



CALL FOR PAPERS

WELFARE STATE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CENTRAL ASIA

KIMEP, Almaty, 18-19 May 2015

KIMEP and the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC), with the support of Institut Français and the German foundation Friedrich Ebert, organize an international conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to study the erosion of welfare State in Central Asia after the end of the Soviet regime.

Rationale of the Conference

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the cut-down of subsidies from Moscow has considerably undermined the welfare State in Central Asia. Deep economic and political crises forced governments of the newly-emerged Central Asian States to significantly curtail welfare support to their population. In addition, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other organizations have consistently advocated neoliberal reforms that required the Central Asian States to reduce their role in the economy and cut public spending. As a result, education and healthcare expenditures as well as social support to the elderly and disabled people were markedly reduced leading to the underprovision of even basic public goods and services. Many former Soviet people, who then relied entirely on State support, had to struggle with socio-economic hardships on their own. In addition, economic crises – both regional in 1998 or worldwide since 2008 – have weakened even further the capacity of Central Asian States to cope with their duty of social protection and provision of basic services to their population.

The present conference aims at shedding light on two decades of welfare State erosion in Central Asia and collective citizens' response to this process. By collective response, we firstly mean social mobilizations towards the authorities to protest against the deterioration of public services and claim the continuation of social care. Collective action also means the development of self-help groups, community-based organisations, and any other form of non-State providers of social services as a response to the erosion of welfare State. How do individuals and communities in the region mobilize and cope with the poor State provision? How do they help each other to survive under conditions of low State social support? What are the forms and mechanisms in place that help people to deal with the disappearing welfare State? These are the questions that we would like to pose and explore at our conference

Main Topics of the Conference

The conference will address welfare State erosion and collective responses in the following topics:

- Housing in urban and rural areas: the lack of jobs in rural areas and high market prices on real estate force people to take the lands and build their own houses nearby large cities. The 2008 crisis has also led to the bankruptcy of many construction companies that were not able to fulfil their obligations before the citizens, which also led to the protests on the part of mortgage payers (*ipotecniki*). Reviewing the causes, mechanisms, and implications of land squatters, *ipotecniki*, and other social groups will help understand the dynamics of collective action around housing issues in Central Asia.
- Healthcare provision: State retrenchment in the healthcare system has led to a deterioration of the universal access to health services for the population of Central Asia. In response, non-State structures – local NGOs, religious organizations, communities – have filled the void left by the State in healthcare both in terms of medical services and health promotion. The conference will review the types, origins, and dynamics of social mobilizations dedicated to healthcare, including various non-governmental organizations, professional associations, communities, initiative groups dealing with issues such as providing medical services, distributing medicines, raising awareness on the risks of HIV/AIDS among groups at risk (drug users, etc.)
- Social Support: the erosion of welfare State has impacted on social benefits provided to the weakest categories of people: orphans, elders, disabled, families with many children, single mothers, unemployed people, etc. For instance recent reforms to increase the retirement age for women and decrease maternity leave payments caused social unrests in Kazakhstan. In addition to these commonly accepted social categories, Central Asian States have to deal with special groups inherited from their Soviet past: the veterans of WWII (1941-1945), the veterans of Soviet Afghan war (1979-1989), cleaners of Chernobyl nuclear plant (*chernobylcy*), victims of nuclear tests in Semipalatinsk, victims of the pollution of Baikonur Cosmodrome (*antigeptil*), inhabitants of the dried Aral Sea region, etc. In a comparative perspective, the conference will analyse how the erosion of the welfare support has influenced the mobilization and claims of these categories of citizens across Central Asian States.
- Equity to education: Central Asia's education system is a legacy of the communist principle of free mass education, where every child had the right to an instruction in his/her mother tongue. The collapse of the Soviet Union has jeopardized the federal system of education and each State is now responsible for the provision of a very costly multi-lingual education. In the context of a “de-ideologization” of pedagogic contents, the erosion of welfare State has considerably affected the quality of education in Central Asia, in terms of textbooks supply as well as teachers' qualification. The conference will therefore address equity to education in multilingual post-Soviet Central Asia. How parents' organizations have responded to the deterioration of education in schools, in particular in minority-language schools (i.e. schools where the tuition language is not the State language)? Which form did social mobilisations take in their struggle for equal education?

A Gathering of Academic and Professional Experts

The conference aims to bring together academics and practitioners from professional organizations to spur cooperation and mutual research. It invites scholars from different disciplines including those focusing on Central Asian politics, anthropology, sociology, history, public administration, etc. both from the region and other countries.

All participants will contribute in a joint effort to explore the impact of the welfare State erosion on collective action and understand its dimensions, directions, and dynamics in Central Asia.

Technical details

The working language will be English and Russian.

There is no fee to attend the conference. Coffee breaks and meals will be covered for all participants.

Travel expenses and accommodation will be covered fully for Central Asian participants (except Kazakhstan), and in part for other international participants in the limit of available funds.

Application procedure

Send a 300-500 word abstract and the attached applicant fact sheet to kimep2015@gmail.com

Accepted languages: English and Russian.

Submission deadline: March 1st, 2015.

Authors will be informed of the selection results by mid-March 2015.

Selected participants will be required to send full papers (app. 5,000 words) by May 10, 2015.

Best papers will be selected for a collective publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Scientific Committee

Dr. Dina Sharipova, Assistant Professor (KIMEP University, Almaty),

Dr. Gulnara Dadabayeva, Associate Professor (KIMEP University, Almaty),

Dr. Adil Nurmakov, Assistant Professor (KIMEP University, Almaty),

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Dr. Olivier Ferrando, Associate fellow (CERI-Sciences po, Paris) & Director of IFEAC, Bishkek