

Iran, Russia and Eurasian Integration; Benefits of Active Regionalism

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(Date received: Apr. 17. 2018 - Date approved: Sep. 12. 2018)

Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss the dimensions and benefits of Iran's participation in Eurasian integration process in cooperation with Russia. Regionalism is seen as a mechanism for accelerating the development process through the use of other countries resources and capacities, reducing costs, providing more benefits and effectively addressing threats. Among different regions, Eurasia has been discussed more than ever in different kinds of international literatures and theories of regionalism. One of main reasons for the importance of this region is the transition of world order to a new one. The United States and Russia's "pivot to Asia" strategy and at the same time China's "look to the West" are evident signs of further importance of this region in perspectives of international relations. Despite the theoretical emphasis in Iran, practical attention has not yet been given to Eurasia and the integration process in this region. Lack of objective look at trends and benefits, inadequate understanding of capacities, lack of Eurasian strategy and the follow-up policy to constructed process are main reasons for this failure. Meanwhile, attention great powers role in Eurasia is also important. Russia, which still views Central Eurasia as its traditional sphere of influence, seeks to preserve its interests, security, decisive and defining roles in the region. Therefore, there is no possibility to ignore Russia as a game player in Eurasia at least in the medium term.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to answer the question of how Iran-Russia relations are shaping in Eurasian regionalism. What are the capacities and interests of the two parties to cooperate in this region? What are the opportunities and obstacles for mutual co-operation? And what is its outlook? On the other hand, Russia's emphasis on Iran's positive role in Eurasian politics, Tehran's willingness to cooperate with Russia in the region accompanied by practical steps, including cooperation to build the North-South corridor are evidence of positive approach of the two countries

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to cooperate with each other in Eurasia. So, the main hypothesis is that although in current situation, full Eurasian integration between Iran and Russia is not possible but the two countries can interact in regional structures in the form of confederative/sovereignty-partnership to provide more benefits and fight threats at a lower cost.

Among the most important motivations for Tehran and Moscow to cooperate in the “Great Eurasia” scene are the followings: relative common regional views on various political, economic and security issues; synergistic capacities as influential actors in regional and trans-regional areas; separate capacities to geographically and thematically balance each other foreign policy; desire to extend cooperation from one region to another (Middle East and Eurasia); geopolitical reciprocal needs to deter against US and its allies destabilizing attempts to influence in the region, common benefit in maintaining stability in Central Eurasia including readiness against the threats posed from Afghanistan; the geo-economic necessities of interaction including in transit and security fields, necessities in dealing with asymmetric threats especially terrorism, drug trafficking and extremism.

This paper studies the issue with a futuristic view and deductive-analytical approach to theory and performance of Tehran and Moscow in cooperation and integration in the Greater Eurasia. It is emphasized that Eurasia is a dynamic region in regionalization of international relations and through its resources and capacities will have an important place in the new world order. Transformation in concepts of hegemony and great power, as well as profit-oriented rather than value-oriented approaches, will provide a suitable platform for the concerned countries including Iran to selective integration in Eurasia.

As a result, this paper emphasizes multi-dimensional benefits for Iran’s participation in Eurasian integration such as diversification of foreign partners, interacting with Eurasian powers (China and Russia); using institutional and organizational capacities of the Eurasia; geopolitically balanced foreign policy, fixing the problem of over-focusing on the Middle East; thematically balance foreign policy, fixing the problem of overemphasis on security and political issues through giving more attention to economic issues in Eurasia; using Eurasian space to economize foreign policy (reducing sanctions pressure); mutually beneficial geo-economic exchanges (especially in areas of energy and transit); responding to the need for multilateral engagement in interrelated world order through integration in Eurasia; possibility of generalizing the power received from Eurasia to international arena. It is stated that active foreign policy in Eurasian vector requires a thorough understanding of Eurasia’s position in future

international order, internal consensus on a strategy, adopting a multi-vector approach and balanced engagement with all parties involved in integration process, interacting with Moscow as a pivotal actor of this process at least in the medium term, avoiding unnecessary emphasis on variables such as “West”, “Russia” and “China” and at the same time trying to participate in defining regional trends.

Keywords: Eurasia, Great Eurasia, Integration, International Order, Iran, Regionalism, Regionalization, Russia.