

Beyond the Silk Roads: Navigating the complexities of Central Asian relations with the People's Republic of China

Thursday, 19 June 2025 09:00 (1h 30m)

Title: Beyond the Silk Roads: Navigating the Complexities of Central Asian Relations with the People's Republic of China

Abstract: Our panel delves into the evolving dynamics of Central Asia's relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Moving beyond discussions on state-to-state economic and security linkages under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this discussion aims to unpack the multifaceted interactions that characterise contemporary China–Central Asia relations. We present several collaborative papers, which showcase some of the most recent research co-produced by European and Central Asian researchers on the topic. Each speaker will analyse distinct aspects of this relationship, including the political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of China's increasing presence in the region. Key themes will include Sinophobia, threat narratives, and evolving public opinion of China in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Maracchione & Gruffydd-Jones; Neafie et al.); a problematisation of the state capitalism narrative in connection with new Chinese investment in electric vehicles in Uzbekistan (Galdini & Maracchione); and an analysis of Chinese discourse on Central Asian protests to explore the marketisation of autocratic norms (Sciorati). By addressing all layers of engagement, state, business and population, the panel will provide a nuanced understanding of how Central Asians are navigating their complex and often contentious partnerships with the PRC, contributing fresh insights into the broader implications for the region and its people.

Chair: Dr Frank Maracchione, University of Kent and SPERI-University of Sheffield

Papers and participants:

1) "Conceptualising Autocracy Promotion as Commercialisation: Marketising Narratives and Chinese Responses to Central Asian Protests"

Dr Giulia Sciorati, London School of Economic; and Dr Eva Seiwert, MERICS - Mercator Institute for China Studies

2) "Shared Concerns, Distinct Perspectives: Public Opinion on China's Influence in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan"

Dr Jessica Neafie, Nazarbayev University; Dr Frank Maracchione, University of Kent and SPERI Sheffield; Dr Rashid Gabbulhakov, University of Groningen; Khiradmand Sheraliev, American University of Central Asia; and Islam Supyaldiyarov, Suleyman Demirel University, Almaty.

3) "The limits to state capitalism: Chinese investments in EVs in Uzbekistan"

Dr Franco Galdini, University of Birmingham; and Dr Frank Maracchione, University of Kent and SPERI Sheffield

4) "Sinophobia in the Global East: anti-Chinese sentiment and activity in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan"

Dr Frank Maracchione and Dr Jamie Gruffydd-Jones, University of Kent

Track Classification: East Europe and Eurasian Security Working Group