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Adaptation and Transformation in Central Asia

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Roundtable Rapporteur: Aijan Sharshenova

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Adaptation and Transformation in Central Asia

24-25th September 2022, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

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Introduction

On September 24-25th, 2022, the [OSCE Academy in Bishkek](#) and the [Friedrich Ebert Foundation](#) co-organized the 4th Interdisciplinary Conference on “Adaptation and Transformation in Central Asia.” The conference brought together academics, practitioners, and civil society activists to discuss how civil society, policymakers, and the private sector have addressed paradigm shifts whilst adapting to institutional and political reforms over the past three decades.

This year’s topics included political and institutional adaptation, societal and cultural adaptation, and economic and infrastructural adaptation. Political and institutional adaptation was seen in the establishment and evolution of regional political regimes and civil society. Social adaptation expressed itself through increasing regional mobility related to migration and ongoing changes within the higher education sector. Cultural adaptation manifested itself in Islamic religious revival, as well as increased public aspiration to pursue a Western lifestyle on the one hand and the rise of ethnic nationalist narratives on the other. Economic adaptation was observed in the transformation of the old Soviet top-down command system and top-down allocation of resources, as well as the rising levels of informal and remittance activities in the economy. Infrastructural adaptation varied across the region, and included such phenomena as dependency on natural resources, external investors and donors, and neo-colonial tendencies. Taking all these aspects into consideration, this conference offered diverse perspectives on the processes taking place in Central Asia and their implications for the future.

The two-day conference included four plenary sessions, each of which included a keynote speaker and a panel of speakers. This report mirrors the structure of the conference, having four parts, each covering a plenary session.

Plenary Session I: Civil and Political Adaptation in Central Asia

Keynote I: Trajectories of Post-Soviet Regime Change

According to existing research, the continuum of political regimes stretches from ideal democratic systems to perfect totalitarian regimes. The latter is difficult to find in the real world, with the closest regimes being North Korea and Turkmenistan. Most of political regimes fit into the more central categories of democracy (whether embedded or defective) and autocracy (either authoritarian or totalitarian).

Transformation of political regimes can occur along different trajectories depending on the position of political elites. Elites are important actors in regime transformation. If elites agree on democratic development, the state is likely to develop as a consolidated democracy. If the elites fail to agree and work toward this, it is likely to develop a hybrid regime or slide into authoritarianism.

The Liberal Democracy Index ([V-Dem Institute](#)) has investigated the political transformation trajectories of former Soviet republics, and the quality of democracy was noted to be lower

than the world average. Political regimes in the former USSR can be divided into four clusters. The first cluster includes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which developed liberal democratic regimes. Moldova, Armenia and Georgia represent a cluster of defective democracies where the basic principles of governance are democratic, but there are significant shortcomings. The third cluster includes Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, and the fourth includes Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Belarus.

Conventional research argues that there is a correlation between democratic development and market freedom. However, if one looks at the cluster of outliers, one can see that the autocratic regimes among the former Soviet republics do not show correlation between democratic development and market freedom. A second correlation is believed to exist between the quality of democracy and corruption: with the most corrupt regimes the most authoritarian. A third correlation is geographic, with political and economic proximity affected by distance from more advanced democracies. Countries sharing borders with European democracies are seen to have higher quality democracy. In this regard, Kyrgyzstan is a remarkable case as it is surrounded by strong authoritarian regimes but remains more democratic than its neighbours. A fourth correlation is expected between quality of education and the quality of democracy. In this, the former USSR offers outliers too, as Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus boast higher quality of education but lower quality of democracy. When looking at the former USSR, one should take into account religious factors as well. It is possible to categorize former Soviet countries into three groups: Western Christian, Eastern Orthodox, and Islamic countries.

These correlations highlight the strong influence of structural factors. In the former USSR, economic factors have had less impact on democratic development than expected. Geographic proximity, religion and corruption, however, do strongly correlate with the quality of democracy. The former Soviet clusters of political regimes show significant differences between them. The upper democratic Baltic cluster had elites who sought democracy, while in the lower authoritarian Central Asian cluster, political elites sought personal power and wealth.

Roundtable I: Civil and Political Adaptation in Central Asia

Adaptation and development of currency exchange

For a while, Uzbekistan had a strict foreign exchange policy which made exchange difficult. The population adapted to the policy through the use of informal markets – using street currency sellers and unofficial currency rates. In 2017 the official currency market of Uzbekistan adopted the street rates as the official ones and made it easier to exchange currency at formal institutions. People are now able to exchange their currency at commercial and state banks. Demand for foreign currency, as well as the volume of currency traded has increased significantly as it has left the shadows of the informal economy. The banking system has become more accessible thanks to the Government's reform efforts. Furthermore, an increase in digitalization has occurred due to government permitted new ways of banking and the commercial sector's need to compete for clients. Liberalization of the foreign exchange market presented an integral part of Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021.

Political stability of neo-patrimonial regimes: The case of Kazakhstan

The term neo-patrimonial regime refers to a hybrid mode of rule in which informal political ties and exchange suffuse the management structure of a state. Neo-patrimonial regimes are built on various forms of domination. There are certain limitations in measuring and categorizing such regimes, but one can use empirical case studies. The evolution of governance in Kazakhstan presents an interesting case study if one focuses on former President Nursultan Nazarbayev's regime as neo-patrimonial.

Cycles of Nazarbayev's regime saw the initial period of de-communicization and state-building in 1991-96, followed by a period of strong-man rule in 1996-2015, and the lead up to the transition in 2015-2022. Nazarbayev's regime was built upon a very hierarchical structure, at the heart of which was Nazarbayev himself. Immediately under him was his close family and closest allies. The power transition in Kazakhstan began in 2015 with the transfer of the presidential position to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in 2019. However, the transition remains incomplete. Following the violent clampdown on public protests in January 2022, President Tokayev undertook steps to distance himself from his patron. Analysis of neo-patrimonial regimes provides interesting avenues for future research. Each regime must try to adapt what it inherits formally and informally from the previous regime because neo-patrimonial political systems do not follow written rules.

A critical look at Islamic radicalization and violent extremism in Central Asia

Exploring radicalization patterns in Central Asia is challenging due to differences between individual countries. The role and extent of Islamic radicalization and violent extremism are debated and contested and can sometimes be perceived as existential threats to Central Asia's secular states. The Taliban's rule and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has changed both perceptions and analytical approaches to radicalization.

In the region, there are Islamic extremism organizations, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, Hizb ut-Tahrir and others. It is possible to identify three categories of organizations. The first category includes organizations that are both radical and violent. The second category includes organizations that are radical but not necessarily violent. The third category includes organizations that ostensibly eschew violence. Some groups refrain from violence but can be ambiguous in their justification of violence by others. Other groups openly promote violence; they are sometimes referred to as a "conveyor belt" for violent organizations. For example, Jama'at al-Tabligh is a conservative but non-violent organization; however, its membership has been a source of recruitment for such organizations as Al Qaeda.

The trend of exponentially growing terrorism has not been seen in Central Asia. This does not imply that these issues should not be taken seriously. Radicalization grows insidiously, seeping into the foundations of society and potentially jeopardizing the existence of secular societies. Thousands of Central Asians joined ISIS, showing that the region is susceptible to radicalization.

Radical organizations capitalize on the political contexts and economic conditions in the region. Government repression in Central Asia and the poor economic conditions create alienation at a societal level. Alienation at a societal level creates room for radicalization.

There are links between political conditions, economic environment, and radicalization. However, such simple explanations often rely too heavily on modernization theory, which sometimes equates religiosity with radicalization.

Research suggests that radicalization often takes place when people reside outside their countries. Central Asian ISIS recruits were primarily radicalized while working abroad in Russia. Their Muslim identity came forward during their alienation from their society and through discrimination in their places of residence. Some existing research refers to the correlation between ethnicity and radicalization. However, while some researchers argue that there are ethnic groups that are more susceptible to radicalization, radicalized recruits are usually quite diverse. There is no sufficient data to place the responsibility for radicalization on one aspect or another.

Plenary Session II: Rule of Law and Internationalization in Central Asia

Keynote II: Legal and Political Transformation in Central Asia

Constitutionalism involves common traits revolving around the organizational structure of government: these include the core values associated with constitutionalism, such as the limited nature of government, respect for individual rights, and the rule of law (see Andras Sajó, Giovanni Sartori, Michel Rosenfeld, Louis Henkin).

In the early 1990s, the massive establishment of constitutional courts led to a massive importation of constitutional review systems from Germany and France to the former Soviet Union. These institutions enjoyed broad powers at first, but soon began experiencing hardships: from shutdowns to major constitutional reconfigurations through amendments. Outcomes of such importation were varied, including false empowerment of constitutional reviews to sham constitutions (Law and Versteeg), abusive constitutions (David Landau) and constitutions without constitutionalism (Okoth-Ogendo).

Constitutional courts in transitional democracies play an important role in building constitutionalism and democratic governance. The constitutional courts of Central Asia have behaved in counter-productive ways with regards to the consolidation of constitutionalism. Key cases discussed in this regard include constitutional reviews of political issues, cases involving institutional conflicts, and adjudication. At this point, it is important to highlight country differences. The constitutional courts of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan experienced windows of relative independence, while those of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had their powers restricted from the beginning.

Kyrgyzstan's Constitutional Court behaved differently under each president; its power and name changed depending on political context. The Kyrgyz Constitutional Court's behaviour regarding the constitutional review of the Interim Government's decrees in 2010 is remarkable. The Constitutional Court used a deferential approach on politically sensitive issues and put judicial independence under question.

Kazakhstan's Constitutional Court's history offers another interesting case, demonstrating the instrumentalization of the Court by a President in preparation for a transition of power. All aspects of the transition of power were made constitutional, but the Constitutional Court avoided any sensitive aspects of the case.

Tajikistan's Constitutional Court was involved in institutional conflicts in its earlier years. When a newly elected member of parliament gave away his seat to an Islamic Renaissance Party candidate and the Central Electoral Committee refused to allow it, the Constitutional Court allowed it. This was a case in which the President and the executive branch invited the Constitutional Court to resolve the dispute.

Uzbekistan's Constitutional Court judges were given powers to start processes themselves. They used this power in cases involving regional *hokims* (heads of administration) in 1996. President Islam Karimov was thus effectively able to use the Constitutional Court judges to dismiss the most vocal and active regional leaders.

in the early 1990s, there were tense conflicts between the Presidents and the Parliaments in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia resolved this through the use of force. In Kyrgyzstan, the President convinced some members of Parliament to refrain from attending the parliamentary sessions, and then dismissed the Parliament based on the continuous lack of parliamentary quorums. In Kazakhstan, members of parliament gave away their seats under Presidential pressure, leading to the dismissal of the parliament. When subsequent new elections brought opposition leaders back to Parliament, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev dissolved the parliament again, and dissolved the Constitutional Court as well. The Constitutional Court was then turned into Constitutional Council.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Constitutional Court was used by President Askar Akaev to legitimize his efforts to prolong his rule on several occasions. The second President, Bakiev, tried to introduce more amendments to transition power from himself to his son, and the Constitutional Court agreed to these. This transition of power process was eventually stopped by the April 2010 revolution. The Constitutional Chamber had a window of independence in 2010 after the revolution. President Atambayev changed this in 2016 and introduced new constitutional changes despite the prohibition on any changes until 2020. In 2020, President Sadyr Japarov introduced more constitutional changes.

Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, the Kazakh, Tajik and Uzbek constitutional courts did not have a mechanism for hearing individual complaints. Even though it has recently been introduced in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the jurisprudence in terms of protection of fundamental rights in these states is limited. At the same time, a common pattern can be observed among Central Asian states. First, provisions on revocation of citizenship were introduced in constitutional texts. Second, constitutional provisions on the relationship between international law and domestic law saw a shift from monism to dualism.

Such changes at the domestic level can change the status of international law globally. Political changes in Russia and China affect the established Westphalian system as they shift focus and narratives away from the existing principles of international law. Internal political dynamics and the fundamental rights-related jurisprudence of these courts are being shaped by external geopolitical factors. There is an emerging trend among such courts which involves the promotion

of a shift from monism to dualism with regards to norms of international law that protect fundamental rights. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have already introduced constitutional amendments that have lowered the status of international treaties compared to domestic law.

Constitutional transformation happens incrementally and gradually and requires a long process. The role of constitutional courts as agents of constitutional transformation was analysed in the context of mega politics, ordinary politics and in the domain of fundamental rights. In all three aspects it was confirmed that, without generating genuine political pluralism, willingness to foster transition and constitutional court efforts to make the constitution matter, any reforms or amendments risk being a façade for democratic transition. Ruling elites are interested in alienating the constitution from the public narratives because a constitution's primary goal is to limit the power of the government and protect the people from potential abuses of power.

Finally, there is a need for increased interdisciplinary approaches to constitutional transformation, involving constitutional legal analysis as well as political and economic analyses.

Roundtable II: Rule of law and internationalization in Central Asia

Legal adaptation, rule of law and crisis management in Central Asia: The case studies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

Since becoming independent from the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have worked towards building their own legal frameworks. All five Central Asian states belong to the Romano-Germanic legal family where normative legal acts are the main source of law. Judicial precedent in the region does not have the status of a source of law. While these legal systems belong to the same family, they have developed their own unique features depending on the extent of borrowing from foreign legal systems and adaptation of their legal system to the emerging socio-political challenges in the countries.

The Kazakh Constitution was modelled after the French Constitution, and the country proclaimed itself a democratic state of law and a social state. Kazakhstan recognizes the state of law as an eventual aim, an aspiration. The Russian Constitution, on the contrary, explicitly states that it is the state law. The difference could be attributed to the more realistic approach of Kazakhstan's Constitutional authors. Article 14 of Kazakh Constitution declares the equality of all before the law. Uzbekistan proclaims the task of creating a humane and democratic state of law in its Constitution. Both Constitutions declare similar principles which could be associate with the rule of law, but do not spell out the rule of law in their texts. Successful implementation of the rule of law in Central Asia requires, not only state efforts, but also the contribution of citizens. The law may be regarded as an instrument, not a value in itself, and thus can create a certain degree of public distrust and even legal nihilism.

Certain trends in legal development in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can be observed. The first trend is the positivistic or formalistic approach. The second trend is the heavy reliance on repeated legal reforms when resolving socio-political challenges. Third, the best practices of legal practices abroad have been followed and used.

The Central Asian region is prone to natural disasters and crises such as draughts,

earthquakes, and so forth. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan regularly face the social consequences of such crises. There are also the so-called situations of violence that present challenges to safety and security, as well as to human rights. In particular, Kazakhstan faced such a situation in January 2022, and Uzbekistan faced such a situation in July 2022. Both states applied different legal responses but used the instrumentalization of law and use of full or partial temporary emergency regimes in response to these domestic crises. These responses are usually tools to stabilize a situation.

Gender and youth adaptation in Kazakhstan

According to recent research, Central Asia will need 245 years to reach gender equality at the current rate (for comparison, the USA will require 200 years). While this might be pessimistic, there are ongoing efforts from the part of civil society to push harder for gender equality issues to be addressed.

Since Kazakhstan joined [the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) in 1995, it has been deliberately holding a course for gender policy. In December 1998, the head of state established the National Commission for Family and Women's Affairs. Kazakhstan's gender policy heavily relies on the Act of State of 2009, which guarantees equal rights and opportunities for men and women. The Constitution also enshrines gender equality, but the legislation does not provide a clear and complete definition of discrimination. It also fails to prohibit discrimination and inequality.

In April 2020, Kazakhstan's members of parliament approved the introduction of a 30% quota in party lists for women and young people. The quota will embed the representation of both women and young people. The proportion of women in parliamentary lists is entirely up to political parties and it may well turn out that young people, with very few women among them, will fill the quotas.

The official definition of youth in Kazakhstan is persons between the ages of 14 and 29. At the beginning of 2021, the number of young people in Kazakhstan amounted to 3,739,883, including 2,101,838 people (56.4%) living in urban areas, and 1,638,045 people (43.6%) living in rural areas. The youth were categorized into three groups. The youngest, between 14 and 18 years old, accounted for 27.9% of all young people. The middle band, those aged 19-23 years, constituted 32.3% of youth. Finally, the senior group of young people, aged 24-28 years, amounted to 39.9%. A Friedrich Ebert Foundation [report](#) noted that 77.7% of young people were satisfied with the level of democracy in their country. 17.1% did not know what to say, and only 5.2% were unhappy with the political situation in the country. Concerning the political views of the respondents, 35.8% had right-wing political views, 46.4% leaned towards left political views, and the remaining 17.8% of respondents found themselves in the middle of the political spectrum (2018).

The current legal framework for youth in Kazakhstan is the 2015 State Youth Policy. Kazakhstan's youth sector was managed by three different ministries between 1998 and 2017. Youth as a social category gained official recognition in Kazakhstan with the development of the country's first national youth policy in 2004. Since 2019, the development and implementation of youth policy, as well as inter-sectoral coordination, is undertaken by the Ministry of Information and Social Development.

Participation of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in the process of adaptation and transformation of the states of Central Asia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of international non-governmental organization (INGOs) emerged in the region to help address socio-political and economic challenges. International NGOs have played a growing role in the development of Central Asian states and had some positive impact on the formation of global civil society.

The Uzbek Government started working with INGOs some time ago, providing opportunities for local NGOs to be able to work with INGOs on development projects. Recently, the President signed resolutions, normative and legal acts, which allow INGOs to engage in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek Government has also adopted best practices from INGOs, such as the introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the efficiency of state bodies.

In Uzbekistan, there are many international NGOs which operate on the basis of such principles as mutual equality, transparency, and respect for different political cultures and traditions. International organizations working with Central Asian states contribute to the development and transformation of civil society in Uzbekistan.

German INGOs, the focus of a study conducted by the speaker, work in all Central Asian states with the exception of Turkmenistan. These INGOs include German public foundations such as Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Rosa Luxemburg, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Hans Seidel Stiftung, and government foundations like DAAD, the Goethe Institute, and GIZ. These organizations engage with a wide range of issues, but the most urgent ones in the region are green economy, green energy, and water management.

Plenary Session III: Civil Society Adaptation

Keynote III: Laboratories, experiments, and discourses of international law in the post-Soviet space

Despite some issues, international law maintains its importance as parties to political and armed conflicts still use the language of international law to promote their arguments as being objective and having authority. Using the language of international law enables the speakers to contest, exclude, securitize and criminalize each other through international courts and tribunals, international organizations, official statements, and strategies. In the post-Soviet space these contestations are especially dynamic and have strong impacts on approaches and practices of international law in and between the states of the region and beyond.

Since 1991, all successor states of the Soviet Union have faced the enormous challenge of formulating and implementing their own politics of international law as part of their comprehensive transformation processes. Strong dynamics of territorial conflicts have shaped these processes. These conflicts include the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and the ongoing armed conflict in and about East Ukraine since 2014.

The existing research demonstrates a large variety of approaches to the politics of

international law from the perspectives of international law, comparative international law, and international relations. There is also a growing body of locally produced research from the region.

It is possible to go beyond sources of law according to Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, and to complement the law with field research and semi structured in-depth interviews with lawyer and non-lawyer communicators of international law. One should note the challenges of such an approach too, such as certain volatility to political changes, which particularly affects access to lawyers in official positions. Travel restrictions to all case study countries also affected access to respondents in 2020-2022.

The implementation of such a research approach was further complicated on February 24, 2022 with the start of Russian invasion of Ukraine. Any research on the region now requires taking into account such debates and catch-words as neo-imperialism, neo-colonialism, Westsplaining, Western exceptionalism and Eastern whataboutism.

Expanding comparative perspective requires including Central Asian states, as well taking into consideration Russian, Chinese and Turkish approaches to international law in the post-Soviet region and beyond. Russia and China published a statement on sovereignty which was disregarded by other nations as shallow statement. However, in the light of the recent events in Ukraine and Taiwan, this statement has taken on a different meaning.

There are interesting perspectives and methods that include state academic law-making wherein lawyers reinforce state propaganda and narratives that pursue state goals in international law. In addition, there are court simulations and moot court competitions, which could be viewed as experiments or laboratories of approaches to international law.

Roundtable III: Civil Society Adaptation

Democratic decline in the EU and its effect on democracy promotion in Central Asia

Democratic decline in a donor region (the EU) might inform aid allocation and the promotion of democracy in third countries. As the aid declines, civil society receives less aid, and the state actors in the beneficiary countries receive more aid. An in-depth quantitative study tested these two hypotheses and discovered significant statistical support for the hypothesis that the democratic decline in the EU has led to less aid for democracy promotion in the Central Asian region. There is also limited support for the hypothesis that less aid for democracy promotion will be provided to civil society organizations relative to other recipients (the state).

Kyrgyzstan tends to demonstrate better scores in deliberate democracy and electoral democracy indices. Having explored voter turnout by election type in the Central Asian states, interesting correlations were found. Voter turnout in such autocratic countries as Turkmenistan has been steadily high. Kazakhstan demonstrated an unstable trend in voter turnout. In Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, the voter turnout rates have been declining. Kyrgyzstan's decline in voter turnout numbers could be due to the political trends associated with the so-called revolutions. The 2005, 2010 and 2020 government turnovers changed political participation patterns and protest moods.

A study on the potential correlation between protest patterns and electoral behaviour in Kyrgyzstan developed four different scenarios of political participation. The turbulent apathy scenario occurs when people cannot predict what will happen; the high electoral turnout scenario occurs when people have more trust in conventional political participation and protest potential is low; high pro-opposition turnout coincides with low government strength and high potential of protest; and, finally, hopeless apathy occurs where people have less trust in the government but also low trust in the efficacy of protest behaviour.

Political affects in Kyrgyzstan: An analysis of political emotions, mood, and motivation

Dr. Saltanat Kydyralieva, BILGESAM Centre for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, indicated that, for the 70 years of Soviet rule, the people of Kyrgyzstan were deprived of certain political behaviours, freedom of expression, and the freedom to vote and participate in political processes. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyz citizens, along with other former Soviet citizens, experienced a range of political affects which they had not experienced before. In addition, being a citizen involves a degree of political ambition, which usually manifests itself in how citizens participate in social and political life.

An affect is a temporary emotional state in psychology. Affect in political psychology is a combination of emotion, mood, and motivation (Milkoreit 2013). Cognitive affective maps include a variety of concepts: emotionally positive concepts, strongly positive concepts, neutral concepts, strongly negative concepts, emotionally negative concepts, and emotionally ambivalent concepts. Each concept reflects a participants' feelings about politics. It is important to research political affects and political affectivity. Political affect shapes attitudes, attitudes shape political behaviour, and political behaviour shapes politics.

For the purposes of the study, 32 respondents from diverse backgrounds were invited to participate. 17 interviews were conducted in Kyrgyz and Russian, and a cognitive affective map was created for each completed interview. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan the combination of two key circumstances included inexperienced political emotions and deprivation of political behaviours. Transformation in Kyrgyzstan, according to the interviews on political affect in Kyrgyzstan, is perceived to be an ongoing process.

Youth study Kyrgyzstan: Lost in transition? 2021/22: Political apathy and crisis volunteerism as a key tool for adaptation

Young people in Kyrgyzstan (aged 14-29 years old) are optimistic, the respondents of an extensive research study reported overall satisfaction with their relations with families and friends and with their lifestyle, as well as expressing positive attitudes about their future and the future of their country. However, optimism about their relations with the state and political participation ranked lower. The respondents expressed feelings of powerlessness in the face of state bureaucracy and lack of opportunities for political participation. Only 10% of respondents expressed interest in assuming a political role. Crisis volunteerism is an outlet for youth civic participation against this background. The majority respondents expressed their need to be useful for their society. In order to adapt to rapid changes in the socio-political landscape and to channel their political powerlessness, young people in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to engage in volunteering. Throughout the recent crises in Kyrgyzstan, young people participated actively in volunteerism. While the state remains an important

provider of safety, security and prosperity for the nation, political initiatives or direct political participation remains a less popular option. Civic volunteering provides an easy-to-follow involvement mechanisms but also a sense of cohesion and identity (belonging).

Digital democratic citizen activism in Central Asia: Between contestation and cooperation

The rise of online citizen activism in Central Asia in 2022 followed two large protest movements in the region. In January 2022, there were riots in Kazakhstan and in Nukus, Karakalpakstan, in Uzbekistan. There is literature gap on the roles of digital activism in non-democratic countries. In literature, digital activism is viewed through two approaches. The first argues that digital activism leads to democratization. By contrast, the second bulk of research focuses on how authoritarian regimes use digital instruments to consolidate their strength.

The Lewis framework of civil society roles in authoritarian countries, which focuses on cooperation, contestation and legitimation, can be applied to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Autocracies in Central Asia control digital space, but there still exists relative freedom online in the region. There are online citizen movements based on various causes in the three study countries. Regimes that have at least nominally adopted open government and responsiveness reforms provide more space for digital activism. Such government-led reforms include the “Listening State” in Kazakhstan and the “Year of Dialogue” initiative in Uzbekistan. In Tajikistan, which experienced a turn to hardline autocracy in 2010s, there is outright repression of digital activism by the authoritarian state. Meanwhile, in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, digital activism serves as an important cooperative function that benefits its direct participants and the broader civil society.

Plenary Session IV: Climate, Business, and Social Adaptation

Keynote IV: Climate adaptation in Central Asia

This year’s [Stockholm Conference](#) focused on three problems of global crisis: climate change, degradation of biodiversity, and pollution of the biosphere. This triple crisis is urgent as we are living through the sixth extinction period in the history of our Earth.

The conditions of emergence of these crises were analysed in the Rome Club report on “[The limits to growth](#).” The rapid degradation of the Earth’s ecosystems has followed the extensive exploitation of natural resources in the twentieth century. Climate change and CO2 emissions are often linked to each other, but CO2 is not the only contributing factor. The nitrogen cycle is another contributing factor which should also be taken into consideration.

Rising temperatures affect Central Asia; rising temperatures over a period of 45 years have affected spring temperatures in the region, with Turkmenistan being affected the most. Climate change affects the mountainous regions of Central Asia as it melts glaciers. And, according to some estimates, the region might lose up to 80% of its glaciers. This is a worrying trend as Central Asian glaciers store large deposits of fresh water which are vital for the region’s existence.

According to the Paris Agreement, if the world continues with business as usual, it will lead to a 4-5° C increase in temperature. If the current environmental agreements are effectively enforced, current trends will still result in a 2.9-3.4 ° C increase. The Paris Agreement provision would help keep temperature increase to a 1.5-1 ° C level. One of the ways the Paris Agreement attempts to balance national policies is through [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) (NDCs). Kazakhstan's NDC promises to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Kyrgyzstan's NDC sets the date at 2050. Tajikistan's NDC sets its baseline as the year 1990 and promises to cut down its emissions by 25-35%. Turkmenistan has not updated its NDC since 2016, while Uzbekistan has set the goal of cutting down its emissions by 35% by the year 2030.

There are shared features in the Central Asian states' approaches. First, there is an inclination to work towards adaptation rather than toward mitigation. Efficient and transparent monitoring and reporting are usually a challenge despite the fact that knowledge management and information management are crucial for the successful implementation of environmental initiatives, both formal and informal.

Climate change has a very close connection with biodiversity, especially with biodiversity in wild ecosystems. Biodiversity in turn affects water and climate change through biotic regulation. For this reason, there is a triad of key global agreements related to climate change: the climate change convention, biodiversity convention, and public participation convention.

Forests are also extremely important for climate regulation as they attract water from the global body of water and retain it in the air. Forests are crucial for the formation of low clouds which are able to contribute to the Earth's cooling. By contrast, high clouds tend to warm the Earth. Artificial plantations are sometimes presented as a solution for climate change, but they are different from natural forests. Tree plantation, to be efficient and contribute to climate regulation, need to imitate nature with three level of growth: grass, bushes and trees.

Central Asia is one of the hot spots for global biodiversity as it is one of epicenters of genetic diversity on Earth. At the core of the ecosystems of Kyrgyzstan are the predators who control the herbivore populations and, thus, their effect on vegetation. Lynxes are at the centre of forest ecosystems while snow leopards are at the core of the ecosystems in the mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, one should remember that climate change has strong implications for societies. Climate change contributes to conflicts over natural resources and can affect agricultural activities. Vulnerable groups of people are likely to be affected [disproportionately](#). For this and many other reasons, it is important to consolidate collective action and [act now](#).

Roundtable IV: Climate, Business, and Social Adaptation

Informality in the construction and garment sectors in Kyrgyzstan: Findings and policy recommendations

The existence of informal labour markets reduces government incomes as taxes and social payments are lost, destroys the welfare system, undermines labour rights, and violates labour protections. Construction and garment production provide excellent case studies for studies

of informal markets in Central Asia. These two sectors are great for research because it is possible to identify clear geographic clusters of construction and garment production. These are multidirectional sectors, which involve domestic investment and exports.

For this research project, 800 employees were surveyed in the cities of Bishkek and Osh, and in the surrounding areas of the Chuy and Osh regions. In the garment industry, women constituted 91% of workers. In construction, men constituted 98% workers. In terms of the ethnic breakdown of study participants, 84% were Kyrgyz, 10% were Uzbek (from southern Kyrgyzstan) and 6% were Russians (from northern Kyrgyzstan). It was discovered that most workers work informally (62%) but there are differences in informality patterns. In the garment industry, informality is higher because it is easier to open a garment factory and hide it from the authorities; 86% of employees work without an employment contract.

Garment production is a conveyor type industry with the same types of operations. As such it is easier to automate and employ low-skilled labour for the monotonous tasks. During high season, people work up to 12-16 hours per day in poor working conditions. Individual production rates affect the salaries of garment workers, so they work overtime in order to save and stretch their earnings through the low season.

Construction production processes are more diverse and require more skills and knowledge. The nature of work in construction is more dangerous and more expensive, as special work clothes and equipment are required. The safety training of participants involved in construction was above that of the garment industry (69% compared to 52%).

There are also more health problems in the garment industry. Women working in the garment industry get sick more often due to poor working conditions (it is hot, cold, dusty) – with up to 52% reporting illness. In construction, 41% of men get sick. Only 6% of sick workers received paid sick leave (10% of these in construction and 2% in textiles), 85% didn't get paid while sick, and 4% were fired due to being on sick leave.

Salaries are 20% higher in construction compared to the garment industry. Violations of labour rights are widespread and include injuries due to poor health and safety conditions, non-payment of wages, unpaid overtime work, and other problems.

Informality in the economic sector also obscures official statistics and complicates accurate understanding of economic development. Informality also creates a range of social issues too: unregistered workers cannot access healthcare, education and social protection.

As informality creates jobs, it is unlikely to disappear completely or soon. The state needs to address this issue. Conflicts between workers and employers are numerous and should be addressed through organized trade unions. Education on labour rights, taxes and social contributions, as well as transparency of Social Fund spending, is required for workers to abandon informality and start paying taxes and social contributions.

The role of labour conflicts in Kazakhstan in the transformation of employment relations

The past 30 years of economic development in Kazakhstan have been characterized by a stable annual economic growth rate of 5% thanks to the petroleum industry. Kazakhstan is a higher middle-income country with a GDP per capita of 9,056 USD (World Bank). Kazakhstan tried build an image as a regional power, but suffered from the lack of economic diversification

and positive institutional reform. High dependence on fossil fuels has led to an inability to adjust to economic downturns and socio-economic tensions.

From the 1990s, foreign direct investment (FDI) increased significantly, from 1.435 million USD in 1991 to 119,279 million USD in 2011. Local political elites promoted ethnic nationalism and associated “resource nationalism” to establish joint ventures with state-controlled or quasi private companies. In the early post-USSR period, there were positive developments in employment relations and trade unionism. After 1996, the state tightened control over employment relations.

In 2011, strikes hit all major oil companies in the Zhanaozen region and lasted for 7 months. On December 16, 2011, the authorities violently crushed the protests. Officially, 14 people were shot dead, but unofficial data indicates that this number is as high as 200 casualties. Research suggests that the key contributing factor was the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for addressing such conflicts.

In the Post-Zhanaozen period, the state attempted to improve labour relations: a new law on labour unions was introduced in 2014, and a new labour code was introduced in 2015. The main causes of social and labour conflict in Kazakhstan were poor working conditions, defective management styles, the ineffectiveness of labour unions, poor communications between the administrative managerial employees and workers in production, and a perception of workers that there was a disparity between their earnings and the management’s earnings. If one lists positive developments and adaptation, it is possible to highlight that strikes are not forcefully suppressed anymore and the demands are being slowly addressed. There are improvements in working conditions. The workers wish to be heard. and companies seem to be more open to engagement with research and willing to improve the state of affairs.

Social justice in urban development – the case of Kazakhstan

The state discourses on New Kazakhstan refer to President Tokayev’s speeches in the aftermath of the January 2022 protests. New Kazakhstan discourses include social justice as the main value and “carrier of a new social contract.” In reality, there is still injustice in decision-making, poor state and civil society communication, and a lack of transparency. Demands for justice have led to a rise of civic activism. The state response to these demands is non-systematic and populist.

The public identifies dimensions of justice, develops tools, builds the capacity of civil society to address social justice, shapes public narratives and discourses, and promotes initiatives at local levels. One such initiative is a collaboration between FES Kazakhstan and the Urban Forum Kazakhstan – Adil Qala (Just City). The Adil Qala initiative focuses on justice, inclusive dialogue, and human-centred and sustainable urban environments. The initiative chose six topics to research: governance, infrastructure, climate, gender, labour, and identity. Addressing these six topics in collaboration with key stakeholders has resulted in the production of a number of deliverables in the form of research, policy papers and events. This initiative also presented a great opportunity to launch public discussions on identity, social justice, change, and change-makers.

Economic and political transformations of Uzbekistan since independence, and new stages of reforms

Among the national republics, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic ranked third in population, with approximate 20 million people in 1989. In 1989, 44% of workers were employed in the service sector, 40% in the agricultural sector, and only approximately 16% in industry. The immediate post-Soviet period of 1991-1994 was difficult for Uzbekistan's economy due to the disruption of the Soviet economic infrastructure and increasing inflation. After the initial period of economic difficulties, there was a long period of stable GDP growth.

The Uzbek model of economy consists of five key principles. First, the economy has priority over politics. The state is the main driver behind economic reforms. The rule of law is vital, so are strong social policy approaches. A gradual transition to a market economy is the preferred mode of economic development.

The National Action Strategy is a key economic policy document. It sets the priority areas of development for the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021. The strategy was published in 2017, and is divided into five areas: state and public building, the rule of law, economic development, social sphere, and security and the implementation of a mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy. An important milestone for economic reform took place in 2017, when the foreign exchange policy liberalized the currency market and gave impetus to the development of the banking sector in Uzbekistan. In addition, there were reforms on money circulation, tax, and administrative fees.

Political transformations followed these economic reforms and began with a recognition of the existing challenges and problems in Uzbek society. A program of direct dialogue between the government of the people was developed. Uzbekistan's foreign policy saw some changes too, as Central Asia has become a top priority region for the country and Uzbekistan assumed a more active regional role.

In addition, Uzbekistan adopted two more key policy documents which aim to further the economic development of the country. One of these is the new development strategy for 2022-2026 which sets out key principles of development. Building a people's state by raising human dignity and further developing a free civil society is the first principle. The second is making the principles of justice and the rule of law the most basic and necessary conditions for development in Uzbekistan. The third is that accelerated development of the national economy and high growth rates are crucial for development. The fourth emphasises how the pursuit of a fair social policy and development of human capital contributes to a well-rounded development approach. Finally, it indicates that approaching global problems through the prism of national interests is required for a balanced foreign policy.

Annex I: Programme

4th Interdisciplinary Conference:

Adaptation and Transformation in Central Asia

September 24-25, 2022

Conference Hall, 3rd floor, OSCE Academy in Bishkek

Webinar Link: <https://zoom.us/j/93966921345>

Programme

Day 1: Saturday – September 24, 2022

12:00– **Arrival and Registration**

12:30

12:30 –

Welcome Remarks

13:00

- *Mrs. Indira Satarkulova, Deputy Director, OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*
- *Philipp Jahn, Regional Director, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*
- *Prof. Dr. Anja Mihr, DAAD Associate Professor OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

13:00 –

Plenary I

14:00

Keynote I: Trajectories of Post-Soviet Regime Change

- *Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Merkel, Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), Berlin, Germany and Senior Advisor of the Democracy Institute, East European University, Budapest, Hungary*

14:00 –

Lunch + Group photo

15:00

Roundtable I

Civil and Political Adaptation in Central Asia

15:00 –

- **Adaption and Development of Currency Exchange in Uzbekistan.**

15:45

Dilshodjon Rakhmonov, Professor of Economics, Dean on International Cooperation, Tashkent State University of Economics, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

- **Political stability of neo-patrimonial regimes: The case of Kazakhstan.**

Tlegen Kuandykov, Communications Officer, Central Asia Barometer, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

- **A critical Look at Islamic Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Central Asia.**

Dr. Arsalan Bilal, Doctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Peace Studies, The Arctic University of Norway

15:45 – 16:15	Coffee Break
16:15 – 17:15	<p>Plenary II</p> <p>Keynote II: Legal and Political Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dr. Saniia Toktogazieva, Associate Professor of Law and Coordinator of the Human Rights Program, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</i>
<p>Roundtable II Rule of Law and Internationalization in Central Asia</p>	
17:15 – 18:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Adaptation, Rule of Law and Crisis Management in Central Asia: The Case Studies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. <i>Rustam Atadjanov, LLB, LLM, Dr. iur., PhD, Assistant Professor of Public and International Law, Associate Dean, KIMEP University School of Law, Almaty, Kazakhstan</i> • Gender and Youth adaptation on Kazakhstan. <i>Aigerim Kussaiynkyzy, LLM, PhD candidate, Senior lecturer, Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Suleyman Demirel University, Almaty, Kazakhstan</i> • Participation of INGO in the processes of adaptation and transformation of the states of Central Asia. <i>Dr. Dilmurod Ernazarov, Associate Professor, Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE), Tashkent, Uzbekistan</i>
18:30 – 19:30	Dinner Buffet (Courtyard)

Day 2: Sunday – September 25, 2022

10:00 – 11:00	<p>Plenary III</p> <p>Keynote III: Laboratories and experiments of International Law in the post-Soviet Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dr. Cindy Wittke, Leader of the Political Science Research Group, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Regensburg, Germany</i>
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee Break
<p>Roundtable III Civil Society Adaptation</p>	

<p>13:00 – 14:00</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Democratic Decline and Democracy Promotion in Central Asia. <i>Shirin Tumenbaeva, PhD Candidate in Political Science, Central European University, Austria, and Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</i> ● Facing Political Affects in Post-Transitional Kyrgyzstan. An Analysis of Political Emotion, Mood, and Motivation toward Transformation Processes. <i>Dr. Saltanat Kydyralieva, Postdoctoral researcher in political psychology, BILGESAM Center for Strategic Studies, Istanbul, Turkey</i> ● Youth Study Kyrgyzstan 2020/21: Lost in Transition? <i>Daria Gavriushenko, Program Manager, Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</i> ● Digital Democratic Citizen Activism in Central Asia: between contestation and cooperation. <i>Dr. Bakhytzhon Kurmanov, Assistant Professor, International School of Economics, M. Narikbayev KazGUU University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan</i>
<p>13:00 – 14:15</p>	<p>Lunch</p>
<p>14:14 – 15:00</p>	<p>Plenary IV Keynote IV: Climate Adaptation in Central Asia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anna Kirilenko, Ecological Movement “BIOM”, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
<p>Roundtables IV Climate, Business, and Social Adaption</p>	
<p>15:00 – 16:00</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informality in the construction and garment sectors in Kyrgyzstan: findings and policy recommendations. <i>Dr. Kanat Tilekeyev, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</i> ● The role of labor conflicts in Kazakhstan in the transformation of employment relations. <i>Emiliya Mubarak, Senior analyst in the research team of the Caspian Today Information Agency, Aktau, Kazakhstan</i> ● Social Justice in Urban Development- the case of Kazakhstan. <i>Mereilim Kalen, Program Officer, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Almaty, Kazakhstan</i> ● Economic and political transformations of Uzbekistan since independence and new stages of reforms. <i>Bobirjon Izzatullaev, International Cooperation Specialist, Research Institute of Legal Policy under the Ministry of Justice, Tashkent, Uzbekistan</i>

16:00 – 17:00	Coffee Break
Conclusion – End of Conference	

