

The Politics of Russian post-Soviet Identity: Eurasianism, Geopolitics and Beyond

My presentation will focus on one particular feature of the Russian post-Soviet foreign policy debate – the emergence of two interrelated and mutually reinforcing discourses: discourse on Eurasianism and discourse on geopolitics. The discursive coupling of Eurasianism and geopolitics merits particular attention because it constitutes Russia’s most comprehensive and thorough attempt to come to terms with the Soviet collapse and the international order it gave rise to. However, the exact relationship between the two concepts remains undertheorized. On one reading, the term ‘geopolitics’ receives an already fixed meaning external to the actual Russian discourse, while Eurasianism is dismissed as strategically employed myth-making. Another reading suggests that Eurasianism died both intellectually and geopolitically and was overtaken by a new mode of foreign policy thinking - geopolitics. I attempt to show in my presentation that ‘geopolitics’ and ‘Eurasianism’ cannot be meaningfully sustained without each other, therefore we need to theorize the discursive link between the two concepts. I therefore distinguish three strands within the Russian post-Soviet geopolitical discourse from the point of view of how adherents of each geopolitical ‘camp’ invoke and appropriate the ideational legacy of classical post-revolutionary Eurasianism. Particular emphasis is put on what I term “civilizational” geopolitics as an attempt to overcome the tensions that plagued classical Eurasianism of the 1920s and continue to plague Russian foreign policy under Putin.