Russian in the Eurasian Project: A Commercial Unifier or Neo-imperial Builder?
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The paper engages with the theories of global languages in post- and neo-imperial contexts. Having started within an economic frame (the Custom Union of 2010), the Eurasian Union has soon been defined politically, ideologically and has been discussed as a tool of Russia’s moral crusade against the West. Outlining the position of Russia of Putin’s third presidential term in relation to the outside world, the Russian identity doctrine was most openly and forcefully expressed in his Valdai speech, in September 2013. Challenging Western values, the doctrine establishes as an absolute priority Russia’s integration with its (post-Soviet) neighbors into the emerging centre of global power – the Eurasian Union, which Putin called ’a chance for the post-Soviet space to become a centre of global development rather than the periphery for Europe and Asia’ (Putin, 2013).

The paper deals with the discourses negotiating the status and value of Russian language as a key resource of the Eurasian Union project. The interlinking discourses of legitimization and commodification of Russian as the language of the Eurasian Union will be examined, highlighting the tensions between post-independence neo-imperial (’collecting lands’), privileged market (’the language of the rouble’) and cultural and civilisational (’the great and mighty’) tropes. The data will include discourses produced by both Russian state sponsored ’soft power’ agents such as The Foundation for the Development of the Euro-Asian Collaboration, and the agents and outlets in the states considering the integration proposal: Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia. It is argued that the construct of global Russian emerging from these discourses reveals hybrid qualities, being constantly recast from the resource for economic success to the builder of the new quasi-Soviet stronghold.

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