The controversy between Westernisers and Slavophiles has been an important feature of Russian thought since the nineteenth century. The Westernisers stressed that Russia, as a «backward» country, should adopt European values in order to modernise itself. The Slavophiles, in contrast, propagated a «conservative utopia»¹ and held that Russia should follow its own historical path. For them, the differences between Russia and Europe were positive. After the October Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing emigration of large parts of the liberal and conservative intelligentsia from Soviet Russia, these ideological debates continued in «Russia abroad».² In a polemic review published in 1926, the Russian émigré philosopher Fedor Stepun spoke of the «Slavophiles of the age of futurism»,³ having in mind the so-called Eurasianists (evraziisty).

In contrast to many other ideological movements and political parties in the Russian emigration, the Eurasianists did not simply call for the restoration of the old regime or for a liberal alternative to tsarism. They accepted the October Revolution and saw the Bolshevik regime as an important stage in Russian history – an important stage, however, on the way to the ultimate triumph of their conservative utopia. This is one of the reasons why Leonid Luks and Martin Beißwenger pointed out some parallels between Eurasianism (evraziistvo) and the German «Conservative Revolution», which stressed the idea of reviving traditional order by revolutionary means, too.⁴ In this arti-


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I aim to scrutinise their argument that the Eurasianists might be seen as the Russian version of the «Conservative Revolution» by a close reading of sources. Moreover, I will examine the role Europe played in the utopian project propagated by the Eurasianists. I would like to stress already at the outset that the Eurasianists’ idea of Europe was not inclusive in the sense that they conceived of themselves or their imagined Eurasia (Evraziia) as being part of Europe or vice versa. Before discussing these issues in detail, I will give a short overview on classic Eurasianism.

1. Eurasianism in Interwar Europe

Young Russian intellectuals, who had emigrated mainly to Paris and Prague after the Bolshevik Revolution, developed the idea of Eurasianism in the interwar period. The linguist Nikolai S. Trubetskoi, the geographer Petr N. Savitskii and the historian Georgii V. Vernadskii were the movement’s most prominent proponents. The fundamental idea of Eurasianism was that «Eurasia» constituted a third continent between Europe and Asia, namely a distinct part of the world different from both Europe and Asia. The Eurasianists assumed that the borders of this alleged continent coincided more or less with the borders of the former Russian Empire. In the following, I use the term «Eurasia» in this sense, which differs from many other connotations, such as the German usage of the concept, where Eurasien denotes Europe plus Asia.

In order to prove the existence of Eurasia, the Eurasianists marshalled arguments as well as evidence from many different fields such as geography, linguistics, history and folklore. They developed the theory of linguistic alliances (Sprachbundtheorie) and transferred its basic principle to other disciplines. In other words: they postulated that spatial contact lead to convergent developments and rated the principle of acquired similarities more highly than the principle of common genetic origin. Thus they claimed that the Slavic, Finno-Ugric, Mongol and Turkic peoples of Eurasia were indiscernible – not because they had a common genetic origin but because they had been liv-


ing together in the same geographical milieu for hundreds of years and had thereby acquired similarities in folklore, mentality as well as political and socio-economic structures. As Trubetskoï put it: «Eurasia constitutes a geographical, economic and historical whole.»

Geography and space were central categories for the Eurasianists. Savitskii and others expended a lot of time and energy on contriving new theoretical terms and, based on them, intended to demonstrate that Eurasia constituted a «special geographical world» between Europe and Asia. In 1926 and 1927 they used the term «geopolitics» for the first time, although ideas related to this term had already featured heavily in Eurasian thinking from the very beginning.

The Eurasianists believed that the function of science was not only to provide explanations, but also to guide action. In this spirit, they did not confine themselves to developing innovative methods of investigating the past and the present. In their attempt to conceive a philosophy of history, they extended their historical analyses to include predictions of the future. They claimed that these predictions were based on valid scientific methods, and thus they believed were able to forecast the course of world history. In this regard, Eurasianism shares two main characteristics with what Karl Popper has termed «historicism».

In the eyes of the Eurasianists, the Eurasia of the future, as predicted and legitimised by their scientific methods, would be a single state uniting the peoples of the former Russian Empire in a non-democratic and non-capitalist order. Again and again, they repeated their teleological conviction: «Eurasia is a geographically, ethnographically, and economically integrated system whose political unification was historically inevitable.»

As I have pointed out elsewhere, Eurasianism was a sophisticated metamorphosis of Russian imperialism conceived by some of the most brilliant minds of the Russian emigration. It was, in fact, a new strategy to legitimise the integrity of the Russian Empire at the end of the First World War, when the multi-ethnic Habsburg and Ottoman Empires had collapsed and given way to nation states. This strategy was based on

9 P. N. Savitskii, Rossiia – osobyi geograficheskii mir, Praga 1927.
11 Popper defined historicism as «an approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical pre-diction is their principal aim, and that this aim is attainable by discovering the «rhythms» or the «patterns», the «laws» or the «trends» that underlie the evolution of history» (K. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, London 2004, 3, italics in the original).
13 S. Wiederkehr, «Eurasianism as a Reaction to Pan-Turkism», in: Shlapentokh, Russia, 39–60.
new theoretical approaches to what constitutes nations. The Eurasianists overtly propagated the construction of nations by intentional processes of nation-building and ideology formation as no other national movement had done before them. In an essay entitled «Pan-Eurasian Nationalism [Obshcheevraziiskii natsionalizm]» from 1927, Trubetskoi addressed the question of whether there was a factor «capable of knitting the state [i.e. the former Russian Empire, S.W.] together» after the revolution. The Eurasianists did not question the desirability of this imperialistic objective. Of course, Trubetskoi’s solution to the problem was Eurasianism: «For the separate parts of the former Russian Empire to continue as parts of a single state there must exist a single substratum of statehood [...] A stable and permanent unification is [...] feasible only on the basis of an ethnic (national) substratum [...] the national substratum of the state formerly known as the Russian Empire and now known as the U.S.S.R. can only be the totality of peoples inhabiting that state, taken as a peculiar multiethnic nation and as such possessed of its own nationalism. We call that nation Eurasian, its territory Eurasia, and its nationalism Eurasianism.»

In an earlier text, Trubetskoi had made a theoretical distinction between «true» and «false» nationalism. According to him, «the only kind of nationalism which can be acknowledged as true, as morally and logically justified, is a nationalism that has its origins in a unique national culture or is directed toward such a culture». Thus the majority of existing forms of nationalism were false nationalisms because they were oriented towards a culture that was too limited in scope. What exactly Trubetskoi had in mind is demonstrated by his remark on the «self-determination» of «small» nations, whose «efforts are directed towards achieving national independence regardless of the cost», which he counts as belonging to the «false» types of nationalism. In a letter to Roman Jakobson (dated 7 March 1921), Trubetskoi made his conception of Pan-Eurasian nationalism as an imperialistic antidote to the national movements of the former Russian Empire absolutely clear: «National self-determination» as understood by the former president Wilson and various separatists like the Georgians, the Estonians, the Latvians and so on is a typical kind of false nationalism.

What the Eurasianists tried to offer to the smaller nations of the former Russian Empire was an alternative identity. At its core was not the distinction between these nations and the Russians, but their similarities based on historical convergence in Eurasia. For this purpose, they employed the idea of Turan and the historical person of Genghis Khan, imbuing them with new meaning. In their writings, the Eurasianists re-interpreted these two core concepts of the potentially secessionist national move-

15 Ibid., 28 (translation from: Trubetzkoy, «Pan-Eurasian Nationalism», 239, italics in the original).
ments of the Turkic, Mongol and Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia and turned them into symbols of Eurasian unity. This allowed them to integrate the Russians and the non-Russian nationalities of the former Russian Empire, and to provide them with a shared identity. «The political unification of Eurasia was first accomplished by the Turanians in the person of Genghis Khan [...]. Later [...] the idea of a common Eurasian state passed from the Turanians to the Russians, who became its inheritors and bearers. It was now possible for Russia-Eurasia to become a self-contained cultural, political, and economic region and to develop a unique Eurasian culture.»¹⁹

Eurasianism was one of the most important and controversial intellectual movements in interwar «Russia Abroad». In contrast, its transformation into a political party was much less successful. Faced with the consolidation of the Soviet Union by the end of the 1920s, the Eurasian movement split into two factions with opposing views on the question of approaching the Bolsheviks. Finally, the pro-Bolshevik faction based in Clamart near Paris lost the dispute in 1929 and was dissolved. The internal struggles, however, weakened the Eurasian movement as a whole. After 1929, it declined and then faded by the beginning of the Second World War.²⁰

2. Seeking Allies beyond the Russian Emigration

In the 1930s, Savitskii tried to halt the decline of the Eurasian movement by broadening its audience. For this purpose, he began to publish articles in other languages than Russian²¹, and made several attempts to establish contacts with movements that were not related to the Russian emigration and that propagated goals the Eurasianists considered similar to their own. Among these were Philippe Lamour, his journal Plans and the Ordre nouveau in France, as well as the editorial boards of the journals Gegner, Tat, Umsturz, Vorkämpfer and Widerstand that were part of the «Conservative Revolution» in Germany.²² The Eurasianists also intensified their relations with other so-called

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²² Gosudarstvenii Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), Moskva, f. r-5783 (Savitskii, P. N.), op. 1, ed. khr. 456, l. 16–22; ed. khr. 99, l. 6; ed. khr. 101, l. 24. Beißwenger has found additional archival evidence in Prague and in the United States that Antipov actually established contacts with German «Conservative Revolutionaries» and made attempts to submit Eurasianist articles to their journals. See: Baissvenger, «Konservativenaia revoliutsiia», 52, 62–64.
post-revolutionary movements within the Russian emigration \textsuperscript{23} – without, however, collaborating with the Russian fascists in exile.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1933, A. P. Antipov published a short review article in the Eurasian symposium «Novaia epokha [The New Epoch]», which can be regarded as the most important comment on the «Conservative Revolution» \textsuperscript{25} by Eurasianists. Focusing on the \textit{Tatkreis},\textsuperscript{26} Antipov identified three areas of agreement between the «Conservative Revolution» and the Eurasian ideology: the rejection of political pluralism and parliamentarian democracy in the name of what the Eurasianists called «ideocracy», the rejection of capitalism and free trade in favour of a planned economy and the advocacy of autarky.\textsuperscript{27} Having said this, Antipov also warned of a potential conflict between Russia-Eurasia and Germany if the idea of \textit{Mitteleuropa} was implemented or if Germany expanded its political and economic influence even further.\textsuperscript{28} Luks has pointed out that there were additional parallels apart from the issues explicitly mentioned by Antipov. Both movements had an elitist character and were erroneously believed to be able to instrumentalise the NSDAP or the Bolshevik Party respectively in order to realise their own anti-liberal goals.\textsuperscript{29} They shared an organicist vision of society and, as a consequence, both adhered to geopolitical ideas and rejected modernity.\textsuperscript{30}

The most striking parallel, however, was the notion that gave the German «Conservative Revolution» its name, that is the idea of enforcing conservative goals by revolutionary means, the reviving of tradition by revolution. In Germany, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck wrote in 1923: «Let us not push the Revolution further, but let us develop the ideas which were dormant in the Revolution. Let us combine revolutionary and conservative ideas till we attain a set of conditions under which we can hope to live again.» \textsuperscript{31}
The text continues: «The conservative counter-movements strain towards the future [...]
The conservative counter-movement does not seek to re-create, but to link up with, the past [...]. We do not seek reaction; we do not want a restoration [...]».
Moeller van den Bruck's book is mentioned in the Eurasianists' correspondence (e.g. GARF, f. r-5783 (Savitskii, P. N.), op. 1, ed. khr. 437, l. 196).

32 In the same year, Petr Suvchinskii coined the phrase «revolutionary reaction». Trubetzkoi put this idea as follows: «Any «revolution» (understood as a radical change in the world view) fights the immediate past; it cannot be a «restoration», but it can and often does strive for the «restoration» of antiquity.»
Ten years later, Sofiia Bokhan argued the following: «[T]he Russian revolution ends the European period in Russian history. At this point the essentially Eurasian one begins and continues the properly Eurasian traditions.» In the same text, she proclaimed that the Eurasian synthesis of tradition and revolution marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of mankind.

This echoes the spirit of the very first Eurasian symposium which interpreted the catastrophic events of the First World War, the Russian revolutions and the Russian Civil War as the painful beginning of a new era and compared it to the barbarian invasions of Late Antiquity. The Eurasianists shared the feeling of living in an age of crisis, which was also prevalent in the writings of the «Conservative Revolution». In the introduction of «Iskhod k Vostoku [Exodus to the East]» the Eurasianists wrote in 1921: «The essays that make up the present volume were put together in an atmosphere of a consciousness of catastrophe. We perceive the segment of time within which our lives pass, beginning with the coming of the war, as a pivotal, and not merely a transitional time. In what happened and in what is happening we see not just shock, but crisis, and in the future we anticipate a profound change in the customary countenance of the world. In the catastrophic nature of what is happening we see a sign of the ripening, quickening resettlement and regeneration of culture [...] We do know that the world cataclysm, separating one epoch of world history from the next, has already begun.»

The ideological parallels between Eurasianism and the German «Conservative Revolution» are obvious. The tenuous attempts of co-operation, however, remained unsuccessful. The next sections outline specific aspects of ideological commonalities.

3. Rejecting Parliamentarianism and Democracy
The first area of ideological accordance between the Eurasians and the «Conservative Revolution» in Germany was the harsh critique of parliamentarianism and democracy. The Eurasianists supported a type of government they called ideocracy (ideokratiiia). In 1923, Iakov D. Sadovskii stated that «for the Eurasianists direct popular sovereignty..."
(priamoe narodopravstvo) and democracy [...] are the greatest evil eventually leading to decomposition, decay and general decline. It is only a cultivated, conscious minority committed to an idea that can and should rule.» 39 A decade later Trubetskoi called «liberalism and democracy [...] ideocracy’s sworn enemies» 40.

In the Eurasianists’ definition, ideocracy meant the absolute rule of ideology in every aspect of life. At the heart of it lay the concept of the «guiding idea» (ideia-pravitel’nitsa), which holds together the «ruling echelon» (praviashchii othor). This elitist group was to rule the state in the name and the interest of the people without, however, being elected by the people. 41 According to the Eurasianists, the role of the state in an ideocracy differed fundamentally from its role in a parliamentarian democracy where the state restricts itself to specific functions such as guaranteeing freedom of speech to its citizens. For them, «state-maximalism» was a central feature of an ideocracy, «that is, the active and leading participation of the state in economic and cultural life. In this respect, ideocracy fundamentally differ[ed] from democracy and its state-minimalism.» 42

Thus it is not surprising that the Eurasianists envisioned a one-party state: «We think of a new [Eurasian, S. W.] party as the successor of the Bolsheviks [...], a party of a special type, which does not share its ruling power with any other party. It even excludes the existence of other parties.» 43

When the Eurasianists defined their positions regarding the political regimes of their times, they clearly stated that Bolshevism and fascism were closer to their own ideas than liberalism and parliamentarian democracy. 44 Trubetskoi firmly believed that republican states of the interwar period and the democratic order in general were in decline. 45 For the Eurasianists, contemporary Italy and the Soviet Union embodied – albeit imperfect – ideocracies. 46 Therefore, Italian fascism was a regular topic in the book reviews published in Evraziiskaia khronika. The Eurasianists moreover widely approved of the fascist critique of liberalism and democracy. 47 The difference, for the Eurasianists, between the fascist «pseudo-ideocracy» (lzheideokratiia) and their own envisioned model was the poverty of the fascist ruling idea, which, to them, was simply a common emotion shrouded by the cult of the duce rather than an ideology. 48 This...
56 Trubetskoi, «Obsheevraziiskii natsionalizm», 30; P. N. Savitskii, Mestorazvitie russkoi promyshlennosti, Berlin 1932.
within [...] Autarky emanates from the doctrine of Russia-Eurasia as a special type of a «symphonic personality», it corresponds completely to the Eurasian thesis of Russia as a unique geographic, historical, ethnographical and linguistic world.»

The Eurasianists were in favour of a large-scale division of labour within the allegedly self-sufficient Eurasian economic space. They did not attempt to abolish private property or private business completely, but rather used individual self-interest for the sake of the planned economy in what they called a public-private economic system (gosudarstvenno-chastnaia sistema khoziaistva). The main problem of such a concept, namely the potential antagonism between self-interest and plan, was simply negated: «The Eurasian public-private system derives from the ideocratic world-view [...]. That is, first, Eurasianism points out the inevitable interdependency of the whole and its parts [...]. Second, Eurasianism develops principles of co-operation between the collective and the individual [...]. For us, there is no and there cannot be any contradiction between the efforts of everybody and any individual.»

5. Rejecting the «Romano-Germanic» World

The idea of integrating Eurasia from within went hand in hand with the idea of strictly isolating Eurasia from what the Eurasianists called the «Romano-Germanic» world, meaning Western Europe. On the one hand, the Eurasianists rejected Europe and its values on the basis of a complex epistemological reasoning, a novel theory of «cultural personalities» and the concept of the «migration of culture», namely the assumption that the cultural centre of the world shifts from one geographical region to another.

On the other hand, the arguments of the Eurasianists fit very well into the Slavophile tradition of Russian thought.

In his 1920 pamphlet «Europe and Mankind», Trubetskoi made a zealous effort to unmask the Enlightenment philosophers’ idea of progress as «pan-Romano-Germanic chauvinism». According to Trubetskoi, the «Romano-Germanic» chauvinists had been able to mislead the non-Romano-Germanic nations by using terms such as «humanity», «universally human» or «world progress», and thereby concealing the narrow...
ethnographic nature of these concepts. He claimed that «European cosmopolitanism» was psychologically based on «egocentricity», on considering oneself «to be the center of the universe [...], the most perfect of all beings», and therefore assessing as better that which resembles oneself more.

Trubetskoi argued that this kind of egocentricity lay at the heart of the notion of universal, linear progress: «Concepts such as the ‹evolutionary scale› and ‹stages of development› are all thoroughly egocentric. At their foundation is the idea that the development of the human species has proceeded and still proceeds along the path of so-called world progress, which is conceived to be a straight line. Mankind has moved along this straight line, but certain nations stopped at various points [...] [...] Consequently the cultures of various nations are distinguished from one another as separate phases, as consecutive steps along the common path of world progress.» He demonstrated that this model of thinking inevitably led to the classification of Russia and other non-Romano-Germanic countries as «backward», meaning that the differences were depicted in a negative light and interpreted as shortcomings. He, in turn, propagated an approach of cultural relativism: «Rather than a [evolutionary, S. W.] ladder we obtain a horizontal plane; rather than the principle of arranging people and cultures according to degrees of perfection, we obtain a new principle of the equal worth and qualitative incommensurability of the cultures and peoples on earth. The element of evaluation should be banished once and for all from ethnology, the history of culture, and from all the evolutionary sciences, because evaluation is inevitably based on egocentricity. No one is higher, and no one is lower. Some are similar, and others are not. To declare that those who are like us are higher and those unlike us lower is arbitrary, unscholarly, and in the final analysis simply ignorant.»

While this argument is very similar to the one used by deconstructivist philosophers and critics of eurocentrism today, Trubetskoi did not halt at this point. He rather ended in essentialism and radical anti-Occidentalism: «[T]he intelligentsia in Europeanized nations [...] must understand clearly, once and for all [...] that Europeanization is an unequivocal evil for every non-Romano-Germanic nation; [and] that this evil can and must be fought as forcefully as possible.» In order to condemn Europe,
Trubetskoï departed from the idea of cultural relativism he had developed before and went so far as to construct an absolute antagonism. In his own words: «There is only one true opposition: the Romano-Germans and all other peoples of the world – Europe and Mankind.»\(^7^2\)

This way of thinking in dichotomies was prevalent in nineteenth-century Russia. In the debate with the Westernisers, the Slavophiles juxtaposed a set of, in their eyes, positive Russian (Orthodox) values with negative Western (Latin) ones. These oppositions included wholeness vs. fragmentation, synthesis vs. analysis, dukhovnost’ (spiritualism) vs. rationalism, sobornost’ (communality) vs. individualism, love vs. contract, justice vs. law – to name just the most important elements.\(^7^3\) The Eurasianists drew on these well-known dichotomies when they argued that Western values and institutions such as parliamentarianism or the market economy did not correspond with the nature of Eurasia.\(^7^4\) This argument is, however, also typical of Romanticist criticism of the Enlightenment all over Europe, as Andrzej Walicki has pointed out.\(^7^5\) This is why Luks has concluded that Eurasianism, despite its anti-European drive, was indeed part of the European intellectual history between the two world wars.\(^7^6\)

6. Conclusion

Russian Eurasianism is part of European intellectual history. The Eurasianists of the interwar period shared many ideas with European anti-Enlightenment philosophers and right-wing ideologists in general as well as with adherents of the German «Conservative Revolution» in particular. What these thinkers had in common, were anti-liberalism and a hostile attitude towards parliamentarian democracy. They also held anti-capitalist positions and sympathised with the ideas of a planned economy as well as autarky. Moreover, they contrasted the idea of community with that of individualism, they held the concept of an organic whole in high esteem, and cautioned against the atomisation of society. Last but not least, the Eurasianists agreed with the figure of thought that became eponymous with the German «Conservative Revolution», namely that revolution would revive old traditions and link the bright future to the distant past in which the traditional order had not yet been destroyed.

However, Eurasianism hardly fits into the framework of «Europe as a project of the radical right», since the Eurasianists did not fight for a conservative revolution in Europe. They did not hope to unite Europe on an illiberal basis, nor did they try to install right-wing regimes in Europe. What they had in mind, instead, was overcoming «European» values and institutions in Eurasia, of which they conceived as a separate continent

\(^7^2\) Ibid., 104 (translation from: Trubetzkoy, «Europe and Mankind», 64, italics in the original).
\(^7^4\) G. V. Florovskii, «Khitrost’ razuma», in: Iskhod k Vostoku, 28–39; Savitskii, «Dva mira».
\(^7^5\) A. Walicki, A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism, Stanford 1979, 93–111.
\(^7^6\) Luks, «Ideologie der Eurasier», 393.
between Europe and Asia. Rejecting «Europe» and even juxtaposing it to mankind, the Eurasianists used similar arguments as the Romantic critics of the Enlightenment.

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, this way of thinking proved to be a more important common ground than the geographical notion of Eurasia in the way that the Eurasianists understood the term in the interwar period: The Russian Neo-Eurasianist circles around Aleksandr Dugin have revived Eurasianism as the ideological antithesis to what they call Atlantism. Thus, they have adopted the bipolar worldview of the Cold War and shifted the image of the enemy from the European «Romano-Germanic» nations, which had been Russia’s rivals in the nineteenth century, to the Soviet Union’s main antagonist after 1945, the United States of America. While personal bonds amongst the Eurasianists, protagonists of the German «Conservative Revolution» and other right-wing movements in interwar Europe were very weak, Dugin and his fellow Neo-Eurasianists are an integral part of the European neoconservative and traditionalist network.

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ABSTRACT

«Conservative Revolution» à la russe?
An Interpretation of Classic Eurasianism in a European Context
This article explores classic Eurasianism as part of right-wing European intellectual history. Between the two world wars, the Eurasianists shared many ideas with other European right-wing ideologists and in particular with the authors of the German «Conservative Revolution»: anti-liberalism, a hostile attitude towards parliamentary democracy, anti-capitalism and the anti-individualist idea of an organic whole against the atomisation of society. However, unlike French or British right-wing intellectuals, Eurasianists did not hope to unite Europe on an illiberal basis; what they instead had in mind was overcoming «European» values and institutions in Eurasia, of which they conceived as a separate continent between Europe and Asia. This idea has been revitalised by the Russian Neo-Eurasianist circles around Aleksandr Dugin that have become a central part in European networks of the new Right of the twenty-first century.

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