



L'Europe en formation

Revue d'études sur la construction européenne et le fédéralisme

Journal of Studies on European Integration and Federalism

DOSSIER

Central Asia and the South Caucasus: The EU's Involvement and Regional Perspectives
L'Asie centrale et le Caucase du Sud : l'engagement de l'UE et perspectives régionales

Editors – Coordinateurs : *Mathias Jopp, Tatjana Kuhn & Janny Schulz*

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CIFE « L'Adriatic » 81 rue de France F-06000 Nice France

Courriel : europe.formation@cife.eu

Téléphone : +33 4 93 97 93 97 Fax : +33 4 93 97 93 98

www.cife.eu

Sur Facebook : L'Europe en formation

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Dossier

***Central Asia and the South Caucasus:
The EU's Involvement and
Regional Perspectives***

***L'Asie centrale et le Caucase du Sud :
l'engagement de l'UE et perspectives
régionales***

Preface – Why Focusing on the South Caucasus and Central Asia?

Mathias Jopp, Tatjana Kuhn & Janny Schulz

Mathias Jopp is honorary professor at the universities of Tübingen and Passau and director of the European Integration module in the European and Global Studies programme at CIFE. He is simultaneously Head of International Programmes at the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) in Berlin. He holds a PhD in Political Science and has published numerous on EU affairs and European foreign policy in particular.

Tatjana Kuhn is research associate at CIFE Berlin where she is work package leader in the Horizon 2020 project SEnECA (“Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations”). She has previously coordinated the PhD Support Programme EUCACIS at CIFE and holds an MSc in International and European Relations from Linköping University in Sweden.

Janny Schulz is research associate and programme manager of the PhD Support Programme EUCACIS at the IEP. She holds an M.A. in Central Asia Studies and a B.A. in Area Studies Asia/Africa from the Humboldt University of Berlin.

Central Asia and the South Caucasus—two regions varying greatly in their political realities, societal structures and their relations with the European Union (EU)—are strongly connected through their Soviet heritage. They share a common struggle to establish themselves as relevant players in the international community. This special issue of *L'Europe en formation* sheds light on the two regions, not only because they have become increasingly important partners for the EU due to changing geopolitics, but also because of their remarkable pathways and transformation.

Having received more attention from European policymakers and civil society lately, the two regions are still not in the spotlights of EU politics and media coverage. While the South Caucasus is often perceived as an area of frozen conflicts with a fraught security situation, Central Asia is usually associated with authoritarian regimes, forced labour, environmental catastrophes or with the romantic image of the ancient silk roads. Despite the fact that these images are partly based on political and societal realities, recent political events in the two regions give hope for progress towards liberalization, regional integration and closer cooperation with the EU.

Although the political situation in the South Caucasus is strongly influenced by the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, there have also been positive trends. In spring 2018, protesters during what is now called the Velvet Revolu-

tion caused the Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan to resign after only six days in office. The protests that lead to the revolution targeted corruption and nepotism in the country, marking a historic turning point in Armenia's 25 year-old post-Soviet history. The leader of the April protests is now heading the new government as Prime Minister. In addition, Armenia's neighbour Georgia has become an EU associated country and is trying to strengthen its cooperation not only with the EU, but also with Turkey and Azerbaijan in an attempt to somewhat balance the strong role of Russia in the region.

On the other side of the Caspian Sea, one could witness the smooth transition from Atambayev to Jeenbekov in Kyrgyzstan and the change of leadership from Karimov to Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan. Especially the latter development has brought about unexpected changes to the political landscape in Central Asia, raising expectations of a political and economic opening and more freedom under semi-authoritarian rule. While the relations between Central Asian states had not been very friendly before—especially between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—the situation has improved since Mirziyoyev's presidency. One evidence of this is a meeting of the heads of state of all five Central Asian countries at a Central Asian Summit in March 2018—a constellation last seen 20 years ago and indicating the new “mood” in the region as the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev put it. The five states are now seeking agreements on water management, security issues and intra-regional trade and, hence, give hope for first steps towards regional integration in Central Asia, a quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Russia is increasing its engagement in both regions and is trying to expand its economic and political clout through Eurasian Union-building. China, on the other hand, is further investing in its Road and Belt Initiative and has promoted the trans-Asian enlargement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) resulting in the inclusion of India and Pakistan as members. While the US is retreating from international commitments, the EU has strengthened its partnership with Kazakhstan through an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and is revising its Central Asia Strategy to be finalised by 2019. Furthermore, the EU has signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia in 2018.

This volume provides readers with introductory articles to current EU policies towards Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus as well as case studies from regions on particular issues or difficulties which individual countries are encountering. Three flagship papers in this volume indicate the direction of the relations between the three regions, the EU, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. First, in the article “The EU's Policy in the South Caucasus,” Laure Delcour and Katharina Hoffmann critically investigate how—despite increasing differentiation of

EU policies towards the South Caucasus—the EU is still ill-equipped to tackle the region’s major problems and to attune to local priorities. They suggest the EU to become more flexible in the adaptation of the *acquis* and to encourage dialogue between governing elites and civil society over the country’s EU policy. Second, in the article “A New Start for the EU Central Asia Policy in 2021? Current State, Developments and Perspectives for the Revision of the EU Central Asia Strategy,” Katrin Böttger and Julian Plottka make suggestions for the new EU Central Asia Strategy emphasising the importance of a thorough balance between regional and bilateral cooperation strategies, the focus on a limited number of value-adding priority areas and unconditional, result-oriented policies in the light of the new “principled pragmatism” of the EU. Third, Sebastian Schiek’s article “Uzbekistan’s Transformation from an ‘Old’ to an ‘Upgraded’ autocracy” is taking a glimpse into the future. This paper presents an analysis of political developments in a Central Asian state which has experienced the greatest changes within the last few years. Here, Uzbekistan’s transformation from an “old” to an “upgraded” autocracy is viewed with cautious optimism and is expected to move the country towards a more rational-legal state, respect for human rights, economic growth and improvement of regional cooperation.

This volume has been developed in the context of the PhD Support Programme EUCACIS (“The EU, Central Asia and the South Caucasus in the International System”). We are, therefore, grateful to the Volkswagen Foundation for its generous funding of the programme and the EU for its co-funding. Most of the authors in this volume are current PhD candidates in EUCACIS working on their doctoral theses at universities in their home countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the consortium members of the EU Horizon 2020 project SEnECA¹ (“Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations”) for fruitful exchanges of views on this volume and for raising our awareness of Eurocentric positions in this field of research. We also thank Charlotte McDonald, Florian Lange and Theresa Rettner for their great support during the editorial process.

November 2018, Mathias Jopp, Tatjana Kuhn and Janny Schulz

1. The SEnECA consortium consists of twelve partner institutions: University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany), Centre international de formation européenne (France), Institut für Europäische Politik (Germany), Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies (Kazakhstan), Center of Sociological Research “Zerkalo” (Tajikistan), University of World Economy and Diplomacy (Uzbekistan), Royal United Services Institute (UK), WiseEuropa - Fundacja Warszawski Instytut Studiów Ekonomicznych i Europejskich (Poland), Latvian Institute of International Affairs (Latvia), Trans European Policy Studies Association (Belgium), Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn (Kyrgyzstan), Ynanch-Vepa (Turkmenistan).

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L'Europe en formation examine avec intérêt toute proposition d'article original en langue française ou anglaise, portant sur la construction européenne, les relations internationales et le fédéralisme. Seront traités avec une attention particulière les articles en lien avec les thématiques spécifiques aux numéros à venir. Les thèmes et le calendrier de publication sont présentés sur le site Internet de la revue.

Les propositions d'articles doivent être envoyées à l'adresse courriel de la revue sous forme de fichier électronique (de 4 000 à 10 000 mots), accompagnées d'un résumé (100 mots) et d'une brève présentation de l'auteur.

Les articles seront soumis anonymement à un comité de lecture, qui recommandera ou non sa publication, ou proposera des modifications. Les textes proposés dans les rubriques *Tribune*, *Chronique* ou *Lectures*, seront soumis uniquement au comité de rédaction.

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