The EU in Central Asia: A Normative Partnership or Great Power Politics?

Panel Presentation
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- Part of a larger research agenda (dissertation).
  - EU “actorness”
  - Normative power?
  - Empirically looking at three case studies:
    1. EU –Russian relations
    2. EU-Iran relations
    3. EU policy on Central Asia

- Problem (paper): Does the constructed EU external identity hold up in its relations and policies with Central Asia?
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- **Research Question**: What are the reasons for the EU’s involvement in Central Asia?

- **Hypotheses**:
  
  **H1**: Foster democratization and good governance; and promote human rights in one of the world’s most authoritarian regions (Normative Power).
  
  **H2**: Energy security and geopolitical/strategic reasons (Great Game continued?)
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- **Main Argument:** Despite the rhetoric about promoting a normative agenda, the EU seems to be engaged in Central Asia for reasons more inline with traditional great power politics or realpolitik.

- **Reasons:**
  - Securing access to the region’s energy resources.
  - Great power competition with Russia, China, Iran and others.
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- **Theoretical Approach:** Critical Geopolitics

  Social reality $\leftrightarrow$ Self-constructed identity

  Actor Behavior

- **Power Projection** – actors engage in cross-border activity to get resources beyond legal borders,...connects domestic society and its institutions to the external world.
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- **Methods**
  - Qualitative analysis of EU text and policies
  - EU Strategy for Central Asia (2007)
    - Normative prospectus
    - Implementation? → Strategic/geopolitical
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Background

– Immediately after independence (1992) PCAs were signed with all five republics in CA.
– Germany most active in CA.
– By late 1990s, EU not very interested.
– Changes by mid 2000’s, Why?
  • Growing interest (and competition) in regions’ energy resources (China & Russia)
  • The war in Afghanistan
– EU Special Rep. for CA established in 2005
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- “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”
  - Adopted in July 2007 by the Council
  - Represented a fundamental shift in its approach to the countries of CA.
    - General political goals
    - Concrete working prospectus
  - Key element of German Presidency’s external relations agenda (2007).
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• Adoption of Strategy influenced by three factors:
  – Ongoing war in Afghanistan (logistic supplies)
  – Andijan Uprising in Uzbekistan in May 2005
  – Concern for energy diversification following Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis in 2006.

• Broad range of objectives:
  – Stability and prosperity
  – Attention to common security challenges (migration, terrorism, organized crime, and human, arms and drug trafficking).
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• Normative concerns also highlighted
  – Political dialogue
  – “results-orientated” human rights dialogue
  – Rule of Law initiatives

• Supported by 750 million Euros in assistance
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• Achievements after three years:
  – Most emphasis has been put on security challenges and energy dialogue.
  – Little on the normative agenda: Human rights and good governance initiatives.

• The Paris Ministerial Forum on Security Challenges (September 2008)
  – Consolidation of security relations and establish lasting cooperation on security issues
  – “Narrowly drawn notions of security…with human rights and democracy promotion taking a back seat”.
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- EU Senior officials have added to the impression that the normative agenda is not a top priority in EU-Central Asia relations.

    - Terrorism
    - Extremism
    - Energy
    - Human rights and good governance “pushed down”.

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• If not normative concerns, then why is the EU in Central Asia?
  – A modern “great game”? Russia, China, Iran, India, the U.S. all present in CA…why not the Europeans?!
  – Energy security – normative concerns not primary.
  – Terrorism - fear of Islamic radicalization in CA.
  – Organized crime and drug trafficking.
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• Evidence mounts towards great power strategy.
  – Is there agency here?
    • Critical geopolitics: feedback mechanism between social reality, constructed identity and behavior.
    • EU may be acting in a traditional, great power manner in Central Asia due to political and geo-strategic dynamics brought about by the other external actors and conditions in the region; this behavior may then, in turn, have an effect on the identity of the EU as global actor.