Artemy Kalinovsky, Assistant Professor of East European Studies at the University of Amsterdam, visited campus to participate in the REEEC New Directions lecture series on October 20, 2014. Professor Kalinovsky earned his Masters and Ph.D. in International History from the London School of Economics. He authored *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Harvard University Press, 2011) and co-edited *The End of the Cold War and the Third World* (Routledge: 2011). His research is currently focused on the process of modernization in Soviet Tajikistan.

Professor Kalinovsky's talk, entitled “‘You Can’t Study these Things from Moscow’: Soviet Social Science and the Problem of Development in Soviet Central Asia,” analyzed the Soviet attempt to modernize and industrialize Central Asia in the latter half of the twentieth century. By examining the academic debates of social scientists and their bureaucratic struggles, Kalinovsky highlighted the role of academic scholarship in Soviet policy-making, and drew a comparison between development in Soviet territory and development in the West.

Under Khrushchev, a new hope for Central Asia began to emerge. Projects were planned and undertaken to stimulate economic development and industrialization. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw an expansion of old institutions, the creation of new ones, and a commitment to raise the standard of living in the Central Asian republics. The general belief was that more people would shift to the industrial workforce if agriculture were modernized.

However, modernization did not take as quickly as Soviet academics and bureaucrats had hoped. By the late 1960s, it became clear to social scientists that they needed a new perspective on the matter – “one cannot study these questions from Moscow.” Demographers and ethnographers joined with other social scientists, and experts from the Central Asian republics were consulted.

Industrialization had worked to exacerbate the urban rural divide rather than work to shrink the gap between the two. Europeans who had migrated to the republics staffed the existing factories, rather than those native to the area. Traditional values played an important role in the republics, and the youth were reluctant to move to the cities to take on new, industrial careers. Access to education and the strategic placement of industry was not enough to modernize Central Asia.

By the late 1970s, the Soviets were confronted by the failure of their Central Asian program and struggled to understand why development was not following the path predicted by scholars. In the 1980s, scholars began to bring up the cultural differences between Central Asia and the modernized areas of the Soviet Union. Different lines of thought began to emerge amongst Soviet scholars in Moscow and amongst experts from the Central Asian republics. Some believed that...
modernization still needed to be pursued with as much, if not more, vigor as there was in the 1950s. Others believed there had not been enough of a cultural consideration and perhaps Central Asia could not develop along the same lines as other modernized areas. And still others believed perhaps Russia was “just feeding” the republics. These thoughts and problems plagued the Soviet Union until its collapse.

Kalinovsky ended his talk by highlighting three points. First, he emphasized the important role the social sciences had in shaping policy in the Soviet Union. Its flexibility in debates and methods is often overlooked. He also brought up a comparison to Western debates on development. Both Soviet and Western experts focused on the availability of labor and had faith in industrialization and large-scale planning. Finally, he offered the thought that perhaps culture can be used as a dangerous tool. Scholars who fail to understand and engage with culture often end up undermining it. In this particular instance, it leads to the thought, “Perhaps Central Asia is unable to develop along the same path because of its cultural backwardness.”

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