

## **Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı**

# **Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier (eds.) 2021, *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe EISCAS, 2021.**

**Sevket Hylton Akyildiz\***

(ORCID: 0000-0001-9545-4432)

**Makale Gönderim Tarihi**

04.12.2021

**Makale Kabul Tarihi**

17.03.2022

## **Atıf Bilgisi/Reference Information**

**Chicago:** Hylton Akyildiz, S., "Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı: Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier (eds.) 2021, *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe EISCAS, 2021.", *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7/1 (Mart 2022): 518-521.

**APA:** Hylton Akyildiz, S. (2022). Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı: Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier (eds.) 2021, *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies*, Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe EISCAS, 2021.. *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7 (1), 518-521.

The open-access book *European Handbook of Central Asian Studies: History, Politics, and Societies* by Jeroen Van den Bosch, Adrien Fauve, Bruno De Cordier (eds.) is a welcome addition to the growing literature

---

\* PhD, SOAS, University of London, Languages and Cultures Department, United Kingdom., [sevket.akyildiz1@gmail.com](mailto:sevket.akyildiz1@gmail.com).  
Dr., Londra Üniversitesi Oryantal ve Afrika Çalışmaları Okulu, Dil ve Kültür Bölümü, Birleşik Krallık.

about Central Asian peoples and societies and their role in world civilisation. This *'student-centred handbook'* is produced for learning, teaching, and research purposes (p. 20).

Bruno J. De Cordier and Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch explain: *'This handbook adheres predominantly to one definition of Central Asia, comprising the five majority-Muslim former Soviet Union ('the FSU') republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan'* (p.21). Situated at *'the crossroads of many cultural worlds'* (p. 5), these five nation-states (the so-called 'Stans') exist in a space associated with the ancient 'Silkroad'. After the collapse of Moscow's communist authoritarianism (Soviet Union) from 1988 to 1991, the Central Asia region (also known as Inner Asia/former Russian or former Soviet Asia/ Central Eurasia) is returning to some extent its former regional and historical significance. The five 'Stans' attempt to establish themselves as sustainable nation-states with effective governments—and members of international institutions. However, their futures are impacted by strong external forces, like the spread of Western liberal values, globalisation, and an expanding communist/capitalist/nationalist China, and Putin's Russia. Significantly, each of the five 'Stans' is a crucial transit point in China's ongoing Road and Belt Initiative economic model.

In light of this, the book's publisher, the Eurasian Insights: Strengthening Central Asian Studies in Europe (EISCAS) project mission statement confidently reports: *'The main goal of EISCAS is to integrate the fragmented field of Central Asian Studies by strengthening its educational dimension through the development of teaching materials and curriculum design recommendations'* (p. 1019). The work consists of 22 chapters; this interdisciplinary study covers history, sociology, anthropology and political science (including international relations). Each author is an experienced and accomplished researcher of Central Asia. While most of the contributors are Europeans (p. 16), they are sensitive about the region's clichés and stereotypes. The handbook's seven parts consist of Part I, 'Introduction' (chapters 1 to 3), exploring the concept of Central Asia. Part II, 'Identities and Historical Roots' (chapters 4 to 8), discusses Islam, social groups, languages and ethnicity, and colonialism. Part III, 'Societal-Political Dynamics'

(chapters 9 to 14), examines clans, elites, regimes, civil society and women, and legal systems. Part IV, 'External Interactions' (chapters 15 to 18), analyses geopolitics, international relations, and security issues. Part V, 'Economy and Environment' (chapters 19 to 22), investigates political economy, environment, migration and labour, and urban living. Lastly, Part VI consists of six 'Case Studies' and the 'Overview of Learning Outcomes'.

In terms of the handbook as a teaching aid, Justyna Hadaś and Jeroen J.J. Van den Bosch say *'Since its inception, this handbook has been designed as a didactic material for various target groups of readers'* including students, educators, scholars, and journalists and policy-makers (p. 41). Each chapter includes 'Learning Outcomes' and 'Questions' and a section on 'Topics for Assignment' and 'Classroom Activities'. Additionally, the 22 chapters, the Glossary of Terms, and the 'Smart Index' make it ideal for PhD and post-doctoral researchers (p. 42). The handbook's contents *'present a selected range of the most-important topics in an accessible manner, supported by info-boxes, new maps, recommended literature, and with several case studies integrating chapters'* (p. 45). While the margin positioned 'unique-referencing system' helps communication. In addition, the book's unique 31 postcards from 1900 to 1910 show Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during the Russian colonial period and generate a strong visual impression. The multimodality approach includes a series of linked YouTube lectures and the free-to-join Wikistan (online) academic community on Central Eurasia.

Criticism is difficult considering the originality and quality of the EU Erasmus+ EISCAS handbook. Nevertheless, the choice of 'European' in the title raises some questions, for instance, to which 'Europe' are we referring? Does it include citizens born and bred in Europe like the Black Europeans, Muslim Europeans, and Gypsy Europeans? Secondly, if Central Asia (and Central Asian identity) is a 'modern construct' (p. 16), then, likewise is Europe (and European Union identity) too? Thirdly, some different topics might have been incorporated into the handbook (a point noted on pages 41 and 45); for instance, activities that might foster intercultural relations, locally, regionally, and internationally;

such as popular music, sport, dance, movies, theatre, Western-style clothes, and mainstream consumerist vis-à-vis alternative lifestyles.

The key to understanding the rationale of this handbook is its function as a learning and teaching tool. It sets the book apart from the ever-growing published research about the region. Student's new to Central Asia studies (and Muslim and majority-Turkic societies) will not find many texts on the subject that have had so much thought and effort directed at their specific learning needs. Certainly, during the 2000s at SOAS, University of London, no such handbook was available in its library. Yet, a charismatic senior woman lecturer of Central Asian studies working there motivated students from diverse backgrounds to produce good Masters dissertations on the region—and, in many ways, was the living embodiment of the handbook under review.

The writing of the handbook involved eleven partner institutions and 22 authors originating from different countries; the Erasmus+ EISCAS (p. 5) is co-funded by the European Union, with the money coming from the EU member states, and, therefore, the European citizen taxpayer. The handbook will benefit scholars of Central Asia, Area Studies, the humanities and social sciences, and, indeed, will help *'provide future specialists with solid knowledge, with useful guidelines and with stimulating incentives to engage in new research'* (p.5). The handbook makes Central Asia accessible for a broad readership. Combining this with teaching and learning suggestions makes the book highly recommended for students.