

CENTRAL ASIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK
OF THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

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Arturo Oropeza García and Nikolay Shkolyar (eds.), *Central Asia within the Framework of the Eurasian Economic Union*. Mexico City, National Autonomous University of Mexico, 2021. pp. 358.

The Central Asian region and the topic Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), officially established in 2015 by Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, generally receive relatively little scholarly attention in academia. However, studies related to this region have acquired an additional interest in recent years in connection with China's pivot to Eurasia and more recently with the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war in February 2022. This book attempts to shed light on the developments and geo-economic processes in the Central Asian region over the last 2-3 decades within the framework of Eurasian integration.

The geographic scope of the book is not limited to the actual geographic boundaries of neither Central Asia nor the EAEU, but rather encompasses the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) along with important neighboring regional powers such as Russia and China. It could be said that the book makes a special focus on the economic integration of Central Asia within the context of what is commonly known as the Eurasian Heartland.

The book is rather extensive and consists of 14 sections, grouped into 3 large chapters, analyzing Central Asia within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union from different perspectives. The first chapter, entitled *Central Asia and the Eurasian Economic Union. A Regional Vision*, can be viewed as the main part, where the authors provide extensive in-depth analyses attempting to define the major economic processes going on in the region putting Central Asia into the geoeconomic context of Eurasia. The author attempt to decipher the economic reasons alongside the climate reasons so we can effectively advocate for

The second chapter is called *Central Asia and the Economic Union Eurasian. A Latin American Vision* and provide a vision of Central Asia and EAEU from various perspectives in a greater global context. The authors make interesting conclusions by presenting the EAEU as an open cooperation framework that is not geographically tied to the Euriasna region, but rather as an initiative aiming

to establish a multipolar world by representing and defending the interests of non-western regional powers and developing countries. Within this context, the authors come up with global potentially lucrative cooperation schemes between the EAEU vs BRICS, Latin America and the Caribbean region.

The third chapter *Legal framework of the Economic Union Eurasian* explains in detail the legal pillars on which the EAEU stands. The chapter presents to readers a fairly broad historical background not only of the EAEU but Eurasian integration in general. Basically, one of the core ideas transmitted by the book in this chapter is that the EAEU came into its current state as an equilibrium of efforts to reestablish new diplomacy between the former Soviet states and gain excess to international markets. The narrative of the legal basis of the Eurasian integration also emphasizes that the EAEU is not a strictly regional integrational organization and underlines that it offers various cooperation schemes to other countries as well.

It is worth mentioning that the book makes heavy use of statistical data to support statements. This is especially true for the first three chapters of Part I of the book, where the authors use good quality statistical data from reliable sources to describe and evaluate the economic processes and trade relations of the EAEU member-states within themselves and other countries. The book provides a good understanding of the legal nature of the international processes in the former Soviet Union providing a coherent timeline of the key events. However, one of the most interesting strengths of the book is that it reveals much of the opportunities for development and untapped potential that integration can yield to Central Asian states as well as all other countries of the Eurasian Heartland. In this light, the book could be useful for the countries of the region in exploring the ways of gaining potential benefits from integration beyond Russia's eminent economic decline. In particular, by studying the economies and trade structure of Latin American countries and countries of Central Eurasia the authors of the book provide a useful insight into fields of potentially lucrative economic cooperation and ways to deliver goods from landlocked areas to seaports.

It should be noted though that the book possesses certain weaknesses as well that limit the overall scholarly significance of the book to some extent. First of all, the book is more focused on Russia and China, while many issues directly related to Central Asian states largely remain, which makes the title somehow inaccurate. Secondly, the authors of the book rely heavily on primary official statistics rather than resorting to critical analysis of data in making statements and conclusions. At certain points, the authors evaluate the performance of the EAEU without comparing it to other regional integrational initiatives. For instance, in the first three sections of the chapter, the authors rely very much on official statistical data reports from state organizations that usually try to create a positive image of the EAEU. Therefore at certain points, the authors seem to replicate the official state rhetoric of the EAEU member-states regarding the efficiency of the Eurasian integration.

In conclusion, the book can be perceived as an attempt to model the development of the Eurasian integration. Although many aspects of the book regarding Russia became irrelevant after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the book is most useful for understanding the current geoeconomic realm of Central Asia as well as the Eurasian Heartland. The book provides good insight into the trade relations and economic mechanisms of regional cooperation

in Central Asia and can be recommended to scholars, especially Latin American scholars, specializing in regional studies and seeking to enrich their knowledge about Central Asia.