



“REGIMES”, REGIONAL COOPERATION ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PROMISE OF “PROTO-REGIMES”. INDO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY AND THE CHALLENGE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN’S “VALUES” INITIATIVES

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Abstract:

The concept of ‘proto-regimes’ is a useful analytical tool in investigating various quasi multilateral organizations which have come up during the post-Cold War period. ‘Proto-regimes’, according to the scholar, have emerged as the post-1991 scenario in international affairs. We have witnessed activities where regional and trans-regional organizations, focused on cooperation between actors, have taken shape, and seek to impinge on sovereignty of states through common commitments but in a strongly qualified manner. At issue are also values initiatives of new Russia under the Putin presidency that privilege engagements within a sharply delimited cultural range – values that endow Russian policy with a degree of introversion or “nationalism”. The article analyses the evolving relations between India and Russia in recent decades in terms of greater multilateral involvement within the conceptual framework of proto-regimes.

Palabras Clave: Russia, India, Proto-regime, Regional, Europe, Cold war

Título en Castellano: *"Regímenes", organizaciones de cooperación regional y la promesa de los "proto-regímenes". Las relaciones indo-rusas en el siglo XXI y el desafío de las iniciativas de "valores" de Vladimir Putin*

Resumen:

El concepto de "protoregímenes" es una herramienta analítica útil en la investigación de varias organizaciones cuasi multilaterales que han surgido durante el período posterior a la guerra fría. "Proto-regímenes", desde el punto de vista académico, han surgido tras la posguerra fría en los asuntos internacionales siendo testigos de actividades en las que organizaciones regionales y trans-regionales, centradas en la cooperación entre actores, han tomado forma, y tratan de incidir en la soberanía de los Estados a través de compromisos comunes, pero de una forma altamente cualificada. Se incluyen también iniciativas meritorias de la nueva Rusia bajo la Presidencia de Putin que privilegia los compromisos dentro de un rango cultural fuertemente delimitado – valores que dotan a la política rusa de un grado de introversión o "nacionalismo". El artículo analiza la evolución de las relaciones entre la India y Rusia en las últimas décadas desde la perspectiva de una mayor implicación multilateral en el marco conceptual de los protoregímenes.

Key words: Russia, India, Proto-regimes, Regional, Europa, Guerra fría

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1. Introduction²

In the post-Cold War era, Indian and Russian foreign policy have been marked by participation in regional cooperation organizations as a gambit towards economic development. Here, the process is seen as a tendency towards regional integration³, but with so many deficiencies that the suggestion begs the question. This essay assumes that the participation may be read as instances of a trend within global cooperation, with a regional slant, following Amitav Acharya;⁴ and this in turn can be considered an inclination to “proto-regime” construction in world affairs in a manner that strengthens the position of the region but looks beyond.⁵ Here the notion of “proto-regimes” refers to the literature on “regimes” where regimes are said to be constructed globally, not always linked to states hierarchically, in a tendency to international consolidation at variance with “realist” notions of inter-state relations.⁶ Proto-regimes might be seen as the outcome of a desire for such consolidation, but with an enhanced respect for sovereignty, the state and an “informal” quality to the arrangements involved, strongly guided by “constructed history” and partly focused on a region. Participants are mainly later developing nations, deeply conscious of sovereignty.

Critically viewed, proto regimes may be regarded as offering no alternative to regimes.⁷ But clearly the organizations that develop them do not agree and both as template and activity, they have a life of their own that is worth examination.

In Indo-Russian relations, unlike India's relations with members of the EU and other NATO bloc countries, accustomed to older forms of regime formation, the relationship has benefited from mutual respect for this aspect of international cooperation. Participation in Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa cooperation organization [BRICS] and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO] are the evident example of this approach.

In India and Russia, the perspective builds on experience of cooperative organizations inclined to proto regime formation; and also evolves from an effective bilateral partnership that

² Discussions with Binod K. Mishra, Prabir De, Shantanu Chakrabarti, Kingshuk Chatterji and Krishnan Srinivasan have been of value to the development of this article.

³ In the large literature on regional integration, some attention has been paid to Indian initiatives. General study that deals with the South Asian trend in a comparative framework can be found at the book by Trivedi, Sonu (2005): *Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration*, Delhi, New Century. Jain, Sonu: *Regional Cooperation in South Asia. India Perspectives*, at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/223546-1192413140459/4281804-1192413178157/4281806-1265938468438/BeyondSAFTAFeb2010Chapter13.pdf>. A nuanced account that takes a larger range of literature into consideration but is still concerned with a regional focus is Chakrabarti, Shantanu (2002): *Cooperation in South Asia. The Indian Perspective*, Kolkata, K.P. Bagchi. In the case of Russia, besides the work on the specific organizations, cited later, participation in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization is of interest. See <http://www.bsec-organization.org/> as is support for a similar Caspian organization, for which see *Organizatsiia kaspijskogo sotrudnichestva: znachenie perspektivy, problem*, at <http://casp-geo.ru/organizatsiya-kaspijskogo-ekonomichesk/>

⁴ Acharya, Amitav: “The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics”, *World Politics*, vol. 59, n° 4 (July 2007), pp.629-652.

⁵ On the rise of the region in world affairs, Buzan, Barry and Ole Waever (2003): *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, and Katzenstein, Peter (2005): *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

⁶ Krasner, Stephen D. (ed.) (1983): *International Regimes*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, for a sample of the literature.

⁷ For a critical approach of a proto-regime generating organization see, *On the BRICS of Collapse? Why Emerging Economies need a different development model.*, Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, University of Pretoria, at <https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/BRICS.pdf>



continues in its own right. Post 1991, after the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the relationship has been articulated in terms of common concerns (for example those that affect “multi-ethnic” states). Policy itself has been in accord with the manner in which perceptions of international relations have evolved in the space of the former Soviet Union and in India, where reference to “geopolitics”⁸ and a move away from non-alignment respectively have been hallmarks. Again, continuous centering of the Russian economy as much around high tech military, atomic and space industries as the energy sector, in the last quarter century, and India’s close connection with these industries has ensured a “hard” core to the relationship.

Even so, trends in Russian foreign policy during the past decade suggest limits to Russian participation in regional/trans-regional consolidation and global consolidation - mainly after the 2008 Georgia war but more sharply after the Ukraine crisis of 2014-15 and the imposition of Euro-American sanctions on Russia. At issue are values initiatives of the Putin presidency that privilege engagements within a sharply delimited cultural range – values that endow Russian policy with a degree of introversion or “nationalism”.⁹ The implications are the focus of this paper, which argues that, contrary to being an indication of Russian nationalism, the very terms of the values initiatives make a special room for global cooperative architecture that has features conducive to “proto-regime” generation.

The first section of the article deals with regimes and regional formations and their generation of proto-regimes. Section 2 situates India and Russia and their participation in regional cooperation and proto-regime attributes of the cooperation; it follows with an account of the India-Russia relationship and the common involvement in two major formations that take them towards proto-regime initiatives. Section 3 deals with Russian values initiatives under President Putin and the challenge they may pose to Russian participation in proto-regimes. Section 4 briefly deals with why these initiatives have not had an impact on the Indo-Russian relationship, concluding that proto-regime building is part of the Putin “value” system. Methodologically, the article seeks to work from the cusp of international relations theory and the practices of current and contemporary history.¹⁰

2. “Regimes”, regional cooperation organizations, and “proto-regimes”

2.1. Regimes

In the mid twentieth century, international affairs specialists suggested that concessions of sovereignty and a degree of consolidation of international relations had evolved through the construction of “regimes” in international relations as a set course. Here, regimes had characteristics that would be considered counter-intuitive if international relations were viewed

⁸ On the focus on geopolitics in Russia, see Sengupta, Anita (2009): *Hearlands of Eurasia: The Geopolitics of Political Space*, Lanham, Maryland, Lexington; on Indian foreign policy after 1991, see Rajamohan, C. (2004): *Crossing the Rubicon*, Delhi, Palgrave. Ray, Jayana Kumar (2013): *India’s Foreign Relations 1947-2007*, Routledge, New Delhi.

⁹ This is the implication of the work of Snyder, Timothy (2018): *The Road to Unfreedom*, New York, Tim Duggan Books. For a discussion of the Putin initiatives, see Vasudevan, Hari and Tatiana Shaumyan, “Values in Russian Foreign Policy” in Kris Srinivasan, James Mayall and Sanjay Pulipaka (eds.) (2018): *Values in Foreign Policy: Investigating Ideals and Interests*, London, Rowman and Littlefield International.

¹⁰ For some of the problems of following this approach see Koliopoulos, Constantinos(2010): “International Relations and the Study of History”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, at <http://internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-242> . See also Mazlish, Bruce: “Revisiting Barraclough’s Contemporary History” in *Historically Speaking*, July/August 2007 and Sewell, William (2005): *The Logics of History*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.



from a “realist” perspective. The arguments generated a literature where a spectrum existed in the way in which regimes were defined, although there was some agreement that regimes were “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations”¹¹. While Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye would stress “arrangements”, Stephen Krasner would stress the “principles” and “procedures” that held such arrangements together and Hedley Bull, the “rules and institutions” that were fundamental to such arrangements. Many others participated in the discussion – where the liberal credentials of the views were stressed, and Susan Strange deeply questioned the necessity of regarding regimes as anything more than the product of a range of interests. At issue were arrangements such as the GATT, and various security regimes. The literature hardly touched initiatives that were regional, emphasis falling on global scenarios.¹²

Especially with the onset of globalization widely across the world, the focus in discussions of international affairs shifted from these issues since globalization and the disintegration of Soviet Communism as a force defined a new context. This, though, did not undermine the validity of many of the arguments that drew attention to “regime” formation in their day, as a major aspect of international affairs, since such “regimes” continued to function under globalization, extending their range and membership. A critical approach to the consequences of regime behaviour in such circumstances led scholars like Samir Amin to call for defiance of what were seen as “liberal” regimes.

2.2. Post 1991 regional cooperation organizations and a possible notion of “proto-regimes”

As a supplement to this trend, the post-1991 scenario in international affairs has witnessed activities where regional and trans-regional organizations, focused on cooperation between actors, have taken shape, and seek to impinge on sovereignty of states through common commitments but in a strongly qualified manner. Various factors affect the meaningfulness of these formations to international affairs and their parity with regimes: whether the formations are stable or not, in terms of commitments and regularity of activity; whether they are effective or not in terms of discernible outcomes; and whether they are time bound to a degree that they do not seriously alter the character of international relationships. Noticeably very few of these formations have presented themselves as comparable to the initiatives that were associated with regime formation in the mid twentieth century. And they have not attracted attention from such a perspective as a body of activity.

However, general characterization has been sought since repeated engagement with such formations has been a phenomenon of the last quarter century, mainly in Asia but also beyond.¹³ The outcome has been to see in the attempts at regional integration, where the approach manifestly fails to cover the range of state intentions/subsequent actions, “integration” being underplayed by states concerned, in order to preserve their own sovereignty. Analysis, though, has captured the combination of level of institutional cooperation and even specific tariff adjustment that is being sought and, sometimes, achieved, as well as other cooperation. Organizational structures are created with specific funding, to achieve their goals; and, failing this; departments / ministries receive financial outlays for practical activity, rendering what is at issue more than a “meeting” or the occasion for a meeting of functionaries or statesmen.

¹¹ Stephen D. Krasner: “Structural causes and regime consequences: regimes as intervening variables” in Krasner, *International Regimes*, *op.cit.* p. 2.

¹² *Ibid.* A range of the perspectives are to be understood from the volume. See also Keohane, Robert O. (1984): *After Hegemony*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Axelrod, Robert (1984): *The Evolution of Cooperation*, New York, Basic Books, for methodological issues.

¹³ The Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova formation (GUAM), and the Visegrad formation in Europe are such organizations.



Gaining membership is held to be meaningful and involves commitment to cooperation. The formations are unlike standard “forums” such as the G7 or the G20.

Arguably, self-evident are organizational initiatives tending to the formation of “proto-regimes”, i.e. phenomena similar to but not wholly congruous with regimes, that, at root, derive from the original initiatives to generate decisions and procedures which enhance cooperation at different levels to achieve economic development in a manner appropriate to the region and to larger spaces to which organizations belong. Such proto-regimes are overwhelmingly state driven, involving a number of states, but they seek to set up autonomous arenas for cooperation outside the domain of the state. They are not time bound, seeing no limit to the period of cooperation. They do not seek juridically centred outcomes, although they expect to influence arrangements that are juridically driven (such as tariffs). Initiator bodies may directly or indirectly have an eye to past connections and interactions between states, some of which have persisted after, and often despite, formation of nation states. Such bodies span mega regions, meso regions and subregions and international forums. Their growth is viewed with future perspectives and may draw in countries that do not “fit” such a box in terms of location. In all cases they establish a framework to bring about a connection between the formal sphere of bilateral and multilateral relations and an informal domain of such relationships, usually

In contrast to regimes, proto-regimes would not involve limits on the significance of sovereignty on the scale Stephen Krasner and others outlined in the literature on regimes¹⁴. Rather, proto-regimes would emerge mainly in conditions where sovereignty itself is a relatively recent achievement (half a century/quarter of a century) and nation building an emotive subject. In preference to concessions on sovereignty, and in keeping with the “proposals” put forward by Paul James, countries inclined to proto-regimes could be seen as embedded in a “socio-relational sense in regional contexts and involve imaginative departures by states to engage with globalization”¹⁵. Globalization in fact tends to be the overarching causal variable to proto-regime formation, while the character of proto-regimes exhibits the “informal” side of regimes more than the superstructure associated with regimes.

3: Indian and Russian approaches to regional cooperation organizations: Proto-regimes in the making

3.1. Regional cooperative organizations and India

In the larger neighbourhood of South/Southeast Asia, India has participated in complex organizations focused on regional cooperation since the onset of globalization and even before. This has occurred in addition to the country’s adherence to the strict terms of the WTO regime, as well as other global regimes that deal with security, health etc.

The Indian gambit took place mainly in the meso region of South/Southeast Asia, dominated by three large markets – of India, China and ASEAN - which provided opportunities even as challenges of globalization became apparent to individual countries. In all cases, negotiation of the opportunities has sought to enhance competitiveness and social and interaction. Connectivity and the means to improve it have been high on the agenda. Overlap between the formations is not eschewed and there is a firm possibility of proto-regimes emerging from the links between such formations.

¹⁴ Krasner has addressed the importance of sovereignty for regimes in global affairs in “Abiding Sovereignty”, *International Political Science Review* vol. 22, nº 3, (July 2001).

¹⁵ James, Paul and Ronan Palen (2006): “Globalizing Economic Regimes and Institutions” in *Globalization and Economy Vol. 3, Globalizing Economic Regions and Institutions*, London, Sage.



The main formations hitherto classify themselves as “forums” or “organizations” that exist as part of “Track 1” diplomatic activity:

- SAARC or the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was established before the onset of India’s commitments to globalization and had security as its main concern. It may be argued that it had some form of regional integration as its goal at its inception. The organization initially comprised the different units of the British empire in South Asia and territory that had special relationships with that empire: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives. Afghanistan became a member in 2007. The Association came into being in 1985 and developed a Secretariat at Kathmandu. Today, it has a series of “centres” that coordinates activity among member states: the Agricultural Centre (SAC), Disaster Management Centre (SDMC), Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) Energy Centre (SEC) and Cultural Centre (SCC). But it had larger ambitions and until recently there were also others: a Forestry Centre (SFC) a Development Fund (SDF) a Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) a Documentation Centre (SDCSAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC), a Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC) and an Information Centre (SIC). A Free Trade Area (SAFTA) was envisaged that was often compared with the European Economic Community as a project: but it has performed in an indifferent manner, as a consequence of qualifications and restrictions on trade among member states.
- BBIN or the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India Nepal. This initially developed from 1996 as a forum to exchange views on the “growth quadrangle” that it addressed that was tightly defined in terms of geographic features that involved Himalayan ranges and the rivers dependent on them. Trade, investment, tourism, energy networks and communications were discussed with a degree of regularity, ultimately generating collaborative projects. A linking of common interests was involved rather than “principles” or “procedures” to achieve them, as would be found in “regimes”. However, institution building was envisaged (based on projects), with an overarching commitment to common economic development. The “quadrangle” harks to common interests and limits on sovereignty that have been recognized in diplomatic and monetary arrangements (e.g. Bhutan’s foreign policy is linked to India’s by treaty, while Indian rupees may be freely used in Nepal). Borders tend to be porous and travel is visa-free.
- BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative for multi-sectoral scientific technical and economic cooperation. This emerged from an agreement to cooperate in economic development between Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand in mid-1997, extended to Myanmar later in the year. Highlighted as areas for cooperation are Trade, Technology, Tourism, Information, Investment, Agriculture, Fisheries, Culture, Climate Change, Environment, Disaster Management, Transport and Communications, Public Health, Poverty alleviation and Counter Terrorism. In 2015, a Secretariat has been handling the work of the organization from Dacca.
- BCIM or Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar cooperative forum has focused heavily on the formation of a corridor between the states concerned to improve connectivity and trade.



In all cases, the organizations/forums have generated statements the stress a focus on cooperation at different levels, varying from the strictly economic (tariffs) to cultural (links between think tanks, museums and educational bodies). Both the principles highlighted in commitments and the actions taken around them constitute the fabric of a proto regime.

A distinctive feature in the discussions of all the “organizations” has been an eye to the past and connections that existed between the states either in the colonial and pre-colonial period, or in an even more distant past. This forms an important aspect of the “informal” nature of the proto-regime that is in the making – the rhetoric of its assumptions and guidelines. In the case of SAARC, this is clearly so – harking to the British empire in South Asia as well as a long and more intricate pre-British history that was regularly a matter of interest in a rich 20th century literature on “Greater India”. This tendency has drawn from references to “Indic” connections in the region elsewhere: references that are regular in the case of forums that involve India, Myanmar and Thailand; while the importance of Buddhist and Hindu connections as well as links associated with trade are common elsewhere. The reference to past connectivities has been true even of the BCIM where the connections touch on territory that is contested – in Arunachal Pradesh, which is referred to as “South Tibet” in China. Here, the “Southern Silk Route” or the “Tea and Horse Route”, as well as the “Stillwell Road” (old channels of communication) are regular points of reference to evoke earlier trade links or connectivity.

In almost all cases, the push for the regional cooperation has come from the state rather than civic bodies. But equally, as the focus of BIMSTEC etc. indicates, the “cooperation” is meant to occur in a broader domain where civil actors are to take different matters along a state-approved line. As BIMSTEC discussions indicate, neither the authority of the state or the sovereignty of the country are to slip into a secondary level; but arrangements and institutions are to assume larger trans-border interest under state mentorship.¹⁶

3.2. The Russian Federation and regional formations in the Russian neighborhood

Since Soviet disintegration in 1991, the Russian Federation has participated in specific agreements designed to maintain the infrastructure of the Soviet state with an eye to commercial advantages to a number of states. Special arrangements for railways or for the use of Black Sea facilities have been points of interaction with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States that succeeded the USSR (excepting the Baltic States). Large principles and issues are not at stake in most of these arrangements – and they are merely institutionalization that achieves continuity in facilities. The initiatives coincide with relations with the EU in a more formal manner, the OSCE being the least well defined in terms of commitments and benefits.¹⁷

The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (established in 1992) is a case in point of Russian participation in a different type of organization, and the outcome may

¹⁶ For the organizations, the literature is limited in the case of BBIN and BCIM, besides the standard newspaper output on meetings and mention in the documents put out by ministries in the relevant countries. Material is available also in discussion papers: Ahluwalia, Isher Judge has a perspective in *Economic Cooperation in South Asia*, JICA Research Institute; Simanti Das has information in “Exploring Sectors of Trade Cooperation in the BBIN subregion” Discussion Paper 16, available at the CSIRD website cited below. BIMSTEC material is more copious, with a website, <https://bimstec.org/>, and discussion in the CSIRD, Kolkata, flagged at <https://bimstec.org/>; but only SAARC has attracted a literature, though it is relatively thin, much of it being in the form of articles. Shantanu Chakrabarti has one of the few book length discussions, (Chakrabarti, Shantanu: *Cooperation*) and provides a bibliography. See also Trivedi, Sonu and Jain, Sonu *op.cit.*

¹⁷ For a resume of Russia’s position vis a vis the EU, see the first chapter of Vodychev, E.G. (2004): *Rossiya I Sibir* Novosibirsk, SibAGS, The material here has been updated in Vasudevan, Hari “Europe’s Eastward Expansion” in Krishnan Srinivasan and Fredrik Erikson (ed.) (2016): *Europe and Emerging Asia*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.



ultimately be a “proto-regime” of sorts that deals with much more than regional cooperation among states of the Black Sea littoral. The participants are Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Romania, Bulgaria Moldova, Greece, Albania, Armenia and (more recently) Serbia; but observers include the states of the EU besides the Scandinavian bloc, Egypt and the United States. The organization deals with a range of issues that take it into general energy arrangements outside the Black Sea territories, matters of environment and culture, and international organizations that deal with some of these issues (often as “sectoral” or “sectoral dialogue” partners). Though regional in focus, the organization is global in scope.¹⁸

A perspective that goes beyond this guides the notion of a common “Eurasian economic space” or a “Eurasian Union”. The outcome of the concerns here has ultimately led to the Eurasian Economic Union¹⁹, a key concern of president Vladimir Putin. On 1st January 2017, the Union included Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The Union centers on a Free Trade Area that was established in October 2007 by members of the Eurasian Economic Community founded in 2000. But much more is at work since the “Union” also envisages coordination of legal regulations and a developmental edge. The latter is implicit in the Customs Union. This features elements that exist in the South African Customs Union; and the division of duties paid by member states is in accordance with a development weightage rather than the port of entry or the destination of the goods and services.

These factors (prioritization of law and development) have as reference a “Eurasian economic space”, whose significance is more nebulous than a group of countries. The literature that mirrors the debates on the “space” and the “union” compares and contrasts this with other bodies such as the European Union, the NAFTA and ASEAN, holding none of these as a model for emulation. Preservation of the distinctive trading formats of different states and their problems receive attention in the literature – which suggests a reluctance to accept the melting pot ethos of the European Union. Preservation of national currencies and, yet, the possibility of interweaving of such currencies is also a concern of the literature.

In the tenor of the discussion, procedures, arrangements and principles are seen as negotiable in this perspective, against the overall stress on the mix of sovereignty and cooperation: and the “regimes” that prevail elsewhere are merely objects of discussion. The notion that what is being sought is more and less that a classical “regime” is clear: and the notion of a “proto-regime” that builds on existing networks surviving from the USSR suggests itself easily, while the importance of safeguards for sovereignty is equally clear.²⁰

¹⁸ The Black Sea Economic Cooperation, at <http://www.bsec-organization.org/>

¹⁹ Eurasian Economic Union, at www.eaeunion.org for the basic information on the entity.

²⁰ Vinokurov, Evgeny (2018): *Introduction to the Eurasian Economic Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, provides access to the main discussions in English. For a connection to “identity” in Russia see Casula, Philipp: “Russia’s and Europe’s Borderlands” in *Problems of Post-Communism*, Nov-Dec. 2014. In Russian, Morkov, G. G. (2018): *Evrasiiskii Ekonomicheskii Soiuz*, Prospekt, Moscow is an equivalent. But the differences with other regional organizations and the subsequent “problems” are to be found through careful reading of a different literature, mainly in journals. The discussion is diffuse and seldom available together. Russian doctoral (Kandidat) dissertations therefore prove invaluable. In Russian, a good resume of this scattered literature is available in Kostiuhenko, E.V.: *Integratsiia stran Tamozhennogo Soiuzna v usloviakh razvitiia edinogo ekonomicheskogo prostranstva*, Kand. Diss., Dept. of Economics, Rostov on Don State Economic University, 2013, which provides a good sense of how the project of a Eurasian Economic Space is viewed. Antecedents are set out on p.33-52 and the overlap with the WTO is considered in pp. 52 ff. Tensions between sovereignty and the arrangements are pointed in pp. 82-83, and pp.100 ff. A range of other dissertations approach the problems at specific angles. The range of the debate is clear from a number of abstracts (avtoreferaty) to dissertations: Paramanov, A. I. (2017): *Zakonodatel’noe regulirovanie operativno-rozysknoi deiatel’nosti v stranakh uchastnikakh Evraziiskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuzna*, Kand. Diss. Dept. on Retail Activity, St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Gal’tšina, D. A. (2017): *Informatsionnaia politika Stran Tamozhennogo Soiuzna*, Kand. Diss. Department of Political Science, St. Petersburg State University, Kazakova, A.G. (2016): *Nalogovye Aspekty*



3.3. Indo-Russian relations and bi-lateral cooperation

From what has been stated, it is clear that there was common ground on the importance given to participation in regional cooperation forums in both India and Russia well before the formation of SCO (1996/2001) and BRICS (2009). However, the ultimate involvement of both countries in these forums, whose inclinations lie in the tendency to form proto-regimes, evolved from a healthy bilateral relationship.

In Indian foreign policy within the Asian neighbourhood, following disintegration of the USSR, diplomatic interest in Central Asia and cultural foray in the region was matched if not superseded by extensive commercial and political connections with the Russian Federation. This was seldom on display on either side: but it was evident.²¹ The Russian Federation was the primary successor state of the Soviet Union, inheriting the greater part of the country's treaty obligations and debts. In order to ensure continuity in a number of areas of mutual concern to post Soviet states, the CIS acted as a formation where problems would be managed, and the short-lived economic union of 1991 was reformulated in terms of various treaty arrangements and agreements, with institutions such as "economic communities" being formed to go one better. However, unlike the EU, the CIS never constituted a body with whom negotiations could be undertaken: hence India's former links with the USSR focused on Russia.

India and Russia came to discover mutual interest in Central Asia, to ensure that the region did not succumb to Islamic fundamentalism. The focus came from different sources on the two sides. In Russia, importance was given to the "geopolitics" of Eurasia, predicated on some of the ideas of Halford Makinder, and a sense of the significance of South Asia for Russian interests in Central Asia came from this and the ideas of "Eurasianist" views of Russia's identity.²² India's orientation away from establishment "non alignment" towards a "national interest" based foreign policy led to conclusions regarding the importance of the new Russia for her own strategic space to the North West – in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At other levels, with the Russian Federation, initial engagement centred on past debts to the USSR and how these were to be dealt with. Also important was the long connection in arms' purchase and maintenance of weaponry since Soviet technology was crucial in many areas of India's military naval and air force stock. The outcome of these trends was the formation of a healthy bilateral relationship by the 2000s. Both during the NDA (1999-2004/2014 to present) and UPA (2004-14) regimes in India, close cooperation in atomic energy generation, missile technology and military, naval and air force equipment purchase and manufacture wore powerful sources of bonding beyond issues of principle and geopolitical perspective. Sharing of energy resources in Russia was countenanced by Moscow at Sakhalin and in Siberia. Multinational trading and production houses – the largest being India's global pharmaceutical giants, Dr. Reddy's, Ranbaxy and Cadilla – joined with small multinational

sozdaniia Evrazeiskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soiuza pri integratsii uchanits, Kand. Diss Accounts and Audit Department, State Administrative University, Moscow, Avarskii, S.A. (2017): *Osobennosti Formirovaniia I Perspektivy Razvitiia Evrazeiskogo Ekonomicheskogo Soiuza*, Kand Diss, Economics, G.V. Plekhanov Russian University of the Economy, Levykina, T. (2015): *Prioritety mezhdunarodogo sotrudnichestva v sfere energetiki v ramkakh formirovaniia Evrazeiskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuz*, Kand. Diss., Dept. of Economic Theory, I.M. Gubkina Russian State University for Oil and Gas, Moscow, Kozhan, V.I. (2017): *Razvitie Predprinimatel'skikh struktur v ramkakh evrazeiskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuz*, Kand diss Economics, Department of the Market and Economic Mechanisms of RANEPA.

²¹ Bakshi, Jyotsna (1998): *Russia and India. From Ideology to Geopolitics 1947-1998*, Dev Publishers, Delhi, Ganguly, Sreemati (2009): *Indo-Russian Relations.Making of a Relationship, 1992-2002*, Shipra, Delhi, Vasudevan, Hari (2011): *Shadows of Substance. Indo-Russian Trade and Military Technical Cooperation since 1991*, Delhi, Manohar.

²² Sengupta, Anita (2009): *Heartlands of Eurasia. The Geopolitics of Political Space*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield.



traders to establish networks between the two countries. Regular head-of-state summits took place each year from 2000.

3.4. Russia, India, SCO and BRICS: Multilateral institutional participation as an aspect of Indo-Russian relations²³

At the time that such a fabric of a bilateral relationship took shape, the Russian Federation participated in various institutions to handle problems emerging from the Soviet disintegration process. These involved the “near abroad” of former Soviet states. In the course of this institutional building, relationships with China also came up for discussion leading to the formation of an informal forum, the Shanghai Five (1996), which included China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, besides Russia. This would be consolidated, after further chances, into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization after the admission of Uzbekistan (2001).

In the mid-2000s, Russian leaders also participated in discussions to create the BRICS forum, which took solid shape in 2009. And this, together with the SCO indicated a new direction in the architecture in world affairs where cooperation outside Euro-American participation was taking serious form.

India has featured as a party to both organizations – though only as an observer of the SCO until 2017. Both SCO and BRICS have undertaken common projects and generated positions concerning strategic, political and economic problems. They have evolved their own ritual of international meetings and a deep sense of “membership” and exclusion. As in the case of BBIN, BIMSTEC, BCIM and SAARC, they deserve to be seen as initiators of “proto-regimes” that have the potential of acting in international affairs as forces with a direction of their own. The situation added new dimensions to India’s relationship with Russia, since common program building involving a large number of states added to the range of mutual commitments involved in Indo-Russian relations.

4. President Putin’s Values Initiatives in the Russian Federation²⁴ as a challenge for Russian regional cooperation beyond the “Eurasian space”

Since 2003, a series of initiatives linked directly to President Vladimir Putin and seeking to build “values” (*tsennosti*) in Russia, evolving in parallel to SCO and BRICS, have raised questions regarding how far Russian officials wish to engage with other countries and “civilizations” outside the former Soviet bloc. The initiatives also raised questions about the presidency’s respect for other nationalities and nationalisms. The values that receive projection in Russia aim to build the authority of the Russian language and Russian culture.

The Putin Values Initiatives, which have implications for Russian foreign policy, build on pre-1991 stress on generation of patriotism, where nationalism was regarded as a building block. Societies for the preservation of monuments played a lead role here, as did other forms of public associative activity regulated by the Communist Party.²⁵

Post 1991, the phenomenon developed more intensely, and ‘nationalist’ organizations concerned with Russian identity formation mobilized digital as well as print media to achieve

²³ For the literature on the SCO and BRICS, see the appropriate websites, <http://eng.sectsc.org/> and <http://en.brics2015.ru/> Also for SCO, Stephen Aris(2014): *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* Basingstoke, Palgrave, and *Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Mapping Multilateralism in Transition*, International Peace Institute n° 2, December 2014, at https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf . For BRICS see: *Realizing the BRICS long term goals*, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi.

²⁴ Vasudevan and Shaumyan, *Values*, *op.cit* for a larger discussion of the subject.

²⁵ Dunlop, John (1983): *The faces of contemporary Russian nationalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press



their goals. Economic disarray at the time, however, as well as poor institutionalization of Russian foreign policy limited the impact of much of this.

After 2003, Putin created core bodies designed to disseminate a form of official history and readings of contemporary politics within the former space of the Soviet Union. This, together with links with religious bodies and media initiatives, has attempted to chart a distinct Russian perspective that affects approach to all policy including foreign policy²⁶. The initiatives are tantamount to a serious attempt to formulate values: and the authority of the initiatives has grown with the increasing role of the state in Russian society, partly the result of economic changes during the last decade, following the Georgian War of 2008 and the Ukraine crisis post 2014 that led to cooling of relations between Russia and her former partners of the G7/G8.

4.1. Official History

In this, generation of ‘official history’ became a feature of the presidential establishment in Vladimir Putin’s various terms; as well as the Medvedev Presidency. The *Russkii Mir* foundation was crucial. Formed in 2007, it centred on Vyacheslav Nikonov, and was given funding to work in Russia and abroad as well as in Moscow and the country’s regions. The foundation’s journal indicates many of the views that it spreads, touching on necessity to improve the status of the Russian language globally and providing legitimacy for this through due attention to the Russian “greats” (Ivan Bunin, Leo Tolstoi, Ivan Turgenev).

Nikonov argues for direct engagement with national and international challenges from a distinctly Russian perspective, and appeals to Russian speakers in Russia, the CIS and beyond. The position accepts the Soviet legacy as a solid foundation to build on.

Since 2016, the President has revived the *Rossiiskoe Istoricheskoe Obshchestvo* [Russian Historical Society]. This has an agenda similar to that of the *Russkii Mir*, but with a tighter focus on History.

4.2. Official Religion

Engagement by the government with religion coincides with this generation of official history.

The administrative establishment maintains close relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, officials associating Russian culture partly with the Church. Due attention has also been paid to Islam and Buddhism as practiced with government consent. Church, mosque and temple construction and restoration receives assistance. Since 2000, churches from abroad have faced difficulties in Russia.²⁷ In the case of Islam, this is true of practitioners not linked to the ‘muftiates’ that exist in cis-Ural Russia, the North Caucasus and Siberia: the conflicting apex organizations of various Muslim spiritual boards (*Dukhovne Upravlenie Musalman*) are the *Tsentral’noe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musalman* and the *Soviet Muftiev Rossii*.²⁸ Officials are close to Buddhist lamas in Buryatia and Kalmykia.

4.3. Media initiatives

Official engagement with *Russkii Mir* and religious bodies has involved media projection generated by the institutions concerned. The Values Initiatives, though, have constituted a media focus through agencies loyal to the initiatives. This focus has centred on the historian-

²⁶ Saari, Sinikukka: “The Persistence of Putin’s Russia”, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Paper 92, November 2011; and “Putin’s Eurasian Union Initiative. Are the premises of Russia’s post-Soviet policy changing?”, UI Brief n° 9, Swedish Institute for International Affairs, 2011 [hereafter Saari, *Eurasia*]. Herpen, Marcel van (2015): *Putin’s propaganda machine. Soft power in Russia*, London: Rowman and Littlefield.

²⁷ Rousselet, Kathy: “L’église orthodoxe russe et le territoire” in *Revue d’études comparatives est-ouest*, vol 35, n° 4, 2007, pp. 149-171

²⁸ Hahn, Gordon M. (2007): *Russia’s Islamic Threat*, New Haven, Yale University Press.



publicist Modest Kolerov,²⁹ who developed the information agency Regnum in 2002. This has offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg, with regional bases at Voronezh, for Central Russia, the Volga regions, the Far East and the Urals. Outside Russia Regnum has offices in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the Baltic states and the Balkans.

Kolerov is close to Putin and was head of the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (2005-7). Although he left this position, he continues to head Regnum, supports Putin's policies, and has formed REX a media agency that deals with economic matters. He and his agencies discount the value of "Western" institutions for Russia. The project represents the EU as an "empire" whose expansion is funded and directed by the United States.

4.4. Foreign Policy Implications. Towards Russian introversion in international affairs?

In almost all cases, the values initiatives have been shot through with foreign policy implications. This is evident in what has been said of media initiatives and the *Russkii Mir* project. It is also true of the state's proximity to a variety of religious establishments. The way in which the Eurasia project has become "charged" with the tone, usages and "ideology" that have guided the values initiatives is evident from Russian commentators themselves.³⁰

Considerable stress is given by all the initiatives to the building on the Eurasian Economic Union in the long term. The emphasis is often given a political edge by organizations in Russia who see it as a step towards the reconstruction of the old Russian Imperial community of territories, or the Soviet space.³¹

5. Russian focus on sovereignty in international affairs and implications for Indo-Russian relations

5.1 Russian foreign policy and the focus on sovereignty

Close examination of the context of the interplay between Russian foreign policy and the Putin values initiatives, however, provides an overall perspective at variance with introversion or (the common usage) "nationalism" in what is at issue. Values initiatives themselves do not define the range of policy inputs: and even under the centralizing force of the Putin administration, institutional space exists for the various points of strength that compete for Presidential support and which represent powerful interests.³² The values initiatives require to be weighed along with these.

The focus on sovereignty is overarching – but does not imply insularity. It can be seen to imply a push for Russian hegemony in the former Soviet space in the way in which it has been articulated. But, even in this area, the stand for sovereignty may be used to counteract hegemony, as indicated in the problems of the Eurasian Economic Union, where Russian initiatives are frequently questioned by its partners and Russian commentators themselves question the value of the union to Russia³³. More broadly in a post-Soviet era, where the effects of globalization and participation in the WTO and in EU partnerships have affected a range of countries in the Russian neighbourhood, the stress on sovereignty serves a significant purpose.

²⁹ For Kolerov, see Saari, *Eurasia, op.cit.* Material on Regnum is from its website, www.regnum.ru

³⁰ Kokoshk, Andrey: "Real Democracy and Sovereign Democracy" in *Russia in Global Affairs* 2006.

³¹ For the range of the intellectual spectrum in Russia, see Okara, Andrey: "Sovereign democracy: a new Russian idea or a PR project" in *Russian in Global Affairs* (2008); for a hostile account, Snyder Timothy (2018): *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, New York, Tim Duggan Books.

³² A.M., Salmin (1997): "Iznanka vneshnei politiki" in *Rossiiskaia Politika na rubezhe vekov*, Moscow, Politika, Sakwa, Richard: "Dualism at home and abroad: Russian Foreign Policy, Neo-Revisionism, and Bicontinentalism" in Cadier David and Light Margot (eds.) (2016): *Russian Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.

³³ Kuz'min, E.M. "Evraziiskaia Integratsiia. Rezultaty pervykh let" in *Bol'shaia Igra*, vol. 37, n° 4 (2014).



The stress asserts the importance of regard for a host of so called “legacy problems” as states encounter the challenges of globalization.

5.2 Approaches to regional cooperation and proto-regime formation within the framework of the values initiatives

Again, while the association with Regnum, REX and religious establishments is strongly oriented to community awareness, the importance given to the SCO and the BRICS by the *Russkii Mir* is an indication of a broader vision intrinsic to the values initiatives³⁴. Clearly, Russia’s commitment to global and regional cooperation is seen as compatible with a strengthening self-awareness of Russian-speaking communities and communities associated with Russia. What is at issue appears to be reinforcement of global presence and a campaign to accept respect for a variety of cultures within a globalized framework rather than straight “nationalism”, as Timothy Garton Ash³⁵ would have us believe.

5.3 Implications for Indo-Russian relations

Given the solidity of the bilateral relationship, the implications of the Putin values initiatives for Indo-Russian relations must be regarded as an opportunity for reinforcement rather than a challenge. Certainly, the character of the Putin state indicates an “illiberal” profile that, as yet, is not characteristic of the Indian state. This may add tensions to the relationship in the long term, since the values initiatives legitimize many aspects of statecraft under the Putin presidency. On the other hand, an interactive interface comparable to that which existed between India and the USSR, might assuage such differences.

In the strict domain of foreign policy, however, the reinforcement of support for BRICS and SCO that the values initiatives underscore implies greater scope for collaborative action in dealing with the challenges of globalization. This seems to be indicated in the statements of India’s last Foreign Secretary as late as 2017, which indicated a resilient relationship with Russia.³⁶

6. Conclusion

Arguably, the relationship between the Putin values initiatives, Indo-Russian relations and India’s and Russia’s participation in regional and global cooperation amounting to the formation of proto-regimes is an indication of a new trend in globalization and global affairs. It proceeds past the “regional turn” in the light of globalization highlighted in the work of Barry Buzan and suggests the importance of meso regional and transregional global spaces for cooperative regimes. Revisiting the older literature on “regimes” and a re-examination of the literature on regions and regional integration might be valuable in the circumstances, taking the India-Russia relationship as a reference point. The upshot may indicate that the notion of “proto-regimes” as sketchily outlined here may be worthy of closer attention by researchers of international relations theory, especially in the context of inter-state relations in Asia, where preoccupation with sovereignty exercises a powerful influence.

³⁴ See *Russkii Mir*, 1 March and 1 October 2013 for articles on BRICS and 15 June 2018 on the SCO as examples of this perspective

³⁵ Ash, Timothy Garton: “Welcome to a new world of nationalism” Updated April 2017, *Mail and Globe website*, at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/welcome-to-a-new-world-of-nationalism/article33691223/>

³⁶ *Ibid.*



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