|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Associate Research Fellowship Programme, OSCE Academy in Bishkek** | |
| **Aizhan Sharshenova, PhD** |  |
| **Research project** | Arab Aid in Central Asia: A Study of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s Development Assistance in Kyrgyzstan |
|  |  |

## Introduction and background

My previous research experience has led to the development of this research project. After having worked for a USAID-funded development project in Kyrgyzstan, I have moved onto researching the EU’s development projects in Central Asia during my doctoral studies at the University of Leeds. Most recently, I have researched China’s development assistance and its implications for Western democracy promotion in Central Asia. Quite naturally, the next set of donors in Central Asia came to my attention – the Arab states.

In this paper, I would like to explore the substance, implementation and implications of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries’ development policy towards Central Asia. This research will focus on the so-called ‘Arab Aid’, development assistance provided by the GCC countries to third countries. Arab Aid is generally an under-researched topic in the field of international development, but its implementation in Central Asia is even less researched – I have not found a single publication on the topic by this date.

In particular, I would like to examine the case of Arab Aid in Central Asia. The research project will focus on the GCC countries and their development assistance to Kyrgyzstan. From among the GCC countries, the majority development assistance comes from the Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. As the GCC does not have a unified development assistance policy it makes sense to focus on the individual policies of the above-mentioned states. Therefore, the key Arab donors to be researched are the Saudi Arabic, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait.

On the receiving end of donor assistance, I would like to focus on Kyrgyzstan. There are several reasons why Kyrgyzstan is a suitable case study. Firstly, Kyrgyzstan, a donors’ darling in the region, have worked with a wide variety of national, international and private development assistance providers. As such, it is the most advanced and transparent (compared to other countries in the region) donor recipient in Central Asia. Secondly, Kyrgyzstan represents the most open society in Central Asia, where population exhibits a variety of foreign political preferences. Thirdly, as a Kyrgyz citizen I might have easier access to some of the required data available in Kyrgyzstan.

The research will aim to address the following questions. This set of questions is preliminary and not exhaustive – they might be modified along the course of the project’s development:

* What factors and stakeholders inform the development of donor assistance policy in Arab states?
* How do domestic political Islamic considerations in the Arab donor countries inform and shape their development assistance abroad?
* In what sense is Arab Aid different from other donors?
* How is Arab aid perceived in Kyrgyzstan (if possible to find reliable sources of information for analysis)?

The research will be based on both primary and secondary data. Primary sources of information will include official reports of the national development assistance agencies in the GCC. Secondary sources will include relevant academic publications.