Dear friends,

We are happy to present to you the third issue of KIMEP CASC Newsletter!

Here you can find information about the events that we had in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. The topics of our public lectures ranged from the IMF economic outlook for the region of Central Asia to Kazakhstan’s invisible public debt, from prospects of EU-Kazakhstan cooperation to migration trends in Central Asia (page 3).

We also held book presentations, workshops, and conferences. In fall 2016 in cooperation with our partner Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in Kazakhstan for the second year in a row we held an international conference “Big Eurasia: Dynamics of political and social processes” (page 4). It gathered prominent scholars from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. Like last year, this conference attracted a lot of attention and positive feedback from the community.

In spring 2017 together with FES and Oxford Brookes University, we co-organized an international workshop on theorizing Central Asia (page 5). This newsletter features two interviews in which we discuss with Dr. Alessandro Frigerio and Dinara Pisareva the state of theorizing Central Asia and ways to move forward (pages 6–7).

In our Gallery you can find a photo story of the revival of the Aral Sea by Dr. Kristopher White (pages 8–9).

We present Our picks, a selection of the most interesting recent publications in the field of Central Asian studies (pages 10–11). Finally, in our Recent publications section you can see what research the faculty of KIMEP College of Social Sciences have been engaged in (last page).

We hope you will find this issue informative.

Nargis Kassenova, CASC Director, nargis@kimep.kz

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**Theorizing Central Asia**

International workshop (page 5) and interviews discussing the state of the field (pages 6–7)

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**7 videos from public lectures and the Big Eurasia conference**

- Lectures on post-colonial Russia, violent extremism, and Kazakhstan’s public debt, page 3
- Big Eurasia: Dynamics of political and social processes, page 4

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**Aral Sea region’s coming to life inspires optimism**

Photo story and report from the first Aral International Forum for Sustainable Development, pages 8–9

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**10 recent papers**

by KIMEP College of Social Sciences faculty, last page

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**Civil war in Tajikistan, Central Asian youth, branding Kazakhstan**

Selected publication summaries on pages 10–11
Presentations

November 25, 2016 · CASC–KIMEP School of Law–Human Rights Watch (HRW) event commemorating the UN Human Rights Day

We are not the enemy: Violations of workers’ rights in Kazakhstan

Presentation of the HRW report by Hugh Williamson, Director, Europe and Central Asia Division, Human Rights Watch; Mihra Rittmann, Central Asia researcher, Human Rights Watch

February 20, 2017 · Book presentation

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan: Life and politics during the Soviet era

Edited by Timur Dadabaev and Hisao Komatsu

This volume offers perspectives from the general public in post-Soviet Central Asia and reconsiders the meaning and the legacy of Soviet administration in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. This study emphasizes that the way in which people in Central Asia reconcile their Soviet past to a great extent refers to the three-fold process of recollecting their everyday experiences, reflecting on their past from the perspective of their post-Soviet present, and re-imagining. These three elements influence memories and lead to selectivity in memory construction. This process also emphasizes the aspects of the Soviet era people choose to recall in positive and negative lights. Ultimately, this book demonstrates how Soviet life has influenced the identity and understanding of self among the population in post-Soviet Central Asian states.

Presenters: Timur Dadabaev, Associate Professor of International Relations and Director of the combined MA and Ph.D. Program in Central Eurasian Studies, University of Tsukuba (Japan); Hisao Komatsu, Professor at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan); Guljanat Kurmangaliyeva Erceilasun, Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Turkic Studies at Gazi University (Turkey).
Public lectures

September 5, 2016 · CASC–FES public lecture

**Post-colonial Russia: In search of a Native**
Dr. Viacheslav Morozov, Tartu University (Estonia)
*VIDEO:* youtu.be/t6Th_XWR4QM

September 29, 2016 · CASC–FES–SFK public lecture

**Violent extremism in Kazakhstan: The role of criminal network**

Serik Beissembayev, Gumilev Eurasian National University (Kazakhstan)
*VIDEO:* youtu.be/wAappF7jU4A

October 17, 2016 · Public lecture

**Prospects for the enhanced partnership between the European Union and Kazakhstan**

H. E. Traian Laurentiu Hristea, Ambassador, Head of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan

October 21, 2016 · CASC–IMF public lecture

**Regional economic outlook: Central Asia and the Caucasus**

Dr. Juha Kahkonen, Deputy Director of Middle East and Central Asia Department, International Monetary Fund (IMF)

November 4, 2016 · CASC–FES public lecture (in Russian)

**Uzbekistan: waiting for change**

Dr. Rustam Burnashev, German–Kazakh University (Kazakhstan)

February 6, 2017

**Kazakhstan: External shocks and policy actions**

Mark Horton, IMF Mission Chief for Kazakhstan

March 28, 2017

**The United Nations in a changing geopolitical landscape: A Norwegian perspective**

H. E. Paul Gulleik Larsen, Special Envoy Security Council Affairs, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

April 7, 2017

**Kazakhstan’s invisible public debt**

Kassymkhan Kapparov, Director of the National Bureau for Economic Research (Almaty)

*VIDEO:* fb.com/1415268185160273

*PAPER:* centralasiaprogram.org/archives/9758

April 28, 2017

**Migration trends in Central Asia**

Tatiana Hadjiemmanuel, Head of the Almaty Office and Deputy Sub-Regional Coordinator for Central Asia of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

May 12, 2017

**Ethnic return migration in Kazakhstan: Shifting state dynamics, changing media discourses**

Berikbol Dukeyev

*PAPER:* centralasiaprogram.org/archives/10616

June 5, 2017

**Foreign influences on Central Asian Islam**

Dr. Bayram Balci, CERI, Sciences Po (France)
Conferences and roundtables

October 29–30, 2016 · CASC–FES international conference

**Big Eurasia: Dynamics of political and social processes (in Russian)**

**SESSION 1. SECURITY ARCHITECTURE OF BIG EURASIA: NEW RULES OF THE GAME**

Vladimir Ryzhkov, Higher School of Economics (Russia); Dr. Yulia Nikitina, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (Russia); Dr. Alexander Iskandaryan, Institute of the Caucasus (Armenia)

**VIDEO:** [youtu.be/2PL84aK4QS4](https://youtu.be/2PL84aK4QS4)

Zardushht Alizade, independent political analyst (Azerbaijan); Prof. Viktor Nadeyin-Rayevskiy, Institute of Political and Social Studies of the Black Sea–Caspian Region (Russia); Daniyar Kosnazarov, Center for Studies of China and Central Asia “Synopsis” (Kazakhstan)

**VIDEO:** [youtu.be/kW1uWJt56ws](https://youtu.be/kW1uWJt56ws)

**SESSION 2. STATE, SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE**

Kadyr Malikov, analytical center “Religion, Law and Politics” (Kyrgyzstan); Prof. Roman Podoprigora, Caspian University (Kazakhstan)

**VIDEO:** [youtu.be/aEPmIRG27d8](https://youtu.be/aEPmIRG27d8)

Prof. Nikolai Petrov, Higher School of Economics (Russia); Sergei Chapnin, Innsbruck University (Germany); Xeniya Sergazina, Russian State Humanities University (Russia)

**VIDEO:** [youtu.be/LaWxcU7Rpes](https://youtu.be/LaWxcU7Rpes)

November 18, 2016 · CASC–FES roundtable

**Afghanistan’s energy security: Tracing Central Asian countries’ contribution**

Dr. Farkhod Aminjonov, Central Asian Institute for Strategic Studies (CAISS), Kazakhstan. Discussants: Anna Gussarova, CAISS, and Daniyar Kosnazarov, Narxoz University (Kazakhstan)

April 14, 2017 · Roundtable

**Looking at the rise of populism in Europe: Perspectives from the periphery**

Part of the KIMEP College of Social Sciences and Language Center joint conference “Governance and communication: Between modernity and post-modernity”

**PANELISTS**

Heiko Pääbo, University of Tartu

Security vs. values: dilemma for Estonian right-wing populists

Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir, University of Iceland

Waves of populism on Iceland’s shores: Influences from East and West

Jón Gunnar Ólafsson, University of Iceland

Polarizing discursive themes in the mainstream media: Brexit and attitudes towards the EU in Iceland

Theorizing Central Asia workshop. Photo by Artyom Korchagin
May 18–19, 2017 · CASC–FES–Oxford Brookes University workshop

**Theorizing Central Asia**
The project developed by Dr. Rico Isaacs and Dr. Alessandro Frigerio.

**SESSION 1. THEORIZING IDEOLOGY AND LEGITIMATION IN CENTRAL ASIA**

**Dr. Diana T. Kudaibergenova**
Compartmentalized ideology: Presidential addresses and legitimation in Kazakhstan

**Dr. Galym Zhussypbek**
The perspectives of achieving coexistence between the development of liberalism and religious revival in Muslim Central Asia

**Sofya Omarova** and **Dr. Rico Isaacs**
Legitimizing power: Authoritarian legitimacy and modernization in Kazakhstan

**SESSION 2. FROM SOCIAL PRACTICES TO NEW THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

**Dr. Viktoria Akchurina**
The state as social practice: Re-conceptualizing the state in Central Asia

**Dr. Liga Rudzite**
Theorizing managerialism in development: Changing donor landscapes and persistence of outcomes in Kyrgyzstan

**Dr. Alessandro Frigerio**
Driving in Almaty: Exploring ordinary life as a foundation of political order

**SESSION 3. STRATEGIES OF POWER AND POLITICAL ORDER IN CENTRAL ASIA**

**Dr. Emil Dzhuraev**
Political rationality in Central Asia: Which Machiavelli? What rationality?

**Dr. Mikhail Akulov**
Eternal Futurostan

**Dr. Assel Rustemova Tutumlu**
Governmentalization of Kazakhstani state: Governmentality and political economy of predation
Dinara Pisareva:

“As political life evolves, so would the regional studies”

Dinara Pisareva is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Australian National University; she graduated from KIMEP in 2014 with Bachelor of International Relations with Honors and in 2016 she gained Master of Social Sciences from University of Helsinki.

As somebody who grew up in Kazakhstan and went to study abroad, what would you think are key biases and misperceptions about the region of Central Asia?

I think the main misperception about Central Asia among non-regional experts is that it is a highly homogeneous region where all five member-states closely resemble each other in cultural and political sense. This is a type of bias that I hear from time to time not only from Western but also from Russian scholars. There is also a lot of skepticism in terms of democratization potential of the region and some of the experts tend to say things like Central Asia does not have any demands and/or conditions for democratization. Of course, such statements come from people who are not at all familiar with Kyrgyzstan’s case.

What is missing in Central Asian studies?

It would seem that Central Asian studies are not as much attractive to young scholars in the beginning of their careers as some other regional studies whether it is due to the static nature of political processes in the region or closed nature of majority of Central Asian states that does not make field research any easier.

How can the field move forward?

I think the decline and rise of the interest in the region is a natural process. As political life evolves, so would the regional studies that will always find new puzzles and phenomena for studies. For example, we can see now that since 2016 Uzbekistan has entered a new post-Karimov period of transition that might result in changes in domestic and foreign policy that would certainly have regional implications.
Alessandro Frigerio

The promise and challenge of theorizing Central Asia

Dr. Alessandro Frigerio is a CASC Advisory Board member. He has a Ph.D. in Political Studies from the University of Milan, Italy. He served as Chair of the Department of International Relations and Regional Studies and Dean of the College of Social Sciences at KIMEP University.

Why did you embark on the project of theorizing Central Asia?

I specialized in political theory and when I came to Kazakhstan I had the impression that this subject had not been fully developed here. Then, during a conference, I had the chance of discussing this issue with Rico—who is a prominent scholar on Central Asia—and together we came up with the idea of the book.

What is the idea of theorizing Central Asia?

We would like to go beyond the idea that Central Asia is only a recipient that can be framed and understood by theories generated elsewhere and instead try to experiment on how the region can contribute to change and advance those theories, or even generating new ones. It is clearly an ambitious project and this is just a spark that hopefully will start further reflections.

What is missing in Central Asian studies? What are difficulties in theorizing Central Asia?

Novel theoretical approaches, fresh frameworks. Central Asia has been inserted in categories—post-Soviet, Islamic and so on—that have been and are still useful, but have put an interpretative cage on the study of the region. The movement towards new interpretations has in some sketchy ways already started, for example with the idea of challenging the extension of the region and its actors. We would like to give a further, more systematic and direct push.

What were your findings along the way?

Even though we already had the roundtable at CASC, it is too early to speak about ‘findings’ because the contributors are still finalizing the chapters. Certainly there is an interesting movement that starting from new interpretations on how things are and are justified tends toward normative stances on how things could or even should be.

Anyway, a non-finding for those who know the region is that there is a new generation of excellent scholars on Central Asia. Unfortunately, while there are some relatively good institutional exceptions like KIMEP and maybe a couple others and some brilliant scholars, at the moment universities in the region are not at the level where they should be. Low salaries, bureaucratic burdens, an excessive teaching load, limited or non-existent resources for research, unethical practices, and in the worse cases severe limits to academic freedom are preventing the possibility of creating cadres of research with a real impact on societies and knowledge transfer to the new generations of Central Asian students.
GALLERY

1 Kokaral dam from the Northern Aral Sea, 2017

2 Fishermen near Akbasty, Kazakhstan, 2011
The first ever Aral International Forum for Sustainable Development took place on May 30–31, 2017 in Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan. The forum, designed to highlight the current environmental and socioeconomic situation within the Aral Sea region, attracted governmental officials from Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states, ambassadors, representatives of the World Bank and European Commission, as well as scientists and experts on the Aral Sea. KIMEP University’s Kristopher D. White, a geographer and CASC aficionado, was invited to participate in this forum. One of the highlights of this event was a trip by helicopter from Kyzylorda to the Aral Sea, which offered aerial views of the Kokaral dam. This dam and dyke complex, completed in 2004, stretches nearly 13 kilometers and is largely credited with ‘saving’ the Northern Aral Sea. This most recent human intervention with the Aral has stabilized this lake’s retreat and resulted in a nearly 20% increase in area and volume. The dam’s likeness is featured prominently across the city of Aralsk, Kazakhstan including a billboard featuring President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Since the dam’s completion, regional ecological conditions have improved dramatically, with decreased salinity levels and spawning habitat restoration offering the opportunity for a return of many fish species having vacated the Northern Aral Sea since the late 1980s. The return of long-absent fish species has also led to a return of the fishing industry, the harvest, processing, and export of fish. Since the dam’s completion, total fish harvests on the Northern Aral Sea have increased nearly tenfold. In terms of the regional economy and regional socioeconomic development, increases have been seen in employment and income earned in the harvesting and processing sectors. Fish exports have also injected extra-regional revenue, offering additional regional economic stimulus, cementing fishing as the region’s economic base. All of this is welcomed news for residents long besieged by the Aral Sea crisis. A resultant and tangible sense of pride and optimism can be seen across Kazakhstan’s Northern Aral Sea today. Despite much of the larger Aral Sea still mired in ecological and economic crisis, recent events here in Kazakhstan have provided a hopeful lesson possibly applicable to other regional and/or global environmental problems. Referring to these developments in Kazakhstan, Russian hydrobiologist Dr. Nikolai Aladin, among the world’s foremost Aral Sea experts, stated “that which is destroyed by the hand of man can be saved and revived by the hand of man.” For the sake of the Earth’s social and environmental sustainability, it is hoped that this statement bears, at the very least, a semblance of truth.
The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan
Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space

In May 1992 tensions in the former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan boiled over to a devastating civil war, in which approximately 50,000–100,000 died and more than one million were displaced. The chaos of the disintegrating Soviet Union led to the rifts among the national elites, ideological-religious disputes, and state failure, resulting in the most violent armed conflict in the post-Soviet space. The book explains the causes of the Tajik civil war recognizing long-term structural causes of the conflict dating back to the Soviet transformation of Central Asia in the 1920s, as well as more recent factors related to Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost and the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and the war in Afghanistan. In its comprehensive approach, the book addresses many contested events, their sequences, and how individual actors shaped the dynamics of events or responded to them. The author investigates the role of regionalism, elite bases, political Islam, culture of violent non-state actors in the momentous years between the late 1980s and the country’s independence. Applying a rigorous historical method, “Tim Epkenhans weaves together a multitude of strands—historical, structural, political, personal, and contingent—to make sense of a little known yet fascinating conflict...” “Paired with complementary sources such as the media coverage and interviews, these autobiographies provide insights how Tajik politicians, field commanders and intellectuals perceived and rationalized the outbreak of the Civil War within the complex context of post-Soviet decolonization, Islamic revival and nationalist renaissance.” (Stathis N. Kalyvas) Part of the series Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures, the book contains some memoir-narratives of the major protagonists and archival and press sources on the conflict and provides a detailed account of the origins of the first stages of the conflict in the theoretical and sociocultural contexts. (Most of the sources have not previously been critically and systematically investigated.) The book of a very solid historical scholarship can be considered an essential resource for those interested in Central Asia, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Tajikistan, the rise of Islamism, and the complex dynamics of civil conflict—particularly conflict escalation.

Youth in Central Asia series
Friedrich Ebert Foundation

In 2016 our partner Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) presented a series of publications on Central Asian youth. They were prepared on the basis of the results of sociological studies carried out by FES partners in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, who used the methodology of well-known Shell Youth Study first launched in 1953. The surveys focus on the interests, dreams, and plans of Central Asian youth, their values, attitudes and beliefs, and also problems and challenges that they are facing.

Download
Youth in Central Asia: Kazakhstan
library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kasachstan/13343.pdf
Russian-language reports on youth of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan can be found at www.fes-centralasia.org/ru/ffeh/ffeh-v-centralnoj-azii/youth-centralasia.html
The notion and practice of nation-branding have become a permanent feature of the state promotion in Kazakhstan. In recent years, Kazakhstan has deployed various strategies to cultivate a positive international image, including wide media exposure, “spectacular urbanization,” and aggressive pursuit of image-building projects (имидж-дик zhobalar in Kazakh). In 2007, the government established a special Department of International Information under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the responsibility to build and maintain Kazakhstan’s international image. The heavy investments in image-building projects, lavish spending on social media and advertising campaigns, and intense cooperation with select branding consultancy companies were put at work. The author believes that several reasons spurred such efforts: enhancement of national competitiveness in today’s “world of images,” legitimizing the rule of those in power; enhancement of national pride, and generating social cohesion. This should be viewed in the context of the country’s multi-vector foreign policy and the fact that a majority of the citizens approve of such policies and would support Kazakhstan’s projecting a positive image in the international arena and presenting its achievement in gaining recognition and status through various initiatives at the international stage. However, the author argues, such rationalist approaches to image-building analysis perhaps offer insufficient explanations. In addition, emphasis should also be on the importance of non-material factors such as culture and identity, particularly as they are part of the government’s nation-building process at the domestic level and unique model of interethnic and interconfessional concord. The author concludes that although the Kazakhstani ruling elite continue to link its nation-branding to the current project of constructing an authoritarian civic national identity, mostly based on the country’s post-Soviet achievements, this simplifies or disregards alternative discourses about national imagery. In her view, “in light of the increasing salience and growing popularity of alternative discourses and the fragile passive consensus on civic national identity that were achieved in the 1990s and the 2000s, the dominant position of the official discourse may be challenged in coming years.”

As the author notes, Kazakhstan’s “highly centralized political system is strongly personified and has effectively created stability for the elite.” When looking at the political system of Kazakhstan, he can see several particular features and trends: 1. Corporatist logic (the state interacts only with those structures that are monopolists within their own area; at the same time, the state itself is instrumental in creating these monopolies). 2. Stability based on the intra-elite balance (in today’s Kazakhstan, the key actors are not political parties, institutions, nor civil society organizations, but rather economic actors). 3. Oligarchical pluralism (elite groups are profiling themselves based on names of their leaders, and their positioning inside the regime). 4. Weak opposition (the political system in Kazakhstan lacks consolidated opposition). 5. Supercentralized but inefficient system (everything focuses the country’s Leader; however, “the executive vertical is deconstructed and largely inefficient”). As a result of the last tendency, high-ranking officials often develop relatively sound economic programs, but the lower bureaucratic machine is unable to implement them. As for an outlook for the foreseeable future, it is vital to understand that neither the domestic elites nor society at large are monolithic in Kazakhstan. Within the elites, three groups can generally be distinguished: advocates of the status quo, “reformers,” and “radicals”; the latter group, so far on the margin of the spectrum, would like to completely change the rules of the game and activate grassroots movements in support of their claims for change. They can be challenged by two future tendencies within the society — “national-patriotism” and “religious patriotism.” “These two... could go in parallel, but at some point they could collide. Both may seem far away from established power, but both are in fact growing among younger representative of the elite,” concludes Satpayev.
Recent publications
with Central Asia regional focus by KIMEP College of Social Sciences faculty


