

Editorial

Since its inception, STSS has been slowly but regularly expanding in scope and readership. The evidence is in the fact that in a few years we have moved from Q4 to Q2 in the SCOPUS database, we now have a fair book review section and receive submissions from a variety of scholars and disciplines. We continue our work, thus, to secure a fast and fair review process as well as the good quality of the articles we share with our readers. Another main goal of STSS is to provide our readers with critical, novel or understudied empirical, methodological or theoretical perspectives for a better understanding of the non-Western world. In this respect, all the articles in this issue are an attempt to fulfill this challenging task. We are grateful to our authors, who not only have provided us with good articles, but also have been willing to address all the issues raised by the reviewers and submitted everything on time. We are particularly happy with the fact that the articles feed a growing body of literature containing critical research perspectives on the post-socialist region (Doğan, 2013; Isaacs, 2013; Isaacs & Polese, 2016; Kerikmäe & Särav, 2016; Kevlihan, 2013; Menga & Mirumachi, 2016; Morris & Polese, 2015; Ó Beacháin, 2012), which has been too marginal in academic debates so far.

This June issue starts with an article by Simon Tordjman (2017), who sheds light on the ambiguities underlying the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), active in Brussels since 2012. In principle, this institutional ambiguity was meant to enable the EED to operate in a more flexible and less bureaucratic manner. Yet, the blurred position of the Endowment has also catalysed a constellation of interests and divergent approaches related to the mere methods and objectives of democratisation policies. Dr Tordjman is in a privileged position to discuss this issue, knowing the EED in theory, thanks to his work on international organisations, and in practice (having worked there for some time). He uses the case of EED interventions in Armenia and Azerbaijan to suggest that ambiguity does not necessarily represent an obstacle to the operationalisation of the EU democracy support policy. On the contrary, it might open a path to the autonomisation of democracy assistance and the maintenance of several initiatives in the region that have been so far studied empirically.

The following article by Giorgio Comai (2017) provides the reader with a methodological consideration of research on post-Soviet societies. Acknowledging the increasing role of the internet as a key means of communication by local authorities, organisations and news media throughout, Comai sets out to explore the online publication of content that is routinely consulted and quoted by scholars of area studies. This raises a concern because for a number of reasons scholars tend to consider the world wide web as an inordinate mass of content that can be superficially explored thanks to search engines and meaningful keywords. In turns, this downs plays the role of structured analysis of content that is considered time consuming, difficult to learn and marked by the fact that relevant datasets are usually not readily available.

Keen to overcome this difficulty, Comai's article explores possible ways of dealing with the issue by introducing an open source package developed by the author that facilitates the creation of structured textual datasets from web content and allows for basic word frequency analysis in a straightforward web interface. By doing this, the article advocates for a wider use of quantitative methods based on the analysis of word frequency in textual datasets extracted from the internet as a starting point for in depth research with established qualitative methods.

The third article in our issue by Mochtak and Holzer (2017) focuses on the electoral violence linked to the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections in the Russian Federation. In particular, the authors suggest that electoral violence used to advance the Russian authoritarian regime may be regarded as a modern form of authoritarian rule. Other scholars have highlighted the existence of tools that are not fully acknowledged by scholarship and advocated for novel approaches (Isaacs & Polese, 2016; Ó Beacháin, 2012; Kerikmäe & Särav, 2016). The article uses an analysis of the post-electoral turmoil and the response of authorities to public demonstrations to provide an overview of the regime's ability to adapt its position to maximise outcomes in the political conflict and opportunistically select the best tool to achieve its goals. The authors argue that this approach, in turn, allows the use of confrontation dynamics during elections in order to allow the politicisation

of various latent conflicts (interest or value-oriented) that are impossible to solve in the everyday depoliticised routine of post-Soviet politics.

The last article by Kilybayeva, Nassimova and Massalimova (2017) also develops a critical perspective, in this case applied to the concept of political participation. The authors start from the idea that research on youth political participation has often been informed by a traditional understanding of the concept of political participation, which should be challenged. As a result, they advocate for a more nuanced understanding of political participation in the country, and particularly among the younger generation. By pushing the boundaries of political participation, they come to the conclusion that young Kazakhs are more active in political debates than usually considered by a number of previous studies.

This June issue is also enriched by the review of two books that, in our view, have the potential to further debates on topics that are extremely relevant in today's world. *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (by Jeremy Menchik, 2016 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) is critically reviewed by Gde Dwitya Arief Metera and *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (by Gilbert Achcar, 2016, Stanford University Press) by Alessandro Tinti.

We hope that our readers will enjoy the variety of works that we have selected and that over coming years we will be able to provide a significant contribution to academic debates on an ever changing transitional world.

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