

Russia - China: The Avenues for Connectivity and Mutual Empowerment

Sergei Luzianin

Acting Director of Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Science

(1) As evidenced by the Russian-Chinese documents on comprehensive cooperation, signed in Beijing by Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping on September 2-3, 2015, apart from the “applied” components (hydrocarbons, transports, investments, etc.), the two parties gave the start to development of the Sino-Russian Eurasian Strategy aimed at the unification / connectivity of the two projects, such as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

(2) The roads to connectivity between the construction of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt by all evidence would include the entire spectrum of economic, investment and transport forms of interaction. However, we hardly may discuss a real integration of Eurasia between the EAEU (an institutionalized project) and SREB, which in the essence is rather a process than an organization or a system of organizations.

(3) The parties gave the start to formation of the new (Sino-Russian) ‘heartland’ in the interests of all states in the continent, as well in the interests of peace and development. This a new term in the geo-policy of the contemporary interdependent and unstable world. By the way, Russian political scientists interpret the model of “connectivity” not only in economic but as well in geopolitical terms, because on the horizon of the Belt one can see the clear outlines of the Eurasian empowerment of the future superpower such as China, and strengthening of Russia – but, without the US and its allies. This is obvious. There cannot be “pure” economy within the frameworks of the Belt and Connectivity.

(4) Probably, for connectivity purposes it would be advisable to use the SCO sites as the bases for realization of the whole complex of infrastructural, financial, economic and other projects in the Central Asian region, and then – in view of the possible involvement of India and Pakistan in the SCO – in South Asia, for extension of economic aid to crisis-ridden Afghanistan.

(5) We may assume that Moscow and Beijing would not position the mega-project being designed as some alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), as so far the resources and political will required to do otherwise are not available. Meanwhile the both parties would be emphasizing that

their mega-project is transparent and may be open for other participants (except the US) that are not formally included in the EAEU or SREB. At the same time, we can see the expansion of financial and investment operations by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with the number of its participants, including Russia, already grown to 57 states.

(6) The key role in building the grand space will be played by the renovated SCO which objectively can serve both the technological base for realization of the Eurasian project and the geopolitical / Eurasian kernel of such projects as the “One Belt, One Road” plus the EAEU. In view of the SCO extension at the level of permanent members as well as observer countries and dialogue partners, its role of the moderator in the Russian-Chinese (Eurasian) integration will be growing.

(7) Building the common economic space is a long and complex process hiding a mass of intrinsic problems and contradictions. On the other hand, in the context of China’s empowerment and transformation into a global superpower and Russia’s stabilization in the circumstances of the “cold war” imposed by the West, the strategy of building the common economic space meets the mutual interests and makes it possible to maintain control over Eurasia for consolidation of stability and co-development.

(8) The above discussion suggests the need in topical structuring of the Belt and Connectivity and in identification of the profile projects, the number of which can be rather big (through to 100). The main point is that the expert sites would start operating and producing practical recommendations within a year, offer the methods for multiple problem resolution as well as the most optimal (by terms and budgets) models. Probably the resources of the Boao, Valdai and other forums (in the RF and PRC) would not be sufficient, as such forums seek to address (sometimes not very successfully) almost all world problems. It is evident in order to be realized, the Road and Connectivity project must have its own steering committee, its own global (annual) forum, its own profile sites, etc. The contents must fully correspond to the brilliant long-term strategy of the Belt and Connectivity, set forth by President Xi Jinping.