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Russia's Pivot to Asia: Prospects and Limits

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Abstract

Russia's pivot to Asia has become one of the highly discussed topics among political and international relations theorists. However, diverse opinions exist on the timeframe of the pivot and on the level of favourable results of the new policies of Russia's turn to the East. Mostly, Russia is thought to be intensifying its relations with countries of the Asia-Pacific region, increasingly since the Western trade sanctions were applied on Russia after the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Academic discussion also revolves around Russia's opportunities and challenges in the region. Progressive cooperation, mainly with China, is suggested due to the growing importance of Asia and its countries: China's rapidly rising economy and military strength has made the country into a candidate for the most important world powers. On the other hand, development and modernisation of Siberia and Russia's Far East region would be necessary for efficient maintenance of any progressive relations with Asian countries. Russia would have to develop its infrastructure in the regions to enable connection and cooperation with China and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Among all potential partners in Asia, China is mostly indicated as the most probable and suitable economic and political partner for Russia in the region. However, many authors agree that Russia is failing in actively participating in projects in Middle East and other regions, where China has already taken the main lead. Lagging behind China in international relations and future projects, Russia seems to be on the course of being only a junior partner to China, which is a situation Russia would like to avoid the most. Further, conflicts have often emerged between Russia and other Asian countries, such as India, Japan or Vietnam, mainly due to mutual disputes over territories in South and East China Sea. For more, in many cases, Russia is supporting China's opponents in these disputes with military equipment. Under these circumstances, any intensifying of relationships between Russia and China are therefore not foreseeable for the future. Russia may end up in a situation, in which Moscow would have to take a side sympathetic to China. For the future, Russia is expected to become more active in Asian projects to make sure it will have its place among the rising Asia-Pacific powers, and not dwell in a position of a junior partner and resources appendage of China and others.

Abstrakt

Ruský obrat zájmu směrem k Asii se stal jedním z často diskutovaných témat mezi teoretiky světové politiky a mezinárodních vztahů. Avšak existují rozdílné názory na to, jak vymezit tento proces časově a jaká je míra úspěšnosti nové politiky ruského obratu na východ. Převážně se má za to, že zintenzivnění vztahů mezi Ruskem a zeměmi Asijsko-Pacifického regionu koreluje s uvalením Západních sankcí na Rusko po Ukrajinské krizi v roce 2014. Akademické diskuse se také zaobírají příležitostmi a výzvami Ruska v regionu. Narůstající spolupráce, předně s Čínou, je zmiňována především v souvislosti s rostoucím světovým významem Asijských zemí: rapidní růst čínské ekonomické a vojenské síly proměnily Čínu v jasného kandidáta na významnou světovou mocnost. Na druhou stranu, pokud mají vztahy s Asijskými státy nadále růst, Rusko by se mělo zaměřit na rozvoj a modernizaci regionů Sibíře a Dálného východu. Rusko by mělo zlepšit svou infrastrukturu v těchto regionech, aby bylo schopné spojit se a spolupracovat s Čínou a dalšími zeměmi v oblasti Asie a Tichomoří.

Mezi všemi případnými kandidáty se Čína jeví v rámci regionu jako nejpravděpodobnější a nejvhodnější ekonomický a politický partner pro Rusko. Avšak mnoho autorů se shoduje na tom, že se Rusku nedaří aktivně se zapojovat do projektů na Středním Východě a v dalších regionech, kde se vedení chopila právě Čína. Zaostává za Čínou v mezinárodních vztazích a budoucích projektech se Rusko jeví být spíše na cestě k tomu stát se mladším partnerem Číny, což je situace, které se Rusko snaží zabránit. Nadto se Čína opakovaně dostává do konfliktních situací s ostatními Asijskými zeměmi, kupříkladu s Indií, Japonskem nebo Vietnamem, především pak

kvůli vzájemným územním sporům v oblasti Východočínského a Jihočínského moře. V mnoha těchto sporech Rusko podporuje Čínské protivníky dodávkami vojenského vybavení. Rusko by se tak mohlo dostat do situace, kdy se Kreml bude muset rozhodnout, na kterou stranu se v těchto konfliktech přidá. Z těchto důvodů se v budoucnu neočekává žádné posílení spolupráce mezi Ruskem a Čínou. Do budoucna by se Rusko mělo snažit aktivněji zapojit v projektech v Asii, aby si zajistilo místo mezi rostoucími mocnostmi oblasti Asie a Tichomoří, jinak zůstane v pozici mladšího partnera a přívěsku Číny a ostatních.

Keywords

Russia, Asia-Pacific region, China, Pivot, Cooperation, Relations, Neorealism, Opportunities & Challenges, Development

Klíčová slova

Asijsko-Pacifická oblast, Čína, Obrat, Spolupráce, Vztahy, Neorealismus, Příležitosti & Překážky, Rozvoj

Scope of the work: 127 831 characters

Prohlášení

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V Praze dne 9.května 2019

Barbora Čechová

Declaration

1. I declare that I have completed present work independently and used only literature quoted in bibliography.
2. I declare that this thesis was not used for obtaining another
3. I agree that this work might be published for research and study purposes.

In Prague on 9th May 2019

Barbora Čechová

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Institut politologických studií

Teze diplomové práce

Zdůvodnění výběru práce

Téma ruského obratu do Asie je v posledních letech stále aktuálnější. Nejčastěji se o něm hovoří při problémech Ruska se Západem, ať již v problematice sankcí v souvislosti s anexí Krymu či jinými událostmi. Téma se týká problematiky patrné v posledních letech, v současnosti a pravděpodobně i v budoucnosti, což téma činí nejen aktuální, ale bezesporu i důležité. Případná realizace spolupráce s některou z asijských velmocí by znamenala ovlivnění celosvětových vztahů a těžiště hlavní světové síly, které v posledních dekádách náleží Spojeným státům americkým. Nicméně se zvyšujícím se rozvojem Číny by se mohla situace změnit; a v případě „přátelství“ Ruska právě například s Čínou by pak Rusko mohlo zaujímat dominantnější postavení ve světě.

Předpokládaný cíl

Cílem práce by mělo být zmapování historických vztahů Ruska s asijskými velmocemi, tak rovněž náhled na možné proměny těchto vztahů v době Studené války mezi Sovětským svazem a Spojenými státy americkými, současně s pohledem na aktuální situaci těchto vztahů a vzájemného postavení vybraných zemí. Tato analýza pak bude probíhat pro tři vybrané země reprezentující jednotlivé části Asie, jimiž bude kromě hlavní proměnné, tedy Ruska a Sovětského svazu také Turecko reprezentující nejzápadnější část Asie, dále Írán reprezentující střední Asii a Čína za nejvýchodnější část tohoto světadílu. Cílem práce je na základě analýzy těchto zemí zjistit, jestli by některá z nich mohla být pro Rusko významným partnerem do budoucna. Pokud by tak bylo zjištěno, byla by následně provedena analýza možností tohoto vztahu do budoucna, potenciálu pro další spolupráci či alespoň prohloubení té aktuální.

Metodologie práce

Metodologicky bude základ práce postaven na jednopřípadových studiích vybraných zemí pro analýzu. Jelikož se práce bude zabývat těmito státy hlouběji do historie, bude provedena studie pro Rusko, Sovětský svaz a následně současnou Ruskou federaci, pro Osmanskou říši a později pro Turecko, pro Čínu a posledně pro Persii a Írán, vždy podle aktuálního státního celku. Tyto jednopřípadové studie pak budou dále komparovány ve vztahu mezi nimi a Ruskem, čímž by měl být naplněn cíl práce, jímž je snaha o nalezení možného partnera v Asii pro Rusko do budoucna. Hlavními metodami budou tedy jednopřípadová studie a komparativní metoda. Teoretický rámec práce pak bude vycházet z teorie neorealismu, pro nějž je klíčové nahlížení mocenského potenciálu.

Základní charakteristika tématu

Téma Ruského obratu do Asie, perspektiv a limitů tohoto obratu, se bude soustředit, na historické vztahy Ruska, respektive Sovětského svazu, a vybraných tří států v Asii. Nejzápadněji bude řešen vztah Ruska a Turecka, ve střední Asii pak Ruska a Íránu, na východě pak Ruska a Číny. Bude charakterizován jejich vývoj a vzájemné vztahy od 16.století, kdy se Rusko stalo císařstvím, nejprve do období světových válek, dále v době Studené války, posledně pak od konce této války, tedy od 90.let 20.století do současnosti. Na základě jednotlivých analýz, jednopřípadových studií a jejich komparace, bude dále provedena analýza možného vývoje těchto vztahů do budoucna, respektive nastínění možného partnerství Ruska s některou z těchto zemí, které buď již může existovat, nebo se může v současnosti rodit, či by bylo možné do budoucna. Práce

by tedy měla přinést příliš nezkoumaný pohled na Rusko ve vztahu s Asií a možnosti pro další rozvoj těchto vztahů, tedy jejich perspektivy a limity.

Předpokládaná struktura práce

Předpokládaná osnova:

1. Úvod
2. Metodologie a teoretické uchopení práce
3. Historický pohled na vybrané země od 16.století do konce 19.století/světových válek
4. Období od konce druhé světové války po konec Studené války
5. Období od 90.let do současnosti
6. Předpoklady do budoucna
7. Závěr

Práce by měla být členěna do sedmi hlavních kapitol. Kapitola „Metodologie a teoretické uchopení práce“ by se pak měla věnovat otázce neorealismu a jeho vztahu k práci. Kromě této kapitoly, úvodu a závěru se budou čtyři zbývající kapitoly věnovat konkrétním poznatkům a analýzám. První část nahlédne na historické pozadí vybraných zemí, na Rusko v období jeho carství, dále pak na Osmanskou říši, Persii a Čínu ve stejné době. Podobně budou tvořeny i další dvě kapitoly, z nichž první se bude zabývat otázkou těchto zemí v období Studené války, druhá pak po jejím skončení do současnosti. Poslední část se bude snažit nastínit možné předpoklady Ruska a asijských států do budoucna, což by měla být hlavní invence práce.

Základní literatura

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Introduction

The pivot to Asia became a topic resonating among many political geography and international relations theorist, who began to discuss the foreign policy of Russia and its change of focus to the Asia-Pacific region. Russia is accompanied by several other states, who are turning their gaze to the East. The United States of America has similarly begun its pivot to Asia, mainly in the correspondence with the growth of Asian powers. Asian countries have shown rapid growth in their economies, as well as in technology and innovations in the last decades. Economic success has pushed them to the frontier among the countries of the world and the interest from the “Western world” to build stronger relationships with the Asian regions grew at the same time. Among others, the two main powers of the previous century United States and Russia have begun its pivot to the East, which is what this dissertation will dissect.

There has been significant discussion among many authors on dating the beginning of the shifting attention to Asia. Some claim that this has been a gradual process since the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, others find Russia’s pivot to the East mainly to take off in the recent years, with correspondence to the Crimea crisis in Ukraine in 2014. The Ukraine conflict damaged Russia’s relationships with western countries, mainly the USA and the EU, the latter being the main trading partner with Russia up until that conflict. Under the circumstances of sanctions used against Russia due to its military occupation of Crimea in Ukraine, Russia deepened its politics towards the Asia-Pacific region, which became its main domain. However, this work of research discusses the debatable success of Russia’s plans in Asia, and the opportunities and challenges connected with those strategies.

The main aim of the work is to examine the reasons behind Russia's turn to the East, in a connection to the dating disputes among academic work discussing its pivot to Asia. Further, opportunities and challenges coming up from this turn in Russia's foreign policy will be researched as well. The dissertation will then discuss Russia's policies in Asia, mainly its energy policy oriented on gas in the Siberian region and its possible trade with Asian countries becoming the main trading partner for Russia. This is interconnected with the development of Siberia, to which the work will pay attention as well. Further, China will be examined as a possible partner to Russia in the Asia-Pacific region, but other countries will be researched as well, mainly their potential as Russia's partners and their relationships with Russia in the recent years and from the historical perspective.

The main methods used for the research in this dissertation will be a case study of Russia and its turn to the East. This will be supported by research of academic literature, academic and newspaper articles, and reputable databases, such as the World Bank. Further, partial case studies will discuss possible partners for Russia in the Asia-Pacific region, and the different studies will be compared between each other. This comparison will predict the best partners for Russia, although China is going to be discussed in greater extent due to its size of importance in the discussion on Russia's pivot to Asia in the current academic literature.

Changes have been made in the structure of the dissertation from what was expected in the dissertation plan. Comparative research of three possible partners for Russia: China, Iran and Turkey have been altered into a single case study of Russia's

turn to the East with a dominant part discussing its possible partnership with China, its prospects and limits. This alteration has been decided mainly due to the scope of the work and data availability, as China is the main country discussed for Russia among academics as well. Other countries will be researched as well, but their relationship with Russia will be described with a smaller priority. However, a fuller comparative research could be a possibility for future research in this international relations study area. Research methods used will remain the same; there will be a combination of case study and comparative methods, which correspond with the initial plan.

The work will be structured into ten chapters: next to abstract, introduction and conclusion, there will be seven chapters of the main text of the research and a chapter discussing methodology in depth.

The first chapter is going to be discussing the timing of Russia's turn to the East, mainly academic discussion on whether Russia began its pivot to Asia before or after the 2014 Ukraine Crisis. Further, the reasons behind the turn to Asia will be analysed from a perspective of Russia's domestic and foreign politics.

Second chapter will be discussing international relations and politics theories connected to the topic of Russia's pivot to Asia. In the regard to Russia and its aims in the Asia-Pacific region, academics suggest dominantly the analysis from a perspective of the theory of realism and neorealism. These theories focus on countries and their tendency to regard relations among countries as an arena of enemies or competitors trying to get their own dominance in international relations through winning conflicts

with others. Other countries are seen as possible threats necessary to be dealt with rational thinking and through the means of power.

The next chapter is then going to analyse Russia's opportunities and challenges in Asia – Russia's gains from its turn to the East and losses if the country would be inactive among other Asian countries.

Fourth chapter is going to discuss Russia's foreign policy, its economy and the importance of the Far East region of Russia. Further, it will discuss Russia's energy policy, mainly gas and oil trade and its possibilities for the future in Asia. Finally, this chapter will examine Russia's security and military policy.

Fifth chapter will research Russia's relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It will discuss Russia's opportunities in that region and its identity. Finally, the chapter will examine possible partner countries for Russia in Asia, namely India, Japan, both Koreas, Vietnam and other smaller powers, such as Thailand, Burma or Taiwan. Their current relationship will be described as well as their historical ties.

Chapter six will discuss Russia's foreign policy more in depth, as well as its relations with China and opportunities and challenges of this relationship. Finally, it will examine possible future prospects of the relationship between Russia and Asia, mainly with China.

The analysis concludes the overall perception of Russia's turn to Asia – its background, its process, the opportunities and challenges, but also possibilities for future. The main aim of the work is to show when and how Russia began its pivot to Asia, if the country is successful in reaching this goal and what should Russia do to maintain its place in the Asia-Pacific relations and good relations with others. Possible partnerships with other Asia countries are also part of the research, which could in the end suggest the most probably country to be in tighter relationship with in Asia, or if this is possible regarding to Russia's politics.

Methodology

The research aims to analyse the supposition of Russia turning to Asia, for which qualitative research methods have been chosen. The basis of the qualitative research methods can be expressed in three statements by Alan Bryman. He explains qualitative research as an “inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the latter”, by its “epistemological position described as interpretivist, meaning that, in contrast to the adoption of a natural scientific model in quantitative research, the stress is on the understanding of the social world through examination”, and finally, its “ontological position described as constructionist, which implies that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena” (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). The research in this dissertation aims to examine the relationship between Russia’s pivot to Asia and theories of international relations. Predominantly, the theory of realism and neorealism are used for the research. However, the research is not inductive, but deductive. It is built from the theory knowledge in the direction of the analysis for Russia; it is not trying to construct the theory on the basis of findings (Bryman, 2012, p. 711). While the first criterion is not fully satisfied, the other two are. The research is examining Russia’s turn to the East, while using constructivism, when examining relations between Russia and other countries of the Asia-Pacific region and the outcomes of their interactions.

The main research methods used in the dissertation are a case study and comparative method. A case study is a qualitative method of social research, described by Bryman as a “detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman, 2012, p. 709), which in this case is a study of Russia’s pivot to Asia in depth, its historical

background and timing, opportunities and challenges which this phenomenon brings to Russia, prospects and limits of Russia turning to the East and the future perspective. Quantitative secondary data is used primarily as a supportive element, but no specific quantitative research is held in this study. Quantitative data used is mainly economic and socio-demographic data from reputable databases, such as the World Bank. Qualitative research of academic literature and documents, academic journals etc. are used for the case study of Russia turning to the Asia-Pacific region. This is matching with the main premises of qualitative research and a case study, which Bryman defines as “detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman, 2012, p. 709).

The second part of the research is a comparative research aiming to find possible partner for Russia in Asia. The main emphasis is placed on China, although other countries are part of the research as well, which allows a possible comparison among them. Comparative analysis is a method of quantitative research. However, in this case, there are no extensive data sets, but the relations between Russia and selected countries. This analysis provides qualitative results, aiming to find a possible partner for Russia based on a quality of their possible relationship for the future coming from the quality of their passed and present relations, than on quantity of similar patterns between them. Bryman explains comparative analysis as a method which “entails the comparison of two or more cases in order to illuminate existing theory or generate theoretical insights as a result of contrasting findings uncovered through the comparison” (Bryman, 2012, p. 710).

Literature Review

Academic literature used in this dissertation is an important topic to be discussed. Various sources were chosen from both Russian and non-Russian authors. This contrast is shown at some of the used authors for the research, such as Dmitry Suslov (2016) and Dmitri Trenin (2012, 2015 and 2016) from authors of Russian origin, and Hans-Joachim Spanger (2016), Matthew Sussex (2012 and 2015) and Michał Lubina (2016) from authors of non-Russian origin. During the literature review preceding the main research, differences in the perspective among those authors were spotted. The possible perspective bias will be visible for example on chapters four and five. Authors such as Spanger (2016) or Malle and Cooper (2014) point out problems and detriment of Russia's turn to the East. Spanger highlights several times Russia's complicated situation after the 2014 Ukraine crisis and unresolved disputes between Russia and other Asian countries in the South and East China Seas. Malle and Cooper then explain difficulties in Russia's pivot to Asia from the perspective of Russia's identity dwelling more in the European continent rather than in Asia and also Russia's economic problems in the last decade connected also to the West-led sanctions against Russia after the Crimea Crisis.

However, these perspectives contrast to the image of Russia and its relations with the Asia-Pacific region from authors of Russian origin and active in Russian academic institutions. Suslov (2016) shows much higher level of optimism in the context of Russia's turn to the East than Spanger and others. Similarly, other Russian authors, such as Kuznetsova, Kocheva and Matev (2016), demonstrate optimism, mainly in the expanding trade between Russia and China. This reaches a contradiction

to what is presented by authors such as Sussex (2012 and 2015) or Lubina (2016). Lubina, similarly to Malle and Cooper, also points out Russia's identity as European, and together with Sussex, they both highlight problems between Russia and other Asian countries.

It would be inaccurate to claim that Russian authors only see Russia's pivot to Asia in optimistic perspective of successful cooperation between Russia and the Asia-Pacific region countries, while non-Russian authors would only present the situation in negative context full of obstacles for Russia to succeed in its turn Eastwards. Dmitri Trenin (2012, 2015 and 2016) also discusses the problem in the region, although more between China and Japan, than between Russia and others. At the same time, while Spanger is a non-Russian author who operates as a programme director at the Liebnitz Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (HSFK) in Frankfurt, Germany, he is also actively cooperating with Valdai Discussion Club based in Moscow and is a visiting professor at the National Research University – University of Economics in Moscow (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019, online), which is the same institutions where Suslov holds a position of Deputy Director at the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies (Valdai Discussion Club, 2019, online).

While both Spanger and Suslov operate at the same university, they differ in their opinions on Russia's turn to Asia. Suslov (2016) mainly presents opinion of a strong relationship between Russia and China, while Spanger (2016), together with Sussex (2012 and 2015) and Lo (2008 and 2012), remain pessimistic about the actual process. While Spanger and Suslov are coming from different countries, but operate at

the same academic institution, the research aims to bring opinions of authors from different backgrounds and coming from different parts of the world. Some of the other dominant authors for the research are Sussex and Lubina: Sussex as the Academic Director at the National Security College of the Australian National University (Australian National University, nd, online), and Lubina as a member of the Department of Middle and Far East Studies at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland (Academia, 2019, online).

1. Russia's turn to the east and its historical perspective

1.1. Discussion on the timing of Russia's turn to the East

The foreign policy of Russia has focused on strengthening its relationships with the surrounding Asian countries in recent years, mainly China. The given trend has been noted in various studies and analyses. For example, Olga Puzanova (2016) points out Karaganov's (in Makarov, 2016) stance suggesting "the imminent and long-pending turn to Asia", when he foresaw the turn in the middle of 1990's, but only today, "has it been practically realized". She also highlights the main idea of Makarov's *Povorot Na Vostok* (2016), claiming that "the debate on the importance of developing Russia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region started among academics and policy makers decades ago", when "discussed among Leonid Brezhnev-era academics, and both Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s and Yevgeny Primakov in the late 1990's". Similarly, Makarov(2016) suggests that "Vladimir Putin, in turn, continued to strengthen Russia's political and economic cooperation with Asia long before the Ukrainian crisis".

A similar view is held by Elena Litsareva (2015), who argues that the beginning of Russia's 'turn to East' increased around the 1990's as well. She claims that "the Asian policy of Russia was starting to change at the second half of the 1990s, [when] Russia conducted its policy at the East Asia in a view of the changed balance of national interests, regardless of the ideological considerations and attached a special importance to the economic cooperation" (Litsareva, 2015, p.46). Litsareva (2015) correlates this persuasion mainly with the economic growth of the region of East Asia in the 1990's,

which positively affected the relationship between the Asian countries and the rest of the world. The region of East Asia had become the main centre of technological innovations and inventions. “It must be borne in mind that Asia was becoming a centre of the world economic and industrial growth” (Litsareva, 2016, p. 48). Litsareva (2016) supports her claims by numerical evidence of the rapid economic growth of the strongest countries in the region in the first half of 1990’s, when “the growth of Asian NICs GDP rates (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong) was on average 7.7%, and the economy growth rate of the Association of South-East Asian Nations - Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand - 6.6%. The economic growth of China in these years was 7%” (Litsareva, 2004, p. 136).

Other authors tend to fit “pivot to Asia” to the end of the first decade of the twenty first century. According to Lubina (2016), Russia began to turn towards Asia only a few years before the Ukrainian crisis, which is usually seen as an additional reason for intensifying Russian pivoting to the East. He sees Russia’s turn to Asia as an official policy from 2010, but the further pivot as a connection with the crisis in Ukraine in 2014. He claims that officially, “Russia’ pivot to Asia was proclaimed for the first time in 2010” (Lubina, 2016, p. 159), but not much has been done to support this proclamation by actual actions. However, this has changed in 2014. Lubina points out that the change came in 2014 “after the signing of Russia-China gas contract in May 2014”, and has been even deepened in the relation to the “constant worsening of Russia-West relations due to the Ukrainian crisis further makes Moscow look eastwards. Russia now officially declares her turn to Asia” (Lubina, 2016, p. 159).

Dmitry Suslov (2016) agrees with the opinions held by Lubina, while claiming that the new Russian policies about turning their relations increasingly to the East “was in fact announced in 2011-2012, several years before the Ukraine crisis, and reflects Russia’s strategic interests, and not just a reaction to the environment it fields itself in” (Suslov, 2016, online). For Suslov (2016), the change in policies clearly indicates that “Russia’s turn towards Asia is not the result of its spat with the West, even though it has been an increasingly important factor since 2014” (Suslov, 2016, online). The given interpretation could possibly open a discussion on whether Russia could have already planned the invasion to Crimea at the time of the announcement of its turn to the East to prepare for the possible political repercussions from the West. However, this would be just a speculation, hardly to be proven.

On the other hand, from the objective information, the turn to Asia seems to be a clear calculus of the best possibilities for Russia. As Suslov (2016) explains, “these interests are underpinned by both an understanding that the centre of economic and political gravity is shifting to the APR, a region quickly becoming a hotbed of growth as well as Russia’s eagerness to develop its Far East and Siberian regions. Initially, this policy was described as an effort to expand cooperation between Russia and Asia as a whole, not just China” (Suslov, 2016, online), which is usually claimed to be its main interest. This is contrasting with the opinion of Lubina, although they share the same thought with Suslov regarding the beginning of the pivot to Asia. As he suggests, “it is likely that if there is to be any real Russian pivot to Asia, then it would be a pivot to China only” (Lubina, 2016, p. 159).

The timing of the beginning of Russia's turn to the East could be summarised by Puzanova (2016), who agrees with the previously mentioned estimations. She highlights that although "academics started talking about it over a decade ago, (...) it gained considerable momentum due to the increasing tensions between Russia and the West" (Puzanova, 2016). The given stance is matching with the previous estimations of the increasing attention from Russia to regions in the east. There were talks on Russia's interest in Asia during the 1990's, which were associated with a growth in Asian industries, economies and technology. However, a focused discussion on Russia's pivot to the East began around the period of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, when the relationship between Russia and the West worsened again. As Puzanova points out, "after the beginning of the Ukraine crisis and the rapid decline in relations between Russia and the Western world, Russia shifted attention further to the East" (Puzanova, 2016). A similar view is held by Makarov, who saw the Ukrainian crisis as an accelerator for the medias' interest in the Russia's turn to the East, when he claimed that the tension between Russia and the West made the pivot to Asia "one of the most discussable topics of late 2015 and early 2016" (Puzanova, 2016). However, Makarov reminds that "the turn objectively started before the current crisis accelerated it" (Puzanova, 2016).

The turn to the East is explained in its relation to the Ukrainian crisis as a logical step in maintaining Russia's political and economic position and leverage in the world. Litsareva (2015) highlights the justification and motive behind the pivot by the events in Ukraine in 2014 spring, after which Russia had to reach for alternative markets and partners after the economic sanctions coming from the West, mainly establishing

connections with the East Asia region. The trade sanctions were applied after Russia's attainment of Crimea. As Litsareva reminds, the "modern pivot towards Asia is an opportunity of turning Russia into a real force factor with which the world must be considered" (Litsareva, 2015, p. 47). Similarly, the change of Russian partners is explained by Puzanova, who sees Russia's pivot to the East as an "urgent need to secure economic and political cooperation outside of the Western world" (Puzanova, 2016). Moreover, there are further reasons that have been outlined than merely the Ukrainian crisis in the academic literature discussing Russia's pivot to Asia.

1.2.Reasons behind the turn to Asia:

Puzanova (2016) suggests three possible reasons behind the Russia's turn to Asia. Firstly, she suggests the unreliability of the European Union (EU) for Russia as a possible political and economic partner, which Puzanova associates with the crisis. The second reason according to Puzanova is the new persuasion of the Russian elite that "Asian markets are the best possible alternative at this critical time. [However] the government's early 2000's strategy of creating the supply for them before analysing their demand has proven to be ineffective" (Puzanova, 2016). As a third reason, Puzanova presents the transition of Asian Markets from "the 'Asia for the world' model to an 'Asia for Asia' strategy" (Puzanova, 2016). This means that Russia should prove higher activity in building its relationship with Asia, if Russia wants to profit from Asia economic growth. This corresponds with the reasoning presents by Makarov, who explains Russia's pivot to Asia as a realisation of "Oswald Spengler's prognosis of the decline of the Western civilization" at the same time as he estimated the rise of "Asia's economic, technical, and cultural power" (Puzanova, 2016).

Litsareva explains Russia's turn to the East mainly by the ongoing globalisation process among the whole world. She connects this idea with the tendency that the "end of the twentieth century marked by an increasing competition between the three major economic centres – the United States, Japan and the European Union, especially after the European Economic Community adopted the decision on the establishment of the single market in 1992" (Litsareva, 2015, p. 47). Litsareva is explaining the linkage between Europe and Asia-Pacific markets, when claiming that Russia, who is usually thought as a Eurasian power, built the relations with the Asian region in order "to raise

the political and economic cooperation to the level achieved by Russia in Europe” (Litsareva, 2015, p. 46). She explains that this made from East Asia gradually “the priority strategic direction of the Russia positioning in the world” (Litsareva, 2015, p. 46). Litsareva also suggests that a part of this movement is Russia’s support of East Asia countries in building and “ensuring regional security and stability” (Litsareva, 2015, p. 46). This means that Russia, while turning to the East, is preparing its ground for trade with countries of East Asia and the whole Asia-Pacific region, for which Russia also needs to maintain the political stability of the region. The relationship between Russia and countries of East Asia will be examined in depth later.

Russia’s interests in Asia are explained by Litsareva as a gradual change from the West to the East, when she claims that “at the beginning of 1990’s Russian national interests were more aligned with the interests of the United States and Europe”, while ten years later, at the end of the 1990’s, there is a higher evidence of “the unity of [Russia’s] interests with India, China and South-East Asia countries and the importance of economic and political relations with Asia” (Litsareva, 2005, p. 69) This is associated with the interest to Russia’s natural resource potential, mainly shown by both Europe and Asia, which changes Russia’s main trading partners. As Litsareva explains, “in spite of the fact that the European Union for a long time would be the largest economic partner of Russia, its role would gradually decline. In some period, Germany has been the largest trading partner of Russia, but then China was far ahead” (Kashin, 2014 in Litsareva, 2015). This can be explained from the geographical position of China, which is closer to Russia’s east regions, which are richer on energy resources than the rest of the country (Litsareva).

Lubina shares Litsareva's views that the main reasons behind Russia's turn to Asia are globalisation and its tendencies, especially Russian tendency to maintain its place as a global power in an economically changing world. Lubina claims that the strengthening of the relationships with East Asia is caused mainly by the "understanding of Asia's value to global position of Russia" (Trenin, 2012 in Lubina, 2016, p. 161) at the time when other powers see Russia's importance to be diminishing compared to the Cold War, when Soviet Union was considered as one of the two main global super-powers. He confirms this by stating that "Moscow wants to retain its strategic independence and not to wind up as a junior partner to either Washington or Beijing" (Trenin, 2012 in Lubina, 2016, p. 161). Therefore, capturing trade relations with Asia to have a strong foothold in the future is Russia's main geostrategic and geo-economic goal. Lubina points out the fact that if Russia wants to maintain this position and maintain its position among the world powers, it needs "to develop its Far Eastern region, [as] the future of Russia on the East depends on what will Moscow do with her eastern provinces" (Lubina, 2016, p. 161).

2. Theory (realism and neorealism)

While discussing Russia's turn to the East and its future potential, it is necessary to examine the possibilities from a theoretical perspective. The focal question is whether Russia is capable of creating any sort of relationship with another country, which might become its Asian partner. Several theorists debate Russian political stance within the context of realism and neorealism, such as Michał Lubina, who perceives realism, in both its classical or neo forms, as a belief that "the nature of all politics is universal" (Lubina, 2016, p. 159). He argues that "society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature, the main one being the concept of interest defined in terms of power" (Lubina, 2016, p. 159-160). In the realistic perspective, the world and its inhabitants are not perfect, and their main domain are conflicts. The conflicts are based on the opposing interests of the actors. Lubina highlights that "interests (...) constitute the core of politics" (Lubina, 2016, p. 160). This means that there is no room for moral principles at the realistic scene of international politics. As Lubina says, "moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states or other actors in their abstract universal formulation, but must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place, which means that the moral principles cannot be fully realized" (Lubina, 2016, p. 160). This matches with the perception by Morgenthau, who sees realism in the world as "a system of check and balances, [which] aims at the realisation of the lesser evil, rather than the absolute good" (Morgenthau, 2006, p. 3 in Lubina, 2016, p. 160).

Andreas Jacobs explains realism following the theory by Hans Morgenthau, stating that “states may have a range of different motives for their actions, [but] power is always the means of achieving national goals” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 25). This means that countries seek “justification of political interests and thus of political action” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 25). Jacobs explains this as an attempt to force one’s self-interest over others and set its political actions accordingly. He explains that the monopoly on power can hardly work in reality, as “there can be no superordinate collective will of this kind because of a slender substructure of common ground” (Morgenthau, 1960, p. 263 in Jacobs, 2014, p. 25), caused predominantly by differences in conditions people live in, which gives them different interests. The drive for power is explained by Jacobs as “an essential feature of the human being” (Hobbes, [1951] 2008 in Jacobs, 2014, p. 26). Jacobs often paraphrases *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, a text which is often discussed in debates of the realistic perception of the world.

Lubina sees Russia as a country, which is forming its policies according to the realistic perspective, which from his point of view comes from its “ruling political elites, [who] have been brought up in a realistic strategic culture that emphasizes the element of struggle in an often viciously competitive world, where power relations dominate at the expense of allegedly universal values” (Lo, 2008, p. 176 in Lubina, 2016, p. 160). This means that stronger states can apply their interests and needs among weaker countries more successfully, as they have more capability in the anarchic system based on power politics. In international politics, Russia has been perceived as one of these great world powers in previous couple of centuries. Although, since the end of the Cold War, its reputation as a superpower has decreased, due to its economic problems,

financial crises and loss of many territories after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The only difference between the Cold War Soviet Union and today's Russian Federation in its political discourse is the difference in its vocabulary, which Lubina explains as a change to "soft power, interdependency, globalization, and 'universal threats and challenges' [which] have displaced zero-sum calculus, the balance of power, and spheres of influence" (Lo, 2008, p. 176 in Lubina, 2016, p. 160), while meaning same imperatives from realpolitik of nineteenth century, such as "national security, power projection, management of the strategic balance and emphasis on the primacy of state sovereignty" (Lubina, 2016, p. 160).

In the context of Russian discourse following the old realistic narrative of international politics, Lubina also explains why Russia's pivot to the East should be perceived as a realistic approach for new balance of power. This is explained mainly in the context of the hegemony of the United States in the last decades, which is estimated to be balanced by the rapidly rising Asia. The movement of "global commercial and political centre" (Lubina, 2016, p. 160) from the West to the East is becoming more realistic. Lubina highlights that according to him in this realistic perspective "Moscow properly understood that her status as one of global powers depends on her position in Asia-Pacific region, [as] to maintain her shrinking global position, Russia had to improve her stand in Asia" (Lubina, 2016, p. 160-161). Lubina points out another interesting observation, which is the pivot to Asia by the United States. He estimates that the United States began its officially proclaimed turn to the East before Russia. This could suggest that although Russia has been trying to show itself in the opposition to the USA since the beginning of the twentieth century, and has never actually left this

political stance, the country is mostly copying the steps taken by the United States. We can only guess if this is the case, as it could hardly be official Russian politics in the perspective of Russia aiming to be one of the main world powers.

Similarly, in the context in which Lubina presents current Russia's interests, following the old realistic tradition of the nineteenth century, Bobo Lo also points out the fact that "the Putin regime regards the international environment in Hobbesian terms – a tough place where the strong thrive and the weak get beaten. A world where great powers are dominant, geopolitical influence is critical, and hard power matters most" (Lo, 2012, p. 2). In this sense Moscow's politics perceive the centre of world power to be moving to the East, which confirms Lubina's point of view. Lo sees the main centre to be currently moving to China as one of the fastest rising Asian power, at the same time when "the West is in long-term decline" (Lo, 2012, p. 2). Lo highlights Russia's view that this is highly beneficial for the country and Russia should take it as its advantage over the USA, which comes from its suitable geographical position as one of China's neighbour countries. According to Lo, "in the long term, Russia sees itself as an 'independent' pole on a par with the US and China, largely because each of them will need Russia to balance the other" (Lo, 2012, p. 2).

For Russia, getting closer to China would mean an advantageous partnership in the future world order. On the other hand, taking Lo's perception of Russia seeing world in Hobbesian terms into account, opposes this possibility. Following the traditional view of realism in international politics and the Hobbesian culture, the dominating factors are self-interest and power, which do not correspond with partnership. If Russia stays in the

world as a realistic player, then it can hardly seek partner, as it perceives everyone as a potential enemy. This agrees with Morgenthau's view of an actor in international politics, which is explained by Jacobs as a "power-seeking sovereign nation state, which attempts to realize its interests against those of other states" (Jacobs, 2014, p. 26), not a state seeking alliances or partnerships with others. This means that there is no international community, but a system of states without "central decision-making or sanctioning authority, a system which, in analogy to Hobbes' conception, is in a state of nature" (Jacobs, 2014, p. 26).

Although Russia's interests are presented in the perspective of realist tradition in international relations, Lubina examines Russia's pivot to Asia also from neorealist point of view. He points out mainly difficulties in the relationship between Russia and the East, such as "the ineffective attempts to develop the Far Eastern region of the Russian Federation, Chinese influence (...), Russian (mis)understanding of Asia and the consequences of the May 2014 gas contract with China" (Lubina, 2016, p. 159). Lubina concludes that he sees Russia as a marginal player in Asia, coming mainly from the opinion that "Russia's pivot to Asia remains more in the sphere of dreams than in reality" (Lubina, 2016, p. 159) and that there are not many visible steps taken to turn the country more eastwards.

Niklas Schörnig identifies the core of neorealism in the question "whether, and if so why, despite differing political systems and different ideologies, states tend to behave in much the same way towards the external world, and why powerful states especially must always expect challenges to their pre-eminence" (Schörnig, 2014, p. 39). He

highlights one main similarity with realism, which is the interest in ‘high politics’ over ‘low politics’, which means prioritization of politics of security over economic and social issues. Survival is also seen as a main priority for all actors in international relations, which is usually preserved by maintaining countries’ geographical and political integrity. Necessary steps are then planned with high rationality, which dominate both realism and neorealism. This is mainly caused by the ever-present potential aggression and possible threats from other actors. Schörnig (2014) also discusses the question of power, but in a slightly different way than in realism, for which power is the main variable. In neorealism, together with the uncertainty of other’s intentions, various extents of actors’ capabilities and degrees of power are discussed, as per the theory by Kenneth Waltz, which is thought to be one of the main theorists of neorealism.

3. Opportunities and challenges

Matthew Sussex highlights that the twenty-first century, estimated to be dominated by Asian countries will bring both opportunities and challenges. As he explains, on one hand, “a rising China and India will continue to require reliable access to natural resources, and there is scope for Russia to extend its diplomatic influence in these two nations with a policy aimed at created vulnerable overdependence”, but on the other hand, “Russia will have little to say in how the power dynamics of the Indo-Pacific play out” (Sussex, 2012, p. 1). Challenges for Russia come mainly from the dilemma between maintaining its national interests, coming from its (neo)realistic background, and only recently becoming a more active state in the Asia-Pacific region, together with the necessity to avoid the possible status of an actor, who is “being relegated to the status of a raw materials appendage” (Sussex, 2012, p. 1) and becoming only a junior partner for China or other Asian countries.

Positive outcome of its turn to the East could then come from sharing common interests and aims in redefying current norms with Asian powers in the regions, which are mainly focused on “an emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference” (Sussex, 2012, p. 3). This means that while China and India seek Russia for its extended natural resources, Russia could gain vulnerable overdependence over those countries by its diplomatic influence.

Sussex's subjective opinion on the future situation in Asia is that "Moscow's ability to actively shape the region is likely to be diminished as international attention focuses increasingly on the emerging US-China rivalry" (Sussex, 2012, p. 3). From this perspective, Sussex suggests that the best option for Russia is to maintain its importance in the Asia-Pacific region through organisations, such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This would allow Russia to stay in the region as an important actor and not to be "shut out of important roles in the region altogether, with neither economic nor military-strategic clout to use as leverage" (Sussex, 2012, p. 3). Through cooperation in Asian international organisations Russia could avoid its possible isolation.

Sussex's arguments discussing both opportunities and challenges for Russia, in its turn to Asia, contrast with clearly optimistic views by other authors, such as Dmitry Suslov (2016). He describes Russian aims as a way how to maintain its importance and dominance in the whole region from Europe to Asia-Pacific, and does not cover the current situation, when Russia is not one of the two world super-powers any more. Neither does he discuss Russian position among the world economies, for example, by World Bank's Gross Domestic Product Ranking from 2017 Russia is eleventh, even after geographically much smaller countries, such as Japan (3rd), Germany (4th), France (7th) or Italy (9th) (World Bank, 2019, online).

Despite these numbers, Suslov describes Russian aims in Eurasia as an intention to “expand the Greater Eurasian community with its EAEU partners, as well as China, India and Iran, by reaching out to ASEAN countries, and thereby creating a major Euro-Asian political and economic arc, one which spans from Belarus all the way to the border with Australia” (Suslov, 2016). In this perspective, Russia would like to create a zone throughout the whole Eurasian region, in which it would stay as a hegemonic power by maintaining its position in main international organisations of this regions, such as ASEAN or SCO. This stands out in an opposition to challenges highlighted by Sussex, who points out an important fact that Russia is not being accepted by Asian powers as an important actor, but mostly by an accessible source of natural resources.

Makarov in his ‘Povorot Na Vostok’ states similar arguments as Suslov and presents Russia as a country maintaining overall security in Asia, by claiming that “the region needs Russia, not vice versa, to stabilize the “geostrategic equilibrium” in the ongoing formation of a multipolar world” (Puzanova, 2016). This should be fulfilled by Russia providing resources “for rapidly growing Asian markets” and serving as “a buffer zone between its Asian partners in regional conflicts and territorial disputes” (Puzanova, 2016). As will be explained later, Russia can be considered to be actually ‘playing’ on all sides of conflicts in Asia, which would not be marginalising the conflicts, but on the other hand sharpening them. It is not clear why Russia is in fact supporting disputes between Asian countries, while claiming to be their solver, but a possible reason could be, in the correspondence to (neo)realist perspectives, trying to prevent possible partnership between these countries, so they would in the end turn to Russia while seeking an ally.

Sussex (2016) finds three main areas of opportunities for Russia in Asia. First area dwells in Russian energy resources and their strategic usage. In order to capitalise on that opportunity Russia needs a higher development in the infrastructure of Siberia, so future demand from Russian energy customers could be satisfied. According to Sussex, Moscow will have to make certain concessions to China, to ensure its steady stream of investments and interest in Russian energy resources.

Second option for Russian opportunities in Asia can be determined in its position as a regional security problems manager. Here, Sussex highlights the functions of the SCO, which has the role of disputes regulator in the Asia-Pacific region. Sussex says that the SCO “has largely been a vehicle for the mediation of Sino-Russian disputes rather than a traditional power-balancing instrument” (Sussex, 2012, p. 16). The main mean of maintaining relations in Asia by the SCO was emphasizing the sovereignty of all its nations, which Sussex describes as “the Asian model of multilateralism: less concerned with democratic processes than with outcomes; prepared to accept incrementalism over rapid change; and with a focus on pragmatic cooperation over principled positions on moral and ethical questions” (Sussex, 2012, p. 16).

Third possible opportunity is then found in the exercising of Russian leadership “in the redefinition of norms in the Asia-Pacific geopolitical space” (Sussex, 2012, p. 17). Russia would be in that sense an alternative power to the USA in the West, mainly for “the mediation of disputes, as well as a norm entrepreneur for a semi-authoritarian and semi-democratic politics” (Sussex, 2012, p. 17). This corresponds with the previous opportunity and seems to be a higher step in Russian influence among Asia-Pacific

organisations. In this sense, Russia would become a hegemon among Asian countries. Sussex says that Russia has already found accomplices for reaching this goal in India and China, although this stance could be questioned by the fact that China is becoming a stronger world power than Russia. In this sense, China's position as the main power of Asia could be discussed from two differing perspectives, either going against the opinion by Sussex, or even Suslov, that Russia is dominating Asia-Pacific region, or could become a hegemon of the area in the near future.

On the other hand, Sussex points out the challenges connected with named aims. Sussex explains that "Russian ability to shape the regional environment is likely to be significantly curtailed as the centrifugal pull of the PRC and the US" (Sussex, 2012, p. 17), which overshadows regional actors in Asia. Russia, considered as one of the regional actors, does not play as important role around the world in the recent years as it was used to during the twentieth century dominated by Cold War between Soviet Union and the United States. China is now at the second place of GDP only after the USA, while the gap between the second and third place is threefold, and Russia is not even in the top ten, placing eleventh.

Bobo Lo suggests that the best way for Russia to follow, if the country wishes to maintain its position in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide, is modernisation. He claims that this would set new priorities for Russia in post-Cold War world. Lo points out four possible ways of modernisation for Russia: "'Skolkovo' modernisation – focusing on small projects; sector modernisation; economic modernisation; or full modernisation in the western sense" (Lo, 2012, p. 6). Sector modernisation is suggested

for streamlining of the energy sector. In this situation, Russian economy would be still based mainly on natural resources. Lo points out the fact that “if the regime decides to modernise, it will be because they want Russia to be powerful” (Lo, 2012, p. 6), important especially in the situation when Russia could become marginalised due to the rise of China becoming second largest power next to the USA. On the other hand, Lo concludes that currently, Russia does not have an agenda for modernisation, as it is focusing on saving Russian economy damaged by its mismanagement and high dependence on foreign markets.

4. Russia's foreign policy, energy, security and military policy

4.1. Foreign policy, economy and the importance of the Far East region of Russia

Hans-Joachim Spanger highlights the bright side of the relationship between Russia and the Asia-Pacific region, mainly with China. He points out that while “the “strategic partnership” between Moscow and Brussels never moved beyond the pale declaratory, between Moscow and Beijing it has given rise to a truly preferential relationship” (Spanger, 2016, p. 4). The frequent mutual visits between Russian and Chinese sides are accompanied by signing of many mutual agreements, which show an intensifying future collaboration. An important part of the relationship is the Chinese stance towards the Ukraine crisis of 2014, which is a necessary step towards alignment with Moscow. Spanger claims that “Beijing kept silent to Russia's violation of the once upheld principle of state sovereignty” (Spanger, 2016, p. 4) and the political stance also happens vice versa. “Russia with respect to China's territorial ambitions in the East and South China Seas which also involve an equally close partner, Vietnam” (Spanger, 2016, p. 4). Spanger highlights that China at the same time had condemned the “Western sanctions – and back Russia in its efforts at damage limitation” (Spanger, 2016, p. 4). This could be a crucial part of Russia-China relationship, as their mutual trust could not work without supporting each other in claims over discussable territories: Ukraine and the East and South China Seas.

While Spanger suggests optimism in Russia-China relationships due to their mutual respect to territorial claims, he also points out an important fact, that from a historical and cultural perspective, in “many respects China is for Russia and for ordinary Russians terra incognita” (Spanger, 2016, p. 6). This corresponds with his argument that, while “Russia’s “Europeanism” has always been a matter of identity, Russia’s “Asianism” is just a pragmatic choice” (Spanger, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, Russia had always been trying to present itself as a European country, mainly due to its majority of the economy, population and capital geographically located in Europe. After Russia decided to turn to the Asia-Pacific region, it has begun presenting itself also as an Asian power. Russia can point to the geography, as the bigger part of its territory is situated in Asia, although it is the less populated part of Russia largely consisting of inhabited Siberian land. There are also Russian fears from the growing Chinese economy in the border region, which has begun showing higher asymmetry in the region between blossoming China and sparsely populated Russian areas.

Spanger highlights asymmetries between Russia and China not only in their growth and developments in Asia, but also in their economic affairs. According to him, one of them is “the gradually increasing gap in both Gross Domestic Products: Russia’s is just 22% of China’s” (Titarenko et al., 2015, p. 8 in Spanger, 2016, p. 7), which might lead to the main challenges into their relationship. Similar situation is in their dependency ration, when Spanger says that “Russia’s share of China’s foreign trade remains small, at just 1.76 per cent in 2009 and 2.15 per cent in 2013 – whereas China occupies the first place and its share is well above 10%” (Spanger, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, Russia remains dependent on Chinese market, while China has managed to

highly diversify its trade, which means that “the economic interdependence of the two countries remains extremely low” (Spanger, 2016, p. 7). After the applications of trade sanctions on Russia after the Ukraine crisis, Russia re-oriented itself towards the Asian markets, mainly the Chinese, while China is having more doors opened and has tried not to be dependent on one regions trade relations only.

These one-sided ties with China are also discussed by Andrej Kortunov, who argues that to overcome its economic problems, Russia needs to “modernize and diversify its economy, [and] increase its innovation potential”, otherwise, it would only export “raw materials, energy resources, military equipment and, in return, receive consumer goods, [and] car manufacturing products” (Zubacheva, 2015, online in Spanger, 2016, p. 10). Kortunov suggests higher amount of complex cooperation projects connected with economic restructuring with multilateral trade, and in addition Russia should re-develop its market mechanisms, as it is lacking mutual investments.

Under the circumstances of western sanctions against Russia as a reaction to Ukraine crisis, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced new economic goals on Economic Forum 2014. He announced the decision to purchase certain goods “for government and public purposes solely or preferably from Russian producers” (St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, 2014, online in Spanger, 2016, p 11), together with the establishment of a special fund directed to Russian industry and its development. According to Spanger, these announcements were meant to be a clear reaction to the sanctions, justified as the West trying to “prevented Russia from the “significant progress” and “notable results”” (Plenary session of the 19th St. Petersburg

International Economic Forum, 2015, online in Spanger, 2016, p. 11) Russia had according to Putin. However, the only sector that has showed any significant growth since that economic plan has been announced, has been agriculture.

Spanger also highlights the existence of many limitations of Russia's economic growth, such as its membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). According to Spanger, the membership in WTO "impairs the tariff instrument, the monetary policy by the Central Bank is not exactly geared towards exchange rate management and the sanctions pose problems with raising sufficient amounts of credit" (Spanger, 2016, p. 11). Similarly, it is again the limitation of Russian trade, as discussed earlier, which could cause delays in any economic growth in the future. Although Russia is aiming to deepen its trade with China, forty percent of its machinery is still coming from the EU member states, which can be hardly substituted. This is despite the decreasing imports following sanctions after the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Difficulties also arise from that "China has not really shown a propensity to share its technology with others, nor does it dispose of the appropriate technological potential or appears willing to seriously invest into the Russian economy" (Spanger, 2016, p. 12). Under these circumstances, it is very hard for Russia to re-orientate its trade to Asian markets only, who are not willing to open itself to Russia.

Silvana Malle and Julian Cooper also discuss policies formed under President Putin, directed to “the modernization of defence industry and the accelerated development of Siberia and, in particular, the Far East” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 21). They highlight the fact that beyond the Urals, there are main locations of important sections of the defence industry, which are trying to respond to the growing Chinese military and economic powers. Malle and Cooper argue, that to maintain its position in Asia, Russia should modernise its infrastructure “in order to boost trade opportunities eastward and to enhance and diversify industrial capabilities, a task in which the defence industry has a role to play” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 21). However, this strategy would need a certain degree of decentralisation, as the Far East is not easy to be managed from Moscow, which is laying thousands of kilometres away.

Malle and Cooper see a geopolitical dilemma between the centre and periphery as a crucial part in thinking of Russian foreign and economic policies and its possible future role in the Asia-Pacific region. They are arguing for a boost in mutual interactions between federal and regional institutions in Russia, in which mutual respect and support would “improve the ability to assess in an informed way opportunities and constraints for growth and better discriminate among alternative projects on the basis of their respective outturn, feasibility and cost” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 21). Malle and Cooper point out the fact that if Russia wants to be successful in Asia, it should begin with modernisation of the Far East regions, where the less developed areas of the country are located and which are closer ones to its Asian partners, such as China. Additionally, they also highlight that “while establishing nation-wide economic goals, federal government should be more receptive to local demands, while strengthening its

command over security issues” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 21), which would need a certain level of decentralisation from Moscow towards regional institutions.

Russia has been suffering from economic problems in the last decade, caused by the Western sanctions, economic crisis and heavy reliance on price movements in their main source of income - oil, Russia fell below the OECD members average. Sergei Karaganov warned that “if the current economic trends persist, it is very likely that Russia east of the Urals and later the whole country will turn into an appendage of China – first as a warehouse of resources, and then economically and politically” (Karaganov, 2011, online in Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 24). In this context, President Putin announced new guidelines for modernisation and economic development. Based on projected annual average GDP, the expected growth should have been according to these plans at least five to six percent, while the reality in 2012 was only 3.4% of GDP increase, followed by economic slowdown in the last six months of 2012 and in 2013.

Despite the circumstances of economic problems, Russia has decided to continue in modernisation in the Far East region, which has been assessed as a crucial decision. According to the number given by Malle and Cooper, “the total cost [including private investments] of the Development Programme for eastern regions according to MED’s estimates should be some 10 trillion roubles to 2025” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 32). However, this is hardly the same number as was decided for a modernisation of defence and military. Expectations were that the growth of the Far East region should overtake the whole-country’s income “from 15.8% in 2013 to 49.0% in 2018” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 33). However, this put even higher pressure on “fiscal balances already

strained by the economic slow-down” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 33). The development of the Far East region mainly needs modernisation and investments in infrastructure, on which the allocation of approximately eighty eight percent of federal spending should be directed towards. Due to the scope of modernisation and the size of the territory, Malle and Cooper point out that “only large-scale projects will qualify for subsidies and tax relief” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 33-34). The scope of the project covered in the package, announced during Medvedev era, were two federal programmes; one directed to Kuril Islands in Sakhalin region, as a project of socio-economic development until 2015; second project was then directed to the Baikal region in the Far East including plans for social and economic developments until 2018. However, both projects had issues caused by lack of coordination between the centre with the regions and no additional foreign investments.

The problems that occurred resonate with the theory of centre and periphery as presented by Malle and Cooper. As they argued, it is important to consider “the changing balance between the “core” and the “periphery” inside the country”, especially because in the region beyond the Urals, approximately sixty-eight to seventy-five percent of “exports either extracted or processed in this macro-region, provide 51 per cent of revenues to the federal budget through tax” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 37). From this perspective, Malle and Cooper suggest that the region of Far East in Siberia should have a stronger voice in the government for decision-making, as it has at least the same importance from the future perspective that the European part of Russia and Moscow. This is where calls for higher decentralisation has come from as well, which could focus mainly on the Siberian resources and its potential in technological

innovations, as well as in defence, energy and space sectors. Malle and Cooper suggest that “while basic infrastructure could, and should, remain under the control of central authorities, regional governments are better placed in principle to devise policies and institutions capable of improving the business environment” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 37).

The new agenda by president Putin, has described two priorities both connected with Siberia. Firstly, it is “the accelerated development of Siberia” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 21), secondly the agenda interconnected with the modernisation of the Far East, which is a region of two thirds of the whole Russian territory, while much of it is in decay. The increasing gap between opportunities in different parts of Russia could be solved by increasing its trade with Asian emerging markets.

4.1.1. Siberia:

A similar argument has been shared by Makarov, who has called the region “the locomotive of Russia’s economic-political growth”, possessing “amazing amounts of “natural wealth”” (Makarov, 2016 in Puzanova, 2016). Olga Puzanova points out that according to Makarov, this locomotive has already begun its movement, but “requires external stimuli in order to accelerate and reach its full potential” (Makarov, 2016 in Puzanova, 2016), which should be provided by the modernisation and development of the Far East Region. According to Makarov, if the development plans will be fulfilled, Russia could then become a resource base for the Asia-Pacific markets, mainly due to its energy and raw materials distribution potential. Additionally, Puzanova suggests that

Russia should not consider trading with only one large partner at a time, but has to diversify its customer base. Makarov argues that while “Russia’s resource-based cooperation with China is flourishing, there is an urgent need to continue working with other Asian partners, such as Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam” (Makarov, 2016 in Puzanova, 2016), although he prioritizes China as the main partner for Russia.

Spanger focuses on both limits and prospects of Siberia. He points out that Siberia has only a small population and consequently a small market. Additionally, transportation is a huge and an expensive problem due to the long distances and the maintenance of transport links in the perm frost conditions of the Far East region. Further, labour cost in Siberia are much higher than in its neighbouring countries. All the conditions together make this region highly unattractive for foreign investors. On the other hand, Spanger also highlights many comparative advantages of Siberia, such as “a unique resource endowment and in addition about sixteen percent of the world’s fresh water (excluding groundwater), about twenty one percent of the world’s forests, and in Siberia and the Far East twenty two percent of Russia’s arable land are located” (Spanger, 2016, p. 12). These advantages should be then taken into account in regards in development plans for the region, as they can attract new investments, which are in Siberia highly needs, if the region wants to increase its importance in Asia-Pacific region.

Malle and Cooper offer an original solution for the difficulties that Siberia has to face. The solution could solve the problem of centre versus periphery, causing difficulties in the modernisation of Russian Far East region. The idea Malle and Cooper propose is to create a second Russian capital for the East. It would be probably located in one of the three main cities: Vladivostok, Irkutsk or Khabarovsk. They present this as a parallel to Kazakhstan or Brazil, in which capitals have been moved to a newly created cities, Astana and Brasilia, while certain institutions remained in the former capitals, such as central banks. At the same time, they claim that this should not be a case of moving the currently existing capital city. It is not about “replacing Moscow, as a capital, for a distant far east city, but setting up a parallel government structure for the East” (Fenenko, 2012, online in Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 35). This could provide a more efficient government of the modernisation of the region, and also to reduce travel costs for the whole country, as traveling from one side to the other takes around ten hours by air travel. However, Malle and Cooper admit that this idea has a strong opposition in the current government, mainly due to the worries from possible separatism of the region.

Higher development of the region is also necessary for China to take Russia seriously. There have been complaints from the Chinese side, who is actively doing its part in preparations for connecting Siberia and China. As an example, Spanger (2016) highlights that the problem has been obvious with the building of a bridge across the Amur River. China has built its connections for the route, while Russia had not managed to build its part of 2.2km, promised in 2007 without progress even several years later. China claims the inactivity as a cause of “the still prevalent suspicion of

Chinese participation in the development of Siberia and the Far East [or the growing] Chinese capital or the influx of Chinese migrant workers” (Luzyanin and Huasheng, 2015, p. 16 in Spanger, 2016, p. 12-13).

Similarly, Puzanova also suggests that Russia should be more active in its logistical projects of the Asia-Pacific region and emphasizes “the necessity of including Siberia in Asia’s logistical map”. Together with this, Russia could also use opportunities of cooperation with Asian countries in the Arctic region. Puzanova claims that “Russia can become a strategically valuable partner for those Asian countries willing to participate in Arctic-related projects”. Moreover, Makarov highlights that Russia should use the opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region and not concentrate exclusively on gas and oil exports, as there is “considerable potential for cooperation in natural disaster prevention and mitigation in East Asia” (Puzanova, 2016), in which Russia should play an active role.

4.2. Energy – gas and oil

For the future plans of Russian energy export, Sussex argues that “Russia is poised to become a big player in Asian energy markets” (Sussex, 2015, online), although it has to encounter a problem of feasibility of the project. He claims that “Russia is planning to meet 100% of Asia’s increased demand by the same time, via its massive development of the Far East”, while at the same time “its \$400-billion deal with China starts deliveries in 2018” (Sussex, 2015, online). The huge energy export has begun with the pipelines planning, as China is expected to be importing more gas from Russia than, for example, Germany does at the moment. President Putin has changed his plans for pipelines in the direction of abandoning the South Stream and continuing only on the direction to Turkey, which would allow Russia to sell the same amount of gas to Europe via Greece, which is approximately 6.5 million tons of gas a year. This pipeline would also have the capacity to be rerouted to Asia, mainly India. Russia is also aiming to compete in coal exports with Australia. Sussex points out that although “over the next 20 years, the place of coal in China’s energy mix will go down, [it will] still represent over half its primary energy needs” (Sussex, 2015, online). He also claims that current Russia’s plans are to “quadruple coal output by 2030” (Sussex, 2015, online). To be able to meet these targets, Russia is building two new ports by the coast of Pacific Ocean solely for coal trade, which is expected to export about 40 million tons annually. Sussex also highlights a visible and interesting trend: although the coal market is flooded by Australian exporters, even with the “depreciation of the rouble, Russia’s share of Asia’s coal market has actually increased from 17% to 35%” (Sussex, 2015, online). In February 2019, Gazprom has announced that “construction of its gas pipeline

to China is 99 percent finished” (Russia Today, 2019, online) and deliveries to China should begin in December 2019. It should deliver thirty eight billion cubic meters of Russian gas to China per year. Picture below indicates planned and already finished gas pipelines in Russia.



(Picture 1; Russia Today, 2019, online)

Klein and Westphal, as well as, Sussex point to the fact that Asian market, mainly China, has been in higher demand for Russia’s gas exports in the recent years and that the supply has been increasing only after the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Until that time, Europe was Russia’s largest export market for gas production. However, interest in gas from Russia has gradually decreased in Europe after 2006 and 2009 Ukrainian gas crises regardless, when the “EU’s third internal energy market package” was implemented. At the same time, while “consumption in Europe is stagnating or falling”,

“demand for oil and gas is growing above all in the Asia-Pacific region” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3). Russia would have had to deal not only with the growing competition in the global market, but also within Europe. This is mainly due to fracking in the United States, which has “also considerably increased the global oil and gas supply” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3).

Klein and Westphal suggest a solution to this energy dilemma. They claim that “Russia needs to diversify its exports and become more flexible in its transport options and contract structures if it is to defend its export markets” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3). This corresponds with Russia’s “Energy Strategy 2030”, in which Russia has set a goal of “expanding sales to Asia, further concretised at the beginning of 2014: by 2025 oil and gas exports to Asia are to be doubled” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4). Klein and Westphal highlight that the steps and repeated alterations in their tax system, which began in 2013 are also part of the Russia’s turn to the East – “*povorot na vostok*”. The future cooperation is aimed to be done in a similar way as Russia tried to tighten its energy partnership with Western Europe in the end of the twentieth century. Currently, Klein and Westphal say that as a part of the pivot to Asia, it is clear that the “energy-rich Russia cooperates with energy-hungry China” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4).

Analogously to Klein and Westphal, Spanger also emphasises the Russian policy of developing its relations with Asia in the gas supplies market. The gas export expand to the Far East and Baikal regions, will be one of the federal targets of Russian government. In 2013, new policy of “Directions of development in Russia” was announced aiming economic growth for the next decades. Five main directions were set

up as follows: “development and modernization of transport infrastructure; mining and processing of mineral resources; power generation; processing of biological and natural resources; [and] development of high-tech industries” (Garusova, 2015 in Spanger, 2016, p. 6).

Similarly, Spanger presents other mutual agreements between Russia and China: “On 10 November 2014 Moscow and Beijing signed one more memorandum about the proposed gas supplies along the “Western Corridor” which would connect fields in Western Siberia supplying Europe and a pipeline through the Altai Mountains with China” (Spanger, 2016, p. 5). This should allow the possibility of switching between Western and Eastern customers and it would be the “first project in Gazprom’s once avowed aim to transform the “European” gas market into a “Eurasian” market” (Spanger, 2016, p. 5).

On the other hand, Gazprom’s plans are encountering difficulties as “Russia’s means for implementing the turn to China while guarding its strategic interests are shrinking” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4) and therefore Gazprom has to deal with a dilemma of markets. Klein and Westpahl explain that Russia’s “gas fields in the East are still in the development phase and lack treatment facilities to supply gas in the required dry quality via the Power of Siberia pipeline” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4). However, supply of 38 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year was promised to China as a target for the end of 2017 and for the following thirty years. Gazprom is dealing with insufficient development of the gas routes in Siberia, while “the company finds itself confronted with a potential gas surplus in Western Siberia, where it has

developed fields for the European market whose gas is now no longer required” Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4). Klein and Westphal suggest a suitable solution in the form of the development of the West route allowing more flexible exports. On the other hand, they also admit that this route would only end “end in the province of Xinjiang, far from the centres of consumption – just where the pipeline from Central Asia ends too” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 4). Klein and Westphal conclude that an asymmetry in the relationship between Russia and China is clearly visible, as well as only partially compatible mutual interests.

Similarly, Spanger is also sceptical about the feasibility of the project of the main gas supply for China. He claims that “it has not performed its main function of making the region attractive for businesses as well as for the people” (Titarenko, 2015, p. 19 in Spanger 2016, p. 6) so far. Another problem is that “such a large share of oil and gas exports to China makes Russian deliveries dependent on Chinese resource policy and it has been argued that China by addressing Russia is just seeking to minimize its risks in the field of energy imports” (Valdai Discussion Club, 2012, p. 64 in Spanger 2016, p. 9). Asymmetry between Russia and China can be also found by Spanger’s research who argues that, while Russia is turning its energy supply to Asia, mainly to China, “oil and gas imports from Russia make up just 6% and 4% respectively of all Chinese supplies of these two energy carriers” (Valdai Discussion Club, 2012, p. 64 in Spanger 2016, p. 9). From this perspective, Spanger states that any fixation on gas and oil pipelines for China exclusively should be avoided, as it is not a strong trade partnership, on which Russia could attain a dominatingly dependent position. In contrast, Spanger suggests that the best solution would be to position these pipelines to

“the ports of the Far East and from there on to the markets in the Pacific and Indian oceans” (Valdai Discussion Club, 2012, p. 64 in Spanger 2016, p. 9), where Russia would be able to find additional potential customers for its energy supply. According to Spanger, this would avoid the same mistake as building all of its main pipelines to the West during the Soviet era. Spanger concludes that the expansion in mutual trade can only be reached in the situation when Russia would be exporting its commodities, while China would be importing its machinery. Otherwise, Spanger claims that “Russia might become a mere resource appendix of China” (Luzyanin and huasheng, 2015, p. 15 & 21 in Spanger, 2016, p. 10).

A similar situation is also regarded with the exportation of oil. Malle and Cooper claim that “with the prospect of an expanding trade in oil with China and other Asian countries, the Far East is a natural location for new capacity to meet the energy sector’s demands” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 31). The longest oil pipeline has been built for these prospects as well: The Eastern Siberia Pacific Ocean pipeline (ESPO) has a capacity of one million barrels per day. Due to that, Russia’s oil exports to China have more than doubled between 2010 and 2014. With almost 30 million tonnes in 2014, “China accounts for a good 13 percent of Russia’s crude oil exports” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 5). Klein and Westphal highlight other areas of higher cooperation between Russia and China beginning since the Ukraine crisis as well, for example in the form of civil nuclear technology. However, they admit that Russia and China are simultaneously competitors in the market. Klein and Westphal conclude that the freezing of the relations between Russia and the European Union has led to Russia diverting “increasing amounts of eastern Siberian high-quality light crude from towards

Asia to meet its pledges on volume and quality” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 7), as well as narrowing the market access and capitalisation of Russian and Chinese markets due to decrease in trade with the West. From this perspective, in addition to the economic, there will also be political consequences of the Russia’s turn to the East.

4.3. Security and military policy

According to Ian Storey, restoring the status of a great world power is a key part of Russia's President Putin's ambition. One of the components is also revitalization of Russian armed forces, which once were "among the most powerful in the world but which quickly atrophied following the end of the Cold War" (Storey, 2015, p. 5). Modernisation programme of Russian military was announced in 2010 with a budget of \$650 billion for ten years. As per Storey (2015), the defence budget doubled between 2010 and 2014 from \$58.7 billion to \$84.5 billion, mainly thanks to the economy boost by rising oil prices. The increasing budget helped Russia back to the top three countries with the largest military spending, just after the United States and China. Military is also one of the main domain of the relations in the Asia-Pacific region, also influenced by Chinese aims in the South China Sea. Many other countries, such as Vietnam, do not wish the region to be dominated by an even larger inequality of powers and have apprehensions when China tries to strengthen its defence ties with Russia.

Similarly, military cooperation is an important factor of the relations in the Asia-Pacific region in the work by Spanger. He points towards the intensification of military cooperation in the region in the recent years, which on many occasions have taken place, such as "the "Naval Interaction 2014", the largest ever Russian-Chinese military naval exercise (May 2014), as well as the "Peace Mission 2014" military exercises (August 2014), and the "Sea Cooperation 2015" naval exercises well beyond the Chinese-Russian theatre in the Mediterranean (May 2015)" (Titarenko, 2015, p. 4 in Spanger, 2016, p. 6). On the other hand, Spanger also suggests that military cooperation

between Russia and China declined since the end of the Cold War, when it used to be one of the basis of its mutual trade. Similarly, he also highlights Russian concerns about the “Chinese propensity to copy Russian equipment” (Gabuev, 2015, online in Spanger, 2016, p. 6). This suggests that there is a lack of significant mutual trust between Russia and China, an important element of their relationship as potential partners. If the countries keep seeing each other as a possible threat simultaneously, it is difficult to deepen any relations.

Malle and Cooper, similarly to Storey, also discuss Russia’s spending on defence and modernisation of military. They argue that “spending on the budget chapter ‘national defence’ has risen from 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2006–2008 to 2.9 per cent in 2012” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 29) and projected the estimated rise of the defence budget to 3.8 percent between 2015 and 2016. Malle and Cooper highlight the fact that military modernisation is one of Russian government’s priority and there would not be any decrease in the budget on defence unless the country would be struggling under major economic crises. The upkeep of high spending budget for the military is mainly caused by the growing competing military potential of the neighbouring countries in Asia and consequently Russia aims to not let go of its position as a considerable global military force. Malle and cooper explain that Russia’s main concern is to “safeguard the contested sovereignty of the Kuril Islands”, for which Russia is trying to maintain “a strong military presence beyond the Urals” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 29).

In connection to the maintenance of Kuril Islands, Sussex also highlights the importance of Russian navy in the area of Sea of Okhotsk. Sussex claims that “Russia’s pivot to Asia is resulting in a large-scale revamp of its Pacific Fleet” (Sussex, 2015, online), which should turn into its biggest naval asset. According to Sussex, “the fleet is getting new ballistic-missile submarines, attack submarines and surface combatants” (Sussex, 2015, online) with an overall cost of \$600 billion. He also argues that Russia is trying to manifest its strength and presence in the Asia-Pacific region by sending its ships to the Indian and Pacific Oceans on a regular basis.

In the security questions, Margarete Klein and Kirsten Westphal (2016) explain the dual strategy applied by Russia towards Beijing. According to them, “its first pillar is formed by engagement such as military/political dialogue, joint exercises and armaments cooperation designed to improve mutual trust and transparency and facilitate a joint threat response” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). This is mainly important in the regard to Spanger’s claims suggesting that mutual trust between Russia and China is on a low level, so any improvement would push these countries forward to a possible higher cooperation in the future. Klein and Westphal highlight similarities between Russia and China regarding their geographical neighbours, causing a possible threat to both countries. For example, the situation of “spill over effects from the Central Asian neighbourhood, including Islamist extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking, but also by the United States’ superior military capabilities” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). Under these circumstances, cooperation between Russia and China could benefit both in strengthening their positions against these potential threats.

At the same time, Klein and Westphal also point out that it is not just the outside threats Russia and China have to deal with, but also domestic conflicts. The countries also have had to “share concerns about “colour revolutions”, which they both regard as Western-inspired insurrection seeking regime change” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). This has also been the case of Russia’s interfering in Crimea in 2014. Additionally, Russia has been afraid of China’s growth in the last decade, as Moscow is not sure what the future intentions of China could be. Therefore, it is logical that any deeper cooperation and trust between the two countries cannot evolve and no stable common foreign policy in which they would follow the exact same agreements could be formed. Klein and Westphal also highlight that since the Soviet Union fell apart after the end of the Cold War, Russia has not regained its status as one of the two main world superpowers. Consequently “the power relationship between China and Russia has reversed, to the latter’s detriment”, which can be confirmed for example by their economic state: “today China’s GDP is more than four times Russia’s” and similarly “Beijing’s \$129 billion defence budget for 2014 was almost double Russia’s [with “only”] \$70 billion” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). In 2017, China’s GDP was 12.2 trillion US dollars, while Russia’s only 1.6 trillion US dollars (Trading Economics, 2019, online).

This is where the second pillar of Russia’s dual strategy towards China comes from. As per Klein and Westphal, it is to “foster indirect balancing against China” including “preserving its defensive capability towards China by modernising its nuclear arsenal and expanding its strategic air defences in the East” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). Nuclear industry is also emphasised by Malle and Cooper, who claim that the

nuclear industry in Siberia is much larger than in the Far East. They state that “the nuclear industry is strongly represented in a number of regions with major facilities of the nuclear fuel cycle in the closed cities (ZATO) of Zheleznogorsk (formerly Krasnoyarsk-26) and Seversk (formerly Tomsk-7)” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 32), which were formerly part of the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapon programme. Similarly, nuclear organisations can be found across Siberia: two important organisations in Novosibirsk, the missile-space industry in Krasnoyarsk, which used to be “in Soviet times the leading producer of strategic nuclear missiles for submarines” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 32). Malle and Cooper conclude that from their point of view, “it is clear that the leadership of the Russian state will continue to favour military modernization” (Malle and Cooper, 2014, p. 32).

According to Klein and Westphal, another significant part of the second pillar of Moscow’s dual strategy towards Beijing is Russia trying to restrain China in two aspects. Firstly, Russia “supplies modern weapons systems to countries that are China’s rivals” or involved in territorial conflicts, such as India and Vietnam, and secondly, “it avoids supplying China with the very latest Russian weapons systems” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2). This statement is clearly showing an impaired relationship between Russia and China. Under the circumstances of Russia trying to weaken China by strengthening its opponents by supply of the very latest technologies and military equipment, and at the same time, keeping the same facility from China’s reach, no strong and good relationships between Moscow and Beijing can arise and blossom. On one hand Russia’s activity in the Asia-Pacific region, especially its more frequent relations with China point towards the confirmation of Russia’s pivot to the East,

especially its turn to China. On the other hand, its mutual behaviour does not suggest any special interest and possible prospect of deepening mutual relationships. In this context, it seems that Russia still sees China as a rival, not as a partner.

As stated previously, Russia and China keep contact in military exercises. Klein and Westphal point out for example naval joint naval exercise in 2015 “in the Mediterranean (May) and the Sea of Japan (August)” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2), as well as the common practice of “an amphibious landing” by Russian and Chinese marines during the same month. Although Russia and China have joined their soldiers for training together from 2014, Klein and Westphal admit that they are “naturally still a long way from being able to conduct a major integrated operation”. On the other hand, Russia and China are “expanding their ability to conduct joint military operations in local and regional conflicts, especially in the Central Asian neighbourhood” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2).

Additionally, Russia and China are deepening their cooperation in information security as well. In the framework agreement from April 2015, they “promise to refrain from cyber-attacks on one another and to take joint action against “technologies” that endanger the “security and stability” of the state or seek to “destabilise the socio-economic situation” internally (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 2-3). One of the reasons for this is again the prevention of “colour revolution”. The cyber security collaboration makes the union a considerable force in the century when mass information has become an important part of warfare.

Even though Russia is trying not to supply China with the very latest military equipment, there was a deal signed in April 2015 to “supply S-400 anti-aircraft systems” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3). Klein and Westphal are pointing towards an important fact about this supply: “if the S-400 version with a range of four hundred kilometres is supplied, this would enable China not only to penetrate Taiwanese airspace, but also to operate over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are contested between Japan and China” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3). This is an important fact from the geopolitical perspective for stability of the Asia-Pacific region, which could be significantly shaken by this delivery. At the same time, it is going against Russia’s own “hitherto neutral position in territorial conflicts in the South and East China Seas” (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 3). Russia has aimed to appreciate the potential trade deals over its neutrality and maintaining peaceful relationship in Asia-Pacific region. From this perspective, Russia seems to be only using this region as a potential source of trade deals, but does not actually has as strong relationships with the region to try to maintain status quo in the region. The aforementioned argument suggests that the pivot to Asia might only be a temporary state in the sense of Western countries turning away from Russia after the Crimea crisis than actual new long-term direction aiming to build strong relationship in the region.

5. Situation in the Asia-pacific region

When researching Russia's pivot to the East, China should not be the only country discussed, but other possible partners for Russia in the Asia-Pacific region have to be examined as well. Dmitry Suslov says that "as the confrontation between Western and Non-Western powers for the right to define the future world order enters its decisive stage, Russia is becoming increasingly interested in stepping up its cooperation with other APR countries" (Suslov, 2016, online). He claims that Russia is trying to prevent polarization of the Asia-Pacific region by trying to strengthen its "ties with other regional powers, including US allies, while also expanding relations with China" (Suslov, 2016, online). This should make modernisations and development of Siberia and the Far East region more possible, by increasing its economic growth by expanding into multiple Asia-Pacific markets. At the same time, by increased relationships with multiple Asian countries than solely China, Russia should prevent itself of becoming China's junior partner in the region.

The goal of Russian farther reach should be maintained also by attaching other Asia-Pacific region countries to development projects in Siberia and the Far East region. Suslov (2016) claims that at the same time, including other Asian countries would suit with interest of those countries, who do not wish to see China having a monopoly on those Siberian projects and becoming a hegemon in Asia. Some of the countries Russia has been developing relations with are Japan, South Korea, India and Vietnam. On the other hand, in reality, Suslov admits that relations with most of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries has remained mostly underdeveloped and the only closer ties made are those with Vietnam. The ties to

Vietnam have also a historic background, as Vietnam used to be associated to the Soviet Union during the twentieth century as both were communist countries. Deeper cooperation with ASEAN countries would offer Russia new opportunities in trade, mainly increasing demand for its energy and raw material export.

In addition to Suslov, Natalia V. Kuznetsova, Ekaterina V. Kocheva and Nikolay A. Matev (2016) also claim that Russia has been expanding its trade partnership among Asia-Pacific countries, such as Japan of South Korea. They point out that the share of Russian exports to these countries was “in 2014 amounted to 82.1% of Russia’s exports to Asia-pacific countries” (Kuznetsova et al., 2016, p. 738) and the share of imports from them to Russia was around 83.7%. They conclude that “the Russian Far East and the Asia-Pacific countries certainly have a considerable potential to increase mutual trade flows and their further integration” (Kuznetsova et al., 2016, p. 743). This integration should reduce the costs of the expansion of export and mainly decrease transaction costs between Asia-Pacific region countries, allowing further development beneficial also for Siberia and the Far East region in Russia.

Similarly, Stephen Blank also finds the importance of Russian activity in the Asia-Pacific region for promoting its status of “a great, independent, sovereign, Asian power or power in Asia” (Blank, 2015 in Blank, 2017, p. 4). This would be beneficial for creating multilateral relations among Asian countries, their governments and international organisations. Blank claims that this should “validate Moscow’s long-standing contention of being an indispensable pole of a multipolar world that must be

consulted on all major issues in world politics” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Russia), 2016, online in Blank, 2017, p. 4).

While many authors find Russia’s turn to the Asia-Pacific region as a positive step in expanding its market and develop its Far East region, Michał Lubina (2016) claims that “Russia remains a European country in her mental and axiological approach”, although “the world’s most important events are already taking place in Pacific and Indian Oceans” (Lukyanov, 2013, online in Lubina, 2016, p. 168). In this sense, he finds the most challenging for Russia to be finding its own identity and the consciousness of belonging to a certain geographical area. Lubina highlights the fact that “Russians, as inhabitants of a European country, have traditionally orientated themselves to the West and see the world through a Western prism” (Lukyanov, 2013, online in Lubina, 2016, p. 168), which is corresponding to its orientation throughout the previous centuries.

There has been a long debate on whether Russia is a European or an Asian country, deriving from its geographical location in which most of its area is located in the Asian continent, while most of its population and its capital are located in the European part. According to Lubina (2016), Russian mentality still remains in Europe, although it should orient more to the East, so it would not miss out on opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. This argument contrasts with the dominant perception of Russia’s re-orientation to the East, or possibly could be explained that although Russia is culturally staying in Europe, it is also trying to gain economic and strategic opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. However, this would suggest that creating any

deeper partnerships with Asian countries would be hardly possible due to the cultural differences and Russia might prioritize opportunities in Europe over those in Asia, if they come.

This stance corresponds with conclusions stated by Sussex (2012). Although, he argues, Russia and China are now claimed to be the natural allies and there are arguments made also by President Putin claiming that “the two nations had settled all their major political grievances and embarked on a genuinely pragmatic relationship characterised by unprecedented levels of trust” (Putin, 2012 in Sussex, 2012, p. 2). Regardless, Sussex similarly to Lubina points out the cultural differences with the Asian countries, which may become obstacles on the way to a deeper partnership. Even President Putin’s has supported a similar argument, suggesting that Russia is “an ‘inalienable and organic’ part of European civilisation” (Putin, 2012 in Sussex, 2012, p. 2), but Asia is now in its perspective for its possible economic benefits. Sussex points out that Putin makes clear statements of the Asia-Pacific region being “the engine room of globalisation” (Putin, 2012 in Sussex, 2012, p. 2), giving Russia particular interest in the area. This suggests that Russia is predominantly interested in deals with Asia for its own economical and strategical utility, but there is not any other main interest.

5.1.India

One of the potential Russian partners in the Asia-Pacific region next to China could be India. Justin Logan is highlighting the fact that similarly to China, “India is undergoing rapid economic development, possesses a favourable demographic profile, and is likely to play an increasingly prominent role in regional and global politics” (Logan, 2013, p. 2). The growing population creates a greater role to India in security. Logan states that “by 2030 there will be roughly 100 million young men with at least a high school education in India, compared to only 75 million such people in China” (Eberstadt, 2011 in Logan, 2013, p. 19).

Another important element of the possible partnership between Russia and India is the relationship between India and China. Sussex highlights that both India and China “identify each other as threats to their security” (Sussex, 2012, p. 5). Similarly, Logan points out provocations between both countries mainly over the South China Sea, which is an area of India’s significant interest. China is regarded as a potential threat in this area for the Philippines, Vietnam and Japan as well, who are located next to this region. The main geopolitical concern for China is in the South China Sea, which is its only access to the Ocean, which gives her a naval disadvantage over the others.

While there are conflicting interest between India and China, Lubina (2016) claims that there is nothing like that between India and Russia. India used to be Russia’s strategic partner for a long time and now they both see China in a similar perspective:

growing China and its power is a threat for others in the Asia-Pacific region. For more, India and Russia also cooperate in military trade. Lubina states that “India accounts for around 30 % of total Russian arms exports, and one of the very few ones whom Russia sells the most advanced military technology and a broad range of weapons too” (Rodkiewicz, 2014 in Lubina, 2016, p. 168).

Sussex (2012) also claims that there are strong security ties between Russia and India, as approximately seventy percent of hardware imported to India comes from Russia. This gives a higher potential to India as a possible partner for Russia, although collaboration with India has not been as widely discussed as Russia’s turn to China. This might be deriving from another important fact Lubina (2016) points out: mutual relationship between Russia and India is not the most important one for either of the countries. He highlights the fact that “for India, Russia is a useful tool, though one of secondary importance” (Lubina, 2016, p. 169). India values more its connections to the United States – and for maintaining those, “the Indian government cannot move too close to Russia” (Lubina, 2016, p. 169).

5.2. Japan

Japan is another country necessary to take into account, mainly for its importance as one of the world powers. Logan (2013) suggests that their growing power is significant for the whole Asia-Pacific region. Lubina states that Japan has always been “Russia’s key to the real game in Asia-Pacific” region, mainly due to its well-established image of “the ‘Good East’ - an East at once politically sophisticated, economically prosperous, technologically ambitious and strategically unthreatening” (Lo, 2008, p. 121 in Lubina, 2016, p. 169). At the same time, there would be a main challenge to this possible partnership: “the unresolved territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands” (Lubina, 2016, p. 169). However, Japan remains one of the dominant Asian investors in Russia, which could support modernisation and development of Siberia and the Far East region of Russia. The main obstacle, which has appeared in the relationship between Russia and Japan, are the Western sanctions applied on Russia after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, in which Japan took part in. It seems like there are more obstacles in the possible Russia-Japan relationship than there are opportunities in becoming partners, with the dispute over Kuril Islands, which would have to be resolved firstly before any proper partnership could happen. Consequently, Japan does not look likely to become Russia’s main partner in the close future.

In a similar rhetoric, Sussex (2012) calls political atmosphere between Japan and China poisonous coming from their common geopolitical rivalry and historical memory of unresolved issue from the Second World War. Although they are trading partners, similarly as with Russia, Japan has an unresolved dispute with China over Senkaku

Islands in the East China Sea. From this perspective, Japan does not seem to be a suitable partner for Russia, if Russia wants to maintain good relationships with China.

Dmitry Trenin (2015) also points out China's scepticism to a possible partnership between Russia and Japan. He claims that "the Chinese viewed Russo-Japanese relations apprehensively, fearing that Putin could become the first Russian leader to successfully normalize political relations with Japan" (Trenin, 2015), which would put all three countries into a difficult situation due to mutual disputes over islands in the East China Sea. For this reason, China was pleased by complications in the relations between Russia and Japan because of the US-led sanctions on Russia followed by Tokyo. This meant for China that they could get Russia on their side in the territorial disputes. Trenin confirms that when stating that "in the case of a Sino-Japanese clash over the Senkaku Islands (known as the Diaoyu Islands in China), Russia will keep its formal neutrality, [although] in the future this neutrality may be more sympathetic to Beijing" (Trenin, 2015). From this perspective, under the sanctions of Russia and unresolved territorial disputes over Kuril Island, it does not seem likely that there would be any strengthening in the relationship between Russia and Japan in the close future.

5.3. Korea(s)

Blank (2017) claims that Russia has always been trying to connect Siberia and Korean Peninsula, especially their railway routes. After aiming a connection with trans-Korean railway, in the recent years Russia “proposed a trans-Korean gas pipeline to provide energy to North and South Korea, supplant Pyongyang’s need for nuclear energy, and facilitate regional peace” (Blank, 2002 in Blank, 2017, p. 19). Blank states that Russia’s goal is to become “a major energy provider to North Korea and a major supplier to South Korea” (Blank, 2017, p. 19), by which it could take part on influencing their political and economic relations and trying to maintain the stability between both Koreas.

Lubina (2016) describes the Russian approach towards the Korean Peninsula similarly. He suggests that Moscow hopes for a “concert of Asia – a 21st century equivalent of 19th century’s concert of powers in Europe” (Lo, 2008, p. 123 in Lubina, 2016, p. 169). Trenin argues that Russia has a common interest on Korean Peninsula with China, who would like to work there “in parallel but not in lockstep” (Trenin, 2015). He explains that there is an idea favourable by the People’s Liberation Army of creating a “northern triangle of China, Russia, and North Korea opposing the southern triangle of the United States, Japan, and South Korea” (Trenin, 2015). This is described in an European parallel of the situation between the Warsaw Pact and NATO during the Cold War.

Lubina (2016) further suggests that Russia's possible choice of North Korea over South Korea derives from the unsuccessful tries on building closer ties with South Korea, which prefers its partnership with the USA over Russia. Further, he claims that "South Korea is not particularly willing to invest in the Russian Far East and the future of Russian proposed inter-Korean projects" (Lubina, 2016, p. 169-170), such as railways and pipelines mentioned. However, Lubina does not predict any significant cooperation between Russia and North Korea either. Trenin (2015) adds that Chinese interest in Korean Peninsula is higher than the one of Russia, and "in a crisis between North Korea and South Korea or within North Korea, (...) China and Russia would coordinate their policies, and Moscow would likely defer to Beijing" (Trenin, 2015). From this perspective, neither Koreas seem to become any major Russian partner in the Asia-Pacific region.

5.4. Vietnam

Sussex claims that Russia currently has “a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ with Vietnam” (Sussex, 2015, online) and has entered into free trade agreements with Hanoi. This contrasts with the opinion of Lubina (2016), who finds the cooperation between Russia and Vietnam only exists in the form of weapon trade. He explains the argumentation to be similar with the reasons that are causing obstacles between Russia and Japan or South Korea. Lubina claims that “Vietnam, having had strained relations with China over disputed islands, looks to the US more, and correctly so, given the fact that Russia cannot support Vietnam without risking damaging relations with China” (Lubina, 2016, p. 170).

Many authors find Vietnam to be an important trade partner of Russia. For example, Sputnik International, claims that “Russia plays a very important role in business with the ASEAN countries in general and with Vietnam in particular” (Sputnik International, 2016, online), mainly in the coal imports. Similarly, Ian Storey (2015) suggests that after the increase of tensions in the South China Sea between 2007 and 2008, Vietnam has begun the modernisation of its navy, air and other armed forces, while around ninety percent of this equipment has come from Russia. Storey explains that “Russian weaponry has provided Vietnam with a limited but potent deterrent against China, that could inflict serious damage on the Chinese navy should conflict break out in the South China Sea” (Storey, 2015, p. 7). This is an interesting point and if Russia would continue in supplying Vietnam with weapons, which potentially could be used against China, it would damage the current relations between Russia and China.

Therefore, any deeper partnership with Vietnam would not be appropriate from this perspective. Further, Trenin (2015) suggests that Russia considers Vietnam only as a middle power on its way to the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. Taking this into account, it does not seem to be likely that Russia would regard Vietnam as its primary ally.

5.5. Others

In addition to the large Asian powers, such as Japan or India, Russia is cooperating at least at a certain level also with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Among those, for example is Thailand. Sputnik International suggests that Thailand could “serve as a hub for Russia and a foothold for deeper advance into the area” (Sputnik International, 2016, online) at a time of an expanding market between Russia and the region of Eastern Asia. Furthermore, Thailand could benefit from this cooperation, as it would “get access to Russia’s satellite, electronic or information technologies and mechanical engineering expertise” (Sputnik International, 2016, online) in exchange. Further, Sputnik International claims that Thailand could potentially also be interested in taking part in the infrastructural projects in Siberia.

Lubina (2016) agrees that there are other countries Russia would be able to cooperate with, although no significant results have come of those relations as of yet. This applies to an example of Burma (Myanmar), to which Russia sells weaponry as well, and similarly to Thailand, this could potentially damage Chinese interest in the South China Sea. Lubina explains that “Burma, like Russia, is a big energy exporter, and although the Burmese government is interested in balancing Chinese influence, the Burmese elites turn towards the US” (Lubina, 2016, p. 170). From this position, Burma does not have its main interests in collaborating with Russia, but rather aiming to manoeuvre its place between the USA and China.

In a similar way, other Asian countries are also reserved in their relations with Russia, with the aim not to damage their good relationship with the USA. Examples of those could be Singapore and Taiwan. Trenin (2015) explains that relations between Russia and Taiwan are especially complicated, coming from Moscow's consistent support of China's position on Taiwan, which was even amplified after the 2014 Crimea crisis. Taiwan has kept strictly non-political relations with Russia similarly to Kazakhstan, who has been reserved as well. This reaction has emerged after the crisis in Ukraine, which slowed down Russia's ambitions for a creation of Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) together with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. From this perspective, none of the smaller Asian powers seems likely to establish any deeper partnership with Russia at the moment.

6. Russian foreign policy, China as a possible partner and the future – discussion

Klein and Westphal (2016) explain that Russia's turn to the East is not merely a new foreign policy of a symbolical meaning, but the relationship between Russia and China has significantly grown in intensity over the last years. They claim that "China has become the country outside the post-Soviet space with which Russia maintains its closest military relations" (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 5). This can be visible by the intensification in their mutual military exercise activities, which should ensure successful joint military actions in the Asia-Pacific region. Similar collaborations can be found in the cybersecurity co-operations as well. However, the authors note that by analysing the bilateral relations through the geopolitical situation, the interactions with China are not very constant. Russia has been proven of supporting military actions of India and Vietnam in the South China Sea, where these countries have unresolved disputes with China. Although Russia is claiming to be neutral in these disputes, it is supporting China's opponents with military equipment and technology from Russia, which are concealed from China. This suggests that some distrust still exists between China and Russia and a possibility of an actual physical joint military action between the two countries is not probable. Klein and Westphal state, that "neither side is seriously interested in such a move, which would restrict their own freedom of action" (Klein and Westphal, 2016, p. 5).

Geopolitical challenges for Russia in the Asia-Pacific region are confirmed by Spanger (2016). He points out that while Russia can orientate with experience and confidence in relation to European politics, the situation is different in Asia, where “Russia is operating in a true minefield of competing territorial claims, historical animosities and shifting alliances” (Spanger, 2016, p. 13). Even though Russia has been exposed to an uneasy situation by the Western trade sanctions, the situation may be even more difficult for Russia in Asia if forced to take sides in disputes, in which China is highly involved. Spanger also suggests a tense triangle between Russia, China and India as well as “the even more strained relations between China and Vietnam, the latter not only once the subject of a Chinese military incursion but also engaged in a bitter struggle over the Spratly islands in the South China Sea” (Spanger, 2016, p. 13). Spanger points out similar problems of interest with Japan, as Russia still has unresolved dispute over the ‘Northern Territories’ of Kurile Islands. Moreover, Spanger claims that relations between Japan and China have been slowly deteriorating, which complicates the overall situation in the area even further.

Previous parts of the work presented the intensified cooperation between Russia and the Asia-Pacific region countries in the recent years confirming the frequently discussed Russia’s turn to the East or ‘povorot na vostok’. However, examination of many possible partner countries for Russia in Asia brought various results. There are many unresolved disputes over certain territories in the Asia-Pacific region, mainly in the South and East China Sea. There is a dispute over Senkaku Islands between China and Japan complicating the relationships of both the countries with Russia. As aforementioned, Russia has unresolved issues from the Second World War with Japan

over Kuril Islands and similar territorial aims in the South China Sea of China, India and Vietnam. All of these unresolved conflicts bring tensions with everyone's relationship with Russia, who on one hand claims increasing cooperation and relations with China, while at the same indirectly supports India and Vietnam by deliveries of military equipment.

Despite all these challenges Russia has to deal with, the academic literature highlights its relations with China to be the most flourishing. This view is argued by Dmitry Trenin (2015), who claims that in recent years, under the changing global and regional context of the Asia-Pacific region, Russia is now prioritizing cooperation with China more than ever before. He also points out the geopolitical specificity of the Russia-China relationship. Trenin highlights the fact that it is “a rare case of two neighbouring great powers improving their relations and then keeping them on an even keel, despite the fact that one has risen in importance while the other has gone through a difficult and painful post-imperial adjustment” (Trenin, 2015). However, as it was previously argued, that Russia is not comfortable with the image of becoming junior partner to a stronger China, which could bring a weaker position to building of tighter relationship between them. Moreover, this is not the only complication in the future tighter relationship. Bobo Lo (2012) further points out that it is also the matter of different cultural backgrounds of the two countries. He claims that “Putin is not very interested in China, he's a Europhile” (Lo, 2012, p. 6). This means that Russia still has its main interests in the West and would take any opportunity of possible cooperation with that side over China or other Asia countries.

At the same time, Spanger suggests an interesting point from the geopolitical perspective: “Russia shares a land border with China of over 4,200 km which incidentally is the largest border with a major power and arguably the most peaceful in Russian history – as opposed to the borders with Europe or with Turkey” (Spanger, 2016, p. 2). The geographical intricacies suggest a higher compulsory cooperation with China over other countries. However, the border is mainly in the Far East region of Russia, which is still lagging in the process of development and modernisation. Several reasons are causing the lesser progress, but the density of population is relatively low in that Russian area and infrastructure has suffered consequently. Additionally, China is dominantly separated from Russia by an extensive territory of Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

One of the main arguments for the prospects of Russia-China relationship is the increase of the Chinese economy, which from Russian perspective would give the relationship a potential of future power and financial advantages. Sussex (2015) claims that the twenty-first century is going to be the century of Asia, but the main question is how Russia is going to react to the fact China has surpassed it. Thus far, Russia and China have strengthened ties in many dimensions: energy, military security, trade, investments and institutional engagement.

The importance of China for the Asia-Pacific region is also highlighted by Dmitry Suslov, who claims that China has become a significant influence on Asian and global economy and has reached a status of “the main strategic opponent of the US and a central non-Western power” (Suslov, 2016, online). Next to this, China “has become

Russia's top trading and economic partner" (Suslov, 2016, online), which gives it a ruling importance for Russia over other countries. However, the causes of these new trade achievements are not caused only by the growing importance of China worldwide, but according to Suslov (2016) also because of the damage of relationships created between Russia and the West in 2014. Russia does not wish to achieve the status of Chinese junior associate, however simultaneously, Russia prefers the world power equilibrium to be in the non-Western world. China is fully aware of its current position and is amassing power through global investments – economic and military. With the objective to break American strategy of containment, China is creating its 'string of pearls' with "development of a blue-water navy and aircraft carriers enabling it to project power into the Indian and Pacific Oceans" (Sussex, 2012, p. 6). With this strategy, China is trying to maintain its access to sea to keep increasing its trade and security bases, similarly as the Silk Road should provide its access to the region of Middle East with its energy routes.

Stephen Blank (2017) suggests that the project of building a high-speed Moscow-Kazan railway as a proof of cooperation between Russia and China. China announced its investments to that route through Siberia in 2014. The railway should then continue to Beijing and on its way bypass previously planned Nur-Sultan (*previously: Astana*), as a capital of Kazakhstan, but instead go through Chinese western autonomous territory Xinjiang. According to Blank, "this is supposed to be a "model project of Russo-Chinese cooperation"" (Makarov and Sokolova, 2016, p. 33-34 in Blank, 2017, p. 13). Russia's possible successful control over Central Asian energy and trade flows depends on its ability to compete in the region, for which Russia needs

extensive development of Siberia and the Far East region. Without this option, China could easily bypass Russia on its way to trade with Europe choosing ways through Central Asia and the Caucasus instead of the planned high-speed railway. Blank highlights the necessity of Russia maintaining its importance in Asia, otherwise China would gain dominance in Central Asia causing negative geopolitical consequences to Russia, who has historically been trying to influence and affect this part of Asia.

Spanger (2016) concludes the whole situation of Russia-China relationship as a necessity of tackling obvious asymmetries between them. He claims that there are “three interrelated Russian concerns: the prospect of being no more than the junior partner, the fear of ending up as a resource appendix of the dominant neighbour and the anxious expectation of an influx of Chinese people [and its capital]” (Spanger, 2016, p. 15). Spanger suggests that there are three main causes why Russia has turned to Asia for cooperation and distanced itself from the West recently. Firstly, it is Russia’s nuclear deterrent. According to Spanger, Russia is on “par with the US and well ahead of China’s” (Spanger, 2016, p. 15). Secondly, he claims that “having been a resource appendix of the EU proved risky but not detrimental” (Spanger, 2016, p. 15). Finally, Spanger suggests mutual benefits of Russia and the Asia-Pacific region. However, he also highlights that the current closer relationship between Russia and China might be only conditional and temporary, caused by “Moscow’s demarcation from the West” (Spanger, 2016, p. 15). In this context, Spanger concludes that the Russia’s turn to the East is from his perspective more a simple calculus of the best option under the conditions of deterioration of its relations with the West, rather than a real aim of modernisation and development of the cooperation with Asia.

The main question for the future is the next evolution of possible relations between Russia and Asia, possibly China. Trenin suggests that “Moscow will insist on its coequal status, and Beijing would probably be wise to accept this” (Trenin, 2015). He does not see any block against the West made from China and Russia in the military context, as they are not going to present any supplementary ideology to Western liberal democracy. The future will then remain in the sense of balancing the power of the West. Trenin claims that Russia and China “will join forces to withstand Western pressure (Russia’s main interest today and potentially China’s tomorrow) and to gain resources to better compete against the West (China’s main interest)” (Trenin, 2015). He also states that although the relationship between Russia and the European Union is likely to remain broken for a long time, Russia is going to keep maintaining its European identity even under cooperation with Asian powers.

According to Sussex, “it is unlikely that Russia will be a dominant actor in the new Asia-Pacific” (Sussex, 2012, p. 17) region. He claims that Russia is currently lacking the capacity to “project power effectively beyond its own immediate geostrategic environment” (Sussex, 2012, p. 17). Sussex suggests that the best option for Russia is its ‘pivot’ state status, which should get Russia new opportunities and strategic partnerships with other Asia-Pacific region countries. However, according to Sussex, Russia should maintain its multipolar relationships with both East and West.

Scepticism about the current situation between Russia and China are also argued by Stephen Blank (2017). He suggests that negative geo-economic and geopolitical consequences for Russia in Asia come from Russia’s inability to have a reform at home

and implement necessary development steps, so it could take part in competition in the Asia-Pacific region. He claims that although Russia signs many declarations and agreements with ASEAN members, it is failing in the actual action and implementation. This means, that despite Russia's insistence that the country is actively taking steps to make its pivot to Asia successful, it is failing to benefit from these projects and is being increasingly marginalized in the region by other actors. Blank explains three main reasons for this. Firstly, "Russia is failing to realize the multilateral projects in which it claims to be participating" (Blank, 2017, p. 1). Secondly, Blank points out that "China is minimizing Russia's role in multilateral projects in Central and East Asia and the Arctic, while maximizing its own leverage" (Blank, 2017, p. 1). This causes that Russia to be in the shadow of China, which is what Russia would like to avoid the most, while being only seen as a raw materials appendage. Finally, Blank detects the main reason for Russia's failure in its pivot to the East, which is its political system. He claims that Russia's political system is "suffocating the growth of Russian economic power, which alone would allow it to play a major role in Asia's multilateral projects and security agendas" (Blank, 2017, p. 1). This means that if Russia would not change its politics towards Asia and would not start taking active part in the projects in the Asia-Pacific region, it might soon become just one of the countries in the region without any significant influence and involvement in the development of the region and its new projects.

Conclusion

The main aim of this work was to research the phenomenon of Russia turning to the East and intensifying its contact and cooperation with the Asia-Pacific region countries. It was discussed whether Russia's pivot to Asia is something actual, whether there is any discussion on this concept and how is it perceived in academic literature and academic journals. This phenomenon has been found as increasingly debated in the recent years, although various opinions and perceptions of it have been spotted. From this perspective, various reasons behind the turn to the East were discussed and different opinions on the timing of this change were examined. There were few disputes found regarding the beginning of Russia's pivot to Asia; some claims that it has begun in a connection to the 2014 Ukraine crisis and mainly the US-led sanctions against Russia turning away from it most of the Western world; some suggests that this event only intensified Russia's aims of an increasing cooperation with Asia; some argues that Russia had started its turn to the Asia-Pacific region long time before the Crimea crisis happened, mostly from the 1990's.

The main methods used for the research and examination of Russia's turn to the East were a case study discussing Russia's pivot to Asia from a historical perspective, examination of current relations with countries of Asia-Pacific region and its possible cooperation with China. For other parts of the research, comparative methods were used for examination of possible partners for Russia in Asia. Mainly academic literature and journal were used for the research, together with data from world datasets, such as the World Bank. Theoretically, the main method that this dissertation worked with was the

theory of realism and neorealism in international relations, which was also one of the main chapters of the work.

The dissertation's main chapters were divided into six sections discussing the pivot to Asia, Russia's main foreign policies, its relationship with China and possibilities in the future. One of the dominant parts was examining Russia's energy, military and security policy. This has a strong connections to the development and modernisation of Siberia and Russia's Far East region as well. Necessary steps would be required for Russia to develop these regions to a level at which they can increasingly trade with other Asian powers and be connected with them by a strong infrastructure net. Possibility of establishing a 'second capital' in the East of Russia was suggested as well, although this concept is not currently at any significant discussion. However, this geopolitical perspective was necessary and beneficial for the whole research finding many aspects of territorial disputes which have not been resolved yet in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as different territorial claims of Asia countries, mainly in the South and East China Sea.

This was a dominant point of the examination of possible partners for Russia in the region. Various countries have been researched, such as India, Japan, Vietnam, both Koreas and other smaller powers in the region. However, many issues standing in successful and full cooperation between them appeared. There are unresolved disputes over Kurile Islands with Japan together with Japan taking its part in Western sanctions against Russia after the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Further, Japan has unresolved disputes over Senkaku Islands with Japan. As China is in higher cooperation with Russia in the

recent years, it does not seem likely that Russia would have any significant relations with Japan in the future. Similarly, China has territorial issues with India due to claims in the same area of the South China Sea. This is a similar situation to relations between China and Vietnam, who have unresolved disputes over territories in the same region. Russia is officially standing in these issues as neutral actor, although it is supporting China's opponents by military equipment at the same time. By this analysis, any major relationship or cooperation with neither of those other countries has been found as probable for the near future. Russia is more maintaining its relations with China, although it should also be ready that a situation in which it would have to choose one side might happen if any dispute grows into conflict.

Coming from this point, another important of the research was the examination of the relationship between Russia and China, its prospects and limits. It was argued that Russia's turn to the East seems to be a natural decision based on both Chinese significant growth in the last decade and increasing importance of becoming one of the main world powers just after the United States, and the situation of Russia's relations with the West being devastated by the sanctions following 2014 Ukraine crisis. At the same time, Russia is likely to become only China's junior partner, which is not desirable. Many authors suggest that Russia should maintain multipolar relations with Asia-Pacific countries and be more active in cooperation on project and development in the Central Asia and other regions, in which China is gaining higher dominance. From this perspective, main opinions came from the research as those suggesting Russia to maintain development and modernisations of Siberia and the Far East region, which would allow its increasing cooperation and trade with Asia, who can also invest into

these Russian regions. Currently, Russia has been found as lacking practical performance of any project cooperation, putting it right to the position of China's junior partner, which should be avoided for the future, if any long-term partnership would be desired. On the other hand, some research results highlight the dominance of European identity in Russian thinking, which suggest that Russia would always prioritize cooperation with Western countries, if any possibilities occur.

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