016), however, even suggest that the Soviet regime was able to subvert and undermine the positive effects of

¹³ Of course, this is not the only explanation: rational choice rent-seeking argument is of crucial, and most certainly higher importance in this respect. Note furthermore that the perception of the Eurasian regionalism is frequently influenced by the very specific arguments of the ‘Soviet school of integration research’, which do not always fit the current empirical and theoretical evidence, see Ushkalova 2017.

¹⁴ Even the changes in the Russian elites after Crimean crisis did not seem to have changed it so far.

¹⁵ Admittedly, historical legacies is only one of the numerous factors that impacted post-Soviet democratization at both national and subnational levels along with, for example, external and international triggers (Lankina et. al 2016b; Obydenkova 2012; Obydenkova and Libman 2012).

the accumulation of human capital during the Tsarist era to some extent. For us, the most important issue is that these legacies could have profound impact on the performance of regional organization in Eurasia.

Again, it is possible to distinguish two types of effects. On the one hand, as Mansfield et al. (2002) convincingly show, authoritarianism is generally speaking negatively affecting the ability of countries to pursue economic integration. There are two aspects to this problem. On the one hand, democracies have specific incentives to cooperate in economic sphere, which non-democracies lack. On the other hand, non-democracies have particular problems with both providing credible commitments and delegating power, which of course limits the perspectives of regional integration. The fact that authoritarianism contributed to the poor performance of economic regionalism in Eurasia is well acknowledged in the literature (Libman and Vinokurov 2012a); thus, again, historical legacies limit the perspectives of regional integration, but through a different channel (associated with domestic politics). Similarly, high national corruption and poor bureaucratic quality are also a problem for implementation of regional agreements (Gray 2014) and these factors affect public opinion and trust to regional organizations (Obydenkova and Arpino 2017). Though in Eurasia one can argue that in Eurasia this factor played a somewhat smaller role. On the other hand, domestic political institutions also have an effect on the type of regionalism and the functions regional organizations perform. Söderbaum (2004) provides a detailed account of various non-traditional functions regional organizations have in Africa; in Eurasia, similarly, the types of political systems of the member states should have affected the design of regionalism (Obydenkova and Libman 2017).

Finally, poor quality of governance at the national level certainly affects how international institutions function (which are ultimately populated by the representatives of the same bureaucracies, which exist at the national level). Unfortunately, research on the international bureaucracy of the Eurasian organizations is very limited, so our conclusion here is speculative: but it represents a very promising avenue for future investigations.

3. Historical institutionalism perspective

Finally, we proceed to the alternative view on the historical legacies and their role in the development of the Eurasian regionalism – that one can derive from the historical institutionalism perspective. From this point of view, we need to trace the development of the Eurasian organizations and discuss how the specifics of their evolution affects the current outcomes. The role of this type of path dependencies is particularly visible in case of the CIS. This organization, of all the structures created in Eurasia, seems to be the least linked to a clear and well-thought rational design. On the contrary, the CIS comes into existence during the collapse of the USSR (more precisely, its establishment precedes the formal decision of the dissolution of the USSR), with purpose, specific structures and objectives originally unknown even to its members unsure as to how extensive economic and political ties between countries will remain after independence. The institutions of the CIS are partly taken over from the Soviet bureaucracy (thus, the Soviet army functions for about a year as the CIS Joint Forces; the use of the common (still Soviet) currency creates a de-facto currency union of the ‘ruble zone’ without any clear or well-functioning institutions). The Interrepublican Economic Committee, which was created in September 1991 as the highest economic body of the USSR, becomes the Interstate Economic Committee in October 1991 with the Economic Community Treaty,¹⁶ later is legally dissolved, but then revived as the highest body of the Economic Union of the CIS created in 1994.

¹⁶ This treaty is yet another example of how difficult it is to trace the beginnings of the Eurasian regionalism. The agreement is signed by a number of Soviet republics with the intention to keep a common economic space between them; while some of these republics intend to be part of the USSR, others already treat themselves as independent – but the agreement is established between them ‘regardless of their current status’, which makes it a unique treaty combining both elements of a within-country agreement between provinces of the federation (it is also signed by the Soviet Union president) and an international treaty.

This complexity is one of the reasons why the CIS' mandate and design combine numerous partly contradicting elements. On the one hand, the organization has an extremely broad mandate, covering economic, political and social affairs, and very ambitious goals. On the other hand, its governance structures are purely intergovernmental (reflecting the position Soviet republics gained after August 1991) and, similarly to how negotiations about the destiny of the USSR were conducted, all members keep an opting out right from any agreement signed within the organizations. This 'opting out' rule can be seen as an explanation why the post-Soviet regionalism so early exhibited the spaghetti-bowl proliferation of numerous organizations and agreements: this de-facto happened already within the scope of the CIS. The boundaries between these organizations also remained blurry: thus, the CIS Economic Court for almost a decade functioned as a Court of the Eurasian Economic Community; the Customs Union was between 2010 and 2014 legally part of the EurAsEC, and the CSTO was a direct continuation of the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS. Only gradually do the Eurasian organizations develop a more narrow and focused agenda and a better structured set of governing bodies (with the EAEU being the last step in this evolution).

Furthermore, the Soviet legacy of the Eurasian regionalism contributed to yet another feature: very high level of non-compliance of the countries with the agreements they signed. Again, this to some extent started already in the late 1980s-early 1990s, when the post-Soviet regionalism gradually emerged out of negotiations about the future of the USSR. During that era the speed of historical changes frequently exceeded that with which agreements were drafted. Thus, the Union of Sovereign States – the new incarnation of the USSR under negotiation in 1991 – became obsolete even before the agreement was signed with the August coup attempt. The Payment Union of the CIS created to facilitate transactions between member states in early 1990s, also soon became irrelevant because the CIS countries introduced the free convertibility of their currencies. As a result, countries often signed the agreements without any real intention to implement them, also understanding that the unpredictable future contingencies

make any long-term plans irrelevant. Again, only the Customs Union of 2010 seems to break this tradition. But even the EAEU treaty's numerous integration projects could have established by the countries without a clear intent to implement them – assuming that over the course of a decade (the planned period of implementation of this agreements) external shocks and internal changes in the member states will make them irrelevant. In short, the post-Soviet regionalism was from the very beginning perceived as one where implementation was not mandatory, and this perception persisted over two decades. This, in turn, affected yet another important feature of the Eurasian regionalism – the extreme skepticism of the member states (at all levels: elites, the general public and the experts) towards the implementation of the agreements. This is one of the reasons why the Customs Union came as a surprise to most observers: it became almost standard to expect the Eurasian countries to sign the agreements and later not implement them.

To sum up, similarly to other regional organizations, the development of the Eurasian regionalism is of course path dependent: decisions made at a particular point of time affect how organizations evolves in the long run. For Eurasia, it means that the conditions under which the first regional agreement – the CIS – was conceived – had a strong impact on the design of the Eurasian regionalism, its performance and its perception by the general public, which seems to have started to vanish only with the Customs Union of 2010.

4. Conclusion

Table 1 summarizes the main arguments made in this paper. It shows that there are multiple historical legacies of the Soviet era, which affect the development of the Eurasian regionalism. In some cases, historical legacies encourage the Eurasian integration; in others, on the contrary, they lead to negative outcomes (note that 'negative' and 'positive' here refers to whether the regional organizations progress or not and not to their effects on the economies and societies of their member states). Importantly, historical legacies explain why Eurasian regionalism reacts differently on external characteristics (like economic crises) or does not exhibit features

predicted by some of the established theories of regionalism (like functionalist spillovers). Historical legacies therefore are interesting for us not only as *predictors* of the performance of the Eurasian regionalism, but, possibly even more importantly, as *moderators* of the effect theory otherwise predicts.

Certainly, regional organizations in Eurasia are affected by the legacy factor to a different extent. For example, the organizations, which do not include Russia (Central Asian regionalism and GUAM) do not seem to exhibit some of the features we described. Russian presence, for instance, is very important for the organization of governance bodies of the Eurasian regionalism, of the perception of the organizations by the public etc. But even for these organizations some of the legacy effects we described are clearly present (thus, the lack of functionalist spillovers was as visible in the Russia-centric organizations as in the Central Asian regionalism). An interesting question, certainly, is whether one needs to expect the legacy effect to dissipate over time. Some of the observations we made in this paper allude that this dissipation is happening, but again, a key conclusion of the legacy research is that the effects are can often be long lasting.

Table 1: Soviet legacies and Eurasian regionalism

Type of legacy	Effect
<i>External environment</i>	
Economic interdependence and technological complementarities	Demand for regionalism to manage common infrastructure → positive effect Concerns of excessive dependence from foreign partners (especially Russia) → negative effect Incentives of bureaucrats and lack of functionalist spillovers → negative effect Crisis-driven integration → positive effects during economic crises
Social ties	Common identity and demand for regionalism to maintain social ties → positive effect Clash with nation-building projects and concerns about empowering pro-Russian minorities → negative effects
Idealized historical memories of the USSR	Soviet nostalgia → positive effect Hijacking of integration agenda by the conservative forces → negative effect
Poor quality of governance at the member-states level	Poor quality of governance → negative effect
<i>Historical institutionalism</i>	Emergence during the collapse of the USSR → broad scope, intergovernmental design, spaghetti-bowl of different agreements, low credibility of commitments, low trust of the government

Finally, not all factors described in this paper are fully unique for the Eurasian regionalism. Some of them may be present in other regional organizations created by countries, which in the past belonged to a single political entity (e.g., post-colonial regional organizations). Others, however, have to do with the organization of the Soviet economy (organization of production chains and technological complementarities), governance or ideology. In any case, historical legacies play a crucial role in explaining the path of the Eurasian regionalism and, as such, have to be taken into account by researchers dealing with this topic.

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