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Pandemic Politics in Central Asia. Authoritarian Contagion

Friday 5 June 2026 13:15 (1h 30m)

Book presentation roundtable: Anceschi, Luca. (2026). Pandemic Politics in Central Asia. Authoritarian Contagion. London: Routledge.

Central Asia experienced a pandemic power grab in 2020-2022: the authoritarian leaderships of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan managed the politics of Covid-19 to ultimately strengthen their control over the region's politics and societies. This book looks at three policy areas wherein this power grab surfaced more noticeably:

- Mobility Control, whereby the regimes, through restrictive legislation enacted in thoroughly repressive fashion, limited the population's freedom of movement and, indirectly, their capacity to protest;
- Authoritarian Information Flows, whereby Covid-related measures ostensibly meant to align broadcast, print, and digital information flows to the governments' pandemic message curtailed even further the freedom of expression of everyday citizens across Central Asia;
- The International Politics of the Pandemic, whereby the three regimes studied here capitalised on a rapidly mutating international environment to strengthen their kleptocratic hold over Central Asia's politics and society, and benefited from the crumbling international order to pursue large-scale deception of their Covid response capacity.

This roundtable advances the conference's call for 'new thinking, new directions' by interrogating how the Covid-19 era empowered authoritarian governance in Central Asia and thus challenges prevailing frameworks in International Studies.

Track Classification: East Europe and Eurasian Security Working Group