

**The Emergence of a New Geopolitical Region in Eurasia:  
The Volga-Urals Region and its Implications  
for Bulgarian Foreign and Security Policy**

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# I Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet geopolitical system after the end of the Cold War brought about new strategic alignments in Eurasia. Two geo-strategically very important regions – the Caucasus and Central Asia appeared in the “Heartland” of the Eurasian mainland. Parallel to this process the centrifugal forces in the Russian federation led to the emergence of a new geopolitical region in the very heart of Russia. This is the vast area stretching from the basin of river Volga to the Ural mountains. Between 1990-1992 in the region of Volga and the Urals appeared six sovereign ethnic republics: Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Mordovia, Udmurtia and Mari-El. The total area of these sovereign republics is about 400,000 square kilometers and their population amounts to 12 million people – the majority of them being of non-Russian descent. The Volga-Urals region has considerable oil resources and a great part of the Russian military-industrial complex is concentrated there.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the republics in the Volga-Urals region pursued a consistent strategy for emancipation from Moscow, especially in the economic sphere. This strategy, called by some analysts “economic separatism” led to the establishment of two important economic associations in the Volga-Urals region: the “Greater Volga” and “Urals” associations.<sup>1</sup> These associations embrace the six sovereign republics and the other administrative units in the Volga-Urals region. The changing balance of power between the Volga-Urals region and the central government in Moscow was clearly expressed in the political sphere too. During the first Chechen war (1994-1996) the political leaders of the six Volga-Urals republics appealed for ending the war against Chechnya.<sup>2</sup> The President of the Chuvash republic even refused to allow the participation of Chuvash forces in the Russian campaign against Chechnya. Thus, at the threshold of the 21st century in the region of Volga and the Urals gradually has appeared a new geo-economic and geopolitical entity within the framework of the Russian federation.

The Volga-Urals region is geo-politically and geo-culturally linked to a greater extent with the Central Asia region than with Moscow. There is only a small “buffer” between Bashkortostan (the Eastern part of the Volga-Urals region) and Kazakhstan (the Western part of the Central Asia region). This is the Orenburg district, an administrative unit called “oblast” in Russian

terminology, wherein the majority of the population are Bashkirs. Therefore, the developments in the region of Volga and the Urals are not only matter of Russia's internal affairs but also a matter of broader Eurasian international interests and stability needs. These issues require an in-depth analyses within the conceptual framework of the regional and security studies. The aims of this Research Report are:

First, to examine the historical background and the geopolitical legacy in the Volga-Urals region in order to assess its current developments and perspectives.

Second, to lay out the contemporary Bulgarian geopolitical vectors in the context of a globalising world and a rising need of broader stability arrangements.

Third, to evaluate the possible intersection between the developments in the Volga-Urals region and Bulgarian foreign policy on the background of the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition.

## **II The Legacy of Volga Bulgaria Revived**

During the Middle Ages the crucial geopolitical actor in the Volga-Urals region was Volga Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup> Volga Bulgaria was founded in the 7th century. In the 10th century the Bulgarian khan (king) Almush converted the Volga Bulgarians into Islam, thus setting the foundations of a religious synthesis between Islam and the ancient Bulgarian religion – the so-called “Tangrism”. From 10th-13th century Volga Bulgaria became a great Eurasian empire, larger than the Byzantine empire. Volga Bulgaria encompassed a vast area stretching from the Caspian Sea, North Caucasus, Arctic Sea, Eastern Europe and Siberia. In the 13th century the Volga Bulgarians were forced to accept the supremacy of the Mongol empire of Cinghiz khan. At the end of the 13th century Volga Bulgaria revived from the Mongol invasion and between the 14th and 16th centuries again became a great geopolitical actor. This is the period of the so-called “Kazan Renaissance” of Volga Bulgaria. In 1552 the Russian tsar (king) Ivan “the Terrible” conquered the town of Kazan – the last capital of Volga Bulgaria. He accepted the title “tsar of the Russians and the Bulgarians” and imposed a union between Moscow Russia and Volga Bulgaria. On the basis of this union after the 16th century the Russian empire has been established, which to a great extent is successor of the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition. About 40% of the Russian aristocracy had its origins in Volga Bulgarians. The very name of the strategic “backbone of Russia” - river Volga etymologically is derived from the Bulgarian ethnic name.

The “Bulgarian issue” in the Russian empire from the 16th till the beginning of the 21st century is one of the most complex issues in Russian internal affairs. It is a problem not just about the right to self-determination of the Volga Bulgarians, but it has broader implications in terms of the legitimate grounds of Russian sovereignty over the region of Volga and the Urals and over North Caucasus. The “Bulgarian issue” is a continuous series of uprisings and liberation movements aimed at restoring Volga Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> These armed uprisings took place in 1553-1584; 1648-1649; 1708; 1735-1741; 1755; 1773-1775.

In order to justify and disguise in legitimate terms their aggressive policy towards Volga Bulgaria the Russian authorities have made up the so-called “Tartar (or Tatar) ideology”. According to it the Volga Bulgarians had been exterminated by the Mongol-Tartar army in the 13th century. Therefore, the population of the Volga-Urals region is of Tartar descent and Russia’s policy against the “Kazan kingdom” is a just punishment for the “Tartar yoke” imposed by the Tartar “Golden Horde” on the Russians for three centuries. During the 17th and the 18th century Russian propaganda strove to impose the derogatory name “Tatars” on all the non-Slav peoples in the Russian empire. Prof. Halikov, a Russian scholar of Bulgarian descent clearly demonstrates in his studies that till 19-20th century the population of the Volga-Urals region had quite negative attitude towards the name “Tatar” and that the so-called “Tatars” actually used to call themselves Bulgarians or Muslims.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the “Tatar ideology” is a perfect example of the imperial formula “divide et impera”, which let the Russian empire destroy national consciousness in part of the Volga Bulgarians.

During the 19th century in the Volga-Urals region started a process of Bulgarian National Renaissance in the cultural as well as in the political sphere.<sup>6</sup> It was aimed against the political domination of Russia and the anti-Bulgarian “Tatar ideology”. In 1862 the leader of the Volga Bulgarians – Bagautdin Vaissov (al Bulgari) founded the Freedom Party which made efforts to restore Volga Bulgaria via legal means. Successor of the Freedom Party was the “Council of the Volga Bulgarians-Muslims”, which had representatives in the Higher Chamber of the Russian Parliament from 1905 till 1914.

In 1917 after the February Revolution (several months before the Bolshevik Revolution) in the Volga-Urals region was built up an independent state – the “Republic of Idel-Urals”. The President of this newly-evolved state was the outstanding leader of the Bulgarian liberation movement – Sadrey Maxudey. He proclaimed that the Republic of Idel-Urals was the successor of Volga Bulgaria.<sup>7</sup> A Bulgarian Parliament and a Bulgarian Army were

constituted. However, in 1918 the Bolsheviks destroyed the Republic of Idel-Urals and dissolved all the independent political and military institutions of the Volga Bulgarians. The Republic of Idel-Urals was torn into several Soviet republics, wherein the “Tatar ideology” was imposed by force. Thus, in the Volga-Urals region was built up an invisible “Kazan Wall”, analogous to the Berlin Wall, splitting the national consciousness of the Volga Bulgarians.<sup>8</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet system in the Volga-Urals region started a process of re-evaluation of the legacy of Volga Bulgaria. Since 1990 the Tatar ideology has been exposed to critics from various groups in the “Tatar” society. A large web of culture-and-education clubs “New Bulgar” was set up in the six sovereign republics of Volga and the Urals. In 1990 in Kazan (the capital of Tatarstan) was founded the Bulgarian National Congress (BNC).<sup>9</sup> The main purpose of BNC is the restoration of Volga Bulgaria and the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Volga Bulgarians. The total number of the Volga Bulgarians at the beginning of the 21st century is estimated at 10-15 million people.<sup>10</sup>

In 1992 in Kazan was constituted a Bulgarian National Assembly (BNA) – the official representative body of the Volga Bulgarians.<sup>11</sup> BNA adopted a Declaration, wherein the Russian authorities were accused of genocide against the Volga Bulgarians. BNA focused the attention of the international community upon the violation of the right to self-determination of the Volga Bulgarians. In its Declaration BNA defined the Bulgarian ethnic and cultural area in the Russian federation: the Republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Chuvashia, Kirov, Ulyanovsk, Saratov, Orenburg, Astrakhan, Penza, Chelyabinsk, Volgograd, Gorkov, Ryazan, Perm, Omsk, Tomsk, Tyumen, Novosibirsk, Kemerovo and Tambov districts (oblasts). The “Lebensraum” (living space) of the Volga Bulgarians at the end of the 20th century embraces a vast area of 700,000 km<sup>2</sup> : the whole Volga-Urals region from the delta of river Volga in the Caspian Sea to the Eastern European river Oka; and to Siberia.

In 2000 the Bulgarian National Congress headed by Gusman Halilov sent an official Statement to the Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>12</sup> In its Statement BNC suggested that Tatarstan should be renamed into Bulgaristan in its capacity of legal successor of Volga Bulgaria (7-16th century) and the Republic of Idel-Urals (1917-1918). Although this proposal was not implemented it is an important political manoeuvre of the “Eastern Bulgarians”. Another verification of the increasing role of the Bulgarian movement in the Volga-Urals region is the increased international activity of BNC. In 2000 the leader of the Volga

Bulgarians – Gusman Halilov paid a visit to Bulgaria having been invited for the All-Bulgarian Fair in Rozhen summoned by the Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov. Since 1995 there have been established close contacts between the Volga Bulgarian organisations and several non-governmental organisations from Danube Bulgaria (Union of the Bulgarian Communities, Bulgarian World Union, “Bulgarian Horde” Society etc.). By far, the cooperation between Bulgaria on the Balkans and the “Eastern Bulgarians” is mainly in the cultural sphere. However, there is a growing interest in Bulgarian society in the political and economic affairs of the Volga Bulgarians. From historical point of view the close relations between Volga and Danube Bulgaria have always been the underlying basis for the most prosperous periods of both the Bulgaria-s. In this train of thought it is important to lay out the contemporary geopolitical vectors of Danube Bulgaria with a view to an eventual emergence of another Bulgarian state (or quasi-state) in the Volga-Urals region.

### **III Contemporary Bulgarian Geopolitical Vectors**

The first contemporary Bulgarian geopolitical vector is Bulgaria’s integration in the European Union. This strategic Bulgarian objective is a natural continuation of the European “thread” running through Bulgarian geopolitical tradition. An important milestone in this respect is the policy of the Hun-Bulgarian khan (emperor) Atilla during the 5th century, whose main purpose was the unification of Europe. In this respect khan Atilla is predecessor of Charlemagne and Napoleon. During the 9-10th century Bulgaria was the third parallel column of European civilization along with Latin-Roman and Greek-Byzantine culture. The Bulgarian-Slav alphabet and the “Bulgarian heresy” (Bogomilstvo) played a major role in the formation of European pre-Renaissance culture and later in the Reformation.

At the beginning of the 21st century Bulgaria’s relations with the European Union form the most important part of Bulgaria’s foreign policy. Nowadays there is no other state or organisation with which Bulgaria develops such an intensive partnership in all the spheres of social life. The EU integration of Bulgaria is an expression of Bulgarian political realism. After the end of the Cold War the EU integration has no alternative in terms of Bulgaria’s economic and political development, and in terms of the solution of the Bulgarian national issue. The re-integration of Bulgaria in the European geopolitical area is marked by a number of step-stones. In 1995 Bulgaria became an associate member of the EU. In 1999 Bulgaria received an invitation for negotiations for full-fledged EU membership. In 2000 the Council of Ministers of the EU lifted the visa regime for Bulgarians. In December 2000 at the Nice

summit, Bulgaria received seats at the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers as a result of which it acquired the right to a measured participation in the decision-making process of the EU once Bulgaria joins the Union. The prospects of this country's European geopolitical vector could be enhanced first and foremost by Bulgaria's active contribution to the process of crystallization of the so-called "European project" in the geo-cultural sphere.

Closely interrelated with European integration is Bulgarian "peace geopolitics". The term "peace geopolitics" was established during the 80s as an antipode of geo-strategy and conflict geopolitics.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of peace geopolitics is the setting-up of a global security system in order to overcome the contradictions and the domination of power in international relations. Bulgarian peace geopolitics has well-rooted tradition. Since the early Middle Ages Bulgarian geopolitical order "Idel" has been firmly established on the Balkans and in the region of Volga and the Urals.<sup>14</sup> The Bulgarian term "Idel" is etymologically bound to the ancient Anglo-German word "edel" meaning "noble, aristocratic". The meaning of the Bulgarian term "Idel" is similar to the Roman term "Pax", i.e. "peace, order and security". Throughout history Bulgaria has tried to contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and security in the Eurasian geopolitical zone. At the beginning of the 21st century there is an imbalance in the military and economic sphere on the Balkans. The Bulgarian southern neighbours (Turkey and Greece) have greater military and economic capacity than Bulgaria. Subsequently active peace geopolitics is indispensable to Bulgarian national security.

The most important expression of Bulgarian peace geopolitics are the efforts of Bulgaria to join NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the contemporary projection of the so-called Atlantic (or sea) geopolitical tradition. The sea geopolitical tradition starts from Carthage and ancient Greece, and is continued by the Vikings, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France and Great Britain. At the beginning of the 21st century the USA, respectively NATO are the major centre of the Atlantic geopolitical tradition and the so-called globalism.

The theory of geopolitics draws a clear distinction between thalassocracy, i.e. states based on sea military force, and telurocracy – states based on land military force. Bulgarian geopolitical tradition has predominantly telurocratic characteristics moulded within the framework of the Eurasian zone. Nevertheless, there is a strong "sea thread" in the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition. In different historical periods the Bulgarians have controlled great parts of the Caspian and the Black Sea. During the early Middle Ages Black Sea was called "Bulgarian

Sea”, and later on between the 10th and the 13th century Caspian Sea would be called “Bulgarian Sea”.<sup>15</sup> Along the Volgo-Kama river system the Bulgarians cooperated in the sphere of shipping and trade with the Vikings. On the basis of this cooperation Bulgarian and Viking trade companies were the first to explore and set up the strategic North Sea route between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup> The greatest Bulgarian tsar (king) Simeon I ordered the building of a large fleet to support the Bulgarian efforts to conquer Tsarigrad (Istanbul). Bulgarian marine specialists played a major role in the conquering of Tsarigrad by the Ottomans in 1453. The first Ottoman admiral – Baltadziolu was a Bulgarian converted to Islam.<sup>17</sup>

The great experience with the Bulgarian talosocracy along with the Bulgarian model of geopolitical order “Idel” constitute a stable basis for Bulgaria’s NATO orientation at the end of the 20th – the beginning of the 21st century. Bulgaria’s peace geopolitics played a major role for the settlement of the Yugoslav crisis. Bulgarian armed forces participated in the multinational peacekeeping forces SFOR in Bosnia and continue to be part of the peacekeeping forces KFOR in Kosovo. Bulgaria launched several peace initiatives for Kosovo and gave access to Bulgarian air space for NATO humanitarian intervention in Kosovo in 1999. Despite its limited financial resources Bulgaria played a crucial role in the setting-up of the Multinational Peacekeeping Force South-East Europe that were deployed in the Bulgarian town of Plovdiv. As a successor of the Bulgarian geopolitical order “Idel” at the beginning of the 21st century Bulgaria is an “island of stability” and “producer of security” in the dangerous Balkan geopolitical “knot”. A recent example of Bulgaria’s constructive role was the Bulgarian effort of mediation in the settlement of Albanian-Serb contradictions in Kosovo at the beginning of 2000. Official Albanian and Serb delegations visited Sofia and the Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Kostov paid a visit to Kosovo in an attempt to lower the tension between the parties to the conflict. An objective analysis of the contemporary Balkan situation shows that the one and only alternative for Bulgaria is its being a guarantor of peace and security on the Balkans. Under the new geopolitical realities peace geopolitics and NATO membership are very important instruments for Bulgarian national security in the 21st century.

The underlying motor of the contemporary Bulgarian geopolitical vectors is the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition which is Eurasian in essence, i.e. Bulgarian tradition is both “Eastern” and “Western-like”.<sup>18</sup> By a strange paradox this “dualistic” orientation may turn out the



greatest contribution of Bulgaria to EU and NATO's strategic goals. Due to its geopolitical location and its historical links with many Eastern communities Bulgaria may become a "bridge" between the East and the West, a mediator and disseminator of the Western ideas and security paradigms in large regions of the Eurasian supercontinent. The most important contribution of Bulgaria to Eurasian stability at the beginning of the 21st century is the establishment of a Bulgarian zone of responsibility and security on the Balkans.

#### **IV Bulgaria's Zone of Responsibility and Interest on the Balkans**

The setting-up of a Bulgarian zone of responsibility and interest on the Balkans has three facets. Firstly, it is a part of a broader security system in the Black Sea geopolitical region, which is strategically linked to the newly evolved Eurasian regions: the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Volga-Urals region. Secondly, it is the natural response to the objective necessity for cultural and economic integration of the Bulgarian "Lebensraum" (living area) on the Balkans. And last but not least we need to underline the cultural, artistic, spiritual, educational and science-technology aspects of the contemporary Bulgarian regional "ambitions" and "plans". Bulgaria's greatest advantage is its culture, i.e. the sphere of ideas, the creation of meaning. Namely Bulgarian geo-cultural capacity is the underlying basis of Bulgaria's efforts to produce stability and security on the Balkans.

The Bulgarian "Lebensraum" on the Balkans is defined in the Bulgarian National Doctrine of 1998.<sup>19</sup> It encompasses Bulgaria, Macedonia, the district of the South Morava river, Aegean Thrace and North Dobrudza. The scope of this Bulgarian interest sphere is determined by ethnic, cultural, historical, geographical and economic motives. It is to be stressed out that this geopolitical vector must not be interpreted in terms of a "Great Bulgaria" project – a project which is unrealistic at the beginning of the 21st century. This is rather a project for cultural and spiritual unification of the Bulgarians, regardless of their citizenship. The long-term consequences of these efforts will be more peace and security on the Balkans, for when the Bulgarian minorities in other Balkan countries have the right to self-identification, cultural autonomy and free communication with Bulgaria they will not strive for political independence from the states whose citizens they are.

In 1941 Batakiev, one of the forefathers of the Bulgarian geopolitical school grounded on scholarly assessments the physical-geographical and anthropological-geographical unity of the Bulgarian ethnic and cultural area on the Balkans.<sup>20</sup> The main lands inhabited by

Bulgarians (Bulgaria, Macedonia, the district of the Morava river, North Dobrudza and Aegean Thrace) constitute a geo-morphological unity. This is of vital importance for the communication and transport infrastructure of these Bulgarian lands, which underlies Bulgarian national and cultural cohesion. The objective geographical and ethnical realities determine the natural frontiers of the Bulgarian “Lebensraum” – Aegean (White) Sea to the south, river Morava to the west and the delta of river Danube to the north. The contemporary political map of the Balkans does not reflect the traditional and natural Bulgarian ethnic-cultural area - a set-back for the normal functioning of the Bulgarian geopolitical “organism”. Obviously, at the beginning of the 21st century Bulgaria will not conduct aggressive policy against its neighbours, but it can use different forms of trans-border co-operation with the “outer Bulgarians” in the other Balkan countries.

The first element of the regional policy of Bulgaria on the Balkans is a policy of active co-operation and support for Macedonia. Up to the 40s of the 20th century the “Macedonians” considered themselves an integral part of the Bulgarian nation.<sup>21</sup> Due to the repressive Yugoslav policy in the second half of the 20th century there began a process of artificial secession of the “Macedonians” from the Bulgarian nation. But after the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the liberation of Macedonia there started again a return back to the Bulgarian roots. A great part of the Bulgarians have relatives in Macedonia and some of the important public figures in Bulgarian history are from Macedonia. Nowadays a great number of Macedonian students study at Bulgarian Universities. Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia’s independence in 1992. During the Kosovo crisis in 1999 Bulgaria assisted military and humanitarian aid to Macedonia. On the one hand Macedonia is the “geopolitical key” to the Balkan peninsula, but on the other, it is a very vulnerable Balkan country with many uncertainties for its future. An important step towards the overcoming of Bulgarian-Macedonian “schizophrenia” was an Agreement between the two states of 1999, wherein the parties solved the main issues of contradiction and gave way to an active bilateral co-operation on the basis of European interstate practice. There are middle-term opportunities for the setting-up of a joint Bulgarian-Macedonian Euro-region in order to promote co-operation in all the spheres of social life. A major role in this respect plays the common infrastructure project, known as Corridor №8. This project was approved by the Stability Pact for South-East Europe and will connect the transport systems of Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey. Moreover Bulgaria maintains close contacts with the Macedonian Albanians who are about 1/3 of Macedonian population. Thus, in case of possible ethnical

tension in Macedonia Bulgaria may serve as a mediator and guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of the young republic.

The second element of the regional policy of Bulgaria on the Balkans is the protection of the rights of the Bulgarian minority in the district of river Morava in present- day Eastern Serbia.<sup>22</sup> The district of river Morava was a diocese of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, but in 1878 it was given to Serbia according to the Treaty of Berlin. During the First and the Second World War this district was reintegrated in Bulgaria, but in 1945 again was annexed by Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the 21st century Bulgaria is concerned mainly about the district of South Morava, known as “Bulgarian Morava” as well as about the so-called “Western Bulgarian Outlands”, wherein Bulgarian national identity is mostly preserved. The Yugoslav war and the actual secession of Kosovo from Yugoslavia gave way to a renewed Bulgarian interest in the district of South Morava. This district is an area of about 4,000km<sup>2</sup> between the Bulgarian and Kosovo frontiers. The distance between the Bulgarian and Kosovo frontiers is only 50km. The district of Bulgarian Morava is very significant from point of view of geo-strategy because the transport corridor from Hungary to the Aegean Sea crosses there. This is the only link of Serbia to Macedonia. On an informal level there has been launched the idea for a reformulation of Serbia as a federation of autonomous regions. At the informal summit in Budapest in March 2000 the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán and the Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Kostov echoed the idea of six federative parts of Serbia, one of them being the district of Bulgarian Morava (South Serbia). Bulgaria’s concern in this district at the beginning of the 21st century was triggered not by “romantic” motives, but by current security needs. Hopefully, they may be answered constructively by an eventual new policy of the democratic government of Serbia and FRY.

In the district of Bulgarian Morava is the so-called “Small Kosovo” wherein 90% of the population is Albanian. In 2000 there were armed clashes between the Serb police forces and the “Albanian Liberation Army for Presevo, Bojanovac and Medvedja”. These are the main towns in “Small Kosovo” located in the Western part of the Bulgarian Morava district. In fact Bulgarian Morava district is the “buffer” between Bulgaria and the still unstable Kosovo. In order to prevent any “spill-over” of instability from near-by Kosovo Bulgaria strives to mediate between the parties to the conflict in the district of Bulgarian Morava. Bulgaria has already established close contacts with the Kosovo Albanians. At the beginning of 2000 a Parliamentary delegation headed by the Kosovo Albanians’ leader Hashim Tachi visited

Sofia. After Milosevic's fall from power Sofia established close contacts with Belgrade. These diplomatic steps, along with Bulgaria's thorough knowledge of the district's specific characteristics are important prerequisites for an active Bulgarian participation in the preventive efforts for coping with the conflict along the river Bulgarian Morava.

The third element of Bulgaria's policy towards the "outer Bulgarians" on the Balkans is the recognition of Bulgarian interests and responsibilities in the district of Aegean Thrace, called by the Bulgarians "White Sea Thrace". White Sea Thrace (otherwise known as West Thrace) is a district of 8,000km<sup>2</sup> which was an integral part of Bulgaria from 1913 to 1920 but was annexed by Greece according to the Treaty of Sevres of 1920. The Treaty of Neuilly of 1919 provided for a Bulgarian economic corridor to the White Sea but this clause was not implemented. Nowadays White Sea Thrace constitutes the Greek department "Rhodopes" with an administrative centre the town of Komotini. Other important towns are Xsanti and Alexandrupolis. White Sea Thrace is artificially separated from its natural geoeconomic hinterland – South Bulgaria and Bulgaria is deprived of its outlet on the Aegean Sea. The distance between the Southern Bulgarian frontier and White Sea is only 30km. At the beginning of 21st century in White Sea Thrace live about 100 000 Bulgarians of Muslim denomination (the so-called "Pomaks").<sup>23</sup> Moreover for the last years a great number of Bulgarians have immigrated to White Sea Thrace in illegal way. White Sea Thrace is of great strategic importance for Bulgaria. This district connects Bulgaria with the Mediterranean Sea and lowers the importance of the Bosphorus (the Straits between Black Sea and Aegean Sea). Therefore, White Sea Thrace is part of Bulgaria's sphere of interest on the Balkans. The protection of Bulgarian national minority's rights in this district will be an integral part of the relationship between Bulgaria and Greece, especially in terms of Greece's membership in the EU and the prospective Bulgarian integration in the Union.

In sum, one may delineate three main Bulgarian geopolitical vectors at the beginning of the 21st century: EU and NATO integration, constructive peace geopolitics and the setting-up of Bulgarian zone of security and responsibility on the Balkans. These vectors are systematically bound to an eventual "Eastern vector" of Bulgaria directed at a number of Bulgarian quasi-states that appeared after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the Volga-Urals region and in North Caucasus.

## **V Prospects for a Bulgarian “Eurasian Vision”**

Throughout history the “Bulgarian mission” has been fulfilled via the building up of transnational geopolitical structures: civilization, cosmopolitan statehood, eclectic religion and a synthesis of different cultures.<sup>24</sup> Toynbee was one of the first scholars to discover the specific characteristics of an idiosyncratic Bulgarian civilization, distinct from other civilizations.<sup>25</sup> There are some ten geopolitical projections of the Bulgarian civilization, the most important of them being the Hun-Bulgarian empire, Magna Bulgaria, Danube and Volga Bulgaria.<sup>26</sup> A comparative geopolitical analysis demonstrates that the great Eurasian empires – the Russian and the Ottoman empires are to a great extent “superstructures” over the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition.<sup>27</sup> A major verification in this respect is the “Third Rome” doctrine, which originally was a Bulgarian one but later was taken up by Moscow.

In 1995 Grimberg, a Volga Bulgarian analyst laid out the draft for a pan-Bulgarian super-ethnic doctrine in order to unify the energy of the Eastern Bulgarians in the Volga-Urals region with the geopolitical capacity of Bulgaria on the Balkans.<sup>28</sup> This pan-Bulgarian project was launched to protect the Bulgarian super-ethnic community, stretching from the Balkans to the Volga-Urals region, from the pressure of pan-Slav and pan-Turkic doctrines. As a natural product of the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition the pan-Bulgarian doctrine of the 21st century is to be interpreted in terms of a Bulgarian “Eurasian vision”, aimed at producing peace, order and security in the Eurasian zone inhabited by Bulgarians.

At the beginning of the 21st century the Bulgarian super-ethnic community amounts to 25-30 millions.<sup>29</sup> The Bulgarian ethnic and cultural zone in Eurasia encompasses large parts of the Balkans, South Ukraine, North Caucasus and the Volga-Urals region. The majority of the “Western Bulgarians” speak the so-called Bulgarian-Slav language and are of Christian Orthodox denomination. They inhabit Bulgaria (8 million Bulgarians); Macedonia (1,5 million Macedonian Bulgarians); Yugoslavia (about 300 000 Bulgarians – in the Western Bulgarian Outlands, in the district of Bulgarian Morava and the Bulgarians-Gorans in Kosovo). In northern Greece (White Sea Thrace and White Sea Macedonia) there are about 300 000 Bulgarians – Christians as well as Muslims. In Eastern Albania there are about 100 000 Bulgarians – mainly Muslims; in Romania – about 250 000 Bulgarians – Christians in North Dobrudza and Catholics in Transylvania. In Turkey there are 100 000 Bulgarians Christians and over 1 million Bulgarian Turks – immigrants. In Moldova live about 100 000 Bulgarians Christians and about 100 000 Bulgarians-Gagauzs (in the autonomous Gagauz

republic - Christians who speak the Hun-Altai language of the “Eastern” Bulgarians). In South Ukraine (Bessarabia and the Crimean peninsula) there are about 1 million Bulgarians – Western (Christians, emigrants from Bulgaria) as well as Eastern (the so-called Crimean Tatars – Muslims, descendants of the “Black Bulgarians”).

In North Caucasus there are several ethnical groups of Bulgarian origin – descendants of the so-called Magna (Great) Bulgaria. These are the Kalmyks, Karachaevs, Balkars, Dagestans, Abkhazians, North Ossetians, Ingushes.<sup>30</sup> There are even certain circles in the Chechen society pretending for the Bulgarian legacy and name.<sup>31</sup> A clear sign for the national perceptions of the Caucasus Bulgarians was the visit to Sofia of Bagautdin Aushev, the Secretary of the National Security Council of Ingushia. In 1999 Aushev paid a visit to Sofia in search of support for his small country. In North Caucasus there are several autonomous republics within the framework of the Russian Federation: Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kalmykia. Besides, there are two republics (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), which “de jure” belong to Georgia but there are Russian troops deployed there. All of these North Caucasus republics have participated in the major regional initiative at the beginning of the 90s – the Confederation of the peoples of North Caucasus. The lands of the Caucasus Bulgarians are the strategic link between the Western and the Eastern Bulgarians. With respect to language and religion they belong to the Volga Bulgarians. The majority of the Caucasus Bulgarians are Muslims and speak the Hun-Altai (Kipchak) Bulgarian language. In 2000 the idea for a Caucasus Stability Pact was launched. Bulgaria has ethnic and cultural ties with the North Caucasus peoples. Moreover, Bulgaria is actually a neighbour (via the Black Sea) of the Caucasus Bulgarians. Therefore, one may expect the active involvement of Bulgaria in an eventual Caucasus Stability Pact.

In the region of Volga and the Urals the Bulgarian super-ethnical community includes the population of Tatarstan (4 millions), Bashkortostan (4 millions), Chuvashia (1,5 millions), Mordovia (1,5 millions) and Udmurtia (1 million people). Besides, in the administrative units in the Volga-Urals region, which are not parts of the sovereign republics there are 2-3 million Volga Bulgarians: Tatars, Chuvashes, Bashkirs, Mishars, Hajnas, Tamtays, Nukrats, Teptyars, Hanties and Mansies. There is a considerable part of Volga Bulgarians inhabiting Siberia (the republic of Hakassia, Tyumen, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Omsk and Kemerovo oblasts).<sup>32</sup> The majority of the Volga Bulgarians are Muslims, but in the Bulgarian Islam there are strong remnants from the ancient Bulgarian faith in Tangra.<sup>33</sup> Tangra is a God, who was part of the

religious systems of the Celts and the Shumers. Supposedly, the English word “thunder” is derived from the name of the ancient God Tangra. Even at the end of the 20th century the Volga Bulgarians use the name of Tangra as a synonym of Allah. They speak a Hun-Altai (Kipchak) Bulgarian language.

Another important segment of the Bulgarian demosphere at the beginning of the 21st century is the Bulgarian diaspora in the USA, Canada and Western Europe. There are about 500 000 Bulgarians in the USA, 200 000 in Canada, 150 000 in Western Europe, 150 000 in Australia and 200 000 in Latin America (mostly in Argentina). The most influential organisations of the Bulgarian diaspora are the Bulgarian National Front and the Macedonian Patriotic Organisation.

In conclusion, it should be underscored that the Bulgarian super-ethnic community is a crucial factor in the Eurasian international alignments in three regions: the Balkans, the Volga-Urals region and in North Caucasus. Therefore, a lasting Eurasian security system has better chances of build-up with an active Bulgarian participation. The overestimation of the Russian (pan-Slav) and the Turkish (pan-Turkic) doctrines at the expense of the pan-Bulgarian Eurasian vision could mislead the international community in its strategic planning in Eurasia. In particular, further neglect of the Bulgarian emancipation movement in the Volga-Urals region could lead to a “spill-over” of ethnic crises in the heart of the Russian Federation, and respectively to the destabilization of the whole of Eurasia.

The Bulgarian Eurasian vision has well-rooted tradition. Throughout history Bulgarian geopolitical organisms have contributed considerably to the establishment of a comprehensive Eurasian security system. In fact, the Hun-Bulgarian empire is one of the first comprehensive Eurasian security systems. The Bulgarian geopolitical model “Idel” and its projections (Magna Bulgaria, Danube and Volga Bulgaria) have been the underlying basis for the production of peace, security and stability in the Eurasian geopolitical zone. The most clear expression of the Bulgarian model is the Bulgarian “Third Rome” doctrine, founded in the 13th century by tsar Kaloyan, which was one of the first ideological contributions to the Eurasian idea, i.e. the idea that Eurasia has idiosyncratic identity, “neither West, nor East”. A product of the Bulgarian “Third Rome” doctrine is the Bulgarian-Slav alphabet, which is the major means of civilized communication in the Eurasian geopolitical system to date. A symbolic fact is that the “birth” of the Eurasian ideology took place in Sofia in 1921, when the book “To the East. The establishment of Eurasianism” was published by Russian

immigrants. Moreover, some of the forefathers of the Eurasian ideology, Petr Savitsky and Lev Gumilev are of Volga Bulgarian descent.<sup>34</sup>

The contemporary Bulgarian Eurasian vision is a pragmatic concept based on the theory of “political realism” and the realities of globalization and interdependence of the world at the threshold of the 21st century. The Bulgarian Eurasian vision is a vision of the spiritual and geo-cultural unification of “Eastern” and “Western” Bulgarians - a unification that is vital for the promotion of stability and security on the ancient “Silk road” between the East and the West. It is also of vital importance for the setting-up of a multi-polar geopolitical order in Eurasia that is the only basis for multilateral co-operation in the Eurasian “grand chessboard”, as Brzezinski has put it.<sup>35</sup> The emergence of the Volga-Urals geopolitical region is an empirical fact that, although unrecognized should be taken into account. There are medium-term prospects for an economic and political entity of the Volga Bulgarians within the framework of the Russian Federation. This prospect will inevitably make a strong impact on the geopolitical situation of Bulgaria on the Balkans, because the main trend in the Bulgarian geopolitical tradition is the permanent Bulgarian “return to Eurasia”. One may expect that in the long run Bulgarian foreign policy will extend its integrative link with the West as well as with the East. Thus, in its capacity of a mediator and “bridge” between the East and the West Bulgaria may contribute to the setting-up of a more secure and prosperous world.

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