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The ‘Ideational Regionnes’: Case of Central Asia

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The main aim of this Working Paper is to invite the researchers working on the regionalism in former USSR to venture deeper into the discussion on inter-state cooperation and ‘regionness’ of Post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and thus open the door to the ideational domain of narrations about the state and the region. Alasdair MacIntyre writes “I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”¹. Similarly, the ideational space of Central Asia offers insightful prospects at the narratives about the region within the official discourses of the states that comprise it. However, the notes of caution should be made. The difficulty of dissecting, deciphering and measuring this ideational realm lies in the intangible nature of the object of analysis. How does one separate regional identity? How does one measure its level of embeddedness across the region? What is the relationship between the discourses on the region and discourses on the state? All these questions require long-term research that has not been fully addressed in the studies on regionalism in Central Asia.

Writing about, and analyzing, the phenomenon of regional integration in post-Soviet Central Asia is thought-provoking, if not to say intricate, against the backdrop of: institutionalizing and formalizing Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia, involving two regional states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and a new aspiring member Tajikistan; *One Road, One Belt* initiative by China; presidential successions in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; the crisis in Ukraine, which keeps Central Asian leaders silent while their domestic constituencies remain divided and unable to wholly develop their vision and reaction to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, two former “brotherly republics” of the USSR; the presence of ISIS in Syria and increasing numbers of Central Asians joining the call²; and, finally, Afghanistan after

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 216.

² According to John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery in “Why Do Central Asians Join Isis?”, “estimates of their numbers range widely—from the conservative 1,000, based on official figures from the five post-Soviet republics, to the speculative 2,000 to 4,000 cited by the ICG.” <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/excas/2015/07/17/isis/>

the withdrawal of international military troops. These international events contribute to the context of the calls for cooperation and integration and, as a result, should appear conducive to the closer inter-state cooperation. Yet, the reality is rather different.

The two and a half decades of constructing Central Asia have resulted in various regional cooperation formats. Among the latest works that offers a comprehensive overview of the regional organizations is the working paper by Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse entitled “Regional Organizations in Central Asia: Patterns of Interaction, Dilemmas of Efficiency.”³ The authors categorize these organizations in eight clusters, which include Central Asian Organizations and Treaties; Post-Soviet organizations; China-led regional organizations; European and Transatlantic organizations and programs; Islamic organizations, West Asian and South Asian organisations; United Nations Institutions and programmes and regional financial institutions. The incentive for the existence of these organizations is worth analyzing, and especially through the ‘eyes and ears’ of Central Asian foreign policy circles to see how they, in turn, see their roles in these processes. Illustratively, integration projects led by Russia at a point in time where it is becoming increasingly isolated from the major power clubs, and turns its eye to non-European, or rather “non-Western”, partners, and attempts to influence its former Soviet subjects, appears to be providing new impetus for these initiatives. Louise Fawcett writes, “if regionalism has expanded to meet new demands and needs, it has also prospered in a more permissive international environment where regions have been freer to assert their own identities and purposes.”⁴ What identities and purposes do we find in the discourses on states among these five Post-Soviet republics? And how do they influence the ideational construction of the region?

Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres (translated from Spanish ‘Tell me with whom you walk, and I will tell you who you are’). This Mexican proverb cuts straight to analytical angle of looking at the regional formats. If we were to translate it into the language of International Relations, it would suggest that the alliances/bilateral cooperation frameworks that the states create, or become members of, tell us what narratives these states tell about themselves and what identities they represent there. In one sense, this is not a novel idea. Normative competition among states exists and it can become a “stumbling block” to improved

³ Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, “Regional Organizations in Central Asia: Patterns of Interaction, Dilemmas of Efficiency”, Working Paper No. 10, 2012, Graduate School of Development, Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Central Asia.

⁴ Louise Fawcett, “Regionalism and the Changing International Order in Central Eurasia”, *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 80, no. 3, (2004), pp. 429-446, p. 439.

relations.⁵ The non-interference in the internal affairs of a state, emphasis on the sovereignty and, subsequently, the protection of borders and securitization of the discourses of the common global security threats of terrorism and fundamentalism are few defining characteristics of Central Asian security perceptions in general. An example of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is perhaps most telling as it was often mentioned as a ‘league of dictators’⁶. Nevertheless, if we were to move beyond an analysis of these organizations which is based on the regime types of their member states, and address the issue from the viewpoint of questioning the identities of those states in these organizations, and the influences these narratives exert on these organizations, we could arrive at deeper and thicker explanations of the nature and processes of cooperation within these organizations. Such a discussion is aimed at furthering the already existing Neorealist explanations with an attempt to capture the ways in which all these material concepts are *understood* and *employed* by state officials speaking on behalf of the states they represent, through their respective foreign policies towards the region. Moving to a more constructivist understanding of it as a process that is constantly re-created and formalized, we are equipped with an additional tool that is not always easily measurable in material terms, but that is equally useful to measure qualitatively, and that could, conceivably, offer more insights into the ‘unquantifiable’ dimensions of the analysis.

In this discussion it becomes essential to look at the concept of ‘regionness’ of Central Asia, which is “the process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject, capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region”.⁷ Regionness, according to Bjorn Hettne, denotes the constructed nature of regions and it calls for thicker and deeper explanations that are beyond the classical definition of a region as a group of states that share geographic proximity and economic and infrastructural interdependence. Central Asia’s “becoming rather than being is thus what is focused upon in this context”.⁸ The concept does not look at the region as an actor that interacts with other region-actors, but it rather opts for “looking at the actors, practices and processes of social and political interaction that define the region not as a unitary actor but as “spaces or arenas for

⁵ Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, “Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?” Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House Briefing Paper, August 2012, REP BP 2012/01, p. 14.

⁶ Robert Kagan, “League of Dictators” Washington Post, April 30, 2006 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/28/AR2006042801987.html>

⁷ Bjorn Hettne and Frederick Soderbaum, “Theorising the Rise of Regionness”, *New Political Economy*, Vol.5, no. 3, (2000), pp. 457-473, p. 469.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 471.

action”⁹, where narratives are showcased and enacted. Having established the frame where region is an arena for dialogue of narratives, it is important to look at the specific behavioral actions that these states engage in and their symbolic meanings. Since being a state and acting as a state is important, sovereignty becomes central vis-à-vis the region and the interactions within it.

Illustratively, analyzing regional cooperation and regionalism projects in Central Asia, Alexander Cooley writes that the membership of Central Asian countries in these projects provides them with juridical sovereignty through the mutual recognition of their respective authorities and “a steady diet of regional summits and cooperative initiatives also allow these leaders to regularly emphasize their foreign policy profiles and agendas to a domestic audience and captive media.”¹⁰ The author argues that though the international community maintains the mantra of the need for regional cooperation in Central Asia, “the preservation of national borders, as it turns out, is a key part of the region’s local rules.”¹¹ While sovereignty and physical expression of it through borders is important for Central Asian elites, there are also key factors in the routinization of the self-narratives of those states that influence their stances on regional cooperation.

Ted Hopf argues that where interests are absent one should look at the social practices and structure, since “the social practices that constitute an identity cannot imply interests that are not consistent with the practices and structures that constitute that identity”.¹² The practice of virtual regionalism as “a form of collective political solidarity with Russia against international political processes or agendas that are interpreted as challenging politically incumbent regimes and their leaders”¹³ hints at the absence of clearly defined mutual interest in creating a Central Asian union. On the interests derived from identities, Hopf writes that US intervention in Vietnam was consistent with multiple US identities, “great power, imperialist, enemy, ally, and so on,” and consequently “durable expectations between states require intersubjective identities that are sufficiently stable to ensure predictable patterns of behavior.”¹⁴ The question here is, then, what lies in the self-articulation processes of these state identities in the region that provokes virtual regionalism and the repeated rhetorical spells of

⁹ Pia Riggirozzi, “Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis”, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 17, no. 4, (2012), pp. 421-443, p. 423.

¹⁰ Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, p. 151.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ted Hopf, “The promise of constructivism in international relations theory”, p. 176.

¹³ Roy Allison, “Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia”, p.186.

¹⁴ Ted Hopf, “The promise of constructivism in international relations theory”, p. 174.

cooperation. Cooley's argument about mutual recognition through regional fora is essential, however, we need to look deeper into the narratives by states about the region.

Comparatively, if we look at other regions, Kuniko Ashizawa traces the role of Japan's self-recognition and self-narrative in regional policies and how a relatively inactive regional policy based on bilateral ties changed to a more self-assertive stance of Japan in creating APEC and ARF. The author's finding points to a set of conception of Japan as "the sole member of the West in Asia" and as "a one-time aggressor in the region" that changed the perception of the role of the state in the region.¹⁵ Ashizawa writes:

In the process of conceptualizing a regional order, the concept of Japanese state identity as perceived by foreign policymakers – a "dual member of Asia and the West" (in both the APEC and the ARF cases) and a "past aggressor in Asia" (in the ARF case) – manifested prominently in their thinking. These particular concepts of state identity generated specific values – the US-in value (APEC and the ARF), the Asian – model value (APEC) and the reassurance value (the ARF), respectively, which together shaped Japanese foreign policymakers' preference for the Asia-Pacific multilateral institution-building, resulting in their respective initiatives for APEC and the ARF.¹⁶

The author analyzes the change of perceptions based on the reflections on the part of Japanese foreign policy makers about the tiers foreign policy in the early 1990s. The reasons for these tiers evolved from the reflections on self-recognition after the end of the Cold War keeping the bilateral US-Japan relationship as one of the tiers and categorizing the relations with other states in other relevant tiers to maintain the opportunity for all possible arrangements open. Is there a Central Asian parallel? In fact, the Central Asian regional cooperation is tiered as well. It has following analogous tiers: Russian (CIS, CSTO) and Chinese-Russian (SCO) and Western (OSCE, NATO PfP) and a tier through UN agencies and projects as well as a separate tier with bilateral agreements of states with US, Russia, China, Turkey, Japan, Afghanistan and Iran.

To illustrate the argument further let us look at Kyrgyz Republic, a natural case study of a state with a membership in practically all regional organizations. The Foreign Policy Concept of Kyrgyz Republic of 2007 is more explicit about the "spaces of foreign policy",¹⁷ dividing it into the regional, continental (Eurasian) and global. The document includes references to Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as neighboring states with which

¹⁵ Kuniko Ashizawa, "When Identity Matters: State Identity, Regional Institution-Building, and Japanese Foreign Policy", *International Studies Review* Vol. 10, no.3, (2008), pp. 571-598, p. 574.

¹⁶ Kuniko Ashizawa, *Japan, the US, and Regional Institution-Building in the New Asia: When Identity Matters* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 195-196.

¹⁷ "Prostranstvo vneshney politiki" is the formulation in Russian, which literally translates into the "space of foreign policy".

Kyrgyzstan tries to establish good neighborly relations.¹⁸ Similarly to Turkmenistan's foreign policy conception, there is a reference in the text to developing a transit potential in "global and regional flows of West-East, North-South as an air cargo terminal and export center of Eurasia and it seeks to receive the status of a "free country" with market economy in the international rankings."¹⁹ The regional dimension re-appears further in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development for 2013-2017, which contains a section on New Understanding of Foreign Policy and it states the need for:

The deep reboot in the relations with neighboring countries – Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as the exit into the new level of strategic partnership with Russian Federation – the main player of the integration processes that are gaining momentum in the framework of the CIS. This is a priority direction of our foreign policy.²⁰

The geographic space for the location of the state narrative is clear and it includes the neighbors and reflects the importance of Kazakhstan and China. If we took the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and applied it to Kyrgyzstan, then its narrative to the region is indeed "half-ours and half-someone else's",²¹ it is an *internally persuasive discourse* (a literary concept used by Bakhtin) that "enters into inter-animating relationships with new contexts"²² of regional settings ascribing meanings to the partnerships it forms with states in the region.

For Kyrgyzstan the objectives of cooperating with NATO were to develop its defense policy and carry a reform in the military; peace making within the framework of the Centrasbat (Central Asian Battalion); border control and strengthening borders; mountain rescue and mountain rifle services and raising the general professional qualifications and the language of the military personnel.²³ Further, if we were to cast a look at the membership of the state in regional security institutions, we are to find more insights. Referring to Gregory Gleason's categorization of international cooperation in Post-Soviet space along three lines, constitutionalism with compact on norms, functionalism, and hegemony,²⁴ Adam Weinstein

¹⁸ Foreign Policy Concept of Kyrgyz Republic adopted on 10 January 2007. International Institute of Strategic Studies. <http://www.iisr.ru/kvpvkg.html>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "New Understanding of Foreign Policy" based on the National Strategy of Sustainable Development of KR for 2013-2017, Article 2, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic <http://mfa.gov.kg/contents/view/id/31>

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, pp.345-346.

²² Ibid, p. 346.

²³ "Kyrgyzstan v mirovom soobshestve" ("Kyrgyzstan in World Community"), Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, Department of History, Culturology and Advertisement http://www.history.krsu.edu.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=479%3A---&catid=24&Itemid=56&limitstart=13

²⁴ Gregory Gleason, "Inter-state Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum", pp. 1077-1095.

writes that “the CSTO’s evolution demonstrates the current salience of hegemony as a binding force in the post-Soviet space, it is not clear how stable and lasting that hegemony will be as a basis for the future cooperation.”²⁵ Hegemony entails a certain discourse of power and since the CSTO is a Russian creation the organization is inescapably faced with endorsing a narrative of Post-Soviet styled collective security. Kyrgyzstan’s official interest in the CSTO is based on the vision of the organization as a “mechanism of regional security, multilateral cooperation in military-economic, scientific-technical and production spheres, in the fight against the new security threats as well as in the foreign policy coordination and the training of cadres for specialized relevant organs.”²⁶

Kyrgyzstan appealed to the CSTO during June 2010 to seek assistance in the inter-ethnic conflict, however, the answer of Dmitry Medvedev, who was participating in the SCO Summit in Tashkent, was that the CSTO mandate does not allow the interference into the internal affairs of the state.²⁷ Valentin Bogatyrev notes that the main force that holds Kyrgyzstan as part of the CSTO “are not so much relation with Russia, but as a matter fact the relations towards Russia.”²⁸ The author argues that despite the fact that Moscow forgot about Kyrgyzstan for the first ten years of independence, and despite the sobering pragmatism of the current Russian leadership, the majority of the country is still related well towards Russia. “No one wants the presence of Russian or any other foreign military” writes Bogatyrev, “but in case of emergency it is the protection by Russian army that is seen as most acceptable and feasible”.²⁹ The general patterns are similar to what Ó Tuathail observed in the US responses to the war in Bosnia: that there are constant fundamental disagreements over “the development of geopolitical storylines, internal tensions and incoherencies in geopolitical scripts, and the ways in which the foreign policy process defines ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’”.³⁰ The narratives of states do not converge on the geopolitical significance of the region aside from the repetition

²⁵ Adam Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization", p. 176.

²⁶ “Kyrgyzskaya respublika i ODKB” (“Kyrgyz Republic and the CSCTO”), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic, 27 July 2016 <http://www.mfa.gov.kg/contents/view/id/97>

²⁷ Vitaliy Volkov, “Mandat ODKB ne dayet osnovaniy vmeshivatsya v vo vnutrennie dela Kyrgyzstana” (“CSTO Mandate Does Not Allow Interference in the Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan”), *Kabar*, 12 June 2010 <http://www.kabar.kg/rus/interview/full/19322>

²⁸ Valentin Bogatyrev, “Pochemu Kyrgyzstan ne vidit alternative ODKB” (“Why Kyrgyzstan Does Not See the Alternatives for the CSTO?”), Centre for Information and Analysis of the Laboratory of Socio-Political Development of Countries of Near Abroad, 19 February 2013 <http://ia-centr.ru/expert/15213/>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The case of the United States’ Response to the War in Bosnia”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 21, (2002), pp. 601-628, p. 605.

of the statements about common threats to the region stemming from Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and drug-trafficking.

While states are socialized by the international system and while “norms, rules and decision form the outside the region are an integral part of the institutional context in which regional politicians operate, influencing their professional socialization as well as their opportunity structure”³¹ there are also other ideational influencing factors that require further efforts. The concept of region-building requires the regions to have more features to be in common than language, history and culture. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, looking at Iran and Syria as middle powers in the regional system, argue that foreign policy goals cannot be fully grasped without looking at the conceptions of roles, shaped by history and geography and the regimes that were conceived in the movements against Western penetration tend to “retain some aspiration to ‘organize the regional system’ against this penetration” by seeking the status of region’s middle powers.³² Their foreign policies are then directed “to balance external powers and their regional proxies and to create regional spheres of influence as buffers against external penetration.”³³ The ontologies in Central Asia do not contain the element against penetration of foreign powers into the region, as they do not see the region as an important common value that requires preservation. The region-construction or region-building similar to the EU requires

not only changes in political organization, but also changes in structures of meaning, that is the development and redefinition of political ideas, common visions and purposes codes of meaning, casual beliefs, and world views that give direction and meaning to capabilities and capacities – in effect, the narrative-based production of spaces for state regulation.³⁴

The organizations that appear to be capable of propagating the security of structures appeared to be SCO and CSTO, the former with its proclaimed fight against three evils of extremism, terrorism and fundamentalism, the latter through its Russian hegemonic discourse. However, since both are focused on their reading of non-interference and “placing of the principle of non-interference at the heart of the SCO’s geopolitical identity in itself applies certain limitations on its ability to serve as an active regional security actor” and it acts as “a reaction against

³¹ Klaus Stoltz, “The Political Class and Regional Institution-Building: A Conceptual Framework”, *Regional and Federal Studies* Vol.11 no.1, (2001), pp. 80-100, p. 84.

³² Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 198.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alun Jones, “Narrative-Based Production of State Spaces for International Region Building: Europeanization and the Mediterranean”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 96 no. 2, (2006), pp.15-431, p. 417.

international condemnation and punishment for their domestic policies aimed at regime security”.³⁵

The efforts of development agencies to foster cooperation are often associated with modernization rhetoric and argumentation. Erik Ringmar brings forth an example of the so-called Third World and Islamic countries, “according to the modernizers’ story – and according to the many Western scholars and aid agencies who help ghost-write it – there states are ‘backward’ or ‘underdeveloped’ and must ‘catch up’ with the ‘developed’ countries; move from ‘darkness’ and ‘obscurantism’ to ‘enlightenment’ and ‘reason’, that is, to embrace democracy and a capitalist economic system.”³⁶ This approach has been adopted in the way that the agencies ask for more transparency and cooperation and strive to more cooperation. For instance, BOMCA’s goals involve intra- and inter-regional cooperation between the border agencies of the Central Asian states, which includes cooperation of law enforcement agencies present at the borders between each other internally within a state and externally with their counterparts in the neighboring states, thus paving the way to the acceleration of EU-like “free movement of goods and people”. This would require the opening of the borders to the neighbors for the states, whose ontologies are not socialized to view the significance of neighborhood. Kyrgyzstan is faced with its storylines to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, having been drawn into the EEU by Russia and Kazakhstan still seeks aid and donor investment outside of the region.

The regionalization in Central Asia entails production of new geographical and political space with relevant norms, ideas and values, in addition to the geographic proximity, common languages and common historical and cultural reference points. Michael Keating notes that regional norms form a “system of action to frame issues and proposals” in the “space recognized by actors” where they agree on decisions that they find legitimate for this system and space.³⁷ The recognition of Central Asia as space for action requires it being inter-woven within the narrative of the state’s self-articulation. Europeanization, by which it is meant to include a multi-dimensional “diffusion of distinctive forms of political organization and governance, and the promotion of European “solutions” outside of EU territorial space” to

³⁵ Stepher Aris and Aglaya Snetkov, ““Global Alternatives, Regional Stability and Common Causes”: the International Politics of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its Relationship to the West”, *Eurasian Geography and the West*, Vol.54 no.2, (2013), pp. 202-225, p. 216.

³⁶ Erik Ringmar, "On the ontological status of the state", *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 2, no.4 (1996), pp. 439-466, p. 457.

³⁷ Michael Keating, "The invention of regions: Political restructuring and territorial government in Western Europe" in Neil Brenner and Bob Jessop, Martin Jones and Gordon MacLeod (eds.) *State/Space: A Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), pp. 256-277, p. 257.

motivate “change in the rational and structures of State action”,³⁸ has been exercised through the US and EU as well as UN, ADB and World Bank projects.

The reality of the absence of one organization where all five Post-Soviet states cooperate shows that “international region building is characteristically messy, problematic, and deeply contested.”³⁹ While the space for the dialogism, “constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others”⁴⁰ still exists, no regional format has been able to foster the dialogism of state narratives with meta-narrative of the regional cooperation. Instead, the discussion of cooperation is left to the diplomatic routines, which, as Vincent Pouliot aptly puts, is not equaled to mathematic calculations involving strategic thinking and rational thinking, but where the emphasis is on “the very practical and inarticulate nature of diplomacy”⁴¹ leaving few opportunities for change.

Cooperation in the region of Central Asia is a cooperation between the representatives and the *representations* of states in the form of their identities. The specific character of the inter-state cooperation in this region is that of the closed borders and the emphasis on sovereignty, where cooperation discussion is carried out formally through the means of diplomatic meetings and, as a consequence, the formal meetings of the representatives of the state where “each speech is an identity-building project, with the resulting text serving as an instantiation of the Ministry itself”⁴². Therefore, the dialogue is between these representations and between the ontologies within which the states imagine themselves to be located. Kyrgyzstan looks at the region pragmatically as an area of vulnerabilities, and therefore it self-articulates as a state in need of international assistance to help it sustain its unique status in an otherwise unpredictable region. At the same time, the internal instability of a “small” and relatively “free” state presents challenges to the formation of a coherent state-articulated message to the domestic and foreign audiences. In addition, the actual reality of being physically dependent on the energy resources of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the understanding of its geographical location between Russia and China, forces the state to maintain the neighborhood in its ontology.

³⁸ Alun Jones, "Narrative-Based Production of State Spaces for International Region Building: Europeanization and the Mediterranean", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 96, no. 2, (2006), pp. 415-431, p. 416.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 428.

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 426.

⁴¹ Vincent Pouliot, "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities," p. 257.

⁴² Iver Neumann, "“A speech that the Entire Ministry May Stand For,” or: Why Diplomats Never Produce Anything New," p. 183.

By way of concluding this paper, let me quote local experts on regional cooperation. Discussing the theme of regional cooperation in Central Asia, Valentin Bogatyrev and Muratbek Imanaliev argue that the region is a point of intersection of various cultural and civilizational influences, including Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Russian and Mongolian, and the only common denominator for the region could be found in the ethnography of cuisine.⁴³ Imanaliev illustrates this point with an anecdotal example that if anyone is invited to a house anywhere in Central Asia by any family, irrespective of ethnic or religious background, the likelihood of the following menu is common: a Dungan starter salad “funchoza” is followed by Russian “borsch” and either “plov” or “beshbarmak” (both are local dishes in Central Asia named differently in each state) as a main dish depending on the local preferences. Imanaliev says that when it comes to the understanding of the region, “Central Asia started and ended in Moscow.”⁴⁴ As the discussion shows, there ideational domain of Central Asian cooperation requires further research both in terms of testing the existing theories of regional identity building with Post-Soviet experience of the five states, thus enlarging the empirical dimension with necessary methodological updating revisiting the methodologies and finding the suitable methods of inquiry. The venture into the ideational realm of political imaginations between state representatives would be rewarding to assist both researchers and practitioners to uncover the conceptions of the worldviews and the socialization of the ideas. The attempt is a challenging qualitative endeavor; however, it would uncover an additional layer of regional fabric of Post-Soviet Central Asia. This above discussion, although somewhat brief, was aimed to highlight and sign-post those ideas and invite all those interested in regionalism and regionalization of Central Asia to take note of these abstract notions and ideas that, nevertheless, play crucial role in imagining the state, the region and the world.

⁴³ Muratbek Imanaliev and Valentin Bogatyrev, “Yest li budesh ee u TsA kak regiona?” (“Is there a future for CA as a region?”), Youth4Peace Webinar, 21 March 2016. Video is available at the YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awGJZ0UQd5I>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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