

## **No. 9 Cultural and other relations - Mapping strategies of Russia, USA and China towards Central Asia**

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## POLICY PAPER

### No. 9 Cultural and other relations Mapping strategies of Russia, USA and China towards Central Asia

September 2018



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## Executive Summary

In this Policy Paper, actual issues of cultural ties of the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) with three world powers (Russia, China and the United States) are gradually analysed. These cultural relations consist of the following areas: shared identity and values, leadership links, foreign media outlets operating in Central Asia, cultural influence, diasporas, financial support to cultural activities and people-to-people cooperation. Each of the above world powers has its own mechanisms and channels for establishing, maintaining, and sometimes strengthening cultural ties with specific countries individually, or with the region in its entirety. The countries of the region in turn have their own preferences and approaches in maintaining cultural ties with each of these three world powers.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline the cultural relationship of all the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) with three world powers, namely Russia, China and the United States. The mapping of this relationship takes into account a variety of categories: shared identity and values, leadership links, foreign media outlets operating, cultural influence, diasporas, financial support to cultural activities and people-to-people cooperation.

Information collected as part of this paper was found through open sources, largely online. Desk-based research was conducted primarily in English. The period examined for this paper is 2007-2017, so as to capture the most recent developments in the region.

This paper outlines key areas of cooperation between the Central Asian states and the world powers in the cultural sphere. The findings of this paper will provide a comprehensive basis for the following analysis of the world powers' cultural relations with the Central Asian countries as well as for policy recommendations for future priorities for European policy-making vis-à-vis Central Asia to be elaborated in the course of the H2020 project "SEnECA – Strengthening and Energizing EU-Central Asia Relations".

## 2. Mapping Central Asia – world powers

### 2.1. Russia

Out of the three world powers examined in this paper, Russia's cultural influence in Central Asia historically was and still is the strongest. Nonetheless, Russian cultural relations with Central Asian states provide more questions than answers. While promoting Russian language, culture, and literature abroad, Russian current political leadership predominantly makes decisions and still relies on common Tsarist and Soviet heritage, including Russian language, popular culture, and political ties. One example is the strong personal connection between the Russian president Vladimir Putin and his Kazakhstani counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev. Regional dialogue platforms and organizations have been initiated as a result of these personal ties, including the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The level of proficiency of Russian in Central Asia differs from country to country, however is overall quite high, due to the aforementioned historical ties. According to Gallup 2013 results, high proficiency is registered in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – 99.9 percent and 87.1 percent respectively. The level of Russian language proficiency in Tajikistan is declining (68.5 percent). In Uzbekistan, the data is inconsistent, with 99.2 percent respondents claiming knowledge of the language.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian language is used by street advertising media, mainly in Tashkent, Almaty and Bishkek. Concerning Uzbekistan, a number of state educational institutions operating in Russian have managed to survive and continue to operate. In the regional centres and Tashkent, there are schools where pupils are being taught in Russian. From 2012, the Uzbekistan Ministry of Justice allowed limited official use of Russian when processing documents in the registry office.<sup>3</sup> Although the Russian language does not have state language status in Uzbekistan, it acts as a second language for the majority of citizens regardless of their nationality.

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<sup>2</sup> Nikita Mendkovich, "Rucckii yazyk nachinaet ukhodit iz stran SNG?" *Russkii Mir*, last modified February 22, 2013, <http://www.russkiymir.ru/publications/86120/>

<sup>3</sup> "Uzbekskim ZAGSam razreshili ispolzovat russkii yazyk," *Lenta.Ru*, last modified November 01, 2012, <https://lenta.ru/news/2012/11/01/language/>

Ethnic Russians have been emigrating from Kyrgyzstan due to many reasons, including social and economic problems, political instability, and to a lesser degree ethnic discrimination and rise of Kyrgyz nationalism. Russian is still an official language according to the Kyrgyz constitution; however it has been replaced in a significant number of preschools, schools and universities by Kyrgyz.<sup>4</sup>

The Russki Mir Fund (“Russian World Fund”) is the most important Russian cultural organisation in the region. Their centres provide broad access to cultural, historical and literary Russian heritage, as well as the methodology and practice of Russian education.<sup>5</sup> The fund is widely represented in Kazakhstan by a network of ‘Russian centres’ in Ust-Kamenogorsk, at the Kazakh-Russian International University in Aktobe, and at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty. Russian centres also operate in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Osh, and Kant) and Tajikistan (four centres within universities of Dushanbe).

The Russian Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation established the program for compatriots (2015-2017), which is aimed at widely promoting consolidation of public associations, information security, maintenance of Russia’s spiritual, cultural and linguistic background in Russian-speaking communities, as well as developing educational, cultural, research religious ties, supporting youth and socially vulnerable compatriots.

The Rossotrudnichestvo Agency offers courses for professional development and Russian language in their Russian Science and Culture Centres.

Currently, there is no jointly with Russia established university in Kazakhstan, such as the Slavic universities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Kazakh-Russian University in Astana, established on the basis of an agreement between the Ministries of Education of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1998, was closed in 2014 due to non-compliance of the educational activity. In 2014, over 28,000 Kazakh students were educated in Russia. In addition, it is considered that almost every fourth international student in Russia comes from Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup>

Orthodox Christmas is an official holiday in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Each year on June 6, the Russians of Kazakhstan celebrate the Russian language day. The date is symbolic, as it is the birthday of the famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin.

Russia’s biggest TV channels, in particular First channel, RTR, Mir, NTV, RenTV, broadcast throughout Central Asia. Russian television in Uzbekistan is available only via cable, and local providers charge the population for access. A number of newspapers and magazines are published in Russian. State TV and radio channels, as well as many private radio stations partially broadcast in Russian. In the case of Turkmenistan, “Neutral Turkmenistan” is the only Russian language daily newspaper in the country, whereas “Turkmenistan” state TV channel is broadcasting in seven different languages, including Russian.

As the majority of Kazakhstan and Central Asian societies still exist within Russian information and media strategy (Russian language, Russian TV, radio and social media such as Odnoklassniki.ru, Vkontakte.ru, Mail.ru, Yandex.ru), there is a potential to influence these communities online.

Ethnic Russians live in all Central Asian countries, but their number and share in the population differ greatly across the region. The largest Russian community lives in Kazakhstan, where it constitutes

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<sup>4</sup> K. Aminov, V. Jensen, S. Juraev, “Language Use and Language Policy in Central Asia,” Central Asia Regional Data Review, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2010, OSCE Academy, [http://osce-academy.net/upload/file/language\\_use\\_and\\_language\\_policy\\_in\\_central\\_asia.pdf](http://osce-academy.net/upload/file/language_use_and_language_policy_in_central_asia.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Russkii Mir, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://www.ruskiimir.ru/>

<sup>6</sup> Anna Gussarova (ed.), “Russian Soft Power in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia): Taken for Granted?” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung/Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies (2017): 7-8, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kasachstan/14108.pdf>

around 20 percent of the population (3.62 million people).<sup>7</sup> They are located mostly in Northern, Central and Eastern parts of the country, bordering Russia. They make up 55 percent of pensioners and just 10-15 percent of children, because young Russians prefer to leave Kazakhstan, and their fertility rates are lower than the Kazakh ones. Around seven percent of Russians are able to read and speak the Kazakh language.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Russian population is primarily concentrated in the Northern part of the country. According to the latest population census of 2015, there are 364,000 ethnic Russians living in the country (six percent of the whole population). In southern Kyrgyzstan, like Osh, Talas and Jalalabad, Russians are the third ethnic minority after Uzbeks and Kurds.

In Tajikistan, ethnic Russians are a third minority group, constituting 0.5 percent of the population, which is around 35,000 people. They live mostly in Dushanbe and the Sughd region. Even though the lack of economic opportunities pushed people to immigrate to Russia, Kremlin's growing military presence in Tajikistan resulted in school networks for children of the Russian military and locals as well.<sup>8</sup>

In Turkmenistan, Russians are among the biggest ethnic minorities, though their number decreased radically after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and currently, according to the estimations, they constitute a negligible community. The UN Committee of the Rights of the Child has numerous reported discrimination against Russians in the country. The new Constitution of 2008 prohibited to have dual citizenship, and starting from May 2015 the dual citizenship of Russia and Turkmenistan will remain valid only in the territory of Russia, and new permits will not be issued.<sup>9</sup>

According to official unpublished data of the Uzbekistan State Committee on Statistics, as of January 1, 2013, 809,000 Russians (2.6 percent of the population) lived in the country. In 2015, the amount of Russians dropped to 650,000 people (1.8 percent of the total population). Most of them were living in Tashkent.

## 2.2. China

China's "soft power" in Central Asia is implemented through four main dimensions: (a) educational programs, including grants and fellowships, (b) Confucius institutions; (c) mass media; and (d) Chinese public funds and other organizations, various economic projects and exhibitions.<sup>10</sup>

The capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, is a key component for spreading the Chinese cultural influence in Central Asia. Since 2010, there is a special base for the dissemination of Chinese language in the neighbouring countries, and this trend will continue to dominate.<sup>11</sup> Until now, around twenty Confucius institutions have been established in Central Asia. In December 2014, a Confucius institute opened in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. There are two Confucius centres in Tajikistan – the first was established in 2009 at the Tajik National University with 10,000 people trained there. The second opened in August 2015 at the Mining and Metallurgy Institute in Chkalovsk, the Sughd region of Tajikistan. In 2017, three Confucius classes were established in Kyrgyz education institutions in Osh

<sup>7</sup> Kazakhstan Population, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics, [http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav\\_externalId/homeNumbersPopulation?lang=ru&\\_adf.ctrl-state=yf6rcnxu7\\_4&\\_afLoop=2070899119590198](http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeNumbersPopulation?lang=ru&_adf.ctrl-state=yf6rcnxu7_4&_afLoop=2070899119590198)

<sup>8</sup> Aleksandr Arefev, "Szhimayushcheesya russkoyazychie," Demoskop Weekly, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2013/0571/tema03.php>

<sup>9</sup> "Dvoinoe grazhdanstvo RF i Turkmenistana: chto dalshe," Zagrandok.ru, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://zagrandok.ru/emi-graciya/dvoinoe/dvoinoe-grazhdanstvo-v-turkmenistane.html>

<sup>10</sup> Karl'ygash Ezenova, "Kitaiskaya 'myagkaya sila'. Realnost ili mif?" *Exclusive*, last modified May 12, 2015, <http://www.exclusive.kz/expertiza/politika/11991/>

<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Sergeev, "Pekin nachinaet Shelkov'yi put v SNG s vysshhego obrazovaniya," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, last modified March 03, 2014, [http://www.ng.ru/economics/2014-03-03/1\\_china.html](http://www.ng.ru/economics/2014-03-03/1_china.html)

– Technological University, Humanitarian Pedagogical Institute and Bilim Lyceum at the State University. In addition, since September 2017, the first Kyrgyz-Chinese school for 1,000 students was built with Chinese investments.

China is expanding its cultural influence in Central Asia by training local students in Chinese universities. However, it is very difficult to find reliable data on the number of students, though the official numbers may seriously differ. Chinese can be learnt in Kazakh and Kyrgyz universities. Kazakhstan is the leader with regard to the amount of students studying abroad. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, as of 2015, the number of Kazakhstani students in China reached 15,000, which means a significant increase by three and a half times over the past ten years. In 2015, the Tajik Ministry of Education and Science reported over 300 Tajik students, who enrolled in Chinese universities. In 2015/2016, China has allocated 64 fellowships for citizens of Tajikistan to study at language courses, 105 fellowships for Bachelor programs and 20 for Master's degree.<sup>12</sup> The emphasis in teaching in China is on learning the Chinese language and culture. In this regard, Beijing is preparing professional translators to work at the Chinese companies, operating in the region. However, Central Asians graduating at Chinese universities often face employment difficulties, as the job market is rather limited to the same Chinese enterprises and companies, operating in the region. Moreover, the quality of Chinese education is recognized as not sufficiently high by the students and experts from Central Asia.

Days of national cultures of Central Asia, as well as a variety of business and cultural activities are regularly held in China. They contribute to the development of bilateral trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation. In Central Asia, China's national goods exhibitions are held annually; Beijing hosts the Kashgar exhibition, and Urumqi is a place for an economic forum with the participation of the Central Asian states.<sup>13</sup>

The Central Television of China has begun broadcasting in Russian from Xinjiang, targeting all Central Asian states. The activities of the "Xinhua News Agency" and the foreign edition of the "People's Daily" were also strengthened through the expansion of Russian-language versions dedicated to the CA audience. In Kazakhstan, there are active branches of the Chinese newspapers, e.g. "People's Daily", "Guangming ribao", "Xinhua" agency, the International Radio of China and the Central Television of China (CCTV). However, the information influence of China in the region is still much lower than that of Russia or the United States, which actively invest in regional mass media that appear in both Russian and national languages.

It is very difficult to find reliable data on the migration from China to Central Asian states and vice versa, as official statistics tend to be controversial and do not correspond with reality in both Central Asia and China. The number of cases of illegal migration has significantly increased over the past five years. For instance, Kazakhstani researchers and state agencies emphasized the difficulties stemming from an unregulated labour migration from China. These problems resulted in the implementation of stricter visa procedures, as well as reduction of number of issued visas. In 2014-2015, the official Chinese edition of "Huangqiu Shibao" reported that 400,000 ethnic Chinese live in Kazakhstan.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of numbers, it is important to mention oralmans (ethnic Kazakhs) and Uighurs that reside in Central Asian states. Many of them originate from China. Currently, the Kazakh government implements a repatriation strategy to integrate oralmans into the society and the labour market, while

<sup>12</sup> Aleksandr Shustov, "Myakaya sila drakona: kak Kitaĭ pŷtaetcyā zavoevat vliyanie v Tsentralnoĭ Azii," *Evrāziya Ėkspert*, last modified January 09, 2018, <http://eurasia.expert/myagkaya-sila-drakona-kak-kitay-pytaetsya-zavoevat-vliyanie-v-tsentralnoy-azii/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Kairat Matrekov, "Kitaĭsŷ v Kazakhstane – est li ugroza?" *365 Info*, last modified March 30, 2017, <https://365info.kz/2017/03/kitaitsy-v-kazahstane-est-li-ugroza/>

providing social and economic opportunities. As of April 1, 2018, 2,545 families arrived in Kazakhstan and got the status of oralman, 43.7 percent of those were from China.<sup>15</sup>

Uighurs are the fifth ethnic minority in Kazakhstan (1.4 percent of the population or 250,000 people), concentrated in the southern part of the country bordering Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The latter is also inhabited by a small Uighur diaspora – around 70,000 people (less than one percent of the population) who actively participate in political life. There is a growing number of fears and phobias in Central Asia regarding China, including the supposedly higher wages of the Chinese migrants, the fear of losing land via lease or sales to China, and even inter-ethnic marriages between local women and Chinese men.

### 2.3. The United States of America

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States were helping the five newly independent states in Central Asia with their transition to market economies and democratic political systems.<sup>16</sup> However, Freedom House ranks only Kyrgyzstan as being partly free, while the other four Central Asian countries are characterized as “not free”.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been recognized as two of the most authoritarian countries in the world. However, the recent tendencies towards liberalization in Uzbekistan, which have been characterised as a new form of authoritarian regime, may correct this evaluation.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, in the case of Kyrgyzstan the national parliament blocked the proposed “foreign agent law”, which would have copied a Russian law restricting international organisations receiving funding from abroad.

Despite the role that values play in the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Central Asia, it is necessary to take into account that the U.S. foreign policy towards the Central Asian regions has been mainly interest driven. Until 2001, these interests were mainly the access to energy resources, the control over weapons of mass destruction and limiting Russian influence, while the strategic importance for the fight against terrorism become prevalent later on.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the Trump administration, it is still unclear how the U.S. foreign policy towards the region will develop in the future.<sup>20</sup> However, taking into consideration Trump’s rhetoric of making deals, it is unlikely that the U.S. approach towards the region will become more value-based and less interest-driven.

The most important format linking the U.S. with Central Asian leaders – in addition to bilateral relations – is the “C5+1 initiative”, which was launched in November 2015 in Samarkand.<sup>21</sup> However, cultural relations were not one of the key areas for cooperation as agreed by the six partners. These are security, economics and environmental challenges. Whether the C5+1 format will be continued under the Trump administration needs to be confirmed in the future. The intended improvement of cooperation among the five Central Asian states has been achieved independently from the future

<sup>15</sup> “Spravka po oralmanam po itogam 1 kvartala 2018 god,” Ministerstvo truda sotsialnoĭ zashchitĭ naseleniya Respubliki Kazakhstan, accessed July 2, 2018, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz/ru/node/349412>

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Rumer/Richard Sokolsky/Paul Stronski, “U.S. Policy Towards Central Asia 3.0,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, last modified January 25, 2016: 3, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>

<sup>17</sup> “Eurasia,” Freedom House, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/regions/eurasia>

<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Schiek, “Uzbekistan wagt sich ein Update,” *SWP-Aktuell* 68 (Oktober 2017): 1, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2017A68\\_ses.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2017A68_ses.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Eugene Rumer/Richard Sokolsky/Paul Stronski, “U.S. Policy Towards Central Asia 3.0,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, last modified January 25, 2016: 3, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>

<sup>20</sup> Anna Gusarova, “The USA and Central Asia: what will be the policy of D. Trump’s administration?” Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR), last modified January 10, 2017, <http://cabar.asia/en/anna-gusarova-the-usa-and-central-asia-what-will-be-the-policy-of-d-trump-s-administration/>; Catherine Putz, “Will the US Ever Get a New Central Asia Policy? Probably not. American interests in the region remain fundamentally tied to interests outside the region,” *The Diplomat*, last modified May 03, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/will-the-us-ever-get-a-new-central-asia-policy/>

<sup>21</sup> “C5+1 Factsheet,” U.S. Department of State, last modified September 22, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/09/274386.htm>

U.S. interest in the format, as the five states continue to meet in the C5 setting even without U.S. guidance.<sup>22</sup>

The U.S. media outlets such as CNN and CNBC, newspapers such as the New York Times and the Washington Post or online media like the Huffington Post have a global outreach. However, there are two limitations with regard to their reception in Central Asia. Most importantly, the news is not published in Russian. While CNN has outlets in Spanish and Arabic, CNBC does not offer foreign language versions of its website. The Huffington Post offers editions in 18 different countries, but none of them is in Russian. Thus, the proficiency in English is a prerequisite for the reception on U.S. media outlets, reducing the number of potential recipients in Central Asia. The coverage of Central Asia by the U.S. media outlets is very limited. For instance, the keyword “Tajikistan” produces only 111 search results in the CNN archive, which covers the time since 2011. The only exception is “Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty”, which is financed by the U.S. government and directly targets the region of Central Asia, for which it offers websites and radio in Russian but also in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek.<sup>23</sup> There are no specific data for each country, but in 2017, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reached an estimated audience of 25.8 million people per week.<sup>24</sup>

The attractiveness of the Western model of development has decreased in recent years in Central Asia and by default, the general perception of the West by citizens in Central Asia has gone down. Comparing data on the favourable perception of the major international actors (China, the EU, Russia, and the U.S.) among Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens reveals that in both countries the U.S. is ranked last of the mentioned actors since 2005.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Central Asia and the U.S. do not share a common cultural heritage or history, while the historic contribution of Central Asia to science and philosophy in ancient times is mainly neglected in the West or its achievements are attributed to the Arabic countries instead.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the influence of the Russian culture is much stronger, due to the common experiences during Tsarist and Soviet times and also the fact that a considerable Russian diaspora lives in Central Asia.

The Central Asian diaspora in the U.S. is rather small. In 2016, 27,570 people born in Kazakhstan and 57,230 born in Uzbekistan were living in the U.S. For the other Central Asian countries, there is no separate data available, but another 66,404 people living in the U.S. were born in other South Central Asian countries.<sup>27</sup>

Under the current U.S. regional development strategy for Central Asia, support for cultural activities and people-to-people contacts is not one of the three development objectives (DO). However, it is covered by DO No. 3, which addresses also citizens and civil society. Despite not being a priority area for the U.S. foreign policy towards Central Asia, considerable funds have been allocated to the objective “Investing in people”. Main recipients of support under this category have been Tajikistan

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine Putz, “Central Asian States Step Up Afghan Diplomacy. Led by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Central Asia is taking a more active role in engaging with Afghanistan,” *The Diplomat*, last modified January 23, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/central-asian-states-step-up-afghan-diplomacy/>

<sup>23</sup> “Sites by region,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/navigation/allsites>

<sup>24</sup> “RFE/RL: Free Media In Unfree Societies,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://press-room.rferl.org/p/6091.html>

<sup>25</sup> Marlene Laruelle/Eric McGlinchey, “Renewing EU and US Soft Power in Central Asia,” *EUCAM Commentary*, no. 28 (October 2017): 1-2, <https://eucentralasia.eu/download/1313/>

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Frederic Starr. *Lost Enlightenment. Central Asia's Golden Age From the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> “Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in the United States. Universe: Foreign-born population excluding population born at sea. 2012-2016 American Community Survey. 5-Year Estimates,” United States Census Bureau, accessed June 20, 2018, [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_11\\_5YR\\_B05006&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_B05006&prodType=table)

and Kyrgyzstan, while Uzbekistan has also received constant amounts of funding, but on a lower level. The U.S. development aid allocated for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is nearly negligible.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Conclusions

All three world powers (Russia, China and the United States) have formal and informal approaches to establish, support and strengthen their “soft power” in Central Asia through instruments of cultural ties with the Central Asian countries.

Of these three world powers, Russia has branched networks of cultural institutions (media, universities, theatres, music and entertainment centres and much more) – the shared history in the Tsar era as well as during the Soviet times has led to an extensive presence of the Russian language, therefore, the Russian influence in the region is very noticeable. While the Russian language still keeps its status as lingua franca in the region, primarily in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, other foreign languages such as Chinese and English are slowly spread throughout Central Asia.

China is step-by-step strengthening its presence through the opening of Confucius institutes or classrooms, increasing quotas for students wishing to study in China. The United States are nurturing an interest of local communities, especially the youth, in the American way of life through university exchanges, the organization of cultural events (concerts, festivals and talk shows), and financial support. The U.S. prefer to focus on other areas of bilateral and regional cooperation, including the C5+1 platform, paying no attention to the “not free” status of the Central Asian countries. Protection of the human rights seem to be no longer on the U.S. agenda in the region.

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<sup>28</sup> “USAID Central Asia. Regional Development Cooperation Strategy 2015-2019,” USAID (October 2014): 3-4, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/RDCSCentralAsia.pdf>; For Kyrgyzstan no data is available for the years 2015 and 2016.

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