

7th Berlin Conference on Asian Security (BCAS)

***Territorial Issues in Asia
Drivers, Instruments, Ways Forward***

Berlin, July 1-2, 2013

*A conference jointly organised by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin
and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Berlin*

Discussion Paper
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Session I: National Identity and Domestic Legitimacy

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The Settlement of the Russian-Chinese Border Dispute

History

The current Sino-Russian border represents one of the many border fragments that the former Soviet Union once shared with the PRC and which the Soviet Union inherited from Czarist Russia. It is customary to divide this fragment into two separate parts: the eastern part (more than 4.2 thousand kilometers from Mongolia to North Korea) and the western part (less than 100 kilometers from Mongolia to Kazakhstan). All arguments about the Sino-Russian border revolved around the eastern part. The border there had been established (but not demarcated) by the Qiqihar agreement of 1911 which established the border from Mongolia to to the Amur River delta (the fork of Argunia and Shilka) and the Peking agreement of 1860 from the Amur River delta to North Korea (Tumanaya River in Primorskii Krai). From 1860 until 1991 (and subsequently 1994 and 2004) no official agreements about the border were made between Russia and China. Furthermore, more than 100 years had passed without mutual and comprehensive evaluations of the border.

There were also issues pertaining to certain ambiguities within the earlier agreements which contradicted the widely accepted diplomatic norms of that time. For example, after 1911, a highly irregular border situation existed on the Argun River (the middle of which served as the dividing line between Russia and China) because a large group of islands, technically on the Chinese side of the river, were legally part of Russian territory.

In regards to the highly important shipping rivers – Amur and Ussuri – the Peking Agreement of 1860 clearly mandated that the border would be the «current» of the rivers and thereby outlined the banks of the respective rivers as the borders of Russia and of China. Therefore, the surface of the water between the banks and all of the islands located on the river itself, including those lying near the merger of the Amur and Ussuri, wound up outside the territory of both Russia and China and thereby were legally considered to be «no man's land». Similar border agreements still exist today. However, in terms of border defense and in regards to commercial and security issues, such an agreement contains contradictions and impracticalities that became apparent soon after the signing of the 1860 agreement. Formally, nothing was changed for the next 130 years. Practically, however, this created a convoluted reality on the Amur and the Ussuri.

In the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, in response to Japan's military expansion into China's northeastern regions, the Soviet Union unilaterally took over the majority of islands located on the Amur and the Ussuri rivers. To justify

its actions, Moscow used an old map that was attached to the Peking Agreement of 1860. On this map, the border was outlined as a red line and, in the area of the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers, this line lay closer to the Chinese banks. Now, if one is to strictly follow the textual explanation of the border as outlined in the treaty, which by standard international diplomatic practices takes precedence over any cartographic illustrations, then this designation clearly explains that the «current» of the rivers (meaning the rivers themselves) form the border between the Chinese and Russian banks. Nonetheless, the version that the red line, drawn up in 1860 by Russian negotiators, is the actual border on the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, remained the official Soviet stance on the issue for a long time.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, this border line, unilaterally created by the Soviet Union and granting the USSR defacto control over almost the entire span of the surface of the Amur and Ussuri rivers (including all of the islands), remained intact.

When the Communists came to power in 1949, they needed the support of the USSR and, initially, did not raise the border issue. The first signs of dissent within China were the opinions of the so-called «rightists» who voiced their views about the Sino-Russian border in the Chinese press during the «Hundred Flowers Campaign» in the late 1950's. The Chinese authorities claimed that such opinions were unofficial and, moreover, they were expressed by «enemies» who were later made to face the consequences of their actions. Soon thereafter, however, the situation on the border itself deteriorated. Therefore, despite the exacerbation of overall bilateral relations, in 1963 both sides agreed to send delegations in order to discuss the border problems.

Beginning of negotiations

Border consultations between Moscow and Beijing began as early as 1964 after Chinese leaders claimed that there was an unresolved border issue between the two countries left behind from the Tsarist government of Russia.

On July 10th, 1964, soon after the beginning of negotiations, Mao Zedong, speaking to Japanese representatives, made his famous statement about Russia tearing away China's «lands east of the Baikal», an action for which «the bill has not been extinguished». It has now been proven through documentary evidence that Mao made this statement with the intention of applying pressure on the Soviet negotiators at the border consultations. Afterwards Mao often clarified that he did not intend to demand that these territories be returned to China.¹ As such, China never actually made any

¹ S.N.Goncharov and Li Danhui, “Pogranichnyy vopros” zakryt navsegda” [“The Border Question” is closed forever], *Asia i Afrika segonnya*, No. 8, 2004, pp. 6–11.

territorial demands of Russia. Nonetheless, these statements served to dampen the mood of the negotiations and, for a long time thereafter, served as a weapon for radical nationalists on both sides of the border.

Official Chinese negotiators have never spoken of the “millions of square kilometers” once mentioned by Mao Zedong, but only talked about 38,000 km² that they called “disputed.” Moscow did not recognize them as “disputed” but agreed to demarcate the border and to accept the principle under international law, according to which the border on the Amur (Heilongjiang) and Ussuri rivers should be the center of the main fairway.

Despite the discord, the first stage of negotiations ended with significant results. The comparison of maps displayed obvious disagreements in the understanding of the border's location in more than 30 spots along the boundary. It is these disputed regions that would make up the bulk of complicated negotiations for many years to come. It is in this way that the ultimate objective of the negotiations was established: *the demarcation of the existing border on the basis of previous agreements, rather than the creation of a new border*. This mutual understanding became an important accomplishment of the Peking negotiations.

The other, equally important accomplishment was the mutual agreement that all navigatable border rivers would use their central fairway as the border. What did this mean? In terms of the Peking Agreement of 1860, the basic dividing principles of the border – namely the Amur and Ussuri Rivers – did not change. The truly novel aspect of this agreement lay in that, for the first time in history, two countries would share the surface of rivers (including the adjacent islands). Now, the territory of the country would no longer begin at the banks of the respective rivers, but in the middle of the main fairway (back then it was agreed that the central fairway would temporarily be considered to be the area with the largest amount of maritime movement).

This agreement led to the elimination of not only the legal uncertainty, but also to the de facto situation which, since the end of the 1920s, had become the norm on the Amur-Ussuri border. All the subsequent statements made by the Russian side, regarding tracing the border along the fairway, only reiterated and supported the position taken in 1964.²

The attempts to ratify the preliminary agreements were unsuccessful. The main point of contention was that the negotiators decided to table the resolution of the difficult issue regarding the island region at the merger of the Amur and Ussuri rivers

² V.Ya. Vorobiov, “Dogovor 2001 goda i uregulirovanie pogranichnykh voprosov mezhdru Rossiiy i Kitaem” [The 2001 Treaty and Settling the Border Problems between Russia and China], *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, No.8, 2011.
(<http://www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document210434.phtml>)

so that it would not serve as an impediment to other necessary agreements. The decision to temporarily remove this prickly topic from the scope of negotiations served as a positive precedent for the future, but for the time being it prevented the ratification of all other agreements.³

With the worsening of the bilateral relations and the launch of the “Cultural Revolution” in China border consultations were interrupted. In the spring of 1969 there were major military clashes, resulting in serious casualties on both sides, near the Ussuri River border (in the vicinity of the Damanskii Island (Zhenbao Dao)). In August of that year, there was an armed clash at Lake Zhalanashkol in Kazakhstan. Sino-Soviet relations had reached a highly precarious point. The situation was exacerbated by severe measures taken by the USSR: a massive reassignment of armed forces to the Chinese border, an appeal to the United States and other western states in regard to the China problem, and the mobilization of the international Communist movement to wage a merciless battle against the «anti-Leninist» ideologies of the Chinese authorities.

Second round

In September of 1969 Alexei Kosygin and Zhou Enlai, the respective heads of the Soviet and Chinese governments, held an emergency meeting in Beijing's airport. The two leaders agreed to restart negotiations on border-related issues. These negotiations were restarted in October of that same year and the vitriol in Sino-Soviet relations decreased slightly. A contributing factor to this improvement was that the «Cultural Revolution» in China began to wane and the Chinese authorities took specific measures to moderate all of their diplomatic channels. The situation on the border showed improvement and saw a revival of cross-border trade. However, overall diplomatic relations still remained tense.

The border negotiations were stalled due to broad disagreements. China demanded full ownership of several «disputed zones» and demanded that Soviet troops be withdrawn from those regions. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, based its arguments on the notion that the border between the two countries had already been demarcated by several previous agreements and that it simply needed to be clarified and some specific details needed to be ironed out.

The negotiations continued from 1969 to 1978 but were not very fruitful because of ideological clashes and differences in positions. The Chinese demanded recognition of the “disputed” territories. Moscow did not recognize them as

³ Ibid.

“disputed” but agreed to demarcate the border and to accept the principle under international law according to which the border on the Amur (Heilongjiang) and Ussuri rivers should be the center of the main fairway. In 1978 these talks were frozen by Beijing after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Third round

The talks resumed in 1987 after the Chinese side agreed to drop their demands for a Soviet recognition of the “unequal” nature of the nineteenth-century border treaties and the existence of “disputed” territories, while the Soviet Union confirmed its acceptance (in principle) of the main fairway of the rivers as the demarcation line.

By this time both countries were actively engaged in wide-reaching domestic reforms and it was the mutual realization that the successful implementation of the reforms at home required an auspicious environment abroad (namely the improvement in bilateral relations) that carried the day. In 1989, during Michael Gorbachev's historic visit to China that served as a capstone to the normalization of relations, China's leader, Deng Xiaoping, declared «all historic debts have been settled and all problems have been resolved..... the past is now behind us».⁴

This time, the border negotiations were constructive. All of the positive accomplishments from the first round of negotiations were used as stepping stones. Meanwhile, there were lessons learned from the second round, namely that the two sides shouldn't use the border negotiations as a battlefield for ideological polemics. Everyone's attention was focused on resolving a series of concrete questions regarding the passage of the border line and on the need to prepare a new comprehensive document that could replace the agreements of 1860 and 1911. To achieve these goals it was necessary to rely on previous agreements so as to outline the border, one section at a time, and then to come to a mutual understanding regarding the proper location of the border (in consideration of the peculiarities of the terrain and of modern international law).

As a result of long summits which, by many indicators, were rather unorthodox from the perspective of international norms in border negotiations, the two nations signed three separate, interconnected agreements. As a whole, these agreements cover the entire length of the Sino-Russian border. The first agreement, signed in 1991, demarcated the eastern part of the Soviet border (from Mongolia to North Korea). Just as was the case in 1964, the merger of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers was not included

⁴ 邓小平 (Deng Xiaoping): 《结束过去, 开辟未来》 [Ending the Past, Opening up the Future], 1989年5月16日 邓小平文选 (1982-1989) [Deng Xiaoping. Selected Works (1982-1989)], Vol.3, Beijing, 1994, pp. 294-295.

in the agreement. Furthermore, no agreement was reached in regards to a small, swampy island Bolshoi on the Argun River delta. The second agreement, signed in 1994, demarcated the western part of the now Russo-Chinese border (from Mongolia to Kazakhstan) with no pending disputes. An additional agreement, resolving the two questions leftover from 1991, was signed in 2004 and demarcated the final 2% of the border.

The agreement on the borderline in the eastern part was signed on May 15, 1991 by foreign ministers of China and the USSR Qian Qichen and Aleksandr Bessmertnykh. It successfully demarcated ninety-eight percent of the Soviet-Chinese borderline, which is about 4200 km.

The signing of this agreement became the most important event of Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin's visit to Moscow. The document confirmed the location of the border as the main fairway for all shipping rivers (and the center of the river for all non-shipping rivers). Both sides also agreed to form a Commission on the «Demarcation of the border» and to continue discussing the remaining areas of dispute (namely the border line in the area of the Bolshoi Island on Argun River and two smaller islands near Khabarovsk).⁵

The collapse of the USSR did not have a significant impact on the progress of the border negotiations. On December 27th, 1991 there was a meeting between Georgy Kunadze, the Russian deputy Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Qianpei, in which they discussed the principles of new relations between Moscow and Beijing. Based on these discussions, a protocol was signed in which China officially recognized Russia as the heir of the USSR. The protocol specifically indicated that the «guiding principles of development of Sino-Russian relations are still the guidelines established in the two Russo-Chinese communiqués of 1989 and 1991» and that the governments of the two countries would continue to enjoy the rights and maintain the responsibilities that were designated by treaties between the CPR and the former USSR. The two sides also confirmed the positive results of the border negotiations, made statements urging a speedy ratification of the Agreement on the Eastern part of the Sino-Russian border, and agreed to continue negotiations for a «just and rational resolution to the border issues that, due to historical reasons, still remain between us». There was also an agreement on the continuation of discussions geared toward the mutual reduction of military forces in the border region and on the enhancement of trust within the security dimension of that region. There was also a statement indicating a desire to increase formal

⁵ G.V.Kireev, *Rossiia-Kitay. Neizvestnye starnitsy pogranichnykh peregovorov* [Russia-China: Unknown Pages of the Border Talks]. Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2006, pp.188–193.

personnel exchanges within all socio-economic spheres and at all levels, including the highest ones.⁶

However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the demarcation of this already agreed to border line encountered difficulties because of the opposition from some groups in Russia, especially those in the Russian Far East (RFE). The discussion on the border demarcation question was clearly instigated by local leaders who wanted to promote their political agendas. According to the 1991 treaty, in the process of border demarcation Russia and China were to exchange several pieces of land and Russia was to give up slightly more. More than two years after this agreement, the governors of the Khabarovsk and Maritime regions launched a fierce campaign against the treaty.

By October of 1995 the conflict reached the highest level in Moscow. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin wrote an official note to President Yeltsin and described the situation in the Maritime regions and the Jewish autonomous oblast', where the local authorities had called for new talks with China. Chernomyrdin explained that, despite having been informed of the president's position that the treaty needed to be implemented, the Maritime administration continued to block the demarcation process. In February 1996, Yeltsin signed an executive order "On Measures to Conclude the Demarcation Works at the Eastern Part of the Border," which demanded a speedy conclusion of the demarcation works in accordance with the 1991 treaty and ordered the administrations of the border regions to cooperate in preparing a framework agreement with China on the joint economic use of the territories that would change sovereignty after the demarcation. While Nazdratenko himself was cautious enough not to criticize the president directly, Yeltsin faced acerbic criticism from the region's legislature (Duma). The Duma passed a resolution calling the president's order "inconsistent with Russia's state interests and undermining the territorial, economic, and political rights of the Maritime region as a member of the Russian Federation."⁷ In a separate resolution, the Duma claimed that the February 1992 ratification of the border demarcation treaty by the Russian Supreme Soviet was unconstitutional because it needed the vote of the larger Congress of People's Deputies and because a referendum on changing the national border had not yet been called. The first claim was rejected by the Federal authorities explained that demarcation did not mean drawing a new border, but creating a more precise definition of the existing borderline. The second argument, however, was

⁶ G.B. Karasin (ed.) *Sbornik rossiysko-kitayskikh dogovorov, 1949-1999* [Collection of Russian-Chinese treaties]. (Moscow: Terra Sport, 1999), pp. 132-133.

⁷ B.I.Tkachenko, *Rossii--Kitai: vostochnaia granitsa v dokumentakh i materialakh* [Russia--China: Eastern Border in Documents and Materials] (pp. 302-303), Vladivostok: Ussuri, 1999.

more technically correct. It seems that, in the great governmental mess just after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet forgot to pass its ratification decision on to the broader Congress of People's Deputies.

On December 31, 1996, Yeltsin reprimanded Nazdratenko by sending him an "official warning." The warning ran: "In connection with your statements on the problems of Russia's relations with China, I ask you in the future to strictly adhere to the all-state constitutional norms and always coordinate any statements concerning Russia's international ties with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation."⁸ Such a warning was a unique case for the new Russia, whose President tended not to pay too much attention to what governors were doing in their own regions, and it meant that Nazdratenko had really got on Yeltsin's nerves. However, the Maritime governor never ceased his activities; he reiterated his position in numerous interviews and articles. He claimed that the transfer of land to China would deliver a serious blow to Russian interests and would break "the balance of economic and political forces in the Asia-Pacific Region," because these two very small pieces of land "make it possible for China to build a major port here."⁹ Therefore, according to Nazdratenko, "the transfer to the PRC of the strategically important section of the border in the Khasan area means the consequent death of the Maritime ports and the prospect of Russia's losing its position in the Far East not far-off."¹⁰

With the support of the administration, the local press began a campaign aimed mainly at the central government in Moscow, which continued to insist on the implementation of the border treaty. The Maritime and Khabarovsk press, obviously encouraged by the regional authorities, began describing catastrophic consequences of the transfer of Russian land to China, picturing the crafty Chinese as supposedly wanting to take advantage of the lack of patriotism of the Moscow leadership. Nazdratenko's warnings that the transfer would give China an access to the sea and thus an opportunity to build a port and a railroad that would link this port to Europe by way of Kazakhstan and that this would supposedly almost destroy the entire economy of the Far East. Many of these arguments were supported by many local industrialists and newspapers. Some argued that the Chinese began the border talks only because they had this insidious plan in mind. Others predicted that the demands for the 15 km² were only a prelude to reviving much greater claims that the Chinese

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Yevgenii Nazdratenko, "*Radi nashikh potomkov*" [For the Sake of Our Descendants], in *Nekotorye problemy demarkatsii rossiisko-Kitaiskoi granitsy* [Some Problems of the Demarcation of the Russian-Chinese Border] (p. 4), Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 1997.

¹⁰ Denis Demkin and Evgenii Vnuchkov, "*Nazdratenko schitaet demarkatsiiu sdachey territorii Rossii*" [Nazdratenko Believes Demarcation to be a Surrender of Russia's Territory], *Kommersant-daily*, March 21, 1997, p. 1.

government had never put aside. The Khabarovsk media was especially fearful of the possibility that, after obtaining the territories in accordance with the treaty, Chinese diplomacy (which was “traditionally full of craftiness”) would immediately demand the large islands of Bolshoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarova, and the city of Khabarovsk itself. This claim was substantiated by an allusion that authors heard that “during conversations with representatives of various Chinese firms and companies that now operate in Khabarovsk, an opinion was often expressed that Khabarovsk was the former Chinese city of Boli.”¹¹ This possibility could result in a future crisis between the two countries and even a war. A fear was expressed that any Russian concession to China would lead to territorial claims from other Russian neighbors. Some articles articulated an opinion that it was a national disgrace to transfer the sacred battlefields of the conflicts with Japan (in the end of the 1930s) and with China (in 1969) to another country because those battlefields included the graves and monuments to Soviet soldiers. Expressing the dominant mood of the region’s elite, a Vladivostok newspaper concluded: “A transfer of land to another state is a national humiliation to all Russians and we are digging an economic grave for all residents of the Far East with our own hands.”¹² The position of the regional authorities in the RFE played a certain role in the final settlement of the Russian-Chinese border demarcation issue as Russian negotiators had to raise some issues put forward by the Far Eastern leaders at the talks with the Chinese.

The position of the Chinese side, however, was very cooperative. The Chinese approach to Russian regional concerns was to work closely with the central government in Moscow while at the same time taking into consideration the feelings of the Russian public. This position led to the emergence of a unique united front: Beijing sided with the federal government in Moscow against the Russian critics, the public opinion in the RFE, and the nationalist opposition. This allowed Moscow and Beijing to make an extraordinary step: according to a special agreement, the demarcation process was launched on the previously agreed parts of the border before the agreement on the entire borderline was reached. Moreover, the border regime was agreed upon before the entire border was demarcated. These moves stabilized the situation along the border and calmed down some critics in Russia and stimulated cross-border contacts.

Another measure that positively influenced the border demarcation was a protocol on sailing regulations along the Amur and Ussuri rivers that was signed in 1994 and

¹¹ Georgii Levkin, “*Kitaitsam khochetsia plavat_' pod oknamy khabarovchan*” [The Chinese Want to Sail under the Windows of the People of Khabarovsk], *Dal_'nevostochnyy uchenyy*, No. 12, June 12, 1995, p. 9.

¹² “*Vse porty Dal_'nego Vostoka mogut ostat_'sia bez raboty*” [All Ports of the Far East May Become Jobless], *Krasnoe znamia*, March 16, 1995, p. 1.

that abolished unilateral regulations imposed by the Khabarovsk regional authorities. According to the protocol, Chinese vessels, including military ones, were granted the right to sail freely around the islands upon which China has claims. Then, in 1997, Beijing agreed to allow joint economic use of those islands and territories that were being transferred to China. This allowed the Russians to continue to use the territories they had been using for years for economic purposes and made the process of sovereignty transfer much smoother. The realization of this joint use agreement began in 2000.

Another measure that created a better atmosphere for the demarcation process was the agreement on trust-building measures along the border. The talks on these measures began in 1989 and two consequent agreements were reached in 1996 and 1997 between a joint Russian-Kazakh-Kirgiz-Tadzhik delegation and a delegation from China. According to the agreements, Russia and China imposed limits on the number of troops deployed in the 100 km border zone. In 1999, a Joint Control Group began verifying the fulfillment of these agreements.

Meanwhile, during the border negotiations, Russia and China agreed to a scientific method for establishing the exact location of the main fairway of any shipping rivers (which, technically, is different from the main shipping lane). Based on these criteria, the islands on these rivers were delegated among the two parties. On the non-shipping Argun, the middle of the river served as the designation border line. Therefore, there was no bargaining during negotiations regarding one or another of the smaller islands; everything was determined by the clear demarcation of the border.

As a result of the demarcation of the border on three rivers, of the 2444 islands and shoals, 1163 went to Russia (886 km²) and 1282 to China (851 km²). According to Russia's lead negotiator, Vitaly Vorobiov, «when comparing this agreement to the Peking agreement of 1860, in strictly legal terms, the Peking agreement measured the border between Russia and China from the actual native shores on either side of the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers and therefore put all of the shoals and islands in no man's land. Thus, strictly speaking, neither side actually «conceded» nor «lost» anything, on the contrary, both sides increased their legal holdings».¹³

Thus, Beijing did everything it could to smooth the way for the demarcation process. During the process the Chinese side agreed to a further compromise, from which Russia retained some of the most sensitive sections of the disputed land, including those in the Khankaiskii and Khasanskii districts of the Maritime region. The graves that some attributed to the Soviet soldiers killed in clashes with Japan in 1938 remained in Russia and China even dropped the theoretical possibility of

¹³ V.Ya. Vorobiov, “Dogovor 2001 goda i uregulirovanie pogranychnykh voprosov mezhdou Rossiei i Kitaem.”

gaining unilateral control of the Tumen River. By 1998, the demarcation of the eastern part of the border had been finished with only the issue of those few islands whose status was deferred in the 1991 treaty remaining in question. The western part of the border, 54 km from Mongolia to Kazakhstan, did not present a problem. An agreement on this was signed in 1994 and it was soon demarcated.

Evidence of the new level of Russian-Chinese relations was formalized with the “Treaty of Good-neighbor Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation” signed in Moscow in July 2001.¹⁴ Article 6 had great significance. The article fixed China’s agreement to recognize the existing border and the necessity of preserving the status quo where unresolved areas remain. Although Chinese negotiators were reluctant to include this article in the treaty, they finally yielded to Russia’s insistence. This reduced any speculation that China may find some pretext to claim Russian territory or to conduct a planned settlement of the Russian Far East.

Two regions where temporary concessions were made really presented the greatest challenge. First of all, the two sides «interpreted» the same exact geographic area in entirely different ways. Secondly, these regions were already settled by the local Soviet population (in particular the islands near Khabarovsk). Thirdly, the Khabarovsk islands have long been considered by us to be the first line of national defense. Fourthly, this group of islands is located on an important transition point between the Amur and Ussuri Rivers.¹⁵

The resolution of this problem required political will from both sides. This will was shown. The principle was not the division of the territories based on the agreed to criteria (such as the 50:50 split, as many believe), but rather the convergence of the Russian and Chinese versions on the exact location of the border (in consideration with the political concerns of both sides). Ultimately, the border was drawn exclusively through the islands thereby bisecting them in half.

In October 2004, a bilateral summit produced a dramatic result. The question of sovereignty over the last disputed areas was resolved. According to the additional agreement on the eastern part of the border, the remaining disputed islands were divided roughly in half.

¹⁴ *Dogovor o dobrososedstve, druzhbe i sotrudnichestve mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiey i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respublikoy* [Treaty of Good-neighbor Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China], <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2001/07/30565.shtml>.

¹⁵ V.Ya. Vorobiov, “Dogovor 2001 goda i uregulirovanie pogranichnykh voprosov mezhdru Rossiey i Kitaem”

In the words of Chinese leader Hu Jintao, this agreement “meant the final settlement of border issues between the two nations”.¹⁶ Vladimir Putin made the following comments about the achieved agreement: «The most crucial political step has been taken: we have put an end to the border issue between our two states. For forty years we moved toward the resolution of this question. Russia and China showed great statecraft and wisdom and came to a balanced, mutually conducive decision. For the first time in the history of Sino-Russian relations the entire length of the border will be legally framed and set in place».¹⁷

The 2004 agreement showed the willingness of both Beijing and Moscow to finally solve the border issue in order to boost bilateral cooperation and create a better international environment for internal development. Thanks to this general course both sides were ready to undertake constructive talks with reasonable compromise and could understand the concerns of their counterpart, especially the reaction of public opinion in Russia and China.

In 2008 the final legal framework for the last two sections of the eastern part of the Russo-Chinese border was completed. On July 21, 2008, in Beijing, an additional protocol, describing the Russo-Chinese border, was signed as part of an official visit to China by Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov. Upon the completion of internal domestic procedures, the protocol went into effect on October 14, 2008. By 2009 the border was completely demarcated.

Conclusions

The new Russo-Chinese border agreements replaced previous ones, but they also continued them without changing the fundamental principles on which the prior treaties were based. This underscores the fact that, in essence, the resolution to the border issue was not to a question of territorial integrity - that would require new differentiation and the establishment of a new border - but merely the refinement of the original border line.

Today, the Russo-Chinese border is defined and designated along its entire length without any exceptions. This historic achievement comprises a crucial foundation for further development in the strategic partnership between the two countries. Of course, no one can predict the long term future. Within both countries there exist groups of unsatisfied people who insist that historical justice has still not been achieved.

¹⁶ Zayavleniya dlya pressy posle podpisaniya rossiysko-kitayskikh dokumentov [Statements for the Press after the Signing of the Russian-Chinese Documents]. 3 October 14, 2004. (http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2004/10/14/2120_type63377type63380_77989.shtml).

¹⁷ Ibid.

However, the governments of both countries and the majority of the public believe that the territorial problems between Russian and China are resolved forever and can no longer distract Moscow and Beijing from continuing to build a partnership in all areas of relations.