Central Asia during the pandemic: probable consequences for the region

Webinar

The DOC, together with the French Institute for Central Asian Studies, is planning to hold a webinar on the topic “Central Asia during the pandemic: probable consequences for the region.”

The current COVID-19-pandemic has not only had a significant impact on Central Asian countries themselves, but will also have a knock-on impact on neighboring countries.

Available information on the situation in these countries is often unreliable, and there is almost no official reporting from countries like Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

Regional and cultural specifics of these societies (including large families and inter-clan relations) make the introduction of effective self-isolation measures difficult, meaning that stricter measures are required in order to contain the mobility of the population. This could inevitably have a lasting impact on the contemporary way of living. Another complicating factor is the return en masse of labour migrants, as well as local religious practices. While the total number may have declined, many Muslims continue to visit mosques, especially for Friday prayers. Representatives of the Islamist opposition are calling for this.

The situation is challenging, and volatile. If we consider the consequences (particular socio-political) for the region, we see two major scenarios.

The first scenario, in which it will be possible to contain the situation and to move towards easing the restrictive measures in the short-term, will likely not bring any fundamental changes to the societies, and local political elites might try to strengthen their positions by declaring victory.

The second scenario, in which the spread of the virus continues, will see huge casualties and an economic catastrophe, which in turn will lead to a social explosion. This will play into the hands of the radical opposition.

Questions for discussion:

1. How did the measures taken by local governments, religious authorities and organizations influence the religious life of the region: visits to mosques, fasting, burial, hajj, etc.?
2. What will be the impact on networks for Islamic solidarity (especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan associated with Islamic entrepreneurs), as well as on charitable Islamic organisations and associations? How are they continuing to operate during the pandemic?

3. Can the massive return of work migrants from Russia who inevitably find themselves unemployed in their homeland lead to serious social consequences?

4. Will the closing of borders affect the rise of radical Islam in the region, and if so, to what extent? Will there be a possible transformation of radical Islam after the pandemic?

5. What political consequences will the pandemic have on the region? Will we see a social explosion, as many experts are predicting?

6. What will be the possible changes in the inter-state relations of Central Asian countries and their neighbours?

Proposed Speakers:

- **Satpaev Dosym**, Professor, Co-founder of the Alliance of Analytical Organizations of Kazakhstan, Member of the Presidium of Kazakhstan Council on International relations;
- **Malikov Kadir**, Member of the Presidential Council of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Director of the Center “Religion, Law and Politics”;
- **Ergashev Bakhtier**, Director at the Center for Research Initiatives “MA’NO”, Tashkent, the Republic Uzbekistan;
- **Abdukhamitov Valijon**, Director of the Center «Research – and – development center of struggle against terrorism and extremism», Russian-Tajik Slavonic University;
- **Catherine Poujol**, Director at the French Institute for Central Asian Studies;
- **Alexey Malashenko**, Chief Researcher at the DOC Research Institute.

The seminar will be held 14th of May at 1 pm CET.

A paper will be published based on the results of the seminar.

This event will be part of an ongoing series of joint activities between the DOC and the French Institute for Central Asian Studies.