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**Abstract**

Although the idea of the world-class university is not a new one, it has become increasingly commonplace in public policies around the globe, also gaining traction in states outside the global ‘core’. Kazakhstan, the only Central Asian member of the European Higher Education Area, is no exception as it too aspires to have a world-class university. This paper examines the policies of the Kazakhstani government towards a recently founded institution, Nazarbayev University, as it seeks to position Kazakhstan as a credible global knowledge economy, but also use the university as a means of fulfilling domestic nation-building objectives. Addressing the policy challenges of creating a world-class university in this particular Central Asian context, the paper contributes to a reshaping of our understanding of how certain states currently outside the global ‘core’ are using higher education as a neoliberal development strategy. This paper offers the prospect that there might not just be multiple paths to the creation of a world-class university, but also multiple interpretations of what it means to be a world-class university. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)