EURASIA PROGRAM
2019 Year End Report
FPRI's Eurasia Program includes 27 affiliated scholars, five thematic initiatives, and seven regular publication series. In January 2019 we appointed two Black Sea Fellows and three Baltic Sea Fellows, and named Dr. Stephen Kotkin our special Eurasia Fellow for 2019.

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BMB Russia

Central Asia Initiative

Democracy at Risk

Black Sea Initiative

Baltic Initiative
The Eurasia Program was founded in 2015 with the aim of examining the political, security, economic, and social trends shaping the region. It has a multi-year focus on the Baltic and Black Seas, emphasizing how geography, economics, ideology, and history continue to shape politics and security in both areas. The program publishes analyses of Russian foreign policy, including Russia’s role in Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East. The Russia Political Economy Project, along with BMB Russia, analyzes the linkages between Russia’s economy and its political system. The Central Asia Initiative is our newest project dedicated to examining the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the rapidly changing region and informing U.S. policymakers and policy influencers on matters that affect U.S. national interests.

The Eurasia Program includes 25 affiliated scholars, five thematic initiatives, and seven regular publication series. In January 2019, we appointed two Black Sea Fellows and three Baltic Sea Fellows, and named Dr. Stephen Kotkin our special Eurasia Fellow. In 2019, we published 45 articles, 16 special reports, held 20 public and private events, launched the Central Asia Initiative, and inaugurated BMB Ukraine, a companion brief to our long-standing BMB Russia newsletter.

We expanded our work on Russia’s political economy by mapping Moscow’s economic influence abroad and examining the Russian military-industrial complex. We enhanced our focus on the Black Sea region by adding regular video-commentary to the special Black Sea reports, and placed a spotlight on the conflict in Ukraine through field research, public lectures, and private briefings.

We also deepened our Baltic Initiative work by collaborating with the Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis and co-organizing a conference in Lithuania. We partnered with the Baltic Security Foundation in Latvia, and laid groundwork for exciting new initiatives to more closely analyze Baltic security issues in 2020.

The Baltic Initiative

The Baltic Initiative analyzes the geopolitics, geoeconomics, and security issues of the Baltic Sea region, and their implications for Europe and the United States. The monthly Baltic Bulletin and Baltic Roundup newsletter, authored by Dr. Indra Ekmanis, Editor of the Baltic Bulletin, analyze major political, cultural, and economic events in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

In January 2019, we appointed three Baltic Sea Fellows. Una Bergmane, Indra Ekmanis, and Lukas Milevski are driving the initiative’s focus on political and security issues in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and on NATO-Russia relations in
Dr. Milevski is an American scholar based at Leiden University, where he writes and presents regularly on Baltic defense, grand strategy, and strategic studies. In January, Dr. Milevski briefed our Philadelphia audience about NATO-Russia relations and the role of the Baltic states. Based at the London School of Economics, Dr. Bergmane is developing a research project entitled “How to Confront Ukraine’s Oligarchs: Lessons from Latvia.” Her Baltic Bulletin work focuses on Latvian domestic politics and Russian disinformation efforts. Earlier this year, we launched the Baltic Roundup, a monthly newsletter authored by Dr. Ekmanis; it reaches over a thousand subscribers per month.

In addition to this research, we continue to expand on Baltic-related partnerships in the U.S. and Baltic Sea region. In October, FPRI co-sponsored a conference with the Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis, titled Europe on the Edge: The Politics of Grey Zones. The event, which took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, emphasized the destabilizing role that China and Russia play in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Black Sea Initiative

The Black Sea Initiative recognizes that the challenges of the Black Sea region influence all of Europe and Eurasia. The region is home to frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, and is surrounded by major geopolitical actors, such as Russia and Turkey.

This year, we named Dr. Robert Hamilton of the Army War College and Dr. Nicholas Gvosdev of the Naval War College as Black Sea Fellows. In May 2019, Dr. Hamilton traveled to Ukraine for field research in Kyiv and Donetsk. Upon his return, he briefed scholars, policymakers, and Ukraine-watchers in Washington, Philadelphia, and Boston. The resulting report draws lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war in the Donbas in the five years since that conflict began.

Dr. Gvosdev’s work has analyzed Russian foreign policy towards its Black Sea neighbors, and Russia’s impact on regional security and geoeconomics. Furthermore, Dr. Gvosdev regularly writes on American foreign policy more generally in a period of increased great power competition. In November, Dr. Gvosdev wrote a report on Russia’s Southern Strategy, examining Russia’s pursuit for reasserting and
strengthening its dominant position in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions and beyond.

Russia Political Economy Project

In late 2017, we inaugurated the Russia Political Economy Project, which publishes reports that provide a clear-eyed assessment of Russian political economy trends. The project is based on the notion that American analysis of Russia has too often projected its own ideas and politics onto Russia rather than understanding how Russia’s leaders think.

Rather than trying to maximize their population’s wealth, Russia’s leaders see economics as a tool for projecting Russian power on the international stage. The Russia Political Economy Project provides deep research on key themes on Russian political economy. In 2019, the project produced a series of reports mapping how Russia uses economic tools to achieve foreign policy leverage. These reports examined Russia’s interests in Asia, the history of Russian propaganda and interference in other countries, Russia’s economic ties to Venezuela, Russia’s energy politics, Russia-Belarus relations, and Russia’s history of imperial expansion.

BMB Russia

BMB Russia provides news about Russia’s economy, politics, business climate, and political-risk environment. It features a twice-weekly news brief and strives to be a resource for specialists and generalists; a platform for analysis, particularly for emerging area experts and academics; and a space for even-handed, fact-based conversations in hopes of improving Russia/Eurasia analysis and coverage.

BMB Russia is meant for anyone who wants to understand the politics and economics in one of the world’s key emerging markets as well as a peek into the broader post-Soviet space. The brief is a resource for those looking for business opportunities to make sense of one of the U.S.’ most significant bilateral relationships and to cut through the cacophony to find the important signals few outlets cover. The project is led by Fellow and BMB Editor-in-Chief Stephanie Petrella.

In 2019, we expanded this initiative by adding BMB Ukraine, which is led by Associate Scholar Fabrice Deprez. At the end of 2019, we launched the BMB Podcast, which is hosted by Fellow and founder of BMB Russia Aaron Schwartzbaum.
Democracy At Risk

Does the health of democracy abroad matter to the security of the United States? Do democracies make safer neighbors and better allies? How should the United States deal with the democratic recession of the past decade and the authoritarian counteroffensive that has reversed some of the spectacular democratic gains of the 15 years following the fall of the Berlin Wall? The Democracy at Risk Initiative aims to address these questions through publications, events, study groups, and partnerships with other institutions. In 2018, we worked with the University of Pennsylvania’s Andrea Mitchell Center, Center for Ethics and Rule of Law, and Department of Russian and East European Studies to co-sponsor an event series called Democracy in Trouble? The final conference was held in March 2019, assembling 15 researchers for a day-long event entitled Is Russia Undermining Democracy in the West?

The Democracy at Risk Initiative places special emphasis on contemporary political developments in Central and Eastern Europe, with recent publications focusing on the protest movement in the Czech Republic, Ukraine’s elections, unrest in Georgia, and politics in Moldova.

Central Asia Initiative

In June 2019, we inaugurated the Central Asia Initiative, inspired by concern that America was losing focus on the region even as it was becoming a center of geopolitical competition. As the region’s old post-Soviet dictators leave the scene, a new generation must reckon with Russia and China, both of which are trying to shape the region’s politics and economics. Both Russia and China also have competing integration schemes for the region, with Moscow pushing the Eurasian Economic Union and Beijing advocating the Belt and Road Initiative. This initiative will provide objective analysis of trends in Central Asia, informing policymakers and the public on matters that affect U.S. national interests, including energy; the Belt and Road Initiative; terrorism and extremism; and competition between powers, such as China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

Research Spotlight

Maximilian Hess is a Central Asia Fellow in the Eurasia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He is the Head of Political Risk Analysis and Consulting at AKE International in London, where he also heads the Europe and Eurasia desks. He is a graduate of Franklin & Marshall College and SOAS, University of London. His research focuses on the relationship between trade, debt, international relations, and foreign policy, as well as the overlap between political and economic networks. He is currently researching the impacts of Uzbekistan's post-Karimov economic reforms, including comparing the development of the state's credit networks to foreign direct investment. Hess is also researching the politics around the hydrocarbon strategies of various states, the Turkmen economy and its relation to Russian-Chinese “great power” politics in the region, and finally how Russian-Kazakh relations are set to develop over the coming years.
PLANS FOR 2020

While we intend to continue our existing work on the Eurasia region in 2020, the following thematic areas will take special priority:

Develop the Central Asia Initiative

As the United States continues its long drawdown from Afghanistan, American attention toward Central Asia is reaching its lowest point since the countries gained independence from the Soviet Union. The Eurasia Program launched a Central Asia Initiative on the contention that America’s loss of interest in Central Asia is dangerous. Given rising Chinese influence, Central Asia will be a testing ground for understanding the new era of great power competition. How does Beijing interact with its neighbors? How will Russia respond as Chinese influence grows? How will this shape the durability of the Sino-Russian entente?

Strategic competition in Central Asia comes as the region itself is changing. A long-dominant older generation is preparing to leave the scene. For example, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev—who first came to power as a Soviet-era Party Secretary—stepped down earlier this year as he tried to manage a transition of power. Our goal is to help strengthen U.S. policymakers’ and policy influencers’ understanding of the region. In 2020, through a series of special reports, briefings, and a conference in Washington, we aim to consolidate this initiative, making FPRI the go-to think tank for the latest cutting-edge research on Central Asia.

Focus on Turkey and Black Sea Security

FPRI has long prioritized research on the Black Sea, on the grounds that American analysis too often missed the region’s interconnections, putting the region’s countries into wholly separate mental boxes—some in Europe, some in the post-Soviet space, and Turkey in the Middle East. The ongoing crisis in Turkey’s relations with the West shows the danger of such an approach. It was only four years ago that Turkey shot down a Russian jet along its border. Now, the Kremlin is selling Turkey advanced S-400 surface-to-air missiles, sparking a crisis within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We plan to focus our Black Sea research over the next year on the question of Russia and Turkey, with a special emphasis on Syria. What is Russia’s long-term strategy vis-à-vis Turkey and Syria? To what extent does the new alignment reshape regional security? Will Turkey’s pivot toward Russia outlast Erdogan? How should the U.S. respond? We will explore these questions in upcoming roundtable discussions in Washington and Philadelphia, and further deepen our thinking on these issues.
through a series of published reports and an edited volume on the complex roles of the U.S., Russia, and Turkey in Syria.

**Emphasize Long-Term Thinking**

FPRI believes that its most impactful research is not reactive analysis that responds to the news cycle, but deep thinking about long-term trends. Three long-term issues will motivate the Eurasia Program’s thinking and writing throughout 2020. The first is the future of the European security architecture. The U.S. president’s attitude about NATO points to a broader question about the Alliance’s future that Washington has yet to answer. The Western Alliance was remarkably successful at securing Europe in the Cold War and enlarging the zone of peace and prosperity in the years after 1991. **What should its strategic purpose be today, at a time when the world is increasingly multipolar and as all powers are shifting their attention toward the Indo-Pacific?**

Second is the question of Russian politics and foreign policy. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s current term in office ends in 2024, and per the Russian constitution, this term ought to be his last. Constitutions are changeable, of course, especially in dictatorships like Russia, and already the first few months of 2020 have been eventful in this regard. The Kremlin faces a dilemma about what to do, and seems to be leaning towards extending the Putin presidency to 2036—allowing him to surpass any of his modern predecessors with a potential 36-year-long rule. We are likely to find out the fate of his presidency during 2020, while the impending deadline of 2024 makes the question of post-Putin politics relevant for the first time. **We will explore potential pathways of Russian foreign policy beyond 2024, examining long-term historical continuities and exploring the broader implications of both, a potential change in leadership, or lack thereof.**

The third question is concerned with the impacts of Russia’s political economy and defense sector on its current and future domestic and foreign policymaking. FPRI will continue its in-depth study of Russia’s military industry and its technological development. Key questions include Russia’s technology goals, its tech cooperation with China, and its investment in artificial intelligence. **FPRI is also examining the efficacy of Russia’s military-industrial complex, including its technological basis, and its ability to hire talented engineers and computer programmers and to source complex IT components from other countries.** Finally, FPRI scholars are analyzing trends in Russia’s arms exports to understand the effect of U.S. sanctions on the future of the sector.
2019 REPORTS

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Edward Lemon
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Five Years of War in the Donbas
Robert E. Hamilton

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