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“Back to the Routes” – Kyrgyzstan’s Renewal of the Nomadic Life Style

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Abstract

Central Asia is regaining the importance it used to have, due to individual collaborations between the ex-Soviet states, but above all due to the integration or special role as a bridge between Asia and Europe in the course of the Belt and Road Initiative. Not only is the transcontinental and transnational cooperation increasingly offered in the course of the Silk Road Initiative, but certain countries are rediscovering themselves, and reviving forms of life that were in part prohibited. The Soviet command economy has had its day in the period of the independent states’ self-discovery, as well as during the structural crisis. The survivability of nomadism is particularly evident in the countryside, where it became important again after its prohibition. Nevertheless, adaptation to the new circumstances and economic opportunities, and challenges, is necessary. The Silk Road is a symbol that officially stands for a lively, functioning political, social and economic ecosystem – whether it works depends on everyone involved. The present text presents the historical and current economic and social situation of the individual Central Asian ex-Soviet republics and their path in the future.

Keywords: Bazaar, Central Asia, Eurasian Economic Union, Kyrgyzstan, Silk Road, Sitan Countries

1. Introduction – Global Economic Network

Global history, especially in the political-economic context, is booming in research today through sociological reflections. Additionally, globalization is often viewed as a modern development, with different definitions and framework conditions, be it after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, when Fukuyama (1992) generally speaks of the end of history, or the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 2011) about the ideological barriers in the world. However, the lines drawn are too simple. On the economic level one ignores long-term and long prevailing developments since 1750 – “the birth of the world” (Bayly, 2004), “transformation of the world” (Osterhammel, 2009) or the long 19th century with its “ingredients” revolutions, capital and empire (Hobsbawm, 1999, 18). With the European overseas expansion, be it into the world of the Atlantic, Indian or Pacific seas, a dimension of human life supposedly emerged which was built up and which supposedly has a new effect: capitalism.

According to Immanuel Wallerstein (1998-2012) or Eric Wolf (1997), capitalism arose in the 16th century and began to spread. One consequence was the development of a world economy, especially a historical system, with which capital was habitually invested with the primary intention of self-reproduction. In this system, what was

accumulated was used to accumulate more of the same (Wallerstein, 2011, p.13). In the course of time, various production processes were interlinked via product chains, and different markets came together on the production and distribution services on their long journey to becoming consumers. Over time, as a result of the European expansion efforts, economic areas were linked and interlocked with one another, and the modern world system emerged. In the long run it came to the “creation of a world economy through European capitalism and [to] the reorganization of economic relations in almost all parts of the world” (Eckert, 2009, p.26). These considerations, however, were and are Eurocentric.

The global long-distance trade of this type primarily satisfied two needs: on the one hand, that for luxury items and rarities (spices, ivory, tropical woods and the like), and on the other hand, that for capital that could be accumulated and reproduced – gold, for example, but primarily American silver, which secured the Iberian traders’ entry into the flourishing Asian markets. The development of a capitalist world economy went hand in hand with diverse processes of differentiation between the world regions, which can be clearly outlined using the center-periphery model. Certain roles and tasks are assigned according to geographical conditions.

The pursuit of profit and increased productivity, expansion of the monetary and market economy, accumulation and investments in production and consumption cycles, economization and rationalization of more and more areas of life, commodity fetishism and reification up to the human commodity and human capital – some of the possibilities of this ideology and socialized formation mark. Its main historical processes include industrialization and mechanization, proletarianization and bourgeoisisation, nationalization and privatization, democratization and bureaucratization, whereby none followed a straight-line development, suffered progress and setbacks, and saw disputes and struggles, an action of the actors (Sonderegger, 2015, p.9). However, certain ideas were already realized in ancient times, albeit perhaps with different definitions and forms. The symbol par excellence for transcontinental trade with the involvement of many middlemen, so that producers and end consumers hardly had anything to do with each other, was and is the Silk Road, whose routes stretched from the northern Tianshan Mountains through the Asian parts of the former Soviet Union to the mouth of the Don on the Azov Sea and from there to Central Europe. The vast space between China and Europe resembled an ocean connecting other countries and communities. A similar picture was found everywhere, and the prosperity was clearly visible in the cityscape. The caravanserais and bazaars had an international flair, where people from different countries and regions cavorted. However, as history repeatedly shows, over the centuries that followed, this continental route, as well as its oases and cities, rose and fell again and again, not just through warlike events, but also by preferring other routes, especially the maritime routes. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the route via the old continental trade route for Europe was shifted, and new countries and other exotic goods were known. The Age of Discovery had left the classic Continental Silk Road, which for centuries had connected the Mediterranean and the Far East, forgotten.

States and regions – once at the center of the Silk Road and then forgotten, moved in the 20th century to the center due to new property and resources such as oil, gas and rare earth. They are partially surrounded by world political powers, which now belong to the “global players”: China and Russia, partially India. China in particular is now propagating the Silk Road as a new opportunity for peaceful world trade. The text deals with a former Central Asian republic of the political Soviet Union.

2. Kyrgyzstan’s historic heritage and its consequences

Kyrgyzstan is a poor country with great economic difficulties. These are due to its history on the one hand, but also to the difficult topography on the other. In Soviet times it had its place in the socialist economic structure and since independence has now had to try to develop its own economic and generally national profile (Umetbaeva, 2015). The framework conditions for agricultural production changed significantly after the establishment of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The collectivization of agricultural holdings in the Soviet Union was first declared a political goal in 1927. Traditional power structures that prevented society from becoming soviet were to be dissolved. In a first step, nomadic family groups were forcibly settled and land owned by tribal leaders or clan heads was confiscated and redistributed. Many shepherds preferred to slaughter a large part of

their livestock rather than letting them fall into the hands of the state. In a second step, the forced settlements were converted into collective farms. The collectives were set up based on existing family clans, the naming continued to correspond to those of the communities of the pre-Soviet era. This was followed by the removal and expulsion of the clan heads. Among other things, they were relieved of their posts because of the failure to meet the specified target. Paradoxically, the sedentary lifestyle even led to a further strengthening of the clan structure, as families were now constantly together that had previously only seen each other in the winter months. In addition, the resulting kolkhozes of nomadic origin remained significantly smaller compared to those in conventional arable farming regions (for example Uzbekistan). Climate change is another factor (Jeenbaeva & Banerjee, 2022).

The individual Soviet republics specialized in certain tasks in the overall system of the Soviet Union; Kyrgyzstan served as a producer of meat, milk, wool and leather. The processing industry was therefore generally neglected by the central government in Kyrgyzstan. Before the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic, the land was owned by the state and was farmed by about 500 kolkhozes and sovkhozes. Marketing was organized centrally. Prices and delivery rates, production volume and number of animals were set by the state. After the independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, a land reform was carried out that enabled private individuals to claim land use rights for a period of 49 years. Land purchase and sale have been possible since September 2001; by 1999 about 52,000 new establishments had been officially registered. The state organizations that had previously coordinated trade between the Soviet republics as well as prices and subsidies ceased to exist after independence. A trading market collapsed. Kyrgyzstan now had to buy and sell on the world market. Large quantities of goods previously produced in the country were no longer needed. A change in production was therefore necessary.

3. Kyrgyzstan's economy since the 1990s

The collapse of the state economy and the old trade relations were also reflected in the figures: From 1990 to 1999, the per capita gross domestic product fell from 592 US dollars to 245 US dollars. It was not until 2007 that it topped the baseline at \$ 740. Since then, things have been looking up. According to the World Factbook of the CIA, the gross domestic product is now 3700 US dollars. This corresponds to world ranking 184. The gross domestic product of Kyrgyzstan (in absolute figures) is 21 billion US dollars (2017) (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>), more up-to-date data are often difficult to acquire in these countries. This puts Kyrgyzstan in the 140th place in the world in terms of purchasing power parity according to estimates by the IMF in 2016, according to the IMF, the real GDP growth in 2020 amounts to -4%. Although Kyrgyzstan was an integral part of one of the largest economies in the world – the Soviet Union – these figures show a very weak economic position, with the north of the country being richer than the south. A third of the population of Kyrgyzstan live below the poverty line. The political and ethnic unrest in 2010 also weakened the economy of the already poor country (Ekmekçioğlu, 2012). The economic growth in 2013 was 10.5%, and in 2014, only 3.6% (Germany Trade & Invest, economic data compact). The gross monthly average wage in 2015 was 13,277 Kyrgyz Som, which corresponds to around € 173. The inflation rate is 6.9% and the unemployment rate 7.3% (2017 estimate). In 2016, roughly 18% of the gross domestic product came from agriculture, 26% from industry and almost 56% from the service sector. However, all of these data must be viewed with some caution. According to ex-minister of economics, Temir Saiyev, the shadow economy reaches around 39% of GDP. Other estimates even speak of up to 60%. In addition, the information varies considerably depending on the source and calculation method.

It turns out that Kyrgyzstan was facing an economic disaster after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Agriculture was cut off from its previous markets and industry almost completely collapsed. Tourism oriented towards Soviet needs also had to realign itself. The former planned economy was transformed into a market economy with international support. Except for a few strategically important sectors, such as electricity and water supply, the economy is now in private hands. Kyrgyzstan can or must benefit from the large amounts of money transferred by the up to 800,000 Kyrgyz guest workers, who mainly live in Russia and Kazakhstan. Money transfers have risen steadily over the past few years. In 2011, for example, according to the World Bank, the

transfer payments reached 1.7 billion US dollars or 29% of the gross domestic product. In early January 2013 the government adopted a new development strategy. This provides for the implementation of numerous projects in the fields of agriculture, energy, transport and communication infrastructure, logistics, industrial parks and mining in the period from 2013 to 2017. Since Kyrgyzstan itself hardly has the necessary investment funds, it is dependent on foreign aid. At a conference in July 2013, international donor organizations declared that they would provide around 2 billion US dollars for the implementation of the projects by 2017 (Aminjonov et al., 2019).

56.2% of the gross domestic product was generated in the service sector in 2016. Kyrgyzstan was the only country in Central Asia to be a member of the World Trade Organization until 2015. Therefore, it was able to establish itself as a regional trading center. Predominantly Chinese goods are now handled in Kyrgyzstan and exported to neighboring countries and Russia. The most important import partners are Russia with 33%, Kazakhstan with 9.4% and Japan and the USA with 4% each (2015). The main import goods are consumer goods, oil and gas, machinery, and chemicals. The most important export partners are Switzerland with 24.6%, Uzbekistan with 21.4%, and Kazakhstan with 19.8%, the United Arab Emirates with 6.2% and Russia with 5.8%. The main exports are gold, vegetables and fruits, electricity, cotton, sheep's wool, clothing, meat, tobacco, and mercury. Kyrgyzstan continues to have a large trade deficit. While exports totaled 1.7 billion US dollars in 2012, imports exceeded this value by 3.7 billion US dollars at 5.4 billion US dollars. Thus in 2015 the foreign trade balance was already 2.6 billion US dollars. This deficit is only partially offset by money transfers from abroad and is currently increasing due to rising imports and a relative stagnation of exports. The tourism industry is another area that can be expanded because of the attractive landscape. Tourism around Lake Issyk Kul has contributed to economic growth in recent years (Akbar et.al., 2021). The number of tourists from the "near abroad," the other former Soviet republics, rose from 59,000 in 2000, 300,000 in 2011, to 1.2 million in 2016. The abolition of the visa requirement for citizens of many states is likely to play a decisive role here. For the majority of those seeking relaxation (from Kazakhstan and Russia), beach holidays were still the top priority. Since 2012, however, the number of round trips and those tourists who have dedicated themselves to mountain tourism has also increased. Shortly after independence, the idea of "Community Based Tourism" was established. In 2003 a corresponding umbrella association was founded. This can be compared with the common terms such as gentle, social or ecotourism. The World-Wide Fund defines community-based tourism as "a form of tourism in which local communities have extensive control and participation over their own development and management. Most of the profit remains in the community itself" (<https://cbtkyrgyzstan.kg/>). The point is to develop tourism models and to focus on responsibility towards foreign cultures and the environment.

According to the CIA World Factbook 2016, agriculture contributed almost 17.9% to the gross domestic product. However, almost half of the workforce works in general agriculture, with the mainstay of agriculture being cattle-raising consisting of sheep, cattle, and horses. Currently, 85% of the total agricultural land is used for this. Arable farming is less intensive. Only 7% of the land is suitable for it. The main crops are wheat, potatoes, cotton, watermelons, and tobacco. So far, only the grain harvest is sufficient for the country's own needs. After independence, three quarters of the pasture and arable land was given to private farmers and a quarter to municipal administrations as part of the land reform (Levine et al., 2017). In connection with the riots in 2010, there were violent land occupations. The agricultural sector is still far less mechanized and there is little or no manufacturing industry to produce competitive products for export. The farmers lack capital. In May 2011, the Kyrgyzstan government passed a program that provided for around 1.5 billion Kyrgyz Som (equivalent to around 22.4 million euros) to be released for the construction of irrigation systems by 2015. This should create 17,000 hectares of new agricultural land. Such a program had already been adopted in 2007, of which only 41% had been implemented due to a lack of participation.

There is only limited value added in Kyrgyzstan: Only 25.9% of the gross domestic product is produced industrially (as of 2016). In addition, the country only has limited production facilities. In the manufacturing industry, the manufacturers of building materials such as cement, glass, and bricks as well as the textile, shoe and clothing industries are of particular importance. Gold and other precious metals are mined on an industrial scale. There is also industrial production of small machines, electric motors, refrigerators, furniture, and food processing.

4. Kyrgyzstan's resources and energy

Compared to other countries in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has fewer raw materials, but the country's mineral resources are important for the economy. Kyrgyzstan has gold, coal, mercury, zinc, tungsten, antimony (whose deposits are famous for their high quality), uranium, crude oil, and natural gas. However, gold is of greatest importance. With the Kumtor mine south of Lake Issyk-Kul on the upper reaches of the Barskoon, Kyrgyzstan is home to one of the largest gold deposits in the world, which was discovered in 1978 but is mined by the Canadian company Centerra. The production was not tackled in Soviet times because of the high costs, and so the Canadian company Cameco (today Centerra Gold) received the license in 1993, and it began operating the seventh largest gold mine in the world in 1997 (Baxter, & McMillan, 2013). More than 2500 workers and engineers are employed here, 97% of whom are Kyrgyzstan citizens, who work in difficult conditions in 14 day shifts in the thin mountain air at 4000 meters above sea level. 45% of the gross domestic product generated within industrial production in Kyrgyzstan comes from there. Critics believe that the Kyrgyzstan government prematurely signed a general agreement with donors from Canada at the beginning of the 1990s and that the country's most important gold deposits were given up. Nevertheless, the trade in the coveted raw material accounts for 40% of the general export income of the state and is responsible for an average of 10% of general GDP. In addition, the mine gives people work in a structurally weak region, which is also well paid in a national comparison. Today, however, many Kyrgyzstan people view the presence of Western investors with skepticism. The dispute over the license, which had been smoldering for years, was initially settled in early 2009. In return for a significantly increased Kyrgyzstan stake of 33%, Centerra received acceptable taxation and supposed planning security for the next few years. However, since the fall of the Bakijev government in 2010, the company has returned to the center of attention. Critics accuse Centerra of negotiating the license agreement with corrupt politicians in his favor. Against the background of local residents' protests, environmental concerns and calls for the nationalization of the mine, the Kyrgyzstani government and Centerra agreed on a joint venture model with a 50% stake on both sides for the joint exploitation of the gold mine. However, the Kyrgyzstan parliament rejected this plan in October 2013 and called for a new agreement with Kyrgyzstani participation of at least 67%. There were protests from residents who were primarily concerned about the environmental problems and the associated health consequences for the workers, which would persist even if a new contract was signed. In 2011, for example, 264 tons of gold were extracted from the rock with the help of 3,650 tons of cyanide. The toxic liquid is stored in retention basins that hold 60 million cubic liters. The gold-bearing rock lies in the permafrost zone, for the most part under a glacier that de facto must be blasted away for extraction. This is particularly worrying because its ice massif is located around the huge Petrov Glacier, which is over 70 square kilometers in size, the most important drinking water reservoir for the entire Naryn Valley. In addition, the mining work pollutes the water of the glacial rivers; additional accidents dramatically damage the environment. Ultimately, financial losses are also the result of this ecological disaster. No final regulation has yet been reached for tourism. In 2014 Centerra even threatened to shut down the mine, whereupon the Kyrgyzstani authorities again approved a return to the previous way of operation. In addition to Kumtor, there is the Bozymchak deposit in the west of the country, which is considered the second largest in the country. The Kazakh gold company Kasachmys holds the exclusive rights to explore and exploit the gold and copper deposits. These rights are limited until 2027. The third largest foreign investor in the Central Asian Republic is the company "Reemtsma Kyrgyzstan" operating in Bishkek and Osh as the owner for the management and investment of 120 million US dollars.

The use of hydropower is also gaining in importance: there are already numerous hydropower plants on the banks of the Kyrgyz rivers, which flow hundreds of kilometers through mountains and gorges. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan exported around 0.7 billion kilowatt hours of energy and the trend is rising. Nevertheless, the country has so far imported more electricity than it exports. Almost everything is for personal consumption; Surplus is exported seasonally. Outdated systems, investment backlogs and loss of income due to theft characterize the energy sector. The technical and commercial losses averaged 35% of the amount of energy generated. Foreign donors must be found for necessary investments, also for cleaner solutions (Sabyrbekov, & Ukueva, 2019). So far, the low consumer prices of around 1.5 US cents per kilowatt hour (and 3.3 US cents for companies) have been subsidized. The rise in the price of gas and electricity was one of the reasons for the fall of the Bakiyev government. After April 2010, the interim government largely reduced the increases, and announced

that electricity tariffs would remain stable for the time being and that future tariff increases would only be slow and socially cushioned. With Russia, Kyrgyzstan agreed to jointly build hydropower plants that were already planned during the Soviet era. This was cascade of 4 power plants on the upper reaches of the Naryn River. The completion of the first dam was planned for 2016, and the entire cascade for 2019. The project partners were the state power station operator OAO Elektrikitscheskie Stanzii (ES) and the Russian company Rusgidro. Disputes over the allocation of costs led to the project being stopped by the Russian partner in 2016. In 2017, a Czech holding company had won as a new investor. The second major project is the construction of the Kambar Ata I hydropower plant on the Naryn near Toktogul. Project partners are ES, the Russian company Inter RAO and the Canadian company SNC-Lavalin. Both projects are also anchored in the government's development strategy. In addition to the construction of new hydropower plants, the renewal and expansion of existing facilities are also planned. The At Baschy hydropower plant is to be modernized by 2017. Switzerland is supporting the project with a loan. For the rehabilitation of the Toktogul Dam, the Asian Development Bank provided a total of 105 billion US dollars in the second section. According to press releases, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development plans to contribute another 75 million. The coal-fired power plant TEZ Bishkek is also to be modernized. The Export-Import Bank of China provided a loan for this, not least as part of the Silk Road Initiative (Feldbacher, 2020). The ailing gas network is also to be renovated. In November 2013, the Kyrgyz parliament approved the sale of the state gas supplier Kyrgyzgaz for the symbolic price of one US dollar to the Russian company Gazprom. In return, the Russians took over the old debts of Kyrgyzgaz and pledged to invest 620 million US dollars in modernizing the gas infrastructure, building new lines, and exploring gas reserves.

Concerning currency, the Kyrgyz Som was introduced in 1993 to replace the ruble. Kyrgyzstan was the first former Soviet republic to abolish the ruble. In the first few years after the currency reform, the Som suffered a very sharp decline in exchange rates, as were the other former member states of the Soviet Union. It was only gradually that the Kyrgyz government succeeded in promoting the country's economic development and stabilizing the currency to some extent. In 2008 the exchange rate to the US dollar was 36 Som, at the end of 2014 it was 54 som. This equates to a loss in value of more than 45% in 6 years. In 2017, however, it was again around 68 Som. The exchange rate against the euro was around 80 Som in autumn 2017, which was mainly due to a strong euro at the time. The foreign debt is currently around 70% of the gross domestic product. A debt relief initiative by the World Bank and IMF failed in 2006 due to the rejection of President Bakijev, who feared for the country's independence. The country will continue to be concerned with the question of how the debt can be paid off in the future. Despite government efforts, corruption remains another problem in Kyrgyzstan (Aydingün, & Aydingün, 2014). In 2016, the country was ranked 136th out of 176 countries in the world in the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International. In a regional comparison, however, the country does relatively well in the ranking on economic freedom by the liberal US think tank "Heritage Foundation", where Kyrgyzstan was ranked 89th out of 180 countries in 2017. A relatively new problem is China's Policy of Political and Lending Conditionality, which is becoming more and more of a debt trap for all cooperation partner demands (Shamiev, 2019).

5. Results

The author spent many years in Central Asia and the difficulties of border crossings did not get any easier, demonstrating the political-social tensions one continues to encounter here. Factors are added very quickly that today determine the life of pandemics on a global scale, how the current Covid-19 spread is negatively affecting the social fabric and the economic situation, and one will see how far the associated fears of globalization also affect the Silk Road Initiative. There are national and ethnic tensions around the world, often encouraged by the political grandees. In Kyrgyzstan, the populist Sadyr Japarov, elected in 2021, prepares a new constitution dismantling democratic principles (Schmitz, 2021). In Central Asia, however, it is mostly related to recent history. Consider the example of Kazakhstan: Its recent history is told as a successful story of industrialization and modernization, in which all the nationalities living in Kazakhstan had their share. The balancing act between these different narratives is not always easy. Dealing with Stalinism, which destroyed nomadic culture and created the basis for gigantic industrial and infrastructure projects by violent means, is particularly problematic.

The settling down of the nomads does not play an essential role in these narratives. It is widely regarded as a necessary and successful act of transition and overcoming archaic ways of life.

Eastern European states share with Central Asian nations the political ideological and cultural devices of an emergent past, and they use the recreation of the past as a key strategy for nation building. Both in Eastern Europe and in Central Asia, processes of decolonization from the Soviet era are an important part of nation building. Specifically, in Uzbekistan the attempts to distance the country from Soviet concepts of an organization are strongly present, but also tensions with the neighboring countries are present, affecting eventually Kyrgyzstan's economy (Ismailbekova, 2018). Another challenge is the general multi-ethnic background among all the Central Asian states (Abdulbakieva, 2020). Central Asia and in a second step South East Europe became an increasingly attractive destination for foreign direct investment (FDI). An interesting example is the planned mini-Schengen, with the aim of a free movement of goods and capital as well as a common labor market for North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo. In an interview with the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, the latter reported that representatives of the World Bank calculated that ten to eleven percent of the operational costs for importing and exporting goods could be saved if this initiative were implemented (Wehrschütz, 2020). There is also a positive political aspect. As a result of these economic alliances, the community would count 20 million inhabitants and progress be noticeable. Serbia's admission to the EU is currently rather cautious. On the other hand, the European former Eastern Bloc states are interested in more intensive cooperation with China and vice versa, since the People's Republic sees this as an ideal gateway for Western Europe, which is more reserved with regard to the Silk Road. After independence from Soviet Union – beware the irony of recent history – international development agencies promoted the establishment of service and marketing cooperatives in the agricultural sector in post-Soviet states, though they failed in many cases (Cima, 2021).

6. Conclusion

It was a long way from Soviet collectivization to nomadic life style and globalization by the Belt Road Initiative in Post-Soviet Central Asia's countries. Central Asia in particular harbors a great common and shared heritage, despite all the new frontiers created mainly during modern times. With the return to the strength of those regions that have existed in cultural and economic exchange with one another over the millennia, and productive communication between the states, a more stable and profitable situation could arise for all those involved. This can happen not only across state borders, but also within the respective societies. It has to be observed again and again that economic and social injustice prevails in post-Soviet states, and that the resources, in which most states are rich, do not reach all classes.

ASEAN is another example of successful economic cooperation between states, each of which retains its own political and national idiosyncrasies and independence. This should not be forgotten in a new Silk Road initiative. Overpowering nations like China should not impose their own cultural idiosyncrasies and economic guidelines on other countries, which would lead to the loss of any independence, but individual states should approach productive cooperation on an equal footing, with one continuing to do so, existing autonomously for the individual. Not only is the transcontinental and transnational cooperation increasingly offered in the course of the Silk Road Initiative, but certain countries are rediscovering themselves and reviving forms of life that were in part prohibited. Kyrgyz as well as Kazakhs have seen themselves as nomads for 3000 years, whose way of life was the only sensible one, in view of the steppe with its dry vegetation and its sparse water reserves, in order to be able to survive permanently in the summer heat and the winter cold. The Soviet command economy has had its day in this period of self-discovery and, at the same time, the structural crisis. The survivability of nomadism is particularly evident in the countryside. The knowledge passed on from generation to generation about the peculiarities of weather, plants, water, and animals are used again. One gets the impression that semi-nomadic cattle breeding in these countries has a future, provided that great powers and international corporations do not interfere too much in the life of the population. It can be best preserved where the natural conditions are given, although the new era has arrived, and you can now find solar panels, radio, television, and mobile phones in every yurt.

Yet, it can be observed that these countries are not always moving forward, but sometimes are returning to traditions. One falls back on inventions and discoveries of the past. Development is necessary, but it is often based on the past and is necessary to preserve the past. The Silk Road is a symbol of a well-functioning political, social, and economic ecosystem that, against all today's challenges, intends to illuminate the new world again.

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