
IERES • THE INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN, RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES

PONARS Eurasia

Policy Memo Guidelines

The PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo series provides scholars an opportunity to disseminate policy-relevant findings from their research on post-Soviet Eurasia in a condensed, engaging format to a broad audience of specialists and nonspecialists, with a particular emphasis on the international policymaking community.

Range of Topics. PONARS Eurasia Policy Memos address global or transnational foreign policy issues as well as domestic political, economic, and social issues facing post-Soviet Russia/Eurasia that are relevant to international policymaking. This may include not only assessments of the foreign policies of Russia and other post-Soviet countries, but also aspects of U.S., EU, and other countries' or institutions' policies toward these countries. We welcome comparisons with other countries, though for our series, with rare exceptions, post-Soviet countries should occupy a central role in the analysis.

Audience. Our Policy Memos are widely read in the policymaking, NGO, and academic communities and are often assigned in college classrooms. Our primary target consumers are policymakers both outside and inside the post-Soviet region who know a great deal about the issues facing Russia/Eurasia and the interests of the US and other countries in the region, but who have little time for stepping back to think about the big picture, not to mention keeping up with scholarly findings that usually appear in jargon-filled academic journals or books. This well-informed policy community generally does not lack facts and figures; if they are not tracking day-to-day events themselves, they can usually call upon their own vast research resources to get the information they need. Accordingly, our experience has been that Policy Memos are best received when they are not action memos and do not attempt to duplicate the work of government analysts, a role for which the analysts themselves are generally better trained than are scholars. What this community can gain from scholars are fresh findings based on deep academic research, original long-term thinking, new ways to synthesize the dizzying array of factual material facing analysts, critical outside assessments of policies and common assumptions ("reality checks"), some truly new factual material that academics themselves uncover (such as original public opinion surveys or archival findings), and other luxuries we academics are permitted to indulge freely but that can be in short supply in a fast-paced policy environment. Policy Memos will be most effective to the extent we base them on these "comparative advantages" we have as academics.

Timing. Policy Memos are published whenever they are ready and timely. While we sometimes generate large clusters of memos through various workshops we organize, we publish Policy Memos throughout the year. Scholars are thus encouraged to submit new memos whenever they are so inspired, but especially when their topic is timely (or should be considered timely!).

Length. Policy Memos should be approximately 2,000 words, give or take at most 500 words, depending on the subject and the editors' judgment. Draft memos that are too long upon submission will be returned to the author before review. If a memo is too short, authors are encouraged to consider it instead for posting as a PONARS Eurasia blog, which publishes shorter pieces and is more flexible in style and content.

Structure and Style Requirements

- **Policy Relevance.** Academic significance is not enough for Policy Memos. At the same time, we do not want to let our own agendas be driven by what others think is significant. *You* as scholars are the expert authors here, and you should be driving the agenda in your field. So write on what you think is important about your research, but where it is not obvious, be sure to explain explicitly and compellingly why your topic should matter to policymakers.
- **Focus.** Memos should focus on making one large point with a clear take-away. The argument should be crisp and clear. We strongly encourage the use of carefully and informatively worded subheadings to reinforce and clarify your argument or key points.
- **Executive Summary.** While we do not label it an “executive summary,” your introduction should concisely summarize your main argument, the evidence on which it is based, and why it is important. The introduction should be no more than two paragraphs and fit entirely on the first page of the memo. *Busy readers should be able to read only the first page of the memo and know exactly what your main point is and how you support it.* Please try to think of a title that also conveys the main argument directly. For example, “Putin’s Popularity Is a Media-Generated Mirage” is more informative and attention-getting than “Analyzing Putin’s Support through Surveys.” And please try to make the first sentence or two as “catchy” as possible so as to gain readers’ interest right at the outset.
- **Avoiding academic jargon, structure.** Policy Memos are not academic papers. Straightforward ideas and uncomplicated prose are absolutely essential. But being clear, concise, and accessible in no way means being simplistic, and we want to encourage you to take on tough issues and questions. If you are writing about a particular country or set of countries, the memo should be of high enough quality to be of strong interest to top experts in those countries. If you find your memo would not be interesting to such audiences, that is a sign you are not pitching the memo at the appropriate level. If you find that specialized terms are absolutely necessary, be sure to justify them to readers and keep them to a minimum.
- **Originality.** As with any good published work, Policy Memos must be original, which means written specifically for PONARS Eurasia. Memos that have been published elsewhere or are edited-down and/or rearranged versions of similar articles previously published are not acceptable. That said, one of the purposes of PONARS Eurasia is to bring academic research that may be published in long and inaccessible scholarly articles or books to policy-oriented audiences. Scholars are thus encouraged to use policy memos to report the main findings from much longer academic articles or books. But the memo itself must be written for PONARS Eurasia and the original studies should be cited appropriately. If you are unsure whether your “distilling” of longer academic ideas and findings (which is completely legitimate) crosses the line to reprinting (which we cannot do), just ask! Submission of previously published work to PONARS Eurasia that does not follow these guidelines will be rejected.

- **Citations.** Normal academic and professional standards apply for source attribution, so references must be included as appropriate, but we prefer that you incorporate them as needed into the text of the memo with a hyperlink rather than as footnotes or endnotes (e.g., “As Stephen [Hanson](#) argued in November 2000...”). Footnotes and block quotations may be used, but please do so sparingly.
- **Type of Content.** Because we assume our audience is well informed, the conveying or summarizing of factual information generally available from media reports should not be a Policy Memo’s central purpose. Conveying facts can be the central purpose, however, if the “facts” are specific research findings that would not be known even to top experts were it not for your research (for example, results from an original public opinion survey that you yourself designed, a field experiment you conducted, or newly released documents in an archive). Other than memos based on original social scientific research findings, contributions should primarily consist of ideas and perspectives that promote an understanding of trends and illuminate what will be important and why. Our memos have thus been described as a good forum to “push the conventional wisdom.”
- **Disclosure of Possible Perceived Conflicts of Interest.** We expect authors to disclose to us and in the biographical statement that is published with the Memo anything that may be seen as potentially involving significant conflicts of interest, along with a statement affirming that the views presented are one’s own. In the area of PONARS Eurasia’s primary focus, this mainly pertains to organizations or projects in the US or other Western countries that receive their primary funding from the government of a country that is being written about and where the foreign government funding is not otherwise immediately evident. If you have any questions about what should be disclosed in this way, please just ask the editors.

Submission, Revision, and Acceptance. Memos should be submitted by email attachment to PONARS Eurasia Co-director Marlene Laruelle (laruelle@gwu.edu) and Program Associate Kelly Stephenson (adminponars@gwu.edu). Before decisions on whether a draft memo is to be accepted for the series, authors may be asked to make significant revisions, including shortening the memo or clarifying ideas. Memos will not be accepted for editing until they meet the basic memo criteria – for example, we will not shorten your memo so it meets the word limit; you must do it. After being accepted, the memo is edited by our whole editorial team in dialogue with the author. Memos typically undergo extensive editing prior to acceptance and publication. Decisions on which Policy Memos to accept and when they are ready for production and distribution are the sole responsibility of the program directors, Marlene Laruelle and Henry Hale.

Publication and Distribution. Policy Memos are distributed by e-mail and social media, sometimes in a hardcopy briefing book if presented at a conference, and posted on the PONARS Eurasia website, www.ponarseurasia.org, which also contains an archive of all previous memos. In some cases, hardcopy or electronic collections of memos may be published together as part of specialized reports on important themes. We have a large distribution list of contacts in academia, foundations, think tanks, government, media, and other interested institutions and also circulate memos widely via RSS, Facebook, and Twitter. Once published by PONARS Eurasia, we allow authors free re-publication of their memos so long as they credit the PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo as the original.