Chapter 1

Introduction to the First Edition

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This first edition of the OSCE Academy compilation series on *Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region* is dedicated to looking at the political, economic and regional transformation processes that are shaped by international and regional policies, social movements as well as influenced by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and that range from North America to Europe, from Central Asia to China. These policies and developments and the so-called New Silk Road between China and Europe, located between the BRICS countries Russia in the North and India in the South, cuts through the OSCE Region and is challenging the post-Soviet countries in several different ways. Many OSCE member states face economic difficulties, high levels of corruption, intransparent political processes and serious flaws of democracy. Not but a few depend largely on natural resources economy, suffer from weak formal institutions and defective democratic structures, or are still in the early consolidation process of their political regimes. Some countries in the region have for these and other reasons turned back to extreme authoritarian rulership with serious human rights violations, while others have opened up and allowed for political plurality, indicating that they would no longer take directions from any hegemonic powers in the region.

The political and economic pressure from the various poles of the OSCE region, such as North America, Russia, the European Union and from outside the region, from China and India, has influenced the dramatic transformations over the past decade within the region. Next to the varieties of authoritarianism—countries neither being full autocracies or consolidated democracies—, the shortcomings and inconsistency in aiming for good governance regimes, have led to massive brain drain and migration, to unbalanced economic developments and new social cleavages and to interregional rivalries with the emergence of corresponding, new security

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threats. Inside the OSCE, these must be faced bridging the widening gap between different levels of democracy between the Western OSCE region and the Eastern, an imbalance that is closely intertwined with economic development and lack of social mobility and equal opportunities in the region.

One reason for the delay in political (democratic) transformations in Central Asia, for example, as Christian Haerpfer and Kseniya Kizilova point out in this volume, has to do with the absence of non-communist new elites during the 1990s. The political regime change across the former Soviet empire was inherited, rather than fought for, in 1991. There was little to no bottom-up approach, and instead a severe lack of a civil society movement that was ready to take a lead, in part or fully, in the democratization process. The results of this rather imposed and half-hearted transition process, three decades later, can be seen in the weak and donor-dependent civil society structures, as Ashot Aleksanyan illustrates in his chapter. This absence of alternative political and economic personnel facilitated the unbroken continuity of the old Soviet cadre who took over the top positions as presidents and prime ministers in the new political systems, without being challenged by new alternative and democratic elites, until now. But this is slowly changing. Some of the reasons outlined in this compilation for the lack of successful democratization were the structural weakness of the rule of law and the high level of corruption inside the legal system, the legislative system or the parliaments and the media system and instead the strengthening of the structural dominance of the executive system of the presidency and central government since 1991.

One of the triggering factors for further change in the OSCE region is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), that is pushing these countries and societies to transform—not only in Eurasia but also in Western Europe, if they want to be taken seriously as political and economic partners in this 'New Great Game' as some call it, or new geopolitics as do others, between Europe, Russia, China and India. Davron Ishnazarov illustrates some of the objectives of the BRI and the possible consequences this can have for all the countries in the OSCE region that are directly involved or indirectly penetrated by it. One of the possible outcomes is long-lasting interstate and interregional rivalries, such as those analyzed in Mihail Paduraru and Claudia Iohana-Voicu's contribution to resulting security dilemmas that apply to the whole OSCE region and Central Asia in particular. If the Eurasian region is to be considered an unstructured regional formation and a multilayered security complex, questions of coordination between countries and the factual lack thereof move to the center of the discussion, carrying further implications for the economic and political developments in the wider region. Such lack of coordination and cooperation weakens the region's resistance against external powers such as China, even Russia and India as well as terrorism and other threats including the regional capacities to meet the manifold challenges posed by the BRI. Similar processes and developments, defunct coordination and development traps can be seen in other parts of the OSCE region, suggesting further comparison. What, for example, the situation in and the political developments of the Western Balkans, and the recent political shifts in one of Central Asia's powerhouses, Kazakhstan, have in common, is found in the case

studies that Raffaele Mastrorocco and Nygmet Ibadildin and Dinara Pisareva provide. Their examples show that civil society has found somewhat innovative avenues to shape political transformation processes even in conflict-torn and authoritarian societies. It can be highlighted throughout all articles that one generation after the dramatic regime changes in Eurasia and Western Balkans, social movements and civil society is slowly growing and asking for change which is mostly expressed by the desire to fight corruption and nepotism on all levels. These dynamics continue, despite the re-emergence of traditional, autocratic and informal decision-making processes on all levels in many OSCE member states, as Arszuu Sheranova describes in her case study. The rise of new religious actors as well as the so-called or perceived re-traditionalization of many aspects of daily lives, such as the role of women, and the widespread practice of illicit economies and pervasive corruption, which are not new to the region, but nevertheless stronger in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, also call for a stronger role of civil society and external economic powers and investments which set more transparent and accountable standards. This edition is the first of more to come that will investigate the recent political, economic, security and societal developments beyond the standard reports of security emergencies, annexations, trafficking, migration and the rise of nationalism. It thus aims to do both, revitalize the study of larger processes of change in the wider region of Eurasia and to widen the scope and ask for a comparison of trends across the whole of the OSCE area.

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