Valdai Discussion Club Report

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Toward the Great Ocean – 6: People, History, Ideology, Education

Rediscovering the Identity

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This report was prepared in an unusual way, unlike previous reports. Rather than being written in Moscow, it is the result of close collaboration with academics and public figures in the Russian Far East. Its leading contributor, Prof. Leonid Blyakher of Pacific National University, wrote it jointly with his Moscow colleagues. The draft version of the report underwent discussion according to the rules of the situational analysis by orientalists, international relations experts, and philosophers from a number of cities in Siberia and the Russian Far East, as well as St. Petersburg and Moscow. Authors made liberal use of their ideas and critical comments and regard them as co-authors.

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Introduction and Summary

The sixth report in the *Toward the Great Ocean* series is distinct from all the previous reports, which sought to prove the expedience and usefulness of Russia's Turn to the East mostly from economic, transport and geostrategic points of view. Solutions were suggested precisely in these areas. One of the reports was dedicated to the concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership from Lisbon to Jakarta, Shanghai, or Tokyo.[1] This report focuses on people, history, ideology, and education. It also covers the ideas behind Russia's Turn to the East, as well as its media and spiritual aspects.

The first stage of Russia's turn to the rising Asia is underway, with the Russian Far East advancing twice as fast as the rest of the country (although this is still not enough). Dozens of big plants are opening. Yet, today we can see more clearly the limitations that were not as obvious before. Eastern Russia's development has not yet become a clear and common cause for the nation at large – the nation that is in dire need of grand projects. Neither do many Far Eastern residents really believe in it, with the outflow of people from the area, though having reduced, is continuing to this day. The goal is to formulate a fundamentally new way of engaging the people living in Russian Asia – the Far East and Siberia – who have interacted with their neighbours for centuries, who know and are able to comprehend them well. Furthermore, Russians in general should change their attitude to country's Turn to the East, where the economic, technological and cultural markets of the future lie.

[1] *These issues were discussed in 'Toward the Great Ocean' (2012–2018) reports, particularly in 'Toward the Great Ocean – 5: From the Turn to the East to Greater Eurasia' (2017).*

Once the sole source of advanced technology and capital since the 16th and 17th centuries, Europe is rapidly losing this status to Asia, which is also quickly coming to be regarded as the global centre of business activity. While 40 years ago, the centre of gravity in the world economy was located somewhere in the Atlantic to the west of Ireland, it is currently in Turkey and will reach the India–China border some 10 years from now.

In hindsight, 2014 may become a year of not just the end of the Western alliances' expansion, but also the end of the Petrine period in Russian history. Russia is to live side by side with Europe, be on friendly terms with it as far as possible, and borrow what is still of interest and needed for development. But it is unlikely to will remain a beacon for Russia, whose turn towards Europe and its technologies in the 17th and 18th centuries was logical. Asia was far away and entering a period of relative decline at that time, in part due to a better armed Europe embarking on colonial expansion. Today, the situation is changing, and it is Asia that will emerge as the crucial external source of capital and advanced technologies.

Russians still do not recognise their country's role as midwife of history and the way it influenced the rise of Asia and other emerging centres of power. It was Russia/USSR that ended the West's almost 500-year military superiority, which was the basis of the Western economic, political and cultural dominance since the 16th or 17th century. The nuclear parity that was achieved and has been maintained makes it impossible for anyone to win a major war. The world has become more free and democratic, and Asian nations have been given an opportunity to make use of their competitive advantages. And we are not heading East empty-handed. We bring not only resources and transportation capacities, but also act as the major provider and guarantor of international security. More importantly, we have an opportunity to establish close cooperation with Asia without breaking off ties with Europe and to become the centre of the Greater Eurasian Partnership, which has been proposed by Moscow and backed by Beijing as being by 90 per cent in agreement with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

There are still many problems on the way to Greater Eurasia. This report seeks to find solutions to a set of these problems. The Turn to the East is becoming entangled in ideological, psychological and cultural constraints, and overcoming them should be Russia's focus in the coming years.

Russians in the Far East have yet to feel connected to the Turn to the East. The initiative came from Moscow, which deserves our gratitude. But people in the Russian Far East still lack the drive needed to undertake a great cause, despite once being known for this. (Albeit, the whole of Russian politics has a dim view of great achievements and Russian daring.) The locals' skill and experience in dealing with China or other neighbours have not been used to the full either.

Restoring the often impressive and thrilling history of Siberia and the Far East to Russia's historical conception of itself is a no less important task for Russia's continued advance towards the new eastern frontiers. Validating the people in Siberia, including by changing attitudes in the country towards Siberia and the Russian Far East, is also important. Occasionally we are asked why it is necessary to invest in the Far East rather than, for example, in the Russian Far North. The answer is simple: The area has been in Russia's possession for four or five centuries; it has magnificent nature, enormous resources and, most importantly, potential for development that is incomparable with other regions due to its rapidly growing neighbours. For the first time in history, Russia has competitive advantages in that part of the country that can be used to accelerate development. It is also necessary to deal with the grudge borne by the people in Siberia, who were abandoned more cruelly in the 1990s than Russians in the rest of the country.

While developing the human capital in Siberia and the Russian Far East, the key to building on that is to not just offer training in new technologies, but provide moral support and inspiration and rekindle their feeling of being trailblazers and leaders who are pushing the whole of Russia towards new economic, political and intellectual horizons, this time within a new Eurasian framework. People of Russian culture with its openness and tolerance have a powerful competitive advantage in the quest to become the centrepiece of the new Eurasian megaproject.

There is need for a patient, systematic effort to overcome the Eurocentrism of a considerable portion of Russian elites. Though rather regressive in the modern world, it was exacerbated by the collapse of the 1990s and the chaotic restoration of the 2000s, when rich Russians transferred their fortunes primarily to Europe, which inevitably reinforced the sense of being compradores. Russian society need not renounce its predominantly European culture. But it should stop fearing or even being ashamed of its Asian origins. In terms of the prevailing mentality and attitude to the central authority in society, Russia, like China and many other Asian states, are heirs to the empire of Genghis Khan. And we should not wring our hands over it or despise our own people, like certain members of the intelligentsia do, but rather accept it and use it as a competitive advantage. After all, given the stiff competition in the modern world, the authoritarian model of governance – assuming a market economy and equal military capabilities – is probably more efficient than modern liberal democracy. And this is what makes our Western partners anxious. It is another matter that authoritarianism, like democracy, can lead to both stagnation and decadence. This represents a danger to Russia as well.

In several years we will understand that we are no longer the eastern periphery of Europe that is slowly sinking into the glorious past, despite being closely related to the European culture. We will realize that seeking out new sources of wealth, strength and progress in Asia is, in a sense,

returning back home. By borrowing from Europe its high culture, we have enriched it with our own. We have borrowed its system of military organization and become a great power. And now we are filling our proper civilizational niche as a great Eurasian power, an original and self-sustained fusion of many civilizations. And we are becoming ourselves again as we make our way *back home*. This is the central theme of this report.

We are still ignorant of Asia, a continent of reviving and rising cultures, civilizations and technologies. Right now, we urgently need to introduce more expansive courses on Asian history and languages in school curricula and train much more numerous orientalists at universities. In any case, the course of human history as written mainly by Europeans will be replaced in few dozen years. The magnificent Byzantine Empire, which the descendants of crusaders portrayed as the embodiment of intrigue and inefficiency, will re-emerge in its full glory – a wondrous civilization that preserved and developed European culture during the Dark Ages and blended it with oriental cultures. Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Korean Houses will rank alongside the Plantagenet, Habsburgs, Bourbons, Stuarts, and Romanovs. We, Russians, should be not only the first Europeans in Asia, or rather the first Asians in Europe, to play our natural role of a civilizational bridge – not just a transportation connection point.

It is high time we do away with what remains of the myth of the 'yellow peril', which has been imposed on us by the same forces that today are diligently working to inflate it, fearing Russia's further emancipation in relations with the West. For this, we would be wise to fall back on the centuries-old experience of people in the Russian Far East, who have had close and mostly friendly relations with their Chinese and other neighbours. We must know Asian history and our place in it.

It is already clear, to a degree, which tools can be used to increase national and local motivation to speed up the movement towards the more promising markets of the future. These include mandatory courses on Asia for secondary schools and universities, a series of films and multimedia programs on Siberia's difficult but glorious history, its bold and indomitable people, and its magnificent natural beauty and resources. Additionally, more active efforts should be made to involve local elites in promoting Russia's Asian policy and in studying, albeit critical of it, of the Asian countries' experience. We also need standing clubs to integrate Eastern and Central Russian and Asian business and intellectual elites. Inside the country, the cross-pollination of European Russian and Siberian/Far Eastern elites should be encouraged, so that the former gain a better understanding of Russian Asia's needs and the latter feel like they have a stake in Russia's decision-making and policy implementation with respect to Eurasia. The sooner Asia – Russian Asia included – comes to feel familiar and fashionable for the maximum possible number of Russians, the better for the country. A promising future project would be to study and compare Russian and Asian systems of values jointly with our Asian neighbours.

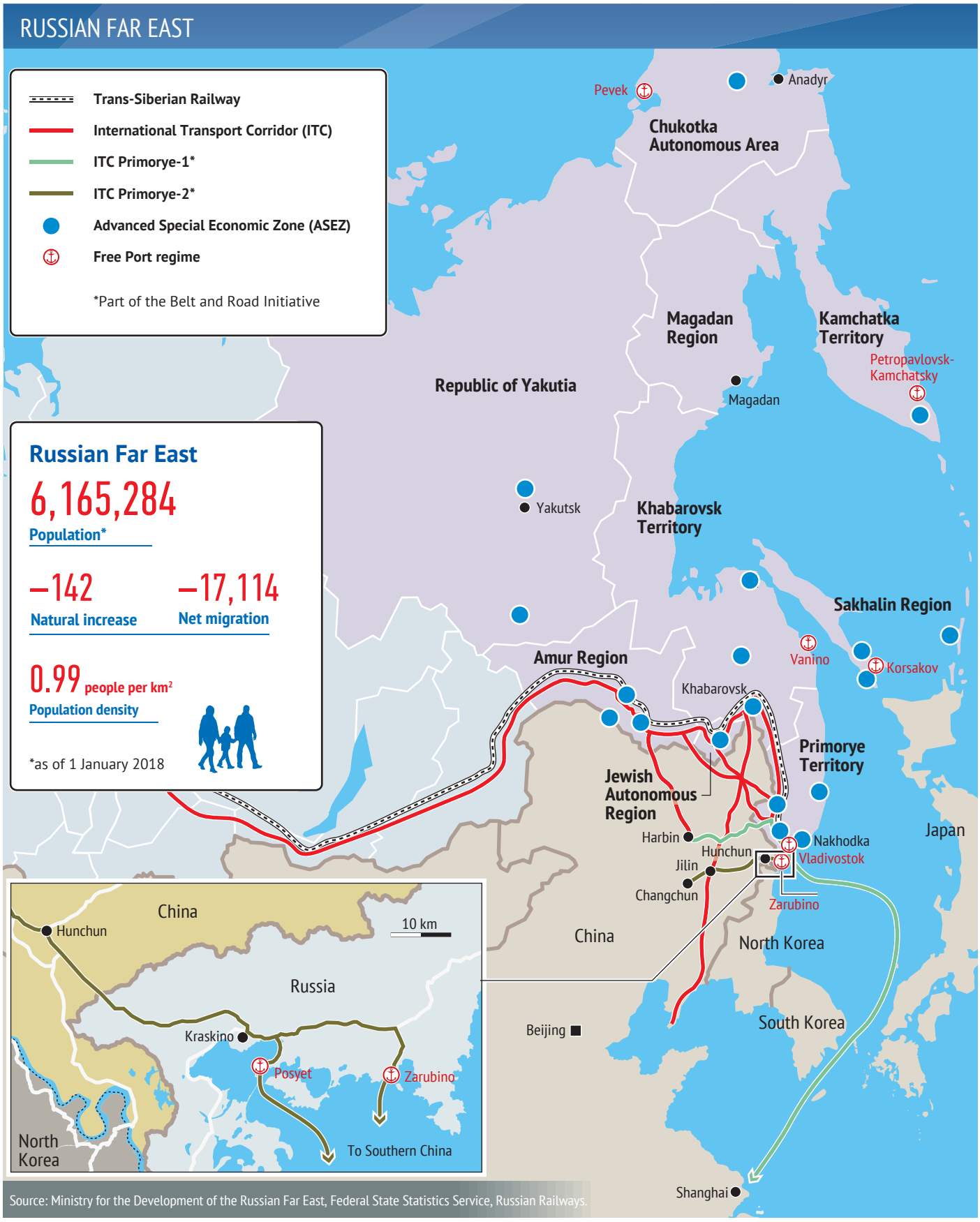
What Has Been Done

Russia's Turn to the East has been a topic for discussions for a decade now, which is a great amount of time in our country's modern history. People are saying different things. Some see the Turn as a new project for Russia's future, others think of it as a priority development project for the Russian Far East, whereas others simply consider it just another buzz that has nothing to it except catchphrases and public events. However, the idea of the Turn to the East has been present in the Russian information space, the media and speeches of the top government officials for quite a while now. This idea is promoted in the economy, and a management system related to this idea has emerged. All of the above (as well as everything that remains behind the scenes) provides grounds for drawing some *preliminary results*.

The core of the global economy has been shifting towards Eastern and Southern Asia in recent decades. It is now home to major production facilities and technology centres, and its education system is developing fast. Financial flows and major trading venues as well are shifting to East Asia. New cities are being built there and a ground transportation network is expanding, now covering more countries and territories than ever. In an effort to maintain their global leadership and consumption levels, the countries of the 'global centre' that are losing their clout are using non-economic tools in economic competition more vigorously, increasing pressure, especially on Russia and China. Accordingly, the usefulness of partnership with the West in the forms that it has taken over recent decades is decreasing.

The situation is different in most of Asia. There is little to no ideological pressure here, and economic relations are much less encumbered by associated political components. This provides an opportunity for diversifying Russia's foreign trade, which will make its positions in global trade and other areas much stronger than today. However, even more significantly, despite centuries of focusing on Europe, much of the Russian culture and its social and political organization is rooted in Asia. It would appear that a further pivot to the East and Asia is becoming even more beneficial and relevant for Russia in the given circumstances.

However, almost the entire economic, transportation, demographic, and ideological system in Russia has for centuries been tied to Europe. Despite its



Source: Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East, Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Railways.

vast natural resources, eastern Russia has been sparsely populated, had an inadequate transport system and an even less developed social infrastructure. And it is not just because of its geographic remoteness, but for the fact that the country that looks to the West may only see Siberia and the Far East with the back of its head. Thus, Russia has to enter the new world centre with a relatively less developed territory and overcome more than three centuries of Eurocentrism.

The issues challenging the state on its eastern borders as it is trying to implement the idea of Turning to the East did not appear today, or even yesterday. They have been accumulating for many decades. The Russian Far East has been developing extremely lopsidedly, mainly as a military outpost of the Russian Empire, later – the Soviet Union, a fortress in the east of the country. The bulk of the region's population was, one way or another, connected with national defence, primarily the defence of the country's eastern fortress. Servicemen and their families, defence plant workers and civil servants of the Defence Ministry were the largest and most high-status group of the employable population. This created major problems in terms of self-reliance of the region, which, during the entire Soviet period, could not do without subsidies from the country's west. Soon after the flow of the subsidies dried up, people began to leave that region *en masse*, which continues to this day. Clearly, interaction between the fortress and the surrounding territory was minimal and not too friendly. After all, the Soviet borders were supposed to be protected precisely from this neighbourhood. Hence weak lines of communication between Russia's Far East and East Asian countries. Seeing neighbours as potential adversaries rather than partners also stood in the way of building good relations.

The fortress status and the military model of the region's economy led to distortions in the intraregional transport system. It developed almost exclusively along the walls of the fortress, where the threat was supposed to be most likely. Even the region's largest port, Vladivostok, was primarily a fortress, the Pacific Fleet base, whose trade functions were secondary. Apart from that, ties between territories inside the fortress were fairly weak. The north and the south of the region were almost separate from each other. A project to create a ramified railway network that would connect the Russian Far East and form new economic regions in eastern Russia, which took shape in the late Soviet period (e.g. Baikal–Amur Mainline), has not been fully implemented. Neither transportation, nor the economic development of the territory has been completed. It was not completed in the post-Soviet period, either, when

Border guards on duty, Khasansky District, Primorye Territory, 2017.

the region was left to its fate and was compelled to survive using resources acquired during the Soviet period: logging roads to forest plots, explored and developed mineral deposits, as well as forest, marine and river bioresources.

In the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years, the Russian Far East was seen as a remote periphery, not particularly important to the country, a region that was run by criminals and that lived under constant pressure from more prosperous neighbours amid wildfires, etc. In a word, it was seen as a place that has nothing particularly good to it. It is not important now whether this vision was true. What matters is that this is what the region looked like in the country's information space.

However, the situation has changed. Asia, in particular its eastern part, which was fairly recently perceived through the cultural prism of 'backward Asia' as a threatening and complex area of Russian politics, is increasingly becoming the space for the most attractive and promising trade, cultural and technical contacts. It is becoming increasingly clear that further rapprochement with the conventional West is entering into sharp

contradiction with important principles of Russian statehood, and Europe has now reached relative stagnation. Accordingly, the concept of developing the Far East is changing from a fortress region to a *transit region*, a region of development and Russia's gateway to Asia. This concept and the circumstances, in which the Far Eastern part of our common home found itself before the beginning of the Turn, defined the goals that the state wanted to achieve in the region. The areas where success can be most clearly seen may be listed as following.

Asia, which was fairly recently perceived through the cultural prism of 'backward Asia', is increasingly becoming the space for the most attractive and promising trade, cultural and technical contacts

Creating trade and production centres, Russia's access points to Asia in the Far East. A project to create a ramified and efficient transport system in the Russian Far East has received a second wind. And not just that. Ambitious projects are being implemented in the Far East that are designed to turn the region into a giant trading and production site with convenient access points to East Asia capable of attracting significant trade flows from the entire region, with their own products enjoying high demand that will take a place of its own on these vast markets. Water-intensive products, agriculture and water bioresources, as well as minerals, lumber, oil and gas – all of that is becoming the region's crown jewels in East Asia. However, its potential extends beyond raw materials. Energy-intensive, resource-intensive and water-intensive production sites, metals, wood products and some high-tech industries are increasingly supplementing the oil-and-gas-oriented Russian exports. The willingness to invest in joint development of gas fields and construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants in Yamal is indicative of the interest of the East Asian countries, primarily, China, in Russian output. The first flow of LNG went to East Asian markets. Business circles in Japan and the Republic of Korea are showing increased interest in Russia. Already today, the Korean business is looking at investing in logistics, shipbuilding, construction and tourism in the Russian Far East.

Ambitious projects are being implemented in the Far East that are designed to turn the region into a giant trading and production site with convenient access points to East Asia

However, major structural changes are needed in the eastern parts of Russia in order to establish itself in Asia. This is what is happening today. The city of Vladivostok is being renovated, and port facilities in most of the region's harbours from Nakhodka to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky are expanding. The logistics centre outside Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island (Khabarovsk) is under reconstruction as well. In this context, it is important to take account of the importance of building bridges across the Amur River, expanding

the road network, renovating the Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR), and building the Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline system.

This includes extending free port regulations to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, building a container terminal in Kamchatka, and much more. Establishing Advanced Special Economic Zones (ASEZ) with special legal and administrative status that create a level playing field for investment with other Asian countries is designed to speed up this process. One can state that transforming the southern part of the Far East and its coastal territories into a commercial and production space is progressing quite successfully. So far, special conditions for investment and efficient investment project support solutions have been created in that region, which cut the time it takes to complete formalities and the project payback time. To date, 76 billion roubles in private investments have been made in regional projects. Agreements on investing over 2 trillion roubles have been signed.

Improving logistics in the northern (resource-rich) part of the Russian Far East. Major projects are also being implemented in the northern part of the Russian Far East with its major deposits of precious, non-ferrous and rare-earth metals and forested areas. As part of the project, this territory is being developed as a *resource region* and a supplier of unique products to the global market. Until very recently, the extraction and economic use of all these minerals was hampered by the lack of efficient logistics and issues associated with importing everything that the mines and ore-dressing plants needed for operation and trucking lumber to saw-mills. The situation is beginning to change.

A northward railroad is being built and is approaching Yakutsk. In the future, it will reach the areas of extraction of precious metals and gems, which will reduce the production costs many times over. Plans are in place to conduct high-quality renovation of Lena and Kolyma federal highways (today they are open only a few months a year), to build bridges to replace old ferries and ice crossings on these routes. The Northern Sea Route is being expanded and there are plans to further improve it. It will not only be the shortest route from Asia to Europe, but also give an impetus to developing Russia's Far North.

Without these innovations, the cost of extracting minerals in the northern regions of the Russian Far East will remain extremely high, and the production companies will break even at best. Obviously, these enormous investments will not pay off tomorrow or even a year from now. However, this is an investment

Control room at the Denisovsky mining and processing plant, South Yakutia ASEZ, 2018.

in the future – the future of Russia. And each paved and renovated kilometre of the road creates new opportunities for private investment and new prospects for expanding the economy of the northern Far East.

Working out and designing tools for the region's development. Importantly, the tools for developing the Russian Far East are in place. Of course, both the ASEZ model and the free port model, and especially practical implementation of these models can and should be improved. However, the idea of and the model for creating the best environment for businesses and ridding it of micromanagement is more than sensible. The projects that are being implemented as part of it are a case in point. So far 18 ASEZs in the region are home to 210 anchor residents that have made an investment, and some of them are already making a profit. The sheer number of projects, approaching

1,000 (969), confirms that. Importantly, while during the first phase, investment was expected to come from European and US investors, today investments from Russia and East Asian countries are taking its place. Each rouble from the state budget going to these projects is matched by 8 roubles in private investment.

Moreover, whereas renovation and construction of the road network, the development of port facilities, and the construction of new terminals will pay off in the mid-term, many initiatives implemented within ASEZs have an effect in the form of increased agricultural and other output, creating new jobs and improving the social sphere, to name a few – already today. In terms of key national economic growth indicators, the Russian Far East is outperforming the rest of the country's regions showing indicators that are twice as high in the sphere of industry and four times as high in both agriculture and investment.

Creating the governance system. It is also extremely important that a territory governance system geared towards its accelerated development has taken shape during these years. Even though the Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy and a Deputy Prime Minister, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East, and corporations for developing the region and constituent entities – were established at different times and for various reasons, today they are becoming a system that integrates the national and regional governance systems.

Issues abound, and some of them are far-fetched. The Far East remained *terra incognita* described in myths to most of the country for too long. One of the most persistent ideas was the need to attract masses of new residents to the region. However, the willingness to populate the region with large numbers of new residents at any cost, while even the available labour resources are not fully engaged, appears to be poorly thought out. After all, one of the main motives indicated by potential migrants from the region during surveys is lack of employment opportunities. Even planned calculations do not include the required number of workers in the region. In its absence, the question of whether the residents in the Russian Far East are 'too numerous' or 'too scanty' remains without a proper answer. Both the first and the second assertions presuppose an answer to the question: How many is the right number? There is no such answer yet. Perhaps, the myth of a 'disastrous depopulation' of the region turned out to be so powerful that it pushed the analysis back to the periphery. That is not to say there should be limitations to attracting high-quality human capital to places where it is clearly lacking: new construction sites for production facilities.

In general, we can safely assume that the first stage of Russia's Turn to the East is nearing completion. The political vision of the need for the Turn has been expressed quite clearly, the orientation of development has been identified, and the economic flows have been given direction. Russia has set itself a goal to actively participate in the construction of an objectively forming new geoeconomic, geopolitical, cultural and ideological community – a partnership of Greater Eurasia. Unlike the old Russian Eurasianism, the concept of Greater Eurasia is not targeted against Europe or the West but provides for including Europe of the European Union or most of it. And Russia will at long last find a comfortable place in history and geography as a great Eurasian power. Given the growing trend toward the regionalization of the world, Greater Eurasia will most likely be one of the leading centres. Greater America is likely to be the other one.[2]

The first stage of Russia's Turn to the East is nearing completion. The political vision of the need for the Turn has been expressed quite clearly, the orientation of development has been identified, and the economic flows have been given direction

The need for transition to a new phase in Russia's Turn to the East is becoming ever clearer. Indeed, the Russian Far East is slowly but surely transforming from a remote and not quite developed border space to become the most intensively developing region. However, it is also clear that the entire country, not just one region, should join in the process of Turning to the East. Residents of the Far East must feel connected to and integrated into the Turn. Otherwise, the process may stall.

A New Stage in Russia's Turn to the East

We are currently approaching the most psychologically and politically complex stage in the megaproject that is Russia's Turn to the East. The contradictory nature of the Russian objective interest in building closer partnerships with countries in East, Southeast and South Asia in various areas, on the one hand, and the resistance to and frustration with Russia's integration with Asia expressed by people in western as well as other parts of this country, on the other hand, – is becoming increasingly manifest. Many of those living in Russia's Far East have also been unable to take this project close to their heart.

[2] *The concept of Greater Eurasia is closely studied in the previous report 'Toward the Great Ocean – 5' (2017).*

Today, it is not uncommon to see the development of Russia's Far Eastern territories described as a 'road to the emptiness', a 'bridge to nowhere', or 'money pit' by the press and bloggers, especially those from the European part of Russia. This resistance is by and large driven by cultural factors. People in Russia do not know Asia and are consequently afraid of it. For many Asia remains a backward, despotic and narrow-minded place. Some in the intellectual elite continue to fight for the preservation of the 'European path' despite its obvious ineffectiveness and lack of progress at this stage.

Finally, there is also an exclusively ideological side to this resistance. Russian pro-Westerners are not willing to give up on the views and stereotypes they have grown used to, no matter how obsolete they are. The scale of the shift to the East in economic, political and technology terms has yet to be realized. That being said, the problem lies not only in bias or ignorance, but in the failure to grasp, whether intentionally or not, the very essence of the project of the Turn to the East.

Changing the region's image was among the priorities at the stage that predated the Turn. The Far Eastern Hectare project, the holding of Far East Days in Moscow and the establishment of ASEZs helped Russia's Far East move away from its image as an abandoned territory. At the same time, these initiatives also had a negative impact, since people across the country, and even in the Far East, have not yet accepted this new vision for the region as something more than an abandoned territory. These two irreconcilable images understandably result in frustration.

There were also other factors that contributed to the inadequate perception of the Turn to the East. Until very recently, this idea was presented and perceived as promoting priority development in Russia's Far East. In other words, an *all-Russian* project, the country's choice of its future was viewed by the majority, except for a few experts and the political leadership, as a local, *regional* project. The Russian leaders announced the Turn and backed it up with decisions, while neglecting to explain the thinking behind this project, which instantly gave rise to a multitude of questions.

People did not have any problems with Vladivostok's makeover ahead of the APEC Leaders' Meeting, which is how the effort was interpreted. But did a single event, however large and important, demand such a thorough overhaul? And why Vladivostok, instead of dozens of other cities that are not that far away? Are they not in need of improvements as well? Initiatives to upgrade

View of Vladivostok and the bridge over the Golden Horn Bay, 2017.

the TSR were also misunderstood, since the railroad was not operating at full capacity, and shipments mostly went in one direction. The project to build a road to Yakutsk was not received with much enthusiasm either, since there is 'nothing there'. Shipping on this route is so scarce that Russian Railways had to offer special rates in order to make it viable. Is there a reason for spending all this money? Failure to understand tends to lead to frustration. People try to figure out who stands to benefit and accuse those behind the project of every conceivable sin.

The region's special status and what seemed like undeserved preferences for people living in Russia's Far East also gave rise to many questions across the country. Why did it all go to the Far East instead of, say, Russia's Far North? This discontent and disconnect could be found not only in the western part of Russia, but also among regional elites, and

sometimes even at the federal level. The resistance from elites that was mentioned in the beginning is still there. Expectations that this dubious campaign will come to an end, just like all other previous development programmes for the Russian Far East, literally permeates the political, media and everyday discourse.

The project to develop the Far East has been met with distrust, if not resentment, by people in Siberia, since the two are part of a single macroregion in terms of their history, people-to-people ties and communication. There is something objectively contributing to this lack of understanding. In fact, the Turn to the East was initially designed 10 or 12 years ago to cover all of Siberia but was then scaled down for bureaucratic reasons to cover only a part of this space. At the same time, central Siberia has immense intellectual, research and industrial potential, and is home to some of the country's best human capital. Moreover, the region suffers from its isolation from other markets. Sooner or later, the idea of tapping new markets will become relevant once again not only for Russia's Far East, but also for much of Siberia.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, and if opinion surveys are any guide, people living in the Far East of Russia were resentful of all these developments no less, and there are several reasons for that.

First, there is resentment towards Moscow, one of the most deep-seated regional prejudices of the post-Soviet era. The region's identity was that of an outpost protecting the eastern boundaries of the country, and the developments Russia went through in the late 1980s with the advent of 'new thinking' and the emergence of the market economy in the 1990s were viewed accordingly. There was no doubt among locals that Moscow had betrayed its outpost and its garrison. Today this sentiment still echoes throughout the region, even though it has become less pronounced, but still complicates relations between the central government and the region.

Second, from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s locals have become more or less used to the new landscape. But with so many new projects underway in the Far East people there have been pushed out of their comfort zones. At the same time, they were not offered an intelligible explanation, or a new ideology, or a way to come to terms with the inconveniences of new and unfamiliar activities justifying these changes. They were not given an explanation why the people in the region and the whole country needed to Turn to the East. After all, it is the feeling of involvement in some kind

of greater cause that inspired people in the Far East, who believed in the importance of their mission, to endure much more serious hardship at the time of the conquest of Siberia and in the Soviet period.

Resentment towards Moscow, one of the most deep-seated regional prejudices of the post-Soviet era

Third, considering all of the above, the active push to promote the region beyond its borders has been met with bitterness, however unjustified, by local activists, and a significant part of the population. For the local identity in the post-Soviet period was that of strong people overcoming extreme challenges in an extremely harsh environment. The image of a 'prosperous region' is a blow to this regional identity, bringing all the negative aspects to the surface. It is not a coincidence that the meme 'They should have built a kindergarten better' is so popular in the region as a response to any initiative without an immediate return. There is an entrenched feeling that the region is developing to the detriment of its people. Some locals are simply afraid of competition from outsiders. This is especially dangerous because this attitude has the potential to slow down the entire Turn to the East programme. Furthermore, people are so vocal about their attitude that it makes the region less attractive in terms of cooperation or investment for its neighbours.

In order to offset both the inward and outward misunderstandings, not just the region but the entire country must move on to a new stage in the Turn to the East – not just a *regional*, but an *all-Russian* project. People and the elite in both western and eastern parts of Russia must believe in this initiative and realize their part in it, demonstrating their understanding to the outside world. Otherwise, the effect from holding the Eastern Economic Forum and other road shows will be limited. Finally, it has been a long time since the country had a major project that could bring people together and make them stronger, more enterprising and persevering. It is an image of the future that creates the tension that enables society to move forward. This is primarily important for the urban youth who know Europe, but know little about Asia, and are often inclined to leave Russia for lack of any viable future. Young people from eastern Russia also tend to leave their homes for bigger cities, or even abroad, primarily Asia.

With many new projects underway in the Far East people there have been pushed out of their comfort zones

It would be advisable to start this stage by fleshing out the idea behind the Turn to the East at the national and individual level into a more or less cohesive concept.

Why Turn to the East?

Russia's Turn to the East should not be viewed as a regional project to prioritize the development of Russia's Far East. Diversifying industrial production and trade flows and tapping new markets with a view to making the economy stronger, while also essential, undoubtedly, are not its only aim. The Turn to the East is a project designed to assist Russia in building its own political and civilizational identity that would be in step with the new world. This is how the entire project is to be regarded and articulated. Furthermore, this is not just about verbal structures, as important as they are, but about a system of practical steps enabling our country to become a centre of shaping the world architecture, structuring a new world order on the ruins of the old one.

The very idea of Turning to the East is less about joining some kind of an outside model, but mainly *working together with partner countries to shape a common future* for the vast Eurasian continent. The conditions for delivering on this project have never been as favourable as they are today. In fact, Northeast Asia is currently facing a power vacuum after the US lost interest in the Asia-Pacific Region's integration and switched to the policy of containment of China. As a result, differences resurfaced among regional powers, pushing them closer to Russia as a means to advance their interests. This enables Russia to respond with a complex and multidirectional policy to promote its own interests in East Asia and in Eurasia in general.

However, a favourable environment in East Asia cannot explain everything. There are also fundamental processes related to the dual nature of Russian statehood and society whose Asian aspect is critical to Russia regaining its true identity. Throughout its history, Russia has absorbed most different political and cultural traditions. These include Scandinavian military alliances that taught it to respect military glory and the warrior's trade. Russia was also clearly influenced by Byzantium, which was manifested in it adopting Eastern Christianity and religious practices. The Mongol Empire had a huge bearing on Russia's political system. It is from there that the Russian style of leadership and its sacral status were inherited. It must be noted that the political traditions of most Asian countries are based on the legacy of the Mongols. Arguably, both Russia and China are rooted in Genghis Khan's Empire. As such, they may be able to better understand each other's cultures, societies, and how they can

work together. While the Christian roots of Russian culture are expected to facilitate (but are not facilitating yet) dialogue with Europe, which has been distancing itself from Christianity, the Mongol dimension of Russian identity could offer a foundation for dialogue with Asia.

It has been a long time since the country had a major project that could bring people together and make them stronger, more enterprising and persevering

Russia's Eurasian identity and its simultaneous existence throughout its history in the two, not always identical or closely knit, dimensions in economic, political and ideological terms, was both a curse and a blessing for the country. It was a curse for a huge and diverse Russia has never been able to fully integrate into either the East or the West. A substantial part of it invariably remained different and would not go with the flow. That being said, living in the two worlds that are equally great is also a promising opportunity. For many centuries the Russian elite was looking only in one direction, to the West, neglecting the country's Asian part or its role in Asia. This one-sided perspective doomed our country to be constantly catching up to or led by someone, which had psychological and political repercussions. However, with the Western track losing its appeal and becoming less certain, there is always Russia's second part of identity as a Eurasian – not European – path to consider.

The Turn to the East is a project designed to assist Russia in building its own political and civilizational identity that would be in step with the new world.

Paul Unterberger, Governor General of Amur Territory (Priamurye) and one of the most insightful scholars of the eastern part of Russia, wrote in the early 20th century that Priamurye constituted Russia's strategic reserve. He referred not only to the abundant natural resources available there, but also to the fact the Siberia and Russia's Far East could serve as a gateway to Asia, a diverse and complex, yet attractive destination. It is important that we understand the objective nature of the shift of the world's centre of gravity to the East. It will be happening regardless of whether one political group or another supports or opposes it, or what foreign policy they pursue. The question is whether Russia will be an *independent* force in this new world or a dependent actor *led by other powers*. From this perspective, Russia's Turn to the East becomes a vital necessity and a matter of the country's future instead of just a pretty slogan or even a profitable economic strategy. And we are talking of years, not centuries here.

Trade is, of course, important for becoming part of this space, but there are also cultural, economic, political and legal dimensions to a full-scale

involvement. The Turn to the East or even trade facilitation would hardly be possible unless accession to this space is a comprehensive affair. To be more precise, this could have been done in the past from the position of strength, by acting as a colonial power. However, the East is gradually restoring the global leadership it lost several centuries ago, including in terms of military capability.

The vast space conquered by our ancestors enables us to become a first-class Eurasian power. We are witnessing the transformation of Siberia and Russia's Far East from a burden and rearguard in the confrontation with the West into a core asset for the country's economy, defence, as well as spiritual and cultural revival. Russia is beginning to fill the entire space history gave it. The Turn to the East should not be viewed as being merely a policy shift or an attempt to secure the backing of new emerging powers in Asia. The country is about to return to its dual identity, in which the European component goes together with the Asian one, while refusing to act as the 'eternal disciple' any more. It is time that Russia revives the memories of its glorious Asian history and understands the role it played in this space. This is the only way for our country to become a centre of the future Eurasian concert of powers. This is the only way Russia can become a key player rather than an observer who wandered onto someone else's land.

The need for Russia's Turn to the East is not dictated merely by current or potential political and economic considerations. There are much deeper and more crucial factors at work related to the matrix of the political system determined by the specific nature of the spatial organization of Russia's state and society. It is important to understand that despite the lengthy Petrine era of pro-Western orientation, the way back will not be a forced one, because *it is the way back home, to its own self – to Russia's Eurasian identity*.

In Russia, given its geography, climate, history, and vulnerability to outside interventions, governance consists of fulfilling three critical functions that are not the same as in Western countries. First, the government protects people and secures preservation and reproduction of the existing forms of life. This is what is described as 'sovereignty' in the current political speak. Second, the government has resources to insure the society against risks and crises and to provide its survival. Finally, the third and most important function is that the government itself forms the structure of society that prevents it from disintegrating. The government does not derive its power from civil society, but actually shapes civil society by itself. In order to fulfil the social demand for protection and paternalism, the government has to be centralized and strong, but when this centralized government falters, the society and the country as a whole come

Vasily Surikov, The Conquest of Siberia by Yermak Timofeyevich, 1885.

apart. This is what happened during the Time of Troubles, then again in 1917, and 1990–1991. The distance between European and Asian systems of governance of governance created a space enabling the Eurasian power to exist in its vast territory within the matrix it has chosen for itself. Attempts by intellectuals and politicians to remove this distance and 'become a European nation' caused unforeseen problems. In the 1990s, Russia was ruled by a local autarchy ('regional barons' and self-sufficient local economic systems), which made the central government *de facto*, if not *de jure*, redundant. Russia's very existence as a single country was called into question. Viewed as a key reference point, Europe had characteristics that were completely at odds with the political approaches that existed in Russia.

Russia's Turn to the East becomes a vital necessity and a matter of the country's future instead of just a pretty slogan or even a profitable economic strategy

However, distancing Russia from the West is far from enough. In fact, this is not even the aim to begin with. Any attempt to run a Western-style economy (of the past centuries) falters given the vast space, complexity and incredible supervision costs that can eat up revenue from even the most profitable undertakings. It is important to understand that this is not mismanagement or poor management, of which we often accuse ourselves (or, more precisely, there is much more to it than just these factors), but the particular nature of society's spatial organization. At the same time, population scarcity and relatively

high labour costs make it impossible to run the economy as modern Eastern countries do. Following in the West's footsteps and stepping up fiscal or other controls is equally dangerous. Obviously, the means of control we have today are much more sophisticated than they used to be. However, the social and political ramifications of harsh controls could prove fatal for society.

Is there a way out? Undoubtedly, there is. And the first step will be to recognize that Russia is neither West nor East. Russia is what it is. Its history, culture and forms of life are rooted in history, traditions, and social forms of both Asia and Europe. However, the fact that Russia is distinct from both the West and the East does not imply loneliness. Russia is a frontier and a *universal intermediary*, as well as the supplier of unique resources to the global market. Recovering this role to the extent possible and becoming part of Asia, while also staying with Europe, will not be just an objective but a vital necessity, a source to ensure stability and viability of the country for decades, if not centuries, to come. Otherwise, either gradual decay, decline, or a sudden explosion is almost inevitable.

Asia is rapidly emerging as the world's 'workshop', as well as a huge market for all kinds of products from raw materials to security and social technologies. This space is increasingly becoming the centre of gravity for the entire world, while remaining largely self-sufficient. However, if Russia plans to just float with the current, waiting for Asia to fall into its open arms, it will get consigned to the periphery of history. It is for this reason that Russia not only needs to Turn to Asia, but to be proactive in doing so. Looking beyond the horizon, the Turn to the East may well be a step towards another major market, which is North America. It could even be reached by land. Tapping this market through Alaska would also help Russia find its true self, but in a new world.

Russia as the 'Assembly Point' for Greater Eurasia

What can Russia offer these countries in return for access to their markets, technologies and investment? First of all, the rich natural resources from its northern regions, exported as finished products of high technologies. In this respect, we can draw on the experience of Canada and Australia. In fact, this is why we are streamlining the logistics in the north of the Russian Far East and

developing the Northern Sea Route. This is why we have built the ESPO oil pipeline, and this is the reason why we are working on the Power of Siberia gas transmission system.

The country is about to return to its dual identity, in which the European component goes together with the Asian one

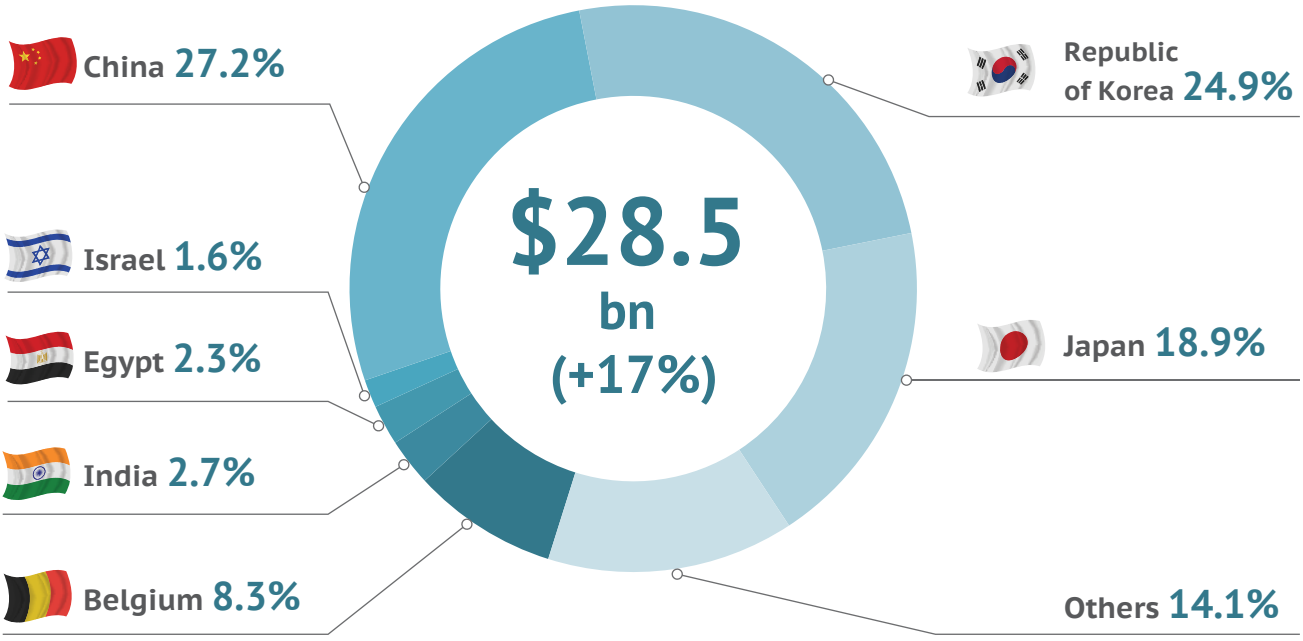
More than that, Russia can use the Soviet legacy and the current geopolitical situation to much greater effect than being a mere raw materials supplier. These opportunities are inherent in Russia's very geography. Until recently, Europe and the United States were the endpoint for the majority of transit corridors and commodity flows. But these markets have long been divided. Besides, the United States has made it increasingly clear that it wants to wall itself off to protect its economy, focusing on domestic production and forcing partners to buy its wares. The logic of this shift is clear, but in making it the United States will lose the status of the world's economic centre. Facing the American containment strategy, China has to renounce parts of its goal to establish the world's main economic centre in Asia Pacific and head southwest and west implementing the BRI. Moreover, China's main trade route via the southern seas is becoming increasingly vulnerable to closure by the United States, whose naval domination promises to continue for a long time to come.

Eurasia is crisscrossed by the Tibet, the Pamir-Alay and Xinjiang mountain ranges and the Taklamakan, Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts. The best ground route across the continent runs via Russia or via Kazakhstan to Russia. Unlike any other alternative route with the potential to connect different parts of the continent, unify the markets of Eurasia, or create these markets, it is not challenged by deserts and mountains. Moreover, the route that may serve as a core is long-established and operating very well – it is the TSR. The transportation systems of Russia's neighbours, primarily the former Soviet republics, are closely integrated with the Russian network of roads, which adds to Russia's geographical advantage a technological one. This ground route will be complemented by a set of pipelines connected to the Northern Sea Route.

There are also vital political and cultural circumstances that make Russia the optimal nucleus around which to create a united Eurasia. Despite the damage Russia has done to its prestige by post-Soviet attempts to become a 'European state', it still wields considerable influence it has inherited from its Soviet and Imperial past. Russian remains a *lingua franca* in Mongolia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as beyond the former socialist camp, and Russia is still viewed as the reference point.

RUSSIAN FAR EAST FOREIGN TRADE IN 2017

MAIN TRADE PARTNERS (MERCHANDISE TRADE)



EXPORTS ($22.2bn)

54% Mineral products

18% Jewellery

12% Vegetable products

IMPORTS ($6.3bn)

35% Machinery

10% Transport

9% Metals

Source: The Far East Customs Service.

Mongolia, which is trying to maintain distance from China despite growing trade relations because of the Chinese assimilation policy in Inner Mongolia, views Russia as a desirable 'second force' that can help it preserve its cultural identity. Of great importance in this respect are the intensifying cultural ties between Mongolia and the Republic of Buryatia in Russia. Their cultural affinity is further strengthened by the theory that the border regions of the Trans-Baikal Territory may be the birthplace of Genghis Khan. Until recently, the Mongolian elite sent their children to study in Russia, mostly at Irkutsk State University, and these children, now adults, still fondly recall the atmosphere of ethnic and cultural diversity at the university's campus. And another factor to consider is the connection between the Trans-Mongolian Railway and the TSR.

The best ground route across the continent runs via Russia or via Kazakhstan to Russia

Russia is well positioned to play an intermediary role in the complicated situation in the **South Caucasus**, even though some local political and government leaders have publicly sought to distance themselves from Moscow. Economic ties with Russia, including in tourism, agriculture and food products, are important as well, considering that the latest technological achievements cannot replace the transportation routes connecting the South Caucasus to Russia.

Russia has an outsize role to play in **Central Asia**, a territory which China strongly intends to 'develop' today, for objective reasons. There is huge unemployment in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan because of the demographic explosion in the 1970s and 1980s, and soil salinization from cotton growing. Those who cannot find employment at home go to Russia, which alleviates social pressures and provides additional foreign currency revenues. Few of them look for jobs in Arab countries because they have little knowledge of Arabic or English and so are unable to compete with the Indians who speak the English language. At the same time, they know or think they know Russian, which is still widely used in cities. And even though Chinese investment is playing a major role in the region, only Russia can help these countries resolve their demographic and security problems.

The complicated relations among elite groups in Kyrgyzstan make Russia's geostrategic and mediating role an important factor in maintaining internal peace and developing the territory. Kazakhstan, naturally, continues to play the role of independent political elder in Central Asia, and not

without success. But Russia's role remains extremely significant for a number of reasons, including Kazakhstan's transport system, which is closely integrated with that of Russia. However, Russia's influence in the country is not an end in itself. Russia and the countries bound to it by logistic, linguistic and historical factors are developing as a universal transit space for goods, services and the cultural experience.

Additionally, Russia is maintaining and building on its influence in **Iran and the Middle East** for a number of reasons. Russia's role in the old and new countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus is based on long-term civilizational factors, while its position in Iran and the Middle East depends on opportunities created by the current political situation. A wise use of these opportunities would make it possible to incorporate these vital Eurasian countries in the structure which Russia is advocating. This is quite possible considering that Iran and Turkey have been turning towards Asia over the past few decades. The potential of the Caspian Sea not only as a link between Russia and the South Caucasus but also Iran has been underestimated. There were periods in the past, when the Caspian Sea emerged as a major trading area in central Eurasia. In part, it can play this role again now.

Furthermore, the construction of a railway between Russia and the Persian Gulf is under way. The Russia–Iran project to build a pipeline to India is of major importance for Greater Eurasia. Not only will this project diversify Russia's gas deliveries in the direction of India, the world's second largest gas consumer, after China. Tensions with China are pushing India to expand its partnership with the United States. Therefore, it is vitally important to involve India in the project of Greater Eurasia, of which it has always been a part historically, economically and culturally. The traditionally close political ties between Russia and India and their increasingly close economic relations give Russia an opportunity to act as an intermediary and create conditions for stabilizing the political situation in the region and promoting economic cooperation throughout the continent.

Importantly, special 'entry points' have developed between Russia and the bulk of Greater Eurasian countries in the post-Soviet period to link together Asian and not only Asian countries. Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg and Krasnodar are gateways for temporary workers and two-way commodity and financial flows. Goods intended for these countries and regions are delivered to these gates, where goods for other Russian regions or other countries are also reloaded and stored. This

has led to the spontaneous development of the corresponding system of warehouses, hotels/ hostels, recreational infrastructure, as well as ethnic markets. Not only goods made in Russia, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan move across or to Russia through these gates, but also goods from China, South Korea and Southeast Asian countries that are delivered by sea or by rail across China. These gates are now operating spontaneously, independent of one another, and often in defiance of pressure. But if made part of Russia's universal trans-Asian transport system, these streams of goods and people will grow and connect with the transport system of Southeast Asia and China's southern provinces. Ultimately, this will lead to the development of Asia as a cohesive economic system. In fact, development of this common space, with Russia as a vital linking element, is the goal of the Turn to the East and building Greater Eurasia.

This trend is being additionally promoted by the BRI, which aims to create a belt of friendly and prosperous countries and markets, dependent on China, and also to reach European markets. It is China that has initiated the transfer of a major part of global trade from the seas to the continent, from the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean to Eurasia. Today China is working to create an integrated transport system to connect its territory with Southeast Asia and to build roads across Kazakhstan. These are not rival but complementary projects in Greater Eurasia and also in the Far Eastern border regions. Vladivostok is not a mere window but rather a gateway to Asia and an entry point for South Korea and Japan, as well as Russia's point of entry to these markets. This is what dictates the need for upgrading the Vladivostok port, expanding the TSR and developing the Baikal–Amur Mainline. The other gates – Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Chita and other cities – must also be developed to promote Russia's integration in the adjacent Eurasian space. The connection of China's northern provinces with Eurasia via the TSR and the Chinese Eastern Railway, which is linked to the latter, will be more convenient than a path towards European Russia across Kazakhstan. The entry points for this project may be Chita as a historical hub on the Chinese Eastern Railway and Khabarovsk, with the logistics hub that is being built on Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island.

Development of a cohesive economic system in Asia, with Russia as a vital linking element, is the goal of the Turn to the East and building Greater Eurasia

The **cultural and geopolitical aspects** of Russia's Turn to the East are extremely important as well. Multi-ethnic but cohesive Russia can become the central meeting point for Asia and Europe. Russia is mostly a Christian country, which brings it closer to the Christian countries of Europe. At the same time,

Welcome greeting ceremony for foreign journalists in Blagoveshchensk, 2016.

Russia, especially Siberia, has a unique centuries-long experience of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of various religious communities. The Trans-Baikal Territory is a shining example of the cultural symbiosis of a multitude of various social groups of different religious identity that have learned to live in peace and successfully communicate with each other. A rational application of this experience can be used to create a matrix of cultural and religious interaction in East Asia. The experience of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan can be used to create a successful system of interaction with Muslim countries and to understand not only the economic or ethnic but also religious elements in their policies. The development of Islamic theology in Russia and the enhancement of its prestige around the world can facilitate interaction in Central Asia and the Middle East as well as deprive terrorists of their religious leverage.

Over the past centuries, Russia has developed a separate language for each of the Eurasian spaces – Christian, Muslim and Buddhist. These languages can and should be used, not to separate different parts of Eurasia but to promote a comprehensive and productive dialogue between them.

Russia can and must become not just a transit territory connecting Eurasian economies but also a territory of dialogue between different yet spiritually close cultures. The Chinese have the concept of harmony in diversity. There is a similar concept in Russian culture of *'sobornost'*, or community spirit. Russia can contribute to the development of this spirit in Eurasia. Therefore, Russia's Turn to the East is not a mere regional project. It comprises the following elements:

- The shifting of Russia's political, economic and cultural focus from the West to the East, as well as raising awareness of Russia's Eurasian roots and of the fact that Asian heritage of Russia has been overshadowed by Europe for too long;
- The creation of a ramified transport and logistics network as the material basis for creating Greater Eurasia and attaining two goals. The first goal is to make use of the unique raw materials of Russia's northeastern regions for economic development and to create conditions for attracting investment for the purpose of processing these mineral resources in Russia. The second goal is to link the economic systems of North Eurasia, Central and Southwest Asia;
- The use of Russia's diverse yet coherent culture to promote the fusion of cultures and societies throughout Greater Eurasia and to turn Russia into a 'meeting point' and one of the main centres of a new world and a new world order;
- Active and in some areas major contribution to the development of a community of Eurasian nations based on cooperation, development and common security, which may eventually include Europe, the western part of the continent.

Due to its cultural diversity, Russia is well suited for maintaining geopolitical and ideological balance between rival Asian countries, primarily India and China. Russia has proved its ability to mediate a settlement of the Syrian conflict. In other words, the Greater Eurasia initiative is aimed at creating a stable and well-balanced world order in Asia. Russia, which is not a member of any formal military-political alliances, but CSTO has the diplomatic skill and military-political weight to become the leading provider of security in Eurasia, an independent and relatively equidistant equalizer and arbiter in old and new conflicts in Eurasia and East Asia, including in relations between China, Japan, India, and the two Koreas. This geopolitical resource can make up, to a degree, for Russia's relative economic weakness. For the first time in the past 500 years, there is a real chance to create a Great and Greater Eurasia not as an empire but as a community of nations that are

Alexander Suchkov, The defence of Albazin Ostrog in 1685-1687.

aware of both their differences and their common history and destiny. Russia with its diverse but peacefully coexisting cultures and its economic gateways can, and is called to, become the natural assembly point for uniting this huge continent into a new community of nations.

However, there are numerous obstacles to Russia's Eurasian mission, such as myths and phobias about Asia and the East. After all, it is not chatty old folks but rather serious experts who are talking in respected media outlets about 'the threat from the East' and 'creeping expansion'. What do they perceive as a threat? We will try to answer this question.

Myths, Phobias and Translating Asia into Russian

Regrettably, xenophobia both on social and political levels continues to be an everyday problem in Russia, posing a serious obstacle to the country's Turn to the East. Moreover, xenophobia is selective: What seems quite pardonable in a European or an American (national traits

and traditions) causes indignation where Asians are concerned. Ignorance or selective knowledge of the East is generating fear and an instinctive urge to steer clear of it. The idea of the 'yellow peril' is perhaps the acme of Eastern phobias.

People have been saying and writing that the East is a threat to Russia for over a century. True, in the early 20th century, the source of the 'threat' was identified as Japan. Accordingly, the Far Eastern region was organized as an outpost and a fortress in the East. The threat changed in the latter half of the 20th century, with China replacing Japan as the source. But the fortress idea remained intact as did the propensity for confrontation with the East that spread from front-page columns and idle chit-chat on park benches to pseudo-academic research. It is this image of the East that shaped the consciousness of people in the Russian Far East and gave them their *raison d'etre*. Every resident in the region and beyond knew that the Far East could not be approached with an economic yardstick, because the security of Russia (the USSR) was involved. The basic mindset throughout the Soviet period was defensive.

Clearly, a conviction as deep as this could not change overnight. People in the region regarded the new official course that originated in 1985 and brought about *perestroika*, the collapse of the USSR and all the events that marked the post-Soviet period, as a crushing defeat. Despite the radical change in socioeconomic conditions and the abolition of the ideology and the USSR itself, the number of people identifying with the 'outpost mentality' was sufficiently high throughout the post-Soviet period and particularly in the 1990s. Even a 2011 poll conducted in the run-up to the APEC summit in Vladivostok revealed that more than 23% of respondents expressed a militarized vision of the region's future ('fortress region', 'fortress city').

China was the main adversary in the Far East for most of the Soviet post-war history. Initially local residents perceived the coming of Chinese people (business people, students, cultural figures, etc.) as a personal disaster and loss of existential rationale. Here the 'yellow peril' myth penetrates deeply into the public consciousness, causing an outcry: 'They are occupying us, they are already inside the fortress!' Meanwhile, the number of Chinese citizens in the Far East

Ignorance or selective knowledge of the East is generating fear and an instinctive urge to steer clear of it

has always been in the tens of thousands, and the low end at that. But their mere presence provoked hysteria that became nearly universal in the first half of the 1990s. Clearly, the fear was not evenly distributed throughout the country. In the north, where the number of Chinese citizens was vanishingly small, people just read or heard the claims that the Far East had been occupied by the Chinese. There was a similar feeling in central Russia. The fear was at its strongest in the southern Primorye Territory and the Amur Region, which had particularly close contacts with the southern neighbour.

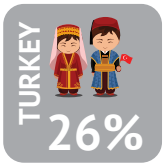
Yet, the fear gave way almost immediately to a more complex attitude: 'They are undoubtedly occupying us, but there is no means of survival other than cooperation, given that the metropolis has abandoned its fortress.' There followed a period of massive 'shuttle' trading and cross-border interaction that gave birth to all small and medium-sized businesses in the Russian Far East, or at least in its southern areas. Russians make themselves at home in China's border towns that rapidly adapt to their presence, establishing cross-border trade infrastructure (cheap hotels, depots, cafes, transportation schemes). Local Chinese learn the Russian language; shops and cafes have signs and menus in Russian. Thus, Chinese border areas ceased to feel alien to Far Eastern Russians.

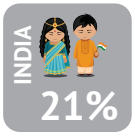
Meanwhile, the situation is not so rosy across the border, in Russia, where the regional authorities are holding up the 'yellow peril' as almost an official ideology. The reason why they have seized on the waning 'peril' idea is dictated by their specific method of organizing relations with the central government. In the light of Boris Yeltsin's generous offer ('Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow'), regions fabricated 'horrors' as a way to induce the central government to delegate additional powers to them. This 'trading in threats' was at the time the optimal regional strategy. The most successful in this sense was Tatarstan, which managed to secure maximum authority by scaring Moscow with the 'threat of Islamic extremism'. But the Far Eastern regions were not far behind. Their alleged opposition to the 'Chinese threat' (whether the claims were sincere or contrived) gained them broad powers that made it possible for the regional administrations to implement what was essentially a free trade regime that offered a means of survival at that time. The 'yellow peril' helped regional leaders to explain to the central government why it should not interfere in Far Eastern affairs or change the existing rules of the game: The situation is awful and only the Governor can keep the balance and protect Russian land from the 'yellow expansion'.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC OPINION

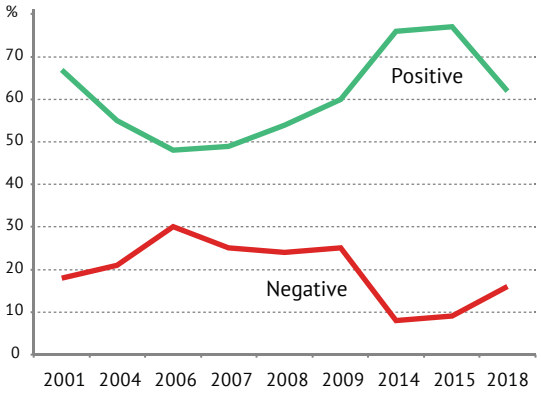
RUSSIA'S CLOSEST FRIENDS OR ALLIES*

*as of April 2018

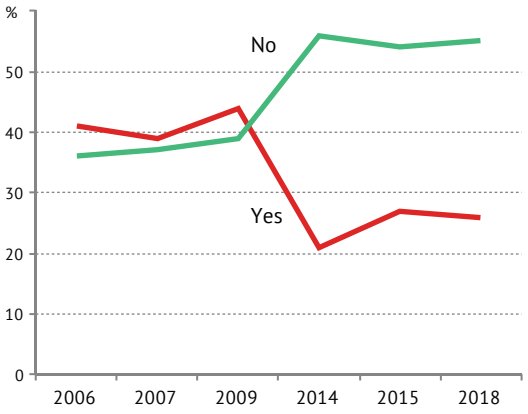




ATTITUDE TO CHINA



DOES CHINA POSE A THREAT TO RUSSIA?



IF YOU HAVE A CHOICE WHERE TO GO, WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT CHINA OR A EUROPEAN COUNTRY IN THE FIRST PLACE?

China **27%**

A European country **49%**

Not sure **24%**

Source: Public Opinion Foudation (FOM).

At the turn of the century, this policy enabled Far Eastern Russians to penetrate further into China, from the borderland to the northern provinces. Harbin, Dalian, Mudanjiang and Qiqihar became quite familiar and popular places of residence. Migration in both directions was growing, with Russian teachers and architects, engineers and students heading for China. In the early 2000s, the Chinese inflow included mostly seasonal workers, but also some business people and scientists. This was accompanied by intensification of contacts between regional administrations. Russia also built the necessary infrastructure adapted to the requirements of the Chinese. But even then, their numbers were negligible compared to the local population.

The situation began to change around 2005. Chinese seasonal labour disappeared and was replaced by Central Asian workers. Instead, more Chinese business people, scientists, teachers, musicians, artists, doctors and cooks came to Russia. With China's northern provinces growing increasingly wealthy, seasonal work in Russia became unprofitable. The number of Chinese citizens in Russia was falling, while their importance was growing. In parallel, the outflow of Russians to China swelled as Russian business people expanded contacts in neighbouring and more remote countries of Southeast Asia. They invested in those economies, established joint ventures, and placed orders with Chinese industries. Russian Far Eastern students became increasingly willing to get education in China or South Korea.

Vacationing in China became increasingly popular as well. Hainan Island and Yellow Sea resorts started attracting Far Eastern residents because they were cheaper and offered a higher level of service than those in the Primorye Territory. That period also witnessed formation of friendly partner networks as well as record levels of interaction in East Asia. Russian and Chinese artists organized exhibitions both in the Russian Far East and China and held joint (border) festivals in Blagoveshchensk. Many teachers, engineers, architects and IT specialists secured long-term employment contracts in China. Until recently, even old-age pensioners could move to Chinese border resort towns and live off the money earned by renting their flats in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk. Under these circumstances, the 'Chinese threat' could be seriously discussed only by conspiracy theorists, who would say, 'They only pretend to be good, but in fact…'

Unexpectedly, however, the few marginal figures who espoused the 'yellow peril' theory received support from the Russian West. The 'Chinese

threat' that originated in the Russian Far East in the 1990s was superimposed on old fears and led to the belief that the 'Chinese had captured everything' in the East. Allegedly, there were millions of them and they were marrying Russian women in droves. Since myths cannot be refuted with logic, they are difficult to dispel. The myth could be undermined neither by statistics showing that the number of the Chinese in Russia, excluding short-term visits, did not exceed one hundred thousand people, most of whom were Chinese students at Russian universities, nor by assurances that direct Chinese investment in Russia was lower than Russian (private) investment in the Chinese economy. Even Russian-Chinese marriages numbered only a few dozen to perhaps several hundred per year, for a total in the low tens of thousands. Besides, it is hard to see interethnic marriages as a threat. For not quite clear reasons, advocates of the 'yellow peril' theory were not alarmed by the Chinese in Europe or in Southeast Asia, but Chinese faces in St. Petersburg filled them with horror and trepidation. Team after team of journalists from Moscow came to report on the 'occupied Far East' only to come back disappointed, because the invaders had sneakily concealed their presence and could not be found. But the efforts of these 'witnesses of the yellow peril' never subsided, for after all they were fighting not only for the customary, if already unprofitable, cultural, political and economic orientation towards Europe, but also for the years they had personally spent working to cultivate connections in the West, invest in Western real estate, and maintain Russia's Eurocentric outlook.

On top of that Russian Sinophobia got encouraged, since the late 2000s, by our friends/ rivals from Europe. They unleashed a torrent of articles claiming that China would swallow up Russia and that the Turn to the East is counterproductive and doomed to fail. These articles, which were duly amplified by Russian Westerners, were clearly aimed at preventing Russia from diversifying its economic and political ties, so that Russia and Russian businesses should not be allowed to become more competitive *vis-à-vis* Europe, which wanted to preserve the lucrative system of relations, where the 'pupil' was willing not only to obey the 'teacher' but also to pay him.

Sinophobia is on the wane in the Russian Far East, but elsewhere the fight against the 'yellow peril' continues. This includes the myth that the Chinese are ruthlessly clearing forests in Russia, when it is actually local timber businesses and sympathetic officials. The Chinese buy the timber, but it is an entirely Russian problem.

An alternative view of China as a godsend for Russia is emerging in light of the strengthened Russian-Chinese political partnership. The existence of this political alliance has led some to the odd conclusion that the Chinese business community should primarily mind the interests of its Russian partners rather than its own interests. China is expected (or was expected until recently) to invest in projects where this investment is needed by Russia or even by certain companies that are not ready to invest on their own, and not where Chinese businesses see the potential for profit. Their inflated expectations dashed, they seek to explain these 'oddities' by invoking a conspiracy and fall back on the myth of the 'yellow peril'. Both the former and the latter are serious obstacles to mutually beneficial trade ties and the Turn to the East as a whole. Besides, the two countries are still unable to move beyond political statements and framework agreements to real massive investment and joint projects.

While all phobias of the East are blown out of proportion, they are not completely devoid of rational basis. Obviously, no Eastern country is contemplating aggression or expansion with regard to Russia. But any excessive closeness to 'the others', even if it is justified in the short term, may lead to a dilution or loss of identity.

East Eurasian countries and peoples responded to their own times of trouble – China devastated by two hundred years of wars, Tibet lying in ruins, Japan torn apart by severe internal crisis – by evolving a two-layer language for communicating with Europeans. The outer layer was the European form that concealed an entirely Asian inner core. This language enabled them to borrow from the European technological civilization what corresponded to their way of life and reject what was alien, while masking the various forms of imitation involved. An effective filter was created between the East and the West that has been in operation for more than one hundred years. Japan was the first to do that during the Meiji period. China took this path much later. Today this filter language and filter structures are everywhere (albeit with substantial national variations). Russia should also make use of this experience in its interaction with Asia. Otherwise commercial deals will not be particularly reliable, investment will be on a lower scale, and sellers are quite likely to turn (and are already turning) into supplicants that profit much less from their activities. We must become 'one of the family' as much as possible, to look beyond the protectionist measures and discern in these countries' laws built-in mechanisms to legally evade them.

The Russian philosophy of foreign relations was created for contacts with the West and on its template. While European civilization – at least its modernist version – gives absolute priority to law and private initiative, the East prioritizes not so much law as order, with law, legislation, custom and faith being just expedients for ensuring order and harmony in society on a more elemental level, based on the notion of 'home' (family, neighbours, and friends). The social fabric consists of these 'homes' (friendly and neighbourly environments) rather than civil society institutions. The West's centuries-long domination (at times quite ruthless) has planted in Eastern soil quite a few seeds intended to grow under a different sky. Outwardly they resemble their Western progenitors, but the soil where they grew made them different. The forms of 'struggle' nurtured by European culture prove inefficient for the 'soil' is different here and it brings different fruits. The strict sanctions introduced against China after the Tiananmen events, the boycott of Iran, sanctions against India and even the isolation of North Korea have failed to bring these countries to disaster and collapse. Quite often they even provided an impetus for development of their national economy and culture.

The existence of the political alliance has led some to the odd conclusion that the Chinese business community should primarily mind the interests of its Russian partners rather than its own interests

Here, the sacred cows of the Western institutional system are only a language, a form (not always felicitous) for expressing different meanings related to traditional social organization – meanings with more relevance for this land. The Western polities have evolved a universal (or universalist, to be more precise) method in international relations, the core element of which is a norm based on the social contract and enshrined in domestic and international law. The existence of an institutionalized formal act is the basis for mutual trust between counterparts. In the East, the basis is person-to-person trust between parties to a contract. Naturally, a deal can be reached when something highly beneficial for the parties is involved. But reliable and long-term cooperation in this case is not particularly likely. Reliability is all the more important in a situation where international law is increasingly eroding and international economic relations are rapidly becoming politicized. In this case, the weakened institutional trust is compensated by person-to-person trust between participants from different

Besides, the two countries are still unable to move beyond political statements and framework agreements to real massive investment and joint projects

countries. To succeed, Russian politicians and Russian business people should learn how to work in a different ideological environment and understand partner's civilizational peculiarities – to make the contacts strategic.

No doubt, seeking to become 'one of the family' does not rule out a rational balancing policy or even soft containment of Asian partners. Excessive dependence is dangerous everywhere. This is where the geopolitical component of the Greater Eurasia concept comes in. It aims not only to create a common space for cooperation, development and security (which is approximately the same as China's idea of 'community of common destiny'), but also to place China, the inevitable regional leader, in a web of ties, institutions and balances that excludes a possibility of even a soft hegemony that would be unacceptable to its major neighbours. This is a challenge of sorts for China, which finds it difficult to resist the millennia-old inertia of the Middle Kingdom quietly rolling over its neighbours. But this strategy will not work with the heirs to the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires, as well as India. Russia needs an interpreter-cum-mediator precisely in order to secure a reliable link to Asia and avoid being taken over by the latter.

The filter structures and the filter language discussed earlier, made it possible for Asian countries to successfully interact with the world economy through the Western-centric matrix, despite the extremely stringent constraints imposed by the West. But these structures have evolved over decades if not centuries. Russia does not have this luxury. Still, the situation is far from hopeless. The southern areas of the Russian Far East and the Trans-Baikal area are an enormous region that has managed to evolve adequate forms of interaction with the business systems of countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia.

This explains the critical importance of developing the Russian Far East, Russia's entryway and intermediary in Asia. It is the Russian Far East that has the unique experience of entering into the world of East Asia. It can become a guide and even an 'interpreter' capable of translating Asia into Russian. It will accompany Russia on its journey through this unknown world and prevent any missteps. We are coming to understand the role that people in the Russian Far East can play in bringing the Greater Eurasia project to fruition.

What Needs to Be Done #1. The Russian Far East and More

It so happened that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Far East was left to its own devices. It found itself almost cut off from the rest of the country (less than 4% of the region's output was sent to western Russia), at a time where the region's economy was absolutely unsuited for operating independently of the national economy. In a little more than a decade, building on Soviet (prior to the 1950s) and pre-Soviet experience, a significant portion of the region's residents managed to incorporate into the neighbouring countries' economy. And not just incorporate. They created a network of partners and friends that today covers practically all of China's northern provinces and extends to Korea, Japan and countries of Southeast Asia.

These networks made it possible to conduct business operations in an extremely challenging environment, to safeguard businesses against a variety of threats, and to address issues with public and private entities of neighbouring and fairly remote countries. Obviously, these were not world-class corporations, but small- or medium-sized enterprises. That is why cooperation retained its cross-border dimension and never expanded to cover all possible areas and spaces. However, even in this form, it amassed experience and made it possible to develop an understandable and convenient communication language and principles of interaction within East Asia. They learned to see real relations hidden behind the Western format and to work with people and local institutions rather than follow imitation formats.

To succeed, Russian politicians and Russian business people should learn how to work in a different ideological environment and understand partner's civilizational peculiarities – to make the contacts strategic

However, it was not only the region's businesses that gained such experience. Russia's Far Eastern universities, research institutes and museums were compelled to establish contacts with their colleagues from neighbouring countries, to learn their languages and to master local ethics – all of that just to survive. For quite a long time, it was, in fact, the only way

to get an opportunity to develop a new area in education, to conduct an expensive experiment or a field study, or to organize a new trade fair, an exhibition, or a high-profile cultural event. Arguably, the experience gained by these organizations is even more valuable, as the communication lines extended to the neighbouring countries' state agencies ranging from municipal to federal. A significant number of these organizations are tightly integrated into relevant unions and associations of the macroregion, exchange programmes, etc. However, simply because they are part of a single nationwide Russian network, the universities, research institutes, museums, etc. had much stronger ties with the country's internal space than the region's businesses.

This territory, its people and local organizations could act as a filter, a mediator, or a guide between European Russia and East Asia. It could, but it does not. So far, this experience of the Russian Far East has remained unclaimed. Partly, the Far Eastern residents themselves are to blame for this, as they are not in a hurry to articulate it, are afraid of competitors from Russians from the western regions and do not want to call their attention. Unaware of this opportunity, the people from Moscow seeking to develop this region are trying to somehow get the locals involved into the global project, but not in the areas where the Far Eastern experts could be useful. Mutual scepticism gives rise to mutual distancing. Many of the existing Asian partners of the Russian Far East are not eager to join the project, either. Active use of small but oftentimes significant expat communities from Asian countries that live and work in Russia is a valuable resource for rapprochement with Asia, too. They can serve as additional conductors for interaction and better understanding and should be involved in education. So far, they have been mostly limited in their actions.

For Moscow officials, the Far Eastern residents have been an obscure deadweight, an appendage to a critically important territory that is constantly whining and requesting (for reasons unknown) more benefits for itself. For local residents, scepticism stems from the fact that, seeing that the attempts to develop the Russian Far East are undertaken without taking account of the region's specifics and its expertise in integrating into East Asia – this endeavour is seen as nothing more than siphoning off the budget money coming from Moscow. They remain silent because they are not asked to speak. Then again, what is the point of discussing things that are clear to the region's residents?

Monument to Nikolay Muravyov-Amursky in Blagoveshchensk, 2018.

Is it possible to overcome this situation? It certainly is. But answers are given only when questions are asked.

The idea of a new and special role for the Russian Far East – that of a region of fast growth, a mediator region, a filter and a guide, Russia's gateway to a new world and new welfare – should not only be articulated but must be embodied in a system of concrete actions with concrete people who are well-known in the region. In this case, the inclusion of the Russian Far East in the process of Turning to the East – as an active participant – is quite possible. The forms of such inclusion do not necessarily have to be public and loud (e.g. conferences or forums). It is even more important to transform the idea of the Turn to the East into a series of concrete projects for Russia's interaction with East Asian countries, to create working groups for these projects and to define terms, resources and the degree of leeway.

Nearby fish factory on Kunashir Island, 2018.

Entities such as corporations for developing territories, which provide support to investment projects and help speed up the formalities, have already been created in the region. It is equally important to work with potential investors in foreign countries and to create such *support and backup groups* for Russian investment abroad. Building up personal ties and networks of trust to spread information will make both Russian and foreign investments more reliable and lucrative. With overall coordination from the centre and proper information support, these local groups will help Russia gain a foothold in Asia. Personal trust and established social networks in these countries will allow these groups to fulfil the most important function for Russia: the function of a guide and interpreter. Clearly, this kind of work performed on an ongoing basis (it matters little if done otherwise) requires the ultimate level of expertise and analysis.

That is why think tanks focusing on collecting and processing information from Asian countries will be among the most critical prerequisites for success. We need highly skilled orientalists. Not just experts in a particular language, but people capable of analysing facts who have broad knowledge about the countries in question. They are needed not only in the capitals, but the regions of contact as well. Training orientalists is a priority task of the Turn to the East at the next stage. Importantly, they should train and work with Russia's financial support. Paraphrasing the famous maxim that people who do not want to feed their army will feed someone else's, one can say that those who do not want to feed orientalists today will pay fines for being ignorant of the East today and forever.

However, not all residents of the region may be such mediators. As in any other society, not all people in the Russian Far East are willing to integrate into international networks (especially in its northern parts). They are the ones who create the negative information background that accompanies innovations coming from the outside. Also, often ignored is the fact that the Russian Far East has excessive labour supply for many categories of workers, not labour shortages, and a large share of 'redundant' population. Which is why two types of actions are possible and necessary.

First of all, some of those people may well be included in projects as 'foremen' and 'workers'. Any logistics or construction project will require large numbers of workers. In the north of the region, each imported worker is cheaper than a local worker (even if they work for the same salary). However, in the south, it is enough to use the existing labour and organize and reorient the retraining centres from training hairdressers and make-up artists to training in professions that are more related to the Turn to the East. Moreover, the relatively labour-abundant south is quite capable of supplying seasonal workers to the northern regions (as was the case in the 1990s). The latter will be substantially cheaper than bringing in workers from other regions or other countries. However, even this will not fully make use of the population that is not capable or unwilling to be Russia's guide to the world of East Asia.

Training orientalists is a priority task of the Turn to the East at the next stage

This is why there is a – second of all: A significant share of the population of Yakutia, Magadan Region and Kamchatka, as

well as the southern regions, has developed forms of survival within the local communities and local economy. It would be much cheaper for the country to give them the maximum freedom of action and lift all forms of administrative restrictions and control over them – to let them live the way they want to live. Willing and active people of the Russian Far East will be included in the global project, take their place within the concept of an intermediary region, a transit territory, or a resource region. However, those who would like to live the way they always have should be given such an opportunity.

Not the region itself, but small businesses, sole proprietors and self-employed individuals should be simply allowed to fend for themselves. Clearly, this must be done very carefully. For instance, to begin with, it is possible to give this group an option to pick a model of social payments (pension insurance, medical insurance, etc.), and then gradually expand the sphere of independent choice extending it to other social groups. These groups will create social and leisure infrastructure, without which global trade is impracticable, and create the territory's food base thus cutting public spending. In this way, indirectly, they will also participate in the grand project. The conceptualization of the new significance of the Russian Far East and, most importantly, the Far Eastern residents as guides to Asia and interpreters of Asia into Russian, will create a new motivation for the region's residents, a new and powerful basis for self-awareness within the region and Russia in general.

However, to implement Russia's Eurasian project, the guides must be available throughout Eurasia. Here, residents of other gateways (in Central Siberia, the Caucasus, Mongolia, the Caspian region, etc.) may well act as frontier trailblazers. Such contacts and communities establishing contacts have formed over the post-Soviet years. However, up until now, no attempt has been made to use them in the interests of the country and, more than that, major restrictions have been imposed on their activities. It is not so much about the mythical 'experts' or the academic community (although its role can also be significant), but about individual people, citizens of Russia. In the Soviet Union, the Siberian and Far Eastern expanses were developed by the entire country. There were no or almost no fundamental differences between ethnic groups. The concepts of the 'Soviet people' and a 'Soviet person' removed these differences. As a result, Russia has ethnic and cultural

communities of people from Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and other former Soviet republics. They are fully naturalized citizens of Russia and can contribute to building interaction in Eurasia. Cultural proximity among Mongols and Buryats and the fact that there is a large Buryat community in Mongolia, can be an important factor contributing to Russian businesses entering this space as 'non-aliens'.

The Russian communities that reside both in and beyond the former Soviet republics could make an even more significant contribution to making Russia feel at home in Asia

The Russian communities that reside both in and beyond the former Soviet republics could make an even more significant contribution to making Russia feel at home in Asia. During the post-Soviet years, the Russian expat community spread to almost all East Asian countries, including the countries of Southeast Asia. Back in the 1990s, residents of that region began to travel there not only for vacations, but also for employment under long-term contracts. Culture and science professionals, as well as teachers, were the first to venture there. Many of them have been living in neighbouring countries for more than a decade now. Entrepreneurs went there *en masse* as well (especially in this century). People worked not only in the Russian sector associated with tourism and servicing traditional supplies of bioresources (e.g. timber, fish), but local businesses as well. The migration to the East Asian countries expanded. Currently, Russian migrant communities in South Korea, China, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. are complex social organisms rooted in the local soil, with their own set of statuses and ways of building relations with their homeland. However, no serious work has been done with them and, unfortunately, is not being done today, either. The existing agencies (for example, Rossotrudnichestvo) perform limited cultural and educational functions; trade missions have so far shown limited effectiveness and are managed, as a rule, by officials, not business people.

An Eastern Club could become a concrete project, relatively easy to implement, to bring together elites and businesses of central and eastern Russia and Asia

The term 'people's diplomacy' is very popular. It is believed that informal ties that arise between citizens of different countries can serve as an additional safeguard against the world slipping into a nuclear disaster. Today, the need to recreate and activate such structures is particularly acute. In this case, political agreements will form a framework within which

networks safeguarding business contacts and making them long-term and reliable can operate. In turn, these networks in East Asia will form the basis for Russia's continued political, cultural and civilizational rapprochement with the countries of the macroregion. With certain organizational efforts, they can also function as filters selecting the forms of cooperation that will benefit our country.

It appears that the majority of existing business associations, which are supposed to establish Russia's business cooperation with specific countries in Asia, need to be reformed and take a reality check. Preliminary analysis showed that most of these associations were largely formal in nature. Major Russian businessmen and public figures, who are at the helm of many of them, have too many things to attend to. Instead, such associations should be led, primarily, by – people who know Siberia and the Far East and have extensive personal experience and connections in Asia. Those of Siberian and Far Eastern origin are the best choice.

An Eastern Club comprised, on the part of Russia, of 20% of the central business, political and scientific Asia-oriented elites, 45% of Far Eastern representatives, and 25% of representatives of other regions of Siberia, could become a concrete project, relatively easy to implement, to bring together elites and businesses of central and eastern Russia and Asia. The club could do more than merely provide assistance to the executive authorities or to help to devise a new strategy for developing Siberia and the Russian Far East and Russia's Turn to the East. Its primary goal would be to fuse the country's central and eastern elites, to develop a single ideology and to move forward to a new world. The club could include representatives of business, academic and media elites of other Asian countries and representatives of Russian expat communities in Asian countries. It could promote organization of forums and ensure interests of Russian-Asian businesses in the federal centre and in Asian countries, develop scientific and cultural contacts, and support NGOs operating in this area. Most importantly, it could become an institutional platform for promoting the idea of the Turn to the East within Russia as a beneficial for the country.

However, even the 'entry points' and a circle of loyalty in the countries of East Asia and Greater Eurasia cannot fully guarantee the success of the Turn to the East until all or most people in the country understand and feel their involvement in this world and comprehend Russia's fate in Asia.

What Needs to Be Done #2. Turn to the East for the Whole of Russia: Get to Know Asia

National history is a crucial component of a political nation. In this context, history is not so much the product of a professional corporation of historians, as a collective memory and collective emotion. No doubt, this memory and emotion should be based on authentic and verified facts, but its role is much more important than just describing past events. Such collective emotions and collective memory are what forms self-awareness, a way to distinguish between a friend and a foe, and acceptance or non-acceptance of 'the others'. It is this experience of the common past that weaves the fabric of society and enables individuals to live, act and create together. Today it is clear that unless we include Asian Russia into the system of collective (common) memory, the Turn to the East runs every risk of remaining a regional project. For Russia to come into its own as the architect of a new, Greater Eurasia, there is a need for shifts in mentality whose basic postulates and even vocabulary took shape during the Petrine European period and particularly under the influence of the post-Soviet romantic Eurocentrism.

Russia must certainly remain what it is, a power stretching across Europe and Asia. Russia's centuries-long orientation to the West inevitably led to a specific change of scale to measure and evaluate certain events. The intricate entwinements of interests, clashes, attacks, sieges, and years of wars unexpectedly turned out to be perceived as a drive to 'develop vacant lands' and obtain furs and walrus tusks, which in that epoch were the equivalent of what is oil and gas exports today. No doubt, people went after unique resources that were in high demand in Europe and China. But the lands were not 'vacant'. And while the Khanate of Sibir and its conquest are occasionally mentioned in connection with the Cossack ataman Yermak Timofeyevich, who is now a Russian folk hero, the Tyumen Horde (yurt) remains only in the knowledge of local history experts, if at all. The same can be said of Golden Mangazeya, the 16th-century Russian Eldorado. Descriptions of the extremely difficult relations and occasional bloody battles with the Dzungar Khanate can only rarely be spotted in print outside special research.

Sergei Agapov and Anatoly Gorpenko, The Panorama of the Battle of Volochayevka.

The forty years war with the Qing Empire is almost unknown. Yeremei Khabarov's campaign, which culminated in a clash with the empire's regular units, Nikifor Chernigovsky's inroads across the Amur River, and the fantastic defence of Albazin organized by Afanasy Beiton, a German–Russian whom Cossacks elected their ataman, are all spectacular historic events that for some reason remain beyond the general knowledge of Russian history. Consigned to oblivion are also years-long efforts by Russian scholars and diplomats Nicolae Spathari and Nikita Bichurin to establish relations with China. Or take the embassy of Evert Ysbrants Ides, who was sent to China by Peter the Great and became the first person from Russia to be received by the Chinese Emperor. These and other important and dramatic events in Russia's Asian history are not yet an element of the all-Russian collective memory.

It has been forgotten that Russian hunters and merchants brought furs and walrus tusks both to the West and China, receiving in exchange Chinese goods that were later resold at a profit. Fur sales made it possible to buy tea, which became Russia's national beverage. In line with the Communist historical tradition that sought to belittle all that was before 1917, we have forgotten the Russo-Japanese war and, most importantly, the feat of valour by the Russian engineers, workers, officers and soldiers who built the TSR, which in fact helped to preserve Russia in its present borders. The mastermind

behind this project, Count Sergei Witte, is a half-forgotten figure. Hundreds of thousands of unknown prisoners of Dalstroy (Far North Construction Trust, an organization set up in 1931 to manage road construction and the mining of gold in the Chukotka region of the Russian Far East), who built ports and roads, mined gold and uranium and thus, although they were forced to, defended their country in its time of troubles, have not been restored to our collective and grateful memory. Moscow has erected a large-scale monument to the victims of political repressions and a Gulag (stands for the government agency in charge of the Soviet forced labour camp system) museum. There are hundreds of similar monuments across the country, but only a few of them in the Russian Far East. Siberia and generally the entire space from the Urals to the Pacific is a zone of historical silence.

For Russia to come into its own as the architect of a new, Greater Eurasia, there is a need for shifts in mentality

Historical events in Russian Asia, even the most significant ones, end up as obscure border clashes. The fact that these clashes lasted for decades and involved battles between thousands-strong armies, sieges, talks, wonders of nobility and vileness remains off screen, as does the amazing fate of Prince Gantimur, the Qing analogue of Prince Andrey Kurbsky, and for that matter – the fates of Russian heroes of these almost forgotten battles, sieges and negotiations. Even the unique Treaty of Nerchinsk, one of the first equitable peace agreements signed by the Qing Empire, which was then at the peak of its power (the Kangxi era), was totally overshadowed by the confrontation between Tsarina Sofia and Tsar Peter. In the meantime, it was this treaty that enabled Russia to emerge as a supplier of silk, porcelain and spice to Europe, whose supplies had been previously monopolized by Venice, Portugal and Holland.

These and other important and dramatic events in Russia's Asian history are not yet an element of the all-Russian collective memory

Remaining outside habitual knowledge is the economic boom in the Amur River region, which rejoined Russia after the signing of the Treaty of Aigun and the Treaty of Peking in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was the period (interrupted by the Civil War) when the Russian Far East was ahead of America's Wild West in terms of development rates. Siberian and Amur cities were acquiring lustre as well as huge palaces of commerce, cinemas, theatres, libraries and other trappings of city life. It was there that the major Far Eastern commodities exchanges were located and where the heart of East Asia's economic life was beating. Russian history has also overlooked the local society that for centuries regarded Siberia as the territory of accord. As a rule, Orthodox Christians, Roman

Catholics, Old Believers, Muslims, Buddhists, and pagans found ways to work together and live in peace and agreement.

This has resulted in a specific image of Russian Asia as an immense void, where there was nothing but 'savage Siberia' and a few trailblazers, who crossed it on their obscure missions. Even the recent heroic events remain local or regional affairs. The defence of Petropavlovsk in 1854, when a handful of Cossacks, sailors and local indigenous volunteers managed to beat back an assault by an Anglo-French naval squadron, which wanted to lay their hands on Kamchatka after doing the same with Crimea, is a memorable event only for the residents of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. But had the situation turned out different, it is quite likely that there would have been no Russian lands on the Pacific coast. Even the forming of the famous Far Eastern and Siberian divisions, which saved Moscow and Stalingrad during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945), is not reflected in the mass consciousness. Almost unknown is the Pacific Fleet sailors' courageous effort to defend Russia's eastern borders and their everyday heroism in 1990s in managing to preserve the key part of the national nuclear deterrent. Most inhabitants of Russia are unaware of this dramatic and heroic story of Siberia's accession and the life of Russian Asia. As an integral phenomenon it is rather timidly presented in museum displays, and its descriptions in textbooks are inadequate. But unless we have this knowledge, we will continue to see Asia as barbaric, incomprehensible and occasionally hostile.

Knowledge of Russia's European history must be expanded to include the history of the exploration and development of Siberia, an exploit that forged the Siberian character embodying the best of Russian nature, its daring, of which present-day Russia is so badly in need, and its knack for both fighting and negotiating, defending one's interests and being a true friend. We need a thorough and concerned description of the Russian eastward push. It must be set out in *popular literature, movies and TV productions* rather than only in professional historical writings (such writings do exist, although remaining in the shadow). It is extremely important to include this content in school curricula, advertise the existing websites on history and present-day life of Siberia and the Russian Far East, and create new websites in the regions to educate people on Russia's history in Asia.

But this knowledge is not only for internal consumption. The important thing is to project the image of Russia and Russian Asia to neighbouring countries. A very odd situation has taken shape and in part continues to exist,

Rehearsal of the military parade of the Pacific Fleet.

where Russia's image in Asia is being formed practically without its participation. Instead, Western analytical and information centres, which are not interested in the success of Russia's Turn to Asia, are actively involved in the effort. The result is a distorting mirror that hampers the establishment of good relations with neighbours.

Knowing the culture and languages of the East is of no less importance. While being familiar with European literature, history and culture is a must for any educated person, having a similar knowledge of China, Japan, Korea and India is perceived as exotic or narrowly professional. This must be changed. It is hard to accept something unknown. Ignorance, in turn, breeds phobias, conspiracy theories as regards someone's clandestine expansion, and the like.

A way to overcome the abovementioned phobias is to translate the works of Chinese and Japanese classics as well as modern writers (after all, there are

hundreds and thousands of authors aside from Murakami, who have created and continue to create fabulous texts), and to translate and screen the films that the Russian public is more likely to understand. The training of *skilled orientalists* should be expanded exponentially. These experts will not only teach Orient languages, but also analyse the past and present of our partners in Greater Eurasia and create an information space for the Turn to the East (a separate report will concentrate on the topic of training orientalists). The Russian Geographical Society could also use its potential to disseminate knowledge on Asia and influence national educational process.

It is vitally important to boost the teaching of Asian languages, history and geography at secondary schools, retrain teachers, and create manuals and possibly online courses, all of this with the help of leading Russian orientalists. When present-day children grow up, the history of the world, which until recently has been written by the Europeans, will look totally different. For example, the culture of Byzantium, or the Eastern Roman Empire, will be perceived as one of the greatest achievements of the world civilization, which preserved the classical culture and made it embrace the best of the orient culture at a time when Europe was sinking into the Dark Ages, rather than an embodiment of inefficiency and intrigue as it has been portrayed by the descendants of the crusaders (who have managed to impose their vision on us).

We need new textbooks and teaching aids on the history of Eurasia created jointly with colleagues from the west and the east of the continent. There are many Asiacentric works published in Asia, but they are likely to be as inadequate as their Eurocentric counterparts. The Russian community of historians could play, jointly with their Eastern and Western counterparts, a significant role in developing a new, more objective and adequate narrative and vision of world history.

Movement in the opposite direction is also important. The East, for its part, should seek to understand Russia better too. This reciprocity will bring together Russia and East, South and Southeast Asia and will make Russians a closer and more comprehensible nation. The effort to **popularize the Russian language and culture** is extremely sluggish in Eurasian countries, even where all the necessary conditions for it are in place. In effect, we continue to exploit the Soviet-era investment in promoting Russian culture in Asia. It would be wrong to say that people in East Asian countries neglect the study of Russian culture. There are departments of Russian or Slavonic studies at universities

in China, Japan and Korea, which continue to pursue research. But, as noted above, their image of Russia is not always true to fact or Russians' own perceptions and is quite often dictated by the dominant (anti-Russian) Western vision. Creating a mechanism for projecting the Russian image of Russia means encouraging a movement towards each other. This is something that can and must be done today. There is an urgent need to popularize the contribution of Russia's great culture to the world's cultural heritage. We also need new, high-quality translations of Russian classics, modern fiction and films into orient languages, especially considering the fact that most of these would be easy for Asians to understand. Lectures about Russia should be delivered at universities in the East. We also need a special kind of journalism explaining Russia to the East. The explanatory work has to be long-term and systematic rather than a one-off effort.

Once Kublai Khan (Shizu Emperor in Chinese texts), the first Mongolian ruler of China, decided to transfer his headquarters from Karakorum to an obscure town he called Khanbaliq (now Beijing) to be closer to his key domains. No doubt, transferring a capital today is a costly undertaking. But the situation, where the political leadership of Russia and its key partners are at the opposite ends of the huge continent, complicates contacts. A likely solution is to establish a third, ***eastern capital*** in Khabarovsk or Vladivostok. Earlier, Moscow took the decision to transfer the offices of major corporations based in the region. But the decision was ignored. A capital of this kind will infuse Siberia and the Russian Far East with new energy, speed up the rejuvenation of Russian elites and spur the development of the Siberian and Far Eastern Russia. Almost all countries that transferred their capital cities or established second capitals, have made strides. An intermediate option is to establish Eastern headquarters, or 'residence' for offices of all key ministries at the level of first deputy minister and offices of related major corporations. The Moscow residents who were involved in writing this report consider this step of use to reduce the pressure on the capital.

Summing Up

Russia's Turn to the East and to itself as a Eurasian power in its own right is a complicated and lengthy process. Tangible results will not be forthcoming tomorrow or in a year's time. This is why it is extremely important to see the reasons behind this Turn, not as an economic or political project

but as **Russia's return to itself**, a sort of homecoming. This is not an easy road, but any road can be travelled, when there is an understanding of what exactly must be done and what we would like to achieve as a result. Let us try to review the tasks that we will need to address at the next stage of Turning to the East. It is important to realize in the process that the material aspect of the Turn is not to be neglected, either. It should be continued, intensified and supplemented through cultural, educational and social elements. The development of the transport and logistics network with Russia as the centre should continue, gradually covering the entire continent and involving new resources and technological areas.

To convert the Turn to the East from a technical, economic and geopolitical project to a political and civilizational one, thereby making it successful, it is necessary to fill it with cultural and political content.

Today, it is essential to **rebuild and promote the knowledge of Russia's Asian destiny** through scientific research, artistic approaches, the media, online resources, and the educational system. The East of Russia should become closer and more understandable to all Russian citizens. It is necessary to establish educational centres that can work to form a collective memory of Russia's Asian destiny. It is necessary to make films and TV shows about the past, present and future of Russia's East, its exceptionally beautiful and rich nature. The best example so far is the Russian-Japanese film *Dersu Uzala* directed by the great Akira Kurosawa. Suggesting itself is a movie about the now popular Tsar Nicholas II. As the heir apparent, he chose to take his first foreign trip to Asia rather than Europe.

It is an absolute must to **achieve a qualitative increase in our knowledge of Asia, its history and culture**. A new, numerous generation of orientalists should appear in Russia in the near future. In addition to translating the best artistic and philosophical treaties, they will also need to act as interpreters of Asia to Russia. To achieve this, we need to intensify the cross-cultural training of orientalists. Naturally, the state, the scientific community and academics should bear the main burden and responsibility for expanding the education of orientalists. But it would also make sense to use agencies in Asian countries that promote their culture and language. Some cases in point are the Confucius Institute, the Korea Institute, the Tokyo Fund and others. Understandably, these institutes and their likes in Europe or Russia's Rossotrudnichestvo are also involved in propaganda efforts, but at this time they are largely of use in replenishing knowledge about Asia. It is necessary to organize training and

upgrade courses for government employees, law enforcers and other citizens whose decisions affect the implementation of the Turn to the East policy. (For example, some government employees in Australia and New Zealand undergo retraining to work with China and other Asian partners.)

No less important are **active efforts to promote the Russian language and Russian culture in Asia** and create a positive image of Russians in the eyes of our partners. It is necessary to emphasize the role of Russian culture in the world and the largess and generosity of the Russian character. A team of qualified experts is also needed for this.

Inducing Russians to invigorate their **personal and business ties in neighbouring countries and form human networks** there is also essential for entering the world of East Asia. The formation of the abovementioned Eastern Club could consolidate people that are capable of this. It could consolidate a community of 'guides' leading Russia to the Asian world.

In this context, it is no less important to **cooperate with Russian diasporas that exist today** in all countries of this huge region, the aim being to create a favourable environment for promoting Russia's economic and political interests. The Eastern Club could also help to intensify this effort.

It would be useful to create **conditions to ensure the co-existence of local communities** and the national economic system that is open to the East in the context of the general idea of a Eurasian country. After all, even members of local economic systems, like any 'hunters from the wild', can make ideal guides in these lands. For more than a century, people in the Russian Far East have been merging with the landscape in neighbouring countries, where they have developed a stable system of contacts, partners and friends. Is it possible to find better guides to communities, where person-to-person contacts are much more important and reliable than formally signed agreements?

It is absolutely necessary (and easy) to **increase Siberian and Far Eastern content in federal media**. Siberia and the Russian Far East should be a fixture in the national media and mentality. If the issue of landfills is raised, for example, a point of focus should be on how it is resolved (or not resolved) in the East of the country, too. If we are talking about major maintenance, we should hear news and opinions of residents in Siberia and the Russian Far East on this matter. Ideally, Kolyma should be next to Kostroma and Khabarovsk and Vladivostok next to St. Petersburg in the Russian media.

A special goal would be to **promote the creation of Eurasian analytical and media complexes,** which would allow the elites and intellectuals in Greater Eurasia to expand intellectual and information independence in a situation where the traditional news channels are still largely controlled by the West and becoming less and less objective. All of this would enable the intellectual classes in Russia and other Asian countries to develop a common line in world economy, politics and ideology. For example, an analytical and information agency, *Eurasia Analysis*, could be established within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This agency might both pool existing resources and produce and disseminate its own content. In other words, it would combine the functions of projects like *Bloomberg* and *Stratfor*.

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While assessing our prospects for the Turn to the East, it is worth recalling that the tasks facing Russia and its government during their Turn to the West were no easier. And the transfer of the national centre of gravity to the Baltic Sea coast in the early 18th century, given the contemporary means of transportation, was hardly simpler than its partial transfer to the East would be today. Moreover, the need for it now is no less urgent than it was in the era of Peter the Great. After all, this is a road to a world that will not receive us with open arms. But this world is ready to cooperate and could offer the best conditions for the reproduction of Russia's political and cultural matrix.

Once, Russia rejected and denounced the Asian part of Russian culture. **Today, while preserving the acquisitions received during the fruitful European period of our history, we are coming back to our dual identity, we are coming back home.** Importantly, we are not rejecting Europe and our European cultural experience. We should invite our European neighbours, who seem to be in an impasse, to join the creation of Greater Eurasia and their own Turn to the East.

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