

# **The importance of the Eurasian Economic Union in Russian foreign policy and Iran's opportunities for cooperation with the E.E.U**

**Touraj Hatami**

PhD Candidate, Department of International Relations, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran, (corresponding author)  
touraj.hatami@yahoo.com

**Afshin Zargar**

Assistant Professor of International Relations, Karaj Azad University  
zargar.a2003@gmail.com

**Armin Amini**

Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran, armin.amini@kiaua.ac.ir

## **Abstract**

Russia's foreign policy has undergone many changes in the last decade. Putin's policies have continued until 2021 and he has changed toward a pragmatic approach to dynamism and initiative in regional and international developments. The Various factors have been influential in this direction. The Regional convergence in the near abroad has always been a priority for Moscow. Russia has tried to use the political, security and economic potential of the Eurasian region in geopolitical rivalries. One of the developments in recent years is the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, which can play an important and effective role in advancing Russia's foreign policy goals. This study seeks to answer the question of how effective the Eurasian Economic

Union will be in achieving Russia's foreign policy goals. What are its prospects and challenges? And what opportunities can be imagined for the cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran with this economic union? The theoretical framework of the research is based on the theory of neoclassical realism. This theory considers the factors of domestic, regional level and the structure of the international system in evaluating foreign policy. The research method is descriptive-analytical and uses documentary and library information and data.

**Keywords:** *Neoclassical realism, security complex, Russian foreign policy, Eurasian Economic Union*

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## **Introduction**

It has been more than two decades since the idea of economic cooperation and convergence in the Eurasian region, and this process has led to the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Realizing their growing needs, the Central Eurasian republics have reached a common understanding that in the form of a regional economic structure, they can better manage their economic problems and design programs for the development of their regional trade.

Under these circumstances, of course, Russia, which felt more concerned than its surrounding republics, has always put regional convergence plans on the foreign policy agenda.

"In the current situation of the international system, countries alone do not have all the factors of production and face serious limitations in this regard, and on the other hand, convergence and close economic cooperation lead to prosperity, wealth and gaining power" (Soleimani and Suleimanpour, 2016: 70).

In the Eurasian region, "the ideas of economic cooperation have been seriously discussed since 2000 in the form of the Eurasian Economic Community and then the Customs Union, and finally led to the formation and crystallization of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, which is a new chapter of cooperation and convergence in Eurasia" (Moldshev, 2015: 2-4).

Among the most important components affecting the success of intra-regional convergence are the level of solidarity, the nature of relations and relations between countries, the amount and levels of power, as well as the arrangements and structure of relations between countries. In this regard, "the degree of similarity and

complementary of political units and their interaction in the economic, political and social spheres, cultural and social relations between people, the potential and actual power and political will of leaders and the influence of elites, as well as stressful areas between units, it is considerable importance in the formation of regionalism and convergence projects" (Cantori and Spiegl, 1970: 8-23).

The trend of economic convergence in Central Eurasia can be defined in the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the 1990s, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community from 2003 to 2014 and the developments leading to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015.

In fact, the prelude to the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union was the formation of a common economic space by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

"Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in 2012 created a common economic space with the aim of creating a common market for the free movement of goods and services and capital, labor, development and deepening of industrial cooperation, transit, energy and agricultural programs. They were modeled on the experience of the European Union". (Soleimanpour and Soleimani, 2016: 82).

Despite the weaknesses of the Eurasian Economic Union in various areas that will be addressed during the investigation, this union can be considered as one of the important Propellants of Russian foreign policy, in order to balance the region and strengthen the security complex around the Russian Federation. This hypothesis is examined and analyzed in the framework of neoclassical realist theory.

The question is, to what extent will the Eurasian Economic Union be effective in advancing Russia's foreign policy goals? What are its obstacles and challenges? And, in this context, what opportunities can be imagined for the cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran with this field? In response to these questions, the subject is examined and explained in a descriptive-analytical

manner, using documentary, library and electronic data.

## **I. Theoretical Framework**

One of the concerns of international relations theorists has always been the possibility of creating a theoretical framework for analyzing the foreign policy of governments, and various theories of international relations have been tried to be used in this direction.

In this regard, neoclassical realism has considerable potential for foreign policy analysis. "In fact, this theory seeks to explain why phenomena are influential in foreign policy, while international policy theory seeks to explain international phenomena". (Kitchen and Nicholas, 2010: 121).

Neoclassical realism, at the same time, is an attempt to systematize the broad and diverse views of realism. "It also acknowledges the complexity of the world of international relations and sees events as a reflection of a variety of factors" (Kitchen and Nicholas, 2010: 116-117).

Therefore, in analyzing and explaining foreign policy, it pays attention to various factors and components at the domestic and regional levels and the structure of the system. In this regard, the Eurasian Economic Union is also one of the influential components in Russia's foreign policy and its effectiveness can be evaluated in the framework of this theory.

In the theory of neoclassical realism, the interests of units in the international system should be considered very diverse and variable. Of course, "the first and foremost benefit for all governments, regardless of internal characteristics and distinctions, is the acquisition and increase of security" (Waltz, 1979: 121-123). Neoclassical realism envisions any collective cooperation to strengthen national power, and in fact believes in game with the sum of diverse and plural sums, although it may be zero, or it may be double.

Maximizing power is one of the most important issues for countries. The consolidation and development of the Eurasian

Economic Union is important in maximizing power for Russia. Power refers to the neoclassical realism of the resources and capabilities of governments that are used to pursue their goals. The Eurasian Economic Union has the capacity to act as one of the structures and sources of Russian regional power generation.

"Power is not just a goal or a tool, it is both a tool and a goal. Thus a combination of classical realism and neo-realism in the definition of power can be inferred. In neoclassical realism, power also has two dimensions of hardware and software, material and perceptual. However, in other realistic theories, the software and perceptual dimensions of power are less analytical " (Salimi, 2015: 27-28).

In the theory of neoclassical realism, the perceptual variable is not independent and is also affected by material power. In addition to the formal structure of government, it is important for social elites to assess threats and opportunities (Lobell, 2009: 56-57).

Another important point is that aggressive neoclassic such as Schuler, instead of emphasizing power and security, are the main goals of states, in classical realism and neo-realism, they believe that states seek to maximize their influence in the regional and international environment (Scmidh, 2005: 542-545).

Analytical structure of neoclassical realism, including the independent variable of systemic components, system structure and regional factors including threats and opportunities, mediating variables (domestic policy issues), leaders' perception, internal cohesion, vulnerability, government-society relationship, possibility of resource mobilization, and then the dependent variable (policy) (Rose and Gideon, 1998: 50-51).

Neoclassical realism thus provides a more coherent theoretical framework for understanding Russian foreign policy. Moreover, like other modern realist theories, neoclassical realism is state-centered and believes that competition for power and influence between states in the system of international chaos is an important feature that defines international politics (Rathburn, 2008: 295-311).

"Over the last two decades, Russia's foreign policy has undergone significant changes. In this regard, numerous domestic and regional factors and events, as well as the structural pressures of the international system, have influenced the orientation of Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, in the study and analysis of Russian foreign policy, it is necessary to understand the internal and regional variables and system-level factors. Russia's foreign policy has shifted towards realism and can be analyzed in the form of neoclassical theory of realism" (Wieclawski and Jacek, 2011: 170-172).

Neoclassical realism helps to understand Russia's role in different roles at the international and regional levels and in regulating relations and interactions with the world's leading countries. In this context, Russia, while regulating its interactions in the surrounding areas, has implemented various policies and programs from soft and flexible to hard and harsh.

## II. Eurasian Economic Union

**Backgrounds:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the creation of a framework for cooperation in the form of a convergent structure has always been Russia's goal, and of course major republics in the region such as Kazakhstan led by Nazarbayev and Belarus led by Lukashenkov fully supported convergent ideas.

Nazarbayev, as the designer and ideator of regional cooperation and convergence models, has played an important role in regional structures in the political, security and economic dimensions. During his long presidency of more than two decades, he has been active in presenting regional convergence programs during ongoing contacts and consultations with Putin. Some experts in the region attribute the initial idea of the Eurasian Economic Union to Nazarbayev.

The CIS Charter in 1994 contained the first proposals for regional economic cooperation, which underwent fundamental changes following Putin's rise to power in 2000. Continuing this path, a free trade regime and an integrated customs system were

proposed, with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan known as the Eurasian Economic Community.

The main spark for economic convergence came in 2007 with the signing of the Customs Union Treaty with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The most important issue in the activity of the Eurasian Economic Union has been the removal of customs borders between members with the aim of developing the free flow of goods and services.

In this regard, the study of the role of the Eurasian idea of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is important. One of the greatest achievements of N.A.Nazarbayev as a leader of modern times who thinks deeply is the advancement of the idea of the Eurasian Union. Over the years, the President of Kazakhstan has developed the conceptual basis of the Eurasian doctrine in his writings theoretically and emphatically promoted the formation of a real and an effective structure of the Eurasian Union at all levels and in all aspects (Sadykova, 2013: 378).

"This stage was the recognition of a common economic space, which is considered a platform to reach the final stage of convergence and implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union program in 2015" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 153).

"The Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and Belarus are the main members of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the accession of Armenia and then Kyrgyzstan to the puzzle has clarified the union's strategic vision. Following the official announcement of the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, the Russian media considered this event a major development in economic issues and tried to introduce this issue as an important variable in the field of regional trade and trade relations. At this time, Sputnik News Agency called the formation of this union the production of a new economic giant" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 154-155).

What also needs to be noted is how, 20 years later, all of these institutions have significantly evolved from their modest beginning. This naturally followed Moscow's changing view of



their utility to its practical needs. While not being flawless by any stretch of imagination, the CSTO and EEU made some noticeable achievements in improving regional military and economic cooperation and coordination (Janko, 2019).

"The European Union can be called the greatest case of regionalism convergence in the new era, and in this context, institutions, legal regimes, structures and common laws have been created" (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 34).

In fact, regional convergence is a cure for the contagious disease of extremist nationalism, irresponsible rulers and governments, and divergent and non-cooperative schemes". (Polani, 1945: 86-88).

"From Moscow's point of view, Eurasian convergence is not defined solely in the economic sphere, but encompasses all social, cultural and identity aspects of the region. The Preserving Russian identity and the historical and cultural authenticity of the region is one of Moscow's top priorities.

**Objectives of Forming the Eurasian Economic Union:** One of the most important primary goals of the Eurasian Economic Union is to facilitate trade activities between member countries and the development of interregional trade and commerce with neighboring regions and economic structures. It can play a significant role in the context of global economic interactions. It also puts on the agenda interaction and partnership with international organizations, governments and other similar structures.

"The Eurasian Economic Union pursues cooperation with other governments and regional institutions to achieve its goals". (EEC, 2015: 16-18).

"Balancing with other regional structures, including the European Union, has been one of the strategic goals of convergence in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union". (Soleimanpour and Soleimani, 2016: 84).

The implementation of infrastructure projects to improve and eliminate transit and transportation deficiencies, mechanized

agriculture and modernization of equipment related to local agricultural products, industrialization and use of new technologies in order to create suitable conditions for balanced economic development in the union. It has been one of the structural and important goals and priorities of the union.

"The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 as a final step in economic convergence in this area with the aim of integrating customs policies and facilitating the flow of goods, services and capital, entered a new phase in the Russian Federation's relations with the region" (Sajjadpour and Soleimani, 2015: 106).

The review of the initial goals of the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in various fields of trade and commerce, customs, labor and capital shows that the principles, rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization have been considered in the drafting of the union's charter. And in trade and commerce between members, the union is moving towards standardizing its rules and principles in accordance with the standards governing international trade, which will play an important role in its reliability and dynamism in the future.

### **III. Eurasian Economic Union and Russia's foreign policy**

**Strengthening Regional Security Complex:** In addition to the Union's stated goals and policies for economic convergence and regional economic and trade development, Russia has long-term goals for the development of regional convergence within the union.

"Examining the goals and structure that Russia has set for the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union, it is clear that the main goal of this union was to create a kind of convergence in the Central Eurasian region against European Union. In fact, by highlighting the economic benefits of convergence in Central Eurasia, Russia explicitly seeks to present the Eurasian Economic Union as an effective and alternative to the European Union. EU Eastern Partnership programs aimed at influencing Central

Eurasian countries" (Sajjadpour and Soleimani, 2015: 106-107).

Russia's institutional push in Eurasia was always driven in part by its regional and global agendas. Regionally, Moscow was concerned by what it saw as an "erosion" of the post-Soviet space, which was particularly visible in a deteriorating security situation stemming from instability in Afghanistan, the civil war in Tajikistan, and the clashes between its former Soviet Republics. Particularly worrying was the rise of the nonconventional threats like terrorism and drug smuggling. Part of this erosion included also a loss of influence over the post-Soviet space, in particular following the "color revolutions" in several former Soviet Republics like Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, which many in Russia saw as West-sponsored plots. Hence, (EEU) and the CSTO are actually sometimes seen as an anti-NATO (Janko, 2019).

Thus, "Russia's view of the Eurasian Economic Union is politico-strategic and important economic and trade concepts for Moscow have not been clarified" (Robert, 2014: 2-6).

In this context, Russia uses all its capacities to achieve foreign policy goals. Regional convergence helps to increase and strengthen the foundations of Russia's national power, and in this regard, the Eurasian Economic Union, in accordance with the theory of neoclassical realism, is one of the most important power-building platforms for Russia and as an important factor in strengthening bargaining. Russia. Of course, it is important for Russia theoretically and practically. The issue of the importance of factors and sources of power in achieving national goals and foreign policy is one of the important issues in the neoclassical realism theory.

"In fact, regional economic convergence has always been one of Russia's most important goals, and of course the importance of this issue has been explained at the academic level, and as a kind of convergence policy abroad it has a special priority for Russia." (Kirkham, 2016: 112-113).

"In many Western scientific and academic papers, the Eurasian Economic Union has been defined in terms of a realistic

approach, describing it as Russia's attempt to implement a new imperialist project, and emphasizing that Russia intends to assert its hegemony in the region, And to exploit this issue in the form of power policy in political, economic and military dimensions". From the Western point of view, this trend is a threat to the process of liberal democracy and can lead to a halt to the process of liberal idealism in the Eurasian countries." (Brzezinski, 1994: 70-73).

"Although the Eurasian Economic Union project is still in its infancy, it can be assessed in terms of Russia's hegemonic goals". (Morto, 2015: 28-30).

One of the most important results of Eurasian economic convergence is the economic growth of the region, political and social stability and, consequently, the strengthening of the security and legal infrastructure of the region.

"The Eurasian Economic Union can be interpreted in terms of Russia's competition with the European Economic Union as well as the development of cooperation with the East" (Dreyer and Popesco, 2014: 25).

**Regional and Trans-Regional Spheres:** The Financing infrastructure projects in each region is one of the most important pillars of regional development. The Eurasian Economic Union Bank, headquartered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, has the potential to invest and finance projects in the region. Which facilitates economic growth, In particular, this financial center can significantly contribute to the implementation of economic projects in the member countries of the union, which have weaker financial strength.

"The Eurasian Development Bank, as a financial and credit agent of the Eurasian Economic Union, is an important fund for financial support and implementation of economic integration projects in the Eurasian area, with the help of regional trade and commerce" (Courtney, 2015: 2-5)

In the modern world, digital solutions on the one hand simplify life in various fields of activity, ensuring the free

movement of goods, services and human resources, on the other hand, play an important role in the competitiveness of separate countries and economic unions. Digital interaction leads to the restriction of the use of paper procedures, providing a complete transition to automated systems and electronic document management, opening up new prospects for economic growth of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In recent years, tangible progress has been recorded in many areas of digital development. The introduction of digital technologies in transport, logistics, cargo transportation administration and public administration will significantly help to improve the efficiency of transportation. Realization of the transit potential of the EEU is a very relevant topic, which can be achieved through the development and creation of a unified infrastructure of the EEU, as well as by digitizing the logistics of such infrastructure. The prospects for the countries of the member states of the EEU are quite high, and the national programs contain promising indicators for increasing transit volumes, for the implementation of which the created flows within the EEU must be coordinated (Koroleva. Et al, 2019).

"The Creating a common financial market before 2025 is also one of the potential capabilities of the Eurasian Economic Union, which facilitates trade and commerce" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 161-162).

The integration of energy infrastructure in the Eurasian area is also one of the capabilities of the Eurasian Economic Union, which will facilitate and regulate the transfer and exchange of energy of member countries. It is decided that by 2025, the infrastructure in the field of energy will be prepared for the access of interested members in this field.

"The diversification of energy delivery routes is important for the countries of the region. In particular, Kazakhstan has paid special attention to the capacities of the Eurasian Economic Union in terms of energy transmission and utilization of the facilities of the West China-Western Europe infrastructure project" (Mukhamediev and Khitakhunov, 2015: 6-8).

#### **IV-Obstacles to the development of the Eurasian Economic Union**

**Internal challenges:** One of the most important challenges and disputes in Eurasia is the politicization of the Eurasian Economic Union. The republics of the region are concerned that, in addition to economic and trade integration, there are goals behind the aspirations of the Eurasian Economic Union. The dependence of some republics on unions and extra-regional structures can also negatively affect the internal cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Disagreements among union members in the Eurasian area will also play an important role in creating barriers to cooperation.

"The concern of the companies of the member republics of the Union about the dominance of Russian holdings and large companies over the course of trade and commerce and the possibility of their bankruptcy in unequal competition with powerful Russian companies are also important variables that hinder a serious incentive to continue Business activities can be" (Eurasian Europe Studies Center, 2012: 13-15).

Fundamental differences in the economic and commercial structures of the union members can also be among the disturbing variables in developing and accelerating the process of cooperation between the two countries. In this case, we can refer to the economic structure of Russia and Kazakhstan as free market-based economic systems, and on the other hand, as an example, the state economy of the Republic of Belarus can be considered as an example. On the other hand, some of the economies of these members are based on the export of raw materials and products and the sale of raw materials and are competing with each other and there are not many complementary dimensions between them. And others have almost made progress in the industrial sphere, such as Belarus. These fundamental differences are among the things that affect areas of cooperation. Therefore, almost all members of the union depend on Moscow to provide for their needs.

In this case, "how can expect all the needs of the union members to be provide, if there is no trans-regional development, by restricting economic relations and relying on the Russian economy" (Dobbs, 2015: 4-6).

One of the main potential and deterrent challenges in the future of the Eurasian Economic Union is the conflicting orientations of the main founders of the union. On the one hand, Russia, in addition to the economic and trade characteristics of the Union in various regional and global dimensions, has targeted its capabilities in international confrontations with the United States and Europe, as well as helping its major foreign policy goals. On the other hand, important members of the union, such as Kazakhstan and Belarus, have emphasized the preservation of the union's economic nature and have always expressed concern about any political and identity change in the union that threatens their political independence.

Therefore, "The preserving the separate nature of the political units that are members of the Eurasian Economic Union is one of the main demands of its members" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 165-166).

**Regional challenges:** The emergence of the Ukraine crisis will create a huge vacuum in the current and future structure of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Republic of Ukraine has a very significant potential in various economic and industrial dimensions and advanced technologies, which is very effective and decisive in achieving the goals of the Union, while the absence of Ukraine in the Union will be irreparable, and The title of the main leader of the union will incur a lot of costs in order to stabilize, strengthen and maintain it.

In the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia controls more than 80 percent of the population and more than 85 percent of GDP.

"Russia's economic capacities and capabilities have led to its excessive influence in the union" (Bordachev and Skirba, 2014).

The growth of trade and commerce, the development of financial, monetary and credit trends, as well as the production of technical knowledge and its transfer are among the most important

necessary components in regional economic convergence. In the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia is the main trading partner of the other members, and trade between members without the Russian Federation is not at a desirable level. And they suffer from weak industrial and economic infrastructure. On the other hand, the turnover of the Union region is completely under the control of Russia and the financial strength of other members is not equal to interact effectively with the Russian financial and banking system in the implementation of economic projects in the region. Therefore, this issue is one of the major challenges in deepening the cooperation of the union.

The Eurasian Economic Union member states, due to the general and common weakness in the production and use of new technologies, are not able to fully provide each other's mutual needs. Attention.

Accordingly, "these structural weaknesses of union members have limited the scope for interaction and cooperation. And will create a competitive pattern for attracting technology from other countries" (Wisniewska, 2013: 28-30).

One of the major obstacles to Eurasian convergence in the long run is the difference in the level of mineral and natural resources of the republics in the region. In fact, it places countries in a range from rich to poor. For this reason, to extent republics benefit from the capacity of the Eurasian Economic Union depends on their economic capabilities, especially in the field of natural resources. Therefore, this issue will have a significant impact on the level of their real participation and regional convergence. Accordingly, "economic inequalities and imbalances in the level of internal development of these republics make the possibility of convergence face significant difficulties" (Soleimanpour. et al, 2016: 90).

In order to maintain and strengthen the presence of the peripheral republics in the Eurasian Economic Union, Moscow must adopt targeted and organized support programs and development assistance for the poor republics to the level of



balance that is necessary for the continuity and stability of economic structures in the union (Bifron and Bruno, 2018: 55-65).

With a GDP of \$ 1967 billion in 2020 and a population of nearly 200 million, the Eurasian Economic Union has significant potential to be exploited in various economic, trade and geopolitical dimensions for Moscow's foreign policy objectives.

The lack of attention of some republics around the Eurasian sphere also plays an important role in the future process of the union. The Republic of Moldova has explicitly refused to join the Eurasian Economic Union. "One of Russia's greatest goals in establishing the Eurasian Economic Union is to establish and consolidate its economic influence throughout the region. Meanwhile, the smaller members of the union must also relinquish part of their economic-political independence. Instead, they can use the union's capacity to strengthen its soft power to engage in interactions outside the union. Of course, Russia has to pay more for the development of this region" (Nurgliyeva, 2016: 92-105).

Therefore, as analyzed and examined, several factors such as the existing political, security and economic realities in the security issues of the region as well as in the field of providing consumer and industrial needs of the Eurasian Economic Union members, highlight the role of Russia as a leader of the union.

## **V. Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union**

"According to the enduring traditions of geopolitical competition and the new principles governing economic competition, Iran is influenced by the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and it is necessary to look at the new economic and trade requirements after the formation of the union as geo-economic rules and its requirements. It is taken into account in its strategies" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 171)

Another key capacity for Iran's economic cooperation is its proximity to EEU member states. Iran has a land border with Armenia and a sea border with Russia and Kazakhstan. One of

Iran's trade priorities in recent years has been cooperation with the EEU, and since 2015, Iran has begun extensive negotiations on the establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA) and has reached a conclusion. In addition, Iran's cooperation agreement with the European Union is a vital opportunity for Iran and its member states. Iran and the Eurasian Union have reached an agreement on preferential tariffs. The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) is one of the most important achievements of cooperation between Iran and the European Union. Iran's presence in organization such as ECO and its collaboration with the EEU and its pivotal role in the North-South Corridor and the International Silk Road and more importantly, Iran's role in linkage between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf are reasons which link Eurasia to the Middle East and East Asia to Europe (Sanaei and Karami, 2019).

If Iran provides the necessary conditions for cooperation within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union," an area of more than twenty million square kilometers and a population of almost two hundred million people will have a significant capacity to attract Iranian goods and exports" (Pozo, 2015: 2-3).

**Current Situation and Future Prospects:** With the official announcement of the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, we witnessed a fundamental and important step in the future convergence of Eurasia, and in fact, this union came into being with ambitious goals. "Economic convergence in this field has been one of the important goals of Russian politicians, and of course in the field of academia and think tanks, the importance of this process has been explained and theorized, and therefore was put on the agenda as a top priority" (Kirkham, 2016: 111-114).

The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and its relative success in the early stages of its establishment and activation is considered an important factor for Russia, and on the other hand, the emphasis on legal equality of member states, the prospects and success of this group to some extent compared to previous economic structures. It shows more clearly that it is a

positive and important leaf for Russia's foreign policy to be used by Moscow in regional and global interactions when necessary.

"Preliminary studies of the Eurasian Economic Union show that due to the sense of equality and legal equality of the member republics, the grounds for achieving the goals and success of this economic structure are more expected than its predecessor structures" (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2017: 4).

Russia has used some tempting and incentive methods and means to attract the surrounding republics to the Eurasian Economic Union. Providing subsidies and assistance in various sectors of the economy, including fuel, especially for the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Belarus, has been and continues to be on Moscow's agenda.

At all stages of the formation of this regional economic structure, the Kremlin's leadership power is seriously present. And as mentioned, Russia has always tried to offer an attractive alternative to the European Union.

"By achieving Russia's goals in establishing and activating the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's position in the Eurasian equations will be further strengthened and it will be more immune to possible harm from regional and trans-regional rivals" (Zagorski, 2015: 4-5).

Of course, it is worth noting that the survival and development of the Eurasian Economic Union will come at a high cost to Russia. It is noteworthy that some peripheral republics are demanding ransoms from Russia in order to be loyal to this regional security-political-economic complex, which the Eurasian Economic Union is an important part. Russia, on the other hand, has the appropriate means of punishment and is likely to use them in certain circumstances.

In the wake of the Ukraine crisis and European sanctions on Russia, Russia reciprocally sought to impose sanctions on European goods, expecting it to use both the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, and urged Belarus and Kazakhstan to do so. The parties did not fully comply with Russia's counter-

sanctions policy and had their own considerations.

In this regard, "Dmitry Medvedev stated that all members of the Eurasian Economic Union need to use a special labeling system for imported goods in order to prevent the re-export of certain imported goods" (Boguslavska, 2015: 10-13).

One of Moscow's main goals for the Eurasian Economic Union is to establish a link between the European Union and the Far East so that it is completely under Russian control. In this regard, the East-West communication route that passes through the territory of the Eurasian Economic Union can be called the "New Russian Silk Road".

Russia has also increased its trade to provide the basic needs of the republics in the Eurasian Economic Union in order to stabilize the Russian consumer market and reduce the dependence of the Eurasian republics on structures outside the region.

"In the first year of activation of the Customs Union and then the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia has increased its exports to Kazakhstan by more than 25 percent and to Belarus by more than 50 percent" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 160).

In the field of security, the Eurasian Economic Union, if successful and absorbs the majority of the republics around Russia, which is an ongoing process, can also be effective in advancing the goals of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in sustaining regional security.

"From a security perspective, the Eurasian Economic Union will have broad overlap with members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and will significantly strengthen the CIS security complex" (Laruelle, 2015: 16-18).

"The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union and the continuation of its success, in addition to the development of trade and economic cooperation for its members, will bring extensive geopolitical achievements and gains in the field of foreign policy for Russia". In this regard, one of the main goals of Russia in the development of the union has been to increase its political credibility in world affairs" (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 46).

"The Eurasian Economic Union is for Russia the primary recognized tool of its global geopolitical guidelines". (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 55).

The study of upstream documents determining the orientations and trends of Russia's foreign policy shows that one of the main propellants of Russia's foreign policy in strategic and geopolitical dimensions is the optimal use of regional economic tools. In fact, it considers the strengthening of the surrounding economic and trade structure in order to strengthen the foundations of the regional security complex. And this set will work together in regional and global equations to advance Russia's grand goals. And in addition to creating international political credibility for Russia, Moscow will use the weight of this set of political bargains in interactions within international organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Russia recognizes the importance of the Eurasian Economic Union's capacity for foreign policy goals, as well as for regional stability and security. Therefore, Russia has always been at the forefront of converging ideas and supporting these structures. Moscow's efforts in this direction have manifested and crystallized in the military-security dimension in the Collective Security Treaty and in the economic and trade dimension in the Eurasian Economic Union.

Of course, these two structures of regional cooperation have significant overlap in members and goals. From the perspective of the United States and Europe, the Eurasian Economic Union is a political project that serves Russia's strategic and geopolitical interests. In fact, the Eurasian Economic Union, along with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, will play an important role in integrating the security complex around Russia. The complex will also be strengthened with China's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The core of the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Moscow

and with the serious participation of two strong republics in the region, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Belarus, which have major sectors of population, investment, technology, industrial and production structures and can play a significant role to fulfill the goals of the union.

Despite the existing challenges, the Economic Union has been well received by peripheral countries such as Iran and the Mediterranean and even East Asia, so that several trade agreements between trans-regional countries and the Eurasian Economic Union are under consideration. The overlap of the geopolitical and strategic interests of Iran and Russia in the Caucasus and Central Asia, especially on security issues, has provided the grounds for cooperation in the Eurasian Economic Union for Iran.

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