Russia and Pakistan: Economic and Security Cooperation on Eurasian Integration

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Abstract

This article attempts to examine the common trend towards regional integration in the foreign policies of Russia and Pakistan, marked by the enhancement of their bilateral relations in the rapidly changing global and regional environment. Their cooperation has been gradually reaching a new level of mutually beneficial partnership and trust as a reflection of Moscow and Islamabad’s recent involvement in the formation of the joint economic and security structure of the emerging Greater Eurasia. The results of the undertaken research vividly prove the fact that the current Russia-Pakistan growing multidimensional interaction, with some periodical ups and downs in their past bilateral relations, is purely determined by the vital long-term strategic interests of these regionally close states belonging to the biggest Eurasian continent.

Keywords: BRI, CPEC, EEU, GEP, SCO, Pakistan, Russia.

In our dynamically changing world there is a political and economic shift towards fast-growing Asia, which has a huge, but still not wholly used potential of human and natural resources. The proclaimed initiative by Russian President Vladimir Putin to build a ‘Greater Eurasian Partnership’ (GEP, 2015) on this world’s biggest continent with the inclusion in it along with Russia, of states such as China, India, Iran, Pakistan and other regional countries on the basis of their existing cooperation structures (Eurasian Economic Union – EEU, Shanghai Cooperation Organization – SCO, Association of Southeast Asian Nations -ASEAN) may be viewed as an evident example in this context. ¹ Actually, the conceptual framework of such a constructive partnership reflects the current trend towards regionalization in the foreign policy of all these states. Thus, for instance, the idea of geopolitical and geo-economic unity of the vast Central Eurasian territories permits to designate Russia as its northern pole, Pakistan as the southern one, and China and Iran respectively as the eastern and western poles. These four countries

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account for about 17 per cent of the global GDP. Their multidimensional cooperation may not only contribute to the growth of their connectivity (transport, energy, military-technical, humanitarian), but to sustainable inclusive socio-economic development with the aim of reducing tension and achieving peace in the region.

This quadrangular states configuration in their interaction appears to be natural and may be rather promising, especially in the scenario of deteriorating relations of all these countries with President Joe Biden’s administration in Washington. The increase of economic, political and diplomatic pressure by the US on all these states serves to promote closer relations between Moscow, Islamabad, Beijing and Teheran. It may help to extend their interstate cooperation both on bilateral and quadrilateral levels, as well as on a multilateral basis within the framework of various international and regional platforms, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Among the most interested actors in the formation of this regional interstate cooperation may be, first of all, the Russian Federation (RF) and Pakistan with their current efforts to catch up for the loss in past opportunities to build their mutually beneficial cooperation. According to jointly conducted studies by domestic and foreign scholars on the evolution of these two countries’ relations during more than 70 years of their interstate development, there were numerous ups and downs in their interaction throughout this turbulent period. Recently their bilateral relations have gradually reached a new level of mutually beneficial partnership as a reflection of both states’ involvement in the creation of the joint economic and security structure of Greater Eurasia. Their progress on this track is facilitated by the coordinated implementation of the Russian integration project of EEU, which opens the prospect to create the Greater Eurasian Partnership, with the Chinese mega initiative of One Belt, One Road (OBOR, 2013), renamed as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, 2016), the flagship project of which is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC, 2015).

In this context, Russia appreciates Pakistan’s initiative (2010), which has been recently under discussion by its expected stakeholders, to establish a new strategic economic unit, the so called ‘Golden Ring Economic Bloc (GREB) consisting, besides Russia and Pakistan, of China, Iran and Turkey. Its think tank centre for strategic economic policy development, ‘Golden Ring Economic Forum’ (GREF) was opened in

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Lahore in 2015. Almost over 30 per cent of the total human and natural resources belong to these five countries which geographically form a kind of ring around Central Asia and Afghanistan, determining the name of GREB.\(^3\) Thus, different GREB aspects covering regional peace and stability for the economic security of the countries engaged in this project were at the centre of their business, diplomatic, defence and political circles’ attention during an international seminar held in Islamabad. It was held on 30 April 2019 at the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services. While sharing his views on the recent ‘sustainable positive trend’ in different spheres of the Russia-Pakistan interaction (people-to-people contact, business-to-business ties, economic and cultural relations), the Trade Representative of the Russian Federation in Pakistan, Y. Kozlov, underlined the importance ‘to expand such humanitarian and economic cooperation on a wider range. So from this standpoint the activity in the frameworks of the Gold Ring Economic Forum is appreciable.’\(^4\) On the other hand, the Acting Ambassador of China in Pakistan, Zhao Lijian, also supporting the GREB initiative as ‘an innovative idea,’ still viewed it more as a long term project which complements the narrative of BRI and CPEC aimed similarly at the ‘economic prosperity of the people of these five countries of the Golden Ring.’\(^5\)

Actually, the GREB concept initiated by Pakistan, being strategically promising and beneficial for all the stakeholders, seems to be a more targeted attempt at advertising the geostrategic importance of the country for regional connectivity and Eurasian integration in the rapidly changing global and regional environment. But in reality, this project right now looks rather complicated for practical implementation due to various reasons aggravated by the recent pandemic and the global economic crisis. It includes, for instance, the rising US-China tensions in contrast to the establishment of US-India closer relations and the ongoing Iran-Saudi Arabia confrontation with their negative impact on Pakistan’s bilateral relations with all these states by adding greater strategic imbalance in the regional environment. Not forgetting the continuous Pakistan-India tense stand-off over Kashmir or the China-India stand-off over their border dispute, as well as a much-delayed peace process in neighbouring Afghanistan.

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\(^5\) Ibid., p.72.
In any case, the emergence of the GREB initiative as a national geostrategic and geo-economic concept of self-identification illustrates Islamabad’s intention to turn its foreign policy towards regional integration by framing a new variation of a regional economic bloc which is not in contradiction, but supplements the existing Russia and China inclusive economic projects of Eurasian integration (GEP-EEU and BRI-CPEC), so as to harmonize all of them. The increasing interest in the world, including Russia, in the dynamically developing, but least integrated Central Eurasian region, is determined through transport and energy connectivity between the states located along the currently revived ancient Great Silk Road. The Chinese mega initiative of BRI-CPEC was also supported by Moscow due to its convergence with the Russian project of GEP-EEU. It provides an opportunity to create a broader partnership in Eurasia and to attain more extensive continental regionalization. That is why Russia views positively the option of CPEC’s further expansion by means of inclusion in it, besides Afghanistan (neighbouring China and Pakistan) that of Iran, which is an important factor in stabilizing the situation in Central and South Asia. The formation of a strategic partnership of these states within the framework of CPEC can contribute not only to their socio-economic growth, but to the stability in the region as well.6

CPEC’s expansion and implementation are in Moscow’s interest primarily as an option to increase regional connectivity in Greater Eurasia. According to Pakistani experts, Russia ‘values Pakistan’s geographical location and desires to assist Pakistan in its peaceful integration into the multipolar Eurasian framework being constructed by Sino-Russian strategic cooperation. Within this framework, the multimodal CPEC currently provides the best opportunity to link Eurasia with South Asia.’7 Besides, it gives Moscow an opportunity to enter the new Asian gas supply markets viewed by the Russian energy superpower as an alternative to the European gas flow. With the operation all CPEC industrial and other projects, there will be a significant increase in the energy consumption in which Pakistan has constantly experienced a big deficit.

The Central Asian region has a great potential for the development of Russia and Pakistan interaction. After all, it is actually through the

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countries of this region, including Afghanistan, that the shortest land route goes to Pakistan. No wonder, that in April 2021, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan and Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan discussed the prospects for regional cooperation and implementation of the trans-Afghan project of the Kabul Corridor highway. The highway will connect Uzbekistan with the ports of Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea. The road will pass along the route Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar-Karachi (573 km). Thanks to this, Islamabad will be able to get a rail access to the markets of Central Asia and the Russian Federation. However, the future route raises certain questions, especially in a long-term period. It is also important to note that the highway will go through the mountainous areas of Afghanistan, where it is rather difficult to implement construction works.

The Uzbek authorities consider this project promising, believing that the road can become a ‘bridge of cooperation’ between Central and South Asia. A ‘road map’ of the project has already been signed between Tashkent and Islamabad. International financial institutions are ready to give money for the project. The high interest of Uzbekistan in the implementation of this transport project, which is relevant for many Eurasian countries, is evident by the intention to hold in July 2021 a high-level international conference aimed at the enhancement of cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia. The plan for the development of land routes through Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan would certainly be tough to implement, but in case of its success, it will serve to strengthen the ties between Moscow and Islamabad, as well as improve the overall socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, which is also in the interest of the Russian Federation.

The intensification of bilateral cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad in trade, economic, military-technical and other fields was promoted by the Russia-Pakistan agreement on the settlement of mutual financial claims and commitments on operations of the former Soviet Union with Pakistan. It was signed on 2 December 2019. In accordance with this document, Pakistan on 26 February 2020, paid off its debt to

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Russia amounting to $93.5 million dollars.\textsuperscript{10} This opened an opportunity for the Russian Federation to launch the investment process in various sectors of Pakistan’s economy. While stressing the importance of removing this practically last hurdle in the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation, Pakistan’s ambassador to Russia, Shafqat Ali Khan, who arrived in Moscow for diplomatic work on 22 March 2020, confirmed the intention of Pakistan’s leadership to ‘invest much more is one of our top priorities in our foreign policy — strong relations with Russia,’ which he considered to be at the moment ‘at the historically strongest point.’\textsuperscript{11}

It is evident that Pakistan, which occupies an important geostrategic position in the Asian macro region with access to the South seas and a huge human potential (population of 220 million people), represents a justified interest for Russia in view of Moscow’s efforts to implement the GEP strategy by strengthening Eurasian integration, including the establishment of long-term Russia-Pakistan cooperation, though certainly not at the expense of a time-tested partnership between Russia and India, but in balance with it. While observing this paradigm shift in Russia-Pakistan relations, the Indian side views it as ‘unlikely that Moscow would make any effort to shift from seeing India as its main partner in the South Asian region and also at the global level.’\textsuperscript{12}

Actually, the Russia-Pakistan political dialogue is aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region, so as to promote sustainable economic development of these countries. Recent bilateral agreements on multidimensional cooperation which were concluded on 8-12 December 2019 between the two countries, opened new opportunities for the enhancement of interstate ties and private sector business activities, especially in energy, information technology, trade, transport, agriculture, industries and production, science and technology. The Russian side, in particular, expressed its intention to invest up to $ 10 billion in energy, information technology, railways and steel industries, including $ 1 billion for the revival and modernization of Pakistan Steel


\textsuperscript{12} Chandra Rekha, ‘Emerging Trends in Russia-Pakistan Relations: Should India Be Concerned?’, Defence and Diplomacy Journal, Vol. 6, No. 1, October-December 2016, p.11.
Mills (PSM) in Karachi.\textsuperscript{13} The said metallurgical complex is strategically located in the south-east of this megacity (40 km) in close vicinity to port Muhammed Bin Qasim. The coastal site of Pakistan Steel lies on the National Highway and is linked to the railway network. The PSM was built and put into operation in 1985 with the assistance of the Soviet Union, which contributed much in laying the foundation for iron and steel production in Pakistan by creating this national industry with skilled manpower.

The PSM earned operating profits from 1985 to 2008 and registered a net profit in 13 years out of 23 years. But after bearing heavy losses mostly due to unchecked corruption and inefficient management, PSM was closed in 2015. It is rather regretful that now the PSM is in a shutdown state which has resulted in accumulated liabilities, thus causing a huge deficit for both the government and the metallurgical complex itself. Currently, Pakistan’s government has planned to revive PSM operations by adopting the ‘public-private partnership’ roadmap.\textsuperscript{14}

In this context, Russia has again extended cooperation for the revival of the PSM and increasing its productivity. This offer, among the others mentioned above, was made during an official visit to Islamabad of the large delegation led by Russia’s Minister of Industry and Trade, D.V. Manturov, on 8-12 December 2019, who took part in the 6th Session of the Russia-Pakistan Inter Government Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. In the framework of this session, the Russian participants identified energy cooperation between Russia and Pakistan as a key area of ‘bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership’ (cooperation in the construction of oil, gas and hydropower infrastructure, mineral exploration, hydrocarbon supplies, training of Pakistani industry specialists in Russian universities). Pakistan is short of electricity production and needs improvement in that sector, especially in electricity transmission and distribution. If the electricity cost is brought down or stabilized, it will bring the manufacturing sector to a more efficient level and thus increase the export of different manufactured+ items, first of all textile goods. And this is beneficial for both Pakistan and Russia as its trading partner.


It should be pointed out, that since the middle of the last decade, the energy sector has become the most important area for mutual economic cooperation. The Russia-Pakistan agreement on the pipeline construction for the transportation of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Karachi port to Lahore (the industrial heart of Punjab) was signed in 2015. Unfortunately, there were different hurdles in the implementation of this project named ‘North-South Gas Pipeline’ (NSGP), which was constantly postponed. But after the first Russia-Pakistan technical committee meeting held on 16-18 November 2020 in Islamabad for NSGP development, the major hurdles were removed. Both sides agreed to revise the project structure with Pakistan’s majority shareholding (74 per cent), but with Russia, with a 26 per cent stake, getting the management control. The project’s name was also changed to ‘Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline’ (PSGP). The designed PSGP capacity has been increased to 1.6 billion cubic feet per day with a bigger 56-inch diameter pipeline.\(^\text{15}\)

The Pakistan Stream pipeline construction protocol was signed in Moscow on 28 May 2021. On behalf of Russia, the document was signed by Russian Energy Minister, Nikolai Shulginov, and on behalf of Pakistan by Ambassador Shafqat Ali Khan.\(^\text{16}\) It was also announced that PSGP’s implementation will start as soon as possible. Pakistan Stream is considered to be the flagship project of Russia-Pakistan cooperation. The construction of the PSGP infrastructure with the help of advanced Russian technologies will provide gas pumping over a distance of 1,100 km from the southern Pakistani port cities of Karachi and Gwadar, which are the main transport and energy links of CPEC, to Lahore city located in the north of the country.\(^\text{17}\) In addition, the talks continue concerning the delivery of Russian LNG to Pakistan for its regasification and usage in the thermal power stations. Cooperation in the energy sector between Russia and Pakistan may be considered as a solid foundation and a real trigger in their bilateral relations.

On the sidelines of the 6th IGC session (8-12 December 2019) attention was also paid to Russian participation in the construction of the Iran-Pakistan offshore gas pipeline with a further extension of this route

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to India (IPI) in case of stability in the regional situation. The idea of building the pipeline has been discussed for more than 20 years. However, continuing conflicts between the regional countries involved and the risks of sanctions have long hindered the implementation of this economically profitable project for all the states involved.

As for the Pakistan railways system, which needs to be renovated, the experience of the Russian state company, Russian Railways, can be of great help in this transport sector. The representatives of Russian Railways expressed their intention to assist Pakistan in upgrading and modernizing the Quetta-Taftan railway line (523 km), which is strategically important for regional connectivity. It is an integral part of one of the main railway lines ML-3 (Main Line - 3), which can be used as one more transport and economic corridor connecting Pakistan with neighbouring Iran, Turkey and further to Europe. The same is about air transport. It is in the interest of both Russia and Pakistan to resume regular flights between the two countries.

Remembering his numerous visits to Pakistan for exchange programmes between scholars, Professor V.Ya. Belokrenitsky (Head of the Center for the Near and Middle Eastern Countries Study, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences – IOS RAS) reminds us that there was no problem in travelling by air from Moscow to Karachi and back in the 1970s and even later to participate with his Pakistani colleagues, including Dr. Masuma Hasan (Chairperson of The Pakistan Institute of International Affairs in Karachi), in different international conferences and other joint academic events. Aeroflot and Pakistan International Airlines had at that time, on his opinion, rather fruitful cooperation. Keeping this in view, he suggests not only resumption of earlier regular flights between the two countries, but the establishment of shorter routes between Islamabad and Astrakhan or Kazan and some other places in the Russian Federation. He considers transport connectivity as a very important aspect for further bilateral interaction. According to his assessments, ‘nowadays we witness progress being made in all spheres of bilateral relations: in the political-cum-diplomatic sphere, in the military-cum-security sphere, in the trade and economic and in social-humanitarian spheres.’ He suggests the formation of a consultative committee consisting of experts from both countries to think over and suggest promising areas and means of enhancing trade and economic cooperation and bringing forward some ideas about Russia-Pakistan cooperation in South and Central Asia for enhancing regional
connectivity and cooperation, adding that this committee can work either off-line or on-line, depending of the situation.\textsuperscript{18}

The Russian Federation considers Pakistan as the main country linking the Eurasian Economic Union with Asia, the Indian Ocean region and far beyond. The successful implementation of all the above-mentioned joint projects demands improvement in the regional security of Central and South Asia. Pakistan is viewed by Russia as one of the main players in stabilizing the regional situation and restoring peace in Afghanistan through the national reconciliation process by implementing the dialogue policy, including bilateral contacts with Moscow or the ‘SCO-Afghanistan contact group. What is more, Russia has recently intensified cooperation with Pakistan in the field of combating terrorism by arranging, since 2016, several joint military exercises called ‘Friendship’ (in Russian – ‘Druzhba’) on a regular basis and equipping anti-terrorist Pakistani units with helicopters. The next one will be held for the second time on the territory of Krasnodar region (Russia) in September 2021.\textsuperscript{19}

Pakistan is among other SCO member-states, including neighbouring India, who signed in 2017 the convention on combating extremism and banning terrorist and extremist groups. Both neighbouring countries had positive experience of participating together in a multinational counter-terror exercise, ‘Peace Mission – 2018,’ under the SCO aegis. The joint manoeuvres involved over 3,000 troops and 500 pieces of hardware. This army game was hold at Chebarkul in the Chelyabinsk region of Russia (22-29 August 2018), where both Pakistani and Indian soldiers for the first time professionally and on a people-to-people level interacted together with other colleagues from SCO country-members. This gave hope for a peaceful future in the unstable Central and South Asian region.\textsuperscript{20}

During his working visit to Pakistan on 18-21 December 2019, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral N. A. Evmenov, discussed the prospects for bilateral naval interaction, including


\textsuperscript{19}‘Russian-Pakistani Exercises ”DRUZHBA-2021” will be held at the Molkino Training Ground,’ https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/67609019?enc=eng., accessed 4 June 2021.

exchange of delegations, cooperation in the field of naval vocational training and plans for joint activities in 2020. He met with the leadership of Pakistan’s defence ministry at the Naval Headquarters in Islamabad, and also visited the Pakistan Naval Academy, the Naval Military College and the naval base in Karachi.\(^\text{21}\)

Moscow and Islamabad’s close stance on the main issues of the global and regional agenda, including the formation of a common regional security structure, promotes intensification of their interstate relations not only on the bilateral level, but on the multilateral scale of their cooperation in various international and regional organizations, including SCO and the EAEC. It is worth mentioning that the military personnel participation of the Russian and Pakistani armed forces in the strategic command and staff exercise ‘Center-2019’ (16-21 September 2019) together with military contingents from India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan aimed at working out their military troops’ interaction in fighting international terrorism and ensuring military security in Central Asia. The practical stage of military exercises was held on the territory of three EAEC states: Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.\(^\text{22}\) These and other joint military activities, including Moscow’s international military-technical forums with its army games, which continue on a regular basis, shows the seriousness of all participating countries to form a common Eurasian security structure.

The option to conduct SCO joint military exercises, in particular the counter-terror exercise ‘Peace Mission-2020’ at the Yurginsky training ground in the Russian Kemerovo region (August 2020), was discussed during a meeting of the 9th Defence and Security Expert Working Group (EWG) of SCO. It was held on 18-20 February 2020 in Islamabad. The participants discussed the main issues of cooperation between the defence ministries of SCO member-states and coordinated the plan of EWG activities for 2020 during Russia’s SCO presidency. The parties also agreed to arrange the operational information exchange on security matters between the defence departments of SCO members.\(^\text{23}\) However, it


should be mentioned, that due to the spread of Covid-19 infection, this joint anti-terrorist exercise ‘Peace Mission-2020’ was postponed from 2020 to 2021.

From the foregoing it is obvious that the convergence of Russian and Pakistani interests is determined by both countries’ aspiration to achieve peace, stability and security in the region. First of all, Russia and Pakistan are seriously concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan and the growing terrorist activity there. Both countries cooperate in promotion of suitable conditions for the warring parties to end the bloody civil war in Afghanistan through agreements on the formation of inclusive power structures. The main issues in a political settlement of the Afghan conflict were discussed during the Troika special meeting in the extended format held in Moscow on 18 March this year by Russia, China, the United States. Pakistan was invited as a globally recognized important player in this peace settlement process.24 Russia and Pakistan are the most interested actors in achieving regional peace, which will enhance their connectivity, trade and economic integration. These issues of mutual interest and concerns over regional security, particularly in Afghanistan, were also discussed in Islamabad during the recent meeting of the Russian Federation’s ambassador to Pakistan, Danila V. Ganich, with the Pakistan’s army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Both of them reiterated their commitment to enhance bilateral relations and defence cooperation between their countries.25

The recent official visit of the Russian foreign minister, Sergei V. Lavrov, to Islamabad on 6-7 April 2021 was an important milestone in the development of bilateral relations between Moscow and Islamabad. His previous visit to Pakistan took place in 2012. The current official visit was preceded by lengthy joint preparations, evidence of Moscow and Islamabad’s serious commitment to developing bilateral relations. During the final press conference, Sergey Lavrov expressed satisfaction with the significant increase in trade turnover between the two countries stressing the fact, that last year was a record year for bilateral trade ($790 million) with its volume increased by more than 45 per cent. Both sides agreed that this was not the limit. Furthermore, the Russian side declared its readiness to supply Islamabad with weapons and military

24 ‘Afghan reconciliation council head says Moscow meeting was very important,’ TASS Russian News Agency, 21 March 2021, https://tass.com/world/1268487, accessed 06 June 2021.
equipment for anti-terrorist purposes and to continue holding joint military exercises, such as the ground ‘Druzhba’ and naval ‘Arabian Monsoon’ to combat terrorism and piracy.\textsuperscript{26} Importantly, the parties also discussed the prospects of cooperation between Rosatom and the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, namely, in industry and medicine. The head of the Russian foreign ministry announced the interest of Gazprom and Novatek in supplying liquefied natural gas to Pakistan.\textsuperscript{27} These and other areas of mutual interests will be further bilaterally discussed within the framework of the next 7th IGC session which is going to be held in Russia this year.

Sergey Lavrov, during his official visit to Pakistan, had several high level meetings with Prime Minister Imran Khan and General Qamar Javed Bajwa, as well as with his Pakistani counterpart, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who named Russia as a factor of stability at the international and regional levels. The Pakistani side underlined Islamabad’s intentions to build multi-vector relations with Russia, which it considered to be a priority for Pakistan. The cordial atmosphere of the negotiations and the issues raised there, including the integration potential of EEU, BRI, CPEC, indicate the gradual emergence of a constructive and mutually beneficial partnership based on building strategic trust between Moscow and Islamabad. During the delegation-level talks, both sides agreed to intensify their efforts, so as to deepen cooperation in all areas, including the economy and trade, energy, counterterrorism, security and defence, education and people-to-people exchanges.\textsuperscript{28}

It is not an exaggeration to say that this new level of constructive bilateral cooperation and mutual trust between Russia and Pakistan was foreseen by an outstanding orientalist, founder of Pakistan studies in Russia, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Yu.V. Gankovsky (06.04.1921 - 07.09. 2001), whose 100\textsuperscript{th} birth anniversary the academic


community celebrated this year at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. By his scientific work of world fame and recognition, and connected with his effective public activities as President of Pakistan Friends Association, Yu.V. Gankovsky achieved excellence in academic diplomacy through his acclaimed academic knowledge and experience for the promotion of constructive Soviet/Russian-Pakistani relations. As former ambassador Arif Kamal reminiscences, being a ‘distinguished scholar on South Asia,’ he was considered by the representatives of Pakistan’s official diplomacy as ‘an informal channel of communication with the political elite, acting at times to forewarn us or provide us with little nuggets of information.’

Yu.V. Gankovsky, in particular, was of the opinion, that due to the new Russian and Pakistani realities, there was ‘the need to expand and strengthen Russia-Pakistan political, trade, economic, scientific and cultural ties,’ which ‘is not determined by conjunctural considerations,’ but proceeds from the long-term vital state interests of the two countries. He made these suggestions at the international conference on ‘Russia-Pakistan Relations: Current State and Prospects of Development,’ held on 16-18 October 1995 at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Top diplomats, government officials, scholars and business community representatives from both countries participated in it. At that time, 30 years ago, it was a rather difficult period for an independent Russia after the USSR collapsed in 1991, when the new state was in the process of developing its own internal and external policies. Practically the same, as it was 50 years ago with Pakistan after the loss of the country’s eastern part in 1971. However, now we can witness the gradual practical realization of the foresight of Yu.V. Gankovsky and his colleagues about positive changes in Russia-Pakistan relations.

No wonder that Ambassador Shafqat Ali Khan, during his recent meeting with Russian scholars from the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, underscored the importance of strengthening cooperation with representatives of the Russian academic community, primarily the staff of IOS RAS, being worldwide recognized as ‘a unique venue for the study of the problems in history and cultures of the Orient,’ in order to explore

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further the potential of the long-term mutually beneficial cooperation between Pakistan and Russia.\textsuperscript{32}

To sum up, the intensification of interaction between Russia and Pakistan, both on bilateral and multilateral levels in enhancing economic and defence cooperation may be considered as a part of the general regionalization trend in the integration processes on the vast area of Eurasia. Here, the ongoing bilateral Russia-Pakistan projects, while facilitating practical implementation of the Russian GEP-EEU initiative conjunctionally with BRI-CPEC, in the long-term will have the option to transform into the emerging joint economic and security infrastructure of Greater Eurasia aimed at promoting peace and sustainable socio-economic development for all belonging to its countries. Thus, one cannot, but agree, that ‘the next logical step of Russian foreign policy is to prioritize its connectivity with Pakistan through the GEP.’