

Keynotes¹

The highlights of the meeting were two keynotes on the extraordinary resilient and mobile Kyrgyz community of the Afghan Pamirs. A community that has dealt successfully with several perilous political situations in the twentieth century by relocating their place of residence across political borders successively, and establishing reliable agreements with the respective political power holders.

M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani, Professor of Anthropology, Central Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana (USA), shed light on the life and career of the fascinating leader of the Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir, Haji Rahmanqul Khan. He also shared his general thoughts about the importance and characteristics of local leadership in Central Asia. He challenged the common understanding of traditional leaders as despotic and oppressive that is generally utilised and provided Haji Rahmanqul Khan an example of a loyal and trustful leader, whose smart actions were driven by the motivation to support his people and to protect them from external threats.

Muhammet Ekber Kutlu, son of Haji Rahmanqul Khan and Professor and sculpture lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Yüzüncü Yıl University in Van (Turkey), described the life of the first and second Kyrgyz generation after their arrival in Turkey. His exciting statements gave an impression about the advantages of the life in the newly built settlement of Ulupamir Köyü and beyond, and the opportunities provided by the Turkish society. His speech was concluded with a short statement by his daughter Gönül Açıksari who is the first doctor from her village. She now works at the Göztepe Research and Training Hospital of the Istanbul Medeniyet University as a senior cardiologist. She underlined the importance and emancipatory potential of enabling conditions for development provided by a society.

¹ Based on minutes recorded by Sarah van Bentum and Michael Spies



Two drawings by Malik Kutlu prior and after the exodus from the Little Pamir. The above scene recorded the sheep-shearing in the Afghan Pamirs while the bottom drawing shows an early scene of life in Ulupamir Köyü. Both drawings are part of the book: Malik Kutlu and Bernard Repond 1992: Afghanistan. Les Kirghizes du Pamir. La Route de l'exil. Lausanne: Association Suisse des Amis de l'Afghanistan and reproduced with kind permission.