

POST-SOVIET DIS-INTEGRATION & DIS-CONNECTIONS (1991-2016)

CERI – IFEAC – IFG – Paris 8

I - Rationale of the conference

25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this conference aims at investigating its transversal consequences from two original standpoints: patterns of integration/disintegration combined to logics of connection / disconnection. These issues have various expressions in societal, normative, linguistic, regional or international fields.

The conference will hence tackle a general question: how do political choices, economic contingencies or social phenomena foster or disrupt all kinds of links throughout the post-soviet area?

In this respect, interdisciplinary dialogue might prove extremely productive.

II - Analytical framework: dis-integration or dis-connection?

This conceptual framework paves the way for stimulating analysis both in geopolitical and sociological terms.

As a matter of fact, « integration » is a classical feature of geopolitics and IR, especially when « regional multilateralism » is concerned (Myllonas 2012). Here, one can examine the creation or fragmentation of integrated cooperation among states. Since 1991, post-Soviet countries strove to maintain economic and political links, such as the CIS, even if bilateral and regional formats were privileged (Duchêne 1993): GUAM, Eurasian Economic Union etc. Nowadays, there is no forum which would gather all of the former Soviet republics. Some countries have sought to keep connections with Russia (Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tadjikistan, Armenia), while others have chosen a more disconnected path (Parmentier 2014), such as Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan or Georgia. Finally, some have focused on European integration (Baltic states), European Neighborhood Policy (Moldova) or neutrality (Turkmenistan). Of course, in this respect, Ukraine is even more problematic and its case has to be investigated thoroughly. In the meantime, mini-lateral formats started to become significant, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Consequently, it seems that fragmentation is prevailing. In response to that, integration projects have emerged, notably the Eurasian Economic Union, now comprising five member States, with Tajikistan negotiating its participation.

These evolutions confirm theoretical hypotheses, such as Höttne & Söderbaum's (2000), who posit that the emergence of sovereign states, based on nation-building, consolidates domestic territories and generates inward policy orientation, hence a lower level of regional integration. But after a first declining phase, a more outward move can be observed in terms of economic cooperation or political negotiation. Krapohl & Fink (2013) also demonstrated that historical or cultural links were never sufficient for such integrative dynamics: there must be some logic of market creation. But within the broad post-Soviet space, some states have developed links with China, others with the EU, which results in centrifugal trends. In Central Asia, inter-state trade only represents 3% of total trade, while various international actors such as China with its Silk Road Belt or the US with the New Silk Road Initiative push for more extraversion.

In the meantime, information networks followed a process of reconfiguration. The circulation of people and goods did change as well. This situation questions the legacy of infrastructures and flow patterns dating back to Soviet times, which were relying on a specific territorial setting. Due to the centrality of its cyberspace infrastructure, Russia is now at the core of digital flows, and has become a truly global data hub, controlling significant shares of the digital economy in post-Soviet states.

But is there still a post-soviet space? As we have just seen, geopolitics and IR demonstrate that scholars might better get rid of the concept or at least reconsider its relevancy. For that particular matter, sociology can be of great help: what about family relations, religion, daily merchant life or national identities (Eriksen 2007)? The concept of « integration » is deeply rooted in sociological tradition thanks to Durkheim, who used it to enlighten social ties, by distinguishing organic and mechanical solidarity. On the one hand, feudal societies are based on a similarity principle, on the other hand, modern societies rely on interdependence among people and groups, because of the division of labor in society. Shared beliefs and practices allow the affiliation to common goals and generate solidarity. But when socialization vectors change, with the implementation of new linguistic policies for instance, this can induce frustration or unease. This conference will be an opportunity to revisit this approach within post-soviet societies.

Moreover, Parsons (1937) analyzed integration of cultural norms as a fundamental basis for social groups. Integration and disintegration phenomena hence have an explanatory value, for example, to comprehend relations between small businesses and the government (Özcan 2010). This conference will thus invite scholars to trace connections between segments of society: Facebook, VKontatke, Instagram and Twitter have an impact on domestic life or citizenship in authoritarian settings, while politicians, such as in Kazakhstan, actively promote *e-government*,

Human groups experience various dynamics which make them more or less integrated, consistent etc. Connection and disconnection, integration or disintegration lie at the very core of social, political and economic processes. When looking over all human societies identified by archeology since millennia, one discovers that 80% of them were finally disintegrated. Indeed, our two conceptual frameworks are fit to reopen stimulating debates about raises and falls of empires or civilizations (Teune 2011).

III - Expected themes for paper proposals

Building upon these considerations, a variety of topics can be tackled through the lenses of integration/disintegration and connection/disconnection. Paper proposals, drawing on recent fieldwork, opening new theoretical prospects or offering comparisons are particularly welcomed.

Here is a indicative list of potential topics

- Regional integration and multilateral diplomacy (EEU, SCO, CSTO etc.)
- The integration of post-soviet states in the globalization of the economy
- Articulations between socio-economic integration, consumption and citizenship
- Migration flows and their impact on family structure in countries of departure, as well as social integration in countries of arrival
- Connections with global digital networks and state control of the web, smartphones etc.
- Ethnic, linguistic, sexual, religious minorities and their social integration
- Protest and discontent, social mobilization
- Religious integrism and fundamentalism
- Social stratification, generational issues and how people view social change
- Citizens' connectedness and collective action through social media

Calendar

July 1st: deadline for submitting abstract and CV

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July 15: acceptance notification

September 30: deadline for submitting papers

November 21-22: conference in Paris

Working languages: English & Russian

Scientific committee

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