Civil Society and Patterns of Security in Central Asia

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Abstract

Since the national independence of the Central Asian countries in the early 1990s, there has been a tension between stability- and transformation-oriented rationalities, goals, and policies. However, the concurrent missions of political stability and societal transformation indicate a clear distinction between state and society. This idea of separating state and society is particularly strong with regard to security issues, but this strict separation is likely to produce contradictory goals and to have dysfunctional consequences since it prevents the political system from benefitting from the contribution that civil society can make to addressing political and social challenges. Therefore, in this article—which also serves as an introduction to the special issue—we argue that it is necessary to bridge the discourses on security and civil society, with a particular focus on Central Asia.

Keywords

political science – international relations – transformation – stability – civil society – security

This special issue contains selected articles from the research project "Between Stability and Transformation: Regional and Transnational Cooperation in Central Asia and between Central Asia and Europe" that were presented at the project's final conference in Almaty in September 2019.[1] The research project was led by TU Dortmund University and Bielefeld University in close cooperation with OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the German-Kazakh University (DKU) in Almaty. It was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation's Central Asia and Caucasus research funding initiative and ran from 2016 until 2020.[2] While the overall project was broader in scope,[3] the articles in this special issue concentrate on civil society development and security dynamics, emphasizing the significance of the interrelations between the two fields for polities, policies, and politics in Central Asia.

In Political Science and IR discourses outside Central Asia, interest in Central Asian affairs is still not sufficiently developed. Regional security issues, however, have attracted scholarly attention, particularly in recent years. Interest in Central Asian security policies is broad in scope, covering national and regionalized security problems,[4] questions of geopolitical order,[5] and,

1 We would like to thank the two reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2 Volkswagen Foundation is the largest private science funding organization in Germany and completely independent of the Volkswagen enterprise. We would like to thank Volkswagen Foundation for supporting this project as well as the editors of *Central Asian Affairs* for the opportunity to publish the results of the final conference in this special issue. Many thanks also go to the reviewers of the articles for reading the papers so carefully and providing helpful comments in the double-blind peer review process.

3 See Chiara Pierobon, Nora Becker, and Steve Schlegel, *Central Asia after Three Decades of Independence: Politics and Societies between Stability and Transformation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021).

4 See, e.g., Alexander Cooley, "Ordering Eurasia: The Rise and Decline of Liberal Internationalism in the Post-Communist Space," *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (2019): 588–613; Taissiya Marmontova and Aigul Khazmuratova, "Central Asia–South Asia: Cooperation in the Context of Prevention of Security Challenges in Eurasia," in *Insights and Commentaries: South and Central Asia*, ed. Anita Sengupta and Mirzokhid Rakhimov (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2015), 195–202; Thorsten Bonacker and Denis Liebetanz, "How Dynamics of Security Contribute to Illiberal Statebuilding: The Case of Tajikistan," in *Securitization in Statebuilding and Intervention*, ed. Thorsten Bonacker, Werner Distler, and Maria Ketzmerick (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 245–70; Edward Lemon and Hélène Thibault, "Counter-Extremism, Power and Authoritarian Governance in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (2018): 137–59; Andreas Vasilache, "Authoritarianism and Security in Central Asia," *Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte: International Quarterly Edition*, no. 1 (2017): 25–29.

5 See, e.g., Marlène Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia. Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); Akram Umarov, "Assessing China's New Policy in Afghanistan," *Central Asian Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2017):

occasionally, even theoretical reflections on Central Asian security.[6] There is also interest—albeit perhaps less intense—in the situation and development of civil societies in Central Asian states and in their transnational relations.[7] Not only because of the particular situation in Central Asia, but also mirroring the broader landscape in political science and IR, discourses on security policies and discourses on civil society tend not to be related to one another, but rather to constitute separate fields of interest and research. This can be explained by the fact that security has long been understood as a field of "hard", state-dominated politics, as seen, for instance, in neorealist theories. It was Kenneth Waltz who concluded that "individuals participate in war because they are members of states" and, as a consequence, "one *state* makes war on another *state*".[8] In addition to its state-centrism, such a view has an international perspective—and, thus, contrasts with societal topics and with a focus on non-state actors that are involved in civil society work and have a mainly domestic level of activity. However, the debate on the inclusiveness of security concepts has demonstrated that the term "security" has to be understood much more broadly, neglecting neither non-state actors, the state and international organizations, nor international regimes. At the same time, though, it has become clear how important it is that broader concepts of security remain operationalizable.[9] This is quite a challenge for IR and security studies, especially when aspects such as the impact of civil society actors are

384–406; Aliya Tskhay and Filippo Costa Buranelli, "Accommodating Revisionism through Balancing Regionalism: The Case of Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 6 (2020): 1033–52.

6 See, e.g., Claire Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?," *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2007): 5–25; Edward Lemon, "Critical Approaches to Security in Central Asia: An Introduction," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (2018): 1–12; Andreas Vasilache, "Security in the Sovereignty-Governmentality Continuum," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 6 (2019): 681–711.

7 See, e.g., M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Clarke Waugh, *Civil Society in Central Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Kimairis Toogood-Luehrs, "Civil Society and Social Capital in Central Asia," in *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, ed. Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler (New York: Springer US, 2010), 236–42; Charles E. Ziegler, *Civil Society and Politics in Central Asia* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015); Timur Dadabaev, Murod Ismailov, and Yutaka Tsujinaka, *Social Capital Construction and Governance in Central Asia: Communities and NGOs in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Chiara Pierobon, "Promoting Sustainable Development through Civil Society: A Case Study of the EU's NSA/LA Thematic Program in Kyrgyzstan," *Development Policy Review* 37 (2019): 179–92; Chiara Pierobon, "EU's Support to Civil Society in Kazakhstan: A Pilot Evaluation of the Social Capital Generated," *Evaluation* 25, no. 2 (2019): 207–23.

8 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War. A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 179. Italics in the original.

9 See Christoph Schuck, "The Concept of Human Security Revisited: Theoretical and Empirical Problems of a Post-Cold War Security Approach," in *Security in a Changing Global*

considered. Bob Hadiwinata, for instance, rightly points out that a civil society can quickly turn into what he labels an "uncivil society" and that the "exclusion of uncivil society groups from civil society has limited the application of the concept in developing societies where primordial interests take root in many associations in society".[10] In this regard, Central Asia is a promising field of study not only because it has not received sufficient scholarly attention, but also because civil society activities have seen both continuity and change since the fall of the Soviet Union. It is fruitful, for instance, to recall Mark Saroyan's elaborations on the highly centralized forms of Muslim activities in Central Asia during the Soviet period. The "sudden expansion in the number of mosques" as a result of the end of the Soviet empire has created a situation in Central Asia in which "ulama-led religious institutions [have been] better positioned to mobilize the community around their notions of Islam."[11] The line between Muslim civil-society engagement and the formation of, in Hadiwinata's sense, uncivil Islamist groups that sought to introduce Sharia has become blurred. While studies on Islamism have shown how difficult it is to distinguish between intrinsically Islamist groups and those that use an Islamist narrative to portray themselves in advantageous ways,[12] secular political elites in Central Asia quickly came to the conclusion that any form of Islam-oriented activism, including a vibrant Islamic civil society with its mobilizational capacity, posed a threat to the stability of the newly independent countries or to leaders' own claims to political power. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Islamic civil society activities were quickly curtailed again, often on the grounds that such (un-)civil society activities were a threat to security and stability.

The security-related friction between civil and uncivil society's impact on politics in Central Asia is an important point of departure for this special issue. It aims to bridge the parallel discourses on security and civil society with a particular focus on Central Asia. There are three main reasons that not only justify but also highlight the necessity of bringing these two topical fields together and interlinking them:

Environment: Challenging the Human Security Approach, ed. Christoph Schuck (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011), 51–81.

10 Bob S. Hadiwinata, "Civil or Uncivil Society? Islamic Extremism and Democratization in Indonesia," in *Democracy in Indonesia: The Challenge of Consolidation*, ed. Bob S. Hadiwinata and Christoph Schuck (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007), 345–61, 347.

11 Mark Saroyan, "Authority and Community in Soviet Islam," in *Accounting for Fundamentalism. The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 524–25.

12 See Christoph Schuck, "How Islamist is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)? An Ideological Assessment," *Asian Security* 17, no. 1 (2021): 105–18.

First, the security challenges faced by the countries in the region go beyond a traditional, narrow understanding of military security,[13] but include problems that are situated, and have to be tackled, on the societal level. Such challenges to regional security include drug trafficking;[14] violent extremism,[15] including the emergence of militant Islamism;[16] ongoing and potential water conflicts;[17] adaptation to climate change;[18] and the current pandemic.[19] None of these problems can be solved within a traditional framework of state security or military security policy alone;

13 See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO, and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

14 See Mariya Y. Omelicheva and Lawrence P. Markowitz, *Webs of Corruption: Trafficking and Terrorism in Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Filippo de Danieli, "Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus: Drug Trafficking and State-Crime Relations in Central Asia," *The International Journal on Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1235–40; Sebastien Peyrouse, "Drug-Trafficking in Central Asia," Policy Brief No. 8 (Stockholm: The Institute for Security & Development Policy, 2009).

15 See Mariya Y. Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2014); Sarah Lain, "Strategies for Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Central Asia," *Asian Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2016): 386–405.

16 See Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

17 See Barbara Janusz-Pawletta and Mara Gubaidullina, "Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia: Legal Framework to Strengthen Interstate Cooperation and Increase Regional Security," *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, no. 25 (2015): 195–215; Aibek Zhupankhan, Kamshat Tussupova, and Ronny Berndtsson, "Water in Kazakhstan, a Key in Central Asian Water Management," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 63, no. 5 (2018): 752–62.

18 See Elena Lioubimtseva and Geoffrey M. Henebry, "Climate and Environmental Change in Arid Central Asia: Impacts, Vulnerability, and Adaptations," *Journal of Arid Environments* 73, no. 11 (2009): 963–77; Christopher P.O. Reyer, Ilona M. Otto, Sophie Adams, Torsten Albrecht, Florent Baarsch, Matti Cartsburg, Dim Coumou, Alexander Eden, Eva Ludi, Rachel Marcus, Matthias Mengel, Beatrice Mosello, Alexander Robinson, Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, Olivia Serdeczny, and Judith Stagl, "Climate Change Impacts in Central Asia and Their Implications for Development," *Regional Environmental Change* 17, no. 6 (2017): 1639–50; Yang Yu, Yuanyue Pi, Xiang Yu, Zhijie Ta, Lingxiao Sun, Markus Disse, Fanjiang Zeng, Yaoming Li, Xi Chen, and Ruide Yu, "Climate Change, Water Resources, and Sustainable Development in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Central Asia in the Past 30 Years," *Journal of Arid Land* 11, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.

19 See Farrukh Irnazarov and Roman Vakulchuk, "Discovering Opportunities in the Pandemic? Four Economic Response Scenarios for Central Asia," Silk Road Paper (Washington, DC/Stockholm: Central Asia—Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 2020); Paul Stronski, "COVID-19 Exposes the Fragility of Central Asia," East Asia Forum, September 3, 2020, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/09/03/covid-19-exposes-the-fragility-of-central-asia/.

they all require societal efforts and answers. Moreover, the inability to address such problems might decrease the legitimacy of the state as such, making state failure a plausible worst-case scenario[20] and creating a state and military security issue. Civil society actors are already addressing these security-related fields—and their activities deserve scholarly attention.

Second, in authoritarian or hybrid political regimes,[21] security-related questions are particularly sensitive, as the government's unchallenged monopoly on security policy is understood and represented as the nucleus of political power. Therefore, security policies are always—in one way or another—related to the question of regime security.[22] Thus, in hybrid political regimes, civil society actors in general and those working on security in particular are always to some degree walking on thin ice. Attempts by governments and state policies to regulate—and, in some cases, to restrict—civil society activities tend to be justified by security concerns about foreign agents or other alleged dangers to public order.[23] Thus, in hybrid political regimes, there seems to be an inner relationship and entanglement between civil society activities, on the one hand, and state and government security, on the other hand.

Third, security policies and civil society development are the two policy fields in which the simultaneous pursuit of stability and transformation in Central Asia is most evident. Thus, linking discussions on civil

20 Steve Schlegel, *International Organizations and State Failure Prevention: The Dilemma of the OSCE Operations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan 1998–2017* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019).

21 See Larry J. Diamond, "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

22 For Central Asia see, e.g., Kemel Toktomushev, "Regime Security, Base Politics and Rent-Seeking: The Local and Global Political Economies of the American Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, 2001–2010," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 57–77; Ernesto Gallo, "Globalisation, Authoritarianism and the Post-Soviet State in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* (2020): 1–24; Philipp Lottholz, John Heathershaw, Aksana Ismailbekova, Janyl Moldalieva, Eric McGlinchey, and Catherine Owen, "Governance and Order-Making in Central Asia: From Illiberalism to Post-Liberalism?" *Central Asian Survey* 39, no. 3 (2020): 420–37.

23 See, e.g., Joanna Hoare and Maisy Weicherding, "Russia's Influence in Shrinking Civic Space in Central Asia," The Foreign Policy Centre, May 24, 2016, https://fpc.org.uk/russias-influence-shrinking-civic-space-central-asia/; Tinatin Tsertsvadze, "Civil Society Cornered in Central Asia," EUCAM Policy Brief No. 35, Europe–Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM), Groningen, October 27, 2017, https://eucentralasia.eu/download/1762/; Maria Tysiachniouk, Svetlana Tulaeva, and Laura A. Henry, "Civil Society under the Law 'On Foreign Agents': NGO Strategies and Network Transformation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 4 (2018): 615–37.

society and security can be expected to deliver relevant insights into the intricate relationship between stability- and transformation-oriented policies in Central Asia.

Taking the current state of research on stability, transformation, and regionalization in Central Asia as its point of departure, the research project on which this special issue is based aimed to advance the conversation on each of these topics as well as their complex interdependencies. Exploring the particular relations between stability and transformation trajectories in Central Asian regionalism was one of the main targets of the project. In hybrid regimes with a young and volatile market economy, there is always a certain tension between the governmental desire for stability in centralized decision-making processes and the necessity for transformation on the societal level. Given the establishment of hybrid and authoritarian political systems after independence and the challenges of state- and nation-building,[24] on the one hand, and the need to reconstitute and develop basically all societal areas (economy, education, health, etc.), on the other hand, the simultaneity of—and tension between—stability and transformation goals and patterns was and still is particularly strong in Central Asia.

Of course, since the beginning of national independence in the early 1990s, we have witnessed what have sometimes been very different political and societal paths in the Central Asian countries. However, we can observe that both stability and transformation seem to be highly and equally important missions in the countries of the region. This resilient combination of stability- and transformation-oriented rationalities, goals, and policies has become even stronger in recent years—informing the direction, topics, and structures of national policies and regional cooperation. This has become even more pronounced since the "transformation-in-stability" or "stability-in-transformation" approaches of the different countries display both similarities and differences. One important similarity is the aim of most Central Asian governments to keep the structures of political decision-making and security policy on the stability path, not least "by framing instability as a security threat"[25]—which includes the tendency to regulate and monitor civil society dynamics. At the same time, governments claim transformative trajectories in other sub-systems of society,

24 For identity discourses and narratives in nation-building processes in the region, see Joshua Kucera, "'Between Europe and Asia': Geography and Identity in Post-Soviet Nation-Building Narratives," *Central Asian Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2017): 331–57.

25 Natalie Koch, "Disorder over the Border: Spinning the Spectre of Instability through Time and Space in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (2018): 13–30, 13.

like economic development or academic internationalization—which in fact require the existence of active civil society actors. This dilemma of simultaneity and tension between the objectives of stability and transformation might even increase the risk of state failure, since civil society activity tends to be sacrificed on the altar of political and government stability even though it would be required for social and societal transformation; in turn, societal stagnation can affect the stability of the political system.

The concurrent missions of political and regime stability, on the one hand, and societal transformation, on the other hand, indicate a rather clear distinction between state and society. The idea—and maybe governmental ideal—of separating state and society is likely to produce contradictory goals and have dysfunctional consequences. Since civil society actors tend to be viewed with skepticism by the government, the political system is unable to benefit from the output of an active civil society and from the contribution that civil society actors can make to solving political and social challenges. Admittedly, the countries of the region have chosen different paths to respond to this structural tension within the "stability-transformation continuum"—ranging from Turkmenistan's leaders' clear choice of government stability and sovereignty over societal transformation to the rather open and diverse environment for civil society actors in Kyrgyzstan. However, while the concrete framing of the stability-transformation relationship might differ from country to country,[26] the simultaneity of, and tension between, transformation and stability patterns play an important role in all countries in the region. This is why we have witnessed similar state strategies for coping with the ongoing juxtaposition of political stability and societal transformation policies. Governmental approaches span from suppression to regulation of civil society initiatives, and three main interrelated strategies for monitoring civil society can be identified over time. First, we can observe the emergence of an informal, discursive, volatile, unreliable, yet categorical distinction between "political" issues, which should be dealt with exclusively by the political system, and supposedly "apolitical" issues, which can also be addressed in the context of civil society initiatives. Such a distinction, however, is obviously open to very different—and again volatile and unreliable—interpretations of which policy areas and

26 To cite just one example from the academic system, we saw that while both Kazakhstan under former president Nazarbayev and Uzbekistan under late president Karimov undoubtedly favored stability with regard to political decision-making structures and security policies, the countries differed strongly in what was, or was not, included in their general political stability goal. This led in Kazakhstan to transformation in higher education with a degree of internationalization and academic freedom remarkable for the region, and in Uzbekistan to strict governmental control and transformation barriers in the academic system.

issues should be classified as (allegedly) political or (allegedly) non-political.[27] Second, various Central Asian states seem to strive for the ideal and possibility of a controllable, top-down civil society in combination with, third, a tendency toward broad and intensive social and societal retraditionalization.[28]

Thus, the will and strategies to regulate civil society are mostly driven by security logics in order to ensure the stability of the governmental system. At the same time, there are manifold security challenges that go beyond a traditional, narrow, state-centric understanding of security, but require the activity of civil society actors—who increasingly tend to engage in transnational networks. The four articles compiled in this special issue therefore aim to interlink discourses on civil society and security:

Serik Beimenbetov takes a comparative look at the regulation of organized civil society in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. While the paper provides an up-to-date and detailed overview of the situation of civil society actors in these seven post-Soviet states, it goes far beyond this empirical aim. By systematically assessing the variations in the regulation of civil society organizations in these countries, the study provides a comparative map of structural similarities and differences in regulating civil society actors in hybrid regimes. In the process, the quite popular thesis that there is a high degree of similarity between national approaches to regulating civil society is subjected to critical review, challenging the common perception of widespread securitization and control of civil society actors as "foreign agents" throughout the post-Soviet space.

Chiara Pierobon's article deals with the strategies employed by, and the impact of, EU-supported civil society activities that seek to prevent jihadist radicalization. Since the Central Asian states face serious problems with

27 For instance, addressing questions of state accountability directly might prove "too political" in Central Asian countries, while ecological problems and challenges—although often connected to issues of corruption, mismanagement, and administrative failure—tend, within limits, to be relatively open for civil society actors to address. There is thus a tendency to regard them as "non-political" or at least "not-so-political" and subject to transformation trajectories.

28 For the latter, see, e.g., Judith Beyer and Peter Finke, "Practices of Traditionalization in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (2019): 310–28; Davlatbegim Mamadshoeva, *Coming of Age in Dushanbe: Sexual Subjectivities of Young Women in Contemporary Tajikistan* (MA thesis, Bielefeld University, 2020); Aziz Elmuradov, "Uzbekistan between Tradition and Modernity: Subject and Symbolic Order," in *Central Asia after Three Decades of Independence: Politics and Societies between Stability and Transformation*, ed. Chiara Pierobon, Nora Becker, and Steve Schlegel (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 21–38. For a discussion on media discourses on the role of religion, see, e.g., Wendell Schwab, "Introduction to the Islamic Mediascape in Central Asia," *Central Asian Affairs* 6, no. 2–3 (2019): 89–94.

jihadist radicalization—Central Asia constituted the third most important region of origin of foreign combatants in Syria (behind Western Europe and the MENA)—civil society actors working in this field address a topic that is in fact crucial for national and regional security. Preventing and combatting radicalization tendencies and phenomena is a challenging issue that can hardly be tackled by security policies alone, but requires an intense civil society commitment. Based on extensive qualitative empirical fieldwork, Pierobon both maps and analyzes the structures and concrete situation of EU-supported civil society initiatives for preventing violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan. She provides an in-depth analysis of the interrelation between different "push" and "pull" factors for violent extremism that need to be addressed by civil society actors in order to be successful.

In analyzing the debate on the Manas Air Base between 2005 and 2010, *Shairbek Dzhuraev* discusses a core security policy decision by the Kyrgyz government that has led to a more pronounced disposition to take foreign policy risks. While common explanations tend to highlight external pressure and individual interests within the government at that time, Dzhuraev goes beyond such a focus on outside actors and corruption issues. He broadens the view by weaving together three approaches to foreign policy analysis into a coherent frame that concentrates on the ideas of a country's leaders, their interest based on domestic political survival, and the institutional structure of the decision-making body. He argues that the institutional transformations and personal dynamics within the ruling elites have led to greater centralization of foreign and security policymaking in Kyrgyzstan, resulting in a more favorable disposition toward risk-taking in foreign and security policy.

Sebastian Mayer addresses the structures and dynamics of cooperation between the post-Soviet Central Asian states in the field of security policy. He focuses in particular on the paradox that hardly any cooperation in security policy takes place within the region, even though collaboration in security management could be expected to deliver cooperation gains for all actors involved. Mayer demonstrates that in security policy, there is only an alleged intention to cooperate, a merely "declarative regionalism." Searching for an explanation for this phenomenon, he makes a compelling argument for the claim that the gains from bi- and multilateral cooperation with great powers outside the core region, not least Russia and China, actually outweigh the potential gains from cooperation within the region. Therefore, interest in regional security cooperation in Central Asia is relatively low, despite governmental declarations to the contrary.

The articles collected in this special issue cover a wide range of concrete issues, cases, and questions and were subject to a rigorous double-blind peer review process prior to publication. The authors provide individual insights into different topics and from different disciplinary angles, so the texts can also be read individually and as contributions to their respective fields of study. However, taken together, the articles compiled here link civil society and security perspectives and thereby also contribute to a better understanding of the interrelation between stability and transformation in Central Asia.