

# A new Eurasian Bloc? Characterizing the activity of former Soviet and Turkic countries at the UN General Assembly

¿Un nuevo bloque eurasiático?  
Caracterización de la actividad de los  
ex países soviéticos y túrquicos en la  
Asamblea General de la ONU

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## ABSTRACT

Soviet countries were the most cohesive bloc in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) during the bipolar era, after which the East-West cleavage was replaced by a North-South division. Hence, the Soviet space fell out of the attention of UN research in the post-Cold War era. However, this North-South polarization arises mainly from voting analyses that ignore other interstate activities at the UN. An analysis of sponsorship patterns of draft resolutions from the last decade, in contrast, reveals alternative groups, including a cluster with former Soviet, Eastern European, and Turkish-speaking countries, suggesting some unity among

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Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In light of such evidence, this exploratory paper uses data on UNGA sponsorship between 2009 and 2019 to descriptively characterize this newfound coalition of Eurasian countries, probing what their pattern of UNGA activity is and what topics bind them together as a group.

**Keywords:** UNGA – sponsorship – coalitions – former Soviet countries – Turkic countries.

## RESUMEN

Los países soviéticos fueron el bloque más cohesionado en la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas (AGNU) durante la era bipolar, después de la cual la división Este-Oeste fue reemplazada por una división Norte-Sur. Por lo tanto, el espacio soviético quedó fuera de la atención de la investigación de la ONU en la era posterior a la Guerra Fría. Sin embargo, esta polarización Norte-Sur surge principalmente de análisis de votaciones que ignoran otras actividades interestatales en la ONU. En cambio, un análisis de los patrones de patrocinio de proyectos de resolución de la última década revela grupos alternativos, incluido un grupo con antiguos países soviéticos, de Europa del Este y de habla turca, lo que sugiere cierta unidad entre Armenia, Azerbaiyán, Bielorrusia, Kazajstán, Kirguistán, Rusia, Tayikistán, Türkiye, Turkmenistán y Uzbekistán. A la luz de dicha evidencia, este documento exploratorio utiliza datos sobre el patrocinio de la AGNU entre 2009 y 2019 para caracterizar descriptivamente esta nueva coalición de países euroasiáticos, investigando cuál es su patrón de actividad de la AGNU y qué temas los unen como grupo.

**Palabras clave:** AGNU – patrocinio – coaliciones – países ex soviéticos – países túrquicos.

## I INTRODUCTION

The Soviet countries were the most cohesive bloc in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) during the bipolar era. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, empirical UNGA studies found that the old East-West cleavage was replaced by one between North and South, pushing the former Soviet space out of the attention of UN research.

Such depictions, however, have mostly been based on roll-call voting data. Although widely used in empirical IR, voting agreements ignore other forms of interstate cooperation at the UN. As will be shown, recent literature deploying alternative metrics, such as sponsorship of draft resolutions, has revealed original coalitions within the organization beyond the North/South logic. Among such groups, a cluster comprising former Soviet, Eastern European, and Turkish-speaking countries stands out, suggesting some multilateral unity among Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In light of such evidence, this paper aims to characterize this newfound coalition composed of the ten aforementioned Eurasian countries. The goal is to describe and explore their pattern of UNGA activity and the topics that bind them together as a group.

For that purpose, we rely on data on UNGA sponsorship of draft resolutions from 2009 to 2019. Although the available dataset has a limited time range, it offers a longitudinal series large enough to capture the main trends within this group for the past decade.

Our findings show that the activity by these ten countries addresses multi-vectorial and -thematic agendas, which aggregate regional and national concerns. Each theme can be inductively traced to national and regional preferences already underscored by past literature, so that our results serve to triangulate and contextualize Eurasian international relations. As such, the paper contributes to the research agendas on regionalism, Eurasia, and the UN by (1) exploring the dynamics of a coalition not detected by past UN research, (2) unveiling the relation between regionalism and in-group cohesion in a global arena, and (3) charting the substantive themes that bind Eurasian actors as a group in multilateralism.

In the following, we offer a brief literature review covering the place of regions in multilateral arenas and the state of the art on the regional and multilateral relations of Eurasian countries. To do so, we mainly use IR constructivist lenses, which argue that regions are socially constructed

entities that may be shaped, remodeled or discarded attending to the preferences of their members and debate how regional coalitions within the UNGA may serve as a tool for the empowerment of smaller states' demands. We also dialogue with Eurasianist authors to identify different regional configurations of the Eurasian space and the motivations behind its regional agglutination, mainly led by Russian and Turkish ideas. The materials and methods section reviews the approaches to detecting blocs at UNGA—and justifies our methodological choice,

showing how draft sponsorship may overcome limitations of commonly used procedures on this type of research and presents the data, which are then analyzed and discussed in the next section. In our conclusion, we summarize the findings on the sponsorship patterns of this coalition, explaining what topics bring the countries in this set together thus laying foundations to fill up the Eurasian regionalism gap left by investigations on the regional-global nexus.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The first part of our review addresses what regions and regionalism are. We rely primarily on constructivism for defining both, as well as for outlining the manners in which regions impact global-level arenas. The second part is substantive and describes the concept of Eurasia and the varied groupings of states in this zone.

### 2.1. *Regions in multilateral arenas*

Regionalism, as seen today, may be studied from various angles and perspectives. According to Fredrik Söderbaum (2015), regionalism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in IR that allows for a plurality of approaches of analysis. Among the several forms

of studying regions and regionalism, the separation of regionalism waves and the relevance of IR's theoretical groundings for the understanding of how and why regions are formed deserve attention. Each of these waves of regionalism builds on (and is built upon) the political organization and global order of its time, and, as such, the causes and effects of regionalism as well as the organization of regions themselves differ depending on the standpoint from which they are being analyzed. On theoretical groundings, Tanja Börzel (2011) proposes the categorization of theories in three different dimensions that affect the form regionalism takes: the level of analysis, the logic of social action, and the role of non-state actors. In a nutshell, the

level of analysis considers whether the backbone of regionalism originates from exogenous dynamics, from endogenous will, or from a combination of both; the logic of social action investigates whether the formation of regions responds to instrumental demands or is part of a norm-based nature of relations among states; and the role of non-state actors separates theories that see the state as the main—if not the only—driver of regionalism from the society-based theories, which see non-state actors as the ones that shape states' preferences in the regional setting and, as such, influence directly on the outcomes of regionalism.

In IR, social constructivism is one of the main theories that developed regionalist thinking. It shaped many of the views and beliefs present in the new regionalism approach and it emphasizes that regionalism is not simply the outcome of states' objective economic or geopolitical interests. Instead, by moving away from state-centric notions and grounding itself in a norm-based logic of social action, constructivism argues that regionalism is a socially constructed phenomenon that results from the interactions between the collective initiatives of the actors involved in transboundary negotiations, states and their institutions, and the ideas that shape their understanding of regional cooperation. In this sense, regionalism is a dynamic process that

involves negotiation, socialization, and learning. From this perspective, regionalism is also a tool for promoting shared norms and values, which can help overcome ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences within a region. Regions, likewise, are defined as socially constructed entities that are not necessarily determined by geography or physical boundaries but rather by shared cultural, historical, and political characteristics (Söderbaum, 2015; Börzel & Risse, 2016). While the idea of regions is conceptual, it is created vis-à-vis a relation of otherness towards different likewise conceptual regions (Ghica, 2013). Its formation is seen as the result of interactions and social constructions among actors rather than a given or natural reality. As such, they can be created, remodeled, and discarded, intentionally or not, in the process of global transformation (Söderbaum, 2015, pp. 17-18), and are multidimensional in essence, taking different configurations depending on space, time, culture, and regional cohesiveness (Ghica, 2013). Regions are, therefore, used for a variety of purposes that may range from increasing economic cooperation, and shaping common behavior in the international arena to counterbalancing the might and influence of more powerful nations. Particularly, this conception of regions as power instruments can be associated with neorealism. The offensive strand of this theory envisages that regional dominance is a

crucial variable for great powers' security and overseas aspirations. As global hegemony is unreachable, these states strive not only to be the *primus inter pares* in their neighborhood, but also to check the emergence of a regional hegemon in other areas that may eventually threaten their prominent position. So, the optimal scenario in distant regional systems is a non-unipolar structure, which they can manipulate for the benefit of their own interests (Mearsheimer, 2001). Despite this instrumental understanding of regions, offensive realists contribute to the debate as they place this concept as a component of their ontological tradition. Other schools of realism are still limited in tackling regions.

Moreover, regions are not cut off from global dynamics and interact in complex forms with upper levels of international governance. With the end of the Cold War, formal Regional Organizations (ROs) multiplied in number and in their participation in global fora, as seen, for instance, in the steady rise between 1990 and 2010 in the number of ROs with accredited status at the UNGA (Parthenay, 2022, p. 272) and their ever-expanding policy scope (Panke, 2020).

The literature has emphasized several facets of this interaction. Causal research designs have focused on different dependent variables as markers of regional actorness in international

politics: group cohesion in votes, mentions to ROs in verbal statements, or the degree of cooperation/conflict between local and global institutions. Independent variables marshaled to explain these outcomes have included the attitude of regional powers, the congruence between regional identity and global norms, the area of policy overlap, and other national and institutional covariates (Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2012; Kacowicz, 2018; Panke, 2020).

Such designs have served to probe the reasons why regions act the way they do in global arenas. For our descriptive purposes, however, the primary interest lies in the anterior step of characterizing the *content* of these regional agendas. This has been the focus of case-oriented contributions, which have sought to map the topics that selected groups, for instance, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and similar caucuses promote at the UN (Smith & Laatikainen, 2020; Seabra & Mesquita, 2023). Such in-depth surveys are useful to discover what each RO, to put it plainly, "cares about". These designs are not exempt from limitations. Notably, the choice of outlining the ROs *ex ante* does not heed to the constructivist warning that the geometry of regions varies. In other words, the collection of proximate states that coalesce as a region in a multilateral arena might be contingent on factors such as theme and

forum considered—instead of geography and formal institutionalization.

By acknowledging this contingency, we subscribe to Andrew Hurrell's (2007) notion that a region's role in global governance might be seen through different lenses. Regions in the international order can be considered as containers for value diversity; as poles or bargaining coalitions; or, as highlighted in the UN literature, as service-takers from global institutions. We expound each in turn and their applicability to the UNGA setting.

Albeit peoples are politically apportioned within territorial states, their language, religion, and culture are often shared across borders. As such, regions can be regarded as bays of civilizational pluralism. The many 'pan' movements in history bear witness to the longevity of this impression, from pan-Africanism to the Islamic *ummah*. The intensification of contacts with contrasting cultures under globalization might have sharpened the need to uphold these identities. Hence, one of the motivations for regions to engage in global discussions is the promotion or defense of indigenous values and interests, as was seen in the case of ASEAN and "Asian values" in the 1990s (Hurrell, 2007, p. 138). This ideational logic befits a place like the UNGA because, unlike the Security Council, Assembly resolutions are mostly void of binding force. As such, Smith and Laatikainen (2020) argue

that these declarations are not strictly policy oriented but serve chiefly for proclaiming concepts and setting up normative frames (see also Mesquita & Pires, 2023).

Secondly, Hurrell (2007, p. 139) adds that regions can be regarded as poles that "maximize bargaining power" within a global balance of power. This configuration of regions results from internal dynamics such as the establishment of what Kupchan (1998) calls benign unipolarity. In self-restraining the exercise of its influence, the local dominant power fosters cohesion in a way that "individual states come to equate their own interests and identity with the interests and identity of the region as a whole" (Kupchan, 1998, p. 47). The insulation of regions into communities or poles impacts their behavior on the global stage, especially because, according to Kupchan (1998) regionalism takes precedence over multilateralism. At fora such as the UNGA, regional coalitions secure numerical strength, being therefore a valuable strategy in majority-rule negotiations. This benefit is greater for weak countries, because they can rely on the group to have a resonance chamber to magnify their otherwise unnoticeable claims and to pool information and resources beyond their individual capabilities (Parthenay, 2022). Indeed, this instrumental rationale operates behind the establishment of integration enterprises outside the euro-Atlantic borders. According to Acharya

(2016), non-Western projects such as the Arab League and the ASEAN aimed to empower their members' positions in dealing with the core of the international system. In other words, given their historical and structural disadvantages, peripheral countries resort to regionalism as a way to boost their political leverage in negotiations with great powers.

Lastly, from a top-down perspective, regions can be service takers from global institutions—to the extent that some challenges are persistently clustered by geography (e.g. rising sea levels on the Pacific Islands, narcotics in parts of South America and Central Asia). Many services that the UN dispenses to regions, from humanitarian relief to health, pass through the UNGA. This also implies that not all regions are equally porous to global governance (Prys-Hansen, 2010). The linkages between the UN system and Africa, for instance, are stronger than for other parts of the world due to a combination of the aforementioned factors (Mesquita & Seabra, 2020). The nature of this linkage for Eurasia, in turn, has yet to be assessed by scholarship.

Although other modes of regional-global linkage have been theorized (see Kakowicz, 2018 for a review), these are expected to be more salient in our case given the features of the UNGA. For the most part, UNGA scholarship has focused on the agenda of the

larger Eurasian powers, such as Russia and Türkiye (Kurşun & Dal, 2017), and on the dynamics of subregional agreements. The rationales of civilizational values, collective bargaining power, and service-taking can assist in making sense of the themes that emerge through the sponsorship behavior of these players at the UNGA. With that in mind, we now review the substantive literature on Eurasian regionalism to contextualize what players and topics are expected to be meaningful in the region's external actions.

## *2.2 Contested Eurasia: concept labeling, regionalism, and interests at the UN*

In the social sciences, the term "Eurasia" is mainly used to refer to the geographical space that comprised the Soviet Union, within the European continent and its Asian counterpart. As Kathleen Hancock and Thomas Libman (2016, p. 203) point out, the term is also used by scholars and policymakers to differentiate this geographic region from other regional arrangements and, as such, to highlight that Eurasia has its own particular dynamics in world politics. Despite being historically contested, the region has been given different names and has faced different degrees of regionalism across time. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, hopes for deep economic relations and political integration oriented toward a market economy arose. New regional

organizations were created then, and the role of regional players such as Türkiye and Iran was reinvented. Still, many of the Soviet institutions remained in operation, thus influencing the relations between the newly independent countries (Hancock & Libman, 2016, pp. 204-205).

The concept of “Eurasia” is used in a variety of contexts, and there is no consensus as to its most correct meaning, given the contested character of the word and the region to which it refers. Nonetheless, most scholars use the term to denote the Russian near abroad (Tanrısever, 2018, p. 14; Hancock & Libman, 2016) and its subregional groupings such as the borders of Europe and the Russkiy Mir (Torbakov, 2018), the South Caucasus<sup>1</sup>, and Central Asia—the last usually considered a natural regional grouping for their shared historical, economic, and political values (Hancock & Libman, 2016; Costa-Buranelli, 2021; Bohr, 2004). There are also approaches that include Mongolia and Afghanistan in this interpretation of Russian-near-abroad

Eurasia (Tanrısever, 2018) as well as the Black Sea, despite uncertainty about their attachment to the region (Hancock & Libman, 2016; Manoli, 2010). Other conceptual frameworks for Eurasia include the agglutination of the overlapping territories of Europe and Asia, which expand the Eurasian concept from the Russian near-abroad to include the territories of Türkiye, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe. Finally, the “Old World minus Africa” concept sees the total combination of Europe and Asia as a supercontinent connecting, in the same region, countries with few commonalities, such as Portugal and Bhutan (Tanrısever, 2018).

Another common way to subdivide Eurasia is through cross-subregional groupings. Among them, the GUAM initiative, aiming to counterbalance Russian-led regionalism but whose institutions are rather dormant, and the Caspian Sea region, featuring members of many subregional groupings interested in themes that range from the development of hydrocarbons, right on the shore of the Caspian Sea, and energy and goods transportation to the search for stability, trying to balance the democratic shift with the political unrest caused by the nature of the states’ own regimes (Anker et al., 2010, p. 12).

Most Eurasian regionalist approaches are embedded in the idea of Eurasianism. While the term Eurasia is contested, the term Eurasianism and

1 Due to the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the non-existence of diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan, Hancock and Libman (2016) do not recognize the South Caucasus as a political subregion in the Eurasian space, despite its geographical regionness. Nonetheless, recent studies find that with the end of the Second Karabakh War and the Russian, and Turkish-led mediation, the conditions for the development of regional talks are now present (Santana, 2021).

its discourses are related to post-imperialist heritages and identities, with Russia and Türkiye being its most relevant proponents. In Russia, Eurasianist scholars argue that the Kremlin has an empire-like approach to its neighbors and shapes their regional dynamics accordingly, hoping for the restoration of Russia's empire-like identity and placing Moscow as Eurasia's central component (Kazharski, 2019; Tanrısever, 2018; Torbakov, 2018; Obydenkova, 2011), mirroring Brussels' behavior in the European Union, which is seen by Eurasianists as a harbinger to an empire-of-a-new-type, one that does not conquer nations but that attracts them to its gravitational field through the expansion of its institutions. Europe's enticement of Kyiv in 2014, for instance, gave force to the discussion of the clash of empires in Russian Eurasianism. The deterioration of relations between Moscow and Brussels and the defect of Ukraine towards Western institutions disrupt the *Russkyi Mir* narrative and weaken the Russian zone of influence. The Kremlin thus uses the different meanings to the concept of Eurasia to, at the same time, highlight Russia's Europeanness, to agglutinate neighboring nations under the same zone of influence, and to oppose the West in a relation of otherness, without which Russian identitarian enterprise of Eurasianism would fade (Kazharski, 2019; Torbakov, 2018). As such, Igor Torbakov (2018) argues that Moscow's aim to expand the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and to control its

neighbors' regional affairs corroborate that Russian elites see their nation as a quasi-imperial polity. Accordingly, the expansion of Moscow's influence in the Eurasian space should enable fair competition with the world's economic powers and thwart a full-blown Pax Americana in the Caucasus and in Central Asia.

In the external affairs of Türkiye, Eurasianism also has a significant influence. In a nutshell, Tanrısever (2018) explains that Ankara, like Moscow, has historically swung its policies in a dual role between Asia and Europe, sometimes praising the Europeanization of its identity and links to the West, while at other times focusing on expanding its cooperative practices and cultural ties to its neighborhood and to Turkic peoples elsewhere. Nonetheless, Ankara soon learned that it would not be able to play the leading role in Eurasia due to its lack of resources, technological strength, and political stability, and the Turkic countries of Eurasia being mostly under Russian might or having disputes among themselves over natural resources, maritime borders, and interethnic conflict (Anker et al., 2010; Tanrısever, 2017). Nonetheless, there are different strategic Eurasianist discourses in Türkiye, the most popular being the Turkish Neo-Eurasianism distantly followed by the Western-oriented Eurasianism and the Pan-Turkism discourse. While the first loathes and feels threatened by Western leadership in international

Table 1: Overlapping Memberships in Eurasian context\*

	Regional Agreements				
Coalition members	EEU **	OTS ***	CIS ****	CSTO *****	SCO *****
Armenia	✓		✓	✓	
Azerbaijan		✓	✓		
Belarus	✓		✓	✓	
Kazakhstan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kyrgyzstan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Russia	✓		✓	✓	✓
Tajikistan			✓	✓	✓
Türkiye		✓			
Turkmenistan					
Uzbekistan		✓	✓		✓

Source: elaborated by the authors, based on information from the organizations.

- \* The table highlights the main regional agreements or organizations in Eurasia. It is also useful to note that Azerbaijan is the only GUAM member in the coalition. In geographical and cultural terms, all Central Asian countries as well as all Turkic countries are present in the coalition. Tajikistan and Armenia are the only members of the coalition that are neither Turkic nor Slavic countries.
- \*\* Uzbekistan is an observer and prospective member to the Eurasian Economic Union.
- \*\*\* Turkmenistan is an observer to the Organization of Turkic States.
- \*\*\*\* Turkmenistan is given the status of a founding state and an associate state to the Commonwealth of Independent State, but not a full member of it.
- \*\*\*\*\* Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan were members of the CSTO. The first withdrew from the organization in 1999 together with Georgia and Uzbekistan. The latter rejoined the organization in 2006 and withdrew from it again in 2012.
- \*\*\*\*\* Belarus is an observer state to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

affairs and, like Nationalist-Islamism, perceives the decline of Western world order (Kınıklıoğlu, 2022), the second—antagonist to the first—praises Türkiye's forged Europeaness, and the former aims to unite leading Türkiye with post-Soviet countries with Turkic heritage as well as Turkic groups such as the Tatar in Russia, the Uighurs in China, the Sakha in Siberia, the Turkmen in Afghanistan, and the Azeris in Iran. While proponents of Pan-Turkism aim for deeper integration of their countries and cultures under the framework of international cooperation, some radical proponents of this thought hope to unify most of the Turkic groups into a common state or federation. Another strand of Turkish Eurasianism is Neo-Ottomanism. The ideology defends the restoration of Turkish influence in the former Ottoman realms, especially in the Balkans and the Middle East, and was responsible for Ankara's projection in these areas during the first decade of Erdoğan's foreign policy (Taspinar, 2008; Davutoğlu, 2008). Tatar, Kazakh and Russia-oriented Eurasianism are also variations of Turkish Eurasianism that do not pose the same relevance in Turkish politics (Anker et al., 2010). Despite good relations with most of the Turkic nations, Anker et al. (2010) comment that there are also resentments among the Turkic groups because of Türkiye's big-brother attitude. Still, Turkish business elites demonstrate interest mainly in areas such as tourism, trade, healthcare, and

construction, while the government and Turkish organizations follow a Western pattern for cultural exchange in the region. Topics such as human trafficking, prostitution, and labor migration are also high on the civil-society agenda. These are, therefore, some of the topics on which Turkic countries are expected to converge.

As summarized in Table 1, Eurasian nations are present in a large number of subregional agreements with overlapping memberships (Hancock and Libman, 2016, 206). Some of these are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (CSO), all of which did not create much concern on the Western agenda (Nikitina, 2021), as well as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS)<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, the most important regional imbrication in Eurasia is the EEU, which agreement was signed in May 2014. With members of different subregional groupings, EEU's main goals are to build common policies in a variety of areas such as macroeconomics, transport and foreign trade, border control, business and legal regulation, and energy. With Russia as its leading member, the organization serves as the main platform for the convergence

2 The Turkic Council was renamed to the Organization of Turkic States in November, 2021. Reference to OTS in this paper may also refer to the time the organization was called the Turkic Council.

of regional interests. While EEU has reached supranational level, following the European Union model, its institutions are rather weak and targeted for contestation by its members, for they show a lack of commitment to deep economic integration and, often, diverge in interests, making the internalization of organizational norms dependent on national constitutions (Vinokurov, 2017, pp. 55-64; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2017, pp. 8-15).

Research on the actorness of the EEU at UNGA, however, has shown that its participants tend to score lower levels of convergence on topics of high politics, such as security and the Middle East question, if compared to developmental issues, low politics, and bonding with G7, G20 and BRICS members—even if their overall level of agreement among themselves is high (Kurylev et al., 2018; Ilyin, Bilyuga, & Malkov, 2016). Such a trend may be explained by the non-binding nature of UNGA activities as well as by the aforementioned lack of commitment of EEU's members to its norms. Another highlight in the patterns of interaction among EEU members at UNGA is that, despite high convergence on low politics, topics related to human rights do not enjoy the same level of agreement among the nations (Kurylev et al., 2018).

Also, within or outside the UNGA realm, Eurasian interdependence reads Russia as a hegemonic player

with which EEU member states try to either bargain for energy benefits (Belarus), military benefits (Armenia), or labor migration (Kyrgyzstan). The least economically dependent member state, Kazakhstan, however, sees membership in the EEU as a balance to Russian influence in Central Asia (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2017; Mostafa, Mahmood, 2018). Russia, in turn, usually contradicts itself by showing different interests on the same topic when its votes at UNGA are compared with votes in other international organizations, such as the OSCE (Hecht, 2021).

Similarly, CIS countries, of which all the EEU member states are signatories, tend to swing between opposing and convergent approaches at UNGA. Kurylev et al. (2018) argue that CIS members, simultaneously trapped in processes of regional integration and disintegration, pursue a policy of balance towards Russia, where, in security issues, for instance, CSTO members tend to sponsor or be sponsored by Moscow while GUAM countries do not. In summary, CIS countries converge globally but diverge regionally, despite interesting outcomes on a number of issues. Baku's votes at UNGA, for example, highly agree with those of the EEU on a variety of topics. Bishkek and Dushanbe sponsor each other and converge on votes on the use of hydropower and the promotion of single energy markets, while Baku and Astana converge on

energy cooperation. On a global level, CIS countries, especially the Central Asian ones, Belarus, and Azerbaijan, are sympathetic to the Non-Aligned Movement and tend to converge on the concerns of post-colonial nations (Costa-Buranelli, 2014; Kurylev et al., 2018). Filippo Costa-Buranelli (2014, 2021) also adds that Central Asian countries historically recommended a Westphalian world, showing high cohesion on pluralist norms of international society and sponsoring topics such as multiculturalism and pluralism, great power management, sovereign equality, and reliance on international law and diplomacy for conflict resolution. Despite not having a regional organization to support their unionness, Central Asian normative convergence on these issues remains, as highlighted by similar positions on security and non-nuclear proliferation, also in line with the South Caucasus countries (Robinson 1998).

When compared with global and regional powers in the world, it is noteworthy that Türkiye does not figure significantly as the main point of convergence for any CIS country at UNGA, not even for OTS members.

This might derive from its NATO status. As argued by Nurullayev and Papa (2023), membership in the Alliance tends to correlate with alignment with the US and against Russia and China in UNGA votes—while SCO membership has the inverse effect—possibly explaining Ankara’s singularity. Nonetheless, CIS countries present high convergence with Brazil, South Africa, and China, which may indicate that Eurasian countries try to avoid the United States at the same time that they balance themselves with Russia. Also, of the GUAM members, Azerbaijan and Georgia have low agreement among themselves (Kurylev et al., 2018). The latter tends to follow a Western bloc, just as Ukraine and Moldova, which would explain their absence in the cluster herein studied. To gain a firmer grasp of why these ten Eurasian countries in particular (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) form a group as per their sponsorship patterns, the next section details our materials and methods.

### 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### *3.1 Coalitions at UNGA: empirical approaches*

Scholarship on UNGA blocs has taken two paths: assuming formal

groups (such as the EU or the BRICS) as givens and surveying their cohesion at UNGA (Dijkhuizen & Onderco, 2019; Smith & Laatikainen, 2020) or inductively detecting coalitions that emerge from state interactions. Studies of the latter type, which is the approach adopted in this article, tend to follow a three-step procedure: choosing an empirical indicator for interstate interactions, applying dimensionality reduction or aggregation techniques, and deriving scores for the proximity/dissimilarity between countries. Well-known applications include: Lijphart's (1963) Index of Agreement between dyads; Kim and Russett's (1996) factor analysis of the early post-Cold War; Voeten's (2000) use of NOMINATE scaling to compare Cold War and post-Cold War votes; and later applications of spatial models (Bailey et al., 2017).

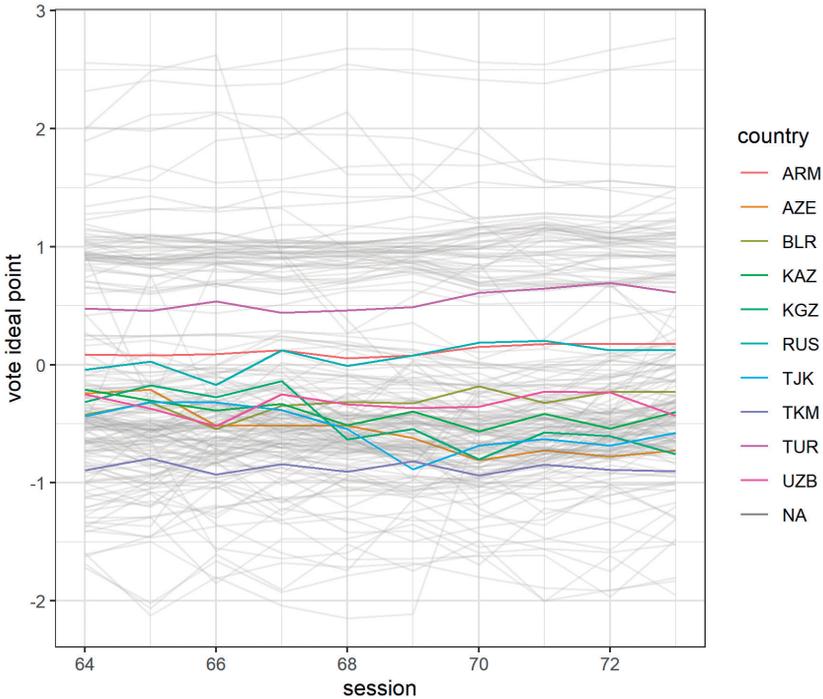
The evidence accumulated by this scholarship tells the following story: during the bipolar era, the East-West cleavage was the main axis polarizing UNGA members; the Soviet bloc (comprising the USSR, the Ukrainian and Belarusian Republics, and other communist regimes in East Europe and Asia) had the highest intra-group cohesion; with the end of the Cold War, the East-West divide gave way to a North-South fault line, which became the dominating dimension of UNGA politics. Hence, present-day coalitions follow the Western vs. non-Western division, so that former

Soviet countries have lost specificity and find themselves intermingled in these larger coalitions. This is exemplified by Figure 1, based on ideal points estimated by Bailey et al. (2017), commonly interpreted as a proxy for satisfaction with the US-led international order.

The plot shows that most of the members of the group have ideal points around the -0.5 mark, which is also where the majority bloc of the UN—largely composed of Global South countries—is located. Armenia and Russia, however, are more distant from this mark, indicating divergent voting preferences, and Türkiye is the most distant of all, registering a score typical of Global North countries. Hence, voting patterns suggest that these ten countries are either indistinct as a group of their own, being instead mixed with other coalitions, or incohesive.

Analyses of roll-call votes partake in a common limitation. As explained by Seabra and Mesquita (2022), data on UNGA votes suffer from sampling bias, given that only 1/3 of resolutions are subject to a vote, and certain controversial topics are disproportionately present. Hence, blocs based on votes might outline the opposing factions regarding disarmament, or Palestinian self-determination, but they will not detect communities whose unifying interests lie elsewhere. This is why the authors proposed draft sponsorship as a more encompassing metric. Previous studies

Figure 1: Voting ideal points (2009-2019)



Source: elaborated by the authors, based on Bailey et al. (2017).

used sponsorship data to draw a better picture of group dynamics at UNGA, albeit normally taking group membership as given (e.g. regional organizations, Chané and Sharma, 2016; or democracies/autocracies, Finke, 2021) instead of inductively mapping coalitions.

In addition, Seabra and Mesquita (2022) also propose two indices, priority and ownership, as a way to ascertain draft relevance for member states. Priority indicates how early (or late) a country adhered to a draft resolution.

Scores range from 1 (the country joined at the earliest opportunity) to 3 (the country sponsored at the last opportunity). Ownership, in turn, is a count of total sponsors, aimed at discriminating between resolutions that embody widespread interests (many sponsors, low ownership) and those conveying peculiar preferences (few sponsors, high ownership). According to the authors, the indices attempt to separate ‘the wheat from the tare,’ that is, differentiate initiatives near to the core interests of member states from those that were ritualistic

and unimportant, based on their urgency and exclusivity. Using this approach to weigh the strength of connections between countries, the authors identify four communities within the UNGA: (1) a large group of 85 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean, which they interpret as an 'African, Caribbean, and Pacific' group; (2) a set of 61 countries from Europe, the Americas and varied locations (e.g. Japan, Israel), which was interpreted as a Western bloc; (3) a third cluster with 38 countries, mostly from the Middle East, Africa, some revisionist states from Asia (North Korea, Pakistan) and Latin America (Cuba, Venezuela); and (4) a group of ten states, all being Central Asian, former Soviet or Turkish-speaking, which is the object of this study.

The results obtained by Seabra and Mesquita (2022) suggest that these ten Eurasian states exhibit significant cooperation among themselves, beyond the level of agreement that they share with other UNGA members. This is informative on the intensity of the cooperation between these countries, but the question of what topics motivate such cooperation remains unexplored.

### 3.2 Data

We used the *UN General Assembly Sponsorship Dataset*<sup>3</sup> and followed the

replication script by Seabra and Mesquita (2022) to reproduce their results. First, we created a network combining countries as well as drafts for the 2009-2019 period. It is therefore a two-mode network comprising 194 countries connected to 2,518 drafts. To replicate Seabra and Mesquita's community detection results, this two-mode network was projected onto a one-mode country-country network, wherein tie weight is given by priority divided by ownership, so that countries share a strong tie if they co-sponsored early and with few other peers. Afterwards, following the authors, we applied the Spinglass algorithm and found the same four communities as them, including the one with ten Eurasian countries.

Having located the same cluster as the authors, we took stock of the joint production by countries inside this cluster. The result is shown in the two-mode network in Figure 2. Circles indicate countries; squares, draft resolutions; and the gray lines, sponsorship. Country clusters are differentiated by color, with bright red indicating the Eurasian community. The importance of drafts to this group of Eurasian countries is suggested by the color and size of the squares. Size indicates the number of sponsors from the Eurasian groups and color number of sponsors from the whole UNGA membership. The largest squares are draft resolutions that secured the endorsement of all ten Eurasian countries. However,

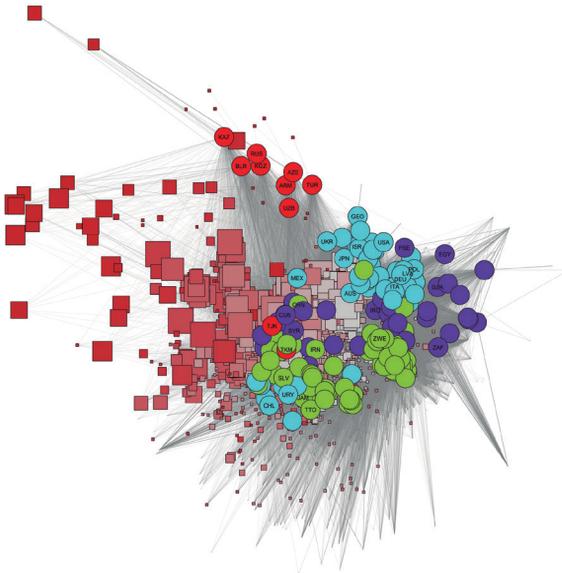
3 Available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MPQUE2>

as this participation will be less meaningful if diluted with many supporters outside the group, we distinguish drafts sponsored by many UNGA members (grayish red color) from those with few sponsors (deep red).

The plot shows that there is a discernible corpus on which Eurasian countries cooperate more intensively and exclusively. We used *igraph*'s multidimensional scaling layout for the plot, as this preserved the unity of the clusters and also arrayed drafts in a

meaningful right-to-left order. We can see that, in trying to find a spatial representation for the proximity between countries and drafts, the algorithm picked up a dimension underlying the data that differentiated between drafts peculiar to the Eurasian group and those that were less distinctive. A portion of draft resolutions receive no attention from the group; these appear in the right-hand side and are represented by squares of very small or null size. Towards the center, there are drafts that attracted

**Figure 2: Bipartite network of country clusters and draft resolutions**



Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the UN General Assembly Sponsorship Dataset. All country codes are shown for the red cluster and a sample for the remainder.

the endorsement of Eurasian countries and hence have larger size. However, as indicated by the grayish color, these drafts at the center were also sponsored by many other UNGA members and were therefore not distinctive. At the left end, there are drafts that managed to unite the majority of the Eurasian countries and are more exclusive, as few other UNGA members participate in them, as indicated by the deep red color. This latter set is the one that interests us.

This high-ownership set can also be represented as in Table 2. The table bins drafts according to the number of sponsors from the whole UNGA membership and from the Eurasian group in particular. The cells indicate the amount of drafts in the sample that

were sponsored by few/many UNGA members (left to right) and none/all Eurasian countries (top to bottom). The lower left cells reveal that there is a subset of a hundred or more drafts that had a more exclusive participation by Eurasian countries. From the  $262 + 57 + 12 = 331$  drafts that were endorsed by 1 to 10 UNGA members (first column), 12 of them had the participation of 6 to 10 Eurasian states. That is, they were sponsored by nearly all Eurasian countries and few other UNGA members apart from them. This selection, as well as the adjacent cells with 56 and 57 drafts, is expected to convey the peculiar interests of this group. In the following section, we discuss the content of these propositions.

**Table 2: Frequency table of sponsorship by group of Eurasian countries x all UNGA members**

		Total UNGA sponsors				
		<i>1-10</i>	<i>11-50</i>	<i>51-100</i>	<i>101-194</i>	<i>Row total (%)</i>
Eurasian sponsors	<i>0</i>	262	323	162	2	749 (30%)
	<i>1-5</i>	57	321	523	598	1499 (60%)
	<i>6-10</i>	12	56	125	77	270 (10%)

Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the UN General Assembly Sponsorship Dataset.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Having discussed both the underpinning literature and our materials, we now turn to analyze the resolutions produced by the coalition. In-depth examination of the draft resolutions provides complementing insights to the quantitative patterns described above. It can expose significant dimensions of Eurasian states' engagement through UNGA activities. Our primary aim is to describe and explore the themes binding this group. This means that we do not intend to determine causal relations that may explain the bloc's involvement with certain topics. Despite being at times downplayed in favor of other methods, description is also a valuable tool (Gerring, 2012a, 2012b). It is particularly useful when the research addresses the type of problem that Gerring (2012a) designates as *what* questions. This applies here because, as stated, our interest dwells on finding and depicting what thematic agendas induce Eurasian countries to cooperate at the UNGA.

For that, we inductively classified the draft proposals within the high-ownership, high-priority set from Table 2, taking into consideration their content and sponsorship list. This was done in a two-step procedure of reading and manual classification. The point of departure was observing the titles of the drafts registered in the dataset. Based on it, we identified

thematic affinities among documents. This was the case, for instance, of drafts A/73/L.79/Add.1 (Combating terrorism and other acts of violence based on religion or belief), A/73/L.52/Add.1 (Enlightenment and religious tolerance), and A/C.3/65/L.46/Rev.1 (Combating defamation of religions). Notwithstanding their differences in nuance, originating committee, and time of proposition, their titles contain expressions that indicate a content convergence. We then sought to recognize this pattern in other drafts and conceived broad categories of issues that could embrace as many entries as possible. We reached a total of seven categories: international crime, sustainability, cybersecurity and terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, outer space, and relations between the UN and regional organizations in Eurasia.

After establishing this typology, we proceeded to investigate the substance of these agendas. This meant inspecting the topics mentioned in the drafts, exploring the context and background information on the theme, and contrasting the contours of their discussion at the UNGA level with those outside the institution. For this, we stepped outside UNGA drafts alone and recurred to other materials, including regional treaties, foreign policy guidelines, and secondary literature.

The analysis of the roughly 70 documents that fell in the lower left corner of Table 2, that is, drafts with high ownership by this Eurasian cluster, suggests a variation in the in-group cohesion depending on the topic. That is, members do not rally around all themes with the same vigor. We begin to discuss the ones that galvanize the bloc more clearly.

The first topic attracting cohesion among the Eurasian countries is international crime. There are recurring draft resolutions on combating human trafficking, which originate in the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (C.3) and are tabled approximately every other year<sup>4</sup>. In most cases, they elicit large backing from the bloc—seven or more Eurasian nations commit as sponsors. An intriguing aspect lies in Belarus' protagonism. During the 2009-2019 period, the country stood out as the main proponent of the topic in comparison with its peers. In fact, Minsk's contribution in this realm has been a landmark in its performance in multilateral fora, particularly within the UN system. Belarus has engaged actively in the development of the normative framework about human trafficking and has proposed diplomatic initiatives to tackle it. The Belarusian government

has often mobilized its good offices to lead this agenda (Emelyanovich, 2012). Similarly, Azerbaijan often takes the initiative in recurring resolutions on the topic of missing persons in connection to armed conflicts. However, Baku does not manage to attract an extensive in-group consensus for this topic<sup>5</sup>.

Russia has also been a front-runner of the crime agenda. It has, however, devoted more attention to subthemes like information security and terrorism. Authoring 13 resolutions in the examined period, Moscow is a champion in evoking information security. For its turn, the coalition has positively received the initiatives, joining the Kremlin in high numbers. These activities can be linked to Russia's approach to the cyber domain: its national authorities handle the dossier from a national security perspective and, in sync with this view, have promoted the securitization of cyberspace. They perceive that a free-flowing information ecosystem without control—as envisioned by Western powers—is detrimental to state interests and, consequently, a potential threat. This posture guides Russia's multilateral stance on the topic, where it has tried to

4 A/C.3/64/L.11/Rev.1, A/C.3/67/L.16/Rev.1, A/C.3/68/L.17/Rev.1, A/C.3/70/L.13/Rev.1, A/C.3/72/L.6/Rev.1, A/C.3/74/L.10/Rev.1

5 A/C.3/65/L.31, A/C.3/67/L.46, A/C.3/69/L.49/Rev.1, A/C.3/71/L.41/Rev.1, A/C.3/73/L.47/Rev.1. While drafts on trafficking in persons were typically sponsored by all, Russia, Türkiye and Turkmenistan never endorsed the Azeri proposal in the studied period.

frame internet governance in terms more favorable to its interests (Noctti, 2015). The shared understanding of this affair accounts for the wide support from the Eurasian countries. Governments across the region have followed in Russian footsteps in tying cyber to security. In this sense, they have adopted a set of mechanisms—technical, legal, and institutional—in order to create surveillance systems (Kerr, 2018). All that said, the adherence to Kremlin drafts is no coincidence, given that neighboring governments share the desire for more control over information flows.

Specific concerns regarding Central Asia also encourage wide mobilization. Compelling evidence of it is found in motions ranging from the environmental and sustainable development agenda to nuclear policy. Specifically, Tajikistan has outstanding authorship on natural resource preservation<sup>6</sup>, framing the issue within the logic of sustainable development, with a focus on water. Therefore, it is possible to infer that Tajik diplomacy exploits the handling of global issues (sustainability) to advance regional causes (water). In any case, the attention to the hydric question owes to the fact that it looms as a pressing environmental challenge in Eurasia, especially for Central Asia, where states face

critical shortages of potable water, and cooperation among them to manage the resources is limited (Mosello, 2008). Still, despite hurdles at the regional level, the drafts typically receive wide collective support. In addition, other initiatives focus on the environmental consequences of nuclear disasters. This is a relevant agenda because Central Asia used to host nuclear sites in the Soviet era. In fact, the nuclear-era legacy is a distinctive topic on which the group cooperates across several drafts. For instance, both *A/C.2/66/L.35* and *A/C.2/69/L.2* (on the former Semipalatinsk testing site) received the entire bloc's endorsement.

Beyond the issues above, the group tends to align in relation to international security, with emphasis on nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction. They rallied around pieces like *A/C.1/69/L.11* and *A/C.1/73/L.48*. Although these documents have similar content—both praise the establishment of a nuclear-weapon free zone in Central Asia—the coalition demonstrated a slightly distinct behavior in each session. For instance, Kazakhstan proposed *A/C.1/69/L.11*, and all but Armenia followed suit. In contrast, the sponsorship of the draft *A/C.1/73/L.48* was advanced first by Uzbekistan, but did not attract the support of Azerbaijan and, again, Armenia. Idiosyncrasies aside, the idea of nuclear-weapon free zones has been a popular UN-sponsored gesture for other regions around

6 *A/C.2/71/L.12/Rev.1*, *A/C.2/73/L.24/Rev.1*, *A/C.2/69/L.12/Rev.1*, *A/C.2/67/L.38/Rev.1*, *A/C.2/64/L.22/Rev.1*

the world. In the case of Central Asia, its adoption represents an important step in the denuclearization of the area (Hamel-Green, 2009). Indeed, one can deem it a historical and exceptional landmark as, in spite of its natural and technical potential, the local governments decided voluntarily to relinquish the very right of having a nuclear bomb (Parrish & Potter, 2006).

Particularly, one can notice that Kazakhstan is a champion of non-proliferation. During the period analyzed, the country introduced at UNGA a total of six pieces about different nuances of the affair<sup>7</sup>. This outstanding engagement with this agenda might be traced to the reformulation of its nuclear policy after the end of the Cold War. According to the literature, at that period, facing domestic and external pressures, not only did Kazakhstan relinquish the former Soviet nuclear arsenal, but it also conceded to binding itself to international commitments such as the non-proliferation regime

(Kassenova, 2022)<sup>8</sup>. These decisions caused long-term implications, placing a preference for disarmament and non-proliferation in Kazakh foreign policy. However, its intensive diplomacy at UNGA overshadows the modest activity of the rest of the group: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Russia<sup>9</sup> assigned themselves as primary authors of two documents at the most, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Türkiye, none. Despite the relevance of the issue, the Eurasian states' conduct reveals some ambiguity towards it. When a non-peer is the first proponent of a motion on the issue, they tend to lend support for it in smaller numbers. In general, with two exceptions, most drafts about nuclear weapons had less than five sponsors

7 A/C.1/73/L.46, A/C.1/69/L.11, A/C.1/70/L.52/Rev.1, A/C.1/73/L.46, A/C.1/72/L.36, A/C.1/67/L.4/Rev.1, A/C.1/64/L.14/Rev.1.

8 Kazakhstan was an important site for the development of the Soviet Union's nuclear program. With the end of the Cold War, the country inherited a large nuclear arsenal and had to deal with the challenge of what to do with that material. Its leadership opted for denuclearization policy. The pursuit of this was motivated by domestic and external reasons. On the internal front, policymakers expected to bargain the dismantlement of the nuclear arsenal for outside assistance to alleviate the dire economic situation; on the international one, the country was entangled between the United States' push for denuclearization and the great power neighbors; notably Russia and China, threat to its security (Kassenova, 2014, 2022)

9 In even more contrast with global focus of the nuclear policy of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan proposals present a narrow scope, as they address only the nuclear weapons free zone in Central Asia.

from the coalition, and Kazakhstan stands out because it joins almost all of them.

As for weapons of mass destruction, it is noteworthy that, during the period examined, Belarus was the only member of the bloc to sponsor documents on the topic<sup>10</sup> — all of them successfully adopted. Still, despite the low involvement of other peers, the coalition maintained relative cohesion on every occasion—only Türkiye and Kazakhstan did not eventually attach themselves to the propositions. However, the unified approach diverges from their posture when the primary author does not belong to the group, confirming the trend identified in the previous paragraph. We notice lower adherence to, for example, A/C.1/74/L.16, A/C.1/64/L.19, and A/C.1/65/L.29, all of which discuss weapons of mass destruction—precisely, the acquisition of these items by terrorists. This disengagement causes surprise because terrorism is a salient issue on these states' security agenda (as revealed by their output on cyberterrorism, for instance). A reason for the detachment might be the authorship by India, an outsider from the group.

Still on the security agenda, Russia has an outstanding role as the primary author regarding outer space questions. In the period examined, Moscow

introduced at least 13 proposals<sup>11</sup> —in addition to the ones in collaboration with China and the United States. In contrast, the theme fails to generate significant enthusiasm among the remaining members of the bloc, as no other of them presented proposals about the outer space. Regardless of their narrow mobilization in this sense, the Russian drafts managed to obtain extensive backing from them. The frequent involvement hints both a certain—but not exclusive—ownership of this agenda by the Kremlin, and a major role in the governance of space. This behavior is grounded in Russian leaders' understanding of space as a key area to national security, thus it is of their interest to hinder the United States' dominance. Given their asymmetric position in relation to the latter, they multilateralize the issue (Jackson, 2019).

Other topics that bind the group together include combating intolerance, discrimination, and hate crimes. On this agenda, Russia has had a noteworthy performance as the primary sponsor of several proposals. Its drafts receive high adherence from the coalition, generally above seven peers, with only Türkiye, and particularly

<sup>10</sup> A/C.1/66/L.24, A/C.1/72/L.9, A/C.1/69/L.7

<sup>11</sup> A/C.1/64/L.40, A/C.1/65/L.38, A/C.1/74/L.59, A/C.1/70/L.47, A/C.1/72/L.53, A/C.1/71/L.18, A/C.1/73/L.51, A/C.1/68/L.40, A/C.1/70/L.48, A/C.1/74/L.60, A/C.1/74/L.58/Rev.1, A/C.1/69/L.14, A/C.1/72/L.54, A/C.1/71/L.19, A/C.1/69/L.15, A/C.1/72/L.46, A/C.1/73/L.68/Rev.1, A/74/L.27

Azerbaijan, at times refraining from endorsing Russian drafts on, for instance, the fight against neo-nazism or any kind of prejudice. Besides, Russian protagonism on those issues stands out as an exceptional attitude within the coalition. Other members of the group rarely author documents about those themes. During the period assessed, in addition to Russia, only Türkiye (A/73/L.79/Add.1) was an original sponsor. It is worth noting that Ankara has a curious stance on this agenda, in particular, on the genocide topic. It backed pieces like A/69/L.88/Add.1, which pays tributes to the victims of this kind of violence. The attitude seems incoherent, as Türkiye has not come to terms with the Armenian genocide (Akçam, 2010). On the other hand, group support to these propositions as a whole is wide, no matter the primary author. This pattern is at odds with the one observed when the discussions take on the nuclear policy. Another dimension worth noting is that this issue is submitted to vote at UNGA. Most documents in the different areas herein examined are adopted by consensus. The deviation lies on some drafts authored by Russia on anti-nazism, outer space, and criminal agendas.

Also, the Eurasian states often propose drafts aiming to promote relations between the UN system and regional organizations. There are several proposals about it, and group behavior oscillates depending on the regional entities mentioned in the drafts.

Documents such as A/65/L.6, A/67/L.5, A/69/L.13, A/71/L.11 focus on the cooperation between the UN and the CSTO. Six countries of the Eurasian cluster (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan) are official members of the institution, and their behavior displays considerable intra-group cohesion no matter which of them leads the proposals. Kazakhstan presented A/67/L.5, and had the support of five peers—all of them from the CSTO. Russia authored A/69/L.13, and only five countries of the bloc followed suit—all CSTO members, as well. The outcome in both situations raise questions about why the coalition did not broadly embrace the drafts. Turkic countries, however, are more reticent: Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan backed none of the documents

The exception is Uzbekistan<sup>12</sup>, which preferred to throw its weight behind Belarus' drafts alone. In fact, it is possible to observe that there is

12 Uzbekistan belonged to the CSTO until 2012, when former president Islam Karimov withdrew from the organization. The move stemmed from the discontentment with Russia's actions and some developments within the organization (Saipov, 2012a). The decision is in accordance with the regime's aim of gaining autonomy in foreign policy (Laruelle, 2012), thus releasing the country from the influence of external powers and commitments of formal alliances (Saipov, 2012b). Bearing this in mind, the Uzbek government's conduct before the Russian proposals must be comprehended as an attempt to pursue this policy.

a cleavage among the Turkic states: those under direct Russian influence through the CSTO are more supportive to themes related to it than the non-members. In addition, drafts on the EEU also reinforce the same patterns of intra-organization cohesion and non-members and members drift. For instance, A/C.6/70/L.2 and A/C.6/71/L.9 received the support only from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, which all belong to EEU.

On the engagement of the UN with the SCO, Kyrgyzstan and Russia promoted drafts A/67/L.15 and A/69/L.12, respectively. In each case, only four countries of the coalition decided to follow the proposals. Some aspects of this development deserve attention. First, the bloc's low interest in the Kyrgyz draft contrasts with the large adherence to documents introduced by nations with a similar status as that of Kyrgyzstan. Second, by the same token, we cannot downplay the fact that the Russian document received low sponsorship. This is particularly striking when one regards that part of the group lies within Moscow's sphere of influence and participates in its organizational arrangements. Nonetheless, Türkiye reaps even more adverse outcomes when it plays the role of primary author. Through the A/C.6/66/L.2 and A/C.6/69/L.4, it sought to grant the OTS with an observer status in the General Assembly. Besides itself, only Azerbaijan,

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decided to subscribe to the pieces—by then, all the four were the only members of the OTS within the UNGA bloc. This narrow support suggests that Turkish diplomacy lacks leverage to perform a pivotal role within the bloc. Moreover, the outcome also signals that Ankara's regional ambitions in Central Asia have fallen short out of the expected results. Uzbekistan's behavior displays the challenges of creating a nexus between the regional and multilateral agendas. In 2019, the country joined the OTS by Turkish invitation. The membership is a watershed, because its foreign policy has prioritized bilateral ties over regionalism. Indeed, the move results from a rehabilitation process in the relations between Ankara and Tashkent that started in 2017, in the wake of the death of former Uzbek president Karimov (Yalinkiliçli, 2018). Still, the rapprochement did not render an automatic alignment, as the Uzbek regime did not support any draft on the OTS after 2017. In sum, the Turkish government has not totally succeeded in co-opting neighbors and turning them into loyal followers in multilateral platforms.

In light of the examples above, it is possible to infer preliminarily that the particularities of the organization addressed in each draft can also explain the willingness of a state to sponsor. Drafts about institutions with more specific missions, like the CSTO, seem more prone to obtain wide endorsement from the bloc—or, from another perspective, its

members can articulate a common position. On the other hand, those with wider agendas do not elicit the same level of interest, as is the case of the OTS, or even the SCO to some extent. This notwithstanding the fact that both entities have charter provisions that encourage their members to articulate a common approach in order to harmonize their behavior in multilateral fora<sup>13</sup>. Hence, CSTO members manage to follow this condition more successfully than those of the OTS or the SCO. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the documents reinforce the regional organizations' missions and tasks and their convergence with the United Nations. That is the case of the draft A/67/L.5, which "notes with appreciation" the CSTO's efforts to "strengthen the system of regional security and stability, to counter-terrorism and transnational organized crime, and to strengthen its peacekeeping capacities, which contribute to the attainment of

the purposes and principles of the United Nations".

Among the factors cited above, geopolitics is likewise associated with the group's dynamics. Processes such as traditional rivalries, interstate competition, strategic alliances, and cooperative activities at the regional level resonate over the coalition and frame their performance before some issues. The documents A/C.3/71/L.26, A/C.3/72/L.42, A/C.3/73/L.48, and A/C.3/74/L.28 illustrate this operation. Authored by Ukraine, which is not part of the group, all the aforementioned drafts address the human rights situation in Crimea. From the very beginning, it is evident that they reflect the geopolitical tensions in the Baltic region and the disputes between Kyiv and Moscow. Since they negatively affect a member of the bloc, most of its members did not throw their weight behind the motions, being Türkiye the only exception by sponsoring them on all occasions. Certainly, it is easy to assume that the Kremlin had more success in bargaining with the other countries in the bloc than Türkiye. On the other hand, Ankara's stance can be attributed to its diplomatic divergences with Russia. Precisely on the Crimea issue, Türkiye's interests confront those of Moscow, since it does not recognize the latter's sovereignty over the peninsula. Thus, its support for the Ukrainian drafts manifests this antagonism. We can also observe the same geopolitical tensions

13 In the case of the OTS, the provision is found in Article 2 of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. The item lists the purposes and tasks of the organization, and one of these aims is "search for common positions on foreign policy issues of mutual interests, including those in the framework of international organizations and at international fora". As for the CSTO, the Article 9 of its Chapter declares that "the Member States shall approve and co-ordinate their foreign policy positions on the international and regional security problems, using, in particular, consulting mechanisms and procedures of the Organization".

in the motions about the Syrian conflict (A/C.3/69/L.31, A/C.3/70/L.47, A/C.3/72/L.54). Again, Türkiye is the sole supporter of these documents. In sum, all these cases expose how the geopolitical frictions reach multilateral platforms and influence debates within them<sup>14</sup>.

In essence, the Eurasian states involvement with the sponsorship at UNGA is a complex phenomenon. As observed, several factors can influence the group's dynamics. Still, we can draw relevant conclusions. First, the

content of the documents defines to what extent countries come together in supporting a proposition. As proposals address more specific agendas and are in tune with particular interests, the bloc's cohesion becomes more diffuse. Second, their convergence is contingent upon externalities stemming from outside the UNGA floor. In other words, the engagement does not unfold in vacuum, nor does it respond to a purely institutional logic. The group's bilateral and multilateral interactions in other realms of international politics impact the way they commit themselves with a draft. Lastly, minor members have a remarkable agency. Notwithstanding the power asymmetries that exist among these ten countries, it is fair to say that those in less favorable positions manage to perform an active role to advance their own agenda and interests.

<sup>14</sup> Apart from the SCO, CSTO, and OTS, other regional organizations mentioned in drafts and collecting support from the group include the Economic Cooperation Organization (e.g., A/65/L.40/Add.1), Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (e.g., A/67/L.12/Add.1), Eurasian Economic Community (e.g., A/67/L.9/Rev.1/Add.1).

## 5 CONCLUSION

In this paper we sought to characterize the newfound group of Eurasian countries cooperating within the UNGA, composed of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. As this was a first exploration of this data, the main goal was to offer a descriptive characterization of this hitherto neglected group, based on two criteria: the topics that brought them together,

and the extension of their cooperation across them.

We found that their collective engagement is underpinned over a cross-thematic agenda, which includes the themes of international crime, sustainability, cyber security and terrorism, non-proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, outer space, discrimination, and relations between the UN and different Eurasian ROs. Though with varying success, these

topics tended to attract part or all of the members, thus highlighting issues that can be regarded as distinctive to Eurasian players.

All three regional-global dynamics highlighted in our literature review can be found at play across these topics. First, they reveal how shared history led certain global values to acquire a distinct local flavor. While in other areas of the world the initiatives on environmental conservation, for instance, associate this topic with activities like carbon emission or depletion of resources, in the former Soviet space this anchorage is found in nuclear sites and radiation—an association unlikely for any other region. Second, a polar or power politics concern could also be inferred in the form of cyberspace securitization, which taps into Russian fears of vulnerability vis-à-vis Western powers. A similar argument can be made with regards to outer space governance, where Moscow again leads the charge and turns to multilateralism as a way to blunt its disadvantages with regards to the US. Furthermore, the different essays of regional clout by greater powers within the bloc could also be read in terms of collective action within the group. We could see, for instance, the extent to which Russia was more successful than Türkiye in marshaling support. Although Eurasianism is an important component in both countries' foreign policies, power differentials

clearly mattered in determining who was the most influential actor. Last, we could find for this region calls for services emanating from the UN to address cross-border challenges, notably transnational crime.

The findings also help illuminate current upheavals in the region, in evidence after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The content and patterns of engagement reveal some shared concerns within the group. These countries adhere to Westphalian notions and to a view of international diplomacy that is mindful (1) to have a voice in the international arena, (2) to limit Russia and US over-influence in the region, and (3) to reinforce their independence and sovereignty.

The expected contribution of this mapping exercise is to establish the state of affairs concerning joint multilateral agency by Eurasian countries. Our contribution has nonetheless limitations. Notably, the interpretation of the meaning of conceding or withholding sponsorship must be made with care. Though we have associated this decision to underlying substantive preferences and interstate affinities, it is likewise possible that alternative explanations account for these decisions.

At any rate, future studies might pick up from this point to add even denser detail to these negotiations. Interviews with delegates or analysis of speeches delivered when these drafts

were presented might furnish even more information about the nature of each topic. Considering that we refrained from making causal inferences, explanatory research designs might also revisit our findings and try to test formal hypotheses as to why it is that these topics stand out, or what drivers explain the differentiated pattern of alignment and abstention across different themes.

With these results, we hope to bring the research on Eurasian regionalism closer to that on other parts of the world, where investigations on the regional-global nexus were already mature (Stewart-Ingersoll & Frazier, 2012; Kacowicz, 2018; Mesquita & Seabra, 2020).

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