

# **Informal Practices and Structures in Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

**21 - 23 November 2013, University of Fribourg, Switzerland**

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The Academic Swiss Caucasus Net ([ASCN](#)), in cooperation with the Regional Research Promotion Program ([RRPP](#)) and the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe at the University of Fribourg (IICEE), with support from the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), is pleased to organise an international conference on **Informal Practices and Structures in Eastern Europe and Central Asia**, to take place at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) on 21-23 November 2013.

The conference offers a forum for the presentation and discussion of on-going research projects. It will consist of thematic panels, roundtables and keynote speeches bringing together researchers from various disciplines.

### **Content**

Informality has become, without any doubt, a fashionable topic of research. The amount of literature on informal practices and networks in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has increased rapidly, producing useful empirically-based research material. The growing interest in this topic may be partly explained by the fact that in many Eastern European and Central Asian countries the democratisation process is hindered by many different forms of informal power networks. One may even conclude that informality is part of the governance mode of all more or less soft variants of authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, it seems obvious that personalised governance networks are not really structures supporting democracy and rule of law; on the contrary, they undermine them. There are many contemporary studies on informal institutions revealing the persistence and perverse effects of such informal structures. The economic crisis, however, particularly in Southern Europe, has again shown the extent to which clientelist networks are co-responsible for the political, economic and financial crises in the region; in addition to the populist movements riding on the waves of wide spread distrust between political elites and the population at large.

However, it would be erroneous to insist only on the negative effects of informal practices. On the one hand, informal power networks for political elites should be distinguished from practices and networks at the level of 'everyday citizen behaviour', wherein they retain a different meaning ("to get things done"). On the other hand, there is the truism and sociologically-speaking fact that no organisation or democratic state can avoid informal practices which derive their meaning with regard to any sort of formal rule. The meaning of these relations, between the informal and the formal, changes depending on specific contexts. Informality, at the political elite level in post-Soviet countries, is certainly different from informal practices and governance in 'rule of law'-based democracies with specific procedures utilised to handle them.

### **Objectives of the conference**

The conference aims to identify and compare forms, functions and meanings of informal structures and practices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia under the following topics:

politics, law, economy, education or, more generally, society. In this sense it will be focused on the dialogue between different disciplines and perspectives with regard to informality. This will be one of the first and largest international conferences focussing on informal structures and practices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in a multidisciplinary perspective, covering the problem of informality in different social systems and contexts. It will cover forms of informality in politics (informal governance, networks of power, clientelism, corruption, etc.), the economy (shadow economies, informal labour markets, etc.), migration, education or other social practices in society within focus of anthropologists and sociologists. The conference will ask for the definition of fields or contexts that demonstrate the certain forms of informality that are more peculiar, persistent or typical for certain regions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example that of the post-Soviet context. To what extent can they be considered transitional or a structural phenomenon in Eastern Europe and Central Asia? What are the social effects of certain practices? And to what extent are informal structures in Eastern Europe and Central Asia different from those in established democracies?

## Call for Papers

**Deadline: 2 May 2013**

**Eligibility:** The call for papers is open to PhD students and recent PhD graduates (2008 or later) dealing with the conference topic in their research activities. The topics may be addressed from a political science, sociological, anthropological or economic perspective.

**Geographic Area:** Submitted papers must focus empirically and/or theoretically on the countries and regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, i.e., the new EU member states of Central- and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the (non-Baltic) Post-Soviet countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldova, Southern Caucasus or Central Asia).

## Topics

Papers should cover one or several of the following themes or fields of research related to informal practices or institutions. They should focus on the interplay between formal and informal institutions or practise. In addition, they should focus on concrete cases or the identification of specific forms of informal practices and institutions. Papers handling specific forms of informal practices, such as clientelism or corruption, should discuss their topic in the framework of the formal / informal distinctions.

- **Informality and Politics:** Informal institutions vs. formal institutions in politics, informal practices and structures at governmental levels, parliaments, political parties, state bureaucracies and, more generally, at the level of political and economic elites.
- **Informality, Society and Culture:** Informality and cultural diversity, informal practices in multi-ethnic societies, minority-related informal practices.
- **Informality and Economy:** Shadow or parallel economies, informality in labour markets, etc.
- **Informality and Law:** Informal practices in legislation and judiciary processes, the problem of 'rule of law'.
- **Informality in Other Fields and Social Systems:** Migration-related informality, informality in education and health systems, informality in civil society, the Church and its organisations.

- **Transversal Topics:** Certain transversal topics are present in the aforementioned themes above. They are particularly important in the context of this conference: Informal governance, power networks, corruption, clientelism, patrimonialism, criminal networks and "post-socialist informality", i.e., the continuity or discontinuity of informal practices from the socialist period. Moreover, we also welcome papers approaching these topics with both theoretical and methodological aspects of informal practices and institutions in Eastern Europe.

The selected candidates will have the opportunity to present and discuss their paper in a thematic panel.

### **Submission Instructions**

All interested scholars are requested to submit an abstract (no more than 300 words) of their paper together with a short biographical statement (including author, affiliation, postal address, phone number and e-mail address) and a one-page C.V.

Submissions must be sent no later than **2 May 2013** to [info@ascn.ch](mailto:info@ascn.ch) and [jan.kreuels@ascn.ch](mailto:jan.kreuels@ascn.ch) with the following email subject: ASCN Informality Conference 2013. All documents must be in English *and* merged into a single PDF file. The selection process results will be announced by mid-June 2013.

Selected candidates will then be invited to submit full papers (up to 5,000 words) by the end of October 2013. After the conference, participants will be invited to submit a revised definitive version of their contribution. The best papers will be published in a volume dedicated to the conference proceedings.

### **Best Paper Reward**

The best paper will be rewarded with a prize during the conference.

### **Venue, Accommodation and Transport**

The conference will take place at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. The organisers will cover travel and accommodation expenses for all selected participants. Opportunities for co-financing will arise should the travel costs in individual cases exceed the average expenses per participant attending the conference. Participants will be located in hotels close to the conference venue. The selected participants will be informed about the programme, specific conference panels and the format of the paper to submit, as well as organisational details, in due time.

### **Timeline**

- Application Deadline: 2 May 2013
- Abstract Selection: mid-June 2013
- Paper Submission: End of October 2013
- Online Publication of Papers on the Conference Website: 7 November 2013
- Conference: 21-23 November 2013

### **Organisers**

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### Website

[www.ascn.ch](http://www.ascn.ch) → "Events" section

### Further Questions

[info@ascn.ch](mailto:info@ascn.ch)

### About ASCN

ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity-building trainings and scholarships. The programme emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN programme is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It is initiated and supported by [Gebert Rüt Stiftung](#).