

of funding and political opposition from Uzbekistan, which claims it would rob them of water. The Russian aluminium oligarch Oleg Deripaska sought to buy the site in 2008, but his negotiations with the Tajiks broke down, and now the project moves ahead at a slow pace with only Tajik funding. The site is nonetheless impressive with several thousand employees and a hundred or so heavy trucks and pieces of earth-moving equipment working away. The valley sides are very steep and the reservoir that would be created will not displace much arable land or many people. Still, it is supposed that it will take another 15 years to complete at this pace, unless there is an international agreement permitting the necessary funding to flow faster. The Tajik government says it would welcome an international consortium of investors to do this, which would be a good idea if, for example, the World Bank and the EBRD could be involved to assure correct financial management.

We had a spot of trouble at Rogun when our car broke down. After a couple of hours of unconvincing efforts to fix the motor with pieces of wire and a hammer, we gave up and instead found an enterprising young man with an elderly Mercedes, which was happily running with over 300,000 kilometres on the clock. Another curiosity of motoring in rural Tajikistan is that the petrol stations have no pumps. At first this was rather disconcerting, but we soon observed the system in action: a plastic dustbin held a reserve of petrol, a plastic bucket was lowered into the dustbin, and a plastic funnel was found to help pour the petrol into the car, and so we went off re-fuelled, without smoking ...

At the Nurek dam, we had the problem of not having had the time to obtain a permit to visit it from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, we discovered that our enterprising driver had a cousin who worked at the dam, and he was found to join the party and help us through the checkpoints. For those concerned about the level of water in the reservoir we can report that it was completely full after recent heavy rains. Downstream from Nurek lies the Sangtuda II, which had recently been completed as an investment of the Russian RAO EES energy conglomerate.

And so on to Kyrgyzstan (via Samarkand, Tashkent, Ashkabad, Istanbul, Astana and Almaty). There the target was the giant Toktogul reservoir and the Kambarata dam projects. This was a magnificent drive, first about 100 km along a flat plain from Bishkek, bordering impressive mountains to the south. Then comes the moment to attack the mountains, and rise up to a 3500 metre pass, already covered in snow, and then down the other side into highland grassy steppe territory. This is the time of year for major seasonal movements of herds of sheep, goats, cattle and horses to move down to lower lands for the winter, driven by Kyrgyz cowboys on horseback. This is real nomadic, Mongolia-style territory. We stopped to talk to a family outside their 'yurt' (traditional nomadic tent). Slightly undermining the romantic image of the nomad, the owner stressed that this was his secondary residence, his real house was down in the valley. The steppe grasslands at this point were a corridor of flat land enclosed on all sides by snow-capped mountains rising up to 4,000 metres. Somewhere we had to find a way through.

Eventually we did find another high mountain pass, and then from the top saw the Toktogul lake down below, held up by the dam at Kara Kol. This time the reservoir was far from full, maybe about 30 metres below the high water mark. However this was apparently a substantial recovery from the nearly disastrously low levels reached in 2008. At the upstream end of Toktogul lies the site of the Karambata II dam project. This is well underway, and we heard that in November or December the engineers will dynamite

the mountain sides so as to create a huge fill of rock and earth to constitute the bulk of the dam.

This is the project that received the pledge of over a billion \$ from Moscow in mid-2009, followed a few days later by the Kyrgyz government's decision to order the US forces out of their Manas airport base near Bishkek, which is currently used for supplying the troops in Afghanistan. But then after a while there were negotiations and the US agreed to pay a much higher rent for the base, and stay. All things considered not a bad deal for the Kyrgyz budget.

There is also a Kambarata I project, further upstream from Kambarata II, but (confusingly), no. 1 is only a paper plan, whereas no. 2 is well underway. The same cascade logic is being developed here for the Narin river basin, however, which runs into the Syr Darya River, and which with the Amu Darya to the south together they have been the main supplies of water to the Aral Sea.

Unfortunately we had no time to visit the Aral Sea, except to observe it from 10,000 feet up on a flight from Ashkabad to Istanbul. The view there is that there has been some progress in filling up the Kazakh part of the sea again, but not the Uzbek part. There is a slightly encouraging story now coming out of the International Fund for the Aral Sea (IFAS), which is the international organisation of the five states mandated to work on all aspects of the regional water dossier, from the mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan all the way down to the Aral Sea. The IFAS has so far been a notoriously dysfunctional body, with a nomadic existence – having to move its secretariat from one capital city to the next each three years. This January it moved to Almaty, and has a newly appointed director general, who is a highly respected man of water science and engineering. If the water problems of this region are to see any major progress, the IFAS will have to be at the heart of mediating the politico-technical agreements. We were comforted in not going to the Aral Sea upon hearing the local joke that if every researcher, consultant and international observer visiting the Aral Sea over the last twenty years had each brought with them a bucket of water the would problem would be resolved.

Stories from the region ...

Regionalism and a long quest for regional identity in Central Asia

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The question of ordering and 'governing the globe' in a way to meet the challenges faced by humankind is central to contemporary discussions of international relations. A vision of world order based on regions has a prominent place in this debate. Stemming from the debate on regional integration initiatives in Europe and other parts of the world since the 1950s, this vision is seen as an alternative to world order based on power polarity, and as a political vision carrying responses to globalisation challenges. For studying the "emerging regional architecture of world politics", scholars call for a comprehensive approach that should include normative and constructivist factors alongside considerations of economic or geopolitical motivations.

Central Asia is not an unexplored space for regional studies. Since the early 1990s, when its leaders announced their intention to create a Central Asian regional integration institution, outside the frameworks including Russia or China, there have been numerous studies on Central Asian regionalism. However, after a decade of political and academic discussions, the much expected Central Asian regional integration institution failed to

take-off and subsequently disappeared. This led some observers of Central Asian regionalism to conclude that there was Central Asian “regional non-cooperation pathology”. Combined with its description as “a region of almost triumphant authoritarianism”, Central Asia thus seems to be a regional space with a slim chance of becoming an integral regional cluster of global governance.

Following this conclusion, subsequent studies increasingly focused on external actors’ involvement in Central Asia’s regional space. These analyses usually turn around identifying the interests of external actors, and notably how Russia, China and the US shape their interests in their bilateral and regional policies in Central Asia. An important part of this literature is devoted to seeing how the interests of these external actors relate to each other, and what impact these relationships between the interests of external actors would have on the evolution of Central Asian region. As the dominant analytical framework is a geopolitical one based, explicitly or implicitly, on zero-sum game logic, most of the short- and middle-term scenarios present the region as an international space harbouring mostly conflict and competition potential.

Two factors usually receive less attention in these analyses. The first one stems from the increasing focus on ‘national interests’, which are deemed to be exclusive and incompatible. This leads to the eschewing of questions of normative or values-based considerations from the literature. In this interests-driven world, the inclusion of ‘rule of law’ and ‘human rights’ issues in the EU’s Central Asia strategy is met with skepticism in the region, and is seen by most as secondary and more of a decorative nature compared to European energy interests in the region. The second aspect is the lack of due attention to possible endogenous developments on Central Asian regionalism. As already noted, Central Asia is expected to be shaped mostly by outside forces. Local governments’ interests in and discourse about regionalism is mostly explained in terms of regime survival objectives. However, the world’s experience of regionalism shows that regions are constructed more from within than from without. Moreover, substantial processes of region-building take place in society in the form of normative debate and discussions concerning the values and identities that should be upheld and consolidated by regionalism initiatives.

Hence, there is a need for those involved in the regionalism debate in Central Asia to enlarge the focus beyond that of the official institutions and external actors, and pay more attention to ongoing debates in the region concerning regional identities and values. These debates should not be limited either to official institutions and regimes or to the post-Soviet period alone. Rather, they are part of a centuries-old quest for regional identity pursued by scholars and intellectuals of the region, marked by such milestones as the emergence of the Jadid movement.¹ Among recent debates it is worth mentioning the one between Central Asianists vs Eurasianists, or the debate on Tajikistan and regional integration in Central Asia. All these debates go beyond geopolitical factors and official circles, and focus on the nature of Central Asia as a region,

¹ The Jadids, which means «new» in Arabic, were Muslim reformers originally from within the Russian Empire in the late 19th century (1880s). Although their beliefs were manifold, one of their principle aims was the introduction of the “new method” of teaching in the *maktabs* (schools) of the Empire. The movement later spread to Central Asia, in particular to the cities of Bukhara and Kokand.

The presence of a book by a Jadid author in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation’s website on Central Asia (<http://www.fes.uz/>) alongside the books of contemporary authors on Central Asian is representative of the links between the current regionalism debate and the earlier debate on Central Asian evolution dating back centuries.

the question of whether or not individual countries belong to the region, and the normative values and considerations that should prevail in the region.

Thus the debate about regionalism in Central Asia is not and should not be limited to agency of external actors or the perspectives of current regimes alone. The question of regionalism encompasses wider considerations, including the perspectives of the region’s intellectuals and scholars. It is situated within the age-old quest for regional identity in Central Asia. Better coverage and understanding of this quest for identity could help introduce normative and ideational questions to the regionalism debate in Central Asia. This could lead in turn to a softening of the predominantly geopolitical approach based on the discourse of conflict of interests and balance of powers in the region.

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Studying Europe in Central Asia: the case of Kyrgyzstan

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As the European Union sets out an ambitious agenda in its Central Asian strategy, its support for education may be used to raise awareness of Europe and help states create national cadres capable of sustaining the desired dialogue. Moreover, for the European donor community, promotion of European studies in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan in particular can be seen as a politically neutral endeavor, which can be justified independently of the trade-offs between security and human rights.

On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is not very hungry for knowledge about Europe, and does not identify with European images, ideas or institutions. Obstacles are considerable, given institutional inertia, the lack of cultural and ideological affinities and the poor state of higher education in the region.

A number of universities in Kyrgyzstan have already introduced European studies into their curricula. These initiatives take the form of either a European studies department or courses focusing on the European Union, together with more traditional ones on European culture and languages. While it is far too early to take stock, some preliminary impressions can already be discussed. For us it is not so important here to argue either for or against donor support for European studies in Kyrgyzstan, but to look at this initiative as a, first of all, *educational* project which requires specific organisational format.

Kyrgyzstan and European studies: general considerations