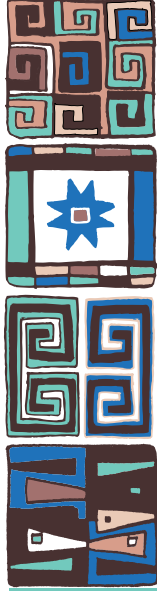


Towards the peripheries of the Western World: Eurasian regional policies in Latin America¹



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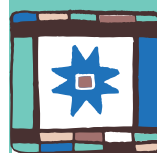
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Until the Second World War, Latin America had been a region where the US and Western European powers hegemonized the diplomatic and economic agenda. The Cold War witnessed the dualistic presence in the region of the Soviet Union, while the end of this period opened the field to a more multiregional and multidimensional strategic game between Latin America and Eurasia beyond the fixed and narrow security agenda of the bipolar world. In addition to the Russian regional presence, an increasing Turkish international activism next to the advent of new nation-states that achieved independence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Eurasian nations have tried to develop a coherent regional policy toward Latin America, especially since the 2000s, with different aims and results. In this work, I will analyze the regional policies towards Latin America of four different Eurasian countries that belong to different international 'leagues': Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Putin's Russia has renewed the strategic ties with the region after a few years of absence. Turkey is an interesting case of middle-power activist diplomacy that regards new regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America as opportunities to reach global and develop fluent trade links. Azerbaijan is a test-case of a small or sub-regional power trying to gain presence and legitimacy in a new regional space, while Kazakhstan has promoting a multi-vector global foreign policy looking for economic opportunities thus trying to jump into a higher status in world politics. This paper will try to explain the relations between Eurasia and Latin America by a bringing static-centric approach from realist and international political economy arguments, thus comparing how particular foreign policies react to different international and structural environments.

While some theoretical developments in the IR discipline continue to claim that single particular variables such as power, commerce, diffusion of international norms, democracy or cultural identity explain the multidimensional international arena; the reality seems to be more complex. Far from these interpretations, this work tried to explain the development of regional policies of different Eurasian states towards Latin America based on the interaction between the international context, and the domestic priorities. Unless Russia –and later Armenia–, the Latin America dimension in their foreign policy is actually a novelty for the rest of the Eurasian powers, which normally place the region as a secondary or non-traditional destination in their general foreign policy framework.

While normally these nation-states pay big attention to the regional or sub-regional environment or their relations with the regional or global power, the expansion of the foreign policy toward distant regions is still a topic scarcely explored, especially for middle and small powers. Changes in the international environment –both at the power structure, and the rules that command it– are central to



understand the incentives and constraints for all kinds of actors. The international architecture of the post-Cold War opened a huge space for deepen and broadening the traditional borders of the diplomacy, by increasing the sectors in which the states develop their interactions, and by incorporate new non-state actors such as NGOs and business networks which, in the case of most of the so-called 'emerging powers', are very attached to the state. Now, the international order is under transition.

The debates around the current state of the world order are becoming more and more intense as the world has moved into an increasing multipolar, polycentric direction (Zakaria, 2008; Ikenberry, 2011 & Acharya 2014). The US hegemony is under heavy criticism while BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and near-BRICS (Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey and Argentina, among others) emerging powers are trying to gain more space, status and legitimacy in the international arena and the next-coming international system. The new emerging nations are looking for new diplomatic, economic and cultural opportunities to spread its influence, usually as soft power but also using hard power tools. Latin America is one of these spaces where the rising powers has been looking to expand their interests, image and values.

The puzzle that I find interesting to explain is why these Eurasian countries have developed an active regional policy towards Latin America in the last decade while, simultaneously, these countries differ greatly among themselves about their historical-path, institutional framework, developmental model and, especially, their strategic size.

This paper will explain and compare the interactions between the named Eurasian countries and bringing arguments from the Power Transition Theory and the literature about emerging powers of the International Political Economy (IPE) approach. In this case, I selected four different kind of actors divided by their position in the global hierarchy of power –great, emerging, middle and small-: Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

Actually, there are four "divisions" or "leagues" in international politics that play simultaneously: the Western World represented in the G7 (with Russia now out of the group), the great emerging powers gathered in the BRICS, the emerging middle-powers whose embryonic institution is the MIKTA, and the rest that can be traditional middle and small powers. Russia is a traditional great power, member of the United Nations Security Council and the BRICS. Turkey is an emerging middle power that has developed a near-BRICS active foreign policy while is member of the G-20 and MIKTA group, even if

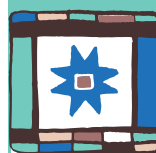


in the last years his label is increasingly contested. Kazakhstan is not anymore a small power but a middle one, with increasing interest in developing global networks, in addition to an active mediator role in her region. Finally, Azerbaijan is an active but small, sub-regional power limited only to the strategic Caucasian region. In relation to the IPE approach, it is relevant because it helps to explain and understand the foreign policy's choices made by the nation-states in the post-Cold War states due to the conceptual interplay of geopolitics, economics, and identity factors that shaped the historical path, institutional framework, developmental model and state's public policies in the context of an open, globalized world economy. Even if the perspective that I followed is state-centered (Gilpin, 2001), it recognizes the relevance of global and transnational processes and their impact and interaction with the state.

In empirical terms I will compare the foreign policy of Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, towards Latin America by evaluating their driving factors, dimensions and the expected aims of each regional policy in order to understand the reasons whence policymakers have decided to expand the diplomatic ties. These cases share the incentives provide by the international environment, and the same outcome, an increasing engagement with Latin America, while the reasons, and the degree of foreign policy vary case by case in relation to the domestic –economic and political– incentives.

To understand the scope of this comparison, it is better to clarify the concepts and its components. I understand 'driving factors' as the key national variables that explain the sources of the process in foreign policy both globally and regionally. I identify three main driving factors: geopolitical or security-centered, economical, and ideological/identity-based. In relation to the dimensions, I divide it by sector (political, economic, cultural, religious, humanitarian, etc.) and level (bilateral, multilateral and global). Throughout this work, I will explore the sectorial dimensions of the regional policy in addition to the global scope, especially related with informal international forums such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa) or MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia).

This paper focuses on country-level structural and domestic factors to explain "why" and "how" these countries have paid an increasing attention to Latin America. In relation to the "why", geopolitical factors –regional environment and global relative position–, politico-economic elements –political regime, institutional framework and economic model–, and ideological –elite's identity and country's self-perception– variables are central to explain the coherent process the choices of a novel foreign policy. The expected results of the



regional policy normally include a wide-ranging spectrum but the observed outcomes are circumscribed with international legitimacy (Azerbaijan), global political networks (Kazakhstan), recognition of great power status (Russia) and international actorship (Turkey).

About the “how”, the process of a regional policy can be divided in the next categories: opening, strengthening, resetting, and retreating. In an “opening” foreign policy, a state tries to initiate or increase – almost from scratch - the diplomatic presence by developing several official actions to gain attention of the regional actors and selecting key partners. The strengthening shows a continuity in the foreign policy while trying to deepen and expand the scope and dimensions of the regional policy. The third option can be explained as the change in foreign policy due to the general modification of the politico-economic framework or a repositioning in the international system and led to a “new regional approach” altering the priorities and partners. Finally, when a state withdrawn from a region fully or nearly fully losing influence and presence might be described as retreating.

In the next section, I will analyze the selected cases by assessing the driving forces that shaped the dependent variable –the novel diplomatic expansion in Latin America– which will be measured by the level of high-level visits, governmental decisions towards the region –e.g. opening of new embassies, bilateral agreements, specific plans, etc.–, the evolution of trade ties and the widening and deepening of the regional policy’s dimensions. A more in-depth evaluation of the domestic institutional actors, key regional partners, bilateral relations and multilateral cooperation are out of the reach of this paper and will be analyzed in future works.

Eurasian regional policies to Latin America

Resetting the ties: Russia's new engagement in Latin America

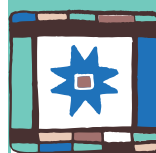
The Russian Federation is a great power, successor of two historical empires –Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, member of the BRICS “league”, with increasing military role in two of the most renowned armed conflicts, the Syrian and Ukrainian civil war. Under the centralized leadership of Vladimir Putin, the transformation of the Russian economy has followed a model based in a rentier state economy with high dependency of energy resources. With a hybrid, and increasing centralized political regime, Russia has returned to the big game of the “high-politics” as a renewed regional player trying to rebuild its regional sphere of influence displacing the western

interests in the region and looking for new international status as a great power. The cases of Russia's military involvement in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since late 2013 are two of the most relevant test cases. Even if the Eurasian region is the priority of her foreign policy, Moscow has interest worldwide and Latin America has been one of pillars of its global foreign policy grounded on diplomacy, trade and military sales (Sanchez, 2010:368).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian Federation has been an emerging actor in Latin American but since late 1990s, after her withdraw from the region (Sanchez and Larreño, 2009:14). The history of the relations between the region and the Eurasian great power is long and controversial. The first contacts date back to the first half of the nineteenth century when the czarist Russian Empire established diplomatic relations with the Brazilian Empire (1828), Uruguay (1857), Argentina (1885) and Uruguay (1890) (Davydov, 2012:8). During the second half of the 20th century, the relation was intersected by the formal needs of the Soviet state, and the Soviet Union's ideological background which was perceived as a major strategic threat for US interests. These complex interactions define the dualistic nature of the Soviet policy towards Latin America during the bipolar age (Jeifets, 2015). In the revolutionary sense, the Russian's regional policy towards Latin America was marked by ideological and geostrategic factors and the URSS tried to expand her regional influence at expenses of the regional superpower. For example, revolutionary regimes such as Cuba and Nicaragua were strongly backed in order to weaken the US hegemony. This conflictual history finishes when the Cold War ends marking also the decline of the Russian influence, especially in relation to its main ally: Cuba.

In spite of the retreat, Moscow never fully disengaged from Latin America, even during Russia's troubled decade of the 1990s. The main diplomatic infrastructure was maintained and even expanded due to the end of the "Soviet threat"². In 1997, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov visited the Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica arguing that "Russia was and still is a great power. As a great power or one of the main players in the international arena, Russia, naturally, should have multilateral ties with all continents, with all regions of the world" (Blank, 2010:4).

The good intentions and actions stopped after the Vodka Crisis in 1998 but after the first years of Putin's government, Russia re-discovered the relevance of Latin America, "resetting" the former ties and boosting an active engagement with the region since "Moscow considered the region as a potential ally in the struggle for a multipolar world" (Jeifets, 2015:92). In this case, geopolitics, and perceptions about global balances matters. The most significant high-level visits were made



during these period. Russian Presidents Vladimir Putin (2004 to Brazil and Chile and during 2014 to Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua and Cuba) and Dmitry Medvedev (Argentina and Brazil in 2008) made the first official visits to the region in addition to several trips to the region of Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister and high-rank Russian officers. In this sense, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba seems to be the three pillars of the regional policy (López Zea & Zea Prado, 2010:79).

Since early 2000s Russia has seen Latin America a region to expand its geo-economics interests and achieve again the status of great power at the global level. Nonetheless, there are different opinions about the re-emergence of Russia as an extra-regional actor. Some authors affirm that Russia abandoned the region due to the structural setbacks and, after almost a decade, has returned to recover lost strategic positions (Sanchez, 2010:365). According to Vladimir Rouvinski, the end of the support of Cuba as well as the decline of all kinds of other interactions with Latin America that can be called the Russian “departure” from the region in the beginning of the 1990 (Rouvinski, 2013:3). An alternative argument states that there is not a return but a new policy given the changes in the political elite and the economic development model (Paniev, 2014:25 & Rouvinsky, 2013:4). One of the key factors that avoid the Russian “departure” has been the role of the Latin American countries as active partners during the 1990s. Given the absence of an active Russian’s regional policy, the Latin American countries had advanced the bilateral and multilateral relations (Paniev, 2014:25).

After the interregnum, Russia made an important shift in her relations with Latin America but, far from returning to the region, Moscow reset the relation toward new aims grounded by dissimilar driving factors the relation from the previous era. While in the Cold War, Latin America was seen a complex space in which the URSS sought both to limit the regional hegemony of United States under the guidance of the Marxist ideology and her geopolitical interests, but also to fulfill their economic and logistical needs; now the driving factors are a blend of geopolitical –plus commercial– interests in which Russia aim to achieve reconnaissance as one of the poles of the next polycentric or multipolar world. A multipolar world is a world with less US influence and more space for Russian maneuvers in which Latin America can benefit. As Alexander Lukashevich, official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, states in February 2015 after the Third Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC): Russia “notes with satisfaction that CELAC is being established amid the general consolidation of the LAC as a new center in the emerging multipolar world order that allows Latin American countries to develop and promote joint approaches to global issues” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2015).

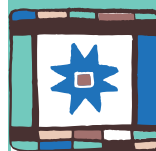


The concept of a polycentric system is used by “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”, an official document released in 2013 that presents the priorities of her foreign policy and offers important insight about how Russia views an international environment (Monaghan, 2013:2). According to the document, the current transition in the international relations will be transformed into a polycentric or a world of three poles –Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian and Asia-Pacific regions– with three leading great powers –China, Russia and United States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2013)

A polycentric order presupposes an adequate participation of the Russia in the regulation of the global economy and international politics along with other rising centers such as Brazil (Davydov, 2012:7). The new Russian diplomatic activism in Latin America targets three levels: global, regional and bilateral ties. At the systemic level, Russia sees BRICS as the main informal actor of the emerging world and Brazil is chosen as a key partner in the new World Order. Regionally, the game is more complicated because of the regional preferences of the regional’s policy toward the members of the “axis of resistance” (Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador and lately, Argentina during the Cristina Kirchner’s years) and the opposition of US and its allies. Russia benefits both from the international momentum of higher commodities prices, and the rise of the ‘new left’ in the region, which leaders seen Russia an allied to counteract the U.S. pressures, and broader the international alliances.

At the same time, Latin America is seen as a partner of Russia in this new world order. For example, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov highlights the increasing role of Latin America “becoming one of the centers of the emerging new polycentric world order, designed to become more democratic and stable, and relying on collective and concerted action with regard to the generally recognized norms of international law, cultural and historical traditions” (Lavrov, 2011). On the other hand, Latin America perceives Russia as an important great power in the multipolar world (Paniev, 2012a:126) and several countries has open the doors to the Russian interests producing a “strategic momentum” where the Russian influence in the region is stronger than ever before, even at the height of the Cold War (Farah and Reyes, 2015:1). Russia’s Regional Policy has become by far more intense than the early post-soviet years (Paniev 2012b:39).

From a realist point of view, the foreign policy of great military powers will focus on preserving their power by maintaining a high profile in world affairs and balancing against other powerful states (Kaarbo, Lantis and Beasley, 2002:9) while the liberal/interdependent approach affirms that more economic interdependence transform foreign policy, making it more cooperative. While I have argued that



the driving factors of the “new” Russian’s regional policy is a mixture of geopolitics and trade interests, the first explains the regional behavior more appropriately. However, Moscow’s main motives in Latin America are geopolitical and tied to its self-representation as a great global superpower and rival of America (Blank, 2010:14) while these geopolitical aims outweigh economic interaction especially in relations with its main partners Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Blank, 2014:5). Even if Russia is guided by geopolitical considerations, is not the sole driving factor because Moscow looks for ways to expand its presence in the world using the growing trade and economic opportunities and demands (Paniev 2012b:47). Regarding the level dimensions of the regional policy, Moscow prioritizes the global and bilateral levels in its approach while the political and economic issues are the most relevant in the agenda.

There are three main characteristics in the “resetting” of the Russian’s regional policy: pragmatism, regional competence and bilateralism. The current regional policy is not driven by ideological concerns but based on pragmatic interests. Geopolitics is tied to state interests, not to a particular set of ideas or beliefs. According to the Document ‘Concept of the Foreign Policy’, Latin America is the fifth regional priority after the three regional poles and Middle East in which Russia is expanding political interaction, promoting trade, economic, investment, innovation, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, combined responses to new threats and challenges, securing the position of Russian companies in dynamically developing industrial, energy, communications and transport sectors of the region’s economies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2013).

2002	2.058	1.173
2003	2.280	1.463
2004	2.694	2.155
2005	4.422	2.357
2006	5.581	2.508
2007	5.742	4.254
2008	7.383	7.154
2009	5.112	3.175
2010	6.682	4.237
2011	7.317	6.499
2012	6.805	7.224

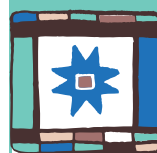
2013	7.121	7.269
2014	7.447	7.415

Table I - Russia-Latin America trade flows (2002-2013)³

The regional competence has two faces: politico-strategic with US and economic with the Western and Chinese companies (Paniev, 2014:28). In relation with the first, Russia is still seen as serious threat to Latin American and U.S. interests (Blank, 2010:7) due to the spread of anti-American feelings in the region, the support of “radical populist” governments and the weapons selling to unfriendly governments (Farah and Reyes, 2016:4-5). Russian scholars dismiss these hypotheses as a “myth” while recognizing the importance of symbolic geopolitics events such as the joint exercise with Venezuela in 2008 as “mirror” example of the US exercises in the Black Sea (Davydov:2010, 10).

The economic competence seems even more difficult for Russian interests. The level of trade between Latin America and Russia is still low, more than USD 14 billion in 2013, while China trade with the region reach US\$263 billion in 2014. The gap is huge. However, comparing with previous years, Latino-Russian trade has experienced a continued growth (see Table I). In spite of the official and academic statements about the complementarity of the economies (Paniev, 2012a:114), the trade is still insufficient for the expectations level and the lack of diversification. Russia sells mineral fertilizers, military equipment, metal laminates and electrical equipment while the Latin American countries normally export primary agricultural products (Paniev, 2014:28). Finally, in the last years Russia is buying more and more products from Latin America due to the western economic sanctions on Ukrainian crisis –unless than the initial expectations–, thus indirectly benefited the commercial ties. Finally, Moscow’s way to engage with Latin America is primarily bilateral, not multilateral (Blank, 2010:6). In the commercial sense, the main partners of Russia are Brazil, Mexico and Argentina (Camhaji, 2015).

In sum, the emergence of Russian interests in Latin America is not a new geopolitical reality, but a strong one due to the combination of a new Russia’s regional policy guided by mainly by geopolitical concerns and facilitated by the rise of counter-hegemonic governments in the region (Sanchez, 2010:362). Nonetheless, there is still strong restrictions for the Russian’s expansion in Latin America due to the characteristics of the global economic system in which both actors are peripheral economies, and the clash of strategic affiliations for or against US that leaves little room for a comprehensive cooperation in central issues (Pio Garcia, 2010:67).



Turkey: An expected opening to Latin America

President Recep Erdoğan visited twice Latin America in 2015 and 2016 demonstrating that Turkey wants to deepen its presence in the region, thus showing the global reach of the “new” foreign policy. But how can we explain this activism of Turkey after decades of low-profile in the region?

Since 2003, Turkey has been one of the leading middle emerging powers due to the active foreign policy that Ankara shifted from the traditional western orientation towards new “old” regions related with the glorious Ottoman past, the Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa. Traditionally, the country of the Bosphorus has been addressed as a middle-range country characterized, according to the theoretical prescriptions, for their ability to obligate other weaker states to take actions which they would not otherwise have taken, and to resist pressure to do so from other more powerful states (Hale, 2000:1-2).

Turkey usually had been focused inwards except in some historical junctures such as the periods of Turgut Özal (1983-1993) or Adnan Menderes (1950-1960) premierships. Nonetheless, during the Erdogan’s years, and grounded on an optimal period of political stability, economic growth, and a soft-power oriented diplomacy, Turkey has tried trying to cross the traditional barrier of a middle power, at least until mid-2015 when the consequences of the Syrian Civil War affected both the prospects for regional preeminence, and the international image of Turkey. During these period, Turkey has been involved in the emerging middle-powers “league” with alike countries who are trying not only to reach a higher status beyond the place of the “middle powers”, but also present a model of good behavior following the rules of global governance. A good example of this “exemplary” links among these countries is the MIKTA group which all of them share different degrees of democracy, fast-growing market economy, constructively foreign policies, and the propensity to play the role of “bridge-builder” among countries with different views on the global stage (Sukma, 2013). In the case of Turkey, this activism has been sustained by two main driving forces: the identity nexus – conservative legitimacy along with the conceptualization of Turkey as a “central state” and inheritor of the Ottoman Empire -, and the economic transformation of Turkey based on a neoliberal model.

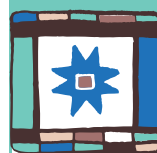
Beyond the material power capabilities –military strength, economic resources and level of development–, ideational factors such as the historical path and the self-perception are fundamental to understand the development of her foreign policy. The conceptual base of Turkey’s new foreign policy, implemented by Justice



and Development Party (AKP), states that Turkey is not only the “bridge” between the West and the East, but a Central country. This concept locates Turkey nor in the “West” neither totally in the “East”. Nonetheless, the increasing de-Westernization and Eurasianization does not signify the total abandonment of the Europeanization Project (Öniş & Yilmaz, 2009:20). The notion of “central country” started to open up towards other regions such as Asia and Africa with an institutionalized partnership and wanted to play a more active role in international relations (Özkan, 2011:116). Beyond the ideational factor, there was some factors that pushed Turkey to search for a different geopolitical orientation from the West in order to increase her role as a regional power, such as the suspension of the EU accession negotiations process in 2007, or the initial western support for the Turkish role model during the Arab Revolutions.

The mentor of the ‘centralist’ approach, the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, argues that Turkey plays an increasingly central role in this new world by promoting international security and prosperity (Davutoğlu, 2010). The notion of central country means an actor that is geographically and geoculturally located at the intersection of self-contained regional systems (Kardas, 2012:1). Also, AKP’s foreign policy is characterized by an emphasis on the use of soft power, developing the friendly relations with all neighbors –especially before the Arab Spring–, showing regional and international activism and opening relations with new regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, among other characteristics. In general terms, the identity of the “New Turkey” –and their main decision-makers– perceived itself with high self-esteem and proud of their imperial past in addition to a high satisfaction of the current economic and social achievements.

Regarding the second driving force, the political economy of the AKP era combines neoliberal policies with a strong commitment of the state to expand the commercial ties of the local businessmen – especially the members of the new “green” or Islamic capitalist elite– and to attract foreign direct investment in strategic sectors such as transport, infrastructure and energy, among others. The increasing importance of the foreign trade in the Turkish economy is not a new phenomenon but a threshold of a process that started in the 1980s during the Özal’s years where the neoliberal reforms started. As stated by Kemal Kirişçi, the transformation of the Turkish foreign policy from a security-centered to the rising of a “trading state” has made deep impacts in the general orientation and the characteristics of the foreign economic and political relations because these new approach push a “wider range of actors come to participate in foreign policy-making or diplomatic games and that the interests and priorities of these actors are quite different from those of traditional



foreign policy-makers of Turkey” (Kirişçi, 2009:33). In sum, the AKP general foreign policy has been shaped by two driving factors that has defined their aims, dimensions and interests: Islamic-conservative identity and trade expansion.

In these years, Turkey has developed an intensive expansion of her political and economic interests in regions historically connected with the past imperial past: Middle East, North Africa, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans. However, there are other non-traditional three regions in which Turkey has carried out an “opening policy”, Sub-Saharan-Africa, East Asia and Latin America, in order to reach ‘global actorship’. These new geographical “dimensions” reflects a change of perception about the attractiveness of these regions. As Mehmet Özkan explains, “Africa and Asia are not regarded as distant and troubled regions but as possible partners with which relations in political and economic areas ought to be established and developed, and where unity of action should be undertaken when necessary” (Özkan, 2011:116).

The same argument can be displayed in the Latin American case with a small difference, Latin America has been the last geographical frontier of Turkish foreign policy. The region was not a priority due to several reasons such as geographical distance, huge logistic costs, almost inexistent investments, lack of Turkish local communities and weak historical links, among others. However, the AKP decision-makers changed the perception about the relevance of the region by looking to the several opportunities to boost trade and investment. At the same time, the diplomatic and economic presence in Latin America has been also a key indicator for them of the Turkish’s global scope beyond the traditional regional boundaries.

The driving factor of the Turkish regional policy is both with the global expansion of her diplomacy to reach recognition as global actor, in addition to the expansion of trade networks leaving aside the identity-nexus due to the lack of strong historical ties and the small Islamic communities in the region –most of them belong to Arab descent communities– that limits the religious diplomacy, even if there were some attempts such as the Latin American Muslim Religious Leaders Summit, hosted by the Presidency of President of Diyanet (Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate) in İstanbul. In order to substantiate this argument, I argue that the turning point of the regional policy was the launch of a specific regional strategy called “Trade Development Strategy towards the Americas” who defines the Latin America as “region of increasing significance for Turkey” but with an “undiscovered economic potential between the two parties” (Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı, 2006). Since this year, Turkey has shown an unprecedented activism in the region including an important number

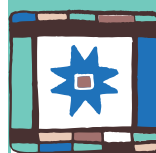


of High-level visits (two visits of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2009 and 2015 while the main Latin American presidents had visited Turkey); opening of new embassies in Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Dominican Republic, Peru and Costa Rica; strategic partnership agreements with Brazil and Mexico; quasi-interregional meetings with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Troika Foreign Ministers; among others indicators. This regional policy has a multidimensional approach that include a wide range of issues in the bilateral and multilateral ties beyond the trade and the diplomatic links such as the incorporation of cultural, religious and humanitarian issues into the agenda.

Year	Importation	Exportation
2002	644	318
2003	1.182	297
2004	1.481	526
2005	2.035	685
2006	2.466	889
2007	3.119	1.063
2008	3.820	1.730
2009	2.762	1.275
2010	3.564	1.836
2011	5.400	2.466
2012	5.148	2.960
2013	5.027	3.131
2014	5.058	2.790

Table II - Turkey-Latin America trade flows (2002-2014)⁴

Beyond the official efforts to increase the level of the relationship, the key empirical indicators that explain the driving factor behind the Turkish activism in the region are the amount of trade relations and the new economic agreements. The figures in the Table II are interesting. From 2006-2011, Turkey and Latin America has double from USD 3.355 to USD 7.848 billion but, since 2011 remain stagnant. If we take the AKP years (2003-2014) the commercial relation quintupled. Brazil, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina are the main trade partners. On the other hand, Turkey has signed a successful Free Trade Agreement with Chile while there are FTA negotiations with Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico.



In sum, Ankara has developed an “opening” to Latin America, a region usually forgotten due to the different foreign policy’s choices of the statist political economic national model. The “new” Turkey –a conservative neoliberal model– has expanded the limits of the foreign policy toward new regions. By developing a multidimensional and active regional policy in Latin America, Ankara has tried to have global presence and to be recognized as an emerging middle-power. In sum, Ankara has a global strategy with clear objectives in which Latin America appears as a secondary but still relevant region to strength diplomatic relations and commercial ties. Thanks to this increasing ties, Turkey has become a relevant non-traditional middle power who is filling special diplomatic and commercial niches in Latin America for the first time since the establishment of the Republic.

Azerbaijan: searching for international legitimacy

Since 2000s, Azerbaijan has improved its strategic relative position in the Caucasus thanks to the political stability and the implementation of a successful rentier state model based on hydrocarbons resources with striking economic results. Between 2003 and 2011, overall GDP tripled, the inflation almost disappeared and the foreign direct investment grew from USD 2.9 billion to USD 5.2 billion according to the World Development Indicators of the World Bank. In economic terms, Armenia and Georgia are nowadays several steps back from Azerbaijan that is not a middle regional power, but a sub-regional power in the Caucasus in terms of her relative economic weight, GDP per capita, and military expenditures. For example, the Azeri economy is three times bigger than the Armenian and Georgian together.

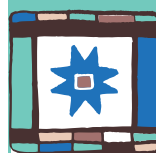
Historically, Azerbaijan had been a crossroads of empires and, since the definitive independence in 1991 is surrounded by a great power, Russia, and two regional powers, Iran and Turkey, in addition to a troubled relation with Armenia and optimal ties with the Western countries, especially United States and European Union. Since the former President Heydar Aliyev’s years, the Azeri foreign policy has been ordered according to a strategic significance in three circles: bordering countries, former URSS states and the rest (Botta, 2013:39). However, the relevance of the West has been growing after the signing of the “Contract of Century” (1994) in which Russia, Turkey, Japan, Saudi Arabia and western companies from USA, Great-Britain and Norway agreed to invest in the hydrocarbon energy sector. Heydar Aliyev conceptualized the Azeri international policy as a “balanced foreign policy” between the interests of Russia and the West, tried not to anger one side or another (Ismailzade, 2004:6).



Azerbaijan prioritizes the national security issues over the economic ones. It sounds logical since the conflict with Armenia on Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh is still unsolved. Actually, there are irregular border clashes between the military forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan which adds to the Russian ambitions in the region, whose concerns have grown especially after the Russo-Georgian War and the Ukraine crisis. Therefore, the restoration of territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, a solution of Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh and the strengthening of the economy based on the strategic-geographical position of the country are the main priorities of the diplomatic agenda. The leading factor in the Azeri foreign policy is the regional external threat that, in addition to its geographical vulnerability, it leaves little space or autonomy to take an alternative path. From a conceptual perspective, the realist foreign policy school argues that the states with little military capability on their own at the beginning of its statehood, are the most constrained and tried to search a regional or extra-regional power to achieve protection while are normally prone to focus on national security and regional issues (Kaarbo, Lantis and Beasley, 2012:10). Challenging its strategic size and its own foreign policy priorities as a sub-regional power, Azerbaijan has shown an interesting activism in its Foreign Policy far from the regional arena, in Latin America.

At the general level, Latin America is a secondary –and even hostile– destination for her foreign policy due to several reasons: geographical distance, lack of strong official contacts since the independence, unfamiliarity with the language, and the role of the Armenian lobby in certain Latin American countries such as Argentina and Mexico against the Azerbaijan's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Another source of regional policy weakness has been the inexistence of commercial interest and local diasporas in the region (Poghosyan, 2012:11). However, there was a change in the planning of the foreign policy decision-makers during the mid-2000s that identified Latin America as a region to develop a diplomatic opening, basically driven by the state. Before that moves, the region has recognized the independence and established diplomatic relations after the formal establishment of the Republic while they take a position in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict⁵.

During the 1990s, Cuba was the link between Azerbaijan and Latin America due to the common socialist history that united the URSS and the Caribbean island. A new politico-economical dynamic due to the benefits of the oil's revenues and the modernization of the country led to an international activism that included Latin America. The growth of diplomatic, political and economic capabilities and the



necessity to show the national progress provided relevant insights to an opening in Latin America by exploring relations with the most relevant regional countries: Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. In spite of these new vibrant orientation, the strategic priorities remain similar: to gain legitimacy in the regional and international arena in relation with the above-mentioned conflict.

The Azerbaijan's regional policy towards Latin America has a triple aim: to gain global diplomatic support for the territorial claim, to balance the Armenian lobby, and to expand commercial ties by placing Baku as a gateway to the Caucasus and Central Asia. As Paul Goble said "more than any other post-Soviet state, Azerbaijan over the last decade has sought to expand its political, economic and cultural ties with the countries of South America" (Goble, 2012).

The main sectorial dimensions of the foreign policy have been the political diplomatic efforts and the cultural and public diplomacy. Baku have there are six diplomatic representation of Latin American countries –Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba and México, while Azerbaijan has opened embassies in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Mexico, in addition to the previously established in Cuba. In general, the regional policy has prioritized the regional powers in Latin America (Mexico, Argentina and Brazil), while the other countries have been addressed in a minor position. Several high-level visits and agreements has been signed while some Latin American countries have started to see more sympathetically the Azerbaijani position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, there are obstacles like the low level of trade relations (see Table 3.1) and the bilateral problem with Mexico due to the Heydar Aliyev's statue incident.

On the other hand, the "soft power" dimension promotes "Azerbaijani reality" showing the position of Baku regarding the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, organizing events about the Khojaly events of 1992, supporting publications and academics initiatives such as the Azerbaijan Chair at the National University of La Plata (Argentina). The diplomatic results have been initially successful, for example in Colombia where the Senate recognizes the Khojaly events.

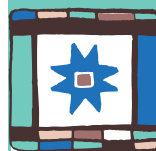
Year	Importation	Exportation
2002	3	0
2003	7	0,4
2004	134	0,5
2005	17	0,2

2006	22	0
2007	46	284
2008	33	2
2009	22	0,3
2010	40	0,3
2011	65	0,2
2012	47	.3
2013	163	1
2014	38	1

Table III - Azerbaijani-Latin America trade flows (2002-2013)⁶

Nonetheless, the Baku's diplomatic expansion has been a matter of dispute, especially experts that seen the diplomatic progress in the region as a classical counter-balance policy of the Armenian communities, and sometimes related with the Turkish 'Denial's Policy'. For example, Poghosyan evaluates the opening as the response of its own weak foreign policy towards Latin America by creating diplomatic representations that has allowed to counterbalance the strong Armenian Diaspora (Poghosyan, 2012:53). According to him, there is an "Azeri lobby" that is clashing with the traditional Armenian communities in the region.

However, the opening to Latin America did not start in 2011 but in 2006 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan decided to make high-level visits and open diplomatic representations in the main countries. Simultaneously, even if it is true that the Baku's regional policy tried to confine the influence of the Armenian Diaspora, it is only restricted to three cases where the communities are really significant, Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay. In the rest of the countries, Azerbaijan has tried to gain more allies in their quest for international legitimacy. In the last years, there is an increasing Azeri interest to go beyond this initial aim of diplomatic relations, especially with Brazil. Azerbaijan had acquired six Embraer (ERJ 170 and ERJ 190 models) and, during an interview the Azerbaijani Minister of Defence Industry Yaver Jamalov announced that Azerbaijan have plans with the Brazilian firm GESPI to produce anti-tank weapons. In sum, the center of this diplomatic opening towards Latin American is the search for regional diplomatic and political support in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, not just to contain the action of the Armenian diaspora, even if these issues are quite connected.



Kazakhstan: expanding political networks

Located at the heart of Central Asia, Kazakhstan has advanced a cooperative regional agenda, bringing her sovereignty interests at the core of multiple regional and international organizations. From an international relations perspective, Kazakhstan is a secondary regional power in Eurasia, a newcomer middle power in world politics. Geographically stuck between the two major powers of Eurasia, the Popular Republic of China (PRCh) and the Russia Federation, the country has used her geopolitical location in a smart way by promoting connectivity between Western and Eastern Eurasia; attracting investments and trade opportunities from these great powers; and furthering ties with Western powers in terms of energy investment and multilateral cooperation.

As secondary regional power, Kazakhstan have an important degree of material capabilities that also are encouraged by the promotion of a Eurasian identity, which has been materialized, with the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In addition to the impulse of regional organizations, the development of logistical and trade routes from the East to the West have posed enormous challenges for the decision-makers. The American idea of a “New Silk Road” or the Chinese ambitious initiative of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” has positioned Kazakhstan at the center of the debates. The *Nurly Jol* development strategy has been the right answer to an increasingly complex regional process, which will transform it into the key Eurasian connectivity hub. At the same time, Kazakhstan have the will, not only to become a logistical and commercial bridge between the Eastern and Western Eurasia, but also a civilizational hub that connect the Russian, Turkic and Islamic worldviews. Being a regional power carries inevitable responsibilities, thus the regional stability and the prospects for a peaceful region is one of the most challenging duties in Central Asia, not only for the great regional powers, but also for the secondary ones.

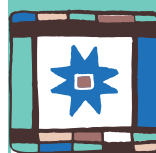
While the Kazakhstan’s role has been widely recognized regionally, Kazakhstan has also a strong disposition to become a global player. One of the key elements that links the regional and global dynamics is the conflict mediation. Middle powers that develops an active foreign policy, normally try to being reliable partners in regional –and sometimes extra-regional– conflicts. The geographical location, next to the national economic structure, and the interests of the government elite has influenced heavily on the formation of a balanced foreign policy, conceptualized as “multi-vector foreign policy”. The external action of the state is guided by the principles of pragmatism, mutual benefit, and solid defense of its national interests, while the nation is committed to a politically stable,



economically sustainable and safe development of Central Asia. 'Kazakhstan 2050', the national development strategy, made a strong emphasis on regional cooperation and integration across Eurasia, not only to avoid unnecessary conflict, but also to expand the trade and economic opportunities. Of course, the main challenges of the foreign policy are related to the region and the puzzling geopolitical triangle between Moscow, Beijing and Washington.

Kazakhstan aims to reduce tensions in Eurasia by encouraging regional integration, to promote of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation between different regions, cultures, and religions, and to improve the country's profile in world affairs. In the regional context, it exerts several efforts to provide regional stability and security and take action against new challenges and threats, including those originating from the neighboring territories. One of the main measures that Kazakhstan has used is the conflict mediation, both inside and outside Central Asia. Several goals articulated in the official document "Foreign Policy Concept for 2014–2020" have a natural connection with the role of Kazakhstan as a regional moderator: the strengthen of peace through regional and global security, the establishment of a positive global image, and the impulse to regional and international integration based on economic and commercial cooperation.

In the Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 presidential speech, the President Nursultan Nazarbayev expresses that the country should "understand our responsibility for regional security and make our own contribution to the stabilization of the Central Asia. Our aim is to help eradicate the prerequisites of conflict situations in the region as much as possible. The best way to stabilize the region is through interregional integration" (Nazarbayev, 2012). In Central Asia, Kazakhstan has play a positive role in three main regional conflicts. First, the hydropolitics tensions between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan because of a Dam project, which Tajikistan that aims to construct on the Vakhsh River in southern part of the country but harsh consequences for water distribution in the region. In March 2013, Kazakhstan try to get the two sides to talk about this dispute. Second, the Ukraine conflict in which Kazakhstan has pursue a neutral position in the bilateral dispute between Russia and Ukraine, while at the same time not only support the Minsk process but also develop a quite active agenda trying to open a space for dialogue. The "telephone diplomacy" and official visits of the President Nazarbayev to Ukraine and Russia on December 2014 attempt to create a forum for dialogue by proposing to host talks. After the situation become worse, Kazakhstan is still active in their relations with Ukraine, and pushing for a peaceful resolution of this situation. Finally, Nazarbayev efforts were central to bring closer Turkey and



Russia after the aircraft incident in Syria which take place in late December 2015.

Far cultural and geographically from Latin America, during the first years of the Kazakh Republic, the relation with the region were sporadic and limited to formal contacts. Latin American countries recognized in a short period the independence of the new Central Asia Republic and establish formal diplomatic relations. In the last years, Kazakhstan become progressively interested on the region in order to develop its multi-vector global foreign policy (Botta & Zholdasbekova, 2014). In the document "Foreign Policy Concept for 2014–2020", Latin America have a peripheral place. Especially it says that "Kazakhstan lays great importance to cooperation with countries of North, Central and South America (...) priority is given to development of trade - economic, investment and humanitarian ties and promotion of common interests in the UN and other international organizations". In this context, the emphasis was placed on Brazil as an emerging power, where the Brazilian embassy was open in August 2006, and then Kazakhstan inaugurated the first Latin American embassy in 2012, in addition to the creation of the Honorary Consular Office in Buenos Aires. This elections sound logical since Brazil is the key economic partner of Kazakhstan in the region (Botta & Zholdasbekova, 2014).

The Kazakh foreign policy has dual aims in the region. On one side, there has been a continuous interest to increase the political cooperation both in bilateral and multilateral terms. The highest rank-level visit was the Brazilian President Lula da Silva visit to Astana in 2009, which became the first visit of a Latin American leader to the Central Asia. At the same time, Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov made visits to Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Mexico in the period 2013-2014. The number of bilateral agreements has increased overtime, while the space for multilateral cooperation has been improved due to the resembling regional initiatives in the nuclear field like the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, Latin America Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (Tlatelolco Treaty), and the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), and the role of Kazakhstan as regional mediator, and global players in the United Nations General Assembly, and the upcoming place as non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in the years 2017-2018, the first for a Central Asian Republic. On the other side, in spite of the underdevelopment of the bilateral economic and trade relations, Kazakhstan has started investing in the establishment of trade networks since there are a huge space for further development. For example, institutional visits of the KazAgroInnovation, KazNexInvest and bilateral agreements with Brazil and Argentina on agriculture and livestock are part of this



commercial, and technological interest. Despite official and private efforts like the Argentine-Kazakh Chamber of Commerce, trade still remains at low levels (Table IV).

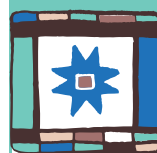
Year	Exportation	Importation
2002	58	27
2003	15	11
2004	40	37
2005	46	96
2006	60	136
2007	37	91
2008	53	163
2009	44	117
2010	70	113
2011	103	172
2012	96	219
2013	87	224
2014	149	173

Table IV - Kazakhstan-Latin America trade flows (2002-2013)⁷

Parallel to the increase of the regional status as a Central Asian regional power, and global middle power, Kazakhstan started more than a decade ago the diversification of her international alliances, thus strengthening ties with key Latin American countries, especially those who are member of the G-20. The establishment of global political networks has been a central aim to have an improved regional and global presence in world politics.

Final Remarks

Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have several differences in relation to their historical background, developmental path and foreign policy's priorities but all of them share the same outcome, they have developed an active foreign policy towards Latin America since the 2000s, while also has experienced problems in the last



years due to the regional conflictivity (Turkey and Russia), domestic violence (Turkey) and the hydrocarbons falling prices (the main source of wealth for Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan). In general, all the selected Eurasian countries has seen Latin America as positive for their interests and a region with long-term opportunities, but also recognized the obstacles derived from the geographical distance and the asymmetric structure of the global economy and the power hierarchy.

Russia has strong historical ties with the region, but her re-hierarchization from a superpower to a great power during the Putin's years, in addition to her new economic model as Rentier State had realigned her priorities and interests. Russia has followed a regional policy guided mainly by geopolitical factors while the economic ones are still present, trying to gain status as one of the power poles of the next-polycentric world. The main sectorial dimensions of the foreign policy are the politico-diplomatic and economic playing at the global level with Brazil in the great emerging powers "league" and bilaterally with her main allies: Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Ecuador. The main peaks of regional activity are related to the increasing pressure from the NATO to their regional environment as the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian War (2008), or the Ukrainian Civil War.

This approach differs from the Turkish which looks for developing a more comprehensive regional approach even trying to impulse quasi-interregional meetings such as the Turkey-CARICOM. From a sectorial point of view, Turkey uses a multidimensional approach bringing diplomatic, economic, cultural, religious and humanitarian efforts into an activist attitude. Ankara has been looking for reach global and Latin America is the necessary step to achieve a fully international scope in the periphery of the western world. On the other hand, the economic ties are fundamental to understand what is behind the Turkish regional policy due to the inexistence of the identity links that connected the past –Ottoman heritage– and the present –strong Islam communities– with the region.

On the other side, Azerbaijan is mainly trying to gain diplomatic weight in Latin America in order to improve its legitimacy in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while secondarily attempts to balance the Armenian lobby in certain countries, and expand economic and business links. The driving factor is essentially geopolitical while the dimensions of the foreign policy emphasizes the bilateral relations –especially in the countries where have official diplomatic representation– with a diplomatic and cultural approach. Finally, Kazakhstan looks for the expansion of their political networks worldwide since it gaining a more prominent role both in Central Asia, and beyond her region. Latin America is a new space to establish



fluid bilateral and multilateral relations, and secondarily to increase trade and economic ties. Kazakhstan is still a new player, although it is cautious in relation to the still limited national capabilities.

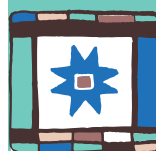
Despite initial progress and the complications in recent years, Latin America expects greater activism from Eurasian powers for the next years. The major Eurasian nations have discovered Latin America as a room to promote various interests, which are related with the characteristics of the international environment, their place in the hierarchy of international power, and the needs of the nations' political elites. After setting a significant political basis, the main challenge will be to overcome economic and cultural barriers. It is a long term process but has already given its firstfruits.

Notes

1. Previous version of this work was presented at the 2nd International Conference on Eurasian Politics & Society, Konya (Turkey), 22-23 May, 2015.
2. Actually, Russia maintains diplomatic relations with 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with 19 embassies of the Federation while Latin-American countries have 17 embassies in Moscow (Sheykina, 2010:184).
3. In millions of US dollars. Source: Latin American Integration Association (ALADI).
4. In millions of US dollars. Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).
5. For example, Brazil and Venezuela were Non-permanent members in 1993 when voted for the United Nations Security Council resolution 822 (cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of local occupying forces troops from Kelbajar district), 853 (call for ceasefire and withdrawal of Armenian troops from Agdam district) and 884 (violations of the cease-fire).
6. In millions of US dollars. Source: Latin American Integration Association (ALADI).
7. In millions of US dollars. Source: Latin American Integration Association (ALADI).

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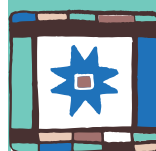
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