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Multilateral Organisations in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Paper proposal for the section: Humanitarian and development aid

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The best-laid plans [...] - Unintended outcomes of development aid in Central Asia

Over the past several decades it has become a heightened strategy of international development assistance to co-operate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This shift in development policy resulted from a disillusionment with classical patterns of development that focused singularly on governmental reform. The expectations turned on the role of NGOs are based on a working assumption that they have good access to local populations, well grounded knowledge of a region or country, a flexible organisational structure, are competent in their subject and more quickly identify problems. Furthermore an increasing number of NGOs in a certain country are identified with a vital civil society and a growing level of democracy.

Despite a growing number of critics that are beginning to express scepticism about NGOs being a panacea for development problems international donor agencies also use this strategy in Central Asia. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the impetus expanded to implement technical and financial assistance, as well as to develop civil society and to foster NGOs with the aim of creating Western-style democratic societies. Donor agencies started what is called "the aid story" or "the grant game" in Eurasia. Simultaneously, research in the same region has begun to challenge this approach. Although the inclusion of NGOs in development policies was initiated to solve problems the overestimation of their role led to new problems.

In this presentation I want to highlight some of the unintended outcomes of foreign aid in Central Asia. In the first part I will discuss the definition of NGOs and their role in development policy. Following I will show the origins and activities of local NGOs in Central Asia. The third part of the paper deals with the activities of donor agencies in Central Asia and the fourth part discusses the results of these activities critically.

Bibliographical note:

Dr. Andrea Berg is currently working as a researcher at the Centre for OSCE Research at the University of Hamburg with the project "Security through democratisation? The case of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan". She graduated from the Department of Political Science at the Free University Berlin. Her M.A. thesis was entitled: "Local networks and public administration in Uzbekistan". She wrote her Ph.D. at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Ruhr-University-Bochum on "Global concepts versus local reality - A study on NGOs in contemporary Uzbekistan". In addition to her research projects she is doing consultancy for development organizations in Central Asia.