

## **Research Proposal- Investigating Regional identities in nation branding and nation-building in Kyrgyzstan**

Sitting between 'Asia' and 'Europe', a post-colonial state with a history of interdependence and a multi-ethnic population, Kyrgyzstan and its people are faced with numerous possible interpretations of its past, present, and future "place" in the world, and consequently how it both sees and conducts itself in its regional, and international, spheres.

By investigating how different regional identities are projected through Kyrgyzstan's 'nation-branding' internationally and in 'nation-building' domestically, this project seeks to explore how regional identity may be both reflected, and reflected in, the development of state identity.

It will begin by using primary and secondary sources to analyse Kyrgyzstan's participation in regionalism, specifically in state-based regional groupings. It will explore how both participation and discourse within these forums reflects different regional identities (such as a 'post-Soviet', 'Central Asian' or 'European'). This is conceptualised as nation-branding. The project will then move towards understanding the basis and implications of these identities. Using primary research (in the form of interviews conducted with academics and policy makers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), the project would enquire into the sense of place in Kyrgyzstan's state identity. Using interpretative methodology, it will explore how nation branding and regionalism internationally reflects or contributes to the development of state identity. Utilising historical, geographical, and anthropological perspectives, and assessing different levels of agency in identity formation (top-down (state policy) and bottom-up (individual/ domestic actors)) this project would take a strongly interdisciplinary approach. It aims to develop a new way of conceptualising how foreign policy, regionalism and state identity interact.

Nation-building, and nationalism, is a challenge faced by states globally; nation branding is an important, but often overlooked, foreign policy tool; identity is key in understanding state and individual behaviour. Likewise, regionalism is both a challenge and a potential solution to problems faced not just in Central Asia but internationally. By improving understandings of the role of international relations in identity formation, and vice versa, the project would seek to make a modest contribution to policy towards or in Kyrgyzstan and in the development of regionalism and collective action in Eurasia. It also aims to prompt further research in bridging the gap between the domestic, the state and international.