

PUTIN'S 'EURASIAN UNION': RUSSIA'S INTEGRATION PROJECT AND POLICIES ON POST-SOVIET SPACE

This paper assesses the rationale behind and the potential of the 'Eurasian Union' project that is being promoted by Vladimir Putin. The author suggests that the project is connected with Russia's tug of war with the European Union (EU) regarding the common neighbourhood as well as its attempts to secure a sphere of influence in Central Asia in order to counteract the perceived growing Chinese threat. Russia's policies towards Belarus and Ukraine are evaluated as both countries are particularly relevant in assuring the successful implementation of the project. Finally, the author asserts that Russia's activism threatens the EU as it creates dividing lines between proponents of an interests-based policy towards Russia and those that consider values to be equally relevant.

Key words: Eurasian Union, Russia, European Union (EU), European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Belarus, Ukraine

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On 4 October 2011, in an article in *Izvestia*, Russia's then prime minister Vladimir Putin laid out what is likely to be a founding stone of Russia's policies for his possible next two terms in office, that is, until 2024. The article, as the heading states, outlines a 'new integration project for Eurasia' and envisages the creation of a 'Eurasian Union' by 2015.¹ The project thus extends ideas which the Russian premier had advanced in Minsk on 12 May 2011, at meeting of Interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) which brings together Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In reference to the Customs Union forged between three members of EurAsEC, that is, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Putin said that an agreement should be signed on the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union. Discussions should start on a draft declaration that would lay out the principles on which the economic union should be based. 'By 1 January 2013', he demanded, 'all preparations for the signing of the agreement on Eurasian Economic Union must be accomplished.' He predicted that the level of integration between the economies of the member states of the new union would be higher than

in EurAsEC. 'Starting 1 January 2012, a common market [Single Economic Space – SES] with unified legislation, free movement of capital, goods, services and labour force should start working [under the EurAsEC] -- and in future its economic policy in key spheres will also be coordinated.'²

These ideas were spelled out and expanded in his *Izvestia* article. On the basis of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space, 'a full-fledged economic union should be created', he wrote, and with this, with the foundation of the Eurasian Union, 'we are setting ourselves an ambitious goal, to reach a next and higher level of integration [...] a qualitatively higher level of integration'. The membership of the Customs Union and the SES 'should gradually be expanded by the full inclusion of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan'. The Eurasian Union, like the European Union to which Putin referred several times in his article, would rest on four pillars. Not only goods, capital and labor would be able to move freely in the union but economic and monetary policy of its member states would be coordinated. Portions of

