

Central Asia as a Macro-Region in the Germany Educational Programs: Regional Study Dominants.

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Abstract. The article is devoted to identifying the political and geographical interpretation of the boundaries of the Central Asia macro-region through an analysis of higher education programs at German universities. Over the past two decades, Germany has been actively increasing its economic presence in this region. Since the end of the twentieth century, the German government has made systematic efforts to attract foreign students and strengthen the reputation of German universities as leading research and education centers. Analyzing humanitarian educational programs for the study of Central Asia, the priority scale is built as follows: Tibet and Mongolia; China as a part of the Central Asian macro-region; Iran and Afghanistan; Central Asia CIS; countries of the South Caucasus. In philological programs Turkey dominates, with the fragmentary appearance of Central Asian CIS countries. In technical educational programs, the configuration of the macro-region changed the parameters: they include, first of all, post-Soviet countries, as well as Iran, the countries of Central Asia. These programs are developed from the point of view of potential investments in technology industries - therefore, both projects and programs are country-specific. The focus on economic diplomacy in relation to the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia reflects the transition from the diplomacy of democratic progress to the diplomacy of economic sovereignty of the countries of the macro-region.

Keywords: higher education, master's degree, universities in Germany, Central Asia, CIS

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Introduction

In modern social sciences and humanities, political and geographic zoning often do not coincide; strictly geographical concepts for defining regions are rarely used in interdisciplinary research [3]. An obvious example of such a discrepancy is the term Western Europe, the political and geographical content of which differ significantly. This article is devoted to identifying the political-geographical understanding of the boundaries of the macro-region of Central Asia through the analysis of higher education programs at German universities. Over the past two decades, Germany has been actively increasing its economic presence in Central Asia, using both economic, educational, cultural, and environmental levers: investment and educational programs of the German Energy Agency (DENA), German projects of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), projects of the German academic exchange services (DAAD), initiatives of the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) are becoming a platform for expanding Germany's influence in Central Asia, popularizing large German companies, ensuring Germany's reputation as a patron of socially responsible business, as well as creating serious competition for Russia and China in political and economic spheres.

Already since the late 1990s the German federal government was concerned about the low level of interest of foreign applicants in German higher education programs. In a joint statement in 1996, the German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Technology Jürgen Rüttgers formulated the following German position: "The Federal Republic of Germany has a direct interest in the training of highly qualified personnel among foreign students in higher education institutions in Germany. The education of foreign students is an investment in the future economic and scientific cooperation of Germany in various parts of the world" [6:15]. The set task of attracting foreign applicants and competing in the higher education market with large universities in the USA and Great Britain, in fact, gave rise to the Bologna process in Germany, the subtasks of which included reducing the duration of study and narrowing specializations in accordance with the needs of the economy [7:97–98]. Already in the early 2000s German researchers noted the increasing competition of higher schools in Germany not only with foreign universities, but also with each other [5:275], leading to partial duplication of educational programs.

Interest in higher education programs in Germany (primarily master's programs), as a view of the region from the outside, is due to the fact that educational programs are the bearer of professional standards, the core that shapes ideas about a particular area (in this case, about Central Asia as a macro-region). It is these standards that set the future research vector, and also reflect the requests of potential employers regarding the competencies acquired by students and, accordingly, determine the career aspirations of graduates. Educational programs form a basic understanding of young specialists about the

geographical and cultural framework of the macro-region and determine the subsequent professional activities of those graduates who did not continue the academic scientific path, and this understanding is transmitted by them in the future in their work and personal circles.

The purpose of this article is to identify the boundaries of the political-geographical understanding of Central Asia in German higher education programs. The research hypothesis is the thesis that the self-identification of countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan with Central Asia does not mean their automatic identification with this region from an external German and, probably, European perspective. The objectives of the article were not to trace the influence of branches of German universities or partner higher schools in Central Asian countries (for example, the Kazakh-German University in Almaty, through which the German Foreign Ministry supports the development of German-Kazakh relations through DAAD).

Materials and methods

The empirical basis of the study is based on master's programs aimed at studying Central Asia, namely the programs of several German universities and Berne, Switzerland. During the analysis of fifteen programs, special attention was paid to reflecting ideas about Central Asia in their names, content and entry requirements. The analysis was based on the principles of comparing the geographical, cultural, linguistic and political determinants of the region.

For convenience and representativeness, programs can be divided into two types: 1) conditionally humanitarian (cultural, ethnological, linguistic, historical, economic, multidisciplinary – these represent the majority of programs); 2) technical (engineering, geographical, energy, and climate). Using the examples of these programs, we will consider how ideas about the Central Asian region fluctuate depending on belonging to these areas TV series and methods.

Results

It would be logical to start with large interdisciplinary programs with the general name “Central Asian Studies” – for example, the “Zentralasien Studien” program at the Humboldt University of Berlin¹, focused on ethnology, history, politics and culture of Central Asia. Within the framework of this program, the following zoning of the macroregion and, therefore, priority areas of specialization are proposed: Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang Uygur region, Central Asia CIS, Afghanistan, Caucasus. It follows from this that

¹ M.A.Zentralasien-Studien. Available from: <https://www.iaaw.hu-berlin.de/de/studium/ma/institut/za>

from the perspective of the Humboldtian curriculum, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan are not actually considered as separate actors. Despite the complex intra-regional context and the intense competitive relations existing between these countries, within the framework of the Central Asia program they continue to be perceived as a single space and the unifying element is belonging to the CIS and thus entering the sphere of interests and influence of Russia. Continuing to develop the idea of zones of interests, I note that in the same program, the countries of Central Asia and the CIS are positioned as a zone of competitive interaction between the PRC and the Russian Federation, and therefore the German position in the region faces a situation of rivalry between these political players.

One of the main focuses of this program is cultural identities, which I tend to interpret as large narratives about the content of national characteristics, traditions expressed in language, rituals of behavior, cultural and social preferences. The topic of building identities is relevant for the countries of Central Asia, but precisely in the aspect of de-Sovietization, which is reflected in regionalization only indirectly.

The program “Culturology of Central Asia”, established by the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Bern, is culturally oriented². In the context of determining regional dominants, it would be appropriate to quote from the announcement of the educational program: “the study of Central Asia will focus on the Buddhist cultures of the region. As part of the program, students acquire knowledge of the social, cultural and religious history of Tibet and Mongolia.” Linguistic training of students goes in the direction of mastering the Tibetan or Uyghur-Mongolian languages. Chinese, Persian, and Uzbek are offered as a second language. We especially note that, as a necessary language of science, students are required to speak Russian at the level of reading and translating scientific literature, since the merits of domestic science in the study of the region are recognized as indisputable. Separately, such countries as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan do not appear at all in the “Cultural Studies of Central Asia” program.

As an additional argument to the intermediate conclusion that from the point of view of German universities the configuration of Central Asia looks somewhat different than from the usual point of view in Russia, let us cite the example of the largest university in Bavaria – the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. There is no independent program on Central Asia at all, but this does not mean that those who wish do not have any access to basic knowledge in this area. Research on Central Asia is considered the third semantic point in the content of the Sinology/Sinology program, with attention paid primarily to the archeology and art of the Central Asian region. The main emphasis of the program, naturally, is on studying the history, politics and society of China.

The countries of Central Asia are also poorly studied in Turkological programs, despite the fact that the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek languages belong to

² Master Zentralasiatische Kulturwissenschaft. Available from: https://www.philhist.unibe.ch/studium/studienprogramme/master_zentralasiatische_kulturwissenschaft/index_ger.html

this language family. The vast majority of Turkology programs take as their object of study the language, literature and culture of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Of course, in Germany, where about 1.34 million Turkish citizens live (the number of German citizens of Turkish origin is an order of magnitude larger), the Turkish issue has particular specificity and relevance. Let us note the program “Turkology and Central Asian Studies” of the Georg August University of Göttingen³: it is focused primarily on modern Turkish, the languages of Central Asia are listed only as Grundkenntnisse (German “basic knowledge”).

The Free University of Berlin has the following structure of the master’s program “Ottoman and Turkic Studies”⁴: historical and social scientific theory and methodology for Turkologists; main themes in the history of the Ottoman Empire from its beginning to the beginning of the 19th century; languages and culture of the Ottoman Empire; Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. The content of the Turkology program at the University of Bamberg is not significantly different⁵ – covering only the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic.

Less common are programs in Turkic studies that fit within a broader cultural and geographical framework. For example, the Justus Liebig University of Giessen within the framework of the program “Turkology”⁶ proposes, as a field of study, modern Turkish language and culture (including the usage of the Turkish language in Germany), as well as directions of work in the field of Turkic languages and Turkic-speaking cultures of the Soviet Union and its successor states. The Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz is based on the same realities⁷, which, firstly, established a program in Turkology at the Institute of Slavic, Turkic and Circubaltic Studies, and secondly, indicates in the content of the course “Turkology” the languages, literature, culture and history of various Turkic peoples in the past and present. In addition to the Turkish language and its predecessor, Ottoman, the program also covers the languages and cultures of other Turkic peoples: from Central Europe through the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia to China and Mongolia. In addition, Turkology also deals with Turkish migrants outside these regions. We emphasize that in this program; Turkish culture and language in modern Germany are disciplinary highlighted.

Consequently, for humanitarian programs for the study of Central Asia, the priority scale is built as follows: Tibet and Mongolia – 1; China as part of the macro-region of Central Asia (remember that there are independent programs in Chinese studies) – 2; Iran and Afghanistan – 3; Central Asia CIS – 4; South Caucasus – 5. In the philological programs of the “Turkology” direction, Turkey is the absolute dominant study, and the

³ Seminar für Turkologie und Zentralasienkunde. Available from: <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/60858.html>

⁴ Osmonistik und Turkologie. Available from: <https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/turkologie/index.html>

⁵ Lehrstuhl für Turkologie (Türkische Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur). Available from: <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/turkologie/>

⁶ Turkologie. Available from: <https://www.uni-giessen.de/de/fbz/fb04/institute/turkologie/turk>

⁷ Turkologie. Available from: <https://www.turkologie.uni-mainz.de/>

Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia again appear either in conjunction with the CIS space, or even more broadly – like all the Turkic peoples of Russia and the post-Soviet space.

Let’s move on to the second type of higher education programs – technical. In technical programs, the emphasis is different; in them, the countries of Central Asia are understood, first of all, to be post-Soviet countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan; Iran also appears. In addition, the states in these programs are more personalized (unlike humanitarian programs, where they are mainly designated as “CIS countries”), and each acts as an object of investment and modern technological solutions in the smart sector. This interest also has a political basis. For example, in May 2023, the Federal Ministry of Science and Education of Germany signed a joint declaration of intent with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan on cooperation in the field of science, research and innovation, which is based on the declaration of intent of the German-Uzbek partnership in innovation area signed in 2019. The fundamental framework for cooperation is formed by the EU strategy in Central Asia “New opportunities for a stronger partnership”⁸, Germany played a key role in its development and revision in 2019. The Federal Ministry of Science and Education also identified the core points of the partnership:

- land management and agriculture;
- climate/ecological research and adaptation to climate change;
- water;
- natural risks and civil safety;
- sustainable urban development;
- biodiversity research;
- bioeconomic research;
- safe, clean and efficient energy;
- health and medicine.

It is within the framework of this agenda that the Technical University of Berlin is forming its programs, which is also implementing a special project “Research on Sustainable Mobility in Central Asia”⁹, where Central Asia refers to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Iran. The university organizes and supervises summer schools, thematic and administrative seminars, research visits and publications on three main topics: 1) land use/transport, integrated transport planning; 2) green mobility; 3) transport policy and economic issues. Moreover, the potential audience for such seminars and events is the highest officials of these republics. The same paradigm of perception is observed in the educational areas of the University of Passau, which calls Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan a

⁸ The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Available from: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf

⁹ SUMRICA – Sustainable Urban Mobility Research in Central Asia. Available from: <https://www.tu-berlin.de/zg/forschung/projekte/laufende-projekte/sumrica>

new promising direction for German companies¹⁰, especially in the field of raw materials extraction, automotive industry, pharmaceuticals.

The Free University of Berlin, in turn, implemented an interdisciplinary master's program "Integrated Water Resources Management for Central Asia" (the program is suspended at the moment), the stated goal of which is to prevent environmental, socio-economic and legal conflicts in the exploitation of water resources. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan appear as objects of study. Of course, this is also a politically oriented program, which is also interesting because it highlights the interests and capabilities of the Central Asian countries in terms of controlling fresh water supplies individually, and not as a monolithic macro-region. The topic of water wars is especially relevant for post-Soviet countries, whose water infrastructure is of Soviet origin and whose operation was conceived in the realities of a single state.

Discussion

Thus, higher education programs in Germany are focused on the interests of German politics and its business: they form the regional dominants and interests of applicants to master's programs. From the point of view of cultural and political regionalization, the countries of Central Asia continue to be perceived either in the CIS paradigm (also in Turkic programs), or as subjects of interstate, interreligious, interethnic relations in the context of greater Central Asia. Moreover, the countries of Central Asia are also included in the research field of the German Society for the Study of Eastern Europe (Osteuropakunde), the boundaries of which are understood as follows: from west to east - this is Central Europe – Eastern Europe – Russia, from north to south - this is the European Arctic, Baltic countries, Caucasus countries, Central Asia.

Technical higher education programs are more focused in their attention to Central Asia itself in the Russian sense, the self-identification of the countries of the region and its regional contexts. These programs are developed from the point of view of potential investments in technology industries – therefore, both projects and programs can be more targeted. However, business interests are more often realized through individual projects within scientific fields, rather than through the creation of highly specialized educational programs. The focus on promoting economic partnerships in specific areas and the focus on economic diplomacy reflect a shift from the diplomacy of democratic progress [1:198–201], in which the dominant role was played by the narratives of backwardness and authoritarianism of the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia, to the diplomacy of the sovereignty of these countries, emphasizing independence as the most important value (achieving economic and energy independence from other major players in the region – Russia and China). The

¹⁰ Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft: Zentralasien - neue Destination für deutsche Unternehmen? Available from: <https://www.uni-passau.de/veranstaltungskalender/detail/event/ost-ausschuss-der-deutschen-wirtschaft-zentralasien-neue-destination-fuer-deutsche-unternehmen-osteuropa-lounge-1>

focus of the programs on attracting applicants, including from the countries of Central Asia and the CIS, speaks of Germany's political interest in the formation of potentially friendly scientific and technological communications with these countries, since graduates upon return will have a positive impact on the controllability of communications in the field of promoting German technological and other scientific projects in these countries [2].

Conclusion

The study of German master's programs in Central Asia partially confirms the hypothesis of the article that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan are identified with the macro-region of Central Asia mainly from an economic and technological point of view. From a cultural and political perspective, these countries are united on the basis of belonging to the post-Soviet space and are not differentiated. The study shows the leading role of the historical and political aspect in building identifications with the region and the secondary importance of natural and geographical landmarks. Determining the research contours in the curricula forms the spatial and ideological paradigm of students' thinking in relation to the region under study – Central Asia. The career opportunities of graduates of such programs in everyday work (both scientific and non-scientific) are determined by the interests of business and the objectives of German foreign policy; both business and foreign policy have specific projects, strategies or targeted programs. Thus, the autonomy and independence of the educational process and further scientific and practical activities of graduates and young scientists turn out to be ephemeral.

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