

CONNECTIVITY POTENTIAL AROUND AFGHANISTAN

Opportunities for the EU?

16 February 2023 (13:30-18:00), Justus Lipsius Building, EUISS meeting room (00-FG-10), Brussels

With the EUISS' recent Brief "Unlocking Afghanistan's Connectivity Potential" as a scene-setter, this event examines existing and planned inter-regional connectivity initiatives around Afghanistan. Among others, it focuses on the role of its immediate neighbours, key regional and rising powers, and international powers involved.

Located at the crossroads between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan -and its broader region- could benefit immensely if they could tap into regional trade, energy, and transport connectivity. Such potential is entwined with the inter-regional nexus defined by virtue of such broad-ranging initiatives as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Russia's 'Greater Eurasian Partnership' or India's 'Act Central Asia'.

Fundamental to unlocking this potential is the country's stability, which can only come with the support of the country's immediate region. The roles of China, India, and Russia, as well as its immediate neighbours – the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Iran and Pakistan– are key, particularly with Western powers being increasingly side-lined. Western sanctions on Moscow linked to the war in Ukraine have further increased interest in Pakistani and Iranian ports to guarantee alternative trade routes to Eurasia for Central Asian countries, China, and India.

Against this backdrop and despite the EU's limited regional leverage, opportunities for it to play a bigger geo-economic role across Central Asia exist, particularly in the framework of its flagship Global Gateway initiative.

PROGRAMME

13:30-14:00

WELCOME COFFEE

14:00-14:20

WELCOME & KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION

Speaker

Gustav LINDSTROM

Director, EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

14:20-16:00

PANEL I: UNPACKING INTER-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Moderator

Amaia SANCHEZ

Associate Analyst, South Asia

Speakers

Nicola CONTESSI

Research Associate, York Centre for Asian Research, York University

Alissa DE CARBONNEL

Deputy Program Director, Europe & Central Asia, International Crisis Group

Christopher DEVONSHIRE-ELLIS

Dezan Shira & Associates

Raffaello PANTUCCI

Senior Associate Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

16:00-16:30

COFFEE & APPETIZERS

16:30-18:00

PANEL II | REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AROUND AFGHANISTAN: THE VIEW FROM REGIONAL AND RISING POWERS

Moderator

Nicola CONTESSI

Research Associate, York Centre for Asian Research, York university

Speakers

Sayed MAHDI MUNADI

IIE-SRF Fellow & Lecturer at Sciences Po

Arif RAFIQ

Non-Resident Scholar, Middle East Institute

Bruce PANNIER

Caspian Policy Center

Anasua BASU RAY CHAUDHURY

Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation (ORF)

CLOSING REMARKS

SPEAKERS' BIO**Anasua BASU RAY CHAUDHURY**

Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Ph.D in International Relations, is a Senior Fellow with the Neighbourhood Initiative, Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata. She is the Editor, ORF Bangla. She specialises in regional and sub-regional cooperation in South Asia, energy politics, forced migration and women in conflict zones. She is the coordinator of the research project entitled "Proximity to Connectivity". (see <https://www.orfonline.org/people-expert/anasua-basu-ray-chaudhury/>). She is also the recipient of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust Senior Media Fellowship (2007) and the Kodikara Award from the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo (1998–99). Her recent publications include *Caste and Partition in Bengal: The story of Dalit refugees, 1946-61* (OUP, UK, 2022); *BIMSTEC: Mapping Sub-regionalism in Asia* (Co-edited Routledge:UK, 2022); *New futures of BIMSTEC: connectivity, commerce and security* (co-edited Routledge: UK, 2021), *Reimagining BIMSTEC: Strengthening regional solidarity across the Bay of Bengal region* (Co-edited/ ORF, New Delhi, 2021); *India– Myanmar Borderlands: Ethnicity, Security and Connectivity* (co-edited/ Routledge, UK, 2020); *Connecting Nations: India and Southeast Asia* (coedited/ Primus, New Delhi, 2019).

Nicola CONTESSI

Nicola P. Contessi (Ph.D., Laval) is an international affairs specialist with expertise in global governance, rising powers, foreign and security policy, international transportation and Eurasia. He is an Associate of the York Centre for Asian Research and previously held positions at Nazarbayev University, Columbia University, McGill University and the United Nations. He has consulted with CANADEM, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Development, the European Neighborhood Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Dr. Contessi is a frequent media commentator featured in *Affari Internazionali*, *AsiaGlobal*, *Asia-Pacific Bulletin*, *Embassy*, *Euractiv*, *Formiche*, *Global Policy*, *Port Technology*, *Ship & Bunker*, *Splash247*, and *The Diplomat*, and in major think tanks like the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada or CSIS. He is a member of the Oxus Society, and on the board of Cercle québécois des affaires internationales. His work has appeared in journals like *Asian Security*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *The RUSI Journal* and *Security Dialogue*, and in edited volumes published with *Cambridge University Press*, *Oxford University Press*, *Presses de l'Université du Québec* and *Routledge*.

Alissa DE CARBONNEL

Alissa de Carbonnel joined Crisis Group as Deputy Program Director for Europe and Central Asia in 2019. She oversees research, analysis, policy prescription and advocacy in and about Russia, Europe, Türkiye, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Alissa has over a decade of experience reporting for Reuters and other media, including from the front lines in Ukraine, Georgia and the North Caucasus. Most recently as European Security Correspondent for Reuters, she focused on political violence, disinformation and counter-terrorism policy, and as EU Energy and Climate Correspondent, on the European Union's efforts to decarbonise its economy and reduce dependency on Russian energy. Prior to that, Alissa was a Moscow-based political correspondent from 2007 to 2015. She holds an M.P.P. from Oxford University and a B.A. from Cornell University.

Christopher DEVONSHIRE-ELLIS

Chris Devonshire-Ellis is the Chairman of Dezan Shira & Associates and the Publisher of the Asia Briefing portfolio of titles. Dezan Shira & Associates are a foreign investment legal and tax advisory firm with 32 offices throughout Asia. Chris founded the firm in 1992. Asia Briefing publishes business news around the Asia region including China, India, ASEAN, Russia and the Belt & Road Initiative. Combined readership is 20 million. A global influencer, Chris's opinion is carried regularly in international mainstream media.

Sayed MAHDI MUNADI

S. Mahdi Munadi is a lecturer on China's foreign policy at Sciences Po Paris and an IIE-SRF fellow focusing on the Central and South Asia region. Prior to his current positions, he served as an Afghan diplomat in China and conducted research as a fellow at several institutions, including the Fudan Development Institute and the China Institute of International Studies. Mahdi has published books and articles on Afghanistan, terrorism, and regional cooperation. He holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in International Relations and Political Science.

Bruce PANNIER

Bruce Pannier studied Central Asia at Columbia University under the legendary Central Asian scholar Edward Allworth. Pannier went to Tashkent State University in the summer of 1990, and in 1992-1993 led a sociological research project co-sponsored by the University of Manchester and the Soros Fund for Cultural Initiative in villages in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and has been a frequent visitor to the region since then. He worked for the Prague-based Open Media Research Institute in 1995-1997 before joining Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, where he worked 1997-2022. Pannier has written for Jane's Intelligence, Freedom House, The Economist Intelligence Unit, the Cairo Review, the FSU Oil & Gas Monitor, The Diplomat, Foreign Policy Research Institute, BNE Intellinews, and Eurasianet.

Raffaello PANTUCCI

Raffaello Pantucci is a Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and a Senior Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) in London where he was formerly Director of International Security Studies. His research focuses on terrorism and counter-terrorism as well as China's relations with its Western neighbours. He currently spends his time between London and Singapore. Prior to joining RUSI in London in 2013, Raffaello lived for over three years in Shanghai, where he was a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). Before that he worked in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and earlier than that at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. He has also held positions at the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) and at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College, London. He is the author of two books, *We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2015) and *Sinostan: China's Inadvertent Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2021), with Alexandros Petersen. He is a regular contributor to various mainstream media outlets like the Financial Times and BBC, as well as the academic press.

Arif RAFIQ

Arif Rafiq is president of Vizier Consulting, LLC, a political risk advisory company focused on the Middle East and South Asia. He is also a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC. Rafiq's research interests include economic connectivity, great power competition, political reform, religious extremism, and terrorism in South Asia. He is the author of grant-funded studies on the *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* and *Sunni-Shia sectarian violence in Pakistan*. Rafiq has written for numerous publications, including *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *POLITICO Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Republic*. He is regularly quoted by major news outlets, including the *Financial Times* and *The New York Times*. And he has appeared on broadcast outlets such as *Al Jazeera English*, the *BBC World Service*, and *WNYC* radio. Previously, Rafiq worked for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and leading public relations firms Burson-Marsteller and Ruder Finn. From 2011-13, he was listed by *Foreign Policy* as one of the *top 100 foreign affairs commentators* on Twitter. Rafiq received an MA in Arab Studies from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service.