

## The Ethno-Cultural Concept of Classical Eurasianism

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze of Eurasianism, which began during the Russian scientific and philosophical emigration and has generated sharp discussion over the last century. Within the framework of Eurasianism, extensive research has been conducted on a wide range of interrelated topics, much of whose theoretical and practical significance is just beginning to be realized. The main objective of the article is the identification of various aspects of the national question, and its many issues which form the basis of Eurasian ethnosociology. Eurasianism has re-examined, among other issues, the inequality of national communities and the ways to eliminate this inequality, the conditions for fruitful interaction between ethnic groups, the nature of nationalism, and many more. Eurasianists have proposed a systemic and holistic approach to the national question, as an alternative to the prevailing ideas of today and, in the authors' opinion, an appropriate heuristic, especially given the deepening of many national problems in the modern world.

### KEYWORDS

Eurasianism, the national question, nationalism, ethnosociology, common values

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 April 2016  
Revised 17 May 2016  
Accepted 28 May 2016

## Introduction

The focus of scientists and policymakers today is the national question, in all of its facets: geopolitical (international and interethnic conflict, extremism); sociocultural (intercultural communication, polyculturalism and multiculturalism); cultural-philosophical and socio-philosophical (rules of the genesis, development, and interaction of nations, the ideological basis of national identity, the ideological essence of nationalism, etc.). In our view, the solution can be a heuristic one, based on the theoretical and methodological framework of the Eurasian doctrine, which emerged among the Russian scientists and philosophers who emigrated from Russia in the 1920s. The impetus for the scholarly study of Eurasia was a new attempt to take the historical experience of the Russian revolution and civil war into account, understand the historical path of Russia and identify the ways of national revival, not through the ideological dogma, but through the achievements of science and the humanities. Leading Eurasianists included prominent Russian scholars: linguist and cultural scholar N. S. Trubetskoy (1995); geographer and economist P. N. Savitsky (1997); historian G. V. Vernadsky (1997); philosopher and jurist N. N. Alekseev (1998) and a host of other visible actors in the Russian scientific and

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philosophical communities. The Eurasianists also had their centers in the East, in Harbin. The Eurasianists published books, newspapers and magazines, and gave lecture series devoted to Eurasian issues. The national question occupied an important place in the heritage of the Eurasians, and many of the results obtained by the scientists in this direction, are very relevant today (Bahtin, 2013).

### Literature review

The literature on Eurasianism is very diverse. In the historiography of Eurasianism there are several stages. The first period includes the works of the founders of Eurasianism, as well as their supporters and opponents (Berdyayev, 1925; Florovskiy, 1998) etc.

Many researches connect the beginning of the second period with 1960s when it drew attention of the western authors. Here first of all it should be noted the monograph about Eurasianism of the German researcher O. Böss (1961), articles and books of the American historian of Russian origin N. V. Riasanovsky (1964), works of R. S. Williams (1972), M. Bassin (1991), etc.

A new period of interest in Eurasianism is largely due to the perestroika when the works of Eurasians and neoeurasians were republished; researches by A. S. Panarin (2002), S. S. Horuzhiy (1994) were issued; among the western researchers it is possible to mention here works of Ch. Halperin (1982), A. N. Liberman (1990), M. Laruelle (2006) and many others.

The Eurasianists considered themselves not so much a political movement, although they waged intense debates with the representatives of the Orthodox-monarchist and liberal democratic emigrant societies, rather than monastic order. They considered their task was to formulate the position of the new synthetic outlook for Russia, which would reconcile “white” and “red” parties, materialists and idealists, people of different faiths and cultural orientations after the collapse of the Bolshevik regime. Moreover, the Eurasianists trained emigrant youth according to the appropriate political position. They were sure that young people returning to Russia would form the core of a strong patriotic spirit of the post-Soviet political elite. Returning to their homeland, many of them paid with their lives for their political naivety.

The revival of Eurasianism began only with the third - "perestroika" - a wave of Eurasianism in the end of the 80s of the 20th century in Russia. L. N. Gumilev (1990), an outstanding Russian historian and ethnologist became a student of P. N. Savitsky (1997). In the post-Soviet period the idea of Eurasianism was developed by a well-known political scientist and philosopher A. S. Panarin (2002). Today, these positions are taken by many Russian writers and lawyers, culture researchers and philosophers, historians and political scientists.

The legacy of the Eurasianists was non-uniform. Some thinkers subsequently left the Eurasianist camp, and some joined its critics, like theologian G. V. Florovskiy (1998). The ideological evolution of the movement's founders was also complicated. For example, N. N. Alekseev (1998) substantially

changed his views on the government and politics after the war; P. N. Savitsky (1997) was able to personally experience the error of many statist constructions of the 1920s. Eurasianism was formed as a synthesized doctrine - a common ideological ground on which a variety of topics developed.

Eurasianism manages to combine the study and methodologies of the humanities and natural sciences, and the political, economic and spiritual aspects of the existence of people in history. This allows us to conclude that Eurasianism is not a relic of the archives, but an effective system of profound ideas.

The National Questions is a major issue in ethnosociology. It can be understood as a question of inequality between ethnic communities and ways to eliminate this inequality. Classical ethnosociology sought a solution to this problem through the unification and homogenization of the world (e.g., in the "melting pot" of nations).

Proceeding from this position many western authors estimated the Eurasians' approach as "nationalistic" and "imperial", which contradicts the universalist tendencies of the modern world, and won't even be coordinated with "the Russian idea" and with the Russian history. O. Böss emphasized that "... the Byzantine and Russian-orthodox East acts as branch of the West European culture" (Böss, 1961). N. V. Riasanovsky (1964) and Ch. Halperin (1982) adhered to a close idea. Today these positions are maintained by M. Laruelle. "Eurasianist ideology... tries to legitimize the empire by arguing the existence of a natural (geographical, historical, religious, ethnic, etc.) entity called Eurasia." (Laruelle, 2006). Of course Eurasianists have an interest in the issues related to the past and future of Russia - a state that has always been multi-ethnic and existed as an empire. But for them, the very concept of imperialism is connected with the external form of coexisting peoples, and it can be based on different and even opposing spiritual principles, and therefore carries a wholly different meaning.

It is indicative that even N. A. Berdyaev, who in many respects positively estimated the Eurasianists doctrine, reproached Eurasianists for narrow nationalism and for opposition to Eurasian and western (Romance-Germanic) cultures: «Modern eurasianism is hostile to any universalism, it imagines the Euroasian cultural and historical type as static and closed. Eurasianists want to remain the nationalists isolated from Europe and hostile to Europe... Eurasianists are unfaithful to the Russian idea, they break off with the best traditions of our religious-national thought» (Berdyaev, 1925). Today criticism of Eurasianism by Russian authors is conducted with two opposing positions: on the one hand, with the religious and nationalist, on the other hand - with Westernizing positions.

### **Aim of the Study**

The main objective of the article is the identification of various aspects of the national question, and its many issues which form the basis of Eurasian ethnosociology.

## Research questions

What is Eurasianism?

## Method

In the article the *civilization* scientific approach, followed by the Eurasianists themselves is used. In this approach national (or ethnic) identity always bears the imprint of civilization itself, because it is carried out in the framework of the civilization (conscious or unconscious) identification. Additionally, in the article the *method of comparative studies* is applied, since the mechanisms of true or false national identity can only be understood in comparison with the other forms and mechanisms of national identity. This principle of "comparative mirror" is especially useful, when we compare the processes of national self-consciousness in Western and Eurasian cultural traditions.

## Data, Analysis, and Results

According to the Eurasianists, the special cultural and geographical world is that Eurasia holds, having a unique and specific spiritual and practical orientation for many ethnic groups. Therefore, the coexistence of the peoples within it may be more fruitful for each ethnic group than an isolated geopolitical existence would be. The general principles of legal and civic life in Eurasianist society were defined by N. N. Alekseev, in his concept of the "State of Truth." He later used the phrase "government guarantee," but everywhere emphasized the main point: the existence of universal moral foundations of state and legal life, guaranteeing the protection of the rights and dignity of its citizens. In fact, the interpretation and application of any law to one's life depends on the values and the intentions behind the actions of each individual. "We must always remember that there have existed states that called themselves Republics and still gave despotic power to a single tyrant...The quality of a government does not depend on the outside forms or names, but on the internal relationships between the governed and the ruling party" (Alekseev, 1998). Individual rights, like the rights of ethnic groups, are an abstraction whose requirements are specific and substantive. And what should be guaranteed first, are not secondary rights (to property, to freedom of speech, etc.), but primary rights: to work, to education, to the preservation of individual and national dignity. These depend little on the form of government: it is well known (and confirmed by Russian legislation of past centuries) that in the Russian Empire, non-Russian ethnic groups were guaranteed very broad rights. In practice, they were often violated, but this again depended on the morality of individual officials.

One of the leading representatives of the Eurasianism who developed the national question deeply in his works was N. S. Trubetskoy. In the first chapter of his work "Europe and humanity" N. S. Trubetskoy gives an overview of different interpretations of the national question by European authors. He writes: "Items that can take every European in relation to the national question are quite numerous, but they are all located between the two extremes: chauvinism and cosmopolitanism. Every nationalism is something like a

synthesis of the elements of chauvinism and cosmopolitanism, the experience of reconciling these two opposites" (Trubetskoy, 1995).

N. S. Trubetskoy stresses that to European chauvinism and cosmopolitanism as opposites. For his part, he argues that the distinction between chauvinism and cosmopolitanism is not in principle, but in degree. Chauvinism and cosmopolitanism have a common base which is concluded in the psychology of self-centeredness meaning the propensity to see the top of the standard of human development in your ethnic group. It is the psychology of self-centeredness, according to N. S. Trubetskoy, a based evolutionary model of world-historical process. It is considered that the development of the human race is in a straight line, and some peoples stop at different positions of the line. Some are behind, while others are able to move on. "As a result, looking round the overall picture of the existing humanity, we can see the whole evolution, because at every step of the path traveled by mankind, there is any stuck nation "stamping on the spot" (Trubetskoy, 1995.). N. S. Trubetskoy assesses self-centeredness as prejudice, offers once and for all to banish the principle of gradation of peoples and cultures from science. Instead, he offers to follow the principle of equivalence and qualitative incommensurability of all cultures and peoples of the world.

One of the Eurasianists' most important conclusions, methodologically and practically, about the need for a broad intercultural and interethnic interaction between the Eurasian peoples, was their openness to each other. The development of national potential depends directly on the development of relations with other ethnic peoples. In the "periodic system of ethno-social communities" each element has its place and is characterized by specific traits. At the disposal of ethno-territorial groups deserted landscape takes another group, which is equivalent to the complex ethno-differential signs withdrawn and replaces it with a network of international relations. In this way, evolutionary changes are made in ethnosphere. This model can be named a relational-substrate and resists substantial and constructivist models of ethnicity.

Eurasianists discourse on the national self-knowledge has become extremely important for Eurasian ethno-sociology. Its prerequisite, according to Trubetskoy (1995), is the fulfillment of the two commandments: "Know thyself," and "Be yourself." In achieving self-actualization, through a foundation of self-knowledge, an individual (or people) will never come into self-conflict. There are diverse forms of self-knowledge, which may be based on reflection, as well as intuition. A nation lives for centuries, whereby self-knowledge is constantly evolving. At the same time, Trubetskoy believes *nationalism* is a form of self-knowledge for a nation. We should note here that the term "nationalism" at that time did not have the negative connotations that it holds today. Trubetskoy considered true and morally just only that nationalism which is imbued with the desire to be oneself. True nationalism is fundamentally peaceful and tolerant towards other nations, and borrowing from other nations can be useful for national culture and foster the development of national identity, or it can be destructive.

In his work “On True and False Nationalism,” Trubetskoy classifies the varieties of destructive nationalism. He identifies *militant chauvinism*, exalting the language and culture of one’s own nation and forcibly imposing them upon other peoples; *cultural conservatism*, “which artificially defines national identity by some previously established cultural values or a way of life, and does not allow them to change” (Trubetskoy, 1995) as well as *state nationalism*, in which the goal is establishing a national state by any means. “However, one must always remember,” warns Trubetskoy, “that this desire is justified when it arises in the name of a unique national culture, whereas state independence as an end in itself, is meaningless. Meanwhile, for state nationalists, state independence...becomes an end in itself. In fact, it is in service of this goal, that a unique national culture is sacrificed” (Trubetskoy, 1995).

As an ideological alternative, Trubetskoy (1995) introduces the concept of “pan-Eurasian nationalism”. In our view, this term is rather unfortunate; but remember that Trubetskoy considered “nationalism” as a neutral term. Pan-Eurasian nationalism, according to Trubetskoy, recognizes the national identity of all Eurasian ethnic groups, but also acknowledges the existence of *common values* that unite people across national, cultural, and religious differences. It is important that these values are not imposed upon groups from the outside, but organically sprout from the depths of the common history and cultures of Eurasia, uniquely refracted in each ethnic group. The supra-national does not deny the national, but rather, gives it a dimension that is not only Eurasian, but universal. For example, during the resettlement of the Russian Old Believers to Altai, they brought their culture and farming skills into the local population, and from the Altaians, in turn, borrowed useful hunting skills and adopted many local customs. This cross-cultural fusion occurred at a deeper level, as well, with the formation of unified cultural values. For example, Mount Belukha and the Katun’ River were considered sacred by Russians as well as by Altaians. The Old Believers were baptized in the Katun’ as in the waters of Jordan; and through the famous Altai Orthodox Spiritual Mission, the Altaians took on a national writing tradition.

In his controversy with the Ukrainian scientists D. I. Doroshenko infected with Ukrainian nationalism, N. S. Trubetskoy was far from denying the originality of Ukrainian culture. Moreover, it is in the infringement of the Ukrainian national feeling made by the tsarist autocracy N. S. Trubetskoy discerned the origins of aggressive Ukrainian nationalism that erupted during the Civil War. Words of the great Eurasianist are able to clear up a lot of what happens in Ukraine today. “In the so-called Great Ukraine, - wrote N. S. Trubetskoy, - all-Russian consciousness was still inherent by the vast majority of the intelligentsia, but the specific Ukrainian consciousness was flawed in many minds” (Trubetskoy, 1995).

After “perestroika”, which resulted in the USSR collapse, the pendulum in Ukraine has swung sharply in the direction of Ukrainian nationalism. Here, of course, we must always take into account that the Western Ukraine is forever restless frontier of Eurasia, where even since the time of Daniel Galitsky the European vector of the cultural and political orientation, often in the most

marginal forms has existed. However, it is in the Western Ukraine in the second half of the 16th century, fleeing the tyranny of Ivan the Terrible Andrei Kurbsky and hesychast Artemy organized the first ideological and cultural outpost of the Orthodox opposition to Jesuit Catholic expansion of the West (Farmer, 2012). And that is Ukrainian cultural roots (Kiev-Mohyla Academy) supplied Moscow scientists of the later 17th century. Let us remember that in Lviv the great Russian educator Ivan Fyodorov was buried.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Summarizing all the above, it should be emphasized that the national question has not only theoretical but also practical meaning. It plays the main role in the geopolitical and social forecasts. It's known that Samuel Huntington believed that the main lines of conflict in modern times ran between nations, and in the future, the dominant factor in world politics will be the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996). Therefore today we see that Eurasianists were right, denying universalism. On the one hand, it erupted into the tendency of globalization and unification, having threatened identity of cultures. On the other hand, it is resisted by a counter tendency about which Huntington writes. As a result, the Eurasians are right that the overcome these destructive tendencies and conflicts can only be based on the binder ideological core of values - as the common ground on which grow the diverse cultural "flowers". But such general ideological and valuable kernel can't be imposed from the outside. Today there are all prerequisites for the formation of a new world view, as a result of synthesis of humanitarian and natural sciences and their philosophical understanding. Separate fragments of this new world view are already created in various researches, and they give an opportunity to see a different perspective on the cultural-historical process, and the national question. But this subject is beyond the theme of our article.

### Implications and Recommendations

1) The Eurasian geopolitical system, political and legal, social, economic and ethno-cultural ideas were subsequently confirmed by many socio-historical processes and events. Therefore, we can assume that it has proven its heuristic and relevant character.

2) The basic ideas and values of the Eurasian world today are supported by many people, despite the Western-oriented vector of Russia's development in recent decades. It means that they are rooted in the Russian mentality.

3) The Eurasian world is not opposed to the identity of national ideas (Russian, Mongolian, Kazakh or Ukrainian), any real form of ethnic (Slavic, Turkic and Finno-Ugrian), religious (Islamic, Christian or Buddhist) or political associations (such as the SCO or the EAEC), but gives them a solid foundation of values and ideological orientation, prevents escalation of nationalist, ethnocentric, religious fanatic or imperial sentiments.

The Eurasianists have developed and advanced a systematic and holistic approach to the national question that is clearly an alternative to the dominant ideas of today. But it begs attention when the very idea of the social contract of

our time reveals its limitations, as evidenced by the growth of international conflicts. The idea of the unity of Eurasia, in its national diversity, is the best antidote to the dangerous extremes that mutually fuel each other: nationalism and cosmopolitanism, exaggerated centralism and regional separatism.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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