



China and the EAEU

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China's Relationships with Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus and How They Affect the EAEU

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Research Questions

- (1) What are the characteristics of China's relationships with Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus?
- (2) How do these relationships affect the EAEU?
- (3) How can China's and the EAEU's approaches to each other be characterised?



The Arguments

Bilateral Relationships

- China's relationships with Belarus and Ukraine are asymmetric
- The Russia-China relationship is one of caution and complementarity

Impact for the EAEU

- The Ukraine-China relationship strains the ties that bind the EAEU
- The Russia-China relationship has the potential to bind the EAEU stronger together
- Belarus-China relations both test and support the EAEU



The Arguments Continued...

China and the EAEU

- China's approach to the EAEU is dualist
"Dualist" in that Beijing is ready to cooperate with the EAEU, but it is also ready to deal at the bilateral level, whether or not the outcome conflicts with EAEU regulations.
- The EAEU–China relationship only goes as far as EAEU members
The EAEU is a Russian-led project, which is only the sum of its parts



Why Are These Questions Relevant?

1. China's activities have implications for domestic/foreign policy in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus
2. The EAEU holds potential promise and problems for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)



Bilateral Relations: China's Relationships with Belarus and Ukraine

Ukraine and Belarus are of interest to China, but they are not vital

- China's foreign policy priorities are: (a) the securitisation of key resources and (b) access to markets¹
- Neither state is plentiful with strategic resources
- Their geographic locations can make them "gateways" to Europe, but this is not unique²

It is Ukraine and Belarus that need China

- Belarus needs China for financial assistance and to reduce reliance on Russia³
- Ukraine wants Chinese investment⁴



Bilateral Relations Continued: China's Relationship with Russia

Cautious on the part of Russia, and complementary for both partners foreign policy aims⁵

The challenge for Russia is to remain a relevant world power

- Zbigniew Brzezinski (1998), a “black hole” between EU and China

For China, Russia as a declining, but still influential power⁶

- political partner in Central Asia and a reliable, rear supplier—like Canada is to the US
- China accepts Russian political and military primacy, while Russia accepts Chinese economic predominance⁷



How These Relationships Impact the EAEU

Russia–China

- The EAEU as a Russian vehicle for remaining a world power and for taking advantage of China's rise
- Russia seeks to become an indispensable player—a vital middleman as Bobo Lo (2015; 2017) argues—for both China and the EU in the Eurasian region.
- The Greater Eurasia Project: To create a regulatory treaty framework—in which the EAEU plays a central role—to lock Russia into a “comprehensive trade and economic partnership in Eurasia with the participation of the European Union states and China” (Putin 2016).



How These Relationships Impact the EAEU continued...

Ukraine–China

- Ukraine is an embarrassment for the EAEU project
- Ukraine serves as an example that China is always willing to engage bilaterally—without Russia
- The 2014 Ukraine Crisis has put EAEU to Eurasian Union transformation on hold (Sakwa 2015)
- Demonstrates to other EAEU members that relations can sour with Moscow, but the biggest economic player in Eurasia—China—is still willing to do business



How These Relationships Impact the EAEU continued...

Belarus-China

- The Belarus–China relationship both tests and supports the EAEU
- Belarus has been a vocal supporter for an EAEU Free Trade Agreement (18 May 2018) with China
- China has a preference to engage one-to-one with regimes (Fox and Godement 2009)
- In practice, Belarus signs deals with China first and worries about EAEU rules later
- If the EAEU doesn't work for members, Belarus shows members (other than Russia) do not work for it



China and the EAEU

China

- China is happy to engage and work within EAEU frameworks as long as it suits the needs of the BRI
- Beijing has shows support for the EAEU (FTA, 18 May 2018)
- Duality: in practice, China is both a supporter and a side-stepper for the EAEU

EAEU

- “Enough honeymoon, time to work” — Yuri Kofner (RIAC 2018)
- The EAEU can work for China and its members only if the EAEU meets its members needs



Conclusions

- China's relationships with Belarus and Ukraine are asymmetric
- The Russia-China relationship is one of caution and complementarity
- The Ukraine-China relationship strains the ties that bind the EAEU
- The Russia-China relationship has the potential for Russia to develop Greater Eurasia
- Belarus-China relations both test and support the EAEU
- China's approach to the EAEU is a duality—to work with or without it
- The EAEU is only as strong as the sum of its parts