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November 25, 2015 12:47 pm

# We are all Eurasian now

Bruno Mações

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In the new age of geopolitics Europeans must think on a supercontinental scale, writes Bruno Mações



Turkey cannot be left alone to face Kremlin attempts to control the gates of Europe

**F**ive years have passed since Vladimir Putin, then Russian prime minister, called for an economic community from Lisbon to Vladivostok — yet Europe is no closer to understanding what he meant.

When Mr Putin spoke of “a genuine harmonised synthesis of the two economies”, including



advanced forms of integration and a common industrial policy, he seemed to be speaking the language of Brussels. To this day, one can hear the longing expressed in European Council meetings for what political leaders imagine was a proposal for a continental free trade area. This is meant to have been the moment Mr Putin came closest to embracing EU methods and goals.

In truth, it was the opposite. Mr Putin was merely lending new words to the traditional theory of Russian geopolitics. Russia will always be too European for Asia and too Asian for Europe. But in Eurasia it can feel at home.

This idea has drawn little enthusiasm west of St Petersburg; in the east, however, it is a different story. Beijing knows that its continued economic growth depends on developing the central and western provinces, and on finding new outlets for capital investment — not to mention securing a steady supply of raw materials. Hence its bold plan to revive the old Silk Road across central Asia towards Europe and the Middle East.

Perhaps detecting signs of warmth from Asian neighbours, the Russian foreign ministry has stopped talking about Vladivostok as the easternmost edge of the new supercontinent and instead drops names such as Jakarta or Shanghai.

Western Europeans are inclined to dismiss this as hubris. In fact, the idea has a compelling logic. Think of the unresolved international questions of the past 20 years — the rise of China, the place of Russia, energy security, Islamic radicalism. They all straddle the boundary dividing Europe and Asia. They can be solved only within the enlarged framework of a new supercontinent. Within this huge land mass, Europe is little more than a peripheral peninsula.

This fact is no doubt at the root of both Russian and Chinese calculations. At least in one crucial respect, we have to admit they are right. The artificial separation of Europe and Asia cannot hold in today's interconnected world. Halford Mackinder, the British academic who was the father of modern geopolitics, pointed out that, where Asia merges with Europe, there is no equivalent to the strong natural frontiers of the Sahara and the Himalayas. Intriguingly, he also suggested the reason we have never come to think of Asia and Europe as one continent is that seafarers were unable to make the voyage around it.

But old habits are dying, and every day we Europeans come closer to realising how much is at stake in those border territories. There is only one way for Europe to escape its geopolitical trap: it too must embrace its Eurasian vocation. Turkish diplomats have been calling for this in the past two years. The shooting down this week by Turkey of a Russian jet accused of violating its air space, and the Russian threat of “serious consequences”, shows Ankara cannot be left alone to face Kremlin attempts to control the traditional gates of Europe.

Influence in the new age of geopolitics will depend more or less directly on the ability and willingness to think and act on a supercontinental scale. We should welcome the challenge. Despite its scale, the Russian plan is not particularly inspiring and nor is China's. By contrast, Europe can draw on vast resources of capital and imagination through which to bring about new forms of

integration.

Many of our regions and cities have historically been open to religious and cultural influence from the east. Our cities are home to big communities with origins in south and east Asia, and the Middle East. Singapore and Hong Kong have become Eurasian capitals, fusions of east and west, thanks to European institutions and values. Our companies and brands know how to appeal to consumers in Asia and will keep profiting from that. European investment remains indispensable to the challenge of linking Europe with China.

When was the last time you thought of yourself as Eurasian? It depends where you are. Perhaps it was just yesterday. Or perhaps the idea never occurred to you at all. It sounds strange and implausible, but its time has come. The sooner we realise it the better.

*The writer is Portugal's secretary of state for Europe*

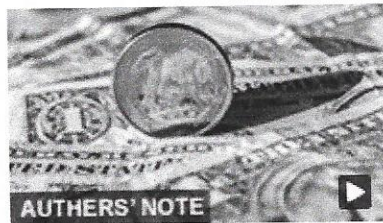
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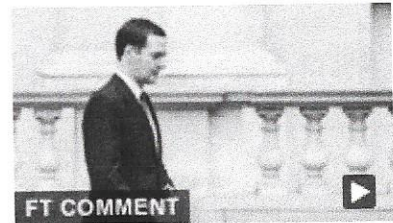
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