



# A New Russian Idea?

Neo-Eurasianist Ideas in the Russian Presidential Addresses

to the Federal Assembly 2014 – 2016

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Word count: 12 845

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Abstract .....   | 3  |
| Studying Neo-Eurasianism.....  | 4  |
| Introduction .....   | 4  |
| Prior research and relevance of study.....   | 5  |
| Material and delimitation to Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism.....                                | 8  |
| Research question.....   | 11 |
| Scientific design and methodology .....  | 11 |
| Descriptive ideational analysis .....  | 12 |
| Thematic analysis .....  | 13 |
| Neo-Eurasianism by Aleksander Dugin .....  | 14 |
| Roots of the Neo-Eurasian thought .....  | 14 |
| Central concepts of Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism .....  | 15 |
| The Neo-Eurasianist concept of civilization .....  | 15 |
| The Russian-Eurasian civilization.....   | 16 |
| A Neo-Eurasianist view of the world .....  | 18 |
| Interpreting Neo Eurasianism from an ontological, normative and policy perspective ..... | 19 |
| Analytic scheme .....  | 22 |
| Comments on the analytic scheme .....  | 23 |
| Neo-Eurasianism and Vladimir Putin.....  | 24 |
| Neo-Eurasianist thematic analysis.....   | 24 |
| Civilization concept.....  | 24 |
| Russian-Eurasian civilization concept.....   | 25 |
| Conception of world order.....   | 28 |
| Conclusion.....  | 29 |
| Discussion .....   | 30 |
| References .....   | 34 |

## Abstract

This essay aims to determine the prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in the Russian official political discourse by examining the Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly 2014, 2015 and 2016. Neo-Eurasianism is understood as a political ideology encompassing narratives, norms and policy suggestions. The study is conducted in two steps. Firstly, it interprets Neo-Eurasianism as conveyed by Aleksandr Dugin and develops an analytical scheme based on his ideas. Secondly, the prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in the Russian Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly 2014, 2015 and 2016 is thematically analysed within the established analytical framework. The study affirms a limited presence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in the material. Normative notions concerning cultural plurality, a multipolar world order and Russia's role in the world are present, whereas the underlying assumptions and subsequent policy suggestions cannot be fully affirmed. Contrary, Putin at occasion enacts the Neo-Eurasianist normative notions to articulate other policy suggestions than what Dugin's ideas prescribe, e.g. counter-terrorism measures. This suggests that the Neo-Eurasianist discourse is used as a rationale to legitimize regime policies, a conclusion that has been drawn in previous studies as well. Regardless of motive, Neo-Eurasianist ideas seem to have taken a limited, but firm, hold in Russian official political discourse.

# Studying Neo-Eurasianism

## Introduction

Just before assuming his position as acting president, Putin called for the formation of a ‘Russian idea’<sup>1</sup> to unite the whole of Russia (Duncan 2015, 107f). Aleksandr Dugin, Russian academic and political figure, has undertaken himself to deliver such an idea in his conceptualisation of Neo-Eurasianism. He has published over a dozen volumes on Neo-Eurasianism and surrounding subjects. Marlène Laruelle (2008, 107), who has published a comprehensive account of the Neo-Eurasianist movement, means that Dugin exercises a ‘quasi-monopoly over a certain part of the current Russian ideological spectrum. He is simultaneously on the fringe and at the centre of the Russian nationalist phenomenon.’ It is however hard to with any accuracy estimate his direct influence on the Russian regime (Laruelle 2008, 107), which make a study how prolific his ideas are in regime discourse highly relevant.

Neo-Eurasianism is school of thought that holds an ambiguous position between politics and philosophy, esotericism and geopolitics<sup>2</sup>. It emerged in the 1990s and is a renewed form of a longer intellectual tradition of Russian exceptionalism. Neo-Eurasianism encompasses disparate political positions whose common denominator is antipathy towards Western liberalism and Western hegemony as well political and economic rapprochement between Eurasian states (Silvius 2015, 79; Laruelle 2008, 206). Neo-Eurasianism is a diverse intellectual movement but all strands share a set of convictions. They presuppose a cultural unity – a shared civilization - and historical destiny for all peoples (Russian and non-Russian) who live in the region denoted as Eurasia. What is included in this denomination varies according to different ideologues, but a central idea to all Neo-Eurasianists is that Russia’s geographical position in the heartland of the continent entails an imperial or hegemonic form of state organization. Civilization and culture are considered historical constants that give a deeper understanding of political events. Neo-Eurasianism is characterized by a broad rejection of ‘Western’ values and institutions, seen as disastrous for the rest of humankind. The rejection is conceptualized as a critique of US unipolar domination over the rest of the world (Laruelle 2008, 203f).

The present study aims to estimate the influence of Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism on the Russian political leadership by analysing the prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in Russian official political discourse. In doing so, it espouses a descriptive approach, laying the foundations of further research on why Neo-

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<sup>1</sup> In Russian ‘Rossiskaya idea’ referring to an idea for the Russian state, not the for the ethnic Russian people (in Russian ‘Russkaya’).

<sup>2</sup> Geopolitics is the study of the impact of geography on politics and international relations, originally conceived by the British academic Sir Halford Mackinder in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Eurasianist ideas may have influence and what the effects may be. An analytical framework is derived from Dugin's publications and research thereupon. The official political discourse will be analysed within the framework. The annual Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly 2014, 2015 and 2016 provides the material for the study.

### Prior research and relevance of study

The study of Duganian<sup>3</sup> Neo-Eurasianist ideas in Russian political discourse is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, Dugin is established to be a central figure in Russian nationalism (Laruelle 2008, 107) and has been an object of interest both academically (Laruelle 2008, Silvius 2015, Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, Bassin, Glebov & Laruelle 2015) and journalistically. For example, Michael Winiarski (2017) at Dagens Nyheter recently conducted an interview with Aleksandr Dugin concerning his view on Russian and world politics, as well as Russia's role in the world. In a recent article on Dugin in *Foreign Policy*, Russian nationalism researcher Charles Clover explained 'how an obscure academic and a marginalized philosopher captured the minds of the Kremlin and helped forge the new Russian nationalism' (Clover 2017). However, Laruelle (2008, 107) points out that the extent of Dugin's influence on the Russian political leadership is yet to be fully determined. This constitutes a gap in the research on Neo-Eurasianism. The present study addresses this issue, and thereby adds to the cumulative understanding of Neo-Eurasianism and its influence.

Several studies conducted on Russian official political discourse over the last years have emphasized the importance of historical and cultural concepts for the creation of Russian national identity in the international arena and for the legitimization of foreign policy (Persson 2014, Smith 2005, Chatterje-Doody 2013). Moreover, Russian foreign policy has been found to be increasingly characterized by a critique of globalization and the West, a focus on multipolarity and founded on civilizational and cultural conceptions (Silvius 2016, Lane 2015, Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009). The presence of specifically Eurasianist ideas has been determined in Russian foreign and domestic policy, academic discourse and literature (Silvius 2015, Duncan 2015, Benjamin Richardsson 2015, Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, Tatiana Filomova 2015, Chatterje-Doody 2015). This gives reason to believe that Neo-Eurasianist ideas could indeed be present in regime presentations, and that a study of the matter would be fruitful.

Here should be noted that the words idea, discourse, doctrine, school of thought and ideology will interchangeably be used to describe Neo-Eurasianism, as a variance in language facilities reading. Likewise, civilization, culture and cultural community are used interchangeably.

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<sup>3</sup> The expression 'Duganian' is used by Marlène Laruelle in her 2008 publication *Russian Eurasianism*.

It is as an ideology that Neo-Eurasianism is understood in the scope of this essay. Ideologies have substantial impact of politics and it is important to interpret them and assess their influence to understand politics (Beckman 2005, 9). Approaching and assessing Neo-Eurasianism in the quality of an ideology, not as a philosophy, thus provide a fruitful method to comment on and understand Russian politics.

Ray Silvius, political scientist at the University of Winnipeg, discusses the prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist discourse in the Foreign Policy Concepts (from 2000, 2008 and 2013) under the Putin regime. Silvius's research holds extensive similarities to the present study with regard to both material and object of analysis. As both the Concepts and Addresses are run past the Presidency, it is reasonable to assume that two set of documents are comparable in their policy content. Silvius' study is performed on material prior to the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, after which Russia is found to focus more on the Eurasian region in its foreign policy (Svarin 2016, 138). Studying the Neo-Eurasianist discourse after these pivotal events is relevant.

Silvius (2015, 76ff) adopts a dual understanding of Neo-Eurasianist concepts, analysing it both as a material/geopolitical project as well as an ideology. The material project is expressed in political and economic regional integration in Eurasia whereas the ideational Neo-Eurasianism is a discourse articulating Russia's role in Eurasia, the world and the world order itself. Silvius (2015, 75) denotes the Neo-Eurasianist discourse as 'embedded civilizationism.' The dual understanding is supported by Duncan, who looks into the Neo-Eurasianist discourse in relation to regional political and economic integration. Duncan (2015, 102) identifies that Eurasia in official political presentations is both as a 'discursive space' and a 'geopolitical project.'

Silvius can observe both the material and ideational Neo-Eurasianism in the Foreign Policy Concepts, the latter serving the purpose of the former (Silvius 2015, 84f). Silvius notes that the observed embedded civilizationism gives the critique against globalisation a civilizational reading, conceptualising the critique of Western hegemony and universalism as a protection or cultural distinctiveness and self-determination. Thus, the 'embedded civilizationism sanctifies a world order in which cultural and civilizational particularity are insulated through the practices of multipolarity and a corresponding protection of national development models' (Silvis 2015, 85). Silvius interprets the embedded civilizationism as a rationale and legitimating discourse derived from historical and cultural conceptions, used by the Putin regime for the purpose of material Eurasian integration project such as the Eurasian Economic Union (Silvius 2015, 84f).

In this, Silvius thus shows that Neo-Eurasianist ideas have been prevalent in central official presentations of the Putin regime up until 2013. By assessing the prevalence after 2013 in a comparable material, the present study adds to Silvius' conclusions. Silvius also attempts an

explanation as to why they are prevalent – to act as a lexicon in which to justify a regime imperative of an increased Eurasian geopolitical and economic integration.

In a 2016 article, Silvius also suggests that an evolving multipolar approach in Russian foreign policy is embedded with critique of liberalism, globalisation and Western hegemony and that it is ridden with civilizational concepts (Silvius 2016, 3). He however argues that the Russian regime will address global issues within multilateral organizations such as the UN, BRIC or G20, but in a framework where major states represents their respective regions (Silvius 2016, 12).

Benjamin Richardson has studied Putin's Eurasianist discourse as an intermedium between opposing articulations of Russia's future, one extreme represented by Dugin's ideas. He notes that Putin draws on the importance of shared values and common civilizational features when advocating the Eurasian Economic union (EEU)<sup>4</sup> (Benjamin Richardson 2015, 93ff). Russia's constitutive position in regional integrative process is articulated as inherent, and predestining a common Eurasian space (ibid.). He suggests that the EEU is a project to maintain the identity of the nations in the historical Eurasian space through the creation of an independent centre for economic development and of an antipode against Western unipolarism (Benjamin Richardsson 2015, 96). A more economically independent Eurasian zone have the potential of creating a more politically independent ditto, with separate civilizational norms and with a Russian privileged interest (ibid.).

Duncan argues that the Eurasian integrative discourse has ideological importance, both internally in Russia and externally in the post-Soviet space. Internally, it accommodates Soviet nostalgia as well as popular calls for conservatism and nationalism, all the while not excluding non-ethnic Russians. Externally, it provides countries in the post-Soviet space an alternative to integration with Western liberal institutions (Duncan 2015, 113). Moreover, Putin is found to use Neo-Eurasianist ideas to promote national unity in the face of social, cultural and class conflict in a divided Russia (Silvius 2015, 76) and to mediate competing ideas on Russia's identity and destiny (Benjamin Richardson 2015, 89).

Dugin's ideology is found at one extreme of the spectrum of Russian national ideas, counterweighted by scholars such as Dimitri Trenin that advocate Russian integration with Western liberal institutions and nations (Benjamin Richardson 97f). Both advocates are disappointed by Putin's policies (ibid.), suggesting that Putin is adopting neither, but finding a middle way. The suggestion is supported by Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas (2009, 59), who have done a study in Neo-Eurasianism's imperialistic tendencies. They establish that Neo-Eurasianism has spread to the high echelons of politics at the cost of certain concessions at the expense of hard-line Neo-Eurasianists like Dugin.

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<sup>4</sup> The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was announced in 2011 and came into effect January 1, 2015 and includes (Jan 2017) Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Armenia.

Putin's Eurasianism must "juggle with realism" acknowledging a large economic dependency on European markets and the value of Western integration (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 62).

Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas (2009, 61ff) suggests that Putin endorses an economic Eurasianism rather than an ideological one. The authors advocate that Putin sees Eurasia more as a geopolitical or economic zone and that he to a lesser extent is influenced by the movement's intellectual heritage. Nevertheless, they note that Putin, through his public appearances, references and choice of collaborators, gives reason to assume a prevalence of more ideological Neo-Eurasianism as well (ibid.). Shedding light upon the pragmatic and ideological dimensions of Putin's Eurasia policy is thus motivated.

In sum, the prevalence of Eurasianist ideas is established in Russian official political discourse. It seems it is more of a political tool than an ideology. Several writers suggest that it is used by the Putin regime as a legitimizing discourse of regional integration and international positioning. It is also suggested that Putin's Eurasianism is a mediated, realistic one, not prone to the esoteric and radical notions of the Duganian ideology.

The present study would thus add to these conclusions by examining the prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in an updated material. It would create an analytical scheme with which Neo-Eurasianism could be discerned in its ideational content, not simply identified as a legitimizing rationale. The analytical scheme could be applied to other material as well, providing a tool for further research. Moreover, this study could fill the research gap on the extent of Neo-Eurasianist influence on the Russian regime. It will shed light upon whether Putin really 'juggles with realism' or rather swallows the Duganian ideas, rod, line and sinker.

### Material and delimitation to Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism

A case study design is selected when the case, in its own capacity, constitutes the focus of interest (Bryman 2014, 75). Here, the description of Russian political discourse is interesting in its own capacity, irrelevant of its impact or origin. The cases of the official discourse are selected due to their capacity to exemplify a broader category of cases (Bryman 2014, 77). In other words, the Presidential Addresses are here considered to be a good representation of official discourse.

Purposive sampling is used when selecting the material. In purposive sampling, the material is chosen with direct reference to the formulated question to ensure that it can be addressed (Bryman 2014, 350). In the annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly, the President is constitutionally obligated to outline the 'basic objectives of the internal and foreign policy of the State' (Constitution of the Russian Federation, art. 84) suggesting a high correlation between the content of the addresses and the actual official discourse.

Bryman (2014, 351f) suggests using internal and external validity and reliability to assess qualitative research. External validity concerns whether the result can be generalized to other contexts (Bryman 2014, 352). As the present study is performed with a purposive, and not random, selection, it is hard to directly generalize to a population (Bryman 2014, 392). However, the ‘population’ in the present study being the Russian official political discourse, and the material being to a high degree representable of that discourse, the results should in turn be inferable to the Russian official policy discourse. The results cannot, however, comment of the discourse outside the material’s delimitations, for example in time and political echelon.

The study will not look into the Foreign Policy Concepts, which has been done by previous researchers, as Neo-Eurasianist notions are expected to be expressed in domestic policy discourse as well.

Bryman (2014, 489) described how Scott (1990) argue that examined material should be assessed with regard to its *authenticity, credibility, representability* and *purposiveness*. This kind of material, governmental communication, generally exhibits a high degree of authenticity (Bryman 2014, 495). Bryman (ibid.) likewise suggests that official communication is highly purposive, as it often is linguistically clear and comprehensible. However, the clarity could be questioned in the present material. Speeches generally include rhetoric, analogies and metaphors clouding the clarity of the sentiment. This could pose problems when deciphering the material, and must duly noticed.

Official communication can however contain distortions or framings preferred by the remitter (Bryman 2014, 495). This is perhaps to be especially expected in the present material, as the Russian regime has been recurrently accused of disinformation measures (Kragh & Åsberg 2017). However, this should not pose a problem, as the it is just the possible distortion and framing of the information that constitutes the focus of interest.

To ensure a high internal reliability the material must be interpreted in a consistent manner throughout the study (Bryman 2014, 352). Applied to the study, all speeches are to be equivalently assessed. The construction of a thorough analytical scheme, conditioning the interpretation of the material to criteria, ensures a high internal reliability in the study. Moreover, the selection of an internally comparable material excludes inconsistent interpretation due to differentiating literal style or context.

In external reliability, the replicability of the study is assessed (Bryman 2014, 352). Bryman (ibid.) suggests that a high external reliability is difficult to ensure in qualitative research as the social reality studied seldom can be ‘frozen’ and studied again. The material here studied is however available to posterity. The present study does not observe a fleeting social reality, but rather published texts, which should facilitate the possibility of replication

The broad spectra of Neo-Eurasianist thought is delimited to the version conveyed by Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin is a former professor at Moscow State University and head of the Department of Sociology of International Relations but was dismissed due to radicalism in the Ukrainian crises (Engström 2014, 360). Dugin has been a member of both conservative and fascistic movements as well as communist ditto, and has advocated Neo-Eurasianism as a syncretic middle way. In 1997 he published *Foundations of Geopolitics: Russia's Geopolitical Future* (Transcribed Russian: *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*), which were to become his breakthrough into actual political influence. Following the publication, Dugin entered regular parliamentary structures holding several advisory positions in the Duma and to its representatives (Laruelle 2008, 110f). In 2001 he created the *Evraziia*<sup>5</sup> movement with the objective of formulating a 'national idea' for Russia. In 2002, it evolved to a political party entering nationalistic parliamentary blocs but gaining only marginal influence. Dugin dismantled the political party in favour of the creation of an *International Eurasian Movement* in 2003, which exists today (ibid.).

The study's focus on Dugin's ideas are due to his central position among Neo-Eurasianist theorists, his public renown and the interested that has been bestowed on him by international academics as well as journalists (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 2, 52). It should be noted that Dugin's ideas have not won public support in Russia (Laruelle 2008, 25f). Popular support of Dugin is however irrelevant, argues Laruelle, as Dugin himself advocates an entry into the state structure rather than a popular endorsement of his ideas by an electorate (ibid.). Laruelle argues that the prospect of the proliferation of Dugin's ideas lies in his ability to 'cater to the need of a regime that seems to be looking for a new ideology' (ibid.). It should be noted that the regime could be looking for either a set of ideas that works as a legitimizing discourse for political goals, as well as an actual ideological conviction. Prior research suggest that the regime is looking for an ideology in the former quality.

When analysing Dugin's ideas, his own publications will be used as a primary source. *Eurasian Mission - An introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, an anthology of several of Dugin's works, has been selected per its recent publication, and *Foundations of Geopolitics (Osnovy Geopolitiki)*, due to its centrality. The selected publications should serve the purpose of explaining the ideology, as one has the expressed aim of introducing the reader to Neo-Eurasianism and the other is considered Dugin's main work. Other researchers' interpretation will serve as secondary sources. As Dugin's ideas are considered especially complex and possibly contradictory (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 51), adhering to other researchers' interpretations provides a method of ensuring a correct, valid representation of his views.

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<sup>5</sup> Transcribed Russian for Eurasia.

## Research question

The present study will espouse a descriptive approach. Descriptive studies that systematically and through the prism of an analytic scheme defines a phenomenon constitutes a substantial scientific contribution (Teorell & Svensson 2013, 22ff). For this study, Neo-Eurasianist ideas will provide the prism through which Russian political discourse will be interpreted. This does not mean that Neo-Eurasianism is the only mean of understanding Russian contemporary politics. There are surely many other valid interpretations that cannot be considered in the scope of this essay. However, considering the presented interest in Dugin's ideas and his presumed influence, the Neo-Eurasianist approach must be considered fruitful.

Furthermore, it is important to fend off any slip of the mind towards viewing the analytic scheme – Neo-Eurasianism – as an explanation to expressed policy. This essay does not attempt, and thereby take no consideration of the requirement of explanatory analysis, to clarify why Russian politics is as it is. Correspondence is not the same as a causal connection (Teorell & Svensson 2013, 27).

The research question is thus formulated as such. *To what extent can Neo-Eurasianism, as conveyed by Aleksandr Dugin, be discerned in the Russian Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly 2014 – 2016?*

## Scientific design and methodology

The qualitative and descriptive study consists of two parts. First, it is a conceptual ideational analysis of Neo-Eurasianism to distill an analytic scheme. In a second phase a thematic analysis of the Presidential speeches is performed using the developed analytical scheme. Typically, qualitative studies are inductive and theory-generating (Bryman 2014, 40). In a first step, the study aims to distillate an analytic scheme from the Neo-Eurasianist set of ideas. This is an inductive approach and generates a theory in form the analytical scheme. In a second step, the study adopts a deductive, theory-testing approach when applying the analytic scheme to the material to determine whether Neo-Eurasianist thoughts are present. The combination of qualitative design and theory-testing approach is unusual but in no way incompatible as such studies increasingly occur (Bryman 2014, 41f, 348).

## Descriptive ideational analysis

To decipher Aleksander Dugin's revived Eurasianism, descriptive ideational analysis is applied. The purpose of a descriptive ideational analysis is to systemize the set of ideas in way that is not self-evident or directly derivable from the material. It should not be a simple presentation of a material, rather, it should infer a result from the analysis (Beckman 2005, 50). In the present study, the analysis of Dugin's ideas will result in an analytic scheme, systemized in the manner that will be presented.

Beckman (2005, 31ff) notes that clear and discrete definitions of central concepts are crucial if we are to reach a satisfactory understanding of an ideology. In a first step, major concepts around which Neo-Eurasianism revolves are identified. The concepts are identified in an inductive process, with recurrent reading of the material and continuous indexation.

Concepts can be vague, differentiating in meaning. The concepts must be understood in their Neo-Eurasianist quality. To ensure validity, Bryman suggests the usage of conceptual precisions, to correctly reflect the different elements of which each concept consists. The specifications are preferably defined in the basis of prior research or established theory (Bryman 2014, 159f). This should be especially important in the present study, as other researches have underlined the complexity and contradictions with which Dugin's work is ridden.

As will become evident in the presentation, these Neo-Eurasianist concepts encompass both ontological premises, normative stances and policy suggestions. I adhere to the intellectual tradition of Ingemar Hedenius, a noted Uppsala professor, who during the second world war established the relevance of studying politics in their ontological, normative and policy capacities (Gustavsson 2010, 85f). Ideological norms and suggestions are based on a description of reality. The credibility of norms and suggestions within an ideology thus becomes dependent on the validity of the ontological approach. When utilized as an analytical tool in the succeeding thematic analysis, the categorization in assumption, norms and policies enable a functional reading to determine if the whole, or certain parts of the ideology, are present in the speeches.

Applied to the present study, Neo-Eurasianism revolves around three basic concepts which are specified using the presented surrounding research. The concept will be presented in the following section. They are then categorized as ontological assumptions, normative conceptions and policy suggestions. Prevalence of the central concepts, in all or many of their specificities, thus constitute a prevalence of Neo-Eurasianist thought. It is important to stress that the presence of Neo-Eurasianism cannot be determined with only one of the indicators. To ensure validity, a more complex presence must be proven.

## Thematic analysis

When testing the developed theory, as inducted from Dugin's ideas, the present study will adopt a hypothetical-deductive design. This design entails setting up a hypothesis, and identifying what empirical consequences (observable implications) that would be present in the material if the hypothesis was accurate. By determining whether these implications are present in the material or not, the researcher draw a conclusion on the validity of the hypothesis (Teorell & Svensson 2013, 48ff).

Thematic analysis is one of the most common methods in qualitative research but is seldom clearly defined. Bryman (2014, 528) suggests using a technique called Framework, described as a 'matrix-based method to organize and synthesize data' (Riche et al 2003, 219 as cited by Bryman 2014, 528). The technique entails the creation of an index of central themes and sub-themes that is organized in a matrix (Bryman 2014, 528). In the present study, the matrix is derived from Dugin's work and interpretations of his work, and then applied as a theoretical framework with which the material is analysed.

Notice should be given to emerging themes in the material that do not fit the framework, as it is important that the contextual understanding is not lost in the indexation (Bryman 2014, 526). Both explicit and implicit themes should be identified. Bryman (2014, 529ff) recommends paying attention to repetitions, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences as well as omissions in the material.

The study will be conducted with an interpretative approach where recurrent themes in the material is interpreted to determine whether it bears reminiscence or Eurasianist thought or not. An interpretative approach is an epistemological acknowledgement that to understand a phenomenon is must be contextually, not literately, interpreted (Bryman 2014, 341).

Moreover, political discourse is not assumed to exist independently of social actors, but is acknowledged as something continually constructed. A constructivist approach acknowledges that the prevalence of expressed ideas and notions, especially in official documents and presentations, have impact on actual policy, giving a study on expressed ideas relevance (Bryman 41f, 341). A constructivist approach thus further encourages the study of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in Russian politics. It should be noted that the constructed discourse has political impact regardless of the reason of its construction (ibid.), motivating a study of Neo-Eurasianism in Russian politics regardless of it being used as a legitimatizing rationale (as suggested by prior research) or has actual intellectual influence.

Beckman (2005, 52) clarifies that a fruitful descriptive analysis of ideas must include a measure of comparison. In the present study, the material is compared to the Neo-Eurasian central concepts developed within the analytical scheme.

## Neo-Eurasianism by Aleksander Dugin

### Roots of the Neo-Eurasian thought

Classic Eurasianism was conceived among émigré intellectuals following the 1917 revolution. Against the backdrop of revolution, territorial losses and an emerging USSR, a young and academic community of emigrants struggled to understand the developments in their homeland and the future for Russia and her place in the world. The Eurasianists viewed themselves as promoting a modern and radical new idea of Russian national identity although their ideas were much influenced by contemporary European notions such *Naturphilosophie*<sup>6</sup> and Third way politics<sup>7</sup> (Laruelle 2008, 16ff). Eurasianism was viewed as a Russian version of Third way politics and the only plausible Russian collective identity for a modern world, neither tsarist, liberal, communist or capitalistic (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 43ff; Laruelle 2008, 25). The starting point of the movement is usually set to the 1921 publication of *Iskhod k Vostoku (Exodus to the East)* (Duncan 2015, 104).

Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism differs from the classic Eurasianism on several matters. In the original version, the Asian features of the Russian-Eurasian civilization were stressed and elevated, whereas Neo-Eurasianism bears a clearer focus on the Russian national society and its role within the Russian-Eurasian framework (Laruelle 2015, 188). Dugin adds influence from the European new right<sup>8</sup>, prescribing a Eurasian form of organic democracy. Where classic Eurasianist third way notions mediated the monarchic/communist/capitalist divide, Dugin presents Neo-Eurasianism as a third way to neither fully partake, nor entirely reject, globalization (Laruelle 2015, 189f). Neo-Eurasianism shrugs Russian imperialism for a more nuanced Russian hegemonic claim (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 179f). Moreover, Dugin introduces geopolitical concepts to the ideology which were not present in the classical version (Laruelle 2015, 189). Where classic Eurasianism primarily concerned the nature of the Russian-Eurasian civilization, Duganian Neo-Eurasianism also espouses a view of the world order. It extends the notions of cultural plurality to a global level and holds a revolutionary claim.

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<sup>6</sup> Naturphilosophie is a current in the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century German idealism, attempting to understand nature in a holistic sense and thereby laying the foundations of the natural sciences (Laruelle 2008, 16ff).

<sup>7</sup> Third way politics is a wide denomination of a syncretic centrist political position, transcending the right/left divide and encompassing notions from both (Laruelle 2008, 16ff).

<sup>8</sup> The European New Right (Nouvelle Droite) emerged in France the 1960s. It rejects multiculturalism, liberalism and capitalism and promoted a localized form of democracy, called organic democracy (Laruelle 2015, 189f).

Neo-Eurasianism is much influenced by Samuel P. Huntington's ideas on civilizations (Laruelle 2008, 119). Huntington established an 'Orthodox civilization' with Russia at its centre (Huntington 1996, 45f) and suggested that Russia will claim a hegemonic role and privileged interests in Eurasia, attempting to exclude the influence from other powers (Huntington 1996, 164).

### Central concepts of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism

Three central concepts of Neo-Eurasianism emerge when consulting Dugin's publications and interpretations thereof. The first is the concept of civilizational originality and their foundations, as well as an acknowledgement of their irreconcilable nature and right to adhere to their own principles. Secondly, the existence of a Russian-Eurasian civilization is determined. It is characterized by traditional values, religiosity, multi-ethnicity and inter-ethnic tolerance and a strong state. The Russian-Eurasian civilization is portrayed as inherently opposite to Western ditto and the Russian nation is seen as the constitutive people of a Eurasian political community. The third is a concept of the world order, where multipolarity and plurality of civilizations are endorsed whereas unipolar globalization is condemned.

### The Neo-Eurasianist concept of civilization

Neo-Eurasianism acknowledges the existence of civilizations in the Huntington definition (Laruelle 2008, 119). Huntington defines civilization as the broadest cultural community with which an individual identifies him- or herself, the broadest 'we' within which a person feels culturally at home and that is distinguishable from a 'them' with which one does not belong (Huntington 1996, 43). Like Huntington (1996, 21ff), Neo-Eurasianists recognizes that the major driving forces behind international political events in the Post-Cold War world are civilizations and cultural communities, not ideologies (Dugin 2014a, 18f). In addition to Huntington's constructivist definition however, Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism acknowledges a material dimension in the civilization concept. Per Neo-Eurasianism, civilizations and their features are results of geographical conditions as well as historical developments (ibid.).

Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism take special notice of a geopolitical theory of land- and sea based nations, proposing that whether a nation is land-based, called tellurocracy, or sea-based, called thalassocracy, have substantial impact on the development of the civilization. Dugin denotes USA and UK as 'Atlantacist' powers, due to their sea-based nature, whereas Russia is a land-based power. Dugin suggests that the clash between tellurocracies and thalassocracies is the main driving force behind all global conflicts, from the clash between Rome and Carthage to the present tension between Russia and US (Laruelle 2008, 116f).

Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism holds that there is no universal pattern of development or a global civilization, and that no civilization should or even could be imposed on another (Dugin 2014a, 18f). In his own words, Dugin (2014a, 54) endorses a 'plurality of value systems' and holds that 'every people and culture has its own intrinsic right to evolve according to its own logic' (Dugin 2014a, 18). The preservation of global plurality of civilisations is a moral imperative (Dugin 2014a, 37, 54). It is only in the sense of diversity of cultures and values that the Neo-Eurasianist notion of pluralism should be understood, not as a pluralism in politics. In this study, pluralism is defined in this Neo-Eurasianist sense.

Moreover, the school of thought endorses that different civilizations possess different psychological traits and that they are predisposed to a certain political system. Society should consequently be organized in accordance to its social, cultural, historical and religious traditions (Dugin 2014b, 139). Thus, liberal democracy could function well in the Western world, whereas it might be undesirable and even impossible to impose on another part of the world (ibid.).

Inherent in the endorsement of separate value systems is a rejection of universal principles. On behalf on their claim to universality, Dugin rejects the regime of human rights (Dugin 2014c, 106f). He means that it is 'totalitarian' as it values the individual higher than the collective (Dugin 2002, as cited by Laruelle 2008, 140). Contrary to this, Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism recognizes the rights of peoples, not the rights of individuals, as the main subject of international and civil law (Laruelle 2008, 140).

### The Russian-Eurasian civilization

Like the classic Eurasianists, Dugin means that Russia-Eurasia has an original civilization (Dugin 2014a, 18). The Russian-Eurasian civilization has been formed by its distinct geographical location as well as by historical experiences. Dugin emphasizes the spatial formative factors, noting that the Russian unique civilization was formed by the need to control the vast steppe and wooden landscape (ibid.). It as a syntax of its European and Asian features, irreducible to neither (Dugin 2014a, 20). The Russian people is seen as the politically constitutive people within the broader Eurasian civilizational framework (Laruelle 2008, 139). Dugin alternates between the terms Russian and Russian-Eurasian civilization to describe the shared civilization, whereas here the term *Russian-Eurasian* will be used. *Russian* will be used to denote Russian denizens.

Dugin stresses that the Russian-Eurasian culture is, and always have been, multiethnic and characterized by inter-ethnic tolerance, and that the Russian people bears a civilizational mission for the benefit of all peoples of Russia (Dugin, as cited in Laruelle 2008, 140). Dugin means that the Russian-Eurasian culture has an intrinsic traditional social organization of society that should be enhanced (Dugin 2014a, 54). This traditional society is characterized by strong local communities with a high degree of self-regulation. The local communities are groups connected by a shared

heritage, albeit national, social, economic, religious or ethnic. To preserve the originality of those communities, by Dugin called “autonomies”, political power should be organized by a subsidiary principle, giving regulatory capacity to the community regarding all internal matters (Dugin 2014a, 64, 81). This provides the foundation of a Eurasianist version of democracy, called *demotism* (also *demotia*). The local governance is supplemented by a central government enjoying full political power over strategic resources, communications and military and foreign policy (Dugin 2014a, 63f, 83f).

Laruelle describes demotism as a Eurasianist version of the European New Right concept of organic democracy. She also means that it expresses a form of statism, providing the state structure absolute power within the designated political fields. The state is seen as an organic political institution that is not subservient to elections, but rather as a consistent interpreter and guarantor of national interest and public will (Laruelle 2008, 28f). In other words, the focus on cultural autonomies and a consistent state working in the interest of the public will, constitutes an endorsement of cultural, but not political, diversity. This is consistent the Neo-Eurasianism understanding of plurality.

Laruelle argues that the Neo-Eurasianists understand their ideological central concepts only in the quality of their totality, not as a sum of its parts. A concept derives its authenticity, per this view, from its claim of total applicability (Laruelle 2008, 209f). Laruelle relates this to Neo-Eurasianism’s influence from *Naturphilosophie*, that attempted to comprehend nature in a holistic sense. In the same way, Neo-Eurasianism, e.g. in Dugin’s theories of land and sea based states’ eternal conflict or a civilization’s inherent political character, offers all-encompassing explanations to political development. Infringing on this totality, e.g. by infringing on the state’s sovereignty or a civilization’s integrity, thus become an invalidation of the whole concept. Therefore, the total integrity of society, civilization and state are crucially important to Neo-Eurasianists.

Dugin (2014a, 67) describes the characteristics of the Russian-Eurasian civilization as diametrically opposed to the features of Western culture. The role of traditional religion and spiritual development are stressed as important features of an original Eurasian culture. Its Western antitypes are materialism and atheism. Religious unity is valued whereas schismatic and extreme deviations must be actively opposed (Dugin 2014a, 67). Solidary, selflessness and social justice are upheld as the hallmark of the Eurasian character, in opposition to the individualistic, egoistic and capitalist traits of the Western world (Dugin 2014a, 54). Dugin describes the ideals of the Western world as decadent, evil and as the causes of a coming catastrophe for humanity (Dugin 2014c, 101f).

There is a deterministic, almost messianic, trait to Neo-Eurasianism. Dugin continually returns to the notion of a Russian or Eurasian obligation to protect cultural diversity and to oppose the perceived corruptive effects of globalised Western ideals on non-Western civilizations. Moreover, the obligation takes on an international claim. In a compelling formulation Dugin notes that ‘[Russia] is called not

only to counter the West on order to safeguard its own path, but also to stand at the vanguard of the other peoples and countries of the Earth in order to defend their freedom as civilizations' (Dugin 2014a, 18). Russia is 'destined to become the leader of a new global, Eurasian alternative to the Western vision of the world's future' (Dugin 2014a, 73). Russia is portrayed as historically predestined to challenge the west with separate ethic ideals (Dugin 2014a, 18), a notion that Neo-Eurasianism inherits from a long tradition in Russian culture (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 101ff). Russia's mission is thus twofold - to ensure the continuation of the Russian-Eurasian original civilization free of Western infringement and to guarantee the same right of other civilizations on an international scale.

Classic Eurasianism was imperialistic, whereas Neo-Eurasianism stops short of an ever expansionist imperialism. It does not entail territorial claims outside culturally defined boundaries, and its imperative to control Eurasia has more to do with resistance to Western infringement than with expansionism. Instead of being fully imperialistic, Neo-Eurasianism prompts for a Russian hegemonic position in Eurasia (Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas 2009, 179f).

#### A Neo-Eurasianist view of the world

Neo-Eurasianism is highly critical of unipolar globalization. Unipolar globalization is seen as an imperialistic manifestation that by force and stratagem imposes Western civilizational as a universal model of development, infringing other societies' right to develop in its own manner (Dugin 2014a 18ff). Furthermore, liberal democracy, spread via globalisation, is rejected as it considers the individual the primary political subject in society, denying equal rights to collectives. It homogenizes the world and extinguishes cultural diversity (Dugin 2014c, 106ff).

Neo-Eurasianism is put forward as an alternative globalization, a multipolar and pluralistic version instead of the present unipolar and universalistic one (Dugin 2014a, 44). Instead of global integration, Neo-Eurasianism thus suggests regional integration creating a multipolar world, providing the possibility to preserve cultural pluralism. Regional integration should be formed within what is called 'Great Spaces' consisting of several nation-states or unions of nation-states. These nation-states share historical and civilizational features as well as common strategic objectives (Dugin 2014a, 61).

Dugin also identifies four civilizational zones, within which the regional integration in 'great spaces' should take place. These are the American zone, the Afro-European zone, the Asian-Pacific zone and the Eurasian zone, in which Russia would take a leading role (Dugin 2000, 215ff; Laruelle 2008, 117).

Moreover, in correlation to his theories on the primordial opposition between land based and sea based states, Dugin suggests that Russia-Eurasia should seek land based allies in other civilizational zones in a 'confederation of great spaces' (Dugin 2000, 247). An alliance between Moscow, Germany, Iran and

Japan is thus proposed as a counterweight to the presumed sea-based alliance between United States, Britain, China and Turkey (Dugin 2000, 220ff).

### Interpreting Neo Eurasianism from an ontological, normative and policy perspective

Central concepts of Neo-Eurasianism as conceived by Alexander Dugin has thus been presented. These central notions encompass a set of ontological assumptions, normative notions and policy suggestions. Adhering to the presented methodology, the central concepts will be specified in the basis of prior research. Thereafter, they will be operationalized suggesting indicators which to search for in the speeches. In the next segment, the analytical scheme or matrix will be presented.

From the Neo-Eurasianist concept of civilization, two major aspects emerge. It is an ontological assumption that civilizations exist, that they are original and based on historical as well as geographical foundations. Specifically, Neo-Eurasianism acknowledges the existence of a Russian-Eurasian civilization. Secondly, civilizations are assumed to be the subjects of historical development (Laruelle 2008, 116ff). This is especially evident in Dugin's understanding of the tension between land- and sea based nations as the basis of world conflict. From Laruelle's research on the political discourse in Eurasian integration, we learn that a Eurasian cultural community is discursively established via conceptions 'mined from history and culture' (Laruelle 2015, 119f). His conclusion suggests that *references to formative historical events and cultural traits* are indicative of the construction shared cultural communities.

Moreover, normative notions of civilizational plurality, civilizational self-determination and judicial rights emerge from the Neo-Eurasianist perception of civilizations. An *endorsement of plural value systems* is portrayed as a fundamental normative part of the Neo-Eurasianist civilization concept. As noted, the endorsement is not simply a rejection of universal culture. It is a rejection of universal principles such as human rights and a rejection of the very notion of personal rights in favour of the rights of peoples. To look for a *relativistic approach to universal principles* can thus be indicative of the pluralistic view of value systems. Moreover, Laruelle (2008, 212ff) takes note of the 'mixophobic' aspect in the Neo-Eurasian notion of plurality of cultures. It endorses plurality, but rejects the miscegenation of civilizations. Laruelle denotes this trait as 'spiritual/cultural racism' (ibid). Thus she suggests that a *rejection of assimilation between civilizations and cultures* are indicative of the Neo-Eurasianist approach to plurality.

How can we expect the imperative to preserve civilizational originality and self-determination in face of outside infringement, here called civilizational integrity, would be reflected in the present material? The Russian *articulation of sovereignty* reflects a will to preserve civilizational integrity, per Petersson (2013). Petersson finds that the Russian conception of sovereignty encompasses a normative right to

nationally determine what supposed universal principles such as democracy and human rights mean in a Russian context. It is a way to demonstrate independence of the outside world (Petersson 2013, 149f). The call for sovereignty is thus a reassertion of the right to uninfringed exercise Russian-Eurasian principles therein. It is a way to assert civilizational integrity and the right to adhere to its own value system, as argued by Dugin. Thus, articulation of Russian sovereignty is a way of patrolling the cultural peripheries of the Russian-Eurasian civilization, both as an opposition towards globalized Western values and to affirm where the Russian-Eurasian civilizational boundaries – and Russian political influence - geographically go.

The Russian-Eurasian civilization is described as characterized by traditional values and organization, multi-ethnicity, intra-community autonomy and a powerful state. Moreover, Neo-Eurasianism supposes an inherent, predestined opposition between Russia-Eurasia and Western-Antlanticist world. Adhering to Laruelle's conclusion of the 'totality' notion within Neo-Eurasianism, only civilizations with total integrity can be called to be civilizations. Preserving the integrity becomes of crucial importance. To detect the Neo-Eurasianist approach to the characteristics of Russian-Eurasian civilization, the operationalization should focus on the essentiality of these characteristics for the preservation of Russia. Thus, reference to traditional values, tolerance/multi-ethnicity, inter-community autonomy and powerful state *as essential* to Russian society are considered indicative of Neo-Eurasianist thought.

Additionally, within the Russian-Eurasian civilizational concept lies normative notions. Russia has a *moral imperative to protect both global and regional cultural plurality*. Dugin describes it as Russia's main role in an emerging world order (Dugin 2014a, 18). An articulation of this norm should be considered indicative of Neo-Eurasianist thought.

Dugin (2000, 215ff) affirms the Russian nation as the constitutive people of a nascent Eurasian political community. Moreover, Neo-Eurasianism argues for a regional integration within the Eurasian civilizational framework to realize Russia's inherent role a regional hegemon. The civilizational foundations and hegemonic objective is confirmed by several scholars. Huntington recognizes the nature of 'concentric circles' (Huntington 1996, 155) in an emerging civilizational world order, where core states, e.g. Russia, are granted hegemonic status (Huntington 1996, 164). Benjamin Richardson (2015, 93ff) notes the discourse of shared culture regarding the formation of the EEU. Silvis (2016, 12) suggest a Russian hegemonic representation of the Eurasian region in multilateral organizations. Benjamin Richardson (2015, 93ff) describes Russia's constitutive role in Eurasian integration as inherent. Laruelle (2008, 179f) notes that the Neo-Eurasianist strive for influence falls short of imperialism, but is hegemonic.

The notion of Russia's constitutive role and normative notion of a leading position in Eurasia implies that Neo-Eurasianism extends the scope of Russia's political influence beyond its national borders. A sentiment of *entitlement to consider the Eurasian region outside its borders as its political domain* should thus be implicit in the inherent hegemonic role and idea of continuativeness.

Concerning the view of the world order, there is an ontological assumption that unipolar globalization constitutes an *existential threat to the Russian-Eurasian and other civilizations*. Globalization is seen as infringing or obliterating civilizations' integrity (Dugin 2014a, 18, 42ff). This is supported by Lane and Silvius' conclusions that Neo-Eurasianist critique of globalization is found to originate in civilizational differences (Lane 2015, 6f; Silvius 2015, 84f). As argued above, articulations of sovereignty can be understood as affirming civilization integrity. Pronouncements of sovereignty *as essential* for the preservation of the civilization can be indicative of an existential threat. This holds congruency with the notion of the essentiality of traditional features for the preservation of the civilization, as shown above.

As a normative stance, Neo-Eurasianism declares that the emerging world order should be multipolar. This is in opposition to the presumed unipolar world to today, frozen in Western-Antlanticist domination. The Neo-Eurasianist quality of this idea is that multipolarity *is a system with which to ensure the preservation of civilizational plurality in the face of globalization* (Dugin 2014a, 44). It is this aspect of an emerging multipolar world order that should be considered suggestive of Neo-Eurasianist designs.

Furthermore, Dugin makes actual policy suggestions to ensure this multipolarity. He suggests crafting *alliances in accordance to his land- and sea based rationale*, creating an alliance of continental great powers to counter the US and her allies and acquire multipolar balance (Dugin 2000, 220ff).

## Analytic scheme

|                                       |            |   |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|
| Civilization concept                  | Assumption | Civilizations exists, are original and based on historical and geographical foundations. Civilizations are the subjects of history. Russian-Eurasian civilization exists. <i>Indicated by concepts mined from history and culture.</i>  |
|                                       | Norm       | There should be a plurality of civilizations. Cultural communities should be the subjects of law, have the right to determine their own development, adhere to their own values and interests. <i>Indicated by an endorsement of plurality in culture and values but a rejection of miscegenation, sovereignty as means to ensure self-determination, relativistic approach to universal principles.</i>              |
|                                       | Policy     | No clear policy suggestion  |
| Russian-Eurasian civilization concept | Assumption | Russian-Eurasian civilization is characterized by traditional values, multi-ethnicity, intra-community autonomy and a powerful state. <i>Indicated by characteristics conveyed as essential for preservation of nation.</i><br>There is an inherent, predestined opposition between Russia-Eurasia and Western-Antlanticist world. The Russian nation is the constitutive people of the Eurasian political community. |
|                                       | Norm       | Russia has a mission to protect other civilizations' originality and to integrate Eurasia under its leadership to create new world order. <i>Indicated by an entitlement to political relevance in the Eurasian region and a leading position in an emerging world order.</i>   |
|                                       | Policy     | Regional integration within civilizational framework.   |
| World order concept                   | Assumption | Unipolar globalization is an existential threat to Russian-Eurasian and other civilizations. <i>Indicated by the essentiality of sovereignty to preserve civilization.</i>  |
|                                       | Norm       | Multipolar world order where all civilizations' integrity is preserved. <i>Indicated by multipolar world order as norm, for the preservation of plurality.</i>  |
|                                       | Policy     | Geopolitical allegiances  |

## Comments on the analytic scheme

The matrix presents the assumptions, norms and policy suggestions within each concept, and provides the operationalization in italics. It should however be noted that it is not solely the operationalization that can indicate Neo-Eurasianism in the material. The material could also directly reflect the expressed ontological, normative and policy notion, bypassing the operationalization. The operationalization simply facilitates the interpretation.

Internal validity evaluates the level of agreement between the observations in the material and the developed theory (Bryman 2014, 352). As the present study is both theory-generative and theory-testing, this is only applicable to the developing of the analytical scheme based on Dugin's ideas. Validity has been ensured in the following manner. The presented concepts in the analytical scheme have been firmly grounded in researchers' conclusion on Neo-Eurasianism. Prior research here served the purpose of peer-review, ensuring concurrence between the developed analytical scheme and the ideology. Moreover, broad concepts of the school of thought have been specified in their Neo-Eurasianist quality to ensure that an indication in the material is truly reflective of Neo-Eurasianism and no other ideas that also revolve around the same concepts.

Dugin refers to cultural communities by the term civilization, and the term has been utilized in the analytical apparatus as well. Can we however expect Putin, however embedded with Neo-Eurasianist notions he might be, to use this term? The term civilization is still, regardless of the proliferation that Huntington's civilization theory has gained in Russia (Laruelle 2008, 119), a rather academic term not commonly used in politics. Moreover, Laruelle (2008, 221) suggests that Neo-Eurasianists themselves often use the term as a euphemism for political communities. For these reasons, cultural communities, peoples and nations are hereby understood as expressing the same qualities as civilizations in the analyzed material.

Moreover, the term hegemony might be counter effective to use in official political discourse when advocating regional integration. We cannot expect Putin to literally prompt for Russian hegemony, which is why reference to Russia's leading role in the region will be considered to be reflective of hegemonic ambitions in the present material.

In the analytic scheme, operationalization of policy suggestions should not be needed. Normative and ontological notions must be understood contextually and can be adapted to various degrees, whereas policy suggestions are clear political recommendations.

# Neo-Eurasianism and Vladimir Putin

## Neo-Eurasianist thematic analysis

In this segment the hypothetical-deductive thematic analysis of the Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly is conducted, using the presented analytical scheme as thematic framework. Ontological and normative descriptions as well as policy suggestions relating to the nature of the cultures and civilizations, the nature and role of Russian ditto and the world order are assessed regarding their accordance to the Neo-Eurasianist understanding of the same concepts.

## Civilization concept

Putin does not articulate a general assertion of the existence of civilizations and their foundations. This is probably due to the rather esoteric features of the Duganian understanding of civilizations – founded in geography as well as history, with specific psychologies. As noted, the term civilization is a theoretical academic concept for many, suggesting that the reference to civilizations in public speeches might be a bit odd.

Putin endorses plurality in his speeches. He calls for respect for national traditions, both domestically and internationally. He overtly expresses support of ‘global diversity’ and opposition towards ‘monopoly’ on the international stage (Putin 2016). He articulates a notion of a Russian mission in that Russia is posed to protect not only its own civilizational path but as well ‘will protect the diversity of the world’ (Putin 2014).

Putin (2016) also stresses the importance of adhering to international law. International law institutionalizes an equality between nations, as all countries regardless of their international standing, are subject to the same regulations and considerations. Moreover, the importance of equality before the law is set as a prerequisite to the ‘security and development opportunities (...) for all countries and peoples’. Thus, the call for equality before the law seems to be a rejection of any one or few countries’ global hegemonic position for the benefit of all countries’ independent development. This endorsement of plurality is reflective of the Neo-Eurasianist normative stance, and the importance of international law is reflective of a rejection of unipolarity. This finds support in the 2014 speech, where Putin affirms that national sovereignty and the preservation of identity should be ensured via the ‘strengthening of the role and the importance of international law’ (Putin 2014).

There is however no trace of a relativistic approach to universal principles. Contrary, Putin (2016) notes that ‘principles of justice, respect and trust are universal’ in regard to individuals’ ‘rights,

freedoms, and labour.’ Thus, Putin endorses plurality of cultures and articulates the importance of international law as a prerequisite to this. Furthermore, Putin does not reject miscegenation.

### Russian-Eurasian civilization concept

In the 2015 speech, Putin affirms the characteristics of the Russian society in terms of the Neo-Eurasianist assumption. ‘Ethnic and religious accord’ are the foundations of Russian statehood. The annexation of Crimea affirmed, per Putin, Russia’s ‘status as a strong state with a millennium-long history and traditions, as a nation consolidated by common values and common goals.’ He asserts Russia’s multi-ethnicity and intra-community autonomy as ‘Russia’s strength lies in the free development of all its peoples, its diversity, the harmony of cultures, languages and traditions, mutual respect for and dialogue between all faiths’ (Putin 2015). This is analogous of Silviu’s (2015) notion that historical and cultural conceptions are utilized by the Russian regime to confirm a Russian or Eurasian cultural community.

The articulation of the Russian cultural community is also accentuated in the 2014 Address. Putin cements the ‘indivisibility and integrity of the thousand-year long history’ of Russia, and specifies the annexed Crimea as the ‘spiritual source of the development of a multifaceted but solid Russian nation and a centralised Russian state,’ from where Russia’s Christian Orthodox nature originated. Christianity is portrayed as a unifying force in the creation of the Russian state. Sevastopol has ‘invaluable civilizational and even sacral importance for Russia’ (ibid.). Here also, Putin affirms the Russian civilization in its religious, multi-ethnic, state-centralised characteristics with concepts derived from history.

The importance of tradition is evident through all speeches. Putin says that ‘traditional values which we inherited from our forefathers’ are political priorities (Putin 2014). and that ‘[Russia’s] efforts are aimed at supporting traditional values’ (Putin 2016).

The importance of national unity for the successful development of the country is mentioned throughout the speeches. A divided society is articulated as an existential threat to Russia and national unity as a national imperative (Putin 2015). Russian society must be united and have a strong and competent state to achieve its goals. Putin does not allow Russia’s ‘interests to be infringed or ignored’ (Putin 2015). He emphasises that ‘either we remain a sovereign nation, or we dissolve without a trace and lose our identity’ (Putin 2014).

In the 2015 Address, Putin states that preserving the nation is a ‘long-term agenda that must be independent of election cycles and the prevailing situation.’ This should not be directly understood as a reference to the Neo-Eurasianist idea of a consistent state that independently of parliamentary

democracy is to interpret and execute the will of the people, as Putin refers to the long-term agenda primarily in relation to demography.

Taking notice of what is omitted, the analysis find that throughout the material, Putin only mentions democracy twice, when speaking of the efficiency of the political system and when suggesting that terrorists presume themselves to fight for freedom and democracy. It is remarkable that the executive head of state, when addressing the legislative body, does not speak of the virtues of democracy or the imperative to cultivate it.

The operationalization suggested that the civilizational characteristics be portrayed as essential for the preservation of Russia. Mostly, Putin simply confirms these traits as Russian. However, in the 2015 and 2016 Addresses, Russia's strength and successful development are conveyed as dependent on civilizational features. In the 2014 ditto, Putin indicates that the territorial domination of the origin of Orthodox Christianity is crucial to the Russian nation. Moreover, in all three addresses, there is repeated reference to the essentiality of national unity for the preservation and success of the Russian nation. Thus, we can settle that Putin shares the Neo-Eurasianist understanding of the features of the Russian civilization, but only selectively (national unity and Christianity) portray those as essential for the preservation of the nation.

Putin espouses normative notions regarding the Russian society. He stresses that Russia has a 'responsibility (...) to take part in resolving global and regional problems, in situations, of course, where [Russia's] involvement is fitting, wanted and needed' (Putin, 2016). Putin says that the 'quality and the size of the Russian economy must be consistent with [Russia's] geopolitical and historical role' (Putin 2014). He adds that 'this is the only way to increase Russia's share in the global economy, and thus strengthen [Russia's] influence' (ibid.). Here, Putin articulates that Russia has a specific historical role, in relation to its geographical position, to fulfill. This has a strong correlation to the Neo-Eurasianist thought that Russia is predetermined to acquire an internationally influential role in an emerging multipolar world, as described by Dugin and reiterated by Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas (2009, 101ff).

The 2015 speech has an interesting normative notion. 'Russia has no right to be vulnerable. (...) We must fully use our current advantages, as there are no guarantees that we will have them tomorrow' (Putin 2015). Russia is articulated as obligated to take advantage of its opportunities. The normative notion is however conditioned temporally, not culturally, which is why it might not be relevant to consider in Neo-Eurasianist terms.

Russia is thus portrayed as having a responsibility, towards its geographical location, history and temporal window of opportunity, to take on leading role in regional and global affairs. While the operationalization focused on the *entitlement* to political influence in the region, Putin focuses on the

*responsibility* to develop political influence in the region. These notions are not different in nature, but rather separate approaches to the same normative stance – that Russia *should* have political influence and take on a leading role in the Eurasian region. Thus, Putin expresses the Eurasianist norm throughout the Addresses. Moreover, the reference to a geopolitical factor in Russia's regional hegemonic role is a strong reminiscent of Neo-Eurasianist ideas, as the ideology bases Russia's identity and international role on its geography.

The hegemonic claim is also expressed in the 2014 Address. In relation to a perceived lack of consideration of Russia's legitimate interests in the Eurasian region, Putin affirms that Russia 'will have to protect [its] legitimate interests unilaterally' (Putin 2014). Moreover, he affirms that Russia will not 'comply unquestionably and blindfolded' with what he views as erroneous policy in Ukraine and expresses outrage that the proposed EU-Ukraine Association Agreement took no consideration of Russian interests (*ibid.*). This suggests a sentiment of entitlement to have Russia's interests considered also outside of its formal borders. It is indicative of a hegemonic regional identity, as encompassed in Neo-Eurasianism.

Putin (2014) states that the fundamental principles of the EEU are 'equality, pragmatism and mutual respect.' This indicates an equal consideration of all nation's interests, not elevating Russia's role in the region. He adds that 'the preservation of national identity and state sovereignty of its member countries' is crucial to the EEU (*ibid.*).

Putin thus expresses that it is imperative to preserve Eurasian countries' cultural distinctiveness. This is coherent with the Eurasian notion of cultural plurality and intra-community self-regulation within the broader Eurasian political framework. Seemingly contradictory to the Neo-Eurasianist argument of Russian regional hegemony and political continuativeness, Putin expresses that the state sovereignty of the integrated countries should be preserved. Two remarks should be made in relation to this. Firstly, Neo-Eurasianists argue for Russian hegemony and not imperial control, leaving room for some endorsement of state sovereignty. Secondly, overtly denying state sovereignty would be both non-strategic and inappropriate for a president seeking regional integration. It is thus possible that Putin endorses state sovereignty for Eurasian countries within an integrative process, while elsewhere establishing Russia's hegemonic claim and constitutive role.

While assuring Russia's continued appreciation and active partaking in global multilateral organizations, Putin stresses that 'Russia also attaches great importance to the idea of building a multi-level integration model for Eurasia' (Putin 2016). He notes that 'further strengthening cooperation within the Eurasian Economic Union and with other CIS countries has always been a foreign policy priority for Russia' (*ibid.*). This shows a focus on regional integration as a parallel process to partaking in pre-existing international institutions, which is coherent with Silvius (2016) conclusions and the

Neo-Eurasianist recommendation for regional integration. However, reference to the integration being founded on civilizational basis is missing. Without reference to the civilizational aspect, this cannot with validity be interpreted as regional integration on Neo-Eurasianist normative grounds as other interpretations as to why the integration is performed (economic etc.) cannot be excluded.

In sum, Putin's stance on regional integration is ambiguous. He endorses regional integration but does not articulate its civilizational foundations. He does however reaffirm the Neo-Eurasianist notion of cultural plurality. Russia's hegemonic position is confirmed by the entitlement of consideration of interest outside its borders, but is also tampered by his respect for the Eurasian countries political sovereignty. Articulations of Eurasian countries' political self-determination within regional integration could however be coherent with Neo-Eurasianism and a Russian hegemonic, not imperialistic, position.

### Conception of world order

In the 2014 Address, Putin describes the United States a 'influencing Russia's relations with its neighbours, either openly or behind the scenes.' In the 2016 ditto he means that the Western world, through sanctions and political pressure, attempts to make Russia 'ignore [its] own fundamental national interests.' Moreover, the sentiment of a hostile world is affirmed in Putin's suggestion the Western world 'for decades, if not centuries' has carried out a policy of containment toward Russia (Putin 2014). He means that 'whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use' (ibid.). Putin even suggests 'support for separatism in Russia from across the pond' (ibid.).

Putin thus paints a picture of a hostile world, where a hegemonic West infringes Russia's interests. It is however unipolarity and not globalized Western values that threatens Russia. Moreover, the threat is not conceptualized as existential. Putin's description of the world order therefore cannot be established to reflect Neo-Eurasianism.

However, Putin recurrently mentions that terrorism and extremism threatens the values upon which Russia is founded and poses a threat to the 'future of the entire civilization' (Putin 2015). He says that Russia has and must continue to take a leading role in the fight against terrorism to 'defend [Russia's] national interests, history, traditions and values' (ibid.). Terrorism is here portrayed as an existential threat to the Russian civilization, corroding national unity and values of multi-ethnic tolerance upon which Russia is founded. Whereas Neo-Eurasianism do acknowledge an existential threat to the values of Russian civilization, the threat consists of globalized western liberal values, not international terrorism sowing dissent and division. Here, Putin seems to substitute the Neo-Eurasianist globalised liberalism threat with a globalized terrorism threat, suggesting that the Russian regime utilizes a part

of the Neo-Eurasianist discourse as a legitimizing rationale for fighting terrorism. This bears similarities to the conclusions of Silvius (2015).

Putin reflects the Neo-Eurasianist normative notion of a multipolar world order. He asserts that it is 'imperative to respect the legitimate interests of all the participants in international dialogue' and that 'respect for other nations and states' are Russian political priorities (Putin 2014). Russia desires an 'equal dialogue' and Putin affirms 'the principles of justice and mutual respect' in international affairs (Putin 2016). He adds that Russia is 'ready for a serious discussion on building a stable system of international relations for the 21st century' (ibid.). This is a call for a multipolar world order. The notion of protection of plurality as normative ground cannot however be established, which differentiates Putin's view from Neo-Eurasianism.

Mentioning a strategic cooperation between Russia and China, Putin does however, refer to consideration of national interests as the normative ground for a multipolar world order. He notes that the 'partnership can be regarded as a model for shaping a world order free from the domination of a single country, no matter how strong it is, and taking into account the interests of all countries in harmony' (Putin 2016).

In summation, Putin iterates the Neo-Eurasianist view of a multipolar world order, but does not found it explicitly on notions of plurality. He however refers to mutual respect, and consideration of national interest as normative basis, which could be the same as an endorsement of plurality.

Putin reiterates two of Dugin's specific policy suggestions for Russia in a multipolar world, forging strategic alliances with India and to a lesser degree Japan, both being representatives of the supposed land-side of the land/sea based conflict line (Putin 2016). In an earlier speech, Putin asserts that '[Russia's] goal is to have as many equal partners as possible, both in the West and in the East' (Putin 2014). Putin thus reiterates Dugin's suggestion, but not in clear reference to build a multipolar world and a Neo-Eurasian correlation is therefore hard to be established.

## Conclusion

The present study aimed to answer to what extent Neo-Eurasianist thought, as conveyed by Aleksandr Dugin, can be discerned in the 2014, 2015 and 2016 Russian Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly. The research question has been addressed using ideational analysis to discern an analytic scheme with which presence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in the Addresses can be identified. The analytical scheme has been applied to the material, providing a framework for a thematic analysis of Neo-Eurasian ideas. The thematic analysis shows that certain, although not all, aspects of Neo-Eurasianism are present in the 2014 – 2016 Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly.

The Neo-Eurasianist notion of civilizations as the subjects of history, and founded in history and especially geography is not explicitly referred to by Putin. Neither is the existence of a Eurasian common civilization plainly stated. However, Putin does reiterate the Neo-Eurasianist cultural features of the presumed Russian-Eurasian civilization when describing the characteristics of the Russian people and Russian society. He affirms them by referring to formative historical and cultural events, as suggested by the study's operationalization. Putin conceptualizes national unity and Orthodox Christianity as essential for the preservation of society. He does not however conceptualize the other expressed characteristics as essential, as prescribed by Dugin. Neither does Putin display a shared civilization as the normative ground for regional integration.

The normative idea that civilizational/cultural plurality should be preserved, both domestically and internationally, and that Russia is posed to ensure this, is fully internalized in Putin's speeches. Moreover, Putin endorses the norm of Russian political influence in the Eurasian region, reflecting the Neo-Eurasianist view on the matter.

Putin endorses a multipolar world order, just as Dugin. He does not explicitly found multipolarity on the Neo-Eurasianist norm of plurality, but does refer to the equal consideration of national interests as a crucial reason as to why a multipolar world order is preferred. A fundamental part of Neo-Eurasianism is the perceived threat of globalization and liberal values to the traditional societies of non-Western countries. This critique of globalization is not found in Putin's speeches. What is nevertheless found is the notion of an existential threat to the traditional Russian society and its values, posed by international terrorism instead of globalized Western values. Putin limitedly reiterates Dugin's policy suggestion concerning strategic alliances in a multipolar world.

Reviewing the Neo-Eurasianist presence in the Addresses, we can conclude that central aspects are indeed present, but that a holistic endorsement of the school of thought is missing. Putin seems to especially iterate the Neo-Eurasianist normative notions, with the articulation of Russian political influence in Eurasia as well as with the endorsement of plurality and multipolarity, and the articulation of a Russian responsibility for protection and realization for the same. The ontological approaches and policy suggestions are, on the other hand, only partly reflected or cannot be established to be reflected in their Neo-Eurasianist quality.

## Discussion

How can the reflection of primarily normative notions be understood? Performing similar research on similar material, Silvius (2015) also found presence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in central regime presentations. The present study thus affirms this conclusion. Moreover, Silvius (2015) suggests that the Neo-Eurasianist discourse is utilized as a legitimizing rationale to promote regional integration and

global political influence for Russia. That Putin in the present study is also found to express the normative features of Neo-Eurasianism, but not fully the ontological assumptions that precludes them nor fully the policies that follow by them, supports the notion that Neo-Eurasianism is utilized as a legitimizing rationale also in the present material.

What is Putin attempting to legitimize? Previous research has suggested that the Neo-Eurasianist discourse is used to legitimize regional integration, promote national unity and domestically mediate competing ideas on Russia's role in the world (Silvius 2015, Benjamin Richardsson 2015, Duncan 2015). Even though Putin mainly expresses the norm of plurality in the field of international politics, it is also accentuated in domestic policy. Domestically, it is used to argue inter-ethnic and religious tolerance. The reverse is ethnic and religious strife, or national disunity. Thus, it seems Putin is utilizing a plurality discourse to promote national unity in the Addresses in the same way that he has been found to do in other material.

Does Putin use Neo-Eurasianists norms to promote regional integration in the material? Putin does express a hegemonic claim to influence in Eurasia, conveyed as the request for consideration of Russian interest in neighboring Eurasian countries, but that claim is not clearly linked to the imperative of regional integration. However, even though they are not overtly expressed as linked, a policy of regional integration logically follows the expressed norm of hegemony, suggesting that the Neo-Eurasianist idea could indeed be used as a legitimizing discourse also in the present material. This is a speculative conclusion, however, which should be furthered studied to be affirmed with any certainty.

The present study show that Putin depicts terrorism, not unipolar globalization, as an existential threat to Russian values and society. In this, a Neo-Eurasianist discourse is evoked, but globalization is substituted with terrorism, suggesting that Neo-Eurasianist discourse of an existential threat is utilized by Putin to legitimize Russia's actions to counter terrorism.

The reflected Neo-Eurasianist ideas are thus to be understood as rationale rather than ideological content, drawing the same conclusion as Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas (2009, 61f) that suggests that Putin's Neo-Eurasianism is a pragmatic and legitimizing, devoid of actual ideological adherence.

An issue that could merit further study is the almost absence of a discussion of the value of democracy in the speeches. Determining whether this is unusual for this kind of material and analyzing why democracy is omitted constitutes an interesting study, given the deterioration of the Russian democracy.

Furthermore, an issue for further study would be the inexact geographical boundaries of Eurasia as Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism claims political relevance in the Eurasian region. Dugin's geographical

definition of Eurasia, which is broader than other Neo-Eurasianists', encompasses the whole of the Soviet bloc, as well as the Baltic states. Moreover, his Eurasia includes Muchuria, Xinjiang, Tibet and Mongolia, as well as the Orthodox areas of the Balkans (Laruelle 2008, 117f). Determining the cultural boundaries of Eurasia in the minds of the political leadership would be a fruitful contribution to understanding the scope of Russia's Eurasian ambitions.

The operationalization of Neo-Eurasianism provided a comprehensive reflection of the ideology. Can we expect a comprehensive reflection of an ideology in a material such as the Presidential Addresses? Presidential speeches adhere by necessity to a certain rhetorical and political style, making references to the most extreme notions within Neo-Eurasianism unfeasible. The improbability that Putin would publicly denounce democracy and endorse the Neo-Eurasianist demotism, or overtly claiming that sea- and land based civilization are primordialially opposed, constitutes a problem with the present study and material. It could well be that Putin espouses a deeper Neo-Eurasianism than expressed in his official speeches. Attempting an assessment of this would be a good subject for further research. Other material than official presentation must then be selected.

Another problem with the present study is Neo-Eurasianism's proximity to other strands of thoughts. Laruelle (2008, 138) notes that for over a century it has been 'normal' for Russian intellectuals sensitive to the national question to affirm that 'every people moves through history according to its own trajectory, upholding its own understanding of the world.' Moreover, the messianic character of the self-imposed Russian mission to protect cultural plurality and unite Eurasia has analogies in Russian history. Chaudet, Parmentier & Pélopidas (2009, 101ff) mean that Russian imperialistic inclinations have recurrently found moral justification in a higher purpose. The Muscovite Tsars found it in the liberation of the Russian people from Mongol horde and in the preservation of the orthodox faith inherited from a fallen Byzantine. Under the Soviet era, a moral imperative to promote communism served the purpose of ulterior motive. In a historical perspective, they note, Neo-Eurasianism is yet another example of imperialistic tendencies under messianic pretences.

It can thus be hard to determine these notions to be strictly Neo-Eurasianist, and not ideas that have been present in Russia for a long time. Although this issue has been addressed by specifying the concepts in their Neo-Eurasianist quality in the operationalization, this still poses a problem for the validity of the study.

On a final note, what does the limited, although established, presence of Neo-Eurasianist ideas in regime official discourse entail? It affirms that Neo-Eurasianism has influence in contemporary Russia, either as legitimizing discourse or as ideology influencing the Kremlin. Putin's endorsement and protection of cultural plurality and its protection, a multipolar world order and a Russian entitlement to regional political influence is sure to have political consequences regardless of the

reason why these sentiments are expressed. It seems that the Kremlin, either influenced by, or using as a strategy, indeed espouses a new Russian idea in Neo-Eurasianism.

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