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Nikolai Kaledin

**POST-SOVIET SPACE:
BACKGROUND
AND THE RESULTS
OF REGIONALIZATION**



The article deals with the regionalization of social processes and their specific manifestations in the post-Soviet space. According to the author, regionalization is developing at four levels-international (macroregional), subregional, intraregional and on country levels. The most important one is the international level. Specific features of regionalization at each level of the post-Soviet space are described. The author draws a conclusion that the post-Soviet space is the epicenter of regionalization in contemporary world.

Key words: regionalization, post-Soviet space, international (macroregional) level of regionalization, subregional level of regionalization, intraregional level of regionalization, regionalization on the country level.

One of the most striking effects of globalization and geospatial response to it was **regionalization** of social processes, that is formation of territorial (regional) communities of various sizes which have certain internal cohesion: political, historical, cultural, civilizational, economic and others. Regionalization manifests itself at both international and domestic levels. In this context “**de jure**” there emerge and usually superimpose on each other regional communities (using the political-geographical terminology of V. A. Kolosov). They are created deliberately and are easy to control. They develop dynamically and are more sustainable over time. While in “**de facto**” [1] communities, which are not set up deliberately, control is either weak or there is no control but their formation took a long historical period. The first or the second type of regional community and regionalization processes are conditioned by a set of specific historical **factors of regionalization**.

From the point of view of nature and mechanisms, (driving force) regionalization processes (both international and domestic) are expressed in the form of two interrelated trends — **disintegration** (decay or its threat to states and their associations, accompanied by appearance of new countries, sub regions, regions) and **integration** (formation of regional communities as a result of merging of territorial-political actors).

These specific features of regionalization are particularly important for analysis and understanding of the specificity of the post-Soviet space. However, identification of current trends also requires taking into account the nature of the preceding historical development of the geospace in which these processes occur.

The formation of the **Eurasian macro region**, which was at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, took four centuries. It developed in collaboration between Slavic-Orthodox, Western, Islamic and neighboring civilizations. It was ethno-culturally, geographically and civilizationally specific, different from European, Asian, etc. entities. As a regional geopolitical “de jure” sys-

tem, that was formed on multi-civilizational basis, it went, in the course of its development, through four stages which were different from the point of view of socio-political history or regional geopolitical eras: **pre-empire epoch** (Moscow State), **empire epoch** (Russian empire), **Soviet (USSR) and post-Soviet** (Russia and post-Soviet states). Each of them was characterized by a specific geopolitical space of political and spiritual domination and influence.

There was a gradually increasing internal regionalization that was particularly noticeable at the territorial and political levels. This is seen, for example, in the different status of the colonial margins in comparison with the rest of the administrative-territorial units in the imperial space, in the nation-state and cultural autonomization of the Soviet space under the Soviet federalism and, finally, in active sovereignization of the Eurasian geopolitical system which transformed into post-Soviet space. The process of gradual economic regionalization of the Eurasian region is also obvious. During the Soviet geopolitical era it ultimately led to the formation of eighteen major economic regions. This is the result of the impact of a complex of historical factors of regionalization on the Eurasian regional community. This is especially obvious in the case of the post-Soviet space formation.

The process of disintegration of the Soviet Union, as a prerequisite for the emergence of new post-Soviet regional communities, was due to a **complex of disintegrating regionalization factors** — both external (the “cold” war between the socialist and capitalist systems, the crisis and collapse of the socialist system in Europe in the late 1980s — early 1990s, etc.) and internal, inside the Soviet Union. In particular, the socio-economic and ideological crises of the Soviet social order in the first half of the 1980s led to its radical change in the course of restructuring (“perestroika” in 1985—1991) which, in its turn, resulted in new socio-economic and political problems such as ethnic conflicts, separatism of national political elites in the Soviet and autonomous republics. This was enhanced by “civilizational diversity” of Soviet society which consisted of a mixture of different ethno-confessional fragments of major civilizations: Slavic-Orthodox, Western, Islamic, Buddhist. Their “fusion” on the basis of communist ideology laid a foundation for building a new “Soviet” Civilization. The disintegration trend of Soviet regionalization of the Soviet and the then post-Soviet space manifested itself not only in the “parade” of sovereignty of the Federal Republics in the early 1990s, but in the emergence, during ethnic conflicts, of self-proclaimed, internationally unrecognized republics which have become centers of sustainable regional conflicts.

Finally, the above mentioned type of regionalization of the post-Soviet space was stimulated by intensification of integration processes in Europe (expansion of the EU and other European bodies, NATO, etc.), by emergence in the adjacent to the Eurasian space of new regional (Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan) and global-regional (China) countries, as well as new regional problems and conflicts (Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo). They have become powerful factors of new regionalism.

At the same time factors of **integration regionalization** which helped shape the post-Soviet space were: still common geographic and neighboring

location of the new territorial and political entities, their long historical development in the framework of the Eurasian region and, as a consequence, the current political and socio-cultural unity of the nations, a common transport system and strong economic ties conditioned by the centrally planned economy of the Soviet Union and a historically traditional financial and economic dependence of the peripheral national sub-regions on Russia. Besides, integration was objectively stimulated by the increasing global and regional challenges and threats to the development of young states (international terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, etc.).

The considered above set of preconditions, factors and development peculiarities of the countries resulted not only in “launching” regionalization processes in the post-Soviet space but also determined a **four level structure** of these processes. These processes are realized, with varying degrees of brightness, at the international (macro regional), sub-regional, intra-regional and country levels.

The **international integration level** is the most obvious one. It had a considerable impact on the other levels. It is manifested in the created “de jure” post-Soviet space states, in international regional communities — regional unions and international organizations of economic, political and integral (complex) character with strong management functions. And it is increasingly obvious that the dominant **geopolitical vectors** of development trends of such international integration processes are **European, (Euro-central)** and **Eurasian** (Russia-central) which manifested themselves already in 1991. They became vectors of the “de jure” regionalization of the post-Soviet space.

The chronology of regionalization of the Soviet space and the beginning of its transformation into a post-Soviet one was, as it is well known, transient: the Baltic republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) withdrew from the Union in the summer of 1991; on December 8, 1991 some republics, founders of the Soviet Union withdrew, on December 31, 1991 Belarus, Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement on the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which officially declared elimination of the Soviet Union and stated their desire for voluntary cooperation in political, economic, humanitarian and other spheres. On 21st of December in Alma-Ata (then the capital of the Kazakh SSR) they were joined by Azerbaijan (actually since 1993), Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan who signed the Declaration on the purposes and principles of the CIS. In 1993 Georgia acceded to it.

Regionalization processes which took place later on the European (Western) and the Eurasian vectors of the post-Soviet space acquired specific features: in the “de facto” space of the Eurasian region two “de jure” new geopolitical sub-regions — the Baltic and the Eurasian ones were formed.

The European vector of inter-state regionalization is re-presented primarily by the Euro-Baltic sub-region which included three former Soviet republics of the Soviet Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Their national political elites chose the path of integration into the West European

regional institutions and a historic return to the fold of Western civilization. That was the first step in regionalization of what was still the Soviet space in the summer of 1991. Further stages of realization of the Western vector of integration and that of the formation of a new sub-regional community were: creation by these countries of the Baltic Assembly, their joining the Visegrad Group (Central European Free Trade Area), the Western European Union, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the EBRD and other European economic structures, and, finally, meeting the necessary conditions for joining the core integration institutions of the West, and, eventually, in 2004 joining the European Union and the NATO. This considerably strengthened and helped finalize the formation of the Baltic sub-regional dimension of the pan-regional community. The Russian exclave on the Baltic coast of the Kaliningrad region (“Eurasian Baltic”) became the “destroyer” of its territorial, political and civilization integrity.

For the majority of the post-Soviet states the **Eurasian vector** of integration processes became the most powerful one and in the 1990-ies and the first decade of the new century it led to the formation of several international and regional organizations among which the CIS played a key role in the formation of the post-Soviet space. The Commonwealth is the main outcome of its “de jure” regionalization.

Modern Commonwealth (in 2007) was 22, 25 million km², with a population of around 280 million people (5 % of the world population). It accounted for 5 % of the world GDP (3 % of which falls on Russia), 10 % of the world's industrial capacity and 25 % of core natural resources. Agricultural lands account for 11 % of the world total but only a quarter of them are favorable for agriculture.

The main goal of the union was **reintegration** of the sovereign states into built on new principles international regional inter-governmental organization with a single political, economic and social space. The Charter of the CIS envisaged a vast scope for joint activities based on: ensuring human rights and freedoms, coordination of foreign policy and security, diverse economic cooperation, joint development of transport and communications, protection of health and environment, joint defense and protection of state borders, social and migration policies, combating organized crime and others. Necessary institutions were established to implement these goals: more than fifty inter-state consultative and coordinating bodies, including the Executive Committee, Council of Heads of States and Heads of Governments, Council of ministers for foreign affairs and defense, inter-state and inter-governmental councils for the most important areas of economy (energy, transport, communication and innovation), Inter-parliamentary Assembly and others. This created such a structure of international relations that could take into account the varying degree of readiness of the countries to integrate. Each of the states had an opportunity to participate in the integration processes to the extent and in the directions that met its national interests [2]. There were also three political centers of the Commonwealth — Minsk, Moscow and St. Petersburg which housed the main inter-state coordinating bodies, thus giving the cites a regional status in the post-Soviet space.

Russia's role as that of a natural historic integration nucleus distinguished the Commonwealth from other regional unions and from similar, in terms of the type of social order, countries of Central and Eastern Europe which also were undergoing international integration during the period of a radical transformation of their societies. Political, socio-economic and ideological transformations of the former socialist society into a new post socialist society became the main feature of the CIS development. These truly revolutionary changes took place through drawing on historical experience (including not very modern or progressive) of the Western countries (especially European ones) which in the twentieth century were already markedly socialized and, for the most part, post capitalist. These countries supported the changes. That is why the most accurate term for the set of changes that have occurred and have affected the integration processes is **“Westernization of society”** not “capitalization”, even though it also takes place. However, geopolitical vectors, pace, depth and results of the reforms have been uneven in the Central-Eastern Europe and in the CIS.

Judging by most aspects of multifaceted activities, the Commonwealth can be considered quite an international regional organization. Among its undoubted achievements especially in the initial and most difficult crisis period of development of the states (1992—1997) are the following: preservation of the main features of cultural-historical and economic ties in the post-Soviet space, smooth and peaceful (as opposed to disintegrating during the time of bloody ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia) development of a new statehood, political and socio-economic reforms (in most countries transition to a multiparty parliamentary system, establishment of mechanisms and infrastructure of a market economy, etc.), regime of free trade between countries, visa-free movement of people, a monetary union, which was the basis of the Russian Ruble (in 1993), deterrence of regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space, combating external threats.

But gradually these integration benefits subsided and disintegration trends increased due to a number of **new factors of regionalization**, which in the second half of 1990s strengthened the trend of disintegration of the post-Soviet space.

This was initially enhanced by the vague legal and institutional framework of the Commonwealth and almost a complete absence of financial instruments and mechanisms for cooperation. Unlike many other international organizations, the founding documents of the CIS did not formulate the ultimate goal for the states to achieve; they did not impose obligations (the principle of freedom of choice of fields of interaction) but stated the willingness of the states to cooperate [2]. But there were more significant objective factors which stimulated the centrifugal tendencies.

Among the first to be mentioned was the **different pace of political and socio-economic reforms** in the post-Soviet countries in 1990s: faster and more radical in Russia, Kazakhstan and later in Azerbaijan; retarded and slow in the Ukraine, Moldavia; ethno-central in Belarus, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. This was due to the numerous typological differences between the countries. These differences were of geographical, historical,

cultural, civilisational, political, demographic and economic character. In the USSR those countries were “canned” and were in highly centralized conditions. Later, in the process of sovereignization of the former Soviet republics they strongly upheld the trend and became a foundation for disintegration processes.

Thus, in terms of the size of the territory (17,1 million km² and, therefore, in terms of natural resources and population (142,5 million people out of 270 million people of the Commonwealth in 2007) Russia considerably exceeds any of the countries and even their totals. Armenia, Moldova and Georgia have the minimal indicators of the above figures. The considerable resources and demographic potential of the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can ensure their successful economic development and can attract foreign investment. The rate of population growth also differs markedly: from natural decrease of population in the Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, Armenia, Moldova and Belarus (−0,7—0,3 %) to a speedy growth in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan (1,1—2 %). Accordingly, there are marked differences and contrasting features of GDP (from 2,1 trillions of \$ U. S. in Russia, 0,33 trillion \$ U. S. in the Ukraine, 0,17 in Kazakhstan to under 0,02 in Georgia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and 0,1 in Moldova in 2007); as well as GDP per capita (from almost 15 thousand dollars in Russia, up to 6—7 in Kazakhstan, Belarus and the Ukraine; up to the minimal 1,5—3 in Tajikistan, Moldova, Georgia). The countries hold different places as to the quality of life (human development index): for the majority it is estimated (according to the UN for 2007) as average, while in Belarus and Russia it is the highest. The places in the world Table of Ranking (out of 187 countries) are also different — from a reasonably high in Russia (57) and Belarus (62) up to unpleasantly low (among 90+) for Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan and the lowest (110) for Moldova (113) and Tajikistan (116).

Finally, historical civilizational identities of the countries of the Commonwealth are also different. This reemerged once again in the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union which, in the course of eight decades, was forming a new Soviet civilization. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia refer to Eastern Christian (Slavic-Orthodox) civilization while Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries belong to Islamic civilization. At the same time in the West of the Ukraine and Belarus there are fragments of Western civilization, while in Russia and some other subjects there are fragments of Islamic and Buddhist civilization.

The differences of internal political modes of the countries and the extent of their support by the West were the reflection of civilization peculiarities, Soviet style including:

from democratic (according to Western standards the Ukraine and Georgia were the closest to these standards) to authoritarian-democratic (according to the same standards Russia, Kazakhstan) and to strictly authoritarian in Central Asian states and Belarus. The second and, perhaps, the most powerful factor of division in the post-Soviet space was **the economic crisis** and reduction of the GDP volume of in 1990s (more than by 50 % by 1991

in Tajikistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, the Ukraine) and, as a consequence, a reduction and discontinuation of the traditional economic ties that have historically focused on each other, their reorientation to the new foreign partners in Europe, Asia and America which was also accompanied by adjusting and changing of foreign policy priorities.

In 2000—2005 the average annual rate of economic growth in the CIS countries was the highest in the world (8 %), significantly higher than the average (5 %) rate of the European Union (1 %) and in most developing countries. During the same period the aggregate GDP in the CIS grew up to 39 %, the industrial output — up to by 40 %, agricultural output — 20 %, foreign trade turnover increased by 2,5 times.

But in spite of the rapid development, given the large-scale reductions in GDP in 1990s, (in most countries by 40—60 % by 1991) in 2006, on average for the CIS, it was possible to only reach the level of the Soviet period indicators of 1991. Only six countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Russia) were able to exceed these indicators in 2002—2006, with the first three countries by 30 per cent or more. The indicators of Moldova, Tajikistan and Georgia remained markedly lower. Yet, the mutual trade of the CIS countries was characterized by a steady tendency of lagging behind in trade with other countries in the world that is, distant foreign countries. If in 1994 its share in the total foreign trade turnover of the Commonwealth accounted for more than 35 %, by 2005 it fell to 25 %, while in the EU it reached 60 %, in NAFTA — about 50 %, in MERCOSUR — 30 % of the total foreign trade turnover of these international and regional organizations [3].

As far as the disintegration impact is concerned, the global financial crisis of 2008—2009 proved to be no less dangerous for the Commonwealth as it led to further cuts in production and in mutual trade turnover.

The third factor of disintegration was **collapse of the Monetary Union** in 1993 and withdrawal of the ruble in international payment and in the CIS, introduction of national currencies and later — limitation and in fact restrictions curtailing the scope of free trade which enhanced the noted tendencies.

The fourth disintegration factor, derived from the previous ones, was the result of **multidirectional and changing over time geopolitical vectors of development** (“pro-Russian”, “pro-Western”, “pro-Asian”, “multidirectional”) of the ruling elites and selective “personal” politics of “promotion” and “containment” of Russia, the United States, the neighboring countries (Turkey, Iran, China), NATO, European Union, the Organization of Islamic Conference and other international organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe, etc.). In this context Central Asia and the Caspian-Black Sea region of the Caucasus became areas of strategic interests of NATO and the United States because of production and transit (including potential) of energy via these territories to Europe of Russian, Kazakh, Azeri and Turkmen energy resources, as well as combating drug trafficking, international terrorism and opposition of Western countries to Iran. The contradictions between the CIS countries in the field of energy policies contribute to increasing geopolitical tensions and to strengthening disintegration trends in the regional community.

The fifth factor is **intensification of integration processes with European regional organization** of the CIS countries and the neighboring countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet republics (especially their accession to NATO, the development of EU in 1999—2007). This stimulated the authority of the “pro-Western” vector of development among some national elites in the CIS. In its turn, the EU “warms up” this interest with new Euro-integration projects of complex nature (like “East Partnership” projects addressed first of all to the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) as well as energy related projects (“Nabucco”, “White Stream”, etc.).

The sixth factor is mass **emigration of Russian and Russian-speaking population** of most countries of the Commonwealth to Russia (in the 1990s alone about 5 million people from more than twenty millions of the whole Russian Diaspora moved to Russia) thus creating for the countries and the migrants serious socio-economic problems. In addition to this, especially in Russia, there were millions of illegal labor migrants of indigenous peoples of these countries (especially the Moldovans, Ukrainians, Tajiks and Uzbeks).

The seventh factor was **energy- geopolitical** factor: related to economic and political contradictions and conflicts between the CIS countries because of energy resources (oil and gas primarily), their price, organization and direction of transportation, etc. Here the interests of the exporting countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the transit countries (“transiters”) (the Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Georgia) and the energy policy of primarily all European and Asian recipients of oil and gas come into conflict. The most conflict intensive are the relationships in the “energy triangle” of Russia-Ukraine-European Union.

Finally, **internal, mostly ethno-political conflicts** in Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Russia contributed to their estrangement. It led to the emergence of unrecognized states (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ichkeria). Domestic political instability and conflicts of the regional elites in the Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also contributed to it. This disintegration factor reached its maximum expression in August, 2008 when there was a failed attempt of the Georgian military to solve its territorial and political problems (with the open support of the Ukraine and neutrality of other countries). This led to the eventual independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to the beginning of their international recognition first by Russia, thus ensuring their military security, and later by other states. This brought about Georgia’s withdrawal from the CIS, to severance of diplomatic relations with Russia and to its leadership’s further enhancement of the Western vector of development.

In the first decade of the new century formation of new and activation of previously formed intergovernmental structures) in the post-Soviet space in the Eurasian regional community took place. It became a very important factor of strengthening regionalization “de jure” (of both integration and disintegration character). These organizations were: Central Asian Cooperation Organization (since 1994), including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia (joined in 2004); Euro-Asian Economic Com-

munity (EAEC) (since 1995) comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan; Belarus and Russia Union (BRU) (December 1996); at the beginning economic, later political (“country's democratic choice”) GUAM organization comprising Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova (since 1997) originally with the participation of Uzbekistan in 1999—2004); political and military alliance of CIS countries — the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (since 2002), uniting the countries of EurAsEC and Armenia; Common Free Market Zone (CFMZ) an agreement on the establishment of which was signed by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine in 2003, (given inconsistent, contradictory position of the latter). In 2006 it was decided to merge EurAsEC and the CAC which had similar objectives.

Thus, the most closely related international regional commonality in the CIS are now the countries- members of the Belarus-Russia Union (BRU), the EurAsEC and the Collective Security Treaty Organization — Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Armenia. Georgia is the least integrated country in the Commonwealth. It declared its aim to withdraw from the CIS, quickly to join NATO and the European Union. Turkmenistan peruses principles of neutrality in international politics and is minimally involved in the structures of the CIS.

Besides there are further signs of **Western and East Asian directions** of the CIS member countries integration processes. They introduce new shades in the regionalization of the Eurasian part (sub-region) of the post-Soviet space due to the political, economic and socio-cultural activities of Turkey (the resurgence of the ideology of “pan-tyurkizm”), due to the revitalization of the Organization for Economic Co-operation, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Organization of Islamic Conference and others. In the East Asian area it concerns primarily the activities of the Asian-Pacific Economic Community (APEC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (since 2001), comprising Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China; it also covers cross-border cooperation, foreign trade and the joint projects of Russia and China.

From the point of view of the “**de facto**” **regionalization** factors — physical, geographical, civilizational, ethnic, cultural, historical and external- the **sub-regional level of regionalization** of the post-Soviet space in the four historical and cultural sub-regions is also very evident. These sub-regions are: **Euro-Baltic** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), **Baltic -Black Sea** (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia), **Central — Asian** (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and **the Caucasus** (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia). These de “facto” regional communities formed in the course of more than three centuries. Though they do not have their own international management function they are still quite robust.

Internal (within the sub-regions) ethno-cultural, civilizational, social, economic and political differences and similarities of these countries, their differences and preferences allow to distinguish one more fractional level of regionalization “de facto” — the **intra-sub regional level**, that is it is possi-

ble to identify fractional regional communities — specific groups of countries: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Belarus-Russia-Abkhazia-South Ossetia, Transnistria, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan- Central Asian group of countries, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Georgia-Azerbaijan.

Under the influence of the reasons discussed above, in some countries (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) there is an **intra- country level of regionalization**. It takes various forms: ethno-political, electoral, geopolitical, etc. There is also **politico-geographical regionalization** of internal space based on the previously existing historical and cultural areas.

Thus, Ukraine demonstrates physical and political differentiation in the two regions — the West-Central and the South-East; in Russia the tendency of autonomization of the subjects of the Federation (in 1990s) changed (since the early 2000) for the trend of geopolitical integration: initially in six federal districts, and then in consolidation of some subjects by reducing their number; in Kyrgyzstan one can clearly see the differences between North and South; sustainable development of the country is impossible without taking it into account. Examples of Moldova, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are no less obvious.

The examined diversity of a kind of “matryoshka of regionalization” and the dynamics of the processes of regionalization of the post-Soviet space point to the fact that, without exaggeration, it is here where for the last two decades there has been the epicenter of regionalization processes of the world.

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