



## **NOTA EDITORIAL**

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This issue of the journal deals with one of the most interesting issues we are watching in the international system and its process of change: the struggle for influence in Central Asia.

The issue has been coordinated by Professor Antonio Alonso, a good expert in Central Asia, who has gathered an excellent group of specialists who selflessly wanted to participate in this issue. It is divided into two main parts. The first part deals with the policies of Russia, the United States, China, and India regarding Central Asia and their evolution, highlighting a major initiative, the Ji Jinping's *Belt and Road* initiative.

Russia's presence and influence are obvious as the five Central Asian States emerged from the dismemberment of the former Soviet Union. The language, culture, the infrastructures that connect these States, the important emigration of these new States to Russia, the links between leaders, are fundamental factors, among others, that allow Russia to be the main player in this region. This explains the development of several initiatives such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which seeks the economic integration of Russia with the five Central Asian States and other former territories of the Soviet Union, despite the strong reticence and non-membership of three of the five States. This organisation follows, in a substantial part of its design, the EU model of integration. Or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a security organization which does not take sides in the internal conflicts of the Member States but that tries to confront an external aggression and other threats, such as terrorism and organized crime. Neither Uzbekistan nor Turkmenistan belong to this security organization.

In this context, the launch of China's One Belt One Road Initiative in 2003, later renamed as Belt and Road Initiative, had a considerable impact. The initiative includes six routes and means a fundamental economic change not only in Central Asia but also in other regional areas of destination. Xi Jinping intends to achieve a wide connectivity and to project the Chinese economic cloud and, later, its political influence. In other words, the initiative is not only a project with geoeconomic implications, but it will also have important geopolitical implications. The Chinese investments made until May 2017, as reported, reach the sum of 60 billion dollars, and the investing anticipated for the next five years will reach between 600 and 800 billion dollars.

Russia has to manage mainly the changes that this initiative will certainly induce in the region, but the initiative has also multiple ramifications and includes other potential challenges given the fact that the cooperation proclaimed by China and the common projects

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to be developed have to overcome barriers and risks of some importance, as explained by several articles in the journal, as well as the competition of other States, who will play in the region with their own designs, objectives and rules, such as Iran, Turkey, India, Japan, the United States and the EU. In any case, as we learned in other initiatives, for instance the EU Barcelona Process, launched in 1995, the economic development does not produce the development of political systems *per se*.

The second part of the journal explains some questions and topics that are fundamental for understanding the internal situation and policies of the five Central Asian States. First, the search for independent or “multivector” foreign policies, the importance and rivalry between the two main states, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the authoritarianism, the enrichment of people linked to the governments and the corruption existing in all these States to a greater or lesser extent. To this, the Afghanistan long shadow projected on all these countries is also presented and evaluated. As well as other topics such as the Islamic-rooted radicalism and terrorism, the presence of ISIS, the organized crime, border problems, the issue of energy, the question of water, ethnic differences and the growing political instability in some States.

We hope that this effort of explanation will serve to reinforce the studies on Central Asia, and, in particular, the major initiatives launched in the region and their implementation processes. Without a doubt, a stable, secure and more integrated Central Asian space and the quick connectivity between Asia and Europe will have a great impact on the EU and Spain.