The presidents of Russia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan, Vladimir Putin, Aleksandr Lukashenko and Nursultan Nazarbayev, respectively, are planning to sign into existence the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) until the end of May. After the ratification by the national parliaments on January 1st, 2015, the founding treaty will take effect. Armenia and then Kyrgyzstan may soon align themselves with these three leaders. Meanwhile, an anti-Eurasian forum recently took place in Almaty, the participants of which expressed the opinion that the EEU is for Russia not as much an economic as a geopolitical project, which reinforces her role as a superpower. That is why Moscow is accelerating the signing of the treaty.

In doing so Russia is obviously reacting to the EU’s accelerated signing of an association agreement with Ukraine and Moldova. The signing of the EEU founding treaty, originally scheduled to take place in the fall of this year, was expedited to June and is now being discussed for May. The events in Ukraine have certainly played a role in the changes. “Russia is trying to mobilize supporters of Eurasian integration and use existing and anticipated advantages for the purposes of propaganda, including doing so in her relations with Western states,” Natalia Haritonova, research fellow at Lomonosov Moscow State University, stated in an interview with the author. She pointed out that the official goal of the EEU is economic integration. In this sense “Union” is the next stage of integration after the formation of the EurAsEC (EuroAsian Economic Community) and Customs Union. “We’re talking about creating a common economic territory. It's pretty clear what's going on. However everyone knows that the economic basis in the form of a united economic area, even throughout its establishment, will have to take on a decidedly political and ideological-humanitarian nature as well. That's unavoidable,” reports Haritonova.

Opponents site precisely this fact as their main argument against Eurasian integration. They strictly disagree with members of state unions sharing sovereignty, especially political sovereignty. Any integration requires the creation of supra-national structures, on behalf of which participating states hand over a portion of this sovereignty. This explains the poor results of earlier attempts at integration, starting with the Commonwealth of Independent States. A portion of Kazakhstan's population in particular sees integration with Russia as a threat of losing their government sovereignty and turning Kazakhstan into a colony of Russia's neo-empire. For example, Kazakh community activist Serikzhan Mambetalin remarks that integration within the framework of the Customs and Eurasian union would mean the end of Astana’s multi-vector politics and a geopolitical shift towards Moscow: “We can't integrate with Russia to the point of forgoing the opportunity to develop independently, without looking at Russia, our relations with China, the European Union, the USA, and other regional powers.”

The deputy general director of MSU’s Center for Research and Information Analysis of post-soviet space Yulia Yakusheva does not agree with this position. She especially noted that “concerns such as these have appeared as a result of poorly thought-out declarations by certain Russian politicians and experts, who advocate extending the future union with a political component as well.” “In Russia almost no one notices such declarations, but in Kazakhstan they are taken in a very unhealthy way. On the whole, people in Kazakhstan to a large extent take anti-Eurasian sentiments in a very subjective and emotional way. From this point of view, the results of the anti-Eurasian forum in Almaty are extremely telling: the movement against Kazakhstan's participation in the EEU is small, unorganized and unconsolidated,” Yakusheva says.
According to expert opinion, the first thing that captures one's attention is the lack of clear-cut arguments. The Customs Union (CU) and the United Economic Space (UES) turned out to be scape-goats for literally all the country's economic problems. To a certain degree the still unresolved problem of competent handling of the informational aspect of the integration project explains these tendencies, that is, the carrying-out of a wide-spread elucidative work amongst the many societal groups, business and political circles of Eurasian countries. However, recent polls in Kazakhstan show that about 85% of the people are for joining the EEU. "I think this data reflects the high level of trust in the direction Kazakhstan's leadership is taking, as well as confidence in the efficacy of the Russo-Kazakh partnership. Under the circumstances, Russia has made an essential choice – she's refused to introduce a political component into the project," Yakusheva said in an interview with the author. According to her, world history provides many examples of erosion of an organization's goals seriously slowing its growth and development. “At this point there's no sense in forcing the creation of a political aspect within the Union. First we must build an effective economic organization. Notice that one of the words in the union's title is “economic.” Moreover, in the EEU all parties will have an equal representation and voting rights, which excludes the possibility of Moscow dominating the other members of the alliance,” Yakusheva pointed out.

Yerevan is not expected to agree. Armenia is a potential EEU member. However, in May Armenia is not likely to sign the EEU's founding treaty, given the fact that the appointed time for Armenia's entering the CU has been postponed since March 5th 2014 and it's still not clear when this will take place. “Armenia was refused and this is not only because Armenia failed to complete all the measures laid-out in the “road map,” but because Russia did not guarantee safety from damage that can come to Armenia's economy as a result of an increase in customs tolls. That's why on March 5th they announced, well, it's alright, right now you're not becoming a member of the CU, but later on we'll discuss the possibility of joining the Eurasian union,” Stepan Safaryan explained to journalists.

However Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs Vasili Nebenzi in an Interfax interview noted that “a road map for entrance into the Customs Union and United Economic Space has been prepared for Armenia, which she is following with great success.” The completion of the road map will serve as the basis for an agreement for Armenia's entrance into the Customs Union and UES and later joining the Eurasian Economic Union. The road map for Kyrgyzstan is under development and I admit the possibility that it will be passed at the Suprime Eurasian Economic Council meeting April 29th,” he said.

Institute of Economics research fellow Aleksandr Karavaev, in an interview with the author, expressed doubts as to whether every participant in the free-trade zone or member of the Customs Union will be able to join the EEU. “It all depends on which country we're talking about. It's possible that task won't go to the Kremlin until the EEU's existed for a long time. However, in terms of development for the CU, the appearance of new members is not surprising. Armenia is already entering the CU. Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam, Egypt, and Israel are, in various phases and levels, negotiating a free-trade zone with the CU. Switzerland and New Zealand suspended negotiations after anti-Crimea sanctions went into effect. Negotiations are taking place for the creation of a working party between the CU and India. The EEC is developing a series of working contacts in South America, who could eventually enter negotiations,” Karavaev said.

_Viktoria Panfilova, staff writer for “the Independent Newspaper,” exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook"._