

Integration and Everyday Conflict: Ambivalent Borders of the post-Soviet Central Asia

Joni Virkunen, University of Eastern Finland

Eurasian borders are shaped by many simultaneous, often contradictory processes determining the way the state conceptualizes its borders and performs its border governance, i.e. globalization, cross-border interaction and regional integration on one hand, and post-Soviet security concerns, state-building and nationalism on the other hand. In this paper, I will look at the Eurasian borders through Russia and former Soviet republics in Central Asia. The paper not only exemplifies the role of joint history and socio-cultural infrastructure in forming and maintaining long-term contact and cooperation, intensive cross-border interaction and economic ties that is supported by an attempt to create joint Eurasian (economic) space inspired by the European Union. On the other hand, the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are very diverse and politically divided. Here, borders have turned from artificial lines on Soviet maps to utterly confusing and contested areas, with exclaves and enclaves as well as badly governed cross-border water, energy and other challenges that become highly conflicted and, in some cases, ethnicized. It is some of these processes that the paper will look at in more detail.