Conferences and Lecture Series

The Eleventh Annual Central Eurasian Studies (CEUS) Conference

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, April 3, 2004

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For over half a century Indiana University (IU) at Bloomington has been the training ground for professors, independent scholars, and government and non-government employees in the field of Central Eurasian studies. Indebted to the life work of distinguished Professor Emeritus Denis Sinor, who most recent recently donated his estate to the IU Foundation (see IAUNRC newsletter Winter 2003: http://www.iub.edu/~iaunrc), the Department of Central Eurasian Studies (CEUS) has been home to a scholarly community dedicated to the continued expansion and growth of the field. Considering the history of the department, it is not surprising that Indiana University graduate students have played a pioneering role in the field. In 1994, two doctoral students, John Elverskog and Aleksandr Naymark, inaugurated what has become an annual event under the auspices of the department — the Central Eurasian Studies Conference. The conference quickly developed under the direction of its founders. In 1997 the Association of Central Eurasian Students (ACES) at Indiana University assumed responsibility for its organization and execution. On April 3, 2004, the CEUS conference took place for the 11th consecutive year.

Since its creation, the overall aim of the conference has been to establish a forum for presenting new research and for graduate students to gain experience in presenting papers before a scholarly audience in the field of Central Eurasian studies. For the purpose of the conference, Central Eurasia is defined as the vast area including or corresponding to present-day Mongolia, Western China (Xinjiang, Tibet), Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as well as northern Afghanistan and historical Khorasan), Azerbaijan, Turkey, Hungary, Estonia, Finland, and other regions that include Finno-Ugric peoples.

As in previous years, the ACES conference committee created both regionally focused panels and also pan-regional panels tied together by a common theme or academic discipline. In the day-long conference in 2004, there were 13 panels, with regional panels on Estonia, Hungary, Mongolia, and Tibet and pan-regional panels on Archaeology of Central Asia, Education, Politics in Central Asia, Music and Culture in Azerbaijan and Turkey, Water Resources, Nationalism and Identity, History of Central Asia, Socio-Economic Issues, and Early Central Eurasian History.

The Education panel chaired by Heidi Ross addressed issues of modernity across a wide-ranging area from Turkey to Kazakhstan with an emphasis on challenges associated with the transition from the Soviet-era education system. Based on ethnographic data, Kevin Meskill examined state education policy in Turkey in light of competing power structures in the production of culture. Rahimjon U. Abdugafurov focused on the decentralization of financial management at Uzbek higher educational institutions based on the model of responsibility centered budgeting (RCB) which has been adopted at Indiana University. Through an overview of public policy reforms since 1991, Almaz Tolymbek analyzed the main challenges and concerns in higher educational policy in Kazakhstan. Chris Whitsel presented a look at current enrollment patterns and regional differences in schools in Tajikistan.

In the Archaeology panel, Jeffrey Lerner re-examined archaeological and historical data to revise the chronological assessment of the Ai Khanum site in Afghanistan, placing its date at the end of the

third century BCE to the beginning of the second century BCE. Applying a multidisciplinary approach, Bernardo Rondelli and Simone Mantelli of the Italo-Uzbek Archaeology Program presented an archeological map of the Zeravshan River Valley in order to reconstruct and give a diachronic study of the ancient populations of this part of the Silk Road. Barbara Carasetti and Maurizio Tosi used data from the GIS system to demonstrate the complex processes of settlement fluctuation in order to reconstruct the paleo-channel network of the Murghab Delta near Merv, Turkmenistan.

The Tibet panel was kicked off by Federica Venturi with a re-examination of the Old Tibetan document Pelliot Tibétain 1283, a travel itinerary of five Uyghur envoys. Elliot Sperling offered a re-evaluation of Khams history by presenting his latest research on the kings of Nang-chen using Tibetan and Chinese source material. Gedun Rabsal presented new findings concerning the content of the six missing books by Thonmi Sambhota. Nicole Willock combined narrative theory with her translation work on the 20th century scholar Tshetan Zhabsdrung to explore new theories on Tibetan autobiographies. Stacey VanVleet presented her fieldwork on Tibetans and Tibetan communities in Boulder, Colorado, tracing the interactions between convert and ethnic communities practicing Tibetan Buddhism.

Following a tradition started in 2001, the students of the Department of Central Eurasian Studies invited a distinguished scholar in the field as guest speaker for the plenary session. In 2004, we were honored to host Leonard van der Kuijp, Professor of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies and Chair of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University. He captivated the audience with his presentation on the history of the Kālacakrā textual transmission in Tibet, an introduction to his paper entitled "The Kālacakrā and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism by the Mongol Imperial Family." The paper was published in the Central Eurasian Studies Lectures Series. Previous publications featured in this series include the full lectures by Peter B. Golden (2001), Thomas T. Allsen (2002) and Robert D. McChesney (2003). They are available for purchase by contacting the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies. (http://www.iub.edu/~rifias).

Due to a limited number of reporters and the fact that many panels took place simultaneously, it is impossible to give a detailed analysis of the research presented at the ten other panels. But other highlights of the conference include debates on the drying up of the Aral Sea after presentations by Luke Potoski and Kuatbay Bektemirov on efficient water management, and analysis of new historical data by Christopher Atwood to revise the dates of Dayan Khan. Also noteworthy was a session immediately preceding the CEUS conference, the IU György Ránki Hungarian Chair Symposium "Imre Kertész in Perspective: Hungarian and Jewish Culture in the 20th Century." Research findings presented at this session were also included in the Hungarian and Estonian panels chaired by Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and Toivo Raun, respectively. Finally, Lynn Hooker combined media resources and her fieldwork in Romania and North America to present her research on authenticity and gypsiness of the Taenchaez movement. This brief report does not do justice to the wide range of scholarship presented at the conference; further information on the panels and presenters is available on our website.

As a part of the mission of the Association of Central Eurasian Students to create a conducive environment for scholarly exchange and networking, we hosted several receptions and an evening social event when composer Jon Liechty performed a piano recital of music by Azeri composers.

ACES looks forward to another successful CEUS conference on April 9, 2005, and we hope that you will be part of it. For further information on the CEUS conference and ACES, please see our website at http://www.iub.edu/~aces or contact us via e-mail at aces@indiana.edu.

Seminar on Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and the CIS

Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, Germany, May 13-16, 2004

Reported by: **Stéphane A. Dudoignon**, Research Fellow, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, and Lecturer, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France, dudoignon@aol.com

On May 13-16, 2004, an international conference entitled Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was held in the House of History in Bochum, Germany. This event was organized by the Seminar for Oriental and Islamic Studies of Ruhr University of Bochum, culminating a two-year research project financed by the Volkswagen Foundation (Volkswagenstiftung), and led by Dr. Raoul Motika in close association with other German researchers and specialists on the CIS. The results of this two-year international collaboration will be published in the form of two distinct volumes: a collection of documents and statistics on the history of Islamic education, legal or "informal," in the USSR through the 20th century; and the proceedings of the Bochum conference itself. Russian editions of both volumes are also in the works.

The idea for the seminar came into being after a meeting in Baku in 2003. The 2004 event in Bochum did not consist simply of a perfunctory meeting of scholars, but distinguished itself from the usual colloquia and conferences by its comparative research, conducted over a period of two years, based on regular and coordinated field and archival work on the most varied Muslim-peopled regions and countries of the former Soviet Union. Among the regions and periods represented, Moscow and its suburbs was not forgotten, with a remarkable reflection by Guzel Sabirova on the attitudes toward Islam among various generations of migrants with Muslim backgrounds in the Russian capital, and on the primacy of ethical preoccupations in these attitudes. The Volga-Urals region was addressed by a particularly rich combination of research focused on Tatarstan: a rare and innovative attempt by a young historian, Ilnur Minnullin, at surveying the evolution of legal Islamic education in this republic throughout the 20th century; a study by Rafiq Muhametshin on current political aspects of the question of Islamic education in Kazan; a historical study by Dilara Usmanova on the place of Islamic education in the "Muslim" press of Russia in the 1900-30s and 1980-90s; and a comparative contribution by Raoul Motika on the actions of various Turkish organizations for the promotion of Islamic education in Tatarstan and in the Southern Caucasus.

Azerbaijan was the focus of three separate studies: the first by Altay Göyüşov on the Soviet policy toward (viz., against) Islamic education in Transcaucasia; the second by Elçin Askerov on the current problems — and geopolitical aspects — of Islamic education in Azerbaijan since the end of the Soviet period; and a pioneering sociological study by Kristina Hunner-Krayser on the decisive role of varied kinds of religious institutions for a typology of religiosity, with special attention to Azerbaijani youth. Although Chechnya was not represented, the Northern Caucasus was surveyed from west to east, with a captivating paper, enriched by original research in regional archives, by the young historian Naima Neflyasheva on Islamic education in the 1920s in the northwestern Caucasus (with special interest on the Adygei Republic). Furthermore, one of the most original and best informed contributions of the whole conference was a paper by Shamil Shikhaliev on Sufi education in Daghestan in the Soviet and federal periods (i.e., since 1991). Also notable was an important contribution by Vladimir Bobrovnikov, a leading specialist on Islam in the northeastern Caucasus, on Islamic education in the rural communities of Daghestan.

Besides the Volga-Urals region and the Caucasus, Central Asia was given special attention, with no less than five contributions on various countries and periods of its contemporary history. These can be divided into two different categories: papers based on official documentation and focusing on legal institutions, and papers interested in more "informal" if not clandestine aspects of the history of Islamic education in the region at various moments of the 20th century. In the first category can be placed a communication by Uygun Ghafurov on the history of legal education in Uzbekistan since the creation of the Spiritual Board of Central Asian Muslims in 1943. Such is also the case with the paper by Asylbek Izbairov on the peculiarities of Islamic education in Kazakhstan today; although this paper gives some attention to non-official and even to oppositional organizations such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir, it is based exclusively on official

documentation and police reports, as were several other contributions to the conference on current aspects of Islamic education. In the second category, we find papers as varied as a captivating attempt by Ashirbek Muminov (a leading historian of Islam in Central Asia, who may not need an introduction) at a typology of Islamic education in Uzbekistan from 1917 to 1943 that identified pre-Soviet traditional, Jadid, Soviet traditional, and clandestine (in the form of the *hujra*) varieties; and a study by the young researcher Manja Stefan on the Islamic religious education and socialization of children in Tajikistan since the end of the civil war.

The two-year Volkswagen Foundation-funded program led by Motika at Ruhr University involved specialists of the most varied backgrounds and disciplines: local political scientists of Islam accustomed to analyzing official or, more rarely, unofficial documentation on religious activity in the former USSR; "conflictologists" specializing in the politicization of religion since the end of the Soviet period; some mainly European specialists of social sciences and several historians of the 20th century. This conjuncture of competences allowed the program to provide its participants and future readers of its proceedings a rare opportunity for genuine geographical and chronological comparative studies. One could underline, for instance, the importance given to the cross-cultural analysis of the ways of thinking and practicing Islam over different generations in a same place (Sabirova), or the importance given to the comparison between urban and rural Islam (especially the contribution by Bobrovnikov), to say nothing of decisive studies on non-official aspects of Islamic teaching in the former Soviet Union through the 20th century (papers by Shikhaliev and Muminov).

In spite of the participation in the project of the most respected historians, the history of Islamic education in the short period of the 20th century still remains a "grey zone" on which the present conference only has begun to cast light (although that may be considered one of its key contributions to the development of the field). The collection of papers had foci on two periods usually privileged by researchers: the 1900-30s and the last 15 years of the 20th century. With the exception of the rarest contributions (e.g., that by Minnullin on Tatarstan, which unfortunately remains based on official documentation about legal institutions), the period from collectivization to perestroika remains a no man's land of modern history for the Central Eurasian societies and populations with Islamic background. With two very rare exceptions (papers by Muminov and Shikhaliev), too many studies on Islam and Islamic education during this period, whether written by specialists from the CIS or their Western colleagues, continue to be based on such documents as accounts by the *upolnomochennye* [authorities] of the Soviet period or more recent police reports. A possible explanation for this recurrent gap could be linked to the self-limitations of the *kulturgeschichtlich* [cultural-historical] approach that continues to dominate Western and former Soviet studies of contemporary Islamic societies and populations in the former USSR. It remains the case that the specific history of Islam in Central Eurasian lands during the short 20th century has probably to be an "anti-history," based on non-official documents and on a careful but extensive use of oral sources, so often neglected by historians. This anti-history largely remains to be written, and it could be the object of future international programs bringing together researchers from various Western countries and the CIS.

The Ruhr University conference on Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and the CIS and its associated two-year special project capped a decade of extensive research on the subject matter. During those ten years Professor Stefan Reichmuth, a leading personality of modern and contemporary Islamic studies external to the tiny circles of research on Central Eurasia, cheerfully led a young and particularly innovative research team. With the constant support of the Volkswagen Foundation, they produced an abundant and impressive assortment of now published doctoral theses and *Habilitationswerke* that have all become reference works in their fields, as well as numerous international projects that have deeply contributed to changing our global perceptions of past and contemporary Central Eurasian societies.

The present dispersion of most members of this research team puts a (provisional) end to one of the richest moments of the recent development of Central Eurasian studies in Europe. This may explain the particular sadness which could be felt among the participants when the time came to say goodbye — many worrying that a peculiar moment like the two-year project led by Raoul Motika may not be repeated in the years to come. Some, on the contrary, shared their resolution that, thanks to the strong personal links that were created over the past decade, such a fruitful experiment should continue in the future.

Central Eurasia in Amsterdam: Three Conference Reports

Reported by: **Babak Rezvani**, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, brezvani@isfedu.org

The Georgian Political Environment after Saakshvili's Rose Revolution

Amsterdam, Netherlands, April 5, 2004

On March 28, 2004, parliamentary elections took place in Georgia. These elections were held after the so-called Rose Revolution, as a consequence of which the former president Shevardnadze was forced to resign. The party of the new president, Mikhail Saakashvili, won the elections by an overwhelming majority of votes. The Institute for the Public and Politics and the Alfred Mozer Foundation, which are attached to the Dutch Labor Party (PvdA), organized a meeting on April 5, 2004, to evaluate the results of these elections. The meeting's speakers were Bert Koenders, member of the Dutch Parliament and foreign affairs spokesman of the PvdA; Wanda Koster, Interkerkelijk vredesberaad [Inter-Church Peace Council], which oversees projects in the Southern Caucasus; and Frank van Beuningen, coordinator of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) affairs at the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The moderator was Matilda Nahabedian of the Alfred Mozer Foundation.

The discussion was concerned with recent political developments in Georgia, the role of civil society in Georgian politics, and Georgian international relations. During the elections in November 2003, allegedly large-scale election fraud led to rotation of power in Georgia. Compared to the earlier elections in November, the elections in March 2004 meant a huge step toward democracy. Although the members of the discussion were generally optimistic about the future of democracy in Georgia, they voiced specific concerns about the challenges that Georgia faces.

First, the enormous election victory of the National Movement-Democrats (formerly United National Movement) means that there is almost no political opposition. The international community has shown already its concerns about the lack of checks and balances that this election has caused in the new Georgian political environment. Moreover, in the future the election procedures should be improved, and there should be developed a better registration system of voters. Another point of concern, according to the speakers, was that there was no clear separation between the state apparatus and political parties!

Koenders discussed his concern that the current government of Georgia will evolve into an authoritarian government. This is likely, in his view, because there is almost no serious opposition party left. Koenders also argued that the European Union and international community should support the existence of a free media in Georgia. The media could function as a watchdog and this would be effective in reducing the risk that the Georgian government might evolve into an authoritarian regime. The Georgian voter expects from the government energetic and strict implementation of its policies in order to solve the problems in the country and fight corruption effectively.

In Shevardnadze's era a powerful civil society existed in Georgia. After the March elections many positions in the state apparatus were taken by former top functionaries of the NGOs. According to Koster this is an ambiguous development: it is positive that civil society has gained influence in the government, but this situation may cause civil society to lose its independence.

Much of the discussion concerned Georgia's international relations, particularly with Russia. Both van Beuningen and Koenders emphasized the so-called "nuisance role of Russia": Russia may make no positive contribution in resolving the conflicts and tensions in the region, but resolution is nevertheless unthinkable without the involvement of Russia. According to the speakers, economic reforms and democratization have always been subordinate to oil interests in Georgia, and the time has come to change this situation. Koenders stressed the role of the European Union and international community in supporting democratic reform in Georgia.

Despite the intended inclusiveness of this conference, not all issues received adequate attention. For example, the situations of ethnic minorities, Muslim Georgians, and the unrehabilitated Meskhetians were not addressed. These are important topics, especially given that one of the most common criticisms of the new government is its nationalistic Christian chauvinism.

Whether true or not, the issue is of crucial importance for both internal stability and Georgia's relations with its neighbors.

Georgia, Federal or Unitary State?

Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September 8, 2004

A conference on the territorial integration of Georgia was held on September 8, 2004, at the Free University in Amsterdam. The speakers were Dr. Charlotte Hille, Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Amsterdam; Dr. Viacheslav Chirikba, a research scholar in Caucasian Studies at the University of Leiden and the representative of the Abkhazian authority for the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization in the Hague; and Prof. Dr. Bruno Coppieters, Chair of Political Science at the Free University in Brussels. The discussion was led by Prof. Dr. George Hewitt, Professor of Caucasian Languages and head of the Department of the Languages and Cultures of the Near and Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Hille said that despite the cease-fire in the South Ossetian-Georgian war, there is no guarantee of reintegration of South Ossetia with Georgia. Whether Saakashvili will be able to reintegrate South Ossetia with Georgia, and bring it under Georgian sovereignty remains in question. Much depends on negotiations and agreements between the South Ossetian president Kokoity and the Georgian president Saakashvili, but the political role of the Russian Federation in the settlement of this conflict should not be ignored and its regional interests should not neglected.

According to Coppieters, despite the fact that Georgia has never been a federal entity, it has a rich tradition in the discussion of "federalization." Chirikba agreed, remarking that Georgia has always had a rich regionalist tradition, and that the concept of a unitary state is something new to the Georgian political culture. Chirikba went on to elaborate on the historical background to the secessionist conflict in Abkhazia and the prospect of a settlement. Abkhazia seceded from Georgia as a result of the 1992-93 war. Although this secession occurred after Gamsakhurdia's presidency, his chauvinist policies effected this process in that non-Georgian ethnic groups believed that they were not welcomed in the newly independent Georgia. The ethnic minorities were called "guests" [*stumrebi*] on Georgian soil.

Chirikba objected to the designation of Abkhazia as a "self-proclaimed state"; all states are self-proclaimed, and the question is whether a state apparatus functions properly or not. According to Chirikba, this is the case in Abkhazia: Abkhazia's economy is stronger than that of many countries, including Georgia, and Abkhazia is able to provide security for all its "citizens," including the Mingrelians and Georgians. Chirikba insisted that a federalist approach to the question is not acceptable to Abkhazians: only full independence is acceptable, but the Georgian government refuses even to consider a confederative solution.

Everyone at the conference agreed on the role of Russia in this conflict: without Russia's consent this conflict is not likely to be solved. The fact that citizens of Abkhazia are all offered Russian passports obliges Russia, according to Chirikba, to be involved in this conflict in the sense that it protects its citizens.

According to some views expressed at this gathering, Abkhazia cannot become be a legitimate independent entity, because ethnic Abkhazians still constitute a minority in Abkhazia's population, even after the large-scale exodus of Georgians. According to Chirikba, in an independent Abkhazia all citizens regardless of their ethnic background will enjoy equal rights of citizenship.

Among other topics discussed at this gathering was the question of the potential for ethnic conflicts in both northern and southern Georgia. The participants had no clear answers, but they agreed that the settlement of these conflicts does not only depend on the conflicting parties, but also on the role and interests of neighboring countries, especially the Russian Federation.

Debate on Terrorism in Uzbekistan

Royal Institute of the Tropics, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, May 5, 2004

In the last week of March 2004, terror attacks in Tashkent, Uzbekistan reportedly killed 14 civilians, ten policemen, and 33 terrorists (among them seven women). Numerous others were injured. Also, on July 30, three near simultaneous explosions by suicide bombers targeted the US Embassy, the

Israeli Embassy and the headquarters of Uzbekistan's chief prosecutor, resulting in at least five deaths. On May 5, 2004, a debate surrounding the turmoil in Uzbekistan was organized by the Royal Institute of the Tropics (KIT), the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and Asian Studies in Amsterdam (ASiA). According to the organizers, the recent terror attacks in Tashkent have raised fears of a potential onslaught of regional terrorism. Central Asian leaders fear suspected militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and those of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Liberation Party). The Hizb ut-Tahrir is calling for a world ruled according to the *Sharia*, or Islamic law; its ideology appears to be particularly popular in the Ferghana Valley, a densely populated territory extending into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In recent years, the leadership of all three countries have advocated harsh crackdowns on suspected Islamists. The Uzbek government, in particular, has shown little tolerance towards Islamists and Islamic movements and has jailed thousands of Islamist suspects, in addition to its secular oppositionists.

The Amsterdam debate on Uzbekistan brought forth more questions than answers: Do the recent attacks have anything to do with the postponed democratic processes or problems of economic development and prosperity, which Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, had promised in 2002? What are the effects of the recent violence on the slow but ongoing democratization processes in the Central Asian region as a whole? Furthermore, what can be said about the identities and intentions of the terrorists? Were the attacks engineered or funded by groups outside of Uzbekistan, as Karimov has claimed? Were such events the first sign of the presence of al-Qaeda in former Soviet Central Asia? What are the implications of such attacks for the ongoing "war on terror"? And what role should the Dutch government play in alleviating international terrorism of the Islamist variety?

The debate was led by Prof. Dr. Wim Stokhof of the IIAS, Dr. Mirzohid Rahimov, Senior Researcher at the Institute of History of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, and Prof. Dr. Touraj Atabaki of the University of Amsterdam, who discussed the history of the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan in its regional context.

According to Dr. Rahimov, the widely assumed stereotype of a Central Asian terrorist as being a poor and disenfranchised youth lacking a proper world perspective is invalid, as many of the terrorists involved in the Tashkent bombings are known to be from middle- and even upper-class families, with some possessing university education. Prof. Atabaki argued that the Tashkent bombings cannot be compared to the Madrid explosions of March 2004, which resulted in nearly 200 deaths and occurred on the eve of the Spanish elections. (Some analysts saw the bombings as having led to the downfall of the pro-Iraq-War Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of the right-leaning Popular Party and to the victory of the newly elected Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero of the Socialist Party.) According to Atabaki, the motives and the strategies of the two events appear to be different. For example, whereas in the case of the Madrid wave of violence ordinary people were targeted with what appear to have been randomly placed bombs, explosions in Tashkent were specifically directed at government and foreign officials. Furthermore, though the ethnic Uzbek Islamist leader, Tohir Yöldoshev, has allegedly had ties with al-Qaeda and likely resides in the Taliban-supporting Pashtun region of southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, links of the Tashkent violence with al-Qaeda are still mere speculation. It is also not clear whether the terrorists in Tashkent were even members of the IMU or Hizb ut-Tahrir, as the Uzbek government has claimed.

In response to a question by a member of the audience as to whether various Islamic groups in the region will likely unite under a general Islamist umbrella, Atabaki responded that in his opinion such a possibility is remote, in that Islamism in Central Asia is to a large extent a function of ethnicity (and likely nationalism) rather than being purely ideological. In conclusion, many of the speakers present agreed that despite the recent violence the fears of an evolving global or regional Islamist terror movement are likely exaggerated.

Multilateral Organizations in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, Norway, June 10-11, 2004

Reported by: **Indra Øverland**, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, Norway, ino@nupi.no

"Multilateral Organizations in the Caucasus and Central Asia" was the title of a conference held in Oslo in June 2004, one of the largest events focused on Central Asia and the Caucasus ever organized in the Nordic countries. It included ten panels, with 44 papers and over 100 participants (for further details, see http://www.nupi.no/conference/). There were presenters from four of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and all three South Caucasus republics, as well as Estonia, Finland, France, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the UK and the US. Among the participants were academics, diplomats, and aid workers, making it possible for the event to function as a forum for interaction and dialogue among various categories of actors.

Financial support was provided by the Norwegian Research Council and the International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (INTAS). INTAS provided specific support for a workshop on multilateral organizations and migration issues in the region by covering travel and accommodation costs for 18 workshop participants, most of whom were from the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In INTAS jargon, this was a "strategic scientific workshop," meaning that it was designed to function as a launching pad for future grant proposals and research cooperation between academics from the West and the former Soviet Union. The workshop formed an integral part of the broader conference, with several participants moving back and forth between the panels of the workshop and the rest of the conference.

The strategic scientific workshop extended over both days of the conference, with four panels on different topics. Particularly noteworthy was the panel on Chechen internally displaced peoples and refugees. It succeeded in bringing together experts who had not met previously, and who were able to exchange information and establish contacts for future cooperation. Among these specialists were Julie Wilhelmsen, Norway's foremost expert on Chechnya, and Maia Tskhenkeli, who is particularly well-informed about the refugee situation in Georgia's Pankisi Valley. Trafficking in women and children was also a topic that received considerable attention and served as a link between the workshop and the main conference, which also included a panel on crime trafficking and corruption.

Two issues gave rise to particularly lively discussions: the first was that of the balancing act between outside pressure and cooperation in the functioning of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Central Asia. In the opening keynote speech, Norway's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kim Traavik, attempted to strike a balance between pressure and cooperation in the approach of Western states and international organizations to governments in the Caucasus and Central Asia. On the one hand, he argued for pressure to improve human rights standards; on the other hand, he argued that such pressure should have certain limits, in order to ensure continued dialogue and cooperation without which little improvement can be expected. He drew fire from both sides, with parts of the audience questioning whether it is acceptable to compromise on human rights, and others disputing whether external pressure serves any function at all except alienation, in particular in Central Asia. The latter view was echoed in later discussions, where it was also argued that international organizations and outside pressure are able to exert greater influence in the South Caucasus than in Central Asia due to the aspirations of the former for membership in such organizations as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. The fact that the Deputy Minister was questioned could be taken as an indication that he had emphasized a diplomatic middle ground. His talk was also one of the most fascinating at the conference, in sharp contrast with those of academics who are specialists on the region.

The second notable debate followed John Schoeberlein's paper, "How Aid is Received: Diverse Views on the Impact of International Assistance." Drawing on rich ethnographic data, Schoeberlein, a professor of Central Eurasian studies at Harvard University, conveyed diverse views among locals on the activities of international organizations in Central Asia, paying particular attention to the OSCE's activities in Central Asia,

including its academy in Kyrgyzstan. Some of the views he cited were highly critical, such as the proposition that locals see such international organizations as vehicles for the enrichment of local elites and the employment of foreigners. This raised protests among some participants, who had observed the work of the OSCE and its academy at close range and were impressed with its efforts. The result was a lively debate about the performance and perceptions of the OSCE in Central Asia.

Due to the large number of papers and panels, the conference organizers plan to split forthcoming publications resulting from the paper presentations into several different publishing outlets: a special issue of the journal of the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, *Asia Insights*, has already been published under the title *Multilateral Cooperation in Central Asia*. It includes eight papers from the conference and can be downloaded, free of charge, from http://www.nias.ku.dk/nytt/2004_2/NIASnytt2_2004.pdf. Additionally, the organizers intend to publish a book utilizing some of the most significant papers of the conference on international assistance to Central Asia. Other papers will be published in the conference proceedings series of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

Several conference participants are currently discussing the possibility of submitting a project proposal to INTAS or another European funding body on the basis of the INTAS strategic scientific workshop. In addition, some participants are actively exploring the possibility of organizing another conference on foreign aid issues in the region. This may take place in Bratislava during September 2005 and be organized jointly by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, the German Marshall Foundation and other institutions. One important focus for this conference will be the differences and end results between American and European approaches to international assistance to the southern tier former Soviet republics.

Workshop on Turkmenistan

The Oxford Society of Central Asia, Oxford, UK, June 18-19, 2004

Reported by: **Paul Bergne,** Senior Associate Member, Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, St. Antony's College, Oxford, UK, paul.bergne@sant.ox.ac.uk

The aim of The Oxford Centre for Central Asia (TOSCA), founded in 2003, is to bring students from Central Asia visiting Oxford University together with their colleagues from the UK and other countries, and to promote interest in the study of the history of and contemporary situation in the region and its neighboring states.

Since its foundation, TOSCA has organized a number of seminars, lectures, and other academic gatherings, the most recent of which was a two-day international workshop on Turkmenistan held on June 18 and 19, 2004, at St. Antony's College, Oxford. The decision to concentrate on Turkmenistan was taken after discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) where it was felt that the relative ignorance about that country in official, media, business, and academic circles in the UK might be remedied by assembling a group of specialists to give presentations and exchange views about existing problems and challenges.

Conference organizers decided that the conference should encompass not only current political and economic issues, but also the historical, social, and cultural background against which Turkmenistan has developed its national identity and current policies. They wanted to place due emphasis on the progress made in the fields of agriculture, commercial law, and cultural cooperation between Turkmenistan and the UK. With regard to the last point, TOSCA was lucky to be able to persuade Professor Georgina Herrman to talk about the successful campaign of archaeological exploration in Merv where cooperation has been continuing for some ten years. The agricultural sector was well covered: first by Professor Zvi Lerman from Tel Aviv, who spoke on agrarian reform, and then through films of life and development in stock-raising on collective farms shown by Chris Lunch of

Insight.[1] These provided a diversion from the conventional lecture approach. Several scholars spoke on the challenges and achievements faced by a one-resource economy like Turkmenistan: Dr. Badykova of George Washington University discussed general economic problems, Atul Gupta of Burren Oil described the progress made in the hydrocarbons sector and Professor William Butler of London University covered the legal aspects of reform in the commercial environment.

Once the workshop program turned to the social and political situation in Turkmenistan, there was considerable criticism of the Turkmen government's record, specifically regarding treatment of the political opposition, violations of human rights, the eccentric and counter-productive manipulation of the educational system, and the implications of the personality cult of President Saparmurad Niyazov, "the Turkmenbashi." The presentation by Vitaly Ponomarev, the Central Asia Program Director of the Human Rights Center Memorial in Moscow, on "The Activities of the Turkmen Opposition from 1992 to the Present — Including the Attempted Coups d'Etat of 1994 and 2002," was especially well received.

The relative paucity of British scholars specializing in Turkmenistan meant that most of the contributors came from abroad. Fortunately, the Open Society Institute (OSI) gave generously to help cover the costs. The final program included speakers from Russia, Austria, Germany, France, the UK, the US, Norway and Israel. Unfortunately, despite energetic attempts, it proved impossible to persuade any independent speakers from Turkmenistan to participate. Few, if any, representatives of the Turkmen opposition are at liberty in their own country. The Turkmen government had even attempted to persuade the FCO to have the conference stopped. To their credit, the FCO resisted this, and even one of the presentations, on Turkmen foreign policy, was given by the British Ambassador to Turkmenistan. In retrospect, participants raised the question of how useful it would have been to have invited a representative of the Turkmen government to respond to the criticisms leveled. The experience of organizing similar meetings has shown, first, that local officials are reluctant to participate in the sort of critical debate usually heard at such gatherings and, second, that such confrontations rarely lead to any real meeting of minds.

TOSCA would like to thank the FCO, the OSI, the Committee for Central and Inner Asia of the British Academy, British Gas, and St. Antony's College and All-Souls College (the two exclusively post-graduate colleges of the University of Oxford). For those interested, texts and summaries of most of the presentations have been posted on the website of St. Antony's College at http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/areastudies/turkprogramme.shtml.

[1] Insight is a UK/France-based organization that uses participatory video as a powerful research and development tool and an important means of influencing policy and decision makers. Insight has over 15 years of experience in facilitating projects at the grassroots level, working with communities, NGOs, and governmental organizations in Central Asia, Africa, China, and elsewhere. Examples of participatory videos can be viewed at http://www.insightshare.org.